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**Invisible Labor in the Academy**

# Progress and Power in the First, Second, and Third Universities

## A Case Study of the University of Waterloo

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### Introduction

In the burgeoning field of critical university studies, many scholars are bringing attention to the myriad issues associated with higher education, which range from academia's discriminatory biases (Smith et al., 2017; Shields, 2012), to poor working conditions for contingent faculty (Street et al., 2012), to a shocking lack of support for mental health and disability accommodations (Price et al., 2017; Chi Wing Lau, 2019). Many of these issues are linked specifically to the increasing economic and capitalistic involvement of universities, a process that started many centuries ago<sup>1</sup> but has become especially pronounced within the past few decades. The current era of late capitalism—characterized by the globalization of markets and labour, mass consumption, and what Ernest Mandel (1975) identified as a “generalized universal industrialization for the first time in history” (p. 387)—in many ways relies on hiding and obscuring labour conditions in many industries and institutions, and the university is certainly no exception.

And yet, despite the growing criticisms against universities' structures, operations, and labour practices, there is still a prevailing rhetoric of progress and positivity within higher education that elides genuine attempts for largescale reform. As history scholar Joshua Foa Dienstag (2009) notes, the notion of “progress” has been an integral component in modern discourses—ranging from medicine to economics to the social sciences—since its emergence in the late eighteenth century (p. 10). The idea that things are constantly improving (and capable of being further improved) is not only prevalent in these discourses, but in fact shapes the way these discourses function; Joseph Packer and Ethan Stoneman (2018) identify “an optimistic grammar at the heart of almost all rhetoric and argumentation” (p. 11), which suggests that the very way our discourses are organized reflects an inclination for growth, progress, and expansion.

This is particularly evident within institutional contexts, especially the Western tradition, wherein the idea of progress is a key aspect of education and institutional prestige.<sup>2</sup> As Abigail

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<sup>1</sup> See Boggs et al. (2019) for a discussion of the history of universities from “an accumulative perspective” (p. 13). Although the article refers specifically to American universities, it provides an excellent overview of the lesser known aspects of universities' historical involvement with capitalism and accumulation.

<sup>2</sup> Eli Meyerhoff (2019) notes how, as early as 1536, “education” was used to legitimate the rise of King Henry VIII's low-born counsellors, as it was employed as a “narrative solution to explain how an individual could

Boggs et al. (2019) explain: “The dominant popular and scholarly narratives about... universities tend to portray ‘progress’ with linear distinctions between past, present, and future” (p. 4). This framing of “progress” as something that moves along a linear timeline is problematic for many reasons, particularly the way in which constructing a singular narrative silences certain voices while privileging others (after all, what constitutes “progress” for one group or individual might be catastrophic or even deadly for another). As such, the modern emphasis on progress can have dire consequences for those who are not in positions of power or prestige, who are not given the space to refute the narratives of progress and positivity being disseminated to the general public. It also overlooks the efforts and labours of people who are not in positions of power, instead shining light only on the “accomplishments” and “breakthroughs” that directly contribute to society’s upward trajectory.<sup>3</sup>

This project demonstrates how this rhetoric of positivity and progress plays out in higher education, using la paperson’s (2017) notions of the first, second, and third universities as a framework to investigate which types of perspectives, positions, and labour are lauded and which are silenced or ignored. The visual component of this project, which “maps out” the different types of universities using the University of Waterloo as a case study, is inspired by James E. Porter et al.’s (2000) article on the rhetorical foundations of institutional critique, wherein the authors identify “postmodern mapping” and “boundary interrogation” as key critical tactics. Although this project certainly doesn’t constitute a feat of postmodern mapping, I was intrigued by the authors’ discussion of the power that maps have to shape and reflect not only spaces but also ideas, power relations, social narratives, etc., and hoped to explore this power in my own work. Moreover, the mapping aspect here allows us to move away from the ways we too often understand higher education only along a timeline of process. Maps can refuse some of this temporal logic by showing several layers, timelines, or narratives simultaneously, as the overlays on this map attempt to do. By visually mapping out the specific spaces within the University of Waterloo that constitute the first, second, and third universities, I consider how space influences the magnitude of power and voice that each can exert—and also what sort of labour conditions actually adhere in certain campus spaces that confirm or even build upon paperson’s (2017) iterations of the university.<sup>4</sup>

I have taken up this project because I agree with Porter et al.’s (2000) assertion that institutions should not just be studied from a “macro-level,” which risks figuring them as “static, glacial, or

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transform from one side of the binary [high-born vs. low-born] to the other” (p. 136). Thus, people who previously would not have been able to “progress” in society gained the ability to improve their status through education, which supposedly closed the gap between people on different rungs of the social hierarchy.

<sup>3</sup> For example, traditional domestic tasks, or “women’s work” are crucial for the sustenance of traditional family models—and by extension, social models—but these daily toils are rarely recognized by the men in various institutions that are “driving society forward.”

<sup>4</sup> For example, the grand notions of progress and improvement pushed by official university documents such as the “Strategic Plan” (University of Waterloo, 2020b) or “The State of the University President’s Report” (University of Waterloo, 2018) come from the dominant first university, which takes up a great deal of the map; the labour performed in these areas is highly touted and seen as integral to the university’s success, whereas counter information that might be coming out of the third university spaces are relegated to very small or fleeting areas of campus (shown on the map in red) that are often rather endured or humoured rather than openly valued.

even unchangeable,” but also from a micro-level (p. 620). Taking a more micro-level approach focuses on “the local and micropolitical operations of social institutions” rather than just their superficial structures (p. 621). Thus, it will enable a stronger analysis of the rhetoric employed by each type of university and the set of beliefs and ideals that they uphold (either implicitly or explicitly) through their practices and public engagement. By searching for instances of the third university within the first (as paperson asks us to do), my intention is to examine the way that prevailing narratives of progress and performance are complicated and indeed refuted by the presence of the third university and its proponents who reject the notions of linear progress and inherent positivity that underscore the operations of higher education institutions.

### Concepts and Theory

As one of Canada’s most renowned postsecondary institutions, the University of Waterloo is an excellent object of study. It exemplifies the entrepreneurial spirit, the push for technological progress, the high value placed on invention and innovation. With its vast cooperative education program (the largest in North America), close involvement with start ups (including two large venture capital funds), and prominent position on the world stage,<sup>5</sup> UW has not just adapted to, but indeed capitalized on, the globalizing forces of late capitalism. And yet, of course, this highly publicized version of the University of Waterloo does not represent the institution in its totality. UW also boasts<sup>6</sup> an Arts faculty with enrollment levels rivalling that of the Math faculty (coming second only to Engineering),<sup>7</sup> and well as three affiliated colleges that specialize in areas such as Social Development Studies, Social Work, Peace and Conflict Studies, Music Studies, Native Studies, and Religious Studies (University Colleges, n.d.-a). It is also home to dozens of student clubs and organizations dedicated to social justice, equality, and activism, although one would have to look very hard to find any information on these aspects of UW’s operations. As far as reputation is concerned, the University of Waterloo is all about prestige and progress, and thus privileges the sorts of labour that contribute directly to increasing its reputation as “Canada’s most innovative university” (as *McLean’s* rankings have deemed it for the last twenty-eight years) (University of Waterloo, 2020c).

While all universities engage in branding and publicity tactics, the University of Waterloo is an extreme example of the sort of ossification that occurs when a singular image is pushed for many years. As someone who has studied at UW for several years (St Jerome’s University College BA in 2016, English PhD class of 2023), I can attest to the many ways in which UW’s “brand” runs counter to many of its less-publicized operations, policies, programs, and faculty. As such, the University of Waterloo is a prime object of study for the framework set out by la paperson, better known as Wayne K. Yang,<sup>8</sup> in the third chapter of his 2017 text *A Third University Is Possible* entitled “A Third University Exists Within the First.” The purpose of

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<sup>5</sup> See the University of Waterloo’s webpage on “Rankings and Reputation” (2020c) for more.

<sup>6</sup> This expression is rather oxymoronic here, as many people are unaware that UW even offers arts courses, so great is its emphasis on its STEM programs.

<sup>7</sup> For more enrollment-related statistics, see “Student Headcounts” (2020a) on the University of Waterloo’s website.

<sup>8</sup> In this paper I will refer to Yang as paperson, for consistency’s sake.

paperperson's book is to highlight and develop the possibility of a decolonizing university emerging from the profoundly colonial and colonizing universities we have today. The University of Waterloo, situated on the Haldimand Tract,<sup>9</sup> is a prime example of the colonial schools that paperperson (2017) asserts "have a tradition of harboring spaces of anticolonial resistance" (p. 1); it is my goal here to explore the areas and aspects of UW that subvert its colonial and capitalistic agenda in ways that illuminate other forms of labour and value that are too often written off—or out—of UW's narratives.

paperperson (2017) sets up his analysis in terms of the three tiers or types of university. Although I have included a key excerpt from the section in question on my diagram, his concepts of the first, second, and third university warrant some elaboration and contextualization, particularly as they relate to the "optimistic grammar" that Packer and Stoneman (2018) discuss. The first university champions charging fees, granting degrees, accumulation through dispossession, and expansion (paperperson, 2017, p. 37); it is highly concerned with its image, the job market, and the economy. It is important to note that, technically, UW in its entirety *is* the first university, and prides itself on this reputation. The buildings I have highlighted on my poster (predominantly administrative or STEM-related) are those that I feel are *most representative* of this first university mentality—the ones key in "charging fees and granting degrees," in keeping the capitalistic and economic aspects of the institution alive and well. These buildings are also those most responsible for emphasizing, publicizing, and spectacularizing UW's progress, as I will discuss below. Their very presence demonstrates the progress UW has made, or at least appears to have made, with the shiny new buildings funded by the university's many illustrious alumni and sponsors. The first university also champions financial prestige and progress, enabled by the sacrifices of students who go into debt in order to "progress" their own lives and careers. It purports to offer advancement and success, in exchange for a few years of hard work and many thousands of dollars, framing this enterprise as a largely positive and character-building undertaking that will put UW graduates ahead of the competition.

The second university is centered around the liberal arts, critique, reflection, self-actualization, critical consciousness, and nostalgia (paperperson, 2017, p. 42). While this so-called "pedagogical utopia" may seem to escape a lot of the pitfalls of the first university, it still has a hidden curriculum that reinforces these same values and goals (p. 43). There are certainly some instances of this type of university on UW campus, although they are largely kept separate or cordoned off, as if in an attempt to keep the physical unity of the first university intact (i.e., the affiliated "liberal arts" university colleges are all separated from the rest of campus by Laurel Creek<sup>10</sup>). This university champions a different form of progress, but one that is still predicated on linear notions of progression and improvement. Its emphasis on critique indicates a belief that things are improving overall as we move away from the issues of the past and become more "woke" (even if this wokeness does not lead to direct action or change).

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<sup>9</sup> Traditional Indigenous land that was "promised to the Haudenosaunee of the Six Nations of the Grand River, and are within the territory of the Neutral, Anishinaabe, and Haudenosaunee peoples" (Faculty Association, n.d.).

<sup>10</sup> The affiliated university colleges are actually inaccessible by car from the central Ring Road that encircles main campus; they can only be reached by entry points along Westmount Road, which borders the westmost side of campus.

The third university is focused on decolonialization—it is interdisciplinary, transnational, transformative, and radical, filling the gaps left by the first two universities (paperson, 2017, p. 43). If it teaches first world curricula, it is out of necessity alone (p. 44). At this point in time, instances of the third university are not yet easy to determine at UW, because it does not enjoy the same level of publicity or official status that the first and second universities are granted. The third university can be found in what David Sibley (1995) calls “zones of ambiguity,” which are spaces of tension, transgression, intersection and transformation (pp. 32–33). These spaces are also key loci of institutional critique wherein the possibility for radical refigurings of the institution might exist. Because of its ephemeral and sporadic nature, the third university cannot operate with the same logic of progress that informs the other two universities; rather, it seeks to create change, disturbance, or rupture, spanning out in all directions rather than trying to forge ahead in a direct path toward its goal of decolonization.

It is important to note that the project of mapping the different universities is a difficult one, both in terms of discerning the proper sites of each university and due to the fact that different areas and aspects of UW are constantly changing (not only in terms of physical locations, but also faculty members, students, budgets, etc.). Thus, the selections made here are not concrete or indisputable; they are simply my evaluations and estimations of UW at this moment in time.<sup>11</sup> Overall, I hope that mapping out the different universities and their clashing values, methods, and goals will help to deconstruct UW’s first university façade by illuminating some potential spaces of the third university and highlighting the importance of countering the notions of progress that are driving this institution forward (but not necessarily towards anything better). I also hope to encourage anyone reading this to start investigating the sorts of narratives privileged in their own institutions, to think about the ways that progress and prestige are signalled in (or “mapped” onto) certain spaces, faculties, programs, etc. Such an investigation will also necessarily draw attention to the areas and aspects that universities seek to hide or ignore, particularly those that bely systemic inequality or discrimination perpetuated by the very structures of the institution.

### **The First University Self-Promotes**

As noted above, the University of Waterloo is a prime example of the first university. Its focus on engineering, science, mathematics, business, and entrepreneurship is clear from the sheer number of buildings dedicated to such pursuits.<sup>12</sup> The key buildings that represent the first university mindset are: William G. Davis Computer Research Centre (DC), Douglas Wright Engineering Building (DWE), Centre for Environmental and Information Technology (EIT), Energy Research Centre (ERC), Central Services Building (CSB), Science Complex (SC), Physics (PHY), Mathematics and Computer Building (MC), Ira G. Needles Hall (NH), Mike and Ophelia Lazaridis Quantum-Nano Centre (QNC), William M. Tatham Centre for Co-operative Education and

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<sup>11</sup> Some locations may also be home to more than one type of university, depending on the different functions or activities performed therein.

<sup>12</sup> This focus is also emphasized in UW’s finances: based on the 2016-2017 data on UW’s total operating revenues, Science (14%), Mathematics (19%), and Engineering (22%) comprised a total of 55%. Arts provided 14%, Environment 5%, and Applied Health Sciences 5% (University of Waterloo, 2017).



**Figure 1: The First World University**

**[Text Transcription:** “The first world university is the academic-industrial complex: ‘research-ones’ preeminently, but also commercial universities and any other corporate academic enterprise... characterized by an ultimate commitment to brand expansion and accumulation of patent, publication, and prestige.” (paperson 36)

**Image Description:** The key buildings that represent the first university are highlighted in yellow on the map of the University of Waterloo campus. They include: William G. Davis Computer Research Centre (DC), Douglas Wright Engineering Building (DWE), Centre for Environmental and Information Technology (EIT), Energy Research Centre (ERC), Central Services Building (CSB), Mathematics and Computer Building (MC), Ira G. Needles Hall (NH), Mike and Ophelia Lazaridis Quantum-Nano Centre (QNC), William M. Tatham Centre for Co-operative Education and Career Action (TC), the Science Complex (SC), Physics (PHY), and Velocity (the on-campus startup hub). The main campus residences (REV, MKV, V1, and UWP), which house out-of-town and international students and are thus crucial for sustaining UW’s enrollment rates, are also highlighted. The map shows that the majority of the buildings on campus, especially everything related to STEM and to research, are part of the “first university.” Several of these buildings are quite new, particularly the Quantum Nano Centre, Science Complex, and Needles Hall’s recent addition.]

Career Action (TC), and Velocity. The more recently constructed buildings (like the QNC) are physical reminders of UW's progress; the beautiful new buildings made of glass and metal signify architectural refinement (from the ugly "1960s brick" of the older buildings) and exude wealth as they flaunt the successful labours of UW's alumni, who are able to sponsor such costly projects.<sup>13</sup>

UW's emphasis on wealth is also evidenced by the buildings dedicated to co-op, start-ups, and research, which represent its connection to the corporate world and fixation on capital gain. Administration buildings like Needles Hall highlight the other side of UW's finances: the charging of fees and the granting of degrees. This aspect of UW's progress narrative involves the exchange of money for a degree, and by extension, a career; paying the university for an education is assumed to be a necessary step to progressing further in life. Thus, while the university accumulates vast amounts of wealth (thereby progressing its own capitalist agenda), students are made to feel that they are also progressing towards a promising career. UW's many residences (indicated on the map as REV, MKV, V1, and UWP), which are necessary for housing the influx of first year students, especially international students, operate within the first university structure as well. They are little more than expensive prison cells that enable students to come from far away in order to partake in UW's "unique" scholastic opportunities, offering little in the way of support or community. Much of the suffering and isolation that students endure is framed as a necessary part of the educational journey at Waterloo, which students must progress through in order to obtain their degree. The unacceptable levels of student suicide at UW,<sup>14</sup> as well as the lack of adequate mental health services,<sup>15</sup> attest to the unrealistic standards set by the university of performance "at all costs"—with the costs sometimes being the very lives of its students.

Lastly, the first university is the place where progress is publicized, where we see the "affirmative function" of Packer and Stoneman's (2018) "optimistic grammar" (p. 2). The material published by UW, from [future student brochures](#) to its [alumni magazine](#), is resolutely focused on achievements, advancements, and breakthroughs; everything that comes out of UW

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<sup>13</sup> It is, of course, these buildings that are highlighted on official University of Waterloo brochures, posters, advertisements, etc., as well as on campus tours.

<sup>14</sup> Exact numbers on the suicides are difficult to unearth, although this is not unique to UW. Peter Goffin (2017) explains that: "In a survey of Ontario's 20 universities, *The Star* found that only about half keep any kind of formal statistics on the number of student suicides. Of those universities, several track only suicides that occur on their campus, meaning that any deaths that occur at a student's off-campus residence or their family home does not get included in their tally." Based on a review of online news articles, in 2017 there were two suicide deaths on UW campus within two months; 2018 and 2019 each reported one student suicide. Liz Monteiro's 2018 news article from the *Waterloo Region Record* reported that there were, in total, "about 10 deaths by suicide of university students" between 2012 and 2018 (last par.).

<sup>15</sup> Meredith Powell (2018) discusses the barriers to suicide prevention and mental health support in her dissertation on institutional mental health rhetoric (see in particular Chapter 4 of *Talk, Body, Performance: Mental Health Rhetoric in Corporate, Government, and Institutional Settings*). Powell notes that: "The University of Waterloo approach to seriously mentally ill students is to get them off campus immediately, directing all students to call 911 in event of a mental health crisis. When students have serious mental illness, they are locked in cells under bright hospital lights for 24-hour emergency observation if they are deemed a risk to themselves or others" (pp. 156–7).

is illuminated with a rosy glow, while anything that is less than amazing—such as UW’s aforementioned suicide rates or the “inexplicable” and persistent discrepancies between female vs male professors’ wages<sup>16</sup>—is left out, even actively suppressed. Statistics, which supposedly support UW’s claims to greatness, are sometimes intentionally skewed or based on data that is not available to the general public. This is perhaps the most daring and dangerous aspect of UW’s narrative of progress, because these public forums are so prone to rhetorical manipulation or exaggeration. A building is a building, and a degree is a degree—but a press release is a written representation of a state of affairs that cannot be easily or concretely corroborated. Through public mediums such as alumni magazines, press releases, webpages, and even presidential emails, UW is able to construct and maintain a narrative of progress and positivity that reaches far beyond the borders of campus. As such, proclamations of Waterloo’s achievements and “excellence”<sup>17</sup> are only one side of the coin, intended to deflect attention away from the less positive ongoing issues and issues that have plagued this institution for years.<sup>18</sup>

### **The Second University Self-Congratulates**

In general, spaces of the second university are those where courses in the Arts are taught: Arts Lecture Hall (AL), Hagey Hall (HH), Modern Language (ML), and East Campus Hall (ECH). The second university is also found in the affiliated university colleges—Conrad Grebel (CG), Renison (REN), St. Jerome’s (STJ), and St. Paul’s (STP). These colleges place more of an emphasis on community and camaraderie in their residence halls, and tend to offer more liberal arts-style courses (St. Jerome’s, for instance, provides “a liberal education, transformative experiential learning opportunities, and a nurturing but challenging learning environment that allows students to flourish as whole persons”) (St. Jerome’s, n.d. par. 1). While at the end of the day they still collect fees (that are, admittedly, somewhat higher than main campus residences) and grant University of Waterloo degrees, the colleges seek to mitigate the overwhelmingly atomistic and capitalistic atmosphere on main campus.

Dana Porter Library (LIB) is also highlighted as part of the second university because, although libraries can support the goals of all three universities, they tend to be sites of conventional learning that takes place in a vacuum rather than in the real world; people can read all they want about revolution, indigenization, critical race theory, etc., but reading alone does not necessitate change or action. Additionally, while campus libraries can house thousands of texts, these texts generally convey information that falls within a certain range of “acceptability” and thus they perpetuate the status quo, or at least don’t directly challenge it. Another instance of

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<sup>16</sup> See Paola Lorigio’s 2016 article “University of Waterloo hikes salaries of female faculty after gender pay discrepancy found” for more details on this controversy.

<sup>17</sup> Excellence, for Bill Readings (1996), is a term that “has the singular advantage of being entirely meaningless, or to put it more precisely, non-referential” (p. 22), which enables it to “function as a principle of translatability between radically different idioms” (p. 23). It has become a buzzword within the university, used as a positive “catchall” that has no overarching guidelines, criteria, or limits. Because of its mutability and transferability, “excellence” is a perfect tool for rhetorical manipulation, because it can be applied to many different aspects of the university (from parking services to faculty accolades to students’ entrepreneurial endeavors).

<sup>18</sup> A quick trip to the Dana Porter Archives clearly demonstrates that UW has been dealing with issues of racism, sexism, discrimination, and inequality since its founding in the late 1950s.



Figure 2: The Second World University

**[Text Transcription:** "The second world university... seeks to challenge and provoke the critical consciousness of its students toward self-actualization. However, its... libertarian mode of critical thinking displaces the possibility of sustained, radical critique and thereby remains circumscribed 'within the ivory tower.'" (paperson 36)

**Image Description:** The key buildings that represent the second university are highlighted in green on the map. They are generally affiliated with the faculty of Arts, and include: Arts Lecture Hall (AL), Hagey Hall (HH), Modern Language (ML), and East Campus Hall (ECH), Dana Porter Library (DP), the Grad House (GH), the Centre for Teaching Excellence (located in MC), and the affiliated university colleges—Conrad Grebel (CG), Renison (REN), St. Jerome's (STJ), and St. Paul's (STP). These buildings tend to be separated from the first university buildings and are for the most part located around the edges and older areas of campus. The affiliated university colleges are "across the creek" from main campus and actually cannot be accessed by car from the central Ring Road running through campus; the only entry points are along Westmount Road, which borders the west side of campus.]

the second university is the Centre for Teaching Excellence, with its focus on pedagogy training and student-centered learning methods (oddly enough, the CTE is located in the Mathematics and Computing Building). The Graduate House (GH) also demonstrates elements of the second university, as it provides a place for graduate students and faculty to meet and cultivate relationships, to share food and time together that is not strictly dedicated to academics or business (as opposed to the Food Services locations spread out across UW which serve the sole purpose of keeping students going through long days on campus).

Although perhaps more varied in scope than the first university (at least from my selections), I would argue that these spaces also support conventional notions of progress, even as they subvert conventional expectations of labour and productivity. The second university tends to focus more on unquantifiable learning goals, such as critical thinking and other so-called “soft skills.” Thus, the sort of labour that occurs within the second university is much less tangible (and thus recognizable) than that which occurs in the testing labs, workshops, and computer hubs of the first university. However, the notions of progress and development are still highly prevalent, although not in the monetized, technologized, or objectified forms valued by the first university. paperson (2017) notes that, “[a]t least ideologically, the second world university is committed to the transformation of society through critique, through a deconstruction of systems of power” (p. 41, emphasis added). There is a firm belief in the second university that, by deconstructing the “bad” systems of power, it can replace them with “good” ones. This sentiment is, again, informed by rhetoric’s “affirmative function” that “preserve[s] a world of meaning, one in which material reality is not blindly cruel and indifferent but welcome, reassuring, and kind” (Packer and Stoneman, 2018, p. 2). It assumes that, if people are more informed—if they perform the necessary psychological and emotional labour to ameliorate their awareness of their positionality and perspective—they will make choices that are fairer, kinder, and even decolonizing.

As paperson (2017) points out though, the second university is a “pedagogical utopia” rather than a driver of change. Although it wants a world wherein “professor ceases to profess, where hierarchies disappear [and] all personal knowledges are special” (p. 42), in the end this is a naïve (if well-intentioned) goal informed and sustained by a foundational belief in people’s boundless ability to progress and grow. This is not to say that personal growth is not a good thing in itself; it is important for all students to develop and grow as a result of their education. The issue with the second university is, for paperson, that this pedagogical utopia is a surrogate for genuine action and change. The mental labour, which manifests in eloquent essays, impassioned poetry, affirmative action mandates, and reading groups (to name a few examples) does not make it into the “real world.” Porter et al. (2000) call attention to the dearth of active institutional critique in their field when they ask: “Where do we find instances of institutional critique in [rhetoric and composition studies]? Nowhere, yet—at least not fully articulated examples” (p. 626).<sup>19</sup> Far from remaining in the realm of ideas or inspiration, institutional critique must be a “fundamental pragmatic effort” (p. 625) that works through

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<sup>19</sup> What they do find, they say, are “projects that reveal dimensions of institutional study, where the institution is an important if not central component of the study and where the researchers form of institutional revision” (2000, p. 626).

disciplinary reform (p. 617), classroom critique (p. 616), and administrative amendment (p. 614). In essence, Porter et al. are calling for a movement towards the third university, which requires and is indeed predicated on labour—not the forms of labour that are prized by the university as an institution, but rather the invisible and often underappreciated labours that go into challenging and reforming institutions from the ground up.

### **The Third University Self-Actualizes (and then Self-Destructs)**

As I warned in my introduction, it is often hard to pinpoint spaces of the third university; as paperson (2017) notes in his conclusion, it is constantly assembling, constantly in a state of coming together, and yet also constantly “expiring” or losing its foothold (p. 52). In this sense, it does not subscribe to the same notions of linear progress that undergird the first and second universities. It is used to backsliding, having to change tack and move laterally; it is adaptable and resilient, and will not be stopped even when particular avenues are shut down or altered. paperson also notes that the third university “assembles decolonizing machines out of scrap parts from colonial technology. It makes itself out of assemblages of the first and second world universities” (p. 53). Essentially, it must use elements of the first and second universities in new ways, taking advantage of various loopholes or situations to push its decolonizing agenda; it does not aim for progress, as such, but for change, disruption, and rupture. It recognizes that “change” is not always necessarily for the better, but that change in some form must occur in order to decolonize the university. It also recognizes that changes are not permanent (as linear narratives of progress would suggest) but can fall apart or disperse as their need expires or new avenues arise.<sup>20</sup> Thus, it also implicitly recognizes the importance of individual and collective labouring towards a common goal of decolonization, although this labour is often difficult and unacknowledged (and even challenged) by the institution where it takes place.

In UW’s case, the third university is most likely to emerge in the “zones of ambiguity” across campus where students and faculty are working to effect change, decolonization, and solidarity. The only stable and constant location of the third university is the Indigenous Student Centre at St. Paul’s College. This is a space “premised on understanding, respect, and trust, as well as a recognition of and sensitivity to the different cultural values and rights of Indigenous peoples and cultures” that “facilitate[s] the sharing of Indigenous knowledge and provide[s] culturally relevant information and support services for all members of the University of Waterloo community” (Indigenous Student Centre, n.d.-b, par. 1-2). While it is not necessarily pushing for radical change, the Indigenous Student Centre is certainly not utopian or nostalgic in the way the second university is. Rather, it represents a decolonial space wherein members of the

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<sup>20</sup> A prime example of this is Pu’u Huluhulu University in Hawaii, which has emerged as part of the “ongoing encampment protesting efforts to construct the Thirty Meter Telescope (TMT) at Mauna Kea”; its goal, according to Dean Itsuji Saranillio, is to “inspire and further demonstrate to all of Hawai’i, and the world, the power of Indigenous movements to create meaningful alternatives to an unsustainable U.S. colonial system” (Boggs et al., 2019, p. 26). This “university” is not a permanent or perfect solution, but it is a phenomenal example of the possibilities of the third university to deliver a decolonizing education in the most unexpected places; although it will likely cease to exist once its “usefulness expires” (paperson, 2017, p. 52), it will still have positively affected the lives of all those who were able to receive an education while protesting against the TMT.



**Figure 3: The Third World University**

**[Text Transcription:** “The third world university defines itself fundamentally as a decolonial project - as an interdisciplinary, transnational, yet vocational university that equips its students with skills toward the applied practice of decolonization.” (paperson 36).]

**Image Description:** The key buildings that represent the third university are highlighted in red on the map. They include the Indigenous Student Centre at St. Paul’s College (STP) and the Student Life Centre (SLC), which is the “home base” for many of UW’s clubs. These two locations are spaces where students and faculty are working to effect change, decolonization, and solidarity through means that run counter to the agenda of the first university. They are, notably, housed within other buildings that are part of the first or second universities, indicating that UW does not allocate permanent space to the third university.]

Indigenous community are welcomed and respected.<sup>21</sup> It is also a space where many if not all of the individuals have experienced the ill effects of “progress,” either firsthand or through generational trauma.<sup>22</sup> Working with/through this trauma is indeed a kind of “invisible labour” that must be performed within the university—labour that requires constant energy and communal support in order for students to be able to engage with and withstand the colonial institutional system.

I have also identified the Student Life Centre (SLC) as a space of the third university because it is the designated home (or at least the symbolic home) of many clubs on campus that might serve as catalysts for the third university.<sup>23</sup> While some of these clubs still work within a capitalistic framework (i.e., focused on raising money, requiring fees, connected to larger outside organizations), they are still challenging the status quo of the first university and what it stands for. The club that appears most in line with the third university is the Socialist Fight Back Club, which aims to “build a base for revolutionary politics on the campus and in the community, and to highlight the importance of collective and militant methods of political action among the workers and students. The main goal of [this] club is to educate and to organize” (Socialist, n.d., par. 1). However, there is certainly space in the other clubs to generate real change and action where it is needed most as well, especially ones like RAISE and the General Equality Club that are focused on issues within UW specifically.

It is interesting to note that these clubs (as zones of ambiguity), which do not have physical “homes” on UW campus, are defined by people rather than set spaces.<sup>24</sup> This speaks to the third university’s reputation as a “machine that produces machines,” a machine that “assembles students into scyborgs” (paperson, 2017, p. 53). A scyborg, paperson explains, is “the agentive body within the institutional machinery.” Its agency “is precisely that it is a reorganizer of institutional machinery; it subverts machinery against the master code of its makers; it rewires machinery to its own intentions. It’s that elliptical gear that makes the machine work (for freedom sometimes) by helping the machine (of unfreedom) break down”

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<sup>21</sup> For an example of how Indigenous learning and teaching methods have been successfully integrated into a wider institutional setting, see Sheila Cote-Meek’s (2019) “The Age of Reconciliation: Transforming Postsecondary Education.”

<sup>22</sup> As the wealth of literature on the subject attests, modern Eurocentric conceptions of progress (in which Indigenous peoples were construed as “barriers” to civilization that had to be destroyed or assimilated) have had disastrous effects on Indigenous peoples around the world. As such, they have little reason to support the traditional and straightforward notions of progress perpetuated by modern-day society.

<sup>23</sup> The clubs noted here, pulled from UW’s comprehensive list of clubs and teams (2020), cover a range of causes and concerns: Because I am a Girl (helping girls attain equal access to education and rights), Black Association for Student Expression, Breaking Barriers: Cross-Cultural Mental Health, Fossil Free UW, General Equality Club, Habitat for Humanity, HanVoice (advocating for North Korean human rights), International Justice Mission, P.A.I.N. Canada (improving living conditions, health care, and stigmatization for individuals living in poverty and addiction), RAISE (Racial Advocacy for Inclusion, Solidarity and Equity), Socialist Fight Back Club, and World Vision UW (providing access to clean water, education, healthcare, etc.).

<sup>24</sup> The fact that the third university on UW campus is relegated to interpersonal relations or “nomadic” clubs that do not have permanent spaces could be UW’s way of stopping potentially inflammatory or oppositional groups from becoming fixtures on campus, suggesting that the first university actually fears the third, since the third produces messages that conflict with the positive and progressive image UW tries to put forth.

(p. 55). This is an accurate description of the members of the clubs at UW that seek to create change or reform by reorganizing structures within the institution or on a broader scale in terms of laws, rights, or economies.<sup>25</sup> These members are not “autonomous, unplugged individuals” but rather part of “a plurality [that] only occasionally becomes singular when a condensation of machines produces intentionality,” as clubs do when they exert their collective labour, energy, and power to achieve certain goals (p. 55). The issue with scyborgs in a university context, however, is that they are constantly flowing in and out of the “machine” — students may have to leave their clubs because of coop terms, particularly busy semesters, or graduation. In this sense, the clubs as decolonial machines are constantly being disassembled and reassembled in different ways, and thus their conception of “progress” is more fragmented, fleeting, and incomplete. Although this certainly does complicate the process by which change can be imagined and enacted, it also means that new opportunities, individuals, and initiatives are constantly arising, constantly adding fuel to the fire of institutional decolonization.

## Conclusion

As Porter et al. (2000) note, it is with micro-level critiques that “[w]e can begin to locate agency”; indeed, “constructing institutions as local and discursive spaces makes them more visible and dynamic and therefore more changeable” (p. 621). Locating agency is crucial not only because it reveals the types of labour that often go unsung in a capitalist institution like the university, but also because it highlights who is promoting which narratives and ideals for which purposes. The first university champions a narrative of progress, productivity, and positivity in order to attract new students, take their money, and send them into the working world; the second university promotes a less ostentatious version of progress, but one that still prizes the positive potential of critical and liberal studies over action; the third university rejects all reductive and linear views of progress, instead envisioning it like a circuit board that can be lit up in any number of ways for any amount of time along many different paths. The third university knows that decolonization is not an easy or straightforward process, but that it must be striven for nonetheless. The third university also knows that all forms of labour, even those unrecognized by the university administration—the last-minute scrambling of temp staff to pull together a course syllabus, the thankless daily work performed by cleaning and maintenance workers, the activities and protests arranged by student organizations, the lobbying for more equitable pay or policies, etc.—is what allows the university to function in the first place, and thus also what enables the university to be changed and challenged.

As my diagram of UW campus reveals, this institution is not a hopeless and monolithic “money machine”—or, more accurately, it is not *just* a hopeless and monolithic money machine. Universities are never static, never stable, and their course forward is never set in stone. Beneath the blithe assertions of positivity and progress, beneath the critiques from armchair philosophers and well-meaning liberal arts scholars, there exists a third university that resists such utopian projects. The scyborgs that construct and comprise this third university take the

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<sup>25</sup> In either the immediate community, like P.A.I.N., or on an international scale as with HanVoice.

first and second universities and turn them back on themselves, highlighting their flaws and inconsistencies, their vulnerabilities. In doing so, they also highlight that progress is not always positive, that change is not permanent, that lip service can never replace genuine action. The third university is not here for the good press or the bonus paycheck—it is here to decolonize education and destroy the narratives of progress that have (mis)guided our educational institutions and practices for far too long.

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