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Affective Disorder @ New School

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2009

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otto friedrich universität, bamberg
universität basel
universitaet beograd
university of california, berkeley
bergische universität
alice salomon hochschule, berlin
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universität linz
university of the arts, london
london college of communications
universität lüneburg
universität giessen
johannes gutenber universität, mainz
h.sch. niederrhein, mönchengladbach

ning at him, he headed for his limo pretty fast. He got away, or perhaps we did. After all, he was flanked by three huge skin-heads, each weighing double what we do.

Antifa is fun now and then, but the far right is really not what we need to worry about nowadays. Instead, it's the complex mediated environments we find ourselves in, the cultural milieu of sublimation that we experience every day. An Iphone might not exactly be a copy of *Mein Kampf*, but it's an indoctrination nonetheless. Neoliberal society has taken the most compelling element of fascism, of futurism; it's ability to aestheticise everything. The giant screens show explosions, fashion and conspicuous consumption; sex and poverty without missing a beat. Our universities, our workplaces; our homes and our lives are theirs. Our analysis has granted us a degree of nihilism. How could it not? It may be that our actions have no effect, since the system is so malevolent, so entrenched that few can even perceive it...

*...yet we survive
in moments of joy.
an affective current
encircles
&& threatens
to liberate a world.*

(Neo)Liberal Arts & Broken Hearts

the empire strikes back...

It was only a matter of time; protest at the contemporary University, and pretty soon the entire state apparatus comes crashing down upon you. At first, it seems absurd — the federal government of the most powerful nation in the world, and the worlds' largest police force, against a bunch of students. Yet after some thought, this attack begins to make sense. In totalitarianism, there is complete, unmediated control by the totality, by the state and commodity forms. In our society, this complete control still exists, only it is channeled through a complex system of institutions, mediated and obscured by what we might call an interface. In our society, we might call this interface liberalism. The importance of liberal institutions, of the New School, Berkley and Santa Cruz, arguably the most progressively liberal academies in the United States, becomes increasingly apparent.

More frequently, however, need for direct intervention is prevented through the involvement of aid organizations and the United Nations, which serve to suppress disturbances with minimal, but carefully targeted aid, or at the very least split opposition into powerless reformists and isolated rebels. If such agencies claim to be against war and conflict, it is only because they have far more effective means of global control at their disposal. It is the process of urbanization which allows for the installation of wage labor as a totalized form of economic relation; the ensuring over-population and decline in self sufficiency has the effect of increasing the potential for exploitation. The consolidation of the harvesting of resources, and the subsequent shift towards more automated, corrosive relationship with nature has poisoned sustainable forms of life. Meanwhile, the complete penetration of luxury goods, mass media and commercialized entertainment has annihilated pre-

existing cultures in order to solidify the hegemony of the commodity form.

For it is our foreign policy think tanks and associated humanitarian institutions that orchestrate a softer form of imperialism, smuggled in through the aid crates of countless non-governmental organizations. The age of colonial domination may be over, but the troops of the Peace Corps ensure subservience: sure, they may help build a school here or there, but their real *modus operandi* is undoubtedly to create a global marketplace, to teach starving children how to drink Pepsi. The aid provided by the International Monetary Fund and World Bank takes the form of conditional loans, which demand a prompt restructuring and privation of the domestic social structure, to bring it in line with the 'integrated' economy. Social services and corporate taxes are cut, tariffs are removed and the local way of life is sacrificed for the benefit of industrial, often-foreign owned production. When revolts against this new world order occur, they are crushed through military coups or right-wing guerrillas, private military contractors or even direct CIA intervention.

A similar process continues in developed countries, as urban development agencies and planners pave the way for the further gentrification and inhibition of urban areas. The Kaplan Center for New York City Affairs, which would later evolve into Milano, served as a modern prototype for what would become the definitive socio-economic control apparatus of the postmodern age. Development, once seen as a means to increase the productive capacity of a city or neighborhood, becomes an end in itself following the cessation of production in the metropolis. Development is now the abolition of poverty through the obfuscation of all the marginalized forces that were once able to elucidate their poverty. It is a prerequisite for the post-industrial economy that the old working class be annihilated as both a political and productive force. The new metropolis must be seen as a space for consumption, as a space

and a cigarette. But the security officer, with an anxious look on his face, was the first to speak. "I just want you guys to know I feel like a complete asshole". We think he was the guy who grabbed our friend. Then the manager, who had minutes before thrown some of us out of the hotel, began to apologize. We figure she probably did a google search and found out what her guest was planning to say. Uh-oh!

"Listen, I'm working on getting them out of here right now. But our guests can't know about this. What would it take to make you guys disappear?" We look at each other. Sure, it would be amusing, but that's not what we came here for. "Uhm, we're not going to do anything. We just wanted to tell you about it." "But what about... are there more of you?" "Most certainly." We waved at a bunch of European tourists on the other side of the street. They waved back, and continued walking. At this point, there were several hundred people around the square, and who are we to say they're not down with the cause.

"Well, can you tell them, uh, not to do anything for half an hour? We're doing the best we can." "Not really. But if we see them leave, we can text our friends. But we can't promise anything. There are some real crazies out there..." She runs back inside, and we proceed to giggle a little bit. We cross the street and wait for the media. But media is all around us, giant garish digital screens and abrasive pixels. So we make fun of tourists for a little while, and contemplate disrupting an Apple commercial that's being filmed. Every few minutes a bunch of tourists would ask the cops where the olive garden was. We giggled. After twenty minutes, some angry looking old white men started emerging from the hotel, getting into cabs. They looked around, trying to find the punks that had disrupted their event, but only saw a crowd of ambivalent tourists smiling at them. We hung back, avoiding cops and waiting for the big fish. Apparently more folks had repeatedly gotten inside, stirring up some more mayhem. So when he came out and saw a bunch of kids run-

and students must ask themselves which constitutes a bigger threat to free speech at the New School: a few students asking questions out of turn, or a federal campaign, supported by Bob Kerrey, to suppress student activism within the United States.

Wait... These Guys... Still Actually Exist?

Some folks went to Times Square to try and disrupt a talk by David Irving, noted Holocaust denier and friend to many an American Neo-Nazi. The event had been moved around a lot, since they're a pretty unpopular bunch and have to book events using fake names. Yet some kids came through, and a barrage of text messages let us know what was going down. He would be speaking at the Doubletree Hotel; folks would assemble around five and make magic happen.

As usual, our crew late and missed the entire action, but it sounds like some folks tried to rush on in there, found the door locked, and ended up having to rush on out stage left after effectively dearresting one of their number. It turned out the event wasn't actually starting for a number of hours. Anyway, those folks dipped out, and folks who were left decided that since their numbers were reduced, they might as well just use the affective power of the spectacular disruption to their advantage. So some folks put on their friendly faces, assumed the demeanor of the concerned activist, and headed on in there.

They came running out after a few minutes. Apparently the manager had refused to believe that David Irving, real life Nazi (TM), was hanging out in their hotel, scheduled to speak in a matter of minutes. The folks who had been talking decided to engage in dialog with customers instead and security promptly emerged. I think that one could safely assume that there was a collective feeling of "What the fuck do we do now?"

Minutes later, the manager and a hotel security officer came running outside; she was visibly shaken, holding a cup of coffee

for life and leisure. It must also a space for the underground economy, for new forms of servitude and subsistence, though this aspect of its existence is carefully concealed by the process of development.

"there was just an anti-war protest in front of 65 Fifth Avenue. at nyu, they arrest their own students. we don't do that here. we're a liberal school."

— officer cruz, new school campus security, 2008

In Pittsburg, rendered capital of the neoliberal world during the Group of 20 Summit, we saw the service economy constitute the face of the new economy. Late stage capitalism sets about to manufacture not things, but abstract concepts such as health and knowledge. As riot cops attacked students and protesters, members of Pittsburg's new middle class dutifully continued their leisure activities out of fear of losing their jobs or student status. In the postmodern playground, all interpersonal relationships are commodified; all existences are subsumed. Yet herein lies the realities of our new world: we either devote our entire lives to an empty form of work that consumes our waking life, determines our existence from cradle, through the abandon of a perpetual adolescence, to the grave. Or we are marginalized, forced into insecure and often dangerous forms of subservience. All labor is political, or it is criminal. Is it any wonder that we choose to appropriate alternate forms of resistance, ones that deviate from the tired and stifling conventions of politics? For, if labor is politicized, the converse is surely true; in today's world, politics has just become a new form of work, of value creation. It could be argued that the affective energies poured into the Obama movement served not only to reinforce a political system, but also served to restore confidence to an economy that would otherwise be in free fall. The illusion of progress, of change, is instrumental to the entrapment of activism; in a world so focused on brand-

ing, novelty replaces ideology and politics becomes little more than a customer service department for transnational capitalism. It has entered the realm of culture, of immaterial products which create their own demands.

Our desire to engage in political activism brought us to New School, where our liberal forms of resistance were commended and supported by the establishment. We learned media strategies, methods of theoretical elucidation. We were given an introduction to a politics that was as apparent as it was meaningless. We spoke truth to power, and they used it in their marketing.

“the new school now prepares to construct a building... from foundational ideas that are just as radical.”

— ideo, new school design subcontractor

We must therefore ask ourselves: what does it mean, the refusal of political work, of a form of shallow dissent which both strengthens and validates the system? Is it a melancholic apathy, as our “strategic” “allies” would have us believe? Or is it a potentiality to be explored? Is it possible that it could take the form of a chronic rupture that destroys the political dynamo, resulting in a subsequent liberation of affective capacity? Fear no doubt serves as a resource for the defensive mechanisms of the sociopolitical establishment, but it is not this force that perpetuates it on a daily basis.

A human strike at New School, a refusal to participate in the production of artificial joy in the form of mass culture and political hope, threatens to disrupt the entire binary in which we find ourselves trapped. It threatens the opacity of the deception of late capitalism, a capitalism that appears dynamic, ethical, green, exploiting as its main resource not products, but the emotional energies and social relationships of its participants. It threatens the conception of a democratic alternative in the

reaucrats, which had as their aim not an educated population but an obedient fighting force. It is no small wonder that Professors Dana and Cattell, in conjunction with a noticeable student movement, refused to cooperate and were fired, or that Drs. Beard and Dewey resigned in protest, determined to found a research institution free from government interference. What institution might that have been? As such, the New School at its inception understood that Free Inquiry demanded separation between the University and Government Institutions.

Meanwhile, real questions about free speech remain unanswered. What is President Kerrey’s relationship with the Intelligence Community? We know that he performed missions with the CIA as a Navy Seal, in which he mastered techniques of suppression and manipulation. We know that he served as Vice Chair of the Senate Committee on Intelligence, with direct oversight over the staff and officers of each of the 16 intelligence agencies (including former DEA Secretary Ray Kelly). We know that he continued participating in repression and intelligence gathering even as New School President, taking a position on the National Advisory Board on Higher Education that the FBI convened in 2005. Are we seeing a revival of COINTELPRO program that illegally suppressed student dissent in the 1960s and 1970s?

Recently, we have seen anti-terrorist squads deployed on student protesters. We have seen a Grand Jury subpoena, an intimidation and intelligence gathering tactic used repeatedly by the FBI, issued against a New School student. Meanwhile, police forces engaged in a brutal, coordinated raid on a fundraiser last semester (arresting 15 students and sending several to the hospital); other activists report being followed or asked questions by police and other individuals relating to protests at the University. And the New School has effectively placed a complete gag order on all student participants of last April’s occupation, preventing them from engaging in any political activity or even remaining on campus outside of class time. Faculty

American society towards totalitarianism. Few members of the university community are aware precisely how terrifying the moment of 1918 was for the future of education in the United States.

People are generally aware that as a part of the War Effort for World War One, the government was given exceptional control over industry, through the War Planning Board. The construction of this board was, in many ways, a major benefit of the United States' entering into the war; the exceptional powers given the board by the United States Government allowed it to appropriate German chemical patents and allocate them to American corporations, allowing the US to become the dominant world power by the war's end. Yet there were some who sought to expand the control of the board to encompass biopolitical production, that is to say, the production of officers and engineers for the war effort. Amongst these was Columbia's present, Nicholas Butler, who advocated putting every University in the United States under what was effectively martial law.

The organizational structure to allow this, the Student Army Training Corps, was already in place on many campuses by the start of 1918. At Vanderbilt College, for example, a school newsletter jubilantly explained the fascistic nature of the new University: "It would even seem that the college has been transformed into a camp, with its men in khaki, now parading along the reconstructed roads of the campus, now drilling on Dudley Field, now marching in squads to their classrooms." All but a few students were drafted into the program; at Princeton out of 2,500 students only 100 were exempted from service. At Columbia, the New York times reported that "all the able-bodied students above 18 years old will be in the uniform of the Army or Navy."

Not only were professors forced to take a loyalty oath, to condone the United States participation in the war, but they were forced to teach classes designed by army and government bu-

age of hyper-mediation and assimilation of resistance movements. It threatens to spread to a generation of precarious laborers in non-profits, universities and start-ups, who are barely deluded by the idea of changing the world without destroying the fundamentals on which it is based. And it has already inspired squats, sit-ins and occupations at schools around the world, where students share our conception of the urgency of political disaffiliation.

We seek not to build a movement, to compose strategies, to win demands. We do not believe we have the means to effect any real changes to the base structure of Capital or Empire, nor can we conceive of preferable totality with which to replace it. Our aspirations are towards escape, towards disruption and disintegration of systemic nodes of control. We may not be able to stop or change the system, but we see inactivity as its perpetuation. We do not know if it is possible to build a non-state community, or develop new forms of social relationships; we don't particularly care. We know that resistance is an end in itself, while strategy is an abstraction and politics a myth. We know we have real potential:

*to affect change,
to empower ourselves and others,
to build the common.*

Communique from Tom Ridge Disruption (Students for the Destruction of the State)

The New School was founded by anti-fascist scholars and we like to think on this day we did some justice to their legacy. Today we shut down the Securing New York and the Nation: The Creation of the Department of Homeland Security event at the New School in solidarity with prisoners of the Green Scare, the victims of the War on Terror, prisoners everywhere,

undocumented immigrants, and the anti-capitalists currently acting against the G20 in Pittsburgh. Tom Ridge was the first Secretary of Bush's Department of Homeland Security, formed in the jingoistic days following 9/11. As Department Secretary, Ridge was responsible for and complicit in the torture of detainees, the entrapment and harsh imprisonment of eco-activists such as Daniel McGowan and Eric McDavid, brutal raids on immigrant communities, the political manipulation of terror alerts, and countless other abuses. The youth of this nation have had the misfortune of growing up under 8 years of the Bush Administration, and we will not tolerate the presence of one of its central henchman in our community.

To be honest, this invitation was no surprise, as Kerrey and Ridge are both politicians with close ties to both the intelligence community and the military-industrial complex. Ridge and Kerrey both actively argued in favor of the war in Iraq. Ridge and Kerrey are both complicit in the harassment of fellow activists, Ridge for the Green Scare, and Kerrey for his involvement in the National Security Higher Education Advisory Board which aims to harass college activists. Early this year, Kerrey admitted to asking NYPD to follow New School activists opposed to his administration, and on April 10th Kerrey asked the NYPD to lock-up 19 of our classmates for protesting his administration. They received Misdemeanor and Felony charges that are still not settled. We will never forget or forgive the actions of either of these scumbags, and want to hold them accountable. There is no discourse that will lessen our rage. At 9:00 AM, cellphones began to ring and continued to ring for 5 minutes. As the crowd grew frustrated, Kerrey was forced to stop his anecdote about the good old days of the Bush Administration. As tension grew, we began to announce ourselves as opponents to the event, calling out Bob and Tom as the fascists they are, reminding them of our imprisoned friends, their complicity in torture and war, and refusing to leave. After a few minutes of this Kerrey asked for civility, and in a desper-

The University is the State (& Free Speech is its Franchise)

New School holds true to the values of free expression, but what is expression without content? Through decades of manipulative simplification, the potent moment that was the founding of this University has been diluted into a completely passive event, deprived of all meaning. We have seen the University spend several million dollars on its rebranding efforts and there are few who do not find its outcome ridiculous: the stenciled logo and the allusions to a franchise. Yet beneath the explicit alteration lies a more sophisticated process, in which the critical nature of the New School is gradually toned down, allowing the University to function as a prototypical Neoliberal institution. The project of modernity, the search for truth, was problematic to say the least. Yet it still served as a barrier to the complete moral relativism and exploitative behavior that the modern economy desires.

Following a recent disruption at a University event, certain students were charged with "the disruption of university business and disturbance of the practice of free speech;" the word choice is telling. In the postmodern University, "free speech" is that speech which is conducive to university business, in the sense that the 'free market' is only free in that it provides for unlimited profiteering. Following the decline of truth, the University has restructured itself as a lubricant for the global economy. New School, with its globalized student body, precarious academic labor force and location in the world's first metropolis, was an ideal target for a new, twisted experiment.

Yet the New School's potent history cannot be completely concealed under the enamel of what is effectively a meaningless concept. The New School was not founded on any abstract conception of 'free exchange of ideas'. Rather, it was founded as an autonomous space in response to a distinct progression of

that “*suis*” could not convey, because “*est*” like the English is can only be used in this way as regarding something other than oneself. We say such things as “that is”, “it is”, “she is”, “life is”, “time is”, and “desire is” but never “I is” because we otherwise would be committing a cultural *faux pas* whose consequence is perceived ignorance. From birth, children are immersed in complex grammatical structures which convey a sense of distinct separation of self from society as a whole — a separation which isn’t really there. At the same time, we accept “we are” as our one and only tool for attaching ourselves to an outsider or to a whole. By saying “I is” another Rimbaud rejects that he is a self outside this other.

Life within the university lacks resolution. The goal of the university is to offer a cure for the sheer nausea we feel every day upon waking up but it’s a cure that is always undesirable, painful, or a lie. I is not an activist. An activist exists to subvert one part of the social order and my goal is to subvert social order. Activists live off of the rotting fruit of excess while denouncing the farmers who grow it. They decompose into fertilizer. Not long ago, the island of Manhattan was filled with tributaries and lakes; these bodies still lie somewhere in our cultural memory. Tributaries are defined as big holes in the ground that allow for the free flow of life. It’s time to stop gathering signatures and to start putting these vortices back where they belong...

*the order,
the ghost,
(the divine intervention)*

ate bid to regain control asked for a question from a student. The question for Ridge was: “Do you feel that your willingness to sentence to death more than 200 prisoners during your term as Pennsylvania governor bore any relation to President Bush’s decision to name you secretary of Homeland Security?”

Despite the calming protesters and Ridges attempt to answer the question, it was enough for Kerrey to conclude that the talk could not continue, and so he shut it down. A large section of the audience applauded, and the neo-conservative invaders of the New School skulked out in anger. Not a single one of Ridge’s books were sold. The entire meeting lasted about 25 minutes, but if Kerrey did not pull it so early we had plenty more planned. And we still do.

This communique is republished for informational purposes only, so we may discuss in depth the events of late September. The Affective Collective was not involved in the disruption of this or any other University event, and continues to assert that it exists outside the boundaries of space and time.

Of Exception & Excitation

*“you don’t need
too many committed to martyrdom
to wreak havoc...”*

— tom ridge

The New School, following a joyous demonstration of rage against that reprobate Tom Ridge, has decided to invoke what can only be described as a State of Exception. The decision to invite the former secretary of Homeland Security to speak at a University that was founded on the autonomy of education from Government and the Military-Industrial Complex was questionable, to say the least. From our understanding, one of Milano’s sinister policy institutes took time out from its regular schedule of brown bag orgies celebrating gentrification

and juvenile incarceration to bring in an individual responsible for the greatest campaign against dissent and popular freedom since the start of the Cold War. As might have been expected, certain New School students exercised their free speech rights to ask why the fuck he was there, and criticize his terroristic tactics against the American population. A few cell phones went off, the word ‘fascist’ was thrown back and forth. It was a dull and predictable response. Yet it served to show us all something about the state of our University. Rather than allow any intervention from students, Kerrey proceeded to shut down the event, storming back to his Ivory Fortress. Less than a few hours later, his minions set about creating a state of emergency, attempting to force the Dean’s Council, Student and Faculty Senates to pass resolutions condemning the dissidents and to allow immediate and ruthless disciplinary action.

Meanwhile, other students found themselves in Pittsburgh, the global capital during the two days of the G20 summit. It was here that the face of the New Economy was most apparent; glistening skyscrapers with no one in them, the poor forced outward to crumbling buildings and tent cities. The productive industries, the steelworkers, were all gone, replaced with the machinery of bio-political reproduction: monolithic Universities and Hospitals. Scattered rebels fractured the spectacle, the entrapment of bodies by capitalist normalcy, and students found themselves in the middle of a Civil War. A State of Emergency had been declared in Pittsburgh, allowing the Secret Service, direct agents of sovereign power, to control and empty the city. Heavily armored riot cops marched through clouds of tear gas, beating back kids and laying siege to University Dorms. The National Guard was deployed preemptively and operated with an uncanny precision, abducting students into unmarked cars. Helicopter searchlights and a virtual curfew dominated the night. Witness the LRAD, the Army’s new crowd control device, “sound tanks” that emit high intensity resonance waves, causing disorientation, pain, seizures... Martial law wasn’t of-

at as a vital entity in itself and living entities — be them human, animal, plant, fungus — above all else desire to remain alive. A culture will fight to rid itself of foreign entities. It will react to foreign substances as if they are allergenic and it will develop desires that may be counter its constituents — to its limbs, to its heart, and above all to its people.

We live in an age of mediated information; an age in which visual and auditory media have become a primary source for information, and very little is experienced. In this way, our primary sources for information are secondary; these accounts are played for us on a screen or a radio as we blink at them. Media is food for culture; it causes homogeneity of experience. Such homogeneity makes it easier for people to be subordinated to a cultural norm, where similar experiences create similar emotions and desires, paving way for an integrated cultural desire and placating desires for cultural upheaval.

Arthur Rimbaud was born in 1854 and was since primarily raised by his widowed Catholic mother in a provincial town in the northeast of France. She had high expectations for young Rimbaud, using Latin verse as a tool to prevent him from falling to the depravity of his poorer friends. He saw no merit in memorizing Latin and out of fury once wrote an essay, regarding his disdain for verse memorization, in which he wrote “I will be a capitalist” over and over again until he had reached 700 words. Verse memorization is a very tangible manifestation of how cultural ideas are transmitted to cultural participants in order to create a collective memory, an essay in which no matter what words are stated they all read “I will be a capitalist” over and over and over again.

In a historic letter, a teenaged Rimbaud writes, “*Je est un autre*”, which translates to “I Is another” or “I Is Somebody Else”. The beauty and horror of these few words lie in their phraseology in that they are fundamentally grammatically incorrect. If Rimbaud meant to say “I am somebody else” he would have written “*Je suis un autre*”. The use of “*est*” suggests a lack of self

face with who they want to be, who they wish they were but are not: the student on the other side of the \$200,000 glass.²

The students and workers inside are at once standing before you and in another world, in person and on the screen. And you could be them. You can see yourself sitting in that library, devouring page after page, writing a film, meeting your first love. The glass is only thing that stands between you and the smiling people in phosphorescent orange glow, the vanguardist concert, the truth, love.³

and for \$200,000
you can glow too...

The Order, the Ghost, (*The Divine Intervention*)

The power of collective memory lies not in memories themselves but rather in how they haunt and manipulate the future like spectres. The ghosts that haunt us the most are not the metaphysical remains of people who have died but rather are past, collective, experiences that have burrowed into tunnels in our brains, seeking to feed and maintain themselves. In day to day experience we rarely acknowledge that they exist, as they burrow farther and farther into the brain to drink and puke and binge and purge until we catch a disease that we don't even know that we have. Because all organic material — be it wood, silk, or aloe must come from living things, then culture itself is organic. It is made of living things. Without the lives of the people that create it, it would die. Culture must be looked

² *Fine Print*: the affect you pay to create will be expropriated in turn and used to hook the next good consumer.

³ This image is from the postmodern designs for the new 65 5th Avenue, the building twice brought to life by occupations last year. Maybe they'll give us a star.

ficially declared, but then what is nowadays? This is a terror that goes without saying.

As Walter Benjamin writes, “the tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the ‘state of emergency’ in which we live is not the exception but the rule.” So one may be forgiven for countering that this is nothing new; indeed, many of us cannot remember a time before the End of History. The imprints of burning towers, of tortured bodies and endless strip malls have been burned upon our unconscious. We are expected to live our lives in a constant state of panic. Perpetual fear, caused by orange alerts and limited-time-only sales, epitomizes our reality. The natural response to such anxiety is an individualistic, disaster-orientated mentality. If we are not building bunkers, it is because we have built them inside our minds. If we are not stocking up on food, it is because we are perfectly prepared to eat each other. When we worry about the future, it is only a conscious reflection upon the millennial orientation of our subconscious. “In the posturban dimension of the cyberspatial sprawl, contact seems to become impossible,” writes Franco Berardi; it must and inevitably will be “replaced by precipitous forms of experience that overlap with commercialization and violence.” We are always lingering in a State of Excitation, having spent a perpetuity waiting for something, anything, to happen.

The Obama phenomenon was indicative of this fact. The communal feeling of hope, of an end to the manipulative tension of the past decade, was inspiring, if misguided. The new President brought not an end to the crisis, but its more effective management. Change deployed troops to Afghanistan and threatened attacks on Iran. Change meant millions of public dollars continue to be poured into banks and health care insurance companies. Change means more of the same, but faster. But the multitude grows restless. What we seek is not a more sophisticated form of entrapment or a more acute excitement.

Rather, we seek an escape, the release that comes from the formation of Common Notions.

A Common Notion is alternatively an idea, a shared orgasm, or an occupation. It is a mode of living, an enjoyment of being-in-the-world, collectivized and made accessible, sublime. It stands directly opposed to the State of Exception, built upon fear and apathy, or a State of Excitation, which results from the reification and denial of desires, in the sense that it is born out-of-and-for joy, in the sense that it is joy itself. The pure engagement of last semester has faded into passion and excitement for further collective action, yet this is a sorry state of affairs — this passion is but a passive melancholia. Everybody is checking the websites, whispering about California, discussing tactics. Not just the students. The administration sees it fit to create the illusion of a threat, to exaggerate a few students with a microphone into a potential apocalypse for establishment values. Yet maybe the time for a true rupture grows near. New School was once proud of its autonomy from the surveillance state, from cutthroat capitalists and military officers. As Walter Benjamin once suggested, “we shall clearly realize that it is our task to bring about a real state of emergency, and this will improve our position in the struggle against Fascism.”

*“let us to do all we can
to honor all those who
rose up with resolve
to defeat evil,
who were released into
the arms of angels
to see the grateful face of god.”*

— tom ridge

¹ Ray Fogelman Study Space, the University Welcome Center, Sheila Johnson Design Center, the proposed 65 5th Avenue Concert and Retail spaces.

On the Commercialization of Affective Commons

These facades¹ employ a view of the interior goings of the university as an advertisement. The unavoidable performance of the students and workers in these spaces produces an affect which is then utilized to make the outsider want to be inside of the space the window excludes them from. This one-quarter inch of glass represents the invisible barrier that is the cost of tuition, of privilege, of consumer power. The very ethos of the university, so blatantly attacked by the university administration that has created this site of spectacle, is instrumentalized to attract potential consumers. These spaces offer the future consumer of the product its advertisement, a simulacrum of the university, a taste of the affect they might soon purchase and fully possess. But the advertisement isn't on a billboard or a screen — the advertisement is the university itself.

This is obviously objectionable, a disgrace, a vulgar misrepresentation and exploitation of the university: a place of rigorous study, innovative design, unbounded artistic expression. But doesn't the new-New School epitomize the dirty secret of the university in consumer culture? It is not the product we buy, but what it means, not the diploma but the experience. We, as students, purchase the guided formation of a better subject, a future self, a better self. We buy our futures. But isn't this the essential hope of education? It is not the study, design, or art itself that the university desires to create, but that these things affect us. We hope that the things we pay to learn in this place might make us part of a better world, which is currently, for the most part, miserable.

The logic of commercial capital in the age of affective labor has become fully (un)realized in the new-New School: simply by walking past a university building, pedestrians come face to