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Encamped: The Unliberated University

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To abjure is to renounce. How does one renounce the institutional location from which we are also hoping to make an intervention? Is that not already to admit some complicity? Does not some taint attach, regardless of the oppositionality that the intervention wishes to manifest? This, surely, is the difficulty of thinking *against* from *within*. Complicity, contamination courtesy of institutional affiliation, amounts to no less than the impossibility of a constitutive outside. All of which refuses any notion of institutional neutrality. The institution is imbricated in the matrices of power, which means that all those who work within it are marked by their relation. The institution is already in, has always been in the world, so that it cannot, at one such immensely demanding historical juncture, pretend to stand outside of a conflict in which it is *a priori* saturated, saturated by the sheer and unrelenting logic of capital as well as by the history of institutional exclusion (an exclusion that almost always bears directly on violence), an exclusion that turns on race, indigeneity, gender and sexual orientation, and so forth.

The institution is an instrument of capital. It functions—as the tensions around this historical moment reveal again and again, each time with the cost for those who stand against heightened by the threat of repression (suspension, deportation, pedagogical surveillance, and so on)—as an apparatus of power. When its role as *dispositif* is brought to light, that is the moment that the institution claims for itself the right to retreat. That is the moment it seeks, no matter the evidence to the contrary, to cloak itself in the mantle of neutrality. Who is, who can be, neutral in the face of death? Who claims such a right? Only power. Only that power which attempts to dissemble its power. A power that is, as we well know, localized but never local. Instantiated but dispersed. Singular in its application but variegated and wide-ranging in its effects. In the moment that the institution is called to account, that is, in the moment that it is asked to act in the cause of something other than its own interests—or that those within the institution are called upon to defy them—that is the moment that disguises its vested interests and claims for itself the right to abjuration. To renounce that which is true.

This is the truth, in all its bracing clarity, of *Encamped: The Unliberated University*. Each of the contributions that constitute this issue of *Diacritics* articulates a relation-to. A relation to this institution, and an imbrication in it too. It is the institution-in-the-world that is also the institution-as-world. The making-present of the conditions that obtain in Palestine and for the Palestinians is what has, since October 2023, roiled many a university campus. Across the global academic community, *al-Nakba al-Mustamera*, the ongoing catastrophe, is at stake. And in the USA, the site from which these various contributions are primarily thought, to think is to write against—against, and yet within—the corporate university in its most unapologetic and unrelenting form; an institution with a decades-long history of complicity and investment in war, empire,

apartheid, and genocide well beyond the country's geographic borders; a culmination of the colonial university, both as institution and epistemic project, without which imperial world-making, indigenous dispossession, and white supremacy are unthinkable.

Of course, were one to render the difficulty of location dialectically, an entirely different but not unrelated possibility comes into view. That is, to write (to think) from within a location is to know the possibility of immanent critique. That is, to be within the institution is to know what it means to be called to account for that which is unfolding. It is to ask the most searing of questions. How can the life of the institution continue to be lived, given what transpires daily in this world? How does one, as faculty, teach? How does one, as student, learn? What kind of research does one undertake? What is the teacher to do when the student is faced with the denial of funding, the withdrawal of scholarships and funding grants, suspension, expulsion, homelessness, deportation? What kind of community is possible? How does one envisage community? What are the costs, different, distinct, each with its own measure, of taking up a struggle? What is to be done when the institution wields its power, when the institution's bureaucratic self controls all mechanisms of justice? When "due process" becomes a matter to be decided by the institution itself? When the institution insists upon its right to charge, to try, and, finally, to punish? Judge and jury, of a very particular articulation.

If abjuration is not possible, if opposition to institutional *diktat* is omnipresent, if protest is subject to institutional whim (such as determining where the protest may take place, at what time, all the while deploying the institution's repressive apparatus, including the police as the university's punitive and carceral arm), then the work of making a different mode of being in the institution presents itself with the greatest urgency.

That mode of being in the institution need not be prescriptive, it may even announce itself in ways unexpected, in iterations that surprise. For all the inclining toward such a prospect, such a prospective of being-in the institution, that is not the work that is undertaken in *Encamped*. Instead, these contributions range from what we might name "reports-on-the-ground" to theoretical explorations and reflective contemplations to poetic ruminations. The scholars, poets, students, photographers who are sharing their work in this issue come from all different walks of life and backgrounds, and they occupy very different positions of power and privilege—both within the institution of the (North American) university, and with regard to their biographical closeness to the ongoing genocide in Gaza, as well as to other genocides. Several of the contributions draw on the image of the (en)camp(ment) which gives this special issue its title, grappling with both the term's negative connotations (displacement, precarity, vulnerability) and its positive associations (spontaneity, grassroots, mobility), as well as the contradictory tensions and optimistic (utopian?) synergies between the two.

As such, then, this volume, rather than taking itself to be a program for how to be in the institution, stands as a record of our moment.

And, as such, it provides us with the opportunity to take stock. To think our location. To not take refuge in abjuration. It asks us, rather, on the order of Vladimir Lenin, what are we to do? And, in a different but not unrelated register, it asks us: How are we to be in

the institution, given our intimacy with it, given our proximity to its machinations, given that we are subject to its disciplinary apparatus?

Is there, in the wake of the ongoing catastrophe, another way for us to do our work? A question that, as we already intuit, rankles because such a line of inquiry is already late. Lacking in punctuality. Still, it remains, despite this, urgent. It is the question that confronts us, it is the question that will not let us look away. It is relentless, this interrogation. As it should be. It bears on life. On keeping the other alive. We begin from where we are, cognizant of our limitations, refusing to concede to that which circumscribes.

In so doing, we renounce renunciation. In so doing, we abjure abjuration. In so doing, we take our place, fully, within that structure of being that will permit of any outside. That is, we take our place, we do our work from within the entanglement that is the institution.

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