

**Leaky Privates:  
Resisting the Neoliberal Public University and  
Mobilizing Movements for Public Scholarship**

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In 1991, I began my counter-commute against the current of academic prestige: After twelve years at Penn, I resigned a chaired position in this very private Ivy League, to assume a faculty line in Psychology at the Graduate Center CUNY, a very public university. Friends and colleagues had serious “reservations” about my self-inflicted fall from grace, but CUNY was the site of historic struggle, where desires for public education were still seductive, in play, if contested.

The public university, and CUNY in particular, has long embodied the quintessential publicly contested space; the messy and degraded nexus where market logic, public struggle, intellectual and political chutzpa, democracy, settler colonialism, White supremacy, liberatory fantasies and Kroll security meet. In the 1930s, faculty and students at City College protesting fascism and capitalism received subpoenas; over 60 City College faculty were eventually fired (Chatterjee, P and Maira, S. 2014). In 1940, the Rapp-Coudert Committee was created to track what were then called “subversive activities” and communist influence at public colleges throughout New York State.

Historically and today, public universities have thin membranes; are highly porous to State surveillance and corporate influence, and are intellectual and political carnivals of structural violence and radical possibility. This promiscuous mosaic has long been under assault, from within and outside.

In 1969, Audre Lorde, Toni Cade Bambara, June Jordan and Adrienne Rich were teaching at CUNY in the SEEK program, a space to support struggling students. In her notes on pedagogy, Rich sketched the sinewy contradictions of the public university classroom:

*What we are part of – Adrienne Rich, 1969, teaching in SEEK, CUNY*

*Classroom as cell—unit—enclosed & enclosing space in which teacher & students are alone together*

*Can be prison cell*

*trap*

*torture chamber*

*commune*

*junction - place of coming-together*

(Rich, "Interdisciplinary Program" 15).

Alexis Pauline Gumbs writes on June Jordan and Audre Lorde's CUNY classrooms as "spaces designed in service of the colonial project to protest that same project, with varying levels of success." (2014, 242; Savonik, 2016) These contradictions are at the heart of Public.

Always a stew of contradictions and complicity, today the public university is being starved, Whitened, adjunctified in labor and intellectually surveilled and colonized, again, by/for corporate interests enacted by/through the State. If Sheila Slaughter and Gary Rhoades (2004) theorize "academic capitalism" in the U.S., Boaventura De Sousa Santos (2010) argues that the academy, globally, is in crisis with respect to intellectual autonomy and academic freedom. Within the specific and precious space of the public university – dedicated at CUNY to educate "all of the children of the people of the city" – we see how neoliberal ideology, austerity practices and privatization have lodged themselves within, deepening the race/class stratification of the public university; accelerating the disinvestment in and degradation of human and intellectual culture of the public academy and fortifying our dependence on private resources and market forces.

And yet the embers of student/faculty/staff/labor protests, "repertoires of contestation" (Delgado and Ross, 2016) and radical public scholarship are ablaze globally and within the U.S., camping out on the main green landscapes of public universities, occupying Presidents' offices, circulating on social media, tucked away as the radically provocative enactments of "civic engagement," popularized through digital scholarship, within and beyond what Robin Kelly might call "fugitive spaces." (2016)

These are, then, deeply contradictory and precarious times for the public university. Our financial bellies hungry, we are vulnerable to corporate seductions, predatory piercings of our integrity and our administrators will only rarely say No. And yet students and faculty are prepared to fight for the soul of the public institution, even as each of our radical interventions runs the risk of appropriation and commodification (see Daniels and Thistelwaithe on digital scholarship, and Hall, Clover, Crowther & Scandrett, 2012 and Torre, Manoff, Stoudt and Fine, 2016 on community based participatory research).

To begin this essay on the (ef) facing of public, and the fragile platforms for resuscitating/radicalizing the rhythms, commitments and solidarities with the public university, I open with an intimate auto-ethnographic moment when the walls of academic freedom surrendered too easily after corporate education reformers knocked on CUNY's doors to gather my personal emails.

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Mid-November 2014, I left the YMCA after a great swim in Montclair, N.J., got into my car, checked my messages and saw an email from a lawyer at CUNY.

“When can we talk? We have received a FOIA request for your emails. See attached.”

My stomach dropped as I scrolled down. In some ways I had been waiting for this.

For the past year and a half I had been deeply embroiled in a multi-racial parent-union-educator movement in Montclair NJ, a town long known for progressive education politics, almost 40 years of aspirational/not-yet-equitable desegregation and teacher driven educational creativity. We are – or were – the number one community for “integrated” families; we delight in the numbers of “queer” families in town. Montclair is also home to some of the major corporate education reformers –the names and financial backing behind high stakes testing, privatization, charters, teacher evaluation, data driven decision making, contracting out. In 2012 a corporate dominated board hired a Superintendent, without public input (unusual in our town), whom we learned was an Eli Broad Foundation trained superintendent and all hell broke loose, as has been the case in other communities (see “How to tell if your town has been infected by the Broad virus, Parents Across American, April 2011). Soon a number of under-qualified and over-paid “chiefs” were hired, straight out of the Broad/Gates/Walmart playbook and realigned the budget so that monies left the classroom into the pockets of consultants, technology firms, testing companies and lawyers.

For two years, at first a trickle and then a growing, multi-racial movement of parents, educators and labor activists took the “mic” at the Board meetings: asking questions, hard questions, the kind considered “uncivil” to speak aloud in a suburban community known to be progressive and elite, even though half of the African American students in our strategically desegregated schools live below the poverty line. Questions like, “are these new ‘Chiefs’ certified? Why are they being paid \$150,000? Why are the legal and consultant budget allocations swelling while you are cutting and privatizing paraprofessionals who work with our most struggling students? Why is all professional development focused on test prep?” We were piercing the edges of civility.

Over the first 18 months of the newly hired superintendent, the schools were pummeled with a number of “disruptive corporate innovations” – the imposition of quarterly assessments on schools distinct for their magnet themes; a contagious chill of intimidation winding through the schools; online attacks designed to discredit the African American woman President of the teachers union; attempts to recover the IP addresses of critical anonymous bloggers and an active subpoena hanging over the head of the one Black male Board member, and a “conflict of interest” charge against the African American town councilor who sat on Board of School Estimate because he is a union official. There are courses on “disruptive innovation” taught in every Ivy League School of Business in the country.

At Board meetings, the public space for debate, the “mic” grew hot. The teachers union was no longer invited to open each meeting with an update, as they had been for years. They were now restricted to 3 minutes like the rest of us. School board sessions were highly contentious, as we learned was typical of districts “infected with the Eli Broad virus.”

MCAS – Montclair Cares about Schools – evolved, as did the Montclair 250 – a group of teachers in the district who are also parents. Both groups were outraged at the depth and velocity of corporate penetration of what had been a relatively progressive, integrated district with great respect for teacher autonomy. MCAS developed a rich and provocative website to bring the reform opposition movement into our sleepy, relatively self satisfied, “progressive” suburb. We were accused, early on and throughout, of being a “union front”, and I of being a “union operative.”

In May 2012, we heard that the Board was about to approve an invoice for thousands of dollars to have our public school teachers professionally “developed” by the teachers from a corporate charter school in Newark. The husband of a Board member had political, if not financial interests in this school. While the school’s oft repeated college going data were “impressive” their persistence/graduation rates, especially for Black boys, were dismal. As Black boys were pushed out/dropped out, the school selectively “back filled” with those likely to be successful. Eventually the graduation class was filled with college going seniors. I approached the mic: “I see an invoice suggesting we are sending teachers from our public schools to X charter in Newark. Recently I calculated the 6<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> grade persistence rates for Black boys, which is approximately 28%. In contrast the persistence rate for Montclair public schools is more like 92%. Yes they send most of their seniors off to college, but what percent of those seniors were at the school since 6<sup>th</sup> grade? From the available data it seems that most Black male students leave prior to graduation. Perhaps the teachers at X charter should come to Montclair public schools for professional development.” I handed the seven Board members the relevant data.

As I returned to my seat, the husband of the President of the Board, quite active in his local synagogue, turned to me angrily, “Why didn’t you just call us (wife and husband) at home to discuss the issues about the Superintendent, or how we are spending money? Why raise them in public?” I answered that I didn’t believe these were quiet conversations for elite Jews to have in private, but public conversations for broad based, cross-class, race and zip code deliberation. I should have known, this was not going well.

This was one of many cues that civility for elites insists on privacy. We learned quickly that as much corporate reformers seek to privatize the finances and labor of education, they also seek to privatize the politics – and hold conversations only behind closed doors, using pseudonyms on blogs, distributing monies to buy off defunded community based “allies” and launching FOIL requests anonymously. In the dialectics of public and

private, the more they tried to privatize democracy with back door deals and secret meetings, the more “uncivil” the parents and teachers appeared to be.

A few months later, a very wealthy, well known as a “character,” community member who had been working with the Superintendent on her public relations approached me, after a Board meeting, introducing himself as the “campaign manager for Cory Booker, Hilary Clinton...” He wanted to have coffee, because he was doing some work for the superintendent. We talked much, searching for common ground. He tried to get me, and our MCAS members, to stop speaking in public and meet with her one on one. We did. As you can imagine it was a disaster. One evening after I spoke, questioning some district data that pointed to the miraculous closing of the achievement gap because of all the testing (they removed the Black special education students from the calculations, and miracle - The gap closes), he approached me at the back of the auditorium, “You are a liar.” I was standing next to a friend, the President of the NAACP was as surprised as I. “I am rich as fuck and I will ruin you.” So much for civility.

Within weeks (remember, we are a small town), two activist parents overheard a “short, white man” in Dunkin Donuts talking on the phone, instructing someone to “start to collect opposition files on the union leaders and the parents.” Doing a bit of our own reconnaissance, we learned this man was on the Board of a major NYC charter network a local leader in the very small Montclair Republican party.

At about the same time, the Montclair Schools Watch appeared; an online blog that ran anonymous clips of the union president’s 1989 tax records, assaults on critical education scholar Ira Shor (who also lives in Montclair and was involved with MCAS) and a White parent who worked for an education labor union, accusations that two African American women who spoke up at the Achievement Gap meeting were “Michelle Fine’s lieutenants”... Classic corporate smear tactics – opposition files gone viral.

And then in November 2014, my emails were FOILED by someone using the pseudonym Mark Smith.

Indeed, I was the White woman, at the public university, who was the portal to the emails of 28 (and then 38) activist parents, courageous educators who refused to be intimidated, a series of Black activists and political figures. And, I think, a race-traitor in the eyes of my corporate [White, investment banking/hedge fund] neighbors.

Montclair is a progressive, racially integrated community with, desegregated schools that are not-quite-as-good-as-we-wish, still-fraught-with-enormous-gaps, that tries to do what most of the country has walked away from. We are also what popular blogger Jersey Jazzman/Ph.D. candidate Mark Weber calls “Reformyville” –dedicated to high stakes testing and major investments in technology, hostile to teachers’ unions, pensions and health care; hungry to privatize paraprofessionals and standardize curriculum; wealthy, White and dedicated to “anonymous” strategies for “reform.”

The anonymous Freedom of Information request specified that CUNY turn over “all emails to and from Michelle Fine”, over a two year period, from a list of what I call the *FOIA 28*: Three Black elected politicians in town who have probed, responsibly and publicly, the finances and governance of the district; five journalists who have written about educational politics in town; eight activist parents; the president of the Montclair Education Association and other trade unionists; a few bloggers (including AssessmentGate who had the subpoena issued last year – s/he was cleared by the intervention of the NJ-ACLU) and the Superintendent, some of her Chiefs, the communications assistant and members of the Board of Education.

I went public with the FOIA request immediately, contacting what I called the FOIA 28, presenting at the School Board and expressing regret for getting them “entangled” in this collective witch hunt, nodding to the ghosts of McCarthy. Assessmentgate – a very critical blogger, also anonymous - wrote to the CUNY lawyer that s/he considered this an extension of the earlier subpoena; the parents from Montclair were outraged that their personal emails to me were subject to a Freedom of Information Act request; the journalists were surprised that they were not immune.

The CUNY lawyer asked “Mark Smith” of SOSCAMDEN.ORG – all fictitious – for a name and address so she could send the requested documents, at an expense of 25 cents/page. “Mark” responded:

“The request I made of the University has been *publicly showcased* by a representative of the University [*that would be me*]. While my request is legal, the actions taken but [sic] your University representative has [sic] been disruptive and intimidating. Based on the specific actions witnessed by Dr. Fine, I do not feel safe ... Dr. Fine decided to make this a *public event*.... It was never my intent for *this private request to become a public matter*.”

The perverse twisting of public/private deserves a moment of analysis to unpack the weird inversions of corporate logic: what’s public and what’s private; who is vulnerable and who is innocent. I made a private matter public; he feels unsafe and violated. Corporate reformers seem to believe that all matters – financial, political and educational should be private; even public schools, democracy and governance.

Without putting up much resistance at all, CUNY moved forward on the FOIA request; they gathered and prepared to send over 1100 emails to and from me to the lawyer, whom the corporate group hired.

I contacted friends at the New York Civil Liberties Union who were surprised that CUNY was complying with the request and sent a lengthy memo to the CUNY Counsel, specifying why CUNY should not simply comply with the full request. CUNY rejected the advice.

The evening before CUNY was set to send the 1100 emails (the list had now been expanded from 28, to 38, persons), I emailed the CUNY Chancellor, Graduate Center president and the president of the Professional Staff Congress. I briefly tried to argue that:

*Two years ago I worked with then President Kelly and Provost Robinson on a large Ford Foundation grant for moving public scholarship into the public square. Indeed I left my Chaired position at the University of Pennsylvania to be at a public university that took seriously our roles as public intellectuals. I recognize that internet has complicated the work; I recognize that parents and teachers from around the country email me at the GC because that is my public email; I realize that perhaps i should always rely on GMAIL for public scholarship - but the soul of CUNY lies in our obligation and intellectual debt to move from the ivory tower into local school board meetings, town councils and bring our craft into public issues of urgency...*

*This FOIL request is simply harassment — increasingly a strategy by the Right and corporations directed at public university faculty. This is of course ironic that those who seek to privatize public education are relying upon a public interest law to undermine the public scholarship of public intellectuals. No one said they aren't clever.*

*In Montclair as a parent, I have been vocal about statistical errors in the town's achievement data; a large group of parents and educators have raised questions in public about privatizing paraprofessionals and where the budget has gone, and why so much is being spent on technology - hence the "key search words." The FOIL against me is an attempt to chill the dissent in town.*

*I ask that you respect the parents/educators who have corresponded with me, and my rights to speak. Again i agree that many of the documents should be forwarded - but this process is a bit of a witch hunt, and i am uncomfortable facilitating the hunt.*

*I appreciate your time; appreciate the good will of the lawyers, and hope we can come to an agreement within the university about how to defend institutional transparency, the public's right to know, academic freedom and our right/obligation to be scholars in the public square.*

CUNY's chief counsel conveyed to the President of the Graduate Center that because "Michelle Fine used State machinery" to circulate "political" messages, CUNY had to comply with the FOIL. I tried to explain these exchanges reflected the very public scholarship they were "branding" as distinct to the GC; the questions posed and debates engaged grew from my research and scholarly expertise; this was why I came to CUNY; this was the grey zone of public intellectual project. I also indicated that if I had known that CUNY would enact a narrow, technical, corporate response I could have stayed at

Penn – a real corporate entity -- which would have treated me “as if” they owned me, like a “good” corporation, and protected my interests.

Of course Penn couldn't be FOILED.

CUNY administrators insisted that as a public university they were obligated to respond in full to the request. I wrote to the Chancellor that I understood their position, disagreed and would write no more to them about the matter. The President of PSC (our union), Barbara Bowen, was outstanding and insisted we all meet. Management never responded.

Within a week, CUNY sent all of the requested emails to an anonymous corporate reform group Montclair Kids First, through their lawyers; they have posted all of them, including my correspondence with private citizens, parents, students, activists, educators, lightly redacted with cheap magic markers, CUNY style; anyone can read through (feel free – mostly boring, no conspiracy some profanity).

The following week, I attended an unrelated session of civil rights activists considering a race-based class action suit against CUNY, contesting the declining admission rates of Black and Latino freshmen into the most competitive four-year colleges. In 2008, on the wave of the foreclosure bubble and financial crisis for middle and working class families, CUNY raised the requisite SAT score to 500 on language arts and quantitative at a number of the flagship four year colleges. As a result, more White, wealthy and higher scoring freshmen were admitted to the four year flagship institutions, with larger ratios of Black and Latino NYC high school graduates re-directed to the community colleges for inadequate SAT scores. After a strategic discussion by lawyers and activists, someone from the NAACP LDF mentioned, with a sense of exasperation: “You know, we have FOILED the information from CUNY about the racial profile of their incoming students at community colleges and four year colleges, but they delay, claim it's a violation of privacy and deny us the information.”

I drafted another email to the Chancellor, the University lawyer and the Graduate Center president, asking them why they comply with FOILS when my reputation is swinging in the breeze, and yet refuse Freedom of Information requests when their institutional integrity is vulnerable.

Two years later, I await a response.

Following the online posting of my emails, newspaper articles appeared in the Montclair Times, scouring my emails, a new attack video was distributed on U Tube, splicing misquotes from the emails, with decontextualized clips of public comments over the past two years as ominous music and subtitles warn that MCAS is violating the town, that Michelle Fine is a Divider, Destroyer and Hater. Within a few weeks, an international petition, initiated by friends and colleagues, circled the globe,



accumulating more than 3,000 signatures gathered in my “defense”. The photo they used in the U Tube was copyrighted by Feminist Voices in Psychology, and was eventually removed.

Really - I was not wounded; was unbelievably touched by the community of support; and somewhat taken aback at the lengths corporate reformers would go to silence criticism. But the behavior of the public university administrators was most shocking. They didn't have to do what they didn't have to do; it was a small gift to their corporate predators; just enough evidence that they are willing to play “bottom” in the *dialectic S/M of academic philanthrocapitalism* and complicity with *corporate interests*.

In a short time I have learned much and spoken to many – about ALEC's (American legislative exchange council) commitment to exploiting FOIA for public university faculty as the “portal” to silence, expose and gather intelligence on progressive critics; about the vulnerability of those of us who teach at public universities and believe naively that we have academic freedom on our institutional accounts OR other email/text accounts that are linked to our university accounts; about the importance and rarity of courageous administrators who stand by faculty despite the corporate challenge, but mostly about how widespread is the fully funded, prefer-to-be-anonymous strategic attempts to silence those in public universities who dare to question the corporate agenda.

People who seek to privatize public education are exploiting a significant public interest legal tool (FOIA is our law!) against public university faculty who position ourselves as public intellectuals to induce a sense of surveillance, silencing and chill. As a teacher at a Board meeting explained, “Some hide behind sheets; others behind anonymous blogs, Super PACS and money. But we are not fooled.”

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But enough about me. I want to pause to think aloud about “what is left” of the construct Public as it has morphed, been contaminated and/but was always rooted in settler colonial soil as a mosaic of contradictions?

This is a moment when the public assemblage is being dismantled and recalibrated; when the construct of “public” needs to be assessed.

Those of us working in public institutions bear witness and are complicit, even as we may resist, the reconstitution of public. We struggle for social justice within the colonial project of the University, at precisely the nexus where, drawing on Melanie Klein and Pierre Bourdieu, the good state and the bad state meet. The State is neither hollowing nor disinvesting wholesale; it is realigning with the interests of global capital, elite Whiteness and logics of privatization and the project of racialized securitization. Pierre Bourdieu (1992) reminds us that the state always had a left and right hemisphere; the

former comforts some while the latter controls and contains Others. The public university is a petri dish where these dynamics are at play.

As Adrienne Rich noted, the public university unfolds as the commons and encloses as a torture chamber. (Danica Savonick, 2016).

And yet when “public” danced off the tongue of Hannah Arendt (1958), she conjured *la vita activa*, a life of engagement, dialogue, dissent, participation. For Arendt, Public constitutes a space of engaged and contentious deliberation.

Today, and again, we are in the tumultuous spin of oscillating constructions, constrictions and expansions of Public. As Gramsci argued in the Prison Notebooks, “The **crisis** consists precisely in the fact that the **old** is dying and the **new cannot be born**; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear.” (275) The morbid symptoms flash off my smart phone.

In the name of *public* safety, police routinely hunt and kill black men and are almost never held accountable; mayors close black schools; the U.S. government sends drones, deports immigrants and feeds the beast of mass incarceration in the perverse name of human security. In the US, as in the UK and dripping across the globe, in the name of public accountability, we generate metric madness for k-12 and now higher education, undermining the sanity, humanity and integrity, the accessibility and sustainability of public institutions once dedicated to the collective good. In the darkest communities, public translates to police with drawn guns in unlit stairwells, crappy schools with metal detectors and military recruiters.

The word is promiscuous and the affects are racialized/classed. Public has been colonized, invaded and penetrated so to speak by corporate interests and the jaws of securitization. Historian Robin Kelley has vividly detailed how the very same public spaces/buses have signaled freedom and mobility for Whites, and surveillance, capture, vulnerability for Blacks. Public has perhaps always been the body through which capitalism and empire traveled, and my White privilege has kept me from seeing.

Always classed and raced, U.S. public institutions have, of recent, endured a doubled loss: material loss in the form of radical disinvestment/austerity, and ideological saturation of public institutions by leaky private interests – sometimes even with good intent.

You may recall that in New York City, Bette Midler had to buy a series of city parks to keep them public.

The notion of “public” has become a hologram, clever, deceptive and imaginary; contaminated, complicit, a borderland. With no accountability, we must ask:

*Was the lead poisoning of children in Flint Michigan, contaminated by corporate dumping and ignored by the state, a public act?*

*Are the publicly funded school vouchers in Milwaukee, provided to parents of children who attend Catholic schools, public?*

*Are the religious cyber charters in Pennsylvania, managed by private Education Management Organizations, public? (In the 2003-04 school year, 6,832 students were enrolled in state cyber charter schools. Today, nearly 37,000 kids are enrolled, according to a Pennsylvania Department of Education spokesman, STATESCOOP, 2-2-15).*

*IN 1960, state support accounted for 78% of the University of Michigan general fund; in 2015, state support accounted for 16%, with tuition and fees paying for 71% of the general fund. Is the University of Michigan still a public institution?*

Below we consider how we might slow down the curdling process of disruptive innovation and privatization in higher education; to take in the landscape, strategies and consequences of privatization and confront the existential question – (how/with whom/under what political and ethical conditions) can we resist from within but also reimagine Public, when public institutions are so fully contaminated by the voracious and punishing logics of capital, greed, White supremacy and anti-labor commitments? And borrowing from Leigh Patel, to whom are we, as public university faculty/staff/students, answerable?

### **Market Creep**

The radical edges of the Public University, at moments bold if always controversial, have begun to fray. The defining adjective “public” has come to be a lite metaphor, a wink, as levels of state support decline, open access to racial/economic diversity shrinks, academic freedom is patrolled and the right to protest/challenge/research/teach counter-hegemonic topics is under attack from within and without.

My colleagues Mike Fabricant and Steve Brier write, in their new book *Austerity Blues: We fear for the future of public higher education, both nationally and close to home at the City University of New York (CUNY). Year after year, we witness the steady withdrawal of state funds and, in turn, restricted access for “the children of the whole people” (CUNY’s original mission, as stated in the mid-nineteenth century) to a quality public higher education. Conversely, we have seen tuition at CUNY increase by 25 percent at the same time that about \$500 million of public money has been withdrawn.*

*Over the past forty years at CUNY, the ratio of tuition paid by full-time students to public funding has shifted from zero to about 50 percent for students, many of whose annual family incomes are below \$30,000. Within that same time frame the proportion of classes taught by full-time faculty has diminished from almost 100 percent to less than 50 percent. We also see the continuing disappearance of young males of color, especially African Americans, in undergraduate education, with black women outnumbering black men in CUNY's community and senior colleges by a ratio of 2 to 1. These are not merely local but rather national trends.*

And yet and still as these three faces of “public,” efface – state support, broad racial/class access and unfettered academic freedom to write, teach and protest - the wild expansion of critical public scholarship and activism explodes from within, and beyond, the walls of the public university.

### **The Changing Face of the Public University**

As if shoplifting from the littered landscape of the neoliberal public university, below I review varied dynamics through which the construct “public” is undergoing dramatic reconstruction within higher education. I won't spend enough time talking about proprietary institutions, MOOCs, the adjunctification of labor, student debt – and for that I apologize. The review is neither comprehensive nor deep; but is intended to be provocative, making legible the multiple fronts upon which privatization seeps through public academic membranes seriously compromising the race/class project, the intellectual project, labor relations and the ethical answerability (Patel, 2015) of the public university to the public good.

To begin: in terms of state support, public universities have suffered substantially in the past decade, with far more of general fund dependent on rising tuition, transferring the cost of public education to private students, and therefore rising student debt. Second, in terms of broad public access, we witness flagship public universities altering admission policies by jacking up SAT scores and cutting financial aid (even as over 800 elite private universities are now SAT-optional) with the effect that fewer students of color and students of poverty are gaining admission to flagship institutions. Third, the curricula, values and areas of research pursued within public higher education are undergoing strategic transformation via both the soft side of philanthrocapitalism and the harsh forms of corporate assault on academic scholarship critical of dominant political and/or financial interests (e.g. research that critically investigates fracking, climate change, corporate education reform, scholars engaged in anti-Zionist/pro-Palestinian scholarship or activism, researchers investigating Republican and/or Tea Party tactics, e.g. the American Legislative Exchange Council). Fourth, higher education institutions are increasingly militarized, with police and cyber-security firms incorporated into the general fund budget (note the contentious hiring of Kroll Security at both UC Davis, and CUNY). And yet fifth, provocative public scholarship and activist

coalitions – via digital scholarship and activism, blogs, participatory research with communities, public journalism, deep research based coalitions have been sutured with local and global social movements - have been mobilized by/on/with public universities across the nation.

## **Public Funding**

Thomas Mortenson (Winter 2012) of the American Council on Education estimates that: “Based on the trends since 1980, average state fiscal support for higher education will reach zero by 2059, although it could happen much sooner in some states and later in others. Public higher education is gradually being privatized.”

Fabricant and Brier concur (2016): “The universities of Minnesota, Illinois, and Washington, and Ohio State University, for example, presently receive less than 10 percent of their total operating budgets from tax levy or public dollars. The rest of their budgets must be raised largely through tuition; private fundraising; income derived from copyrights, patents, and “tech transfer” fees; and grants.” (92)

While almost all states are trending downward in terms of tax levy support for higher education, they vary in speed and depth of their retreat from higher education. While Wyoming (up 2.3%) and North Dakota (up .8%) have managed to maintain their fiscal 1980 investment through 2011, all other states have reduced their support from 14.8 percent to 69.4 percent. A few examples:

- Colorado has reduced its support for higher education by nearly 69.4 percent, from \$10.52 in fiscal 1980 (and a peak of \$13.85 in fiscal 1971) to \$3.22 by fiscal 2011. Colorado state appropriations are expected to hit zero in 2022.
- Minnesota has reduced its higher education investment by 55.8 percent, from \$14.17 in fiscal 1980 (and a peak of \$15.08 in fiscal 1978) to \$6.27 by fiscal 2011. State funding for higher education could reach zero in 2037.
- Virginia reduced higher education funding by 53.6 percent from 10.47 in 1980 (and \$11.37 in FY1979) to \$4.86 in 2011. State funding could reach zero in 2038. Loss of state support provokes a rise in tuition and spikes in student debt.

With the loss of state support, public institutions raise tuition rates, and creatively invent fees, provoking a spike in student debt. In December 2014, the U.S. Government Accountability Office calculated that from 2003 – 2012, state funding for all public college decreased by 12% and median tuition rose 55%. According to their analysis, 2012 marked the first time in recent history when a greater percentage of public college revenue derived from student tuition than all state sources combined.

The state disinvestment in public higher education parallels a rise in the growth and reach of the for-profit sector of higher education. While enrollment for all public colleges increased by approximately 20% from 2002 to 2011, the for-profit college

sector swelled from 817,156 enrollment in 2002-2003 to 2,047,844 in 2011-2012, a rise of 250%. A 2016 analysis published by the National Bureau of Economic Research finds that on average associate's and bachelor's degree students experience a *decline in earnings after attendance at for profit institutions*, relative to their own earnings in years prior to attendance" and a *significant rise in student debt* ([www.nber.org](http://www.nber.org)) These students – disproportionately low income, African American or Latino and female – are also saddles with relatively high loan defaults, as demonstrated by Adam Looney of the U.S. Treasury Department and Constantine Yannelis of Stanford University (2015):

"...drawing on a unique set of administrative data on federal student borrowing, matched to earnings records from de-identified tax records, [m]ost of the increase in default is associated with the rise in the number of borrowers at for-profit schools and, to a lesser extent, 2-year institutions and certain other non-selective institutions, whose students historically composed only a small share of borrowers. These non-traditional borrowers were drawn from lower income families, attended institutions with relatively weak educational outcomes, and experienced poor labor market outcomes after leaving school. In contrast, default rates among borrowers attending most 4-year public and non-profit private institutions and graduate borrowers—borrowers who represent the vast majority of the federal loan portfolio—have remained low, despite the severe recession and their relatively high loan balances. Their higher earnings, low rates of unemployment, and greater family resources appear to have enabled them to avoid adverse loan outcomes even during times of hardship." ([www.BPEA.org](http://www.BPEA.org), July 5 1026)

Cuts in public sector spending on higher education create the grounds for the expansion of the for-profit sector, sucking the monies and dreams of desperate low income students hungry to be educated and credentialed, carving open spaces for predatory lending and the branding of desire.

### **Access: The Whitening of Flagship Public Institutes**

According to a report by Hechinger Institute, only 5% of students at flagship public universities are Black, a smaller percentage than was true a decade ago (Kolodner, 2015). Note the wide variation between percent Black freshmen in flagship public institutions and percent Black high school graduates at, for instance, Universities of Virginia (5% vs. 22%), Delaware (5% vs. 30%) and Georgia, (7% vs. 34%). In 2010, The Education Trust found that "America's most prestigious public universities are decreasing representation of low income students and spending more institutional aid on students from wealthier families." Reducing aid and spiking SAT admissions cut scores are two strategies that have effectively diminished enrollment of students of color. At CUNY, my own university, SAT cut scores were raised at the moment of the fiscal crisis, at the top senior colleges for incoming freshmen such that thousands of Black and Latino graduates from NYC schools who would have previously been accepted

to Hunter, Brooklyn, City or Queens were being demoted to the community colleges for admission.

Drawing from Fabricant and Brier again: *The difficulties poor students face in successfully completing college are not entirely explained by academic challenges. The New York Times and other media have, for example, reported that the crushing pressures of accumulating debt and the growing need to work while attending college have disproportionately affected poor and working-class students, stalling and “dead-ending” movement toward degree completion by even the most gifted students. These economic stresses, when combined with academic challenges, have produced a seismic shift in the proportion of poor students earning college degrees. Martha Baily and Susan Dynarski, economists at the University of Michigan, have reported that “thirty years ago there was a 31% difference between the share of prosperous and poor Americans who earned bachelor’s degrees . . . Now the gap is 45%” (DeParle 2012, A-1). Greg Duncan, an economist at the University of California, Irvine, notes that “on virtually every measure we have the gaps between high- and low-income kids . . . widening” (A-1). These data also contain a critical subtext. As the gap in academic achievement between poor and affluent students grows by race and class, it is accompanied by ever-widening income and gender disparities, especially of young males of color. For example, black women undergraduate students at CUNY’s senior and community colleges, according to a 2005 Inside Higher Education report, “outnumbered [black] men 2 to 1 (a ratio that is quite common nationwide).” (113)*

The moves of slow privatization affect not only who attends public universities, but who teaches and under what labor conditions.

### **Faculty: Adjunctification of higher education – particularly for the poor**

Don Edmonds writes in Forbes Magazine, “More than half of college faculty are adjuncts: should you care?” (2015), noting that more than 75% of American professors are contingent faculty. While 31% of faculty were part time in 1970, by 2011, that figure rose to 51% part time, 19% non-tenure track full time - constituting almost 75% who are NTTF (non-tenure track faculty, full or part time).“ These faculty are of course less experienced, less secure, less available and less reliable over time for students; they reflect an underpaid and exploited contingent labor force. Many/most are fantastically dedicated mentors and teachers, but the conditions of their labor make it impossible for them, and their students.

The impact of a largely adjunct faculty on students is now well documented. The Delphi Project reports that students who work with contingent faculty are less likely to graduate and less likely to transfer from a 2 to 4 year institution than their peers. From 2000-2012, while public research universities Full Time faculty ranks remained flat, part time faculty/instructors/grad assistants rose by 12%. At public community colleges, full time faculty dropped by 8% and part time faculty dropped by 7%. At private research

universities, full time faculty rose by 16% and part time by 21%. (Desroches and Kirshstein, 2014). Hunter College at CUNY is listed as having 34% full time teachers.

### **Curriculum: Philanthrocapitalism, Academic Containment and Corporate Bullying of the Public University**

Market creep affects not only who attends and who teaches, but the values and logics that permeate the curriculum, university response to dissent/protest and how much corporate interests penetrate the foundational values of the institution. For purposes of discussion I will distinguish the passive/aggressive dynamics of *philanthrocapitalism*, which may be viewed as a “generosity project” and *corporate assaults* on, challenges to and ethical charges posed against progressive scholars who contest corporate-bought science.

*Philanthrocapitalism/The generosity project:* With a flat lining of full time faculty and spikes in contingent labor, it is perhaps no surprise that the labor-walls, and knowledge-walls of public universities are increasingly porous to monied interests. This turn takes a variety of forms: a rise in philanthrocapitalism (Rogers, 2013) which attaches to what is called “catalytic giving” – the pernicious influence of elite “givers” to determine who teaches, what is taught, what values and ideologies are featured for instance in Economics or Middle Eastern Studies Departments (Cassidy, 2015). Chronicle of Philanthropy reports (1/27/16) that US Colleges raise \$40 billion in philanthropy, with Stanford leading the pack with 1.6 billion. Almost 30% of the philanthropy went to six colleges; a 7.6% above last year. Of the top 20 receiving institutions, five are public – four in the UC system – USC, UCSF, UCLA, UC Berkley and Michigan.

The country is littered with stories of universities receiving grants, contracts and gifts that over-reach: influencing who will, and will not be hired; what will and will not be taught. A 2012 story from Florida State has all the imprint of Koch money and curriculum colonization:

“The Koch Foundation has been quietly influencing universities across the country for years; [its own list of funded programs for 2011](#) includes 187 colleges and universities. But much can be learned from events as they have developed in Tallahassee. The foundation proposed a donation of nearly \$6.6 million, with a \$1.5 million initial grant to hire staff and fund fellowships and new undergraduate programs. An agreement was reached, and the program got off the ground without much publicity in its first years. By spring 2011, however, some muttering about outside influence on academic matters could be heard on campus and in town. The two of us knew no one in the economics department, but because we have long-term ties with FSU, we decided to take a look at the [donor grant agreement and memorandum of understanding](#) between the Charles Koch Foundation, the FSU Foundation, and the FSU economics



department.

The provisions called for the appointment of five professors as well as other staff members, the establishment of a Program for the Study of Political Economy and Free Enterprise and a Program for Excellence in Economic Education, and the development of educational programs for undergraduates. The money had strings attached: the major one was the appointment of an advisory board chosen by the Koch Foundation. The board would determine which faculty candidates would qualify to receive funding, review all publicly provided material submitted by applicants for the professorship positions, and review the work of the professors to make sure it complied with the “objectives and purposes” of the foundation. Several clauses made clear that the Koch Foundation could pick up the marbles and go home if dissatisfied.” (www.aaup.org6/2012)

In “Spreading the free market gospel,” David Leventhal (2015) documents the 2013 Koch Brothers’ contributions of \$19.3 million to 210 campuses in 46 states and DC according to Center for Public Integrity analysis of IRS filings. Koch dollars lubricate the ideological privileging of free market economics in the curriculum. And provide an EZ pass for further indoctrination. At College of Charleston in South Carolina, Koch Foundation sought names and emails of students who participated in Koch sponsored classes, reading groups, clubs or fellowships, and insisted that the College not speak to the media about Koch funded programs without prior consent from the Foundation. The funding teaching aligns with libertarian economic philosophy and the Foundation maintains partial control over faculty hiring and often graduate student funding. According to Leventhal, “nowhere is expanded Koch involvement in higher education more evident than at George Mason University,” the site of the recent controversy over the Scalia law School: \$14.4 million in 2013 alone where the Mercatus Center has become a primary “source” on Obamacare – which claims to be a stand alone nonprofit... “George Mason University and its students do receive millions of dollars in annual financial benefit from the Mercatus Center, according to federal tax filings. That alone is a major incentive for a public university in Virginia where state funding of higher education is dwindling, to host a privately funded operation on its campus.” At George Mason, The Mercatus Center spent 3.64 million to support graduate students; 1.82 million for communication of research to “media and opinion shapers” – has met resistance from a national campaign UnKoch my Campus.

### **Academic containment/The silencing project**

In dynamic relation with the corporate funding of neoliberal academic values, faculty and courses, universities – often under external pressure - are weighing in against some faculty who are accused of crossing the [always shifting] line. In The Imperial University, Chatterjee and Maira (2016) document what they call academic containment of scholars who “cross the line” as “too political.” (22) They trace the shifting contours of what constitutes political, and too political, over time, only to note that some areas of research and/or engagement are more likely to provoke

administrative or extra-university challenge, including activism/scholarship on Palestinian justice, climate change, fracking, corporate education reform, campaign finance and the tactics of the American Legislative Exchange Council, to name a few. They recognize that “If one speaks from already dangerous embodiments, structured historically, then that speech risks always being seen as a threat.” (24) And that “the neoliberal structuring of the university is also a racial strategy of management of an increasingly diverse student population... Well funded, neoconservative organizations and partisan groups, such as ACTA, David Horowitz’s Freedom Center and Campus Watch have placed ethnic studies, feminist and queer studies and critical cultural studies in their bull’s-eye.” (25)

In this same volume, V. J. Prashad argues that *cultural vigilantes* police teaching, scholarship and university activism to narrowly constrain what can be taught, who can teach and what issues can be mobilized. Steven Salaita, in “Normalizing state power,” writes that the term *political scholarship* “when used to describe another person’s scholarship, functions as polite denunciation because of its ability to signal a disapproval that need not be articulated... The adjective ‘political’ an imputation disguised as a descriptor, is both accusatory and exclusionary.” (221)

I would add here that the corporate sponsorship of FOILs, Ethics Complaints and threats to academic freedom are further enactments of chilling strategies. The Participation Project describes SLAPPS as:

*Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation. These damaging suits chill free speech and healthy debate by targeting those who communicate with their government or speak out on issues of public interest. SLAPPs are used to silence and harass critics by forcing them to spend money to defend these baseless suits. SLAPP filers don’t go to court to seek justice....To end or prevent a SLAPP, those who speak out on issues of public interest frequently agree to muzzle themselves, apologize, or “correct” statements.* ([www.anti-slapp.org/your-states-free-speech-protection](http://www.anti-slapp.org/your-states-free-speech-protection))

There is a growing list of academics engaged in research on fracking, climate change, corporate education reform, Republican and/or ALEC tactics, philanthrocapitalism or lead paint who have been targeted by legal assaults. Others who have engaged with BDS organizing, or Students for Justice in Palestine have been censured, or, if contingent labor, not re-hired.

You will remember the case of Bill Cronin, renowned historian at University of Wisconsin, when he was attacked by then Governor Scott Walker. In 2011, the Republican Party of Wisconsin sent a request to University Wisconsin Madison legal office requesting all emails into and out of professor William Cronin’s state email account referencing Republican, Scott Walker, recall, collective bargaining, AFSCME, WEAC, rally, union, ....

On March 25 and 28<sup>th</sup>, the Mackinac Center for Public Policy, made a FOIA request for email correspondence of professors at three labor studies programs. (PSC CUNY, 4/12/11, FOIA, academic freedom and use of university email and computer resources). In response to the Cronin controversy, Chancellor Carolyn Biddy Martin offered a quite narrow response, arguing that “private email exchanges among schools that fall within the orbit of academic freedom and all that is entailed by it” should be excluded. Martin recognized academic freedom was placed in peril, threatening the “processes by which knowledge is created.”

That same year, Wayne State, University of Michigan, Michigan State and University of Virginia received FOIA requests for faculty emails. The year before, in 2010, the American Tradition Institute, an environmental think tank, FOIAed the research records of Michael Mann, director of Earth System Science Center at Pennsylvania State University. Mann’s research had documented patterns of climate change for past 1000 years, displaying dramatic increases in global temperatures in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The University resisted, and provided only one quarter of the 12,000 requested emails.

More recently, at Rutgers University, Professor Julia Sass Rubin, nationally recognized for systematic research on charter school selection biases and achievement outcomes, received an Ethics Complaint from the New Jersey Charter School Association alleging that she misused her academic affiliation to promote the legitimacy of her findings. To date her University, and union in particular, have defended Sass Rubin’s scholarship and refused to require an institutional disclaimer on her work.

And then in the Summer of 2014, Dr. Steven Salaita, having resigned his tenured position at Virginia Polytech, accepted a tenured appointment as Associate Professor in the Program of American Indian Studies at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. The appointment still needed final approval by the Board of Trustees of the University of Illinois, but Professor Salaita and the AIS faculty had reason to believe the appointment was secure. At the same time, tensions and violence were escalating between Israel and Gaza. Professor Salaita expressed his outrage in a series of impassioned tweets. On August 1, Chancellor Wise wrote to Professor Salaita that his appointment would not be recommended because the University would not tolerate. What were considered words or actions that conveyed disrespect.

The AAUP investigating committee of Henry Reichman, Joan Wallach Scott and Hans-Joerg Tiede reviewed the case and found that both the administration and the trustees acted in violation of the 1940 Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure and the university’s institutional policies on the subject.

With dangerous similarity, in March 2016, members of the NY State Senate threatened to slash CUNY funding because of “inaction on anti-Semitism” – the rising presence of and protests by Students for Justice in Palestine and faculty support from four CUNY campuses. The move came after the Zionist Organization of America urged CUNY

Chancellor James B. Milliken to prevent the harassment of Jewish students at Hunter College, John Jay College, Brooklyn College, and the College of Staten Island by members of the pro-Palestinian Students for Justice in Palestine.

All of these incidents reveal how porous are the membranes of public institutions; long heralded as the site for critical democratic dialogues, always filled with contradiction and colonizing commitments, these institutions are today hungry for money, vulnerable to criticism and fiscal punishment and undoubtedly highly responsive to conservative pressures. These institutional instincts are neither new nor surprising, but they are quite pronounced, ironically (or not) at a moment when critical public scholarship is flourishing within and beyond the academy.

*And yet... Critical public scholarship*

In defense of public we must be vigilant about these three faces of Public where we witness erosion, blockage and cooptation: the rise of tuition and debt, and the swelling of administrative budgets and salaries, accompanied by a slashing of state funding; the strategic realignment of admissions criteria that limits access for students of color and/or poverty, undocumented students or those with criminal justice records; the deep penetration of philanthrocapitalism and our universities' submissive response to corporate containment of scholarship, activism and dissent.

On these fronts we must be relentless and defensive.

And at the same time, we must engage unapologetically in teaching/research/public performances/political mobilizations with communities, social movements for justice, challenging the dominant stories of science being told by corporate funding and instead aligning the public university with the interests and struggles of those who own the public university – the people. We must contest the slippage to the Right of what constitutes “political” or “advocacy” work; we must trouble why some “partnerships” (e.g. with the military, police, Department of Homeland Security, Big Pharma) are considered well funded policy/research partnerships while other collaborations (with social movements, with communities under siege, with social justice policy organizations) are considered advocacy or suspect. And those of us at Public Universities must dare to host the “dangerous” conversations worthy of debate.

Indeed, as tax levy dollars and bodies of color leak out of public higher education, as there are calls for the Scalia Law School at George Mason and the Koch Brothers donate and insemminate public higher education to reproduce neoliberal market ideologies, silence critics and narrow the gaze of inquiry, there is, at the same time, a virtual explosion of public scholarship, community based research, activist-scholarship coalitions, blogs, radical archiving projects, protests and critical participatory science

with social movements in local communities, across the country and with global solidarity movements.

In his essay, *Practically Socialism*, Gar Alperovitz (2016) chronicles a series of “innovative experiments with public ownership” that “point the way toward a more just and sustainable economy,” including worker owned cooperatives, neighborhood land trusts, and decentralized municipal corporations (p.19-20). Alperovitz notes that communities in Philadelphia and Santa Fe are developing municipally owned banks; in Boulder Colorado, climate change activists have municipalized local utilities, and more than 250 community land trusts have been established to prevent gentrification. Bio-regional efforts “anchor economic, social and environmental development in national regions” and Food Solutions New England, for instance, seeks to develop a sustainable and equitable regional food system by 2060. Alperovitz asks us to imagine a “pluralist commonwealth” rooted in participation, collectivity, and sustainability. To this list, let us add democratic and participatory production and ownership of critical inquiry by and for communities under siege (Santos, 2016). A form of public oriented and cooperative science, like worker owned cooperatives, community land trusts, municipal corporations, and the massively expanding practices of participatory budgeting, critical public scholarship challenges the hegemony of elite interests as the dominant lens of science, and insists on social inquiry theorized, practiced, and collectively owned by and for particularly those communities enduring State violence. This must be the project of the public university.

We are now flooded with a landscape of radical possibilities seeded within/beyond/despite the academy; the “fugitive spaces” Robin Kelly (2016) describes; transgressive engagements across our campuses and within our classrooms as Lorde, Jordan and Rich reveal; the building of movements with campaigns within and beyond the academy (BlackLivesMatter, Black youth project, The Dreamers project, UndocuQueer, Inside/Out Coalition for Banning the Box...), and the explicit commitment to progressive, community based research coalitions (e.g. in the critical social sciences Congress of Qualitative Inquiry; Rouge Forum; Participatory Research in Asia (Rajesh Tandon); JustPublics and the Center for Human Environments, Center for Place, Culture and Politics at the Graduate Center; the Next Gen Project for Community based research and social responsibility in higher education at University of Victoria, developed by Bud Hall, Walter Lepore, Rajesh Tandon and colleagues, [unescochair-cbrsr.org/building-the-next-generation-of-community-based-researchers-](http://unescochair-cbrsr.org/building-the-next-generation-of-community-based-researchers-); URBAN at Cuny, directed by Celina Su; The Global Assembly for Knowledge Democracy 2017, borne within the Action Research Network in the Americas, in the U.S.; the ALICE project: Strange mirrors, Unsuspected Lessons for Europe, drawing on epistemologies the South organized by Boaventure de Sousa Santos, 2016 ...)

We are of course at a cross roads when market logic and radical academic possibilities sit side by side under the sprawling academic tent; the latter always vulnerable to being colonized by the former. Public universities are quite vulnerable,

and yet by virtue of the radical commitments and chutzpa of faculty/staff/students we are perhaps best prepared to resist the assault. We now know that public scholarship/civic engagement/digital humanities/democratic knowledge will be advocated and branded by our administrations until we “cross the line.” And then our institutions may well abandon. Particularly for junior faculty, faculty of color and otherwise marginalized academics. As Tressie McMillam Cottom has written (2012):

“The inequalities women and minorities face in traditional academic models only exacerbates the potential risks of contributing to public scholarship. That is potentially devastating to those who would benefit most from the kind of visibility, credibility, and network building that public scholarship can provide. I am clear about these risks. I am also clear that, for me, the risk of not speaking in these spaces is far greater. I am deliberate in how I engage conversations that matter to me. That I make that choice is not a reason for accolades and neither should it be a reason to shame those who make a different risk analysis. However, when women and minorities shy away from public scholarship from fear of retribution I am reminded of Audre Lorde who said, ‘Your silence will not save you.’

Public scholarship spins with a doubled thread: radically rooted beyond the academy, and firmly stitched into the neoliberal brand of the “responsive” public university. Jessie Daniels and Polly Thistlewaite address this conflation when they write on digital scholarship: “Surveying the landscape of the neoliberal war on higher education, many observers mistake the rise of digital scholarship with the neoliberal impulse to commercialize the university. While it is tempting to dismiss the rise of digital scholarship as just another victory for the forces of neoliberalism, or, to get swept away by the rhetoric of the disruptive potential of digital technologies to transform all of higher education ‘with just one click’, both views are too facile. Understanding the complicated landscape of what it means to be a scholar now requires a more sophisticated appreciation of both the shift from legacy to digital scholarship, and the struggle between the forces of commercialization and democratization.” (p.17)

With such rich proliferation, we can not be naïve. History teaches us that progressive educational praxis (open admissions, no tuition, ethnic studies, technology, college in prison, the Free University, Affirmative Action....) advanced *solely* within the walls of the academy is fundamentally vulnerable, always susceptible to full retreat and/or commodification (becoming institutionalized and “acceptable.”) These moves of institutionalization, domestication and the metaphoric circumcision of the radical tip of vibrant movements on campus, speak to the predictable curdling of the radical education imagination, as Rich and Audre Lorde warned 50 years ago (for important counter story see McCann, 2016).

Thus it may be naïve to say: each engagement, lodged at the periphery and the center, swirls as an assemblage of contradictory vectors. Those of us still fighting for the

highly compromised space called the Public University must press to evoke and cultivate the critical public strands, resist the neoliberal and be in solidarity with movements/activists/communities/artists beyond the academy focused on economic and racial justice. We now know that the possibility/likelihood of academic complicity runs high. And as we build these fragile solidarities, even from within, we must also be bold in our critique of the very institutions in which we are situated, as Norm Denzin and colleagues have done through the Qualitative Inquiry Congress website:

*The 2016 Congress of Qualitative Inquiry is devoting a town hall meeting to the topics of the academy, freedom of speech, tenure, faculty appointments and academic boycotts. In 2015, we held a town meeting in response to actions taken by the Administration at the University of Illinois regarding their decision about Professor Steven Salaita. Though the matter has been resolved legally, legal resolutions often do not restore what becomes lost when there is a need to litigate. It is in this spirit, the need to heal and reestablish a confidence in the institution as a credible and ethical place of intellectual inquiry within the academy, that we feel the importance of ongoing discussion.*

*Since its founding, ICQI has been a forum for critical conversations about the role of scholarship in advancing qualitative inquiry as a democratic practice. The tenets of freedom of speech and academic freedom are integral to these discussions. We stand by our mission to be leaders in fostering research and pedagogy that engages the pressing social issues of our time. Our university community has mobilized to support the tenets of academic freedom and intellectual integrity that form the DNA of higher education.*

We can not look at educational or political leaders to advance Public as the collective intellectual, political and ethical project; but those of us on faculty – in full time and contingent tracks, on tenure or short term lines, must link arms across status, with students, progressive labor unions, community members, activists, those engaged with environmental justice, prison abolition, k-12 education and racial justice/immigration/queer activists, demanding equitable, anti-Racist, decolonizing and democratic education, as allies in the struggle to resuscitate the Public as a solidarity project, as if our lives depended on it – because of course they do.

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