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# Unmasking Corporate-Military Infrastructure: Four Theses

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# Unmasking Corporate-Military Infrastructure: Four Theses

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At our workshop at the inaugural Conference on Community Writing on the rhetoric of the corporate university, participants noted that the values espoused by community literacy "in the community" are being eroded *at the university*. Furthermore, they noted the underlying rhetorics of missionary zeal, whiteness, and privatization in community literacy and service learning work. The authors build on these critiques by examining two successive administrations at Syracuse University. The first presented a model of "engaged infrastructure" with progressive rhetoric but oppressive outcomes; the second shed the façade of community partnership for an explicitly corporate and militaristic vision of higher education. Through this comparison, the authors interrogate foundations that community literacy has been built on with the hope of opening new possibilities.

**Keywords:** corporate, military, risk, community, collective organizing, coalition

## Introduction

As we complete the final revisions of this article, construction is underway on a $6 million promenade at Syracuse University. Protesters have noted that the Google definition of a promenade is "a paved walkway, typically one along a waterfront at a resort" ("We Reject"). Hard to believe in the blistering cold winters of Syracuse, New York, but the current university administration is doing its best to create a resort out of campus. Promising heated sidewalks and "seating gardens," it is an expensive beautification project that will reroute 130 city buses to an already busy thoroughfare all in the name of "enhanc[ing] the campus landscape and improve[ing] the student experience" (Grosso). Two petitions circulated against the promenade, one garnering 108 faculty signatures. At a protest, an SU professor captured the sentiment when he said the project is meant only to "attract the eyeballs of elite, full tuition paying students" ("SU Promenade"). After cutting vital campus programs, scholarships, and 254 staff in the name of "fiscal discipline" (McMahon), the promenade is a slap in the face to all those working for justice at SU's campus.

Because projects like the promenade reek of privilege and corporate values, it is easy to critique them. But as we discuss in this article, there are more insidious and yet no less damaging actions taken by universities, especially as they operate

in surrounding communities. The three of us entered the academy excited about community literacy work, but we have become deeply skeptical of work under the banner of community literacy, community engagement, community writing, service learning, or other terms used to describe academic projects "in the community," which are often led by people who are not from the communities with which they are working. We have also recognized that at the same time that university-based "community" programs espouse values of social justice, those same universities are becoming increasingly corporatized and militarized. As a result, the three of us reoriented to struggles against such corporatization and militarization, both on- and off-campus. We write as three committed, relatively new members of the field, hoping to reach other relatively new members of the field who are also committed to social justice and may be experiencing similar concerns.

Since "community work" in academia can both be seductive and appear to scholars as the only possible avenue for social justice, we have recognized the necessity of unmasking the current infrastructure we work under and upending the logic of infrastructure-building. We begin with the rhetorics of the corporate-military university, which as the rhetoric around the promenade demonstrates, are often coded into seemingly harmless terms like "the student experience." In what follows, we do not aim to romanticize work "on" or "off" campus as the "real" work (as Feigenbaum cautions against), but instead, to demonstrate the need to dismantle campus/community orientations that have allowed for the growth of community writing as a professional area that can be claimed by the academic-military-industrial-complex.[1] Pressing social justice struggles are not only located *on* campus, but often *against* campus.

## 1) Institutional rhetorics of community exclude, homogenize, and mask the oppressive logics at play in university-sponsored ''community'' engagement.

> "[Composition-rhetoric] never really interrogated systems of power, though we may have certainly improved learning structures. In this absence of a deliberate critique of power, we ourselves created the very possibility that progressive philosophies of education could be completely co-opted by neoliberalism such that even corporate mechanisms under current standardization regimes sometimes sound like us: *we may have supplied a much too-neutral language*." —Carmen Kynard, "Teaching While Black: Witnessing and Countering Disciplinary Whiteness, Racial Violence, and University Race-Management" (11, emphasis added)

Given the deep structural racism in higher education, and its reproduction in composition and rhetoric, Carmen Kynard's writing demands that we interrogate the terms our field has come to rely on. The term "community" is ubiquitous in

business lingo, in corporate philanthropy, and in feel-good service projects. As Raymond Williams notes in his *Keywords*, "community" has always been a "warmly persuasive word" that "seems never to be used unfavorably"—part of its dangerous power when taken up in corporate doublespeak (76). Our broad concern with the uses of "community" isn't simply a rhetorical frustration of working in the neoliberal academy; it is literally a matter of life and death. Guatemalan environmental activist Bertha Cáceres, assassinated in 2016 after years of threats to her life, said the following about transnational corporations that are stealing land from indigenous people: "They have studied and developed a language that comes directly from the communities . . . speak[ing] of community and us[ing] the peoples' terms [. . .] This is very worrying for social movements as it shows a deepening of the transnationals' aggression" (12).

In a discussion of "community," it is no simple matter to transition between the contexts of struggles for land sovereignty and struggles against the academic-military-industrial-complex (although the two are not so far from each other when we recognize that U.S. universities are part of the settler colonial state). Nor is it simple to transition from Cáceres's assassination to an academic argument. Sharing her words here and registering the impossible tension of moving on to analysis is in some ways reflective of the problem of intervening in an academic conversation that has co-opted grassroots concepts. It also reflects the problem of thinking how/whether a discipline could be accountable to a movement. Cáceres's critique is one to which we want to be accountable; her experience suggests that you know you're in trouble when people you don't know show up talking about community. As we explore further in the following two sections of this article, rhetorics of community further universities' exploitation of local resources and othering of local people. As three teachers/students working in institutions of higher education, we feel a responsibility to call out these logics where we see them, beginning with the seamless assumption that the term "community" broadly describes groups of people and places *outside* of the university: "we have resigned ourselves to the term 'community' to refer to para-university communities" (Miller, Wheeler, and White 176).

Defining "community" as outside of the university has several dangers. First, it could blanket the experiences and lives of all people outside of the university, inadvertently suggesting that those "in the community" do not study or work at the university or do not experience its economic, political, and cultural effects. Second, the definition of community as "out there" instead of "in here" leaves "community engagement" as a matter of choice, when it is a privilege to enjoy private space where you are not subject to surveillance and harassment. Widely-circulated disciplinary rhetoric of "going public," working in "the streets," or "on the ground" carries that embedded campus/community binary. For those in the academy who come from marginalized/oppressed communities, to consistently hear the word "community" evoked as an abstract, exterior subject of study is to risk erasing the scholars of color and people from various subject positions who bring knowledge from experience to

the academy—knowledge that is explicitly valued and foregrounded in intellectual genealogies including Black feminism.

The "out there"/"in here" distinction also has the potential to homogenize the campus "community" in dangerous ways, blanketing the experience of students, faculty, staff, and administration within and across programs to make it seem as if we have common struggles, experiences, and stakes and in order to enforce collegiality (see Salaita). Uncomplicated notions of "university community" mystify the difference between those who benefit directly from the corporatization and militarization of the university and those who have historically struggled just for access to and representation within institutions of higher education, via movements like the Third World Liberation Front and the CUNY protests that led to open admissions (see Hoang's *Writing against Racial Injury* and Kynard's *Vernacular Insurrections*). In light of Kynard's powerful critique of neutral disciplinary language above, it's important to point out that these definitions marginalize and exclude the experiences of those who are subject to daily racist, sexist, ableist, homophobic macro- and microaggressions on campus and fight against oppression largely alone. As feminist scholar Sara Ahmed notes in *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life,* these rhetorics of "us" end up rendering the person who points out embedded logics of racism, sexism, and other exclusions *as* the problem. She likens those who point out institutional oppression to plumbers "who point out what is blocked"; the risk in doing this is "to point out what is blocked is to be experienced as the blockage point, as the ones who are getting in the way of the flow" (186).

We are not the only ones "getting in the way" or who have these critiques of community literacy projects. As an audience member pointed out during Eli Goldblatt's keynote address at the inaugural Conference on Community Writing, the overwhelming majority of celebrated community literacy scholars and conference attendees are white, and the people of color often targeted in "community engagement" projects are almost entirely absent. During our conference workshop, "Community Writing Against the Rhetoric of the Corporate University," it was noted that while community literacy/service learning work is framed in the rhetoric of social good, underlying these rhetorics are troubling patterns: *missionary zeal, fixing others versus turning the gaze inward, whiteness, academic interests, privatization*. We would add *academic capital* to this list; publication and professionalization both domesticates and depoliticizes critical interventions born of embodied struggle.

By reorienting to processes of marginalization and exclusion on campus, we do not mean to deny that significant town/gown divides do exist. SU, where some undergraduates pay upwards of $60,000 per year, is literally on a big hill; campus police patrol surrounding neighborhoods in what amounts to a criminalization of the "community"; and while the Department of Public Safety sends out crime reports for muggings and robberies surrounding campus, SU has failed to address reported druggings and assaults perpetrated by students against other students leading to petitions for administrative accountability like #WakeUpSULaw during the 2014-15 school year ("Adequately Address"). Instead, our reorientation is meant to point out

the everyday re-inscription of campus/community divides in institutional rhetoric, and the rendering of the language of "community" as seemingly apolitical. In reality, considering Cáceres's critique, it can be *oppressive*, depending on who is using it and to what end. The rhetoric is not inherently innocent.

## 2) The corporatization of the university is often consistent with the do-gooder ethos of service learning and community engagement writ large.

> Several years ago, SU joined with foundations, businesses, not-for-profits, state and city governments, and neighborhood residents to create the Near Westside Initiative as an exciting and (we hope) deeply democratic partnership that embeds the arts, humanities, and culture with other fields. - Chancellor Nancy Cantor, "Transforming Higher Education Through Civic Engagement." Imagining America Plenary. Seattle, WA Sept. 2010

The three of us have witnessed first-hand two apparently conflicting visions of a university, but as we will argue, the similarities are just beneath the surface. The first was Nancy Cantor's vision of "Scholarship In Action"—a widely celebrated model of the engaged university that she spoke about in more than 50 articles, keynote addresses, and plenary speeches around the country. Scholars looking for examples of university-wide "engaged infrastructure" would likely end up at Syracuse University under Chancellor Nancy Cantor. From 2004-2013, Cantor worked to break the town and gown, university-on-the-hill model of higher education, theorizing universities as "anchor institutions," grounded and foundational to a strong city.

Cantor's primary example of "Scholarship in Action" was directed at Syracuse's Near Westside, a neighborhood with about 5,000 residents that was one of the poorest census clusters in the country in the early 2000s. While Cantor often publicly framed the neighborhood as lacking, she did not invoke the classic deficit model, savior narrative of service learning. In fact, across major institutions of higher education, one would be hard pressed to find a university president or chancellor who is a more progressive orator than Chancellor Cantor. Her speeches invoke Harriet Tubman,[2] John Brown, Harry Boyte, Wendell Berry, Paulo Freire, and Oren Lyons, among other figures. In a 2010 speech at Baylor University, Cantor evoked the Haudenosaunee concept of planning for the "seventh generation yet to come," a long vision of social action ("Scholarship in Action"). At the beginning of a speech to the University of Kansas, she acknowledged the colonized land that both the University of Kansas and SU occupy ("Higher Education's Public Mission"). Not many university presidents, especially at major research institutions, take such an explicitly progressive rhetorical approach. As we argue below, Cantor embodies a specific kind of progressive ethos that masks oppressive underlying trends.

Cantor's scholarship in action in the Near Westside centered on the creation of the Near Westside Initiative (NWSI), a 501(c)3 that had poured $74 million into the small neighborhood by 2012. Cantor situated the NWSI as an initiative that hinged on a set of "flexible, sustainable, and reciprocal partnerships," and that "adopted a collaborative model, asking participants to meet for consultation and discussion and move toward a common goal," rather than "a 'command and control' model directed exclusively by university experts" ("Transforming Education through Engagement" 4). Cantor's language is consistent with the language of community literacy and community engagement actively circulating in composition and rhetoric.

But from the beginning, the rhetoric did not meet the reality of conditions in the neighborhood. At the same time that Cantor framed the NWSI board of directors in egalitarian terms—describing how a "wise grandmother"[3] from the neighborhood sits across from the city's wealthiest lawyers—and announced that they were setting up a "community of experts" ("Transforming Education through Engagement"), the NWSI website indicated that *only five of twenty-seven board members were actually from the neighborhood*. That is, there were more than four lawyers, CEOs, or university professors and administrators for every "wise grandmother." While the residents of the neighborhood were given equal agency in Cantor's speeches, they were not in positions of official decision-making power when the money was being doled out.

This became clearest when two university professors and a local labor activist attempted to pressure the Near Westside Initiative into signing a community benefits agreement (CBA) during that same period. CBAs formalize and bind reciprocal relationships contractually, requiring that developers hire local workers for a percentage of the jobs and agree to other tangible local benefits. However, the NWSI deemed the CBA unnecessary and justified this by conflating developers and residents—made possible through the token inclusion of people from the neighborhood. Being pressed to sign the CBA, one NWSI representative argued, "You can't really sign an agreement with yourself, can you?" (Parks 514)

The response is a classic example of what David Craig and Douglas Porter call an "inclusion delusion," the co-optation of the "liberal language of empowerment and opportunity" in order for people in the position of power (as defined by access to material resources) to act as if they have the consent and collaboration of communities they attempt to exploit (15). Few jobs or other tangible benefits went to neighborhood residents when the over $74 million was spent on a high-end apartment complex, several art studios and galleries, a pharmaceutical manufacturer, and a TV and radio station. The refusal to sign a CBA and the difference between rhetoric and reality when it comes to decision makers in the "deeply democratic partnership" illustrates the fallacy of "engaged infrastructure" at the macro level in Syracuse. A refined PR machine, Cantor's "Scholarship in Action" relied on an abstract value of community, pairing a deeply progressive message with fundamentally oppressive practices.

In contrast, the NWSI website from 2008 to 2010 ignored neighborhood residents entirely and actively recruited outside artists to live and work in home/studio spaces in the Near Westside "below market prices."[4] This is the blueprint for neighborhood colonization, following Richard Florida's notion of the "creative class" that has gentrified neighborhoods around the country. One of the incentives became the artist-in-residence program at Salt Quarters, a half million dollar project to create two apartments above a gallery and exhibit space. Beginning in 2013, the NWSI funded six white artists to live and work in a predominately Black and Latinx neighborhood, none of them neighborhood residents. One artist, Brandan Rose, spent his time creating an exhibit made from 10,000 painted pennies, "[i]nspired by the resilient beauty of the Near Westside in the face of economic challenges" ("Events and Exhibitions"). With $74 million, the neighborhood got art about their poverty. As one organizer in the city pointed out, the example seems straight out of *Portlandia*—and yet, this is the on-the-ground reality of where NWSI resources were actually funneled.

Of course, if this section were read solely as a critique of Nancy Cantor, it would be misinterpreted. We have no reason to think that Cantor's vision was disingenuous. What the distance between the expression of that vision and the material reality represents is the many barriers of institutional structures: board of trustees members' disagreement; the stipulations of grant writing and funding;[5] the necessity for the project to appear successful after so much time, energy, and PR was invested; the financial-bottom-line priority to please students, faculty, and city officials before neighborhood residents; among many other conflicting tensions. But we would be remiss not to note how the brainstorming, development, implementation, and outcomes of these projects also reveal something specific about the subjectivities, priorities, and political alignments of those who are in the room making these decisions. Cantor and other individuals are in no way innocent; they are collectively complicit in institutional oppression. Fundamentally, Cantor's "Scholarship in Action" exemplifies the logics of expansion and othering that inform rhetorics of "community" in academic disciplines. When we read more deeply into Cantor's progressive rhetoric and compare it to what actually happened in the Near Westside, the colonizing metaphors are all too clear. At the exact same time that the NWSI begs for "pioneer" artists to buy subsidized housing, Cantor describes a university that is "moving west . . . for social and economic justice," touting that over 808 students and 45 faculty members had been involved in the Near Westside by 2012 ("Connecting with the Community"). Ahmed identifies this logic as one definition of what she terms "progressive racism," "how colonization and the theft of land, labour, people and resources is understood as being for others," or as a "white gift" ("Progressive Racism"). To this day, the NWSI and Cantor are still lauded for something like "engaged infrastructure" while the economic conditions of longstanding residents in Syracuse's Westside remain largely unchanged.

## 3) The corporatization and militarization of universities renders them urgent sites of social and political struggle.

> "Neither the communications nor the process of the promenade were as good as they should have been . . . I think we should say that and get over it. We're not all perfect." - Kent Syverud, Current Chancellor of Syracuse University

Cantor's successor, Kent Syverud, shed the facade of "engaged infrastructure." In 2014, Syverud's administration hired Bain & Company to do an assessment of campus finances; shortly thereafter, the administration closed the campus sexual assault advocacy center, cut student scholarships, and implemented a "voluntary separation" program that led 254 campus employees to retire early for a cash buyout, some reporting intimidation and many replaced by part-time work-study students (Tobin; McAndrew). Furthermore, as part of a rebranding strategy, the phrase "university as public good" and references to diversity were removed from the SU mission and vision statements. A series of student protests led to an intersectional coalition, THE General Body,[6] which generated a list of grievances and needs, and staged an 18-day sit-in in the SU administration building (among the wins: the immediate search for and subsequent hiring of an ADA coordinator, changes to the mission and vision statements, increases in TA stipends). The following year, the university's Fast Forward program laid out plans for increased public/private partnerships, including those with military and national security, justified via rhetorics of innovation and job-readiness ("Academic Strategic Plan"). The following fall, the university would be part of a region-wide plan to re-brand Central New York as the "silicon valley of drone research" (Semuels)—an important piece of context is that armed military drones are piloted from Hancock International Airport in Syracuse, and local peace activists are often arrested for protesting there.

The move from "Scholarship in Action" to "Fast Forward" demonstrates that the few protections and possibilities that academia purports to offer are being actively dismantled. We need to look no further than the criminalization of student dissent on campuses as in the case of the Irvine 11 (Alexander & Jarratt); surveillance of Muslim student groups (Theoharis), the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign's de-hiring of Steven Salaita at the behest of wealthy Board of Trustee members; the nationwide protests against institutional racism sparked by Mizzou and the Black Lives Matter movement during the fall of 2015; and the chilling crackdown on Palestine solidarity work via websites like Canary Mission that seek to destroy student-activists' livelihoods. Money and military speak loudly on campus, and punish those who speak out; adjunct professor Divya Nair was suspended after speaking about policing and colonization at a Black Lives Matter anti-police-recruitment rally at Community College of Philadelphia (Fiorillo). This is to say nothing of sexual violence and harassment, or of brutality against students like the UC Davis pepper spray incident (and the subsequent PR campaign to scrub articles about it from the public record).

There are countless other everyday incidents of violence and brutality on campus—we find ourselves invoking specific instances here, but the violence is irreducible to a list—and if it were a list, it would comprise multiple dissertations. We pause as we consider the very real and material stakes such as the brutal violence Dr. Ersula Ore was subjected to at Arizona State University and the racial profiling and detention of Dr. Carmen Kynard's student simply because he wrote a paper about race (Ore; Kynard "Teaching While Black"). These are but a few of the examples indicating the ways that the "campus community" is built with marginalizing, exclusive, and violent logics.

As Kynard writes, "[i]t is much safer for us to unfurl the specialized, disciplinary methodologies and vocabularies in which we have been trained, rather than turn our analytical gaze onto our institutions and its actors that have maintained calculatingly repressive environments, policies, and climates for students and faculty of color" ("Teaching While Black" 2). By exiling or punishing those who would struggle, campuses are thrust into a climate of fear and depoliticization, narrowing the debates that are possible there. This trend is hardly unique; during our conference workshop, participants from a range of universities (public, private, land-grant, liberal arts) in a range of labor tiers (associate professor, assistant professor, adjunct professor, teaching assistant, online course developer) reported a heavy emphasis on STEM-field research that rhetorically links innovation, business, job-training, military partnerships, and corporations in varying combinations. This logic of corporatization, too, relies on racist and opportunistic mobilizations of international students and veterans couched in rhetorics of diversity (obscuring the monetized imperative to recruit international students paying out-of-state tuition and veterans with G.I. Bill benefits, and the simultaneous exclusion of domestic students of color).

Part of how the corporate university works is by depoliticizing and disciplining dissent. The rhetorical taxonomy of depoliticizing and disciplining is an intricate one, and one that demands some fluency if it is to be effectively resisted. It also gives us deeper insight into the institutional co-optation of words like "community." For example, during the student organizing at SU during the fall of 2014, student protests were often redirected into "listening meetings," which sought to incorporate student dissent into an administrative structure without the possibility of real change (i.e., re-opening a closed sexual assault advocacy center); furthermore, the rhetoric of "sustainability" often stepped in to frame systemic change as unsustainable. "Dialogue" and "sustainability" are not commonly understood as dangerous terms, which is part of why they can so effectively obscure dissent.

Depoliticization can also take the form of *theorization,* where student movements become sites of academic critique—an act that is in explicit opposition to movement building. Ironically, organic movement-theorizing—such as intersectional coalitions and multivalent needs—are deliberately undone via accusations of being "unfocused" at the same time that an institution may be celebrating scholarly work on intersectionality. Kynard perfectly captures this contradiction when she writes, "I have not worked at any single institution, to date, where I have found as many as

even three other colleagues who notice, much less speak out, against these kinds of everyday racist microaggressions that I have described despite everyone's seeming incessant discussion of critical theories from postcolonialism/decolonization to intersectionality. The theories can become merely the stage for an academic performance, not a way of engaging the world and oppression in it" (2). Through rhetorics of civility, collegiality, and professionalism, this theory/practice divide becomes even more deeply entrenched, and encourages silence on campus-based struggles (see Salaita). Ironically, on-campus struggle is often framed in terms suggesting that it is recreational or privileged—a rhetorical move that intentionally divides those who might otherwise struggle together. In the final act of co-optation, student movements are claimed as evidence of an engaged, active student body, as students at Colgate University saw several months following their sit in during the fall of 2014, when they ended up featured on the university homepage.

## 4) Realizing the university as a site of struggle will require that we become fluent in each other's struggles and risks,[7] that we practice a deep solidarity, and that we use the power we have in different roles to support one another when risking in local university struggles.

Syverud's explicitly corporate and military university (the latter there to police those who may resist the former) demonstrates how the values that rhetorically animate community literacy work—collaboration, reciprocity, agency—are being actively eroded inside of the university day by day. This is not meant to take away from the critique of Cantor's mobilization of these terms, nor our skepticism of community literacy using these terms, nor is it meant to suggest that there was once a "golden era" of democratic higher education without interference from business and military. Instead, we want to imagine what "community" work would look like if we began with the urgent exigency, put forth by Sunaina Maira and Piya Chatterjee in *The Imperial University,* of confronting universities, which are "firmly embedded in global structures of repression, militarism, and neoliberalism" (2). The most dangerous political literacy (Chatterjee), it seems, is one that not only critically questions or problem-poses but explicitly seeks to transform academic structures—in other words, not *writing about* struggle, but *struggling.*

We ask for collective struggle against the corporate-military university, its exclusive logics, and its devastating impact on the localities it inhabits—a project that represents a fundamental shift from the "campus/community" orientations described in this article. Yet, if and when the question of such transformation comes up in academic spaces, it is often met with a dulling pragmatism. The possibility of altering the operative status quo seems insurmountable and naive. The physical and ideological threads of existing infrastructures run deep and are so tightly wound that, for some, they may seem inevitable. For others, only small reforms seem necessary

or practical, recreating a seemingly more benign version of the same system while appeasing those that fight for deeper structural change (this is different from the sorts of reform that build upon one another through the course of long-term struggle).

Without these struggles, we are offered a narrow spectrum of possibilities from Cantor's progressive "scholarship" that masks the "action" of neighborhood colonization to Chancellor Syverud's "fast forward" towards a militarized, corporatized resort. It is true that in some instances the only option may be leaving the institution, as demonstrated by Sara Ahmed's recent resignation from Goldsmiths around the institution's failure to address sexual harassment. Ultimately, though, we want to think about what must be done via coalition and collective struggle to break down the corporate-military university, beginning with breaking down the rhetorical processes that obscure the need for coalition and collective struggle.

Over the last few decades of community literacy, we have seen various terms being co-opted and commodified. It seems that each wave of critique comes along with a slightly adjusted practice and new language. Service learning was written within language of helping, giving back, and the problems of "at risk" youth—an orientation that has been soundly critiqued (see Mathieu, Himley, Cushman). Community engagement, community literacy, or community writing may be written within an adjusted language of reciprocity, making a difference, and community agency, but our view is that within this "much-too-neutral language," similar logics and practices prevail. Now, how quickly do we find words of community organizing (social change, social justice, even in some cases revolution) being used in composition and rhetoric scholarship? The 2016 and 2017 CCCC Conferences, for example, suggest community-organizing terms of "cultivating change" and "taking action."

Similarly, as a participant in our conference workshop pointed out, when "revolution" is invoked in community literacy work it is merely metaphorical. Writing about the co-optation of the term "decolonization" in the academy, Eve Tuck and Wayne Yang note that for "decolonization" to be truly enacted, it would need to involve land repatriation—decolonization is a concept that the academy has grown to mobilize widely and in abstracted terms.[8] We want to talk about the need for revolutionary transformation, about what it means to embrace radicalism in the way that Angela Davis describes it—grasping at the roots, pulling up oppressive structures and logics. In imagining and practicing coalition-building towards such transformation, how do we guard against domesticating the necessity of liberation to the level of the metaphorical? How do we resist the institutional pressure to take movement work and turn it into a "curricular object" as Hortense Spillers describes of the disciplining of movement feminisms and Kynard of the potential curricular objectification of hip hop? ("Academy & Mass Consumer Culture: Hip Hop").

We can begin by actively aligning against and working to dismantle the very power relations that make the institutionalization of "community engagement" (as we saw under Cantor) and subsequent dismissal (as we saw under Syverud) possible. A central process in this collective work is broadening our understanding of the

struggles and risks that each of us brings to campus each day. As we saw in THE General Body organizing, many live these struggles every day and do not have the option of turning away from them—to us, this means that collective action must be thought of as not only possible, but necessary.[9] This acts in contrast to commonplace academic arguments about keeping quiet or waiting until tenure to do anything meaningful (and by that time becoming so thoroughly disciplined that some may forget they even had an impulse to do so).[10] The shape this collective action takes, however, must be informed by a recognition of the various risks and stakes that each of us brings to movement work. How do factors including race, class, gender, sexuality, ability, labor status, obligations, and debt converge and threaten to fracture coalitions in moments of collective-risk taking?

Outside of academic spaces, there are plenty of examples of transformative work that both disrupt and create out of that disruption. In particular, we are inspired by the Black Lives Matter and Zapatista movements, as we understand them as practices of world-building and world-making—a constellation of revolutionary practices and organizing principles born of necessity. Communications scholar Karma Chavez defines world-making as the building of "new relationalities" that include resisting the state but also engaging in less explicitly political exchanges where people come together to think and practice what self-governance could look like ("Reflections on Rhetoric and Citizenship"). Licona and Chavez write that such "relational literacies" are "understandings and knowings in the world that are never produced singularly or in isolation . . . Put concretely, relational literacies enable the space for new kinds of understanding, interaction, and politics" (96-97). The goal here is not relational/coalitional *infrastructures*, but an ongoing practice of intersectional coalition-building.

The Detroit Summer collective is another longstanding example of building by practicing new relationalities (Howell & Boggs). We also find an academic example of world-making in Alexis Pauline Gumbs project, which she describes as, "The Eternal Summer of the Black Feminist Mind, a transmedia-enabled community school (a.k.a. a tiny Black feminist university) and lending library based in Durham, North Carolina" ("Eternal Summer"). Gumbs, via Audre Lorde, opens the possibility of what can happen when we stop thinking of the master's house as our only source of support. If we remain constantly aware that as Gumbs states, the university will never love us; then what kinds of possibilities open up for those of us who stay to reorient our scholarship and our practices toward relational-literacy-building and world-making? ("The Shape of My Impact"). Indeed, this world-making is constantly happening already through various relationalities that remain incomprehensible to white supremacist logics of being and belonging. We know from local coalitional organizing that it is possible to open up difficult, necessary, sometimes momentary spaces of world-building. We know that these moments fundamentally transform ourselves and our social relations, and that this sense of possibility and partial vision of the world we struggle for reverberates beyond the disciplining, moderating force of those who support, maintain, and align with structures of power.

In the spirit of continued struggle, we want to end with questions for reimagining community. These questions are directed specifically at anyone who embodies a privileged position in "community-engaged" work and who operates within the academic-military-industrial-complex. We hope these questions open space for building principles for liberatory praxis that are adaptable to different contexts. *Who is a member of the "community" in my "community-engaged" work? How do I rhetorically construct and/or unwittingly homogenize "campus" and "community," and what rhetorics and practices of othering/colonization undergird this distinction? Is my relationship to this "community" comfortable? Does it write me as a hero? Does the work end up on my resume—and would I still do it if it didn't end up there? What kind of critical interventions would render the work less marketable in the eyes of the institution where I work? Who is marginalized in my or the institution's construct of the "campus community"? What would need to happen for me to become fluent in their struggles and risks and build coalition and solidarity? Am I willing to un-align with the university and the privileges it confers to do so? Would I be willing to give up power, privilege, and professionalizable "community literacy" activities? Would I risk alongside those who are marginalized and toward justice on/off campus in places deeply impacted by the presence of universities?*

## Notes

1. As Sunaina Maira and Piya Chatterjee note in *The Imperial University: Academic Repression and Scholarly Dissent,* Dwight D. Eisenhower originally included "academic" in the well-known phrase "military-industrial-complex" before he delivered his famous farewell address that popularized the term (17).

2. The invocation and domestication of these figures hits home when we consider Paula Giddings' argument in that if Tubman were alive today, she might be helping people escape from prison (137). We would add that —she likely also wouldn't be starting a 501(c)3 named after herself.

3. Given the racial/ethnic makeup of the neighborhood and the trope of the "magical woman of color elder," this is particularly troubling language.

4. This is from a tab called "Artist Opportunities and Incentives" on the website from 2009. In a tab called "making your move," the NWSI asks for "artists with passion and pioneer spirit" to buy "opportunity properties" that become "the building blocks of your own future: spaces where you can create your own environment."

5. As a participant in our workshop pointed out, corporate university rhetorics reassert frameworks of value and valuation to monetize social justice issues; in cases where community literacy programs do not receive institutional support and rely on

outside funding, there is the problem of framing this work for the eyes of funders and principles that can be compromised in the process. And as organizations come to rely on outside funding to "build engaged infrastructure," funders inevitably shape the conceptual frameworks that guide that work, which then shapes the work and relationships that are possible within organizations/programs via a micro-reinscription of hegemonic power relations. For example, when Vani was working with a community literacy nonprofit in NYC, and she and a participant in the program, Cherish, began questioning the "mentor/mentee" framework and the rhetoric of "at-risk youth" that was being used to characterize students via the organization's mission statement, they were told that "this language sucks but it's what funders understand." In the process, the fundraising language comes to set up a power dynamic that is very difficult to resist institutionally, between "mentors" and "at-risk mentees."

6. See THEGeneralBody.org

7. We take this concept of fluency from Chandra Talpade Mohanty, who attributes it to M. Jacqui Alexander.

8. Writing about settler colonialism and how the rhetoric of decolonization has been taken up in the academy and in social justice struggles, Tuck and Yang note that "[d]ecolonization is not a metonym for social justice. We don't intend to discourage those who have dedicated careers and lives to teaching themselves and others to be critically conscious of racism, sexism, homophobia, classism, xenophobia, and settler colonialism. We are asking them/you to consider how the pursuit of critical consciousness, the pursuit of social justice through a critical enlightenment, can also be settler moves to innocence - diversions, distractions, which relieve the settler of feelings of guilt or responsibility, and conceal the need to give up land or power or privilege" (21).

9. See Yanira and Ben's forthcoming, "*The Tone Has Changed*: On the Rhetorics of Neutrality and Civility and the Necessary Acts to Unmask Them" in *Unruly Rhetorics*.

10. See, for example, Steven Salaita's comments in "Episode 26: Conversations on Academic Labor, Academic Freedom, and Palestine" (*This Rhetorical Life*).

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