

Practices of Radical Cartography

Counter-Cartographies Collective

We write from a university in the American South which has contributed over an extended period of time to important progressive tendencies in the state and region, while at the same time struggling with its location in the antebellum South (slavery, low-wage extractive and assembly industries, segregation and civil rights, anti-communism, anti-unionism, and more recently strange interweavings of traditional conservatism, neoconservatism, neoliberalism, and populism). A state that reelected Jesse Helms as its Senator for over 31 years, recently launched a Presidential candidate who has explicitly called for universal health care and politics that is more directly attentive to the needs of the disadvantaged. These conflicted politics have sustained the university's own vision of its birthright and responsibility to the people of the state, and mean that — at least for now — the administrative structures of the university are not monolithic, but work as a complex meshwork of negotiated goals and interests. At the heart of this meshwork are students, faculty, administrators, alumni, staff, state and local politicians, business, and citizens of the state. Thus, the university continues longstanding traditions of faculty governance, engaged scholarship, and support for student activism and progressive community causes as it further embeds itself in the policy institutions of state and federal government as it draws on defense funding, as it links ever more closely to corporate funding streams, as it supports community development groups and schools at home and abroad, as it continues to be one of the few remaining loci of protected free speech in an emerging security state, as it... as a point of interest, UNC-Chapel Hill is the first public university in the country, many of its buildings historically constructed by African slaves, and has become today one of the most renowned universities in the US.

The Counter Cartographies Collective was born in this ambiguous yet exciting context. Different concerns, interests, anxieties and politics began to merge into a series of conversations in hallways and cafes. In particular a group of us were consistently gnawing at how to rethink forms of political intervention in the context of our campus and the US university more generally. The initial success and rapid failure of organizing drives such as the union that brought together both TAs and cleaners among other activist efforts left us organizationally disarmed. At the same time we saw the urgency of overcoming the language and affective vibe of the “ivory tower” which had many more pervasive effects than we had thought both within and without the university. How could we overcome both the anti-intellectualism amongst some political activists and the anti-activism of some critical intellectuals? We gathered different materials for inspiration in our search, material such as: The map of Bowling Green State University by subRosa cyberfeminists (http://www.cyberfeminism.net/biopower/bp_map.html), the impressive work of UT-Watch (at the University of Texas, <http://www.utwatch.org/>), and texts such as the exchange between Tiziana Terranova and Marc Bousquet in *MUTE* (“Recomposing the University,” <http://www.metamute.org/en/html2pdf/view/7148>).

Our first collective steps can be traced to fall 2005. We put together an initial research intervention on the main campus when the administration cancelled the holiday on Labor Day, but only for certain employees — such as professors, teacher assistants, librarians, etc. — and gave the day off to the other sectors of its workforce. This blatant/insulting equation between knowledge work as non-work gave some of us the perfect excuse to raise the question of labor as a public and open target of discussion through the research dispositive of the drift, a stationary drift in this case (see “Labor Day Drift,” http://countercartographies.org/index.php?option=com_docman&task=doc_details&gid=6&Itemid=32). Other interventions and presentation followed culminating in a long-term involvement to trace the multiple contours of the territory we inhabited and find ways of reinhabiting it.

Building on those experiences, our own desire to map our own territory, and the influence of contemporary activist research and radical mapping projects, especially Precarias a la Deriva and Bureau d’Etudes (see “Drifting Through the Knowledge Machine,” in Biddle, Graeber and Shukaitis, 2007) inquiring into the multiple cartographies that compose our university. Following the long-standing tradition of the disorientation guides among campus activism in the US, we wanted one that was more graphical than the text-based production so far.

In the *disOrientation Guide* (http://countercartographies.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=15&Itemid=31) the Counter-Cartographies Collective tried to situate the modern research university as a complex scalar actor working

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at many different geographical scales. Located at the apex of the Research Triangle Park, one of the largest science research parks in the USA, the university and its sisters in the region, form a complex meshwork of knowledge institutions, the structure and consequences of which are currently in flux.

The map we produced sought to read the university in terms of three linked eco-epistemological frameworks: as a factory, a functioning body, and as a producer of worlds. These three points of our conceptual triangle each had their primary locus in the interest theories of Marx, the biopolitical and governmentality regimes of Foucault, and schizoanalysis and flat ontologies of Deleuze and Guattari. One of our main points was to render the university as a complex economic and political actor which, through its pedagogy, research, and other investments shapes particular regional worlds and promotes certain types of class divisions and diverse (at times precarious) modes of existence. In addition, the disOrientation Guide served/serves to arm its users with new tools, contacts and concepts to reinhabit, intervene in or subvert the university and its territories — a Re-Orienting function if you will.

In the summer of this year the 3Cs started tracing the development of Carolina North, a 250-acre industry/university collaborative research park that the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill hoped to build on a large tract of forest a few miles north of the university. When we started our research, it seemed to us (and almost everyone else) that development on the new campus was inevitable and unchangeable: yet another example of hegemonic corporatization of the university.

As we talked to boosters and opponents, however, it became clear that even within the administration the vision of a new research campus was many things to many people. Some administrators argued that they needed top-of-the-line research labs with space for corporate offices in order to hire and retain top faculty, others framed that need more directly in terms of competition within the hierarchy of top-tier US schools to become a “world-class university.” At other times and in other places the campus was cast as an economic development initiative for the State of North Carolina, a model of sustainable design, or even (just) a critically needed fix to shortages of research space on the main campus. Regardless of what they wanted, most everyone was already convinced that building a new campus would get it for them. Somehow, the one name of “Carolina North” managed to hold together a multitude of distinct and sometimes contradictory visions, and sediment them in space (or on paper, at least).

What follows is our attempt to catalogue the visions, logics and motives which produced the necessity and inevitability of a new university-corporate research park at our university. In some senses, then, this is a contextually specific project. However, many of the distinct logics we studied here in this place were explicitly global and national. Many of them are already part of the dis-

cussions on this list serve: hierarchization, corporatization, metrics (in fact, many of the items brought up in Toby Miller's contribution referring to the *mimetic fallacy* and new measures/bench marking of university performance are directly relevant to the project we're engaging in currently). Just as "Carolina North" articulated distinct logics together with contextual specifics, we contend that a set of broader logics and discourses is traveling the United States, and perhaps the globe, held together in the name of "the 21st Century University," "the global university," or "the world-class university."

This is not (just) the 3 c's of corporatization, commodification, and enclosure of the intellectual commons. Rather, we see a set of distinct forces, each with its own logics and discourses, which at this particular moment have coincided to form an apparently coherent vision for the future of the university. It is precisely because of its complex and contradictory nature that this vision is so powerful — it has become many things to many people. But this complexity also opens up new lines of flight. A cartography of the complex assemblage of "the global University" is our ultimate project.

We feel a need to trace the contours and topographical forms of our "university-in-flux" even to be able to begin to discuss what exactly this (or any) university is. To understand the "under-construction" composition of the university in order to discover what are our points of intervention: Is it a form to be resisted, defended against? Is it to be re-appropriated, hacked? In what ways is it a threat and/or an opportunity? Is it the end of one of the few bastions of critical thought in the Homeland Security state? Or can it become a form that can incubate more and more counter-institutions within and despite of itself (much like our own)?