

Introduction

Dehumanist Education and the Colonial University

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The concept of “educational undergrowth” points toward an account of educational practices and institutions that attends to ecologies that are not always visible in dominant (humanist) conceptualizations of what education is and does. Beginning with universities—because each contributor to this issue is entangled with them, albeit in differential ways—we aim to go beyond critiques of the institution (although such critiques orient our thinking),¹ toward the project of asking what education is and what it might yet become. This is, of course a question that has been asked for a very long time, but we ask it today, again, because too many of us have been trained to conflate education with schooling (including at the university) or to accept that education requires institutionalized schools. Approaching the question of education—which is at once practical and theoretical, ontological and speculative—from an ecological account of institutions, practices, and affective attachments gives us a way of seeing distinct, and perhaps incommensurate, critiques of the university as intimately adjacent. Moreover, it allows us to ask what it is about education that we are committed to, what it is we want to preserve and protect. In the undergrowth, education names a wider, more diffuse set of practices of collective sense making and world making than dominant, European, imperialist, and Enlightenment conceptions allow.

Much of what happens in and around the university cannot come into focus if you see “the university” as a bounded entity. Not only is the university a porous space where things and beings that “don’t belong” are creeping into and out of its cracks, but it is also an entity absolutely dependent on other bodies. We can offer much more complex accounts of many of the university’s asymmetries, in terms of which forms of life

and liveliness are biopolitically invested for flourishing (while others are defunded, marginalized, delegitimized, uninvited, eliminated, etc.), when the university is seen as one part of a larger ecology that endures in a global climate of coloniality, where extraction, expropriation, and accumulation shape our physical and affective landscapes.² Instead of seeing universities, P–12 schools, prisons, banks, police forces, agribusiness corporations, nonprofit organizations, and other institutions as separate things that enter into manifold relations, an ecological account lets us see how they are all specific, intraactive outgrowths of the same field.³ This enables us to see, first, how the figures of the student, teacher, and administrator account for only some of the humans in the milieu, inviting us to think the university as a contact zone that also includes health care workers, grounds keepers, custodial staff, service industry workers, accountants, lawyers, consultants, counselors, coaches, and police. As all of these humans circulate in that institutional landscape, they are in dynamic relation with a vast number of nonhuman actors: books, computers, buildings, power grids, processed foods, plants, pesticides, bacteria, viruses, athletic fields and equipment, surveillance systems, and internet services.⁴ As all these entities emerge and endure as porously bounded things in the ecosystem where resources, energies, and opportunities are distributed in highly unequal ways.⁵

Sylvia Wynter's distinction between the human as a particular kind of biocultural entity and Man as the white, colonialist, heteropatriarchal overrepresentation of the human in the wake of 1492 lets us conceptualize educational institutions as humanizing assemblages that generate fully human persons (what universities have long called *character development*) only through the simultaneous production of less-than-human and inhuman "constitutive outsides."⁶ Man does not dehumanize Indigenous, Black, Brown, or impoverished people in the same ways, even as a distributed, uneven ecology is precisely what links critical, decolonial, and abolitionist praxes. What Wynter's Man/human distinction allows is a way of seeing that schools and universities typically betray the directionality signaled in the word *education*: *ex + ducere*, or leading out of or away from. While this has been conceptualized as humanized adults leading the young out of immaturity, or thrall to their "animal" impulses, or the cave of ignorance, as operationalized in modern institutions of schooling what we see is almost the opposite: induction into being Man, coupled with violent forms of dehumanization that exclude or devalue anyone who can't or won't be thus mastered. We are interested in ways of attuning to education that refuse Man and its modes of mastery and that instead affirm education as the collective flight from Man.⁷ While education may often be an alibi for induction to Man, it can also be "directed toward the protection and flourishing of people and of ways of being and knowing and of

inhabiting the planet that liberal humanism, wrought through the defining structures of modernity, tries so hard to extinguish.”⁸

Three primary leftist approaches have emerged in contemporary writings about the university: the critical, the decolonial, and the abolitionist. Critical approaches, often based in some variety of Marxist project, have tended to focus on funding, adjunctification, debt, and the panoply of corporatization projects that many writers signal with the word *neoliberalism*.⁹ Decolonial approaches, especially in settler colonies like the United States, Canada, Australia, and occupied Palestine, focus on how educational institutions are an “arm of the settler state,” as Sandy Grande wrote in the “Refusing the University.”¹⁰ Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang put it succinctly: “Decolonization is the rematriation of Indigenous land and life,” and decolonial education is entangled with what LEEANNE BETASAMOSAKE SIMPSON calls “land as pedagogy.”¹¹ Abolitionist approaches foreground the university as part of racial capitalism and explore the entanglements between racial slavery and its afterlives.¹² They focus on intimate relations among schools and the carceral system,¹³ on racialized state violence, and on initiatives to make legible how many US universities—including many of the most prestigious private universities—are materially, architecturally, and financially dependent on the labor of enslaved people and their descendants. These three approaches can often seem like competing frameworks. They tend to summon different temporalities in their genealogies of institutions, and they take very different stances toward the state as a formation.

Rather than seeking to construct a common, all-encompassing critical frame with this special issue, “Educational Undergrowth” offers us a way of thinking and feeling how the critical, abolitionist, and decolonial educational projects are tied to modalities of living that struggle to grow and endure within the same surrounding colonial environment.¹⁴ “Educational Undergrowth” is thus a collective attempt to approach the university from dehumanist perspectives. Rather than simply repudiate the dehumanizations that constitutively bound Man (often by calling for inclusion), dehumanism involves a radical form of dwelling with the dehumanized and with the knowledge and forms of living produced beyond Man.¹⁵ Dehumanist projects understand diversity and inclusion initiatives as apparatuses of institutional capture that neutralize the demands of social movements.¹⁶ These projects push us to understand the specific kinds of practices, study, and collaboration that happen inside, at the edges of, and below universities, without falling back on an affirmation of the university form as it currently stands or simple calls to return to the well-funded postwar university that are found in so many critical university studies texts.¹⁷

We look to the undergrowth thriving in the ecological milieu beneath

this Man or outside his reach, to the forms of disbelonging that infiltrate and subtend the university, to the ways education that bears little resemblance to official accounts of it takes place. Whether directly or indirectly, all of us contributing to this issue are interested in thinking the university as a state strategy and are influenced by the seeds of Stefano Harney and Fred Moten's *Undercommons*, which advocates for the subversive intellectual in the modern university to "steal what one can" from it and to cultivate oneself to be "in but not of" the institution.¹⁸ Education, or study, happens throughout the social field, even if we might say, playing with Wynter, that schools and universities try to overrepresent themselves as education itself. Some of us are interested in and entangled with other modes of study that happen outside or on the far edges of universities, such as experimental colleges, anarchist free schools, and community-based study groups.¹⁹ We are also inspired by the more-or-less formal study groups that arise in and are animated by social movements, such as Black Lives Matter, Idle No More, the Standing Rock movement against the Dakota Access Pipeline, that use social media to collectively generate syllabi. These syllabus projects, like so many older informal modes of study that did not rely on devices that are environmentally horrific,²⁰ can be thought of as curricula against the state: ways of affirming and amplifying the world-making capacities of education outside of and in antagonistic relationship to statist capture of study.²¹ Education need not even be that formal: it can happen whenever and wherever there is a collective grappling with the conditions of (un)livability and speculating on how to grow and cultivate alternatives. And even though it may sound paradoxical, this nonstatist education also happens in schools and on university campuses in spite of how universities attempt to capture and redirect our capacities for study.

One of the more insidious aspects of the university system (always linked to P-12 schools, banks, prisons, other corporations, etc.) is how it obscures its violent sorting of persons into radically uneven life chances while modulating affects of deservingness and safety.²² The affective politics of humanism means that no classroom discussion can ever be separated from larger historical-political forces of colonization, racialization, heteropatriarchy, and extractive capitalism. The university functions for many of us, individually and collectively, as a site of cruel optimism:²³ if we could just get the jobs, the promotions, the postdocs, the degrees, the acceptance letters, the university might be livable. Mulling over Harney and Moten's question, "How come we can't be together and think together in a way that feels good, the way it should feel good?"²⁴ we seek in this issue to understand how classroom practices, modes of scholarship, and disciplinary or interdisciplinary formations are entangled with histories of land theft, slavery, forced labor, the politics of the nation state, ecologi-

cal devastation, and ongoing struggles over the meaning of the *human*. In the mess of these entanglements, other things (and differently animating affects) sprout, struggle for endurance, and grow. This means we all begin with some question demanded by our specific locations—at different universities, with vastly different conditions of arrival and current positions within institutional structures—and in every case this leads us beyond the university.²⁵ We aim to feel out the larger ecological surround (where universities touch P–12 schools, prisons, banks, corporations, etc.) and also let ourselves be pulled by collective world making—that is, education—to imagine how we might study otherwise and elsewhere.

All of the contributors of this issue are affiliated with what Roderick Ferguson calls the interdisciplines of minority difference, or what the right wing has recently called “grievance studies.”²⁶ We are interested in asking what possibilities exist for (re)thinking study from the perspectives of Black, Brown, Indigenous, feminist, queer, decolonial, and ecological perspectives that have always been rendered marginal—indeed, pesky—to the university (if they are included at all). We are in or entangled with universities in a variety of ways, and our lives hinge, to greater and lesser degrees, on access to the spaces, resources, and rhythms of academic institutions.²⁷ So this issue is neither a call for nor a fantasy of a simple rejection of the university, or a wholesale giving up on it, even if we also attune to what Eileen Joy has called “para- and outstitutional spaces” for study.²⁸ But there is also something to be said for picking up and extending Jennifer Nash’s recent call for letting go of particular forms of critique therein. That is, in the face of “the workings of the so-called corporate university that has incorporated a particular kind of investment in difference,” can we let go of our defensive attachments to the university?²⁹ Can we attune more capaciously to the practices and encounters happening in the undergrowth in a way that lets us feel how study—in the expansive political sense that Harney and Moten give that term—doesn’t always require that university anyway, and that we’re already cultivating new modes of being, becoming, relating, and building? We see our dehumanist thinking of education as symbiotically related to Abigail Boggs and colleagues’ recent invitation to imagine and enact the abolition university by asking, “What would an abolitionist university say yes to?”³⁰

In asking this question, “Educational Undergrowth” can be constellated with recent calls to move beyond critique. Boggs et al. note that “it’s not that critique isn’t useful, it’s that an instrumentalist understanding of critique cannot account for the ways in which critique organizes us within a larger institutional framework of valuation.”³¹ Critique, in classrooms and in academic writing, can easily be recuperated by the university today, folded into its cathexis on assessment and metricization of academic labor as long as it is done excellently.³² Beyond critique, we want

to affirm all the ways that our affective encounters pull and push us in other directions: toward refusal, failure, delinquency.³³ Nathan often theorizes such encounters using the concept of “bewildering education.” He wrote, “This particular affective state of disorientation—bewilderment—might be the most productive way to open up possibilities for moving away from Man toward other, incipient and furtive, ways of performing the human.”³⁴ Thinking with the same concept, and responding to the 2017 American Studies Association’s conference theme, “Pedagogies of Dissent,” Julietta and Jack Halberstam organized a roundtable conversation about the concept of decolonial bewilderment. Looking back at a long legacy of decolonial thought that sought to recuperate or redefine civility in the colonies against colonial force, the roundtable experimented with forms of bewilderment—of being lost in the wild—as potential modes of decolonization.³⁵ Departing from the premise that the activity of bewilderment—of letting ourselves become lost, of recognizing that we are already lost—may be a practice of anarchic refusal, participants engaged with how to teach and learn bewilderment as a political practice. Whether in the academy, in the United States, or in the world we call *global*, the embrace of bewilderment against colonial logic may offer us more generative ways of becoming decolonized. The US university here becomes a particular site from which we think, enabling some generalizations about what education is without affirming either US exceptionalism or assuming that universities around the world are shaped by coloniality in the same way.³⁶

This collective interest in wild or bewildering affect in educational encounters keeps the two sometimes distinct senses of affect—as the capacity to affect and be affected, and as feelings or emotion—at play. In educational encounters we find ourselves feeling bewildered, energized, angered, hurt, depleted, and bored. These affects circulate socially in particular spaces, such as classrooms, because bodies, like institutions, are viscosely porous.³⁷ But these affects neither begin nor end with humans, and recent activism, such as the Black Lives Matter–related student demands that focus on how present material conditions are entirely shaped by the wake of slavery—calls attention to how the physical, architectural, and geographic environments of universities and univerCities prime differential affective experiences of education.³⁸ Mel Y. Chen wrote that “if affect includes affectivity—how one body affects another—then affect . . . becomes a study of the governmentality of animate hierarchies, an examination of how acts seem to operate with, or against, the order of things.”³⁹ While the articles in this special issue focus primarily on the intrahuman affective politics of education, the ecological framing of “educational undergrowth” enables us to track outward, below, and beyond the human bodies, attuning to how their affective experiences are also shaped by

nonhuman actors. This is perhaps most clear in two essays not included in this issue but that have been part of our collective discussion: Erin Manning's *Social Text* article "Me Lo Dijo un Pajarito" and Mel Chen's unpublished manuscript "Differential Being and Emergent Agitation." These essays not only foreground how the human (and its politics) is suspended in networks of more-than-human affective relation but also approach education—in the university and beyond—through attention to the violence of its neurotypicality and ableist architectures.

Continuing Chen's earlier work "Agitation," they argue that "agitations cross the realms of the human, inhuman, and nonhuman, and capture some form of un-rest."⁴⁰ Attuning to these agitations, which happen in what we are calling the educational undergrowth, requires us to slow down and shift our attention to a smaller scale of relation, movement, and collision where things happen without (always or easily) adding up to subjects with identities acting in conscious ways. Chen wrote,

What are called "race" and "disability" are notions that sum—into labile, responsive form—massive distributions of being, sensation, and matter, distributions with interested histories. Affect studies suggests that if the calculus of race and disability often seem simple or formulaic in terms of legislation, labor practices or public policy, what they reveal under examination, even within these domains, are deeply contingent, highly specific formulations that only come to *seem* entrenched and repetitive.⁴¹

Chen calls these specific formulations "differential being."⁴² Taking up *The Undercommons* and cocomposing with Black and neurodiverse critiques of the university, Manning has called for "attuning to the under-common currents of creative dissonance and asymmetrical experience always already at work in, across and beyond the institution."⁴³ For Manning, this attunement opens the possibility for collective study that does not begin with the usual concepts animating leftist political thought: "To work with the circulation of power, it is necessary to move beyond the body to bodying, beyond a notion that there are preexisting individuals that are powered by hierarchy that measures their movements."⁴⁴ What Chen and Manning call for, in different vocabularies, is the widening of our attention to the more-than-human flux of relation that constitutes the world that allows us to better grasp how intrahuman struggles in and over education are always entangled at scales below, around, and beyond the ones usually dominant in educational thought.

Some of the articles in "Educational Undergrowth" invite us to move beyond thinking education in anthropocentric terms, instead analyzing how the intrahuman politics of education as the modulation of de/humanization, understood broadly, are related to the more-than-human ecologies that make it possible. In so doing, we ask not just whether another univer-

sity is possible but whether other kinds of education are already growing in the shadows of the statist university.⁴⁵ Our political agitations in and around universities are already in response—even if this isn’t conscious—to how we are agitated by spaces that concretize histories and economies and that attempt to orient us in particular directions. In *We Demand* Ferguson wrote that “large institutions like universities were thus seen as racially motivated ways to control and manage irrational Native and Black populations and the environmental resources that—without the management and control of whites—would go to seed.”⁴⁶ We want to generalize and affirm this going to seed, leaning toward futures in which we tend the weeds of non-Man genres of the human and the material ecologies within which they flourish.

Affect theory, feminist new materialisms, queer inhumanisms, and posthumanist ecologies all provide resources for thinking about the myriad encounters, relations, and affective shuttlings that enable education even if they happen at a scale (spatial, temporal, molecular) that is outside of traditional humanist ways of viewing education.⁴⁷ If the university is an assemblage (or network of assemblages) that generates Man and its outsides, then we need to attune to the nonhuman agencies, entities, and animacies that make the university’s version of “human” persons (Man) possible: buildings, plumbing systems, electrical grids tied to extraction, computing devices, wireless networks, slaughtered animals served in dining halls, manicured plants around campuses, and so forth. Universities accumulate a massive amount of things.⁴⁸ And while many therein now talk explicitly about sustainability, we suggest that the university’s particular infrastructural articulations are inescapably part of anthropogenic climate change, precisely because, as demonstrated by Jaime Acosta Gonzalez and Eli Meyerhoff in their article on Duke University’s ties to tobacco in this special issue and by Theresa Stewart-Ambo and K. Wayne Yang in their article on land acknowledgements, the university as it has taken shape over the last few hundred years is part of the colonial project and inseparable from colonial ecologies.

But critical, queer, decolonial, and abolitionist educational practices also thrive in this colonial ecology. We need not share the same frameworks, the same concepts, the same citational fields, but we find ourselves together exposed to a colonial ecology that under- or malnourishes some of us while others thrive,⁴⁹ that works to direct our energies, attentions, and affects toward Man’s dominion. The contributors to this issue occupy a range of distinct positions in universities—tenured and tenure-track professors, contingent faculty, postdocs, graduate students—with very different access to wages, resources, and control over institutional operations. We might learn to attune to how we are differentially situated without always beginning with distinct, known identities that then

have to be collated. Instead, here in the undergrowth we may come feel one another in what Chen calls our “differential being,”⁵⁰ to become animated by one another’s dreams and demands. This is education as the cultivation of what Julietta has called “a dehumanist ‘we,’ one that arises not on the grounds of Western scientific discourse and humanist politics but from the promises of those subjugated and emergent worldviews that recognize life, feel energy, and hear rhythms where there appear [under Western imperialist eyes] to be none.”⁵¹ While the articles in this issue begin with critiques of how universities capture education and siphon its energies, we are also all trying to affirm the urgency and necessity of education as collective world making. The ecological framing, which foregrounds the entangled intraaction of myriad entities that remain porously bounded, means we can also find ways to affirm shared projects now that do not require us to ground these alliances in a single, shared vision of the past or the future. Etymologically, the university is driven by a desire to master everything, and perhaps dehumanist futures where non-Man genres of the human thrive require not a single shared institution, state, or social framework but a pluriverse sustained by differential modes of education.⁵²

Alongside this issue’s appearance in print, the *Social Text* blog has published two shorter texts that grew out of our collective thinking of educational undergrowth. Eileen Joy’s “What’s Academic Freedom Got to Do with Us? Nothing. Absolutely Nothing” cuts underneath the critical university studies call for protecting academic freedom to explore the material, institutional, and ultimately imperialist conditions the hold that (narrow and unevenly protected) freedom in place. Rejecting the idea that such freedom is a right that one can own, or that state violence can protect, Joy instead calls for an ethics of care in the undergrowth:

What academic freedom is, instead, is a kind of practice that we have to work at (vigilantly) every day (for ourselves and for others), and at the same time, it is also a state of being, a sort of ontological ground without which practically nothing new could ever emerge nor proceed, which is why I believe one of the most important tasks—perhaps the only task—of any scholarly ‘community’ today would be to simply clear space (to *make room*).⁵³

On a similar wavelength, Chad Shomura’s “Cultivating the Weeds” begins with his simultaneous experiences of receiving a teaching award named after Rosa Parks and being attacked by right-wing media for offering a class titled American Political Thought with no white men on the syllabus. Shomura’s text—a hauntingly poetic distillation of anger, frustration, and the joys of educational encounters in the undergrowth—similarly turns to making space:

José Esteban Muñoz shows us that utopia is not the pristine place it is often imagined to be. It is the impossible refuge of all who have been left without one: the perverse, the backwards, the abject. It can never arrive, and so it is always already here. Bored with the staleness of diversity and inclusion, the denizens of utopia are animated by unrest, agitation, and wildness. They turn humans into weeds, differently and evermore.⁵⁴

Educational undergrowth, then, rejects Man and seeks impossible refuge—an unsettled and antisettlement fugitive collectivity—elsewhere. Joy and Shomura ultimately amplify two questions that resonate persistently across “Educational Undergrowth”: What does it mean to care for one another and the material conditions within which we live? And what kinds of collectivities can emerge—however fleetingly or enduringly—through careful study when we don’t begin with assumptions about the discreteness of persons, projects, institutions, and visions of the future?

The print issue begins with “Beyond Land Acknowledgment in Settler Institutions,” in which Teresa Stewart-Ambo and K. Wayne Yang, from their perspective in the “Indigenous undergrowth,” query “what land acknowledgment does, where it comes from, where it is pointing.” While land acknowledgment has become much more common recently in North American universities, such statements often prop up colonialist recognition politics and even function as a kind of recolonization, even as they also hold open crucial pedagogical space for dwelling in and with settler colonization as ongoing violence. Schematically, such statements—in their wording and their specific material contexts of enunciation—often relegate settler violence to the past, posing the politics of the statements as a kind of redress of historical wrongs. Stewart-Ambo and Yang’s article offers a genealogy of such practices structured around a comparison of how struggles for and around land acknowledgments took shape at University of California, Los Angeles and University of California, San Diego. By attuning beyond those practices toward nonanthropocentric ecologies of land, Stewart-Ambo and Yang foreground “land as pedagogy” (a phrase they borrow from Leanne Betasamosake Simpson), and they elaborate this practice through careful attention to Indigenous relationality and questions about how settlers might enter into a politics of hospitality as “guests” with specific responsibilities. Instead of oriented toward a past in which those present do not have to understand themselves as complicit, the article ultimately offers a pedagogy oriented *beyond* (in part a reference to *Star Trek*), theorized “as a potential decolonial framework for land acknowledgment that recognizes Indigenous futures.” This decolonial project is, as Yang has written elsewhere with Eve Tuck, not metaphorical,⁵⁵ and it requires us to think seriously about how universities as material instances of land have to be reconfigured if decolonization

is to be a politics and not a liberal practice of virtue signaling that allows settler violence to continue unabated.

The second article similarly moves from discourses of meritocracy, and even social justice, circulating within the university toward a materialist account of the violences such discourses obscure. Bennett Carpenter, Laura Goldblatt, and Lenora Hanson's article, "Unprofessional: Toward a Political Economy of Professionalization," excavates discourses of professionalization in the university, especially as a modality of graduate study, in relation to a shifting landscape of neoliberal financialization. Taking off from two high-profile cases—a Yale administrator's critique of student activists hunger striking, and the Title IX complaint against New York University professor Avital Ronell—they ultimately see in the figure of the professional a kind of suturing of university brand reputation and individual branding: "Professionalization is no longer a process that disciplines academic laborers through the aspirations of autonomy from the institution but is, rather, an education in the simultaneity of their own means of reproduction and the reproduction of the university through workers' disavowal of the precarity of their workplaces." Situating the university within a larger milieu of capitalist extraction and labor politics, Carpenter, Goldblatt, and Hanson shift focus from what universities say they do with graduate training in relation to an academic job market teetering on the edges of collapse, to the material conditions that structure subject formation and political affiliation. With careful attention to organizing efforts at Duke University and the University of Virginia, the authors seize on the possibilities that sprout in such conditions to summon the counterfigure of the unprofessional. For them, the unprofessional forges alliances with communities outside and on the edges of the university, enacting education as a world-making practice that exceeds institutional capture through activities such as "meetings in public housing computer labs, apartments, and community centers; training for public housing and section 8 residents in institutional review board protocols; community-driven research projects; and decentered archives and archival practices." The unprofessional, then, works against the university as an expropriating and accumulating mechanism and instead cultivates study throughout the social field.

Our third article explores the mutual coimplication of two (colonialist) institutions of expropriation and accumulation: the school and the prison. Drawing on work in abolitionist university studies, David A. Maldonado and Erica R. Meiners's article, "Due Time: Meditations on Abolition at the Site of the University," weaves together collective statements with their individual voices to offer rich accounts of situated, differential knowledge, and moves from existing work on school-to-prison pipelines toward attention to increasingly popular programs offering university classes in prisons.⁵⁶ These programs—especially those offered by elite

universities—and much of the student activism ostensibly aimed at dismantling systems of mass incarceration effectively prop up a model of the university in which neoliberal logics of individualization are structurally coupled with university-prison assemblages in which knowledge and bodies circulate in multiple directions. In other words, Maldonado and Meiners reject simple affirmation of university efforts to expand programming in prisons, seeing this instead as a new modality of racial capitalism. In their attunement to the complex geographies of the educational-carceral field, Maldonado and Meiners imagine education (beyond institutions) as abolitionist praxis in the undergrowth: “Abolition is the space that holds on to contradictions and paradoxes to imagine an elsewhere, an otherwise, right here and now.”

Closing out the issue, Jaime Acosta Gonzalez and Eli Meyerhoff’s “Stained University: Reckoning with Duke’s Nexus of Higher Education and Tobacco Capitalism” explores the complex ways that, both historically and in the present, racial capitalism links agribusiness corporations, universities, and state investments in settler colonization and racial biocapitalism. Taking as their point of departure Duke University’s announcement that it will soon become a “tobacco-free university,” Gonzalez and Meyerhoff sift through the entangled institutional histories of Duke—a university named after a tobacco baron and historically organized around knowledges linked to tobacco in messy, complex ways. Foregrounding long histories of activist resistance to tobacco’s racial capitalist regime that requires settler colonization and forms of racialized labor linked to slavery and its wake, the Gonzalez and Meyerhoff see Duke University’s history in terms of interlinked attempts “to obscure how the tobacco companies and universities have accumulated capital through racism, deception, dispossession, and exploitation.” At stake here is the production of specific economies of affect through the material linkages across tobacco plants; mechanisms of farming, harvesting, and processing; corporate practices; and “elite” educational institutions. Gonzalez and Meyerhoff see new alliances of praxis, forged within the tobacco university as a site of extraction and accumulation, that constitute education as an accumulation of demands growing from critical understandings of “the links among education, citizenship, debt, colonialism, racism, patriarchy, prisons, the military-industrial complex, police violence, borders, environmental degradation, and climate change.” Excavating the material linkages that extend across different sites, bodies, and historical moments, Gonzalez and Meyerhoff ultimately underscore the narrowness of most framings of education, and this may allow us to feel how our living and studying are shaped both by the coloniality of the institutions and by encounters and affects that constitute the undergrowth in which we—a complex, fragile, more-than-human

collective of differential being(s)—are already making and being made by different worlds.

Notes

1. Our use of *beyond* here draws on Theresa Stewart-Ambo and K. Wayne Yang's contribution to this special issue, titled "Beyond Land Acknowledgment in Settler Institutions."

2. This argument is made by a host of feminist, queer, decolonial, and Black studies thinkers. One version of it is found in Judith Butler's *Bodies That Matter*, where she argues that "the production of the human is a differential operation that produces the more and the less 'human,' the inhuman, and the humanly unthinkable" (8). Building on Sylvia Wynter's and Hortense Spillers's work, Alexander Weheliye's notion of the "racializing assemblage" tracks "the sociopolitical relations that discipline humanity into full humans, not-quite-humans, and nonhumans" (*Habeas Visus*, 5). Extending both of those toward an engagement with a shift from disciplinary to control societies, Nathan Snaza's *Animate Literacies* thinks of schools, including universities, as "humanizing assemblages" that inescapably generate dehumanization through their mechanisms of humanization.

3. For Karen Barad, "the neologism 'intra-action' signifies the mutual constitution of entangled agencies," in contrast to *interaction*, which implies preexisting entities that enter into relation (*Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 33).

4. Our use of *contact zone* to signal a more-than-human field of encounter is inspired by Donna Haraway's development of Mary Louise Pratt's concept in Haraway, *When Species Meet*, 216. Our use of *porously bounded* is motivated by Nancy Tuana's essay "Viscous Porosity."

5. Abigail Boggs and colleagues offer an extremely helpful overview of the "shifting regimes of accumulation that constitute the university as such" ("Abolitionist University Studies," 3) with a sustained focus on institutional, legal, and economic imbrications of settler colonial land theft and chattel slavery.

6. See Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality"; and Wynter, "1492." The concept of constitutive outsides is from Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 8.

7. For extended accounts of these ideas, see Snaza, "Bewildering Education"; and Singh, *Unthinking Mastery*.

8. Chuh, *The Difference Aesthetics Makes*, 2.

9. Important critical studies of the university include Readings, *University in Ruins*; and Newfield, *Great Mistake*.

10. Grande, "Refusing the University," 47.

11. Tuck and Yang, "Introduction," 9; Simpson, "Land as Pedagogy." This includes reckoning with the university as, first and foremost, a question of land in the sense that term is used by Indigenous and decolonial thinkers: "Land as a system of reciprocal relations and obligations" that "can teach us about living our lives in relation to one another and the natural world in nondominating and nonexploitative terms" (Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks*, 13).

12. Wilder, *Ebony and Ivory*, is one of the most influential texts in this field.

13. David A. Maldonado and Erica R. Meiners's contribution to this issue examines education programs offered in prisons by (mostly) elite universities. Such programs reveal how institutionalized education is not in any simple way antagonistic to mass incarceration; rather, they reveal how the school/prison nexus strengthens the

overall carceral system, despite the language of social justice often used to describe these programs.

14. Our approach is different from but draws on some of the work that highlights and insists on the incommensurability between abolitionist/Black critique and decolonial/Indigenous critique. Frank Wilderson III's *Red, White, and Black* and Jodi Byrd's *Transit of Empire* are exemplary of this crucial work. It is also different from recent work that attempts to affiliate those incommensurate projects through the elaboration of metaphor. On this see Mark Rifkin's recent attempt to think across *land* and *flesh* as the governing modalities of Indigenous and Black critique in *Fictions of Land and Flesh*, and Tiffany Lethabo King's turn to *the shoals* as a way of articulating *land* and *ocean* as governing metaphors in *Black Shoals*. While our introduction plays with a number of metaphors suggested by *undergrowth*, we also want to refuse seeing this as merely metaphorical: our interest is in material ecologies within which bodies and entities of many kinds relate, endure, and grow. Put differently, our intervention is not primarily critical—operating at the level of theoretical and political frameworks—as much as it is pragmatic and affective: we are interested in the modes of affiliated study and struggle that take place even when we struggle to theorize them critically.

15. Singh, *Unthinking Mastery*, 4.

16. Sara Ahmed's *Living a Feminist Life* offers extremely important critiques of the ways universities institutionalize diversity work.

17. Boggs et al. wrote, "Here we draw a line between our project and much of Critical University Studies (CUS), the decade-or-so-old para-disciplinary formation which has eked out a meaningful institutional footprint and intellectual impact. We break with such work because of the ways CUS is haunted by its allegiance to a 'crisis consensus' fueled by nostalgia for the apogee of the postwar public mass university. In its oddly non-materialist reliance on a periodization that yearns for a return to the so-called 'Golden Era' of the university, CUS conjures the imagined goodness of an expansive and expanding public university system flush with federal and state support. Here, the university exists as a redistributive institution through which the masses can acquire upward social mobility. Almost invariably, however, this story neglects the ways this expansion was underwritten by militarized funding priorities, nationalist agendas, and an incorporative project of counterinsurgency" ("Abolitionist University Studies," 5). See also Boggs and Mitchell, "Critical University Studies."

18. Harney and Moten, *Undercommons*, 26.

19. Eli Meyerhoff's *Beyond Education* offers a useful overview of these projects, including Black Panther schools, the Highland school, and contemporary experiments like the Experimental College of the Twin Cities (see chap. 5, "Experimental College," 163–98). Concordia's SenseLab, a collectively run parauniversity endeavor, is also a crucial touchstone, as is the Montreal 3Ecologies Institute, which offers not-for-credit study entirely delinked from the university. For more on these, see Manning and Massumi, *Thought in the Act*.

20. On the ecological devastation related to electronic communications devices and internet connectivity, see Parikka, *Anthrobscene*.

21. For an overview of these projects and their importance as public pedagogies, see Snaza, "Curriculum against the State."

22. Building on Ahmed's work, Meyerhoff theorizes this as an affective economy of debts and credits that is managed by the university. See Meyerhoff, *Beyond Education*, 135–62. On the affective politics of safety in education, see Doyle, *Campus Sex Campus Security*; and Gilbert, *Sexuality in School*. For one that ties those discus-

sions directly to Black Lives Matter, see Wanzo, “Deadly Fight over Feelings.” For an account of “the relation between depression and academic careers,” see Cvetkovich, *Depression*, 23.

23. Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*.

24. Harney and Moten, *Undercommons*, 117.

25. Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 9–10.

26. Ferguson, *Reorder of Things*. On “grievance studies,” see Engber, “What the ‘Grievance Studies’ Hoax Actually Means.”

27. Bennett Carpenter, Laura Goldblatt, and Lenora Hanson’s contribution to this special issue foregrounds the logics of professionalization that affectively suture faculty and students to university brands, obscuring both the labor politics of the university and the opportunities for collective agitation for redistributing resources from the university to the social worlds it is constitutively bound up with.

28. Joy, “Improbable Manners of Being.”

29. Nash, *Black Feminism Reimagined*, 27.

30. Boggs et al., “Abolitionist University Studies,” 2.

31. Boggs et al., “Abolitionist University Studies,” 27.

32. Bill Readings makes this point in *University in Ruins*.

33. This list of adjectives is inspired Audra Simpson, Jack Halberstam, and Jasbir Puar.

34. Snaza, *Animate Literacies*, 81.

35. Nyong’o and Tompkins, “Eleven Theses on Civility.”

36. Eng-Beng Lim argues that “the global university is . . . a mausoleum of imperial ego and corporate excess” (“Performing the Global University,” 36). Isaac Kamola’s *Making the World Global* offers a framework for thinking about the different imbrications of capital and colonial geopolitics in post-WWII global universities.

37. For an overview of different approaches to affect, see Gregg and Seigworth, *Affect Theory Reader*.

38. Ferguson, *We Demand*. We take *the wake* from Sharpe, *In the Wake*. On the UniverCity, see Baldwin, *In the Shadow of the Ivory Tower*. Sharon Haar’s *City as Campus* is a crucial case study of similar phenomena, focusing on Chicago.

39. Chen, *Animacies*, 12.

40. Chen, “Differential Being and Emergent Agitation.”

41. Chen, “Differential Being and Emergent Agitation,” 2.

42. For Chen, *differential being* “refers to ways of being in space, time, and sociality, that allow for variabilities that in themselves are not cognizant of social difference, and yet manage to interpellate those differences” (“Differential Being and Emergent Agitation,” 2). Using this concept to shift our attention, Chen continued, “As those studying the university’s dependency on diversity have pointed out, the tyranny of names includes those of race and disability put (along with a few other exclusives) to the work of cooptational diversification. Undergrowth and undercommons recognize that as much as these tyrannical imaginations may lay claim to something of what’s there, there is always a supplement or a fundament that escapes their reach”(3).

44. Manning, “Me Lo Dijo un Pajarito,” 2.

44. Manning, “Me Lo Dijo un Pajarito,” 6.

45. la paperson (aka issue contributor K. Wayne Yang) has proposed a four-moment scheme for conceptualizing universities (modeled on cinema practice): The first university accumulates land, buildings, people, electricity, debt, dead animals, degrees, citations, grant money, sports teams. The second university is liberal, committed to critique and rational deliberation, and it imagines itself as a “pedagogical

utopia” that “everyone can and should attend.” Its watchwords are *diversity* and *inclusion*. On la paperson’s reading, most of the time when people ask, “Is another university possible?” they are really thinking about making the first university more like the second. The third university, though, is decolonizing, working from the “scrap material” of the first and second universities (*A Third University Is Possible*, 43). A fourth university would be not a “decolonizing” but a “decolonized” institution (44).

46. Ferguson, *We Demand*, 49.

47. See Luciano and Chen, “Introduction”; and Bozalek et al., *Socially Just Pedagogies*, which focuses primarily on universities in South Africa.

48. “The first world university also accumulates through debt . . . loaning, borrowing, repaying, defaulting. This ability to turn anyone into a debtor is what fuels the first university toward inclusion” (la paperson, *A Third University Is Possible*, 38). See also Annie McClanahan’s claim that “not only are banks now invested in education; universities are becoming more like banks” (*Dead Pledges*, 189).

49. Matt Brim’s *Poor Queer Studies* underscores just how much dominant strains of leftist thought, in queer studies, presumes access to the best-funded and highest-endowed universities. Against the kind of flourishing attending what he calls rich queer studies, Brim highlights how open enrollment universities, like the College of Staten Island, allow for poor queer studies that operate in vastly different material circumstances and have different animating politics (including a shift from obviously liberal arts curricula toward a more vocational horizon for thinking queer living). Brim’s sustained account of the queer work of study in a “poor” university offers another way to think about educational undergrowth.

50. Chen, “Differential Being and Emergent Agitation.”

51. Singh, *Unthinking Mastery*, 173.

52. See Escobar, *Designs for the Pluriverse*.

53. Joy, “What’s Academic Freedom Got to Do with Us?”

54. Shomura, “Cultivating the Weeds.”

55. Tuck and Yang, “Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor.”

56. Work on the school-to-prison pipeline includes Meiners, *For the Children?*; and Laura, *Being Bad*.

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