

The Paradoxical Academic Cultural Revolution: A Long March to a Capitalist Road

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1. Techno-hegemony

I would like to begin by juxtaposing a personal anecdote of mine with a recent online “hot take.”

The former is a remembrance of a meeting of the members of the Centre for Research in Modern European Philosophy at Middlesex University with our dean in 2010, at which he was explaining why the university was effectively shutting us down. Against the invocation of conventional norms of higher education, he offered a contrasting vision of a university that was open 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, and that had no students at all. Even today, more than a decade later, this sounds like dystopian science fiction, and I can scarcely believe that a senior university administrator would say this in such a meeting, but I am nonetheless reasonably sure that my memory is correct here.

To this I would juxtapose a recent tweet from the notorious contrarian enthusiast for apparently dystopian futures, the ex-university philosopher Nick Land: “Everyone now knows that the entire socio-political apparatus is downstream of university culture, so why isn’t higher education policy the first item on all political agendas? Without fixing the universities, nothing except rolling cultural revolution is possible.”¹

1. Nick Land (@Outsideness), Twitter, October 12, 2021, 12:03 a.m., <https://twitter.com/Outsideness/status/1447774960680779781>.

By this juxtaposition, I mean to represent the duality of the prevailing trends in the contemporary university: on the one hand, it is an institution facing dissolution from the Janus faces of a technological obsolescence brought about by the internet and of a commercialization brought about by neoliberal managerialism that eradicates its distinctive mission, but on the other, it has today apparently become the generator of the dominant ideology in Western societies.

On the one hand, the internet allows scholarly communities to form and education to go on without any need for a geographical locus. This does not entirely eliminate the *raison d'être* of the university, but it does imperil the logic of the employment of most professional academics. A single instructor can now teach an unlimited number of students, giving rise to the phenomenon of MOOCs.

On the other, relatedly inasmuch as technology is no small driver of this too, there is a trend toward the instrumentalization of the university, which is to say, turning it into something that is useful in a new context. The purpose of the university is now increasingly imagined in terms of utilitarian social benefit, denuded of any normative positing of an intrinsic value in knowledge, and expected in itself to turn something like a profit. Although technically universities remain not-for-profit concerns, they are still nonetheless run ruthlessly to keep them in the black; indeed, universities are much more averse to going into debt than private companies and instead often sit on massive reserves that they dare not touch.

From a Landian perspective, both the dynamics of capital and the impact of the internet are part of a single, irresistible logic of technological acceleration.² Culture can only be a kind of forlorn inhibitor of this process. Yet Land's apparent concern about "cultural revolution" seems to belie his insistent confidence in his accelerationist prophecies. While the logic of capital might be expected simply to reduce universities to lean producers of truth, in practice the university's instrumentalization and neoliberalization has perversely seen the rise of discourses that are ostensibly opposed to an unsentimental reduction to use values. This should in fact come as no surprise to anyone who understands that capitalism is

2. Nick Land, "Teleoplexy: Notes on Acceleration," in *#ACCELERATE: The Accelerationist Reader*, ed. Robin Mackay and Armen Avanessian (Falmouth: Urbanomic, 2014), pp. 509–21.

more concerned with exchange than use value: capital is quite capable of turning practically anything into a commodity.

In this regard, the university resembles nothing so much as its increasingly close consort, the “legacy” media: both are at once apparently moribund but nonetheless more aggressively ascendent than ever in their ideological sway over a crucial plurality of society. I will argue in fact that this apparent paradox is precisely in part a consequence of the obsolescence of such traditional forms of knowledge production, which has seen academics and journalists seek new relevance and power by transforming the relatively banal function of knowledge transmission into an urgent political mission. The politicization of what had been seen as a neutral conduit makes possible the commodification not only of the medium but of its slant, even if the perspective in question is supposed to be inherently opposed to capitalism. That is to say, while information is commercially valuable, ideology is too and has a value quite separate from that of data.

This politicization has itself come about through a change in the nature of left-wing politics in Western societies over the last half century. Academics and journalists themselves have become increasingly left-wing over the same time period, to the point where they—and even the universities and media themselves as such—can be understood to constitute components of the political left.

One driver of this has been the relative proletarianization of these professions in recent decades. Once, academia and journalism were elite professions for scions of wealthy families in the same way that law or banking were. Falls in the relative remuneration of these jobs have predictably meant that those in them have become increasingly left-wing, both because poorer people tend to be more left-wing due to their material interests and because people motivated by money now do not gravitate toward these professions, leaving only those who wish to become journalists or academics because of a crusading zeal. It is also the case that, since the 1960s, some on the left have deliberately attempted to colonize such sectors, in a soi-disant “long march through the institutions”: unable to bring about socialist revolution in Western countries, elements of the student left decided instead to establish Gramscian hegemony via cultural influence. However, in the process, the leftism of these radicals largely morphed from Marxism into a culturalism, reflecting their new inherent interests as academics and bureaucrats. This shift in neo-Gramscian

left perspective was signaled decisively by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's 1985 manifesto *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, which stripped socialism of its decisively Marxist class dimension.³

Even where it has not made such a declaredly "post-Marxist" turn, moreover, contemporary left-wing politics has become profoundly bivalent, alloying older class politics with a newer politics of social movements. This addition is at first blush both necessary and laudable, one that strengthens socialism: while socialist politics has always been "for the many," this risks ignoring the interests of minorities, so, increasingly, it has been supplemented with demands for the protection of more and more marginal groups. However, since—despite claims to the contrary from the advocates of "intersectionality"—socialist politics is not inherently a cause of minority rights, nor do the interests of minorities inherently require socialism to further them, this will always be a matter of suturing socialism to essentially liberal concerns. This can be done most adeptly, perhaps, by reconfiguring socialism itself as a form of liberal rights discourse on behalf of the poor or working class qua an interest group. By denying the existence of any distinction between class politics and minority rights, however, it is possible for the left to argue that they are following a left-wing path on both fronts simply by following one of them, since the other is supposed automatically to be included. In actuality, however, the left's logic here is quite asymmetrical: the currently dominant left-wing perspective grew up through contestation with older tendencies of the left that were purely class-oriented and hence is genetically predisposed to reject anyone who has a class analysis that does not account for minority rights. Thus, it is the commitment to the latter and not the former that has ended up as the operative left shibboleth. This has made the contemporary left prone to be drawn into alliances with capital via agreement over key liberal demands in relation to minority recognition, even against others on the left who do not.

Schematically, the contemporary left has evolved in the following way. Workers—in particular, journalists or professors—with contemporary broad left-wing demands, have agitated in an adverse climate to save their jobs and conditions, while also making a broader raft of demands for rights of minorities. Faced with this, management almost inevitably finds the latter demands easier and cheaper to meet, and can see clear publicity

3. Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (London: Verso, 1985).

benefits in doing so; hence it meets these first and indeed leverages them to avoid having to make more expensive concessions, including by casting workers' demands as effectively opposed to minority rights. Across society, the bourgeoisie has accommodated itself to demands for recognition of minority identities, and has found that doing so has largely defused left-wing demands for systemic change. In the face of this accommodation, reactionaries now shrilly denounce corporations and organizations for their "woke" posturing, but this has provoked the left further to ally themselves with the institutions against what they deem to be a much more serious "fascist" threat coming from a "populist" right. The designation of "populism" is perhaps a thick end of the wedge here: at this point, the socialist mission of advocating for the people at large is denigrated and the defense of minorities licenses disapprobation toward a larger section of the populace.

2. Ideology-Discourse

The result is nothing less than a new hegemonic ideology of our societies, which takes the recognition of formerly marginalized groups as its core. This new orthodoxy constrains what can be said in universities, as it does in polite society more generally, and increasingly even what can legally be said in many Western countries, in the name of protecting the marginalized.

Of course, there have always been constraints on speech, and these always relate to the ruling ideology. The universities have only ever been a partial exception to such constraints, and have never allowed an entirely unfettered pursuit of truth. As Michel Foucault has it, "in every society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organised and redistributed according to a certain number of procedures."⁴ The precise modes of the current restrictions and their production are *sui generis*, perhaps, but not entirely so: as many have pointed out, our new hegemonic belief system resembles older religious ones. Today, universities might define their missions in terms of social justice as once they did in religious terms. This is not to say, moreover, that things are necessarily better where a university defines its mission more neutrally in terms of the pursuit of truth. Mission statements have little substantive import and can indeed serve to cover up the way that truth is being shaped: claiming that one

4. Michel Foucault, "Orders of Discourse," *Social Science Information* 10, no. 2 (1971): 8.

is working purely in the service of truth might serve in practice to completely exclude all possibilities of thinking outside of a set framework on the basis that that framework simply is the truth. A commitment to freedom of inquiry itself might then seem the requisite prophylactic, but mere freedom to inquire in any direction is no guarantee that anyone will. As we know from Thomas Kuhn,⁵ academic disciplines, while formally maintaining a rigorous principle of academic freedom, can reproduce an orthodoxy perfectly well through gatekeeping that ensures only those with orthodox opinions are hired, promoted, or published. Moreover, it's surely never the case that one can practically be allowed to say absolutely anything, nor that it is normatively desirable that absolutely no limit to the freedom of speech exist in the university, or indeed anywhere else in society.

We are nonetheless today faced with new restrictions and imperatives in relation to truth that many find uncomfortable. I daresay we actually are restricted and pushed to a greater degree than formerly, inasmuch as there is nothing now being said that wasn't previously sayable, but that rather a lot of things that were previously sayable have ceased to be so. It is true that many new commonplaces in the contemporary university—new orthodoxies, if you will—were previously heterodox thoughts that carried certain risks: you might have been attacked to a greater degree for voicing them than now, and they might have hurt your chances of being hired or promoted, where now it will help you to spout these. However, the new orthodoxy is more censorious toward views it disdains than the previous one: while the views that are now ascendent might have been mocked and derided formerly, disagreement with them is now, by their lights, cast as dangerous hate speech that needs to be suppressed, including by the use of physical force.

There is, then, a somewhat unfamiliar stifling atmosphere on university campuses, but this is not historically unprecedented: the medieval university was after all hardly welcoming to heresy. What is really peculiar about the current situation is not the enforcement of orthodoxies—which is more or less the historical norm for the university—but the way in which the university now relates to the production of orthodoxy. The medieval university was constrained by an ideology re/produced by the Church, with which it was closely involved, but in a subordinate role.

5. Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1962).

Today, the university would seem to have a more central role in the production of ideology, generating discourses that constrain thought within it, and which have now spread throughout society in turn. The university has never previously functioned so centrally to ideology: in the Middle Ages, it was a site for both the refinement of ideology and its marginal questioning, but it was never its beating heart. This is why it is worrying that truth is disappearing from institutions' mission statements to be replaced by social function: not because mission statements are in themselves determinative of the activity of the institutions, but because it is symptomatic of a changing operation.

Today, there is no clear headquarters of ideological production analogous to the medieval Church: as Louis Althusser noted half a century ago, the Church "combined a number of functions which have today devolved upon several *distinct* Ideological State Apparatuses that are new."⁶ At the same time, however, Althusser is explicit that "*the Church has today been replaced by the school,*" even if the school qua "dominant" "Ideological State Apparatus" is more circumscribed in its operation than the Church used to be.⁷ Althusser is referring of course here principally to grade school, not to universities, since it is in K–12 education that most people receive their primary interpellation.

Althusser actually has oddly little to say about the universities in his analysis, particularly given that he is writing in the immediate aftermath of the paroxysm in French society of May 1968, which grew out of a revolt of university students. Still, this does not in itself indicate that the university was a major ideological center of society. While the decline of the Church allowed the university to become a more autonomous site of ideological production, this decline also allowed every man in principle to think for themselves, or at least to be influenced by diverse centers of ideology production, including political parties, for example, and nowadays social media accounts, leading to considerable diversity in ideology itself, even if ultimately there is always a level at which a consensus coheres. The revolt of May 1968 was against a higher education that students saw as stultifyingly inculcating bourgeois norms, and the result was a university that did this less so, or at least less obviously.

6. Louis Althusser, *On the Reproduction of Capitalism: Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*, trans. G. M. Goshgarian (London: Verso, 2014), p. 142.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 147, italics in original.

Half a century later, a significant portion of the production of ideology has shifted into the nebulous online space, entirely lacking in institutional hierarchy and accountability. The contemporarily hegemonic ideology was one that was pioneered partly in the university and partly in countercultural discursive spaces that were either outside it or at least para-academic, but has since seen a great metastasis in online fora, in particular the “micro-blogging” platforms, first Tumblr and then Twitter. It has since spread into mainstream media and corporate communications, while its vital productive circuits remain online and in academia.

Given this nebulosity, to understand the role of the university, I will turn aside from Althusser’s institutional analysis of ideology and instead to his contemporary and sometime associate Jacques Lacan’s analysis of discourse. Lacan worked outside the university, and as such did not have it in his blind spot in the way Althusser did. Lacan approaches the university not as an institution but precisely as a mobile discourse that is genetically related to it, but which overflows it and is capable of profound alteration. The “university discourse” for Lacan is one of four fundamental possible structures of discourse, the others being those of the master, the hysteric, and the psychoanalyst. Characterizing these discourses succinctly is fraught, since Lacan understands them principally on the basis of quasi-mathematical formulae with ambiguous meanings, using a series of abstruse terms of art that themselves elude easy definition, all of which I wish to avoid here. I will therefore engage in some calculated simplification—with apologies to Lacanians—in an attempt to gain some passing insight into what is happening in relation to the university, although I will also make some remarks aimed at those familiar with Lacan’s theory.

For Lacan, the master discourse is the fundamental one on which the others are based. I would characterize it as the movement by which an idea grounds an ideology (by which I mean to gloss Lacan’s claim that a master signifier grounds knowledge; Lacan does not himself articulate concepts of either ideas or ideology). By contrast, the university discourse places ideology in the driver’s seat, making knowledge the “agent,” producing the student, and concealing the dependence of knowledge on a master (signifier).⁸ This means that the university discourse is simultaneously a kind of unwitting servant of the master discourse, but also crucially means that the university discourse has a kind of critical function in relation to it,

8. Jacques Lacan, *On Feminine Sexuality: The Limits of Love and Knowledge*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: Norton, 1998), pp. 16–17.

ultimately tending by examining knowledge to reveal its presuppositions, if often blocked in this trajectory for long periods.⁹

However, Lacan suggests, contemporaneously with Althusser's post-1968 reflections on ideology, paradoxically, that the university discourse's progressive "denudation" of the master has led in quasi-Hegelian fashion to its critical discourse becoming the dominant one in our age, taking the place of master discourse from the discourse of the master *sensu stricto*.¹⁰ The child in the crowd has become the emperor, but of course this necessarily means that the child can no longer call out the emperor without calling out himself.

It is tempting to assert against this actuality a normative vision of the university as a purely critical institution, as Foucault effectively does in his prescription of a negative role for intellectuals.¹¹ To restrain the university qua institution to such a negative function though is surely ultimately impossible because its main function is, as Lacan notes, not critical analysis but the positive education of students, which implies ideological imbrication. Foucault's pure Kantian criticality is really in Lacanian terms a form of psychoanalytic discourse, not a "university" one. This might go some distance to explaining why, despite the ubiquity of references to Foucault in certain academic discourses, his real critical points never seem to be properly absorbed by academics.

Lacan nevertheless sees the university discourse (perhaps because of its dominant role) as the only place where movement remains possible.¹² He does not specify how this might happen, however. One obvious way that it might is in the trivial form of changes in the specifics of what is said in this discourse. Certainly, we have seen these change since Lacan's time. However, such superficial alteration is surely not uniquely possible in the university discourse. A more intriguing possibility is that Lacan is suggesting that the university discourse qua dominant discourse might effect a further turn in the dominant discourse toward one of the other of Lacan's four discourses: a quarter-turn backward to the master discourse, a quarter-turn forward to the discourse of the analyst, a full half-turn to

9. Jacques Lacan, *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Russell Grigg (New York: Norton, 2007), p. 148.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 31.

11. For a discussion of this, see Mark G. E. Kelly, *The Political Philosophy of Michel Foucault* (New York: Routledge, 2009), pp. 136–38.

12. Lacan, *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, p. 178.

the discourse of the hysteric. As Lacan says, things don't always have to "rotate in the same direction."¹³

That said, it seems extremely unlikely that either the discourse of the hysteric or that of the psychoanalyst could become the dominant one. Those discourses bring us back to basic psychological realities such that, while individual subjects might need to enter into them, it is hard to imagine them playing anything like an institutional or sovereign role. A turn back toward a discourse of the master would, by contrast, be eminently logical, inasmuch as the negative subjects lurking behind the university discourse by their very nature yearn for a master to reinstall symbolic order. Lacan famously suggests as much in caustic remarks made to leftist students in 1969:

The revolutionary aspiration has only a single possible outcome—of ending up as the master's discourse. This is what experience has proved.

What you aspire to as revolutionaries is a master. You will get one.¹⁴

Yet even if Lacan is right in this prediction, that does not guarantee that this must now be the current state of the university discourse. After all, those revolutionary students might be said to have found their masters by leaving the university and its discourse behind for activism. Still, Lacan's critique of the revolutionary students of the 1960s could presumably be said still to apply to their 2022 counterparts: even if there was no turn back toward the discourse of the master occasioned by the 1960s, that does not mean that our universities are not still pregnant with such a turn.

There is, however, a powerful opposite tendency of the university discourse always to capture attempts to break with it: "in seeking to escape from the university discourse one implacably reenters it," Lacan says.¹⁵ The leftist students Lacan who engaged with in his 1969 "impromptu" in fact were denouncing Lacan as if he were a representative of the university discourse, and the university itself as if it were representative of the master's discourse, when in fact they in their critique of Lacan and the university represented the university discourse par excellence, and hence the occulted voice of the master. This has indeed been the predominant pattern of the revolutionary impetus of the 1960s over the intervening half century.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 188.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 207.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 64.

The university discourse turns language into an object of analysis. The discourse of the master brings us into language in the first place. This is why it conventionally has to be prior to the university discourse. Lacan's suggestion that the university discourse itself becomes the master discourse implies that the analysis of language is taking over from its naive usage as the dominant approach to language. While we might not think dominant forms of "critical" discourse today are as critical as we would like, they nonetheless are forms of university discourse and proliferate more and more widely outside the university. While one might rightly complain that discourses about race in K–12 education and corporate training that are being maligned from the right as "critical race theory" are at best grossly simplified versions of what is properly called "critical race theory" in academic legal studies, they are nonetheless critical and theoretical enough as to constitute forms of university discourse in Lacan's sense.

Lacan's point of course predates and is much broader than this example. Primary and secondary education in Anglophone countries have long encouraged schoolchildren not to learn by rote—a simple education in the master's discourse—but rather to engage in analysis, aping the cognitive plasticity of the professor. Such education has perversely come to perform the function of rote-learning while presenting itself as critical, or indeed we are perversely seeing particular forms of criticism, of denunciation and disavowal, become the rote. The grossly overused reference to Orwell in this regard seems apt, and indeed, as Lacan suggests when he says that the university "reigns" in the Soviet Union,¹⁶ the basic pattern might well be one that was originally innovated in the Soviet Union, inasmuch as from the 1930s Soviet children were taught to recite a catechism that was critical of a capitalism they had never directly experienced.

There is yet another discourse within Lacan's schema, however: an additional, fifth that Lacan later adds to his original four, the "mutant" discourse of capitalism.¹⁷ There is surely ample basis in its ripeness to imagine that the capitalist discourse is taking over the university, as our society more generally. For Lacan, the capitalist discourse is, unlike the four "true" discourses, a radically unsustainable one that accelerates and consumes itself. It is thus apt to become parasitic on other discourses, but for it to become the sole dominant discourse would surely herald an imminent collapse. While I think there is a kind of lurking prospect of

16. *Ibid.*, p. 206.

17. Jacques Lacan, *Lacan in Italia, 1953–1978* (Milan: La Salamandra, 1978).

the restoration of a master discourse in the currently dominant university discourse, what I definitely think has happened, and perhaps could be said to mark the movement that Lacan heralded, is a new articulation of the university discourse into the capitalist one.

The capitalist discourse positions both the subject and knowledge overtly at the fore, but conceals both the presuppositions behind it and its products, concealing also, unlike the four discourses, the relations between these overt elements. There can therefore be a capitalist version of the university, but it would be one in which subjects and knowledge are at the fore, but not education—this is perhaps the version of the university envisioned by my dean at Middlesex. However, in practice, such a reduction of the university to a commodity seems unlikely because it would destroy much of what is commodifiable about the university and the university discourse, and hence it would be less valuable than a university that retains at least some of its more traditional operation.

What is crucial for understanding what is happening currently in relation to capitalism in the university is a dictum of Lacan's that one cannot denounce the capitalist discourse, because by denouncing it, one reinforces "it, by normalizing, which is to say, perfecting it."¹⁸ This would explain the extraordinary way in which discourses that are apparently radically anti-capitalist can be so successful within neoliberal educational institutions. The alternative to the denunciation by which the left today participates in capitalism is, on Lacan's view, the position of the analyst himself, which he casts, in more historic terms, as the aloof stance of the "saint."

3. Knowledge-Power

The current situation in the university has emerged out of a period that was itself unique, in which there was historically high freedom in the universities, as in society in general, as a result of a development of liberal values, the development of the autonomy of the university, the development of a robust tenure system, and a period of something of a Gramscian interregnum due to a deep conflict between right and left over the direction of society during the mid-twentieth century.

Forty years of neoliberalism have disintegrated all this. Serious contestation between right and left largely disappeared globally by the 1990s,

18. Jacques Lacan, *Autres écrits* (Paris: Seuil, 2001), p. 518, my translation.

with a consensus developing around major issues (most obviously the neoliberal consensus around economic issues, but also in the West broad sociocultural consensus around the equality of men and women and people of different ethnicities). Neoliberalism meant the instrumentalization and/or commercialization of knowledge and the erosion of tenure—the effect here was greatest on public university systems, and hence had its worst impact outside of the United States, which is the only Western country with a significant proportion of higher education in the private sector.

Neoliberalism struggled to take over universities at the level of discourse, however, outside of economics departments and business schools. Rather, academics have in general bridled at the neoliberalization of the academy. Their opposition has of course been ultimately ineffectual, inasmuch as it has not prevented creeping managerialism and corporatization. However, academics' resistance has proven a continual stumbling block for and has thus presumably slowed these effects. It is in order to overcome this resistance that the neoliberal university has adapted itself to elements of the discourse of resistance, as the capitalist discourse is wont to do.

Once again, this strategy has been replicated across society, and not merely coincidentally: the accommodation of capitalism with or via the university discourse has been replicable by leveraging that discourse wherever it occurs, which is very widely in professional-managerial culture, where university education is ubiquitous, and in left-wing political organizations, which are similarly graduate-led and have otherwise strongly absorbed elements of the current university discourse.

This is paradoxical in view of the radicality of many currently hegemonic demands on the university-educated left, which ought *prima facie* to inoculate it against any straightforward compromise with neoliberal capitalism, such as demands for prison abolition, police defunding, racial reparations, and indeed even the abolition of capitalism. However, such demands have nonetheless largely proven surprisingly co-optable due to the academic left's tendency toward semiotic reductivism. Rather than taking concrete actions toward its radical goals as its *sine qua non*, the left tends to orient itself instead toward combating verbal opposition to those goals, and hence is focused on lexical shibboleths. Consequently, for example, as long as institutions and corporations declare that "Black lives matter," then the left will vent its ire on those who contest the slogan rather than focusing on anything so crass as the life expectancy of Black people in the United States of America. The left does press for action from those

who have made declarations of support for its principles, but this pressure is mild compared to the ire reserved for those who contest its claims. This has effectively turned the far left into a force to attack the right on behalf of an establishment that has clothed itself in left signifiers. That is, crudely, the far left attack Republicans to the benefit of Democrats, on the basis that somehow this will further an anti-capitalist cause. Of course, it is also contended that, for example, lessening the voluble racism of discourse is a victory in itself, but this is by now a banal principle that has been consented to by the entire political establishment for half a century.

I am not positing a conspiracy of the far left and capital here. What I am describing are effects that Michel Foucault outlined thirty-five years ago, in work that many involved here from the academic side have presumably read and certainly reference, namely, the strategic coherence of power relations, which entails a “tactical polyvalence” of discourses.¹⁹ Power automatically coheres strategically by dint of its own native dynamics, without requiring any understanding of or intention behind this coherence by anyone involved. The classic case given by Foucault is the way that the prison system produces crime in the form of criminal recidivism even though no one involved intends this result.

From this point of view, in fact, leftist discourses were already relatively stably integrated in a structure of power relations decades ago, as a kind of institutionalized opposition: they were siloed outside of the mainstream of political discourse, a steady simmer of dissent on campuses that never really threatened the status quo but rather greased a conveyor belt of left-wingers who would become academics, politicians, writers, creatives, and the staff of NGOs, tending to moderate their leftism as they aged. Since then, however, the same language, intentions, and affects have increasingly taken on a new valence. This valence cannot be seen if one is focused exclusively on language, intentions, and affects themselves, as the university left increasingly has been. It is indeed difficult not to be deceived in this regard: everyone is apt to presume that maintaining words and affects ensures that they are still on the same course, when, in fact, in moving waters, a vessel can end up pointing in an opposite direction even though the rudder remains steady. To be specific, the contemporary left has maintained an analysis, developed in the twentieth century, of constituted power in the United States in particular as

19. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1, *An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon, 1978).

white supremacist patriarchy. This ignores the extent to which powerful (typically white male) people have increasingly adopted this critical framework as a basis to denounce their (on average perhaps even whiter and more male) opponents. In ignoring this they are aided by the existence of reactionaries, principally Donald Trump, whose behavior and relative popularity seem to confirm all their theories, and by the continuing extent to which white men remain overrepresented in positions of power more or less everywhere, including in the universities and left-wing organizations. These facts are, however, increasingly marginal, vestigial, and superficial. Demographic facts have shifted decisively, and indeed the extent to which the discourse that criticizes white supremacy has become mainstream is in part a symptom of this. Put simply, until recently, the overwhelming commercial and political calculus was such that pushing the representation of minority groups beyond a token level would negatively impact bottom lines, so the demands to do it could gain little traction. As women have earned proportionally more money, more and more people identify as LGBT+, and immigration has changed the ethnic makeup of every Western country, the non-white, non-male, non-cis-het market segments have grown and changed the calculus such that it has become an inherently risky commercial decision *not* to cater to these segments. However, such symbolic catering must be seen as just that, not the substantive alteration of power structures but (often literal) window dressing. Even the replacement of personnel who belong to former in-groups by members of out-groups leaves the underlying structure intact.

We see here, in Lacanian terms, the point of coherence of the university discourse with the capitalist one. The university discourse puts language in the prime position, while also ascribing authority over it to the subject. Language is central, and people are held responsible for producing it. The capitalist discourse, by contrast, situates language as something that produces money. The consumer is in the driver's seat, and language ultimately depends on them, not because the capitalist discourse understands the consumer as the producer of discourse, but because the customer also figures primarily as a source of revenue. The customer is always right, just as the profitable language is always true. So when the schoolman insists on the importance of language, the bourgeois can only nod in furious agreement and take their money.

This is not merely a question of the university as such but a weaponization of university discourse throughout society. The Great Financial

Crisis of 2008 led to an upsurge in left-wing demands, later cohering around the socialist campaigns of Bernie Sanders in the United States and Jeremy Corbyn in the United Kingdom. This surge was naturally forced along the paths of least resistance, which is to say that although economic demands were at its core, these were always mixed with cultural and other political demands that could much more readily be accommodated. So in the United Kingdom, despite Corbyn's historic Euroskepticism, the visceral Europhilia of his most active supporters became a major conduit into which the political energy of this movement ran, and it consequently dissipated due to the relatively small electoral base in England outside London for a Europhile socialism. In the United States, the Democratic Party saw off Sanders twice in presidential primary contests, in part by aggressively signaling their support for certain left-wing causes that they could agree with, distracting from Sanders's more radical (and popular) economic demands, while assuring that Sanders himself and most of his supporters would back the triumphant Democrat nominee in the presidential ballot.

This political operation of the university discourse has been made possible by the growth in the college-educated proportion of the population. Even as the proportion of people receiving tertiary education has plateaued in recent years, the generational replacement of older people who were overwhelmingly not university-educated with younger graduates has seen a significant shift in society's cognition.

Universities have always reproduced ruling-class ideology, although they have also been incubators for counter-hegemonic ideologies. In an environment where research is instrumentalized, however, scholars in the humanities and (softer) social sciences have been encouraged to commercialize their very ideological radicalism, in effect to market their ideas as a business tool. In an instrumentalized educational marketplace, the softer university disciplines sell prospective students mastery of modish arcane discourses that are dominant in almost every desirable workplace.

This does not seem likely ultimately to provide an employment avenue for many academics, however. While, for some early innovators, this corporate turn has been a way of advancing their careers, for most it is at best a temporary survival strategy. Indeed, this instrumentalization is a very poor survival strategy inasmuch as the university discourse is thereby put at the disposal of administrators to run cover for their initiatives: few will oppose a restructure in a university if it is appropriately badged as an "equity" initiative.

A long march through the institutions has terminated in a capitalist road, as indeed was the ultimate destiny of the original Chinese Long March. The great difference between the trajectory of our figurative Western Long March and that of the actual Chinese one is that our “Cultural Revolution” has not been a failed attempt to block the Capitalist Road but rather has been turned effectively to the service of the latter: the two have come together to become apparently unstoppable, combining the energy of student rebellion with the power of money, the former in the service of the latter.

To return to the case of Land, his is a perverse logic: perhaps recognizing the ineffectuality of opposing capitalism, he pointedly cheerleads its nihilism (“if you can’t beat ‘em . . .”). What confounds his right-Deleuzian affiliation to capitalism is that capital, at least in the West, now prefers an alliance with a university discourse that denounces it than with discourses that praise it. Land’s Twitter take, that conservatives should seek to contest and seize control of the universities, correctly identifies the universities as nodes of power in the current ideological setup but fails to recognize that it is the university discourse itself, rather than the institution, that is powerful now.

The bourgeoisie has shed one ideology and donned another, exchanged liberal formal equality for liberal representative equity. It has not ceded control. As long as it mandates diversity at all levels lower than itself, the owning class can remain as it is. Becoming a billionaire is still something that functions on the old principle, that it be open only in principle to all, not that billionaires must be representative as a group. The billionaire continues to reap billions while they stage something akin to a racially charged middle-management Hunger Games, while the entrenched power of certain groups at the very top continues to function as a dynamo to generate the resentment required to fuel this.

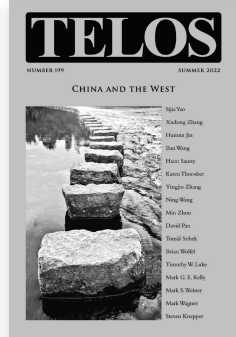
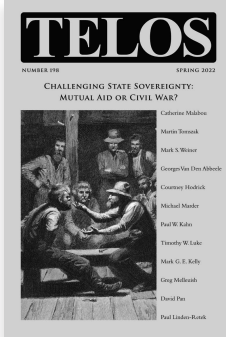
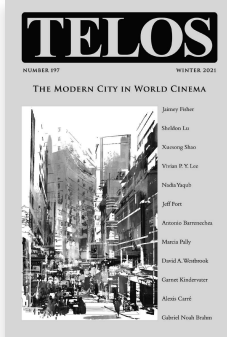
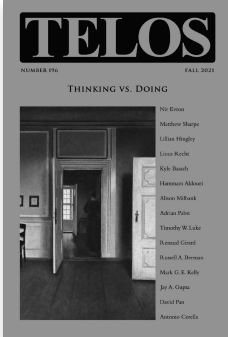
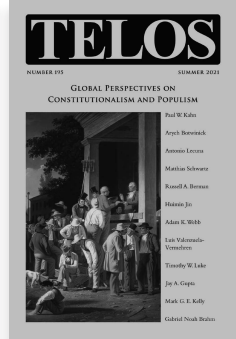
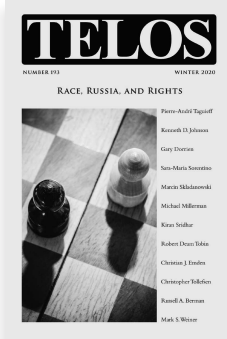
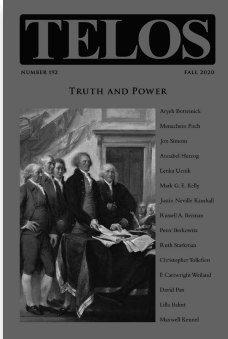
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