THERE IS ANOTHER ACADEMIA (AND IT IS) IN THIS ONE
Superficial impressions on institutional capitalism

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Translated by George Hutton

I take discipline as my starting point (in the sense of order and method), and I read the abstract for the open call for papers for this issue of Re- visiones, in which I hope to be included. Many questions come to mind, and I have to choose.

I choose to try and think in another way about the statement that mentions those public and private policies that “progressively introduce debt as a form of disciplining subjectivities” at university. Pablo and Gelen speak of the university and the museum, but lately, the more I get involved with the museum, the closer I feel to the university. Why does debt have to be a synonym for disciplining? At the moment I am saying farewell to a Programme Without Credits and I have just reread the text by Fred Moten and Stefano Harney about Debt and Study in which they discuss doing away with credits and defending, maintaining and practicing our right to bad debt, which cannot be paid off, a debt without creditors, a debt that is black, criminal, queer, excessive, incalculable, without motive. To stop associating debt with the need for credit is to liberate it, and make it an act of liberation. In the university where I work, the student embraces this debt, they are bad creditors because they study and they refuse to learn quantifiable kind of knowledge that can be evaluated objectively. The communities also embrace this debt, for they are bed debtors, and determined to stay that way. I am one of them, and I write without discipline; that is, accruing debt.

I choose to concentrate my efforts on the initiatives that try to escape from the (hateful) biopolitical consequences that lead to the structural transformations that the states and private corporations inflict on the institutions. These consequences are often weariness. I don’t to grow weary (not even reading what others write about weariness). I am going to start writing this text basing it on something which I have already written. Not repeating what has already been said (which is somewhat frequent and tiresome in university), but rather proposing it as a diversion from the path we are already taking. To divert, according to the María Moliner dictionary: “to separate or distract somebody’s attention from something,
drawing it elsewhere”. I was already working on a thing, which resulted in a
text, and I am going to maintain my determination from that work, just
shifting it in another direction. I will come back to this.

I choose to work not in such a way that complements the “distinct kind of
knowledge and in-disciplines from outside and within Academia”, but
rather observing, to see what’s going on, those who are already there
within it. To point out academias within these academias, namely those
which have been “expelled” (or ignored) within the logics of academic
capitalism. If the desired Academias are already therein, “what academia
are we talking about when we talk about academia”?

I choose, and I now bring to a close the decisions that explain the starting
point of what follows, I take up the gauntlet and write from the situated
positions from which the journal’s potential participants are invited. And
here I return to the base text I already have —published and everything—and to the diversion that is leading me to the present one. That one came
about from an express commission: I had to write about art and revolution,
and I only had a week. I was getting stressed out by having to work in such
a hurry, and I became overwhelmed by it all, and I still get overwhelmed by
the deluge of information that comes from having total access to
information. How can we work within such avarice, such greediness? To
defend myself from the tyranny of excess, I imagined a strategy for
emancipation based on maximum restriction: to research from a place of
scarcity, albeit a chosen scarcity. And I decided to work solely with the
materials of the Fine Arts Faculty library, the faculty where I work. I want
the included corpus of references to be taken from this place only, a place
which, as with other university libraries, is a special place. It works like a
porous organ within the multiple and diverse body that comprise complex
institutions. In the library, the overbearing divisions and roles can be and
are dissolved, and different parts come together, when they are usually
classified separately: teachers and students, for example. I like to think
that they are our retreat.

ANNOTATE, EXHIBIT, VANDALISE, WORK

There are further limitations. In the text on art and revolution I tried out a
method that I think is worth maintaining because it led me to extraordinary
discoveries: the searching process in the library is to be limited to real-life,
solid books. It’s analogue. To give up online and digital materials, accessible
via the university website, and to work physically with the volumes, makes
sense there in a building in which you are greeted by Victory of
Samothrace. To reach the reading room, you have to go up a staircase next
to L’Aurora by Guido Reni, before being confronted head-on by a copy of

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Andrea Mantegna’s frescos from the Ovetari Chapel, which were destroyed in the Second World War; you can glance at the timeless academic nudes in the newly-baptised Hall of Hot Men, where the library staff like to have their photo taken as we see below, and then head towards the book down a corridor flanked by cabinets that were place there on the 3rd March 1923 when Alfonso XIII presided its inauguration in the San Fernando School of Fine Arts.

I know what I want to find in the books: marks, signs of use. Things that show something about their users, and that talk about the university from this faculty of Fine Arts. As happens so often with the ideas you’re working on, the topic of crossings-out, annotations in books, marginalia, is suddenly everywhere. Since I started researching this, I have come across two activities that, in theory, could belong to a similar universe. One of them is the series Scribbles and Gloss by Nora Turato, an exhibition of typed scripts that form the basis of her performances, annotated by her with “instructions to herself and what appear to be nervous scribbles”5. Another is a recent exhibition in London, The Annotated Reader, in which the curators Ryan Gander and Jonathan P. Watts invited “creatives, artists, academics, writers, musicians and designers” to select a text that they would want to have with them should they miss the last train to somewhere, adorning it with notes, thoughts, feelings, drawings, etc. They brought together 281 of them, that they hung on the walls of the gallery6.
But these are not the kind of gestures that I am interested in here. It is not about predictable results, or authorship, or aestheticising, or commissions, and by no means is it about pieces that might end up in an exhibition. I am not pursuing anything that might be considered the crux of any matter. The objective I am pursuing is related to potentialities of delocalisation and the margins. Working with the idea of what the text can glean from the outside, when that outside is right next door. Because, is it really on the outside? One of the very best Master’s dissertations I have supervised lately deals with, among other things, the possible effects derived from the media coverage of slime on cognitive work. The potential effects of slime as a semioticiser, that’s right. I get stuck in just as Alberto Martínez did, the author of that text: "I therefore shift a peripheral element, somewhat incidental, to the status of the object of study”7.

If I had to select “works” with which I feel an affinity, or which I believe suggest the system and worldview that interests me, I would choose, for example, the famous map from The Hunting of the Snark, that “blank page”, how dreadful, in which the supposed writer dared only write in the margins; or, on the flipside, the black page in Tristam Shandy, so full as it was with text, legal or illegal, that the writing on this page had short-circuited and disappeared. I also like the pages that Proust constructed when he would correct the test prints sent to him by his editors for checking, and he would write like that, from and with the margins. I insist, the key point here is about removing centrality.
Scrutinising the marks left in books, the marginalia, the underlining, etc., implies, as I have just noted, situating a peripheral element as the object of study. But it is not about just any peripheral element. The context of the marks that I am pursuing is violent. There is the vandalism as exercised by the users. “Pay attention to your personal belongings”, warns one of the poster stuck to the tables. There is poetry in this phrase, and there is theft. “Remember that painting and underlining in the books are actions harmful to us all”8, can still be read in many volumes. It is not a direct prohibition: it is an exhortation that reminds us (in a somewhat perverse way, which has a certain whiff of remonstration) that we cause damage that in fact damages ourselves too. And there’s more to it: the range of possible harmful actions that it suggests is also interesting, because underlining is somewhat predictable, but painting? Is that a specific warning for Fine Arts faculties? None of the marks I have found in the books I have examined were, in the strict sense of the word, painted. Curiously, the more “artistic” ones, like those by Nora Turato, were indeed painted. This may speak volumes about what kind of practices are carried out in academia.
Regarding such individual vandalism carried out on the books, the institution responds with “permissible” violence. This kind of violence, albeit habitual, is far less perceptible, and we barely notice it. The library does not hesitate to mark the books, in pen and pencil, with the pertinent shield and labels. “Not for loan”, “Not to be removed from the reading room”... There is tension there, a universe of incomprehensible pleas and bans out of context (“do not leave the books on the table?”) or which are entirely impossible to respect. All tension entails an invitation for transgression. For example, in this place where silence is mandatory, what about the permissible noises?

In Sopa sólida, a changing group in which I participate alongside Gloria G. Duran and Javier Pérez Iglesias, we have started a list: tummy rumblings, yawns, yawns while stretching, yawns covered by a hand, yawns you hold in, breathing, hiccups, farts, burps, dragging chairs, compulsively jiggling your legs, when they kick your chair leg, coughs, sneezes, blowing your nose, sniffing, sipping a liquid, gulping, typing on a computer, the sound when a computer starts up, a mobile phone switched to silent mode, sighing, feeling horny, verbal tics, cracking your knuckles, turning off and on the table lamp, moving the books, dropping your book, dropping your pen, dropping your glasses, dropping your glasses case, dropping a clog, a wooden one, for your feet; dribbling and sucking it up, dropping your earring, dropping your 12-loop necklace, a pearl one, that breaks, and then
12,000 pearls are rolling on the floor, dropping your rings, dropping a clanger...³.

In the library there are the traces of violence which is the result of certain tasks. A closer look at the scratches on the tables reveals that they are invariably straight-lined, and very long, because they have been made with a knife and a ruler, perhaps cutting the papers that Fine Arts students use in certain exercises. The actions carried out in books, as I de-scribe, also come from work, albeit of another kind.

**SEARCH RESULTS FOR ACADEMIA**

As I get down to work, I am unsure what to search for. I can’t decide: academia? Academic capitalism? I give it a go, and I search on the library’s website for the latter. In terms of “topic”, there are no matches. But the system refuses to give up, and it proposes an alternative: academic cannibalism. I click it quickly, thrilled by the possibility that there might be texts on a topic like that, and no, there aren’t any. But it opened up an unsuspected universe, to imagine what this topic could possibly be. One of them, the most immediate, is to think of the subjects of academia as thinking heads by virtue of their devouring of books. Above all the teaching staff: in the 12th century, one of the most well-known scholastic theologians was the professor Petrus Comestor, i.e. ‘Peter the Devourer’, thus named due to his fame as “devourer of books”. But, in the context of how academic
capitalism constructs us, it might be more interesting to think that, given that we are the texts we produce, cannibalism would entail eating one another up, eating each other.

Since academic capitalism is not a “topic”, I search for it as a “keyword”. This time there are matches, but I’m only interested in printed books that are physically in the Fine Arts Faculty, and there only eight. It’s not enough; although I work in terms of restriction, I want to try with more things. So I try out “academia”. Now there are 104 matches linked to the Fine Arts Faculty. Too many. But because I am limiting my enquiries to books, the results come down to 83. It’s still a lot, but as I’m only concentrating on those that have marks, it doesn’t take me that long to check them all.

Besides, I am not seeking conclusions based on percentages or statistics. It is more about reflecting impressions, and I have no qualms in their being rushed or capricious. It is capricious, of course, to research a topic only using books that have marks, doodles or words in the margin. I am writing with no aspirations to be completely exhaustive; it is more about reflecting impressions based on unique quirks. And, of course, non-objectively. What I am writing is brimming with subjectivity. Questions and problems always come from personal configurations. It is detective work, but amateur.

(A brief but necessary parenthesis: just a couple of months ago, the online catalogue of the Complutense University’s libraries was redesigned. Among the new features, one thing caught my eye: beforehand (when I was working on art and revolution, just a year ago), what used to be called materia (i.e. ‘matter/material’, ‘topic’) is now called tema (‘subject’). The dematerialisation implied by this new translation of the English word ‘subject’, which has been used as a reference, deserves a brief moment of reflection in this text that is being written with books in hand).

Leafing through the books, the first impression I get is that they have not been used much. The pieces of paper stuck to the inside front cover, where they keep a record of the times that the books have been loaned, are almost empty. Most of them are unblemished and, for exactly that reason, I quickly dismiss them. I pay more attention to those that are in a bad condition because they’ve become worn down from use, from being carried around all over the place, even from being read. Although they look like they should be handled with tweezers (they even smell bad, all musty), and they’ve been touched so much that they don’t inspire much enthusiasm to touch them again, they still arouse feelings of affection. In the present times, they are, furthermore, fossils that will surely be touched less and less.

Among the most-used volumes is the one titled La Real Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando (1744-1808) by Claude Bedat. It has hardly any marks inside; one of the people who started to red it underlined in pencil,
right at the beginning, one of its first sentences, which furthermore, curiously, repeats the title: “Real Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando”. Nothing else is underlined in the whole book, so either they stopped reading, or they stopped underlining. Given its somewhat shabby condition, the latter would appear to be the most likely option\textsuperscript{10}.

The prologue that contains this underlining is by Enrique Lafuente Ferrari, the first professor of Art History in Spain, taking his position in a Fine Arts faculty: the very one where I am writing this. I am also a teacher of Art History, and I like this lineage. Furthermore, he explains that, given that Bedat analyses the role of academia in the Enlightenment, it is a study that transcends “the mere field of artistic history, interwoven as is such an initiative [the Academia] in the complete transformation of the life that is attempted in the 18\textsuperscript{th} century”. University transforming life, a role that we would not hesitate to embrace today.

Another volume catches my eye. It is the library’s second copy (there are three) of the book Discursos académicos sobre el arte y la belleza (‘Academic Discourses on Art and Beauty’)\textsuperscript{11}. I take it because, although it’s immaculate on the outside, inside it is the only one that has been underlined. This is only in one of the discourses, the speech given by the Valencian painter Ignacio Pinazo in 1916 on the occasion of his admission into the Academy. It is called “On Ignorance in Art”. The title is crucial for the text I am writing: if I had set out to look for it, I might not have found it. But here it is, analysing the —and I quote directly, here— “perfect ignorance”. I haven’t quite worked out what exactly this perfection consists of: I don’t want to read this text from Pinazo’s viewpoint, nor the when or why he wrote it. I can only put forward certain ideas about how it was read by the person who underlined it. All of the marks are by the same hand: the modus operandi is repeated. The interesting points, for that person, are placed between brackets. And if, within these brackets, there is something even more interesting, it is underlined. As a reader, to have a text underlined and annotated by a single person is peculiar. It’s as if the book had been lent to me by somebody I know. Even if we do not know who did
it, the fact that somebody gets all the attention leads to a reflection, even if just a little, on the issue of authorship. To that end I would share something about the condition of the works of the artists mentioned above, but without this gesture being, of course, in any way pretentious.

It is not artistic and, however, I imagine the person who is underlining as somebody engaged with artistic practice but who does not form part of the system or, at least, not entirely. What we do not know is whether this is out of personal choice: “Other elements in the artist’s surroundings, perfectly ignorant, are some art critics”, writes Pinazo. Highlighted with an arrow, there is a handwritten annotation: “The reason for bein’ outside the circuit”. It is a “natural” annotation in a Fine Arts faculty where an overwhelming majority of the teaching staff, for a wide range of reasons, are, indeed, outside of the circuit. You could easily count on two hands the number of exhibitions in which they participate each year, to give one example of an indicator of belonging to this system. Might this person, who made notes in the book, be a teacher? It is clearly a person concerned by time. They have also underlined: “What is good is always modern, no matter how many centuries ago it was made, it is young. What is bad is always old and arid.” And: “Some people live all their life, and some people live all their days.”

Melancholic annotations. Others are completely enigmatic. In one book published to mark the event of an international congress about academies of art, held in Guanajuato, as if it were a dedication, somebody has written, among other things—one of which is a reference to a biography of Frank Sinatra, and another linking Ana with a phone number—“God intervenes”12. Concentrating on books, and concentrating on other things. Distracted writing, distracted knowledge.
More things. If there is a book about “academia” in the Fine Arts library, that is a bit shabby and similarly covered in marks, it is *Las academias de arte, pasado y presente* (‘Academies of Art, Past and Present’) by Pevsner. In the three available copies, unlike in Pinazo’s *Discourse*, there is a true compendium of modes of acting that suggests endless possible and imaginable readings. Once one person has opened fire, by underlining the book in a certain way, those who follow unleash a spiral of violence: black pencil, red pencil, pen. How can you make your marks stands out against the others? Here we see another form of text, be it asterisks, wavy lines over straight lines (that nearly cross the text out), arrows, “look”... They are like a catalogue of possibilities.
Predictably, at university, books are marked because they are being studied. Pevsner’s book has been studied. This is evident from scribbles that highlight concepts or key facts, summarising words... But there are other traces worth mentioning. In a system of imposed learning, in which optimising studying means doing just enough to pass, when the word “no” is written in the index this could indicate those chapters which do not form part of the exam (chapters 3, 4, 5, and 6). Studying that is worthwhile, i.e. that which, to revisit the words of Moten and Harney from the introduction, is considered in terms of “good credit” —the official kind— despite itself, despite its sad and mean instrumentality, sometimes leaves space for gripes to be aired. For example, the sense of astonishment when faced with obscure Latinisms, as felt by those lacking knowledge of the classical languages. Otherwise, why would there be question marks slapped onto the end of paragraphs written in incomprehensible languages? Their size says it all.

There are also emancipated readers who disagree. In the margin next to the paragraph that reads: “…if today we read something about the ‘Academy of Vienna’, we will undoubtedly believe that it refers to a government institution that chooses distinguished specialists, representatives of research in science, history, and philology, of the highest order”, somebody has written, in pencil: NO. And they get bored and distracted, and they draw stick people, little characters, charmingly making use of the numbers of the date that marks the beginning of the chapter on the Barroque and the Rococo. Their boredom livens up our reading. After reading Jorge Van den Eynde, those doodles that look like memes would be like the critters and flowers of medieval marginalia. As with memes, “the dense reality that surrounds us is lightened by means of a parodic or antagonistic vision”.

Attributing certain kind of marks to teachers or students is risky. Thinking about this distinction in the library, regarding books, is not appropriate. The thing with university libraries is that, as I have said above, roles are dissolved there, roles that function elsewhere. But I cannot help but think that those who correct erroneous dates, whoever they may be, do so in their condition as an expert. A 1536 modified to 1563, 1574 to 1774. Anonymous facilitation and specialised knowledge. Proof of such porosity pointed out would be consensus: there is one phrase,— “the fundamental objective of academia is educational”— which is underlined, with varying degrees of emphasis, in each of the library’s three copies of Pevsner.
CAPITULO PRIMERO
Introducción

"Académica o Academia era el nombre de un barrio situado al noroeste de Atenas, donde había varios templos, un gimnasio y un amplio parque donado por Cícero. En este parque, y en una finca contigua a él, convivió Platón en sus últimos años con sus discípulos y les transmitió su filosofía. Al cabo del tiempo, la gente de Atenas comenzó a llamar Academia también a la comunidad de seguidores de Platón y el término fue poco a poco aplicándose en un sentido más amplio a la escuela de Platón, hasta llegar a la historiografía griega, que describe el desarrollo del platonismo distinguiendo generalmente entre una Antigua, Media y Nueva Academia.

El término Academia surgió de nuevo con el renacimiento del platonismo durante el segundo tercio del siglo XV, por influencia de los eruditos griegos que se habían trasladado a Italia en 1438-1439 para negociar la unificación de las iglesias griega y romana. Magnus Cosmus, Senatus consultor Patricio Pater—escribe Marsilio Ficino— en el prefacio de su traducción de Plotino— que tempore concilium inter graecos atque latinos sub Eugenio pontifice Florentiae tractabatur, philosophorum graecorum nomine Gemistum, cognome Platonem, quasi Platonem alterum, de mysteriis Platonis disputantem frequentar audivit. E cuius ore ferventi se affluant est protinus, sive animatus ut inde Achademiae quumdum altum mentem conceperit.

Aunque no parece que Cosme de Médicis haya puesto su plan en práctica inmediatamente, la idea de un círculo filosófico digno del nombre de Academia debió de haber impresionado profundamente también a humanistas italianos de otros grupos. Ya en los años 50, el término “Chorus Academicae Florentinae” se aplicaba al círculo reunido, primero, en torno a Alamanio Rinuccini, y después en torno a Giovanni Argyropulos. En los años 60 una llamada “Academia Romana” se aglutinaba en torno a Pomponio Leto, y en una carta que data muy probablemente de antes de 1471 el cardenal Besarion y sus amigos son descritos como “Bessarionae Academia”.

Sin embargo, mucho más importante e influyente que estos pequeños círculos...
CODA

*Email from fakebook.ucm@gmail.com:

Hi Selina,

I am getting in touch with you to tell you about something that happened in the university library a few years ago because it might be of interest for your investigation. I found myself studying Fine Arts when I had the idea of carrying out an anonymous intervention in the faculty library.

I swapped one of the books on restricted loan, those that are in the stacks, for the same book, which I had bought in a bookshop in Madrid so that the book that was originally in the library is now in a slightly smaller library, the one next to my bed.

I forged all of the stamps inside the book, as well as the barcodes, and I underlined everything that had been previously written in pen in the book.

The name of the book, as well as its author, and the person who carried out this action, must all remain anonymous.

Regards,

XXXXX

Going over the volumes that I have decided to explore has entailed, in my case, finding out things that point to the existence of certain kinds of knowledge that make the construction of knowledge possible, in a sort of academia, with a little a, which is within Academia (with a big A). At first, it reminded me of the question posed by Gelen and Pablo regarding what we say when talk about academia, and about the desired kinds of academia. I now say that what I have come across is a desired kind of academia within the undesirable Academia. I am highly critical of the university institution, but the instrumentalisation of discomfort in order to destroy the public sector causes me even more pain. Fine, then: writing with these materials in this place has helped me make peace the university.
This academia-with-a-little-a is one of rebels, and it is thus possible to construct a kind of knowledge that would never be visible if the logics of academic capitalism were respected. It is academia in the shade, and the strength of its presence comes from the fact it is still there, like a ghost. A few days ago, I received an anonymous email from Fakebook which recounts clandestine interventions which, I was told, could be of interest for my investigation. Who am I working with? What community am I joining, without realising? There are more of us than we think, those of us who are constructing in the margin, in the gaps that exist in the official institution that wants to subject us to its rhythms and its demands. We are at university, we remain here, we relax here.

Bibliography


*This is Jackalope* nº 1 (2018), pp. 98-107.


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**Notes**

1. https://programasincreditos.org/


3. These preliminary positions repeat some of the words already in bold in the abstract of *Re-visiones*, and they mark some other new ones. I have tried out, with Lila Insúa, drawing new texts with words in bold within pre-existing texts in “In bold. Searching for the words to find the modes”, *Programme Without Credits in Celebration Mode. Other Stories about Artistic Learning Communities*. Madrid, Ediciones Asimétricas y Comunidad de Madrid, 2018. Together we also form part of the Research and Development group La incorporación de las comunidades artísticas universitarias a los relatos de la modernidad y del presente (HAR-2015-64469-P).


This warning is not quite as bizarre in Spanish as it is in English —*pintar* usually means 'to paint', but sometimes also 'to draw', e.g. with ink, without necessarily using paint. It is translated literally here due to the subsequent reflection on this warning within the context of a Fine Arts Faculty, later in the paragraph. [Translator’s Note]


Claude Bedat, *La Real Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando (1744-1808)*. Madrid, Fundación Universitaria Española, 1989. Signature in Bellas Artes UCM, DE061.23(460.27):7BEDrea


Pages 44 and 103 of the copy with register 6071, respectively.