

Academicism, within
& without the
“Academy”



LINES IN THE SAND

Writings on the Gaza Solidarity Encampment
& Campus Flood at U.C. Berkeley from
an Anarchist Prisoner of War

Casey Goonan

with whatever weapons at hand

*transcribed, formatted, & edited
with love & rage from
comrades to the end*

cover images:

شهادة الاطفال في زمن الحرب
In Time of War: Children Testify
(Drawings by Palestinian Children)
Beirut: Mawakif / PFLP, 1970

April 17, 2026

Palestinian Prisoners' Day

*with whatever weapons at hand
withwhateverweapons.noblogs.org*



Editor's Note

The content of this book comprises writings and letters written by Casey during their time at Santa Rita Jail in the year before they were sentenced to federal prison. Some of the ideas and opinions expressed in this text are rooted in a particular moment in time and do not reflect Casey's current views on strategy, approach, and political action. These are not definitive statements and must not be construed as such, especially given that Casey is imprisoned and certain ideas may create undesirable repercussions.

The editors have aimed to be as faithful as possible to Casey's original words in the transcription and editing process, with minor spelling and grammar changes for readability.

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Writing a letter to a political prisoner or prisoner of war is a concrete way to support those imprisoned for their political struggles. A letter is a simple way to brighten someone’s day in prison by creating human interaction and communication—something prisons attempt to destroy. Beyond that, writing keeps prisoners connected to the communities and movements of which they are a part, allowing them to provide insights and stay up to date. Writing to prisoners is not charity, as we on the outside have as much to gain from these relationships as the prisoners. Knowing the importance of letter writing is crucial. Prisons are very lonely, isolating, and disconnected places. Any sort of bridge from the outside world is greatly appreciated. Find out more:

nycabc.wordpress.com

Casey Goonan is a dedicated community educator, writer, distroist, printer, and anarchist/anti-imperialist political prisoner who has committed their life to struggles for liberation. Casey is incarcerated for actions carried out in solidarity with Palestinians facing genocide in Gaza and in response to the repressive actions against the pro-Palestine student encampments in the United States. In January 2025, Casey pleaded guilty to one count of maliciously damaging or destroying property used in or affecting interstate commerce by means of fire or an explosive for the arson attack on a campus police car. As part of a plea agreement, Casey took responsibility for other attacks but pleaded not guilty to the additional charges and was sentenced to 235 months in federal prison. Just as Casey has persistently for years cared for, supported, and struggled alongside incarcerated comrades, we aim to replicate these actions in solidarity with Casey as they continue their struggle from the other side of the wall. A note from Casey in September 2025: “*Thanks to everybody out there who has shown me love and offered support through this time. I wish every prisoner could experience the level of support you all have shown to me. In here, I’ve done my best to show my love to all my fellow prisoners and I remain steadfast to the movement to Palestinian liberation and the movements for decolonization and abolition worldwide.*” More information:

freecaseynow.noblogs.org

Last Friday night, i read an article about my grand jury indictment published by *The East Bay Times*, a conservative-liberal local newspaper.¹ It was not published in any print version of the newspaper this week (or last), but someone showed the article to me on their G.T.L. tablet. This most recent article refers to me as an “academic,” which i presume most stories or news articles have done. As i sat with the thoughts of this characterization, i increasingly became annoyed. Not too long after, the full implications of this naming sunk in, and, frankly, i find it quite insulting. i’m sure in different circumstances my good sense would have struck sooner. After all, this has been only the second article that i read concerning my case at that moment. As of this writing, i have now read a total of five news articles about my case, all from mainstream media outlets, and only a few more in total related to the so-called “student intifada” as a whole since my capture by the feds in June [2024].

Anyway, i find it both annoying and insulting to be reductively characterized as an “academic” for several reasons that are worth detailing below. I believe my perspective on the matter can lend a helpful framework for others similarly mis-characterized. Or maybe, alternatively, the conceptualization put forward can help demystify *who* in fact *is* one.

I do want to mention from the start that my frustrations with the label of “academic,” as with the Academy and academicism more generally, come from an abolitionist and anticolonial perspective based in revolutionary love. This is a needed clarification because i do not wish to perpetuate the devalorization of critical scholarly and intellectual work (in the

university or otherwise), such as the arrogant reactionaries of the fascist/zionist U.S. far-right are attempting to do. Those far-right wing asshats are fabricating a public narrative about me that frames my politicization as revolutionary abolitionist over the span of nearly two decades as “extremist radicalization” which results from alleged “indoctrination” by my degrees in Critical Race and Ethnic Studies and specifically my Ph.D. in Black Studies.

Now, if we understand the word “radical” to mean what Ella Baker defines it as—to think about and confront social problems “at their roots”—then i am most certainly a radical. And i guess if it is an extremist perspective to be against policing, incarceration, and genocide from within an anti-Black white-supremacist slave-holding settler nation then so be it. You can even call me a “terrorist.” I don’t give a fuck, just don’t call me complicit.

Yet what these nazi-brain-programmed right wing dorks intend to do is establish a public narrative that infantilizes me as some “once malleable” student turned scholar who apparently is unable to think for myself under the influence of “manipulative leftist professors.” Such narratives (and several others i’ve encountered over the years but are not worth the energy of going into at this moment) are absolutely bullshit. They remove all of my agency and pathologize my highly intentional ethical, political, and spiritual growth. Such narratives attempt to displace the truth of my steadfast coming-to-consciousness about normalized systemic state and interpersonal domination/violence and global power relations. I believe such narratives de-



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ployed by the U.S. Right (and to varying intensities by the so-called liberal “center”) are in fact strategic and preemptive maneuvers to dismiss any public retrospective or historical claim to my defiant intellectual formation as an abolitionist and anti-colonialist with revolutionary aspirations. My actual, lived politicization and intellectual formation is a process of dedicated study and struggle that is unintelligible to right-wing pundits, journalists, pseudo-scholars, influencers, politicians, their funders, and their cultish followers alike.

Okay, so now that i’ve made that initial clarification, i can begin to more directly explain the characterization imposed on me of being an “academic.” The criticisms that follow cut across the entire spectrum of political sensibilities, including what exists today of a U.S.-based Left and adjacent anarchist milieus. Most deliberately, this essay is a polemic against all neoradical intellectuals who extract from grassroots movements and organize insurgencies through public-facing relations based on partial solidarity and performative activism, while in turn giving little if anything at all back to the source.² I am an anarchist in principle, so this sweeping discernment of hierarchy, authority, and entitlement flows somewhat easily from pen to page.

I think the annoyance of being characterized as an “academic” first of all is triggered by my recollection that in fact i have *not* been welcomed, accepted by, no less invited into the increasingly conservative “Academy” for two years since completing my doctorate at Northwestern in May 2022. (Not complaining about this, just want to clarify some facts.) Moreover,

i'm *not* currently a professor of anything. I do not experience awards like some of my peers went on to do, *nor* do i have the same scale of access to resources. I've very much been struggling financially and was left in the dust by the university job market given my incompatible accessibility needs. And yet, i still have been able to significantly impact the trajectory of multiple social movements, across different fronts and fields of struggle, through autonomous intellectual work and my involvement in several scholarly, media, print, and distro collectives. Most of this work is "public facing," although not predominately done using my face or legal name.³

Certainly i've had the luxury of access to college campuses and university resources for a large chunk of my adult life. These spaces—as exploitative and elitist as they are—allowed myself, my comrades, and some colleagues to create several lasting projects with real material teeth. It gave me the luxury to write often and research many topics and political interests. It provided an avenue to constantly "steal time," in spite of excessive and unregulated work hours, and a base to steal production materials from (printer paper, staples, envelopes, copy machines) and establish some informal decentralized networks with others. Much of this effort would wind up getting funneled into already-existing groups, campaigns, and movements. Unfortunately, this time in universities and my encounter with the Academy was over time punctuated by frequent extremes of hazing, stress, isolation, physical suffering, and illness, for which i retain a lasting resentment toward (albeit two years removed). Enduring through all of this, i fought very hard to maintain my

youtube—cited from memory. [Editors were unable to locate this citation.]

15. Alfredo M. Bonanno, *The Anarchist Tension*, trans. Jean Weir (Cuneo: *Edizioni Laboratorio*, 1996; London: *Elephant Editions*, 1998).

Press, 2020).

6. Jared A. Ball, Dylan Rodríguez, “Stop Asian Hate, Zionism, Policing, and Counterinsurgency,” I Mix What I Like Podcast (*Black Liberation Media*, May 7, 2024), 1:43:05, www.youtube.com/live/gxQ-itZB0t8.

7. Joy James, *New Bones Abolition: Captive Maternal Agency and the (After)Life of Erica Garner* (Brooklyn, NY: *Common Notions*, 2023), 34.

8. Nick Mitchell, *Disciplinary Matters: Black Studies in the Neoliberal University* (University of California, Santa Cruz: Ph.D dissertation, 2013).

9. Walter Benjamin, “The Author as Producer,” *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*, ed. Andrew Arato and Eike Gebhardt (New York: *Urizen Books*, 1978), 257.

10. [Editor’s note: We retained Casey’s quotation from memory with the desire to preserve the imprisoned guerrilla intellectual’s position. The original quotation is as follows:

Rather than asking: what is the attitude of a work to the relations of production of its time? I should ask: what is its position in them?

11. Stuart Hall, “Race, Articulation, and Societies Structured in Dominance,” *Sociological Theories: Race and Colonialism*, ed. UNESCO (Paris: UNESCO, 1980), 305-45.

12. Ibid.

13. Safiya Bukhari, *The War Before: The True Life Story of Becoming a Black Panther, Keeping the Faith in Prison & Fighting for Those Left Behind*, ed. Laura Whitehorn (New York: *The Feminist Press at CUNY*, 2010).

14. Gayatri Spivak, “Revolution and Reform,” interview on

commitment to a praxis of liberatory militancy and ongoing (imperfect and impure, yet consistent) refusal to cede my soul to white devils and systems of anti-Black/racial-colonial domination. So, with that now shared, i’d like to define and further unpack what an “academic” actually is. Just so we’re on the same page moving forward.

First off, there is “the Academy,” which is a colonial-bourgeois construct and a Civilizational/civilizing aspiration that i want no business being associated with. This colonial structure of belonging (the Academy/academia) does not encompass the totality of what occurs in universities or on college campuses to be crystal clear. Nor does it describe the totality of people (and their desires) who labor, teach, research, write, learn, love, and struggle within the context of “higher education” schooling institutions. I’m under the impression that college campuses (broadly construed) are *contradictory sites of political struggle*, to borrow a phrase that Ruth Wilson Gilmore once generously explained to me.⁴ As the intifada on the campuses is demonstrating, these contradictions have sharpened and intensified to a relative highpoint. Surpassing the most recent crest in the fall of 2020 on some (not most) campuses in the “United States” and the wave of student-worker strikes in 2022-2023, we are faced with a rapidly shifting historical conjuncture—hopefully, this next school [year] ruptures conditions.⁵

So, “the Academy”/academia is not a place *per se*, but more accurately, as Dylan Rodríguez argues, it is a construct: “*an aspiration—and it’s not a good one.*”⁶ And college *campuses*—analytically distinguishable from “the Acad-

emy"/academia—are inherently pivotal sites of struggle over social power. Similar to how Joy James nods to the U.S. prison/jail/detention-center as a “fulcrum” site within the apparatus of state power, i would stretch this notion of a fulcrum site and apply it to an analysis of the structural location of the university or college campus.⁷ I write “stretch” here because the university/college campus has a different institutional and socio-economic function than the prison/jail/detention center, although both contain, discipline, and manage “surplus populations.”⁸ I also say “stretch” here because, in James’ overarching framework and her analysis of contemporary university life, she remains more skeptical than i of the capacity for students and teachers to break from their historically assigned specialized roles. This wave of pro-Palestine, anti-war, and anti-genocide protest is challenging those theorists who consider the campus as a foreclosed or obsolete site of political struggle, a thesis i reject even amidst perpetual validation of the very real problematic of the domesticated (professionalizing) “student activist” subject (an element of the new counterinsurgency and product of neoliberal shifts in the U.S. schooling regime and larger capitalist world system of the last sixty years).

Second we have the term/concept of the “academic.” Hopefully by now i haven’t buried the lede.

“Academic” refers to a disposition and positioning with the social relations of production and nexus of interlocking systems of domination that contextualize an individual or collective’s intellectual standpoint. It is thus a condition to be identified and named, it is not an identity one chooses. Even though

Notes

1. Article in *The East Bay Times*, early-August-regarding grand jury indictment.

2. Joy James, “Radicalizing Black Feminism,” *Seeking the Beloved Community: A Feminist Race Reader*. (Buffalo: SUNY Press, 2013 [1998]).

3. One project worth mentioning is *True Leap Press: Publishing and Distribution*. In 2016, my close friend and comrade, [], and i started a radical publishing collective named True Leap Press. Our first project was a journal of Black study and revolutionary abolitionist analysis, poetry, and experimental writing called Propter Nos. We published four issues between 2016 and 2021. Between 2017 and 2024, True Leap hosted a zine distro that used printwork as a medium to organize across prison walls, through the creation of study groups and autonomous educational initiatives. In 2019, this project expanded into the streets. First in Chicago, where it took the form of an informal network of prisoner support events and mutual aid food/resource distribution, and an ad hoc circuit of regional action-reportback circulation via mass printing of zines on commandeered university printers. Then, most recently in the Bay Area from 2022-2024, in the form of supplying and facilitating prisoner support events, tabling in the community, distributing materials across popular social spaces, and the circulation of “print-only” action bulletins such as the Bay Area Newsreel, which had a four issue run in 2023.

4. Personal correspondence via email in 2017.

5. A great example of protest activity on a major university campus in 2020, please see: *Insurrectional Abolitionism, Vol. 2: Vistas of Militancy on a Midwest College Campus* (Chicago: True Leap

that “we” create, share, and what we deem useful, a labor to clarify the conditions necessary for insurrectionary processes to develop in ways favorable to the most vulnerable, marginalized, criminalized, and dispossessed among us. Most importantly, such vigilance disallows the entryism and misleadership of charlatans, false prophets, and paper tigers. This task of relentless demystification is profoundly important in an era where a largely self-anointed punditry of neoradicals use social media, podcasts, and collaborations with academia, the publishing industry, and their overlapping professional networks to directly impact the historical development of emerging movements and insurgencies—a position of incredible social responsibility where one’s intellectual production can either empower or break the cohesion, morale, and hard-earned momentum of the mass struggle in motion.

people use the term flippantly to describe a wide range of things under the sun, it most definitely means something.

The contemporary academic subject is defined by their constant practice and embodiment of *academicism*. Whether this is known to the subject or unknown is of little meaning within this schema i’m explaining. “Academicism,” to my understanding, is a mode of intellectual activity (i.e. interpretation, conceptualization, analysis, archiving, historicizing, pedagogy, etc.) that is detached from concrete practical experience. In the context of radical intellectuals who study, write about, or work with(in) grassroots movements and/or organic insurgencies, academic ways of being are characterized by any manner of thinking and doing that is not (at the least) intentionally contesting or (at the most) attempting to transform the immediate material context one is situated within in their everyday life.

Of course, academicism is pervasive in U.S. research universities. You may have encountered it recently in the work of tenured R1 faculty and researchers who remain idly on the sidelines making statements while their students for the past several months have faced not only emotional or administrative attacks but also aggressive physical attacks by the police and zionists. These are the more obvious culprits, the easiest to expose. Yet according to the definition i am proposing, one doesn’t have to be employed by a university nor even be welcomed by the Academy/academia to qualify as an academic. To explain what i mean further, i’m going to outline the structural aspects, relational features, and agential dynamics of this positioning process of the academic subject.

In the 1930's, Walter Benjamin wrote an essay titled "The Author as Producer."⁹ The essay offers some suggestions for analyzing, in a more systematic way, the *difference between* a Marxist author whose work has revolutionary dimensions for the "proletarian" mass struggle on the one hand, and on the other hand the Marxist author whose means of subsistence are removed from and/or antagonistic to the fate of the masses in struggle, despite the possible anticapitalist attitude or performance of revolutionary disposition by the latter. Benjamin fixes his critique on a well-known contemporary of his, whom i know little about, but the logic of the argument still stands.

In Benjamin's analysis, the author he is studying is representative of a much larger stratum of "activist intellectuals" whose work appears to relate to the proletarian masses and class struggle in good faith, but does not share a similar class fate. For Benjamin, the uncritical consumption and valorization of this stratum's work led to the popular legitimization of numerous authors who did not share similar material conditions nor similar stakes as the masses. More consequentially, such authors ultimately do not face the same potential consequences of bourgeoisie reaction that revolutionary rupture inevitably summons. This contradiction has a concrete outcome on the form and content (mostly on the content) of an author's theoretical production. The predominance of this stratum's intellectual output in the public discourse and the era's emerging mass culture industry makes this dynamic particularly troubling for Benjamin. It is an antagonistic contradiction that is obscure and concealed, glossed over by this stratum's mastery over proletarian vernacu-

its roots" means to wake up daily and ask yourself: "what is it i think in relation to what i do?" This is what Bonnano teaches in *The Anarchist Tension*.¹⁵ How to improvise on this oppressive reality is a whole other question altogether, but it's one well worth asking!

So to return to my definition of an "academic" one final time. The claims i put forth, as fragmented and likely flawed as they are, might be useful or interesting to share with others engaged in similar work during this rapidly shifting conjuncture. If anything, it could be useful to share these definitions of the Academy, the academic subject, and academicism as a small contribution toward defending those radical intellectuals with revolutionary intentions whose work *does not* stand at odds—philosophically or materially—with the fate of the most vulnerable, marginalized, criminalized, and dispossessed among us.

A lot of counter-revolutionary bullshit can be demystified when you combine the analysis of a radical intellectual's work with: 1) a deep-structural consideration of their concrete social context, 2) a simultaneous reading of the intellectual's activity with(in) movements and insurgency, and 3) a study of the complex ways that points #1 and #2 relate to the form, content, circulation, and social meaning of their work. This is important to do not for moralistic reasons, nor to fulfill some egoistic or contrasting drive to power.

To identify academicism is a labor of criticism for the sake of "our" movements and the likelihood of successful future insurgencies. It is a labor to preserve the integrity of the ideas

historical present-tense.¹⁴ This applies to more than only an economocentric analysis of class. It applies to an analysis of all relations of domination/power. Despite the aforementioned point, i would still insist that myself, most of my interlocutors, our collective projects, and the decentralized networks we work within are not (according to the schema laid out) qualifying recipients of the “academic” label thrown upon us.

To speak for myself, i am not an academic. i am a revolutionary—a label not self-appointed but given as a placeholder to communicate my near decade-long participation in (and faithful commitment to) protracted, collective struggle against the anti-Black U.S. prison regime and militant opposition to the capitalist, white-supremacist settler state. I’ll let you (the reader) be the judge of whether or not the label applies adequately. I’m only one person among hundreds of thousands of people who are giving significant amounts of their scarce time, limited resources, voluntary labor, and in some cases have lost their mortal life to sustain the historical memory and social basis for autonomous liberationist/anticolonial/Black revolution to spring forward—with every systemic “crisis” and rupture greening in potential for protracted mass struggle to destroy this World, and, in the same breath, to build things anew in an epoch of ubiquitous opportunism, extraction, and normalized treachery.

All i personally care about is bettering the material condition of the multiple communities i’m a part of, and primarily for the most systemically vulnerable, marginalized, criminalized, and dispossessed among us. To live life and interpret reality “at

lar, aesthetics, and concepts derived from actually-grounded theory. The ubiquity of the activist intellectual’s work—both in terms of circulation and consumption—is not contingent on the importance of their ideas to the revolutionary proletariat, but rather on the mass reproduction of their works which is facilitated by varying degrees of access to capital.

Whether the radical disposition of the author is genuine or well-intentioned makes little difference in this schema. Again, some of these authors’ works may be situationally useful. However, what Benjamin is arguing is that the concrete social context of, in this instance, a Marxist author, must be considered in its systemic entirety if we are to discern the historical significance, political impact, and potential consequences of their ideas in the play of revolutionary class struggle.

Given the context of my writing this essay in jail, i’m unable to access most of the sources i’m referencing (at the time of this writing). Although this is the situation before me, i would still like to share a quote from Benjamin. Some of the words may be slightly off, because i’m paraphrasing from memory, however, the kernel of his argument is expressed so succinctly, it is difficult to withhold sharing his helpful phrase:

It is not enough to merely examine the work of an author based on their *attitude* toward the mode of production. We must always simultaneously identify the author’s position *within* the social relations of production.¹⁰

The framework proposed above by Benjamin has use

beyond the study of writerly production, given how the cognitive praxis of any intellectual is not reducible to writing or the vocation of “author.” But what precisely does it mean to examine an intellectual’s work “within the social relations of production” that positions them? To my understanding, it means we must attempt to comprehend (as best as possible) the historically specific arrangement of productive forces wherein the intellectual is situated, which in turn can enable a more accurate analysis of the material circumstances that give their work form, circulation, and meaning. This establishes a more holistic point of reference for analyzing its content.

From this point, it becomes much easier to demystify an intellectual’s relative complicity or participation in the process of accumulation and dispossession, if it isn’t obvious upon first glance. The active involvement of an intellectual with(in) an existing movement or insurgency would concomitantly be considered here in relation to the aforementioned phenomena. And to push beyond the Eurocentric class-reductionism of Benjamin’s framework, i would crucially add that within a “society structured in dominance,” as Stuart Hall¹¹ aptly describes slaveholding white-supremacist settler nations, we are obligated to examine not only an intellectual’s position within the social relations of *production*, but their full situatedness of the nexus of multiply-scaled and densely interwoven *systems of domination/power*. Such systems include global anti-Blackness, settler-/franchise-/neo-colonialism, white supremacy, and cis-heteropatriarchy, which are all inseparable as social-historical formations but *analytically distinguishable* from capitalism, im-

perialism, and Empire as socially determinant structures.¹²

Within this theoretical context, i would like to return to the topic of the contemporary academic subject and why the label feels pejorative and sits uneasy when applied to certain people who really just don’t fit the profile.

“Academic” is a relationally-formed position and trajectory of becoming that a radical intellectual may or may not inhabit, with *academicism* as the primary characteristic activity that establishes this distinction. (It is the coupling of the performance of radicality with access to capital and/or the institutional capacity to pursue, sustain, and circulate their detached intellectual work that elevates one into an extractive perch within the social relations of production and interlocking systems of domination/power.) “Academic” therefore does not mark a static disposition alone. This is a categorically distinct *positioning process* and trajectory of *divergence* from one of a radical-to-revolutionary intellectual whose work directly confronts and intervenes in the social reproduction of the material circumstances they inhabit. From what i have observed, this is not a disinterested or passively established difference but an actively created difference, meaning that academicism can present itself across inherited positionality and add a nuanced layer to critical analysis of even the most structurally dispossessed intellectuals.

To paraphrase Safiya Bukhari, there is no difference between survival and resistance.¹³ And to riff on Gayatri Spivak, “class” is not only “where you come from,” but, sometimes more importantly, “what you are doing” (and not doing) in the