These brief opening remarks aim to strike a keynote of sorts, that is, to set resonating some of the central terms in any discussion of the very idea of an ‘anti-university’. It is necessary to address both the issue of contestation within the contemporary restructured university and the making of counter-spaces beyond the halls of licensed education. The urban critic Mike Davis once argued that, as bad as things may be on the campuses of the modern university, and while acknowledging their function as diploma mills and fog factories, they remain places worth defending if only because of the utopian zones contained within them. I remember debating this claim many years ago with Silvia Federici and George Caffentzis in the pages of the Common Property Resource Digest. It surely still deserves discussion.

The neoliberalization of the European university system has been a stealth affair – it took many years, and several generations of students, from the moment of cutting of subsidies at the student cafeteria in Bologna to the marketization of all room space in the
University of London, which has meant that students have to rent space in their own institution if they wish to meet any time outside classroom hours. The squeeze on campus meeting-places has been mirrored by the squeeze on communal spaces in domestic settings. Soaring urban rents have caused the widespread conversion of common living rooms into private bedrooms. And these developments are merely symptoms of the malady.

The hidden financial dynamics of the neoliberalized university have been uncovered by the political philosopher and marxologist Robert Meister at the University of California Santa Cruz and by Andrew McGettigan for the case of English universities. Meister was able to explain the paradox of massive campus construction projects moving in parallel with the sacking of janitors, staff and instructors. He grasped the importance of the decision taken by the trustees of the University of California system back in 2004, namely, to break the link between tuition fees as an income stream and the business of teaching itself. If faculty were unaware of what was happening, the money managers on Wall Street were quick to smell a sure bet; they knew that highly capitalized building campaigns could profitably go ahead because uncapped tuition fees would act as a hedge even in years of general recession. Meanwhile, students and their families were (and are) desperate enough to cough up the rising fees and plunge deeper into debt.

It took years for the dynamic to become clear and to spark demonstrations at Berkeley and Santa Cruz, inspired by a history of occupations when direct resistance flared on campus. As Mario Savio once put it on the steps of Berkeley’s Sproul Hall, “There comes a time when the operations of the machine become so odious that you cannot take part...” There is much to be learned from historical accounts of such actions; I am thinking of Paco Taibo’s memoir of the student uprising in Mexico City in ‘68, and George Katsiaficas’ monograph on the student/worker insurrection in Gwangju, South Korea in 1980.
At other times a turning away towards counter-spaces has been felt necessary. Typically these are refunctioned buildings, either squatted or rented. Sometimes matters takes place in the open air, as in the ancient world. Lately in squares and streets, precarious though they have certainly proved. In addition to these favored sites, there is of course a long history of docksides, orchards, prisons, and barracks acting as counter-hegemonic settings of exchange and learning. And for women, the kitchen, the well, the riverbank wasing place, the autonomous feminist publishing ventures, the circles of sisterhood.

The pulse of radical energies code-named ‘the sixties’ produced a plethora of educational experiments. Among the most notorious and instructive was the Anti-University of London which emerged in 1969 out of the 1967 Dialectics of Liberation Congress at the Roundhouse (a converted railway building) where Allen Ginsberg, Eldridge Cleaver, Gregory Bateson, R.D. Laing and other luminaries of the counterculture came to argue.

The traces of the Anti-UL’s brief flowering have been assembled by the Danish artist/archivist Jakob Jakobsen and published as a tabloid in the style of International Times, the leading organ of the London counterculture. Vividly on display at the Anti-University were the perennial issues facing any counter-institution in a capitalist world - financial woes, sectarianism, millenial dreams, and florid psychopathology. Some of the decisions taken in those heady days now strike the reader as truly hallucinatory. The coordinator of the project, Bob Cobbing, wrote with poignant understatement in his letter of resignation: “The new arrangement by which courses will be formed at a [mass] rally in Hyde Park seems to me to be largely unworkable”. Indeed!

Equally resonant was Cobbing’s consternation at the sordid condition of the premises in the East End, and the seeming reluctance of its inhabitants - who included, as one must expect under such circumstances, a number of the sad, the mad, and the bad - to
“understand and accept their responsibilities to offset their privileges as guests of the building.”

The Liberation School in San Francisco was a simultaneous initiative six thousand miles west and with similar problems. The Bay Area has long been a generative zone for social experiment and antinomian education. Haight-Ashbury’s gift economy - its free clinic, concerts and street theatre - was in connection with Berkeley’s countercultural zones around Sproul Plaza, Telegraph Avenue, and People’s Park. These focal points were themselves embedded within a much wider network of producer and consumer co-ops and collective schemes. In the shadow of the Vietnam war, when a significant part of an entire generation refused their assigned roles in the American century, some stayed on campus and in the city, taking their politics to the administration buildings and the streets. Others decided simply to turn their backs on the city, and went to the countryside, seeking to build another world together, outside the state and the market.

The communards who headed for the hinterland soon realized that they were lacking many of the skills needed to survive. They had to reinvent practices whose memory had been erased in the transition from rural to urban life, over the long process of dispossession and enclosure. For example, gleaning in the fields after harvest.

Either way, in city and country, the renegades soon discovered the vital importance of holding space for their experiments, and what it means when you lose it. The 1960s communitarians of the Bay Area repurposed hectares of empty warehouses near the waterfront, whole streets of cheap Victorian houses near the Golden Gate park after the flight to the suburbs, and derelict farmhouses and orchards in the back country following the postwar death of small-scale agriculture.

But it wasn’t long before the local and state enforcers came after them. The most famous of the rural communes in Califor-
nia, Morning Star Ranch in Sonoma county, was bulldozed - *three times* - in the name of health and safety regulations and the laws of nuisance. In the course of Retort’s *West of Eden* project of reclamation, these struggles became referred to as “the code wars”. Anyone who has run an alternative space is very aware that the only reason it remains open is because the authorities haven’t yet shut it down. Typically by invoking municipal code violations which, as Weber understood, place us all in an iron cage.

The history of struggles in the domain of knowledge production can be traced over a long arc of resistance, all the way from the Paris student riots of 1229 through the late medieval St Scholastica Day uprising, down to the worldwide disturbances in the 20th century during capital’s long boom. Since the crisis of the early seventies, when Nixon came off the gold standard, there has been a real intensification and expansion in the weapons of mass deception and distraction under conditions of spectacle, affecting the whole field of education and public discourse in general.

For example, the discovery of a secret memo from inside the scientific laboratories of the tobacco industry stating: “Doubt is our product”, alerted the Stanford historian of science Robert Proctor to the necessity of mapping out a new discipline, the study of the active *production* of ignorance. Under late capitalist modernity ignorance is often something quite deliberately constructed; it has definable contours, not merely the limitless ocean of the unknown. As a recovering classicist and longtime collaborator I took up Robert’s challenge of coining a word for this new specialty. “Agnotology” was chosen and it seems to have some traction. For example, the word itself has recently be banned by a judge in a Florida tobacco trial courtroom, apparently a testament to the power of naming. Recently, in a lecture at the London School of Economics, Bruno Latour declared agnotology the most important science of the new century. Among other things, an agnotological perspective highlights the way in which, to take a case within the
field of public higher education, the massive half-billion dollar BP grant for biofuels research at UC Berkeley has cast a deep and long shadow of ignorance and deskilling, blighting alternative agro-ecological knowledge. Key mantras for the Uniconflicts gathering therefore need to be: Why do we know this and not that? Are we using idioms and assumptions unwittingly satisfactory to the management, even invented by them?

At the same time, we are also obliged to be aware that there is danger in the self-conscious ‘anti.’ T.J. Clark has noted that Nietzsche is good on the miseries of our endless nay-saying, and alert to the way it most often ends by being a parodic ‘moralized’ version of the decayed positivities it aims to explode.

One major difficulty is that the very memory of the anti-capitalist praxis and countercultural knowledge generated in the great wave of 70s commoning has been, not surprisingly, under threat of loss, erasure, travesty or romance. It was one of the chief reasons a group of historians, archivists, librarians and artists - commonists of one stripe or another - materialized a new educational charity, MayDay Rooms, in the heart of London’s historical newspaper quartier. It was set up - in 2011 - as a safe haven for archives of dissent at a time when intense pressure was bearing down on social democratic institutions of learning. The aim was to create an archive-cum-social space. In an effort at prefiguration, it was designed with a reading room, a refectory and a roof garden, where the past might be animated and activated for the igniting of a future worth inhabiting.

Among the MayDay Rooms’ early archival holdings were the Wages for Housework campaign materials, the Greenham Common peace encampment documents, the New England Prisoners Association News, and papers and posters from the student struggles in the British arts schools. Documents were also contributed relating to the radical science and technology movement in Britain, and its counterpart in the US, Science for the People.
They both proposed a range of liberatory (and largely unrealized) research programs, for example, developing the science of statistics ‘as if women counted’, new methods and materials for anti-racist pedagogy, as well as swords-into-ploughshares engineering projects in anticipation of factory take-overs. These initiatives had more or less disappeared by the time of Reagan and Thatcher, and have left little trace. The excavation of such histories, carried in the hearts and minds of a generation now passing, seemed to us a matter of urgency.

Libraries used to be the heart of a university community. No longer. They urgently need rethinking. Recently, on the 10th anniversary of the creation of the Prelinger Library in San Francisco - an image-rich, browsable, appropriation-friendly resource open to all - the founders, Rick and Megan Prelinger, who are associated with the Retort group and closely involved in establishing the MayDay Rooms, wrote this reflection on what they call ‘social and collaborative reading’, a phenomenon that is made possible through their conscious attention to the arrangement of space and the materials in it:

“Visitors arrive in twos, threes, fours, fives, and sixes. Bonds of friendship, kinship, and collegiality bring them here together. A solo visitor is a bit less common, yet, more often she is the visitor who commences social reading soonest. The visitors will patiently absorb the brief orientation, then go their own ways for a while. The first wave of their engagement with the library is some “solo” browsing, though they often stay within murmuring distance of one another. The second stage is the call-out to their companions: “Hey, can I show you something over here? They might pull chairs together in the aisles. Otherwise, after an hour, they have pulled a book or two, or have requested a box for sit-down exploration. The sight of one friend heading toward a reading table often pulls the other out of the stacks as well. There they sit, elbow-to-elbow, with their find-
ings spread before them spine to spine and stack to stack. Quiet behavior is respected but not required. This is a noise-positive place. People share their pleasure in discovery, pleasure at finding information they hadn’t imagined might exist, information beautifully presented, information problematizing something they thought they already knew. There is reading from one person to another, reading across generational divides. Social reading time is characterized by people reading out loud to one another, sharing discoveries to the whole table, or in whispers, and bookmarking things for the other to examine. In an age when digital devices have made the solitary apprehension of reading materials into a new constant, social reading is one of reading’s many expanding futures. The emergence of digital culture has had a defamiliarizing effect upon analog materials. In the library we’ve discovered that print has become a privileged medium whose allure seems to grow greater as books recede from the everyday sphere. There is no more enthusiastic library visitor than a born-digital teenager who has never been “allowed” (offered the opportunity) to handle an old book before. We hear that all the time from our teenaged visitors: “I’ve never been allowed to do this before!!” While the world enacts ritual mourning around the so-called end-of-print, our weekly library visitors are digging in deep to the long history of social reading, and out of the pile of diggings, building a bridge to the future.”

Completely unpredicted, for example, has been the extensive use of the Prelinger Library by young urban farmers of the Bay Area researching old 1930s reports from the Department of Agriculture, when the Roosevelt government responded to the crisis down on the farm during the Great Depression. Could there be more eloquent testimony to the need for, and the sociality of, radical knowledge-making? However much it may be obfuscated by the ideology of the Lockean monad, by the patent system’s
cult of priority, and by the myth of the lone inventor down in the basement.

Speaking of the subterranean, one recent boss of the University of California, Mark Yudoff, pronounced in the *New York Times* (24.ix.09): “Being president of the University of California is like being manager of a cemetery: there are people under you, but no one is listening.” This Uniconflicts gathering is taking place, so I have read in Mark Mazower’s marvellous historical biography, *Salonika: City of Ghosts*, on ground that used to be the old Jewish cemetery. It was cleared, I understand, in the winter of 1942, some years before the postwar developers drew up their blueprints, by city council workers who turned the site into a “rubble-strewn waste-land of vandalized graves”.

We owe it to the ancestors and to coming generations to mark out another graveyard…..for the Yudoffs and the vandals now in control of higher education.

We have the tools, we have the know how. So, comrades, if not now, when?

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