Marches Through the Institutions: University Activism in the Sixties and Present

In April of 1970, President Nixon ordered the invasion of Cambodia, a combination of ground troops and massive aerial bombing. Universities in the United States erupted in protest, and at two campuses—Kent State University (Ohio) on May 4 and Jackson State University (Mississippi) on May 14—National Guard troops and local police shot and killed student protesters. The Kent State killings intensified the wave of protest on campuses nationwide, directly involving nine million students in protests. The National Guard was brought onto 21 universities in sixteen states, and public universities were declared to be in a state of emergency in five states. More than 450 universities closed. Reserve Officers’ Training Corps (ROTC) buildings—army recruitment centers on campuses—were burned on an average of four per day during the first half of May. \(^1\) Five days after the Kent State killings, more than a hundred thousand protesters marched in Washington. As the capital filled with National Guard troops, President Nixon, fearing that the city would erupt in armed struggle, retreated to Camp David. Ray Price, the president’s speech writer, later recalled, “The city was an armed camp. The mobs were smashing windows, slashing tires, dragging parked cars into intersections, even throwing bedsprings off overpasses into the traffic down below. This was the, quote, student protest. That’s not student protest, that’s civil war.” \(^2\)

I was a high school student taking classes at the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA) during that spring. On Tuesday May 5, the day of UCLA’s big protest, I was at one point part of a group of students pushing a burning dumpster toward a group of policemen in order to disperse the phalanx massed to break up the student crowd. I outran the club-wielding
The crisis has its roots in divisions of American society as deep as any since the Civil War. The divisions are reflected in violent acts and harsh rhetoric, and in the enmity of those Americans who see themselves as occupying opposing camps. Campus unrest reflects and increases a more profound crisis in the nation as a whole. . . . If this trend continues, if this crisis of understanding continues, the very survival of the nation will be threatened. A nation driven to use the weapons of war upon its youth is a nation on the edge of chaos. A nation that has lost the allegiance of part of its youth is a nation that has lost part of its future.

One extraordinary dimension of that political season—if not near civil war, then certainly the hottest the nation had known in some time—was that it occurred at a time when, by all accounts, the ideological and organizational coherence of the student left was at its lowest point. The Students for a Democratic Society (SDS)—which throughout the sixties had been the best organized and most prominent force on the campuses—had effectively ceased to exist following their summer 1969 national meeting, which had witnessed the expulsion of the Progressive Labor faction and the birth of what was to become the Weather Underground. The forces that had led to organizational collapse were many, including the very significant factor of police and FBI repression. Thousands of paid informants, infiltrators, agents provocateurs, and surveillance experts did much to foment paranoia and distrust within the organizations, which had never been overly disciplined to begin with. Moreover, by spring of 1969, the position of the student, the content of university life, and the role of universities in a good society had ceased to be central items of discussion in the organizations, all of whose increasingly holistic and revolutionary critique sought their potentially revolutionary masses outside the student milieu: in African America, in the alienated young white working class, in “youth” in general. This was doubtless one reason that even in the wake of the 1970 uprisings the student qua student failed to achieve the coherent political identity, along with guarantees of formal participation in university government, that students achieved in France,
Mexico, Greece, and elsewhere, a political identity that has enabled student movements in those countries, among others, to remain a certain political force into the present.4

And yet, despite this organizational and ideological incoherence, the student movement, by reflecting what was widely acknowledged as a “crisis,” effected significant changes on the university. Although the Republican Party—in the Nixon campaigns, the Nixon-Agnew presidency, and the Reagan gubernatorial campaign and governorship in California—had worked relentlessly to create a popular demonization of students, faculty, and intellectuals, even those public commissions appointed by the Nixon and Reagan administrations tended more toward accommodation than overt repression or condemnation. Universities’ own task forces proved even more sympathetic to many of the protesters’ positions. Given the electoral political orientation of the time, the degree of accommodation was astounding. At the policy level, ROTC recruitment was banned from dozens of campuses; military research was subject to new scrutiny, including an outright ban on some campuses; and university admissions increased affirmative action programs. The immediate aftermath of the 1970 protest saw the beginning of a number of new organizations of knowledge—not only a burgeoning of African American, Latino, or third-world “studies” programs but also programs like Kent State’s Center for Peaceful Change. Around the country, experiments in organization of university education proliferated, in explicit efforts to make the university experience coterminous with a richer and better life—at UC Santa Cruz, Strawberry Creek College at UC Berkeley, Reed College, Evergreen State College in Washington, Antioch College, and Hampshire College. As the veterans of the student movements acquired doctoral degrees and faculty positions, the nation saw the rise of a cohort that Roger Kimball derided as “tenured radicals.” The impact of this new intellectual orientation—very much a sixties phenomenon—is familiar to all and I need not belabor the point.

Many of the fruits of those efforts to transform the university from within, and to make it a central institution in the reordering of society and of individual life, echoed concerns given voice in the tremendously influential Port Huron Statement of 1962, effectively the first manifesto of the SDS:

A new left must transform modern complexity into issues that can be understood and felt close-up by every human being. It must give form to the feelings of helplessness and indifference, so that people may see the political, social and economic sources of their private troubles and organize to change society. In a time of supposed prosperity, moral complacency and political manipulation, a new left cannot rely on only aching stomachs to be the engine force of social reform. The case for change, for alternatives that will involve uncomfortable personal efforts, must be argued as never before. The university is a relevant place for all of these activities.
But we need not indulge in illusions: the university system cannot complete a movement of ordinary people making demands for a better life. From its schools and colleges across the nation, a militant left might awaken its allies, and by beginning the process towards peace, civil rights, and labor struggles, reinsert theory and idealism where too often reign confusion and political barter. The power of students and faculty united is not only potential; it has shown its actuality in the South, and in the reform movements of the North.

To turn these possibilities into realities will involve national efforts at university reform by an alliance of students and faculty. They must wrest control of the educational process from the administrative bureaucracy. They must make fraternal and functional contact with allies in labor, civil rights, and other liberal forces outside the campus. They must import major public issues into the curriculum—research and teaching on problems of war and peace is an outstanding example. They must make debate and controversy, not dull pedantic cant, the common style for educational life. They must consciously build a base for their assault upon the loci of power.

The Port Huron Statement, largely drafted by Tom Hayden, remained the central text of the sixties student movement. Written explicitly from a middle-class position of relative privilege, its attacks on contemporary American society, drawing heavily on C. Wright Mills, Harold Taylor, Eric Fromm, David Riesman, Sheldon Wolin, Norman O. Brown, Paul Goodman, and like thinkers, were a wide-ranging catalog of the squandering of wealth, resources, human activity, and creativity, in the service of a dangerous and dehumanizing political economic hegemony. As in much of the period’s critical positioning, Port Huron mobilized dominant ideological values—freedom, democracy, and equality, all core “American” values—to contest dominant politics.

As 1970 approached, however, in the movement literature there were fewer and fewer appeals to a transformed university and more and more overt appeals to standard Marxist tropes of class struggle. As student political organizations, often influenced by the tightly disciplined Maoist-oriented Progressive Labor Party, further embraced the class struggle line, they lost mass influence, even though the numbers of student protesters reached a peak in 1970. The left-progressive, largely university-centered utopianism of the Port Huron Statement was insufficiently coherent for the core organizing bodies, although it did represent a position embraced throughout the period by the bulk of students and by more and more faculty and even administrators. The movement’s institutional victories, though radical-reformist, were real, even as the student leadership had become more radical Marxist. As the mainstream media and government “civil war” discourse illustrated, it was in part the sheer scale of the opposition, and the tacit assumption of a new zeitgeist, that had forced educational and political authorities into some form of accommodation.
The trajectory of Clark Kerr, one-time president of the University of California, is instructive here. Kerr’s *The Uses of the University*, first published in 1963, was then the clearest articulation of what was to be imagined as the postwar academic monolith, the research university, a product of federal decisions that research would be conducted primarily in universities rather than in national research centers. The new industrial state would require a knowledge-production institution whose complexity would have to reflect the complexity of society itself. Over the rest of his life, Kerr wrote several new chapters of *The Uses of the University*, reflecting on his experiences leading the university through the protest period and then through his dismissal by Governor Ronald Reagan, who made his intention to dismiss Kerr—whom he accused of being too soft on protest—central to his campaign. Students had attacked Kerr’s notion of the multiversity as instrumentalist and as hopelessly wedded to dominant political and economic power, but, in students’ demands for “relevance,” engagement, and more universalized access to the university—the latter central to Kerr’s liberal democratic vision—Kerr saw a recognition of the convergence between the university and the economic and political life of the state. The nature of that convergence was at stake, and Kerr’s later chapters show considerable sympathy with student demands that the new university engage more directly with the whole of social existence. In the book’s later editions, though, the sobriety of his analysis leads him to focus relentlessly on the encroachments of economic rationality. He notes that the reorganizations of humanistic and social scientific knowledge that flowered in the wake of the sixties movements failed to achieve any significant and lasting organizational achievements, and saw in the rise of institutions such as the University of Phoenix an important step forward in the degradation of the university into an auxiliary function of the labor market.

Kerr was particularly attentive to the fiscal threats to the emergence of a knowledge society in which all citizens had access to higher education. He was pessimistic about the period 1990–2015, but optimistic that after that date, as the public recognized the centrality of university knowledge to the good life, there would be a renewed march toward a university marked by “access, quality, and autonomy.” One senses in Kerr’s optimism a faith in the underlying rationality of what economists Claudia Goldin and Lawrence Katz have called “the age of human capital,” a concept that is not reducible solely to capital to be sold on the labor market. In their *The Race Between Education and Technology* (2008), they document the extent to which US prosperity has tracked closely with increased access to secondary and higher education and with the increased social equality that such access delivers. They muster very solid data to show that the funding formulae that began in the 1980s and accelerated in the nineties and the first decade of the this century erased many of the gains made in the two and a half decades immediately
following World War Two, with the burden of inequality falling disproportionately on urban minorities. The effects of neoliberal trends toward privatization, tax reduction, and lower levels of state funding for the University of California began to show up in statistics from the mid-eighties, with major declines on all fronts accelerating after 1990. Faced with what appeared to be an inexorable decline in state funding, and armed with statistics showing the enormous lifetime wage differential delivered by a bachelor’s degree, university administrators seemed to find nothing wrong in shifting the financial burden of undergraduate education increasingly onto student debt, reasoning implicitly that individuals and families would make the rational calculation that more than $100,000 in debt would well be worth what was widely understood as the lifetime wage premium. Goldin and Katz’s work, and a number of other studies, make clear that an increased number of graduates would in fact lower the average wage premium but would result in greater social equality, an outcome that has been foreclosed by the now ascendant hegemony of federal-level deficit reduction and state-level Hooverism that seem to have rendered unthinkable any notion of an expanded public sector, particularly in education.

Kerr’s vision of a multiversity was that of an institution that, rather than serving the economy, would in some sense supplant it, and the post-sixties transformation of US universities across the political spectrum never embraced a purely economic line. In recent years, a purely economic case for higher education’s capacity to deliver high-quality, high-value workers to the labor market is indeed difficult to make. Recent studies document the decline of the “education premium,” and suggest that the need for white collar workers, including a significant amount of intellectual labor, will be greatly reduced by technological advances, whose effects will be felt not along a skilled/non-skilled divide, but along a routinizable/nonroutinizable division of labor. Stanley Aronowitz, Jeremy Rifkin, and others have been making the case for a version of “the end of work” for some time. More theoretical discussions about the rise of “affective labor” have even suggested that we are witnessing fundamental transformations in the nature of labor valuation itself. Most of those who have been fighting the recent round of defunding understand that purely economic arguments for the value of higher education are likely destined to fail. Christopher Newfield’s important interventions, in recent books and on his blog, have been very clear on this point. Yet a great impasse of the present period has been the difficulty of even engaging discussions of the value of the university on noneconomic grounds.

The hegemony of a narrowly defined discourse of the “economic” has thus considerably narrowed the field of action within the university in the current period. As mentioned, the sixties-era struggles in the higher-education sector took place within a perception of a crisis that was broadly
social in nature, and the transformation of the universities in the wake of that crisis ushered in a brief season when university education was conceived, largely along social-democratic lines, as a component of the right to a good life in a more egalitarian society. Neoliberalism, it must be remembered, has functioned on a global scale as an attack on the egalitarian achievements of the sixties and earlier social movements. By remaining outside a purely market logic, universities—for all their inadequacies—had remained sites of that period’s partial victories. While conservative attacks on the universities as bastions of radicalism have largely failed in efforts to undo those victories, the structural logic of market values did its work in a more thorough and insidious way. As universities became subject to the new hegemonic consensus, students came to be figured as “customers,” and administrators were quick to get with the program, expanding their numbers, adjusting their salaries in accord with corporate management salary trends, embracing such B-school fads as “total quality management,” and representing their value to the legislature, the citizenry, and society in more purely economistic terms. Too few in the academy realized that the real threat was coming not from the sclerotic, neocon ravings of Roger Kimball, David Horowitz, and others, but from profound changes in institutional logic. As neoliberal logic pervaded the national institutions, higher education came to be figured as a good with monetary value, a privilege available for those who could afford it or were willing to mortgage their futures.

Although these trend lines were visible in the 1990s and into the 2000s, and although important voices in faculty governance denounced the compact (signed between university officials and Governor Schwarzenegger in 2005) that committed the university to reduced public funds, increased tuition, and increased reliance on private fundraising, the organized protest movement did not get off the ground until the summer of 2009, as the university made more and more clear what its responses would be to further declines in funding consequent to the 2007–8 recession. The faculty opposition that coalesced during the summer was spread across the system’s ten campuses. Some efforts were coordinated and some reflected individual campus initiatives. The fundamental position was the defense of the public university, and the primary target was privatization: subjecting access to the university and the university’s internal operations to market forces and thus

1. limiting access to the university to those who can pay; and
2. orienting the university’s basic values toward sources of revenue—federal, private, or other funds—rather than toward knowledge and the social good as a whole.

The faculty groups saw their roles largely as information-gathering, data presentation, analysis, policy recommendation, and countering local administrative
or higher administrative claims or decisions. There were concerted efforts on
some campuses to revive or strengthen faculty unions and to enact legislation
in the academic senates. Clear cases were made for the following positions:

1. The high-tuition/high-aid model advocated by the university leadership signifi-
cantly reduces access to the university, especially by lower-income groups.
2. In allocating its budget in the face of the cuts, the university was making dispro-
portionately large cuts to the teaching and research missions, favoring capital-
intensive projects that were thought to be potential funding generators.
3. The university’s claim that units that received large grants—medical schools
and so on—subsidized disciplines such as English or sociology, where such
grants are in shorter supply is simply false; the claim was based on questionable
accounting of infrastructural and overhead expenses. Rather, humanities and
social science instruction subsidized the other units.
4. The political course the university had embraced was disastrous. California vot-
ers were in fact quite supportive of the university, although high tuition, which
made the university less “public,” threatened that support.
5. The university embraced the privatization model without first committing sig-
nificant resources to more broadly based advocacy for the public university.

The opposition faculty was well organized and made its case in a num-
ber of venues—to the higher and central administrations, to the legisla-
ture, and to the students. It demonstrated that even given the fiscal crisis,
saving the university was politically and economically feasible. Whereas in
the summer of 2009 there were fears that faculty at some the richest and
most elite campuses, Berkeley and UCLA, might sign on to one possibility
floated by the central administration—privatization at the top, along the
University of Michigan model—it was clear early in the movement’s his-
tory that the UC faculty were holding together. This had become a broad-
based popular movement among the faculty, with the work and leadership
participation of some of the system’s most prominent scholars as well as
those on its lowest and most precarious rungs. Groups included the Fac-
ulty Organizing Group (FOG) at UC Santa Cruz, Solidarity Alliance and
SAVE at UC Berkeley, UCR Mobilize and Concerned Faculty at UCR at
UC Riverside, the UCSB Community Coalition for Option 4 at UC Santa
Barbara, SAVE UCLA, and others. Faculty associations were strengthened
and revived, and cross-campus coordination was dense and fruitful.12 It
was remarkably democratic and effective in its ideological, political, eco-
monic, and fiscal analyses. But by the autumn of 2010, after nearly a year
of effort, dozens of position papers, vocal opposition at hearings, websites,
and teach-ins, the faculty opposition had won not a single significant con-
cession or retreat from the higher administration. The faculty opposi-
tion’s defense of the public university, of reformism, and of a politics of
rational communicative action, then, was objectively a failure. If rational
reformism could do nothing, what could?
Student organizing and reading groups over the summer and fall of 2009, particularly in Northern California, produced a vanguardist orientation that resulted in several achieved or attempted occupations, events which, once mediatized, became a key public image of the student movements. This movement has been termed “electro-communism,” and I’ll use that term here. These students were a numerical minority of those who participated in demonstrations. Although only on a few occasions did the numbers of students participating in rallies or marches reach into the thousands, the student actions did become an important factor in state politics. In Sacramento and in Oakland it was assumed that the campuses would erupt further if things went too far, or if the neoliberal rhetoric were too unleavened. As Susan Kennedy, Governor Schwarzenegger’s chief of staff, said in an interview, “Those protests on the U.C. campuses were the tipping point. Our university system is going to get the support it deserves.” The specter of student protest is a recurrent image in University of California administrative discourse, and though largely productive of anodyne minor reformism, does accord to students a reserve of power that they have not often used over the past few decades, and this has been one source of the new movement’s efficacy. The primary tactic was occupation, a tactic with a long history, forming at Columbia University, at Harvard, at UCLA, and elsewhere enduring images of sixties movements in the United States and elsewhere. Invariably short-lived, occupations nevertheless demonstrated the transformability of university space and gave temporary actualization of what was a widely circulated slogan in the 2009 actions: “Whose university? Our university!” For “our university” to form a coherent referent, however, the tactic would have to have been complemented by a far more massive student movement, which proved difficult to achieve. Compounding the tactical impasses to build a mass student movement were core elements of the electro-communist line. Its core elements offer a useful diagnostic of the politics of the current period and can be summarized as follows:

1. The latest crisis in capitalism is its terminal crisis. Fundamental contradictions of overaccumulation can no longer be resolved through “fixes” such as the finance-capital induced bubble economy. As Mike Davis put it, from an analysis by Théorie Communiste on the 2008 Greek riots that was widely quoted among the electro-communists:

[What we have seen in Greece] is an original species of revolt, prefigured by earlier riots in L.A., London, and Paris, but arising from a new and more profound understanding that the future has been looted in advance. Indeed, what generation in modern history (apart from the sons of Europe in 1914) has ever been so comprehensively betrayed by the patriarchs? . . . My “baby-boom” cohort bequeaths to its children a broken world economy, stupifying extremes of social inequality, brutal wars on the imperial frontiers, and an out-of-control planetary climate.
2. The terminal crisis will leave no institutions intact, the university included. The university struggle is not a struggle for a different or better university, but a postapocalyptic site for “communisation,” described by one activist as “a practice of communist measures of collectivity and secession from capital that doesn’t wait for a communist revolution.” A key text for this tendency was *L’Insurrection qui vient*, published by the Invisible Committee in 2007, translated into English the next year as “The Coming Insurrection” and widely circulated on the internet and in print. The university is conceived, in this analysis, as a failed or ruined instrument of capital.

This revolution generated considerable prose, and many of the movement’s texts neared Port Huron or Weather Underground levels of rhetorical force. The tone was an admixture of Situationism, Italian autonomism, apocalyptic anarchism, left communist thinkers such as Gilles Dauvé and the Théorie Communiste group, plus a newer, largely anarchist-derived politics of joy: the joy of comradeship, of being wholly present in liberated space, of dancing, of enacting and fully inhabiting communal life. This actualization of communisation was viewed as a direct intervention into the scene of “real subsumption” under late capitalism, whereby any activism on behalf of institutions or social categories that were born of capitalism—the working class, universities, and so on—served only to prolong capital’s reign. The “electro” of electro-communism came from the practice of holding occupations in conjunction with dance parties outside the occupation grounds: the dancers that the parties attracted provided a deterrent to police attack and added to the joyousness of the atmosphere. The electro-communist slogan “We are the crisis” aimed to situate the crisis not in the airy realms of finance capital, but in daily life itself, which would also then be the site of the crisis’s Aufhebung.

Certain crucial movement texts were explicit about the generality of the crisis, and of the electro-communist refusal to engage the space of the university as such. The “Communiqué from an Absent Future: On the Terminus of Student Life,” a text that drew importantly on a key Situationist text of the French 1960s, “On the Poverty of Student Life,” notes:

The university has no history of its own; its history is the history of capital. Its essential function is the reproduction of the relationship between capital and labor. Though not a proper corporation that can be bought and sold, that pays revenue to its investors, the public university nonetheless carries out this function as efficiently as possible by approximating ever more closely the corporate form of its bedfellows. What we are witnessing now is the endgame of this process, whereby the façade of the educational institution gives way altogether to corporate streamlining.

Occupation, thus, was not about transforming a university, nor did the occupationists see the university as in any way a product of earlier struggles: there was nothing to be defended. Fredric Jameson recently wrote...
that “we must support social democracy because its inevitable failure constitutes the basic lesson, the fundamental pedagogy, of a genuine Left,” and we could argue by analogy that a defense of the postsixties university could embody a political strategic defense, however doomed, of the twentieth-century social-democratic achievements threatened on all sides by neoliberalism. This was the road not taken, for various reasons. One school of thought on the sixties movements in Europe and the United States—Regis Debray’s is a representative analysis—sees the first-world youth revolts period not as transformative in a revolutionary way, but, through a cunning of history, as preparing a new subject for capitalism—the bourgeois consumer. This narrative of what I have elsewhere termed “always-already cooptation” not only hobbles our ability to claim victory for real gains made but also engenders a cynicism toward any transformative energies that are not immediate and totalizable, rendering unattractive the long marches through the institutions that would naturally face reversals and setbacks, as well as gains. By staking its politics so prominently on the totality and irreversibility of the crisis, the movement’s maximalism, moreover, could hold no appeal for students who saw their lives not as some Mad Max fantasy of love in the ruins, but as a quietly desperate struggle to live with some comfort in straitened times.

The movement drew on Situationist and Situationist-derived commitment to “no demands,” an autonomist stance prominent in May ’68 and recurrent in movements since, most notably in Greece in recent years. “No demands” doubtless strengthened the situational intensity of the groups’ actions, but it alienated many of those students who were actually struggling for a transformed or reformed university. By the end of the 2009–10 academic year, electro-communism had not gained significantly more adherents, and the academic year ended with the administration burdened by little more than a vague disquiet over potential campus eruptions. Similarly, the electro-communists’ ideological coherence did not result in a stronger and more coherent ideology of protest in general. The occupations themselves led to police intervention, arrests, and unjust or excessive disciplinary proceedings, and, in spring of 2010, continuing into the autumn of 2011, much faculty and student oppositional energy was absorbed by defending those against whom charges had been brought. This metamovement occupation of activists’ efforts occasioned some rethinking of strategy. The electro-communists at UC Santa Cruz (UCSC) engaged in considerable soul-searching, and on March 4 of 2010 they tried something new, not an occupation but an alternative university—a cessation of classes and the creation of an alternative creative/intellectual space on campus—poetry readings, seminars, and talks, with more than a
thousand participants. The police stayed away. It was a significant and important high point in a political season marked more commonly by frustration and disappointment.

When I speak with comrades in the current movement who had some experience with the sixties movements about the difference between the two, about the vastly different size of the sixties movements and about their relative successes, when I ask for a comparisons with the neutralized, stationary character of politics today, the most commonly identified differential is “Vietnam,” though some also mention the economic expansion that marked the pre-1974 years. Perhaps. The depoliticizing and neutralizing consequences of the antisixties reaction, a worldwide phenomenon that I’ve analyzed elsewhere, drawing on the work of Wang Hui and comrades, have contributed to the current situation in university politics, in a time when the term “crisis” has none of the earlier period’s urgency.20 I participated in and supported the faculty opposition efforts to defend the university. The weakness of the defensive position, of course, is that it too is subject to the economic logic wherein the line of defense can be pushed ever further back, so that we’re fighting in 2010 for 2000 levels of funding, in 2020 for 2015 levels of funding, ad infinitum. The March 4 event at UCSC suggests that perhaps we need to learn something from the electro-communists. Although their core positions did not recognize a university whose postsixties transformations, limited though they may have been, were worth defending, the March 4 event showed something of the potentiality of university space and suggests the importance of refusing, at the level of everyday life, the fait accompli of its market transformation. We need to create for ourselves, in the present and in a resource-neutral manner, a mode of being in the university to which we can be committed. This will not be easy. The professionalism and careerism that dominate our profession inhibit risk-taking, and the hegemony of economic discourse abets conservatism. And yet risk-taking is necessary. University administrations are more bereft of ideas than at any time in our nation’s history, seeking creativity only in deepening the university’s accommodation to finance capital logic and debt financing. They cannot and will not engage with alternative vision. But if we could perhaps create a university within a university, a Strawberry Creek College for our times, say, and one genuinely worth defending, our allies could proliferate. At least the nature of our commitments could become clear. It seems to me that this is the present task. The electro-communists, it seems to me, misapprehend our historical epoch. Their apocalypticism is ultimately as debilitating as higher administrative stasis. But the passion of their commitment to a liberated space, in the ruins of the present, is something from which we rational reformers can learn.
This essay is a product of participation in the 1970 and 2009 university protests. The UC Santa Cruz context was determinative, and my thinking about the trajectory I trace here was shaped by work and discussion with Santa Cruz comrades in the movement. The essay also reflects the occasion of its writing, in 2010–11 Shanghai, where visions of the imminent demise of capitalism seem very far away. Thanks to Ryan Bishop, Diego Gullotta, Mai Dian, Xiao Tie, and others for comments following oral versions at the University of Hong Kong and at the Women fia Youth Center in Wuhan, China. I owe many thanks to Colleen Lye for detailed and helpful suggestions.

4. For the European student movements in the sixties and seventies see Gerd-Rainer Horn, The Spirit of ‘68: Rebellion in Western Europe and North America, 1956–1976. For an important analysis of the political subjectivity and temporality of the student, see Carlos Sevilla, La fábrica del conocimiento. La universidad-empresa en la produccíon flexible (Madrid, 2010). Thanks to Alberto Toscano for the latter reference.
7. On the convergence of university policy with market logic, see the essays by Bob Meister and Suzanne Guerlac in this issue.
9. On the flawed character of this calculation, see Bob Meister’s essay in this issue.
17. The communiqué, which circulated on the internet, has been reprinted in a useful Verso collection. The citation is from Clare Solomon and Tania Palmieri, eds., Springtime: The New Student Rebellions (New York, 2010), 154.