

A Course Proposal: Institutional Critique and the University

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What Happens at the Intersection of Conceptual Art & Teaching?: A Marathon Zoomposium

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## A Course Proposal: Institutional Critique and the University

**Course Title:** *Institutional Critique and the University*

**Catalog Description:** This course will generate “knowledge in the university—at the level of its form, content and practices—[that] tends towards the knowing degeneration, disorganization and disequilibrium of the university.”<sup>1</sup> It will take as a starting point that a materialist analysis of the university is necessary;<sup>2</sup> that the incorporation of our collective practices into the university must be resisted;<sup>3</sup> and, finally, that discourses of art cannot escape violence.<sup>4</sup>

The course will consist of five projects.

### **Project 1: Materialities and Virtualities of Debt**

Overview: Students will review their financial aid, loan, and credit card statements and, using their current debt as a baseline, calculate anticipated debt to complete their degree. When the student has determined their forecasted debt, they will design a “time-based performance” (a five-, ten-, or twenty-year plan, for instance) in which the student would have the hypothetical financial ability to repay their debts. The student’s performance should account for an estimated

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<sup>1</sup> Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, “The University: Last Words.” Currently unpublished, the paper was circulated as part of the graduate student-led FUC series, led by Moten and Harney on July 9, 2020. Text available at: <https://www.fuc-series.org/>

<sup>2</sup> See The Edu-Factory Collective, eds., *Toward a Global Autonomous University* (Brooklyn: Autonomedia, 2009); Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson, *Institutional Critique: An Anthology of Artists’ Writings* (Boston: MIT Press, 2009).

<sup>3</sup> See Gerald Raunig and Gene Ray, eds., *Art and Contemporary Practice: Reinventing Institutional Critique* (London: Mayfly Books, 2006); Claire Fontaine, *The Human Strike Has Already Begun & Other Essays* (Berlin: Mute/PML Books, 2013); Eli Meyerhoff, *Beyond Education: Radical Studying for Another World* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2019).

<sup>4</sup> See John P. Bowles, *Adrian Piper: Race, Gender, and Embodiment* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011); Darby English, *To Describe a Life: Notes from the Intersection of Art and Race Terror*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019).

time-to-repayment and any financial factors that will affect the duration of their performance.<sup>5</sup>

Those factors might include: rent, car payments, computer payments, children, pets, cell phone bills, internet bills, netflix subscriptions, groceries, insurance, alcohol, marijuana, etc.

\*If a student does not have any debt, that student may substitute this assignment for a close reading of Karl Marx's *Capital*.<sup>6</sup>

Supporting Documents (Artworks):

Joseph Kosuth, *One and Three Chairs* (1965)

Tehching Hsieh, *One Year Performance 1980-1981 (Time Clock Piece)* (1980–1981)

Supporting Documents (Texts):

Christopher Newfield, *The Great Mistake: How We Wrecked Public Universities and How We Can Fix Them* (2016)

Abigail Boggs, Eli Meyerhoff, Nick Mitchell, and Zach Schwartz-Weinstein, “Abolitionist University Studies: An Invitation” (2019)

**Project 2: Materialities and Virtualities of University Resources**

Overview: Students will thoroughly read the university's annual financial report, paying close attention to all new building and renovation projects over 10 million dollars. Students will tour every building on campus, including sites of planned construction. Students will note buildings that show signs of financial health and/or dilapidation as well as signage that might denote donors, honorary building names, or corporate sponsorships. Next, students will thoroughly

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<sup>5</sup> Maurizio Lazzarato, *The Making of the Indebted Man*, trans. Joshua David Jordan (New York: Semiotext(e), 2012), 34-35.

<sup>6</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of the Political Economy, Vol. 1*, trans. Ben Fowkes (New York: Penguin, 1992).

research one location and design a tour of that building. Examples might include: the future site of a football stadium, a building named after a former slave owner, a tour of administrative offices with salary information, or a tour of the corporate-sponsored lab.

Supporting Documents (Artworks):

Mark Lombardi, various drawings

Andrea Fraser, *Museum Highlights: A Gallery Talk* (1989)

Supporting Documents (Texts):

Marc Bousquet, *How the University Works: Higher Education and the Low-Wage Nation* (2008)

Katherine McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle* (2006)

**Project 3: Materialities and Virtualities of University Real Estate**

Overview: Students will research the history of the neighborhood where the University has recently expanded its footprint, paying close attention to the racial makeup and income level of its current and former residents. Students will visit the neighborhood, noting new buildings, types of cars, and the activity level of the police. Next, students will scrutinize University press releases regarding the opening of these buildings and create a revised press release containing their research on the neighborhood's history prior to the University's expansion.

Supporting Documents (Artworks):

Hans Haacke, *Shapolsky et al. Manhattan Real Estate Holdings, a Real-Time Social System, as of May 1, 1971* (1971)<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> It was rumored that the Board of Trustees for the Guggenheim, the original site of the installation, had a personal relationship with the real estate group. Haacke's exhibition was canceled by the Guggenheim.

Adrian Piper, *Vanilla Nightmares* (1985–1989)

Supporting Documents (Texts):

Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, *Race for Profit: How Banks and the Real Estate Industry Undermined Black Homeownership* (2019)

Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California* (2007)

**Project 4: Materialities and Virtualities of the Entrepreneurial Spirit**

Overview: Students will do a close reading of the mission statement and recruitment materials of the University’s Entrepreneurship major alongside research on the Entrepreneurship major itself: its history, the context in which it was created, the “success” its graduates have had, etc. Students will repeat this process for majors within the Art Department.<sup>8</sup> Next, students will create annotated versions of the Entrepreneurship and Art Department’s informational materials. The annotated materials should reveal marginalia as a deconstructive tool, position the occlusion of information as an ideological strategy of erasure, and critically read University-produced materials as propaganda.

Supporting Documents (Artworks):

Wendy Red Star, *1880 Crow Peace Delegation* (2014)

Latoya Ruby Fraser, *Campaign for Braddock Hospital (Save Our Community Hospital)* (2011)

Supporting documents (Texts):

Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (2007)

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<sup>8</sup> I’m grateful to David Court for the suggestion of a comparative reading.

Brain Holmes, *Escape the Overcode* (2009)

Dylan Rodríguez, “The Political Logic of the Non-Profit Industrial Complex” (2007)

### **Project 5: Materialities and Virtualities of Abolition**

Overview: Students will begin by viewing Jayson Musson as Hennessy Youngman in his video *Art Thoughtz: Institutional Critique* (2011). In this video, Youngman sardonically states: “rather than talk about the theoretical aspects of Institutional Critique, I’m just going to go ahead and critique institutions... so I went ahead and created a list of the Top 5 institutions.” He counts them down:

- 5) Rikers Island
- 4) ADX Supermax Prison
- 3) Abu Ghraib
- 2) Auschwitz
- 1) Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade

Youngman’s critique is a debilitating blow to the tradition of Institutional Critique as a tautological practice unable to account for these “Top-5” institutions. For the final project, students will create a “time-based performance” (a five-, ten-, or twenty-year plan, for instance), wherein the student creates the conditions of study<sup>9</sup> to be able to articulate two questions: 1) How does the University play a role in supporting the following: Anti-Blackness and the Prison Regime (Rikers and ADX); Xenophobia, Islamophobia, and Imperialism (Abu Ghraib); Fascism, Genocide, Militarism, and Antisemitism (Auschwitz); and Anti-Blackness, Social Death, Racial

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<sup>9</sup> See Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, “Debt and Study,” in *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study* (Brooklyn: Minor Compositions, 2013), 58–70.

Capitalism, and the reproduction of white supremacy (Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade)? 2) How has our experimental course on Institutional Critique and the University failed?

This time-based performance might include reading lists, organizations to join, participation in imagined future uprisings, etc.

Supporting Documents (Artwork):

None

Supporting Documents (Texts):

None