This book argues that today’s professoriate has become increasingly theatrical, largely as a result of neoliberal policies in higher education, but also in response to an anti-intellectual scrutiny that has become pervasive throughout the Western world.

*The Theatrical Professoriate: Contemporary Higher Education and Its Academic Dramas* examines how the Western professoriate increasingly finds itself enacting command performances that utilize scripting, characterization, surrogation, and spectacle—the hallmarks of theatricality—toward neoliberal ends. Roxworthy explores how the theatrical nature of today’s professoriate and the resultant glut of performances about academia on stage and screen have contributed to a highly ambivalent public fascination with academia. She further documents the “theatrical turn” witnessed in American higher education, as academic institutions use performance to intervene in the diversity issues and disciplinary disparities fueled by neoliberalism. By analyzing academic dramas and their audience reception alongside theoretical approaches, the author reveals how contemporary academia drives the professoriate to perform in what seem like increasingly artificial ways.

Ideal for practitioners and students of education, ethnic, and science studies, *The Theatrical Professoriate* deftly intervenes in Performance Studies’ still-unsettled debates over the differential impact of live versus mediated performances.

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The Theatrical Professoriate

Contemporary Higher Education and Its Academic Dramas

Emily Roxworthy
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For as long as I can remember, I have been fascinated by representations of professors. A bit like Narcissus, I would pore over any novel, short story, or play depicting my professional world, and consume movies and television shows about academia as quickly as I could find them. So you can only imagine my excitement when Susan Carlson, Vice Provost for Academic Personnel and Programs at the University of California’s Office of President (UCOP), gave me the opportunity to devise a short play about the climate for faculty in the UC system and to tour that play as part of a leadership workshop presented at all ten University of California campuses. I am grateful to Susan and to my colleagues from the Academic Senate’s University Committee on Affirmative Action and Diversity for entrusting me with this project, and even more grateful that it spurred the writing of this book. Moreover, without the anonymous faculty informants (all women and people of color) who shared their experiences with me as part of the devising process, the documentary play used in this workshop would have been impossible to create; they were brave to share their often painful and demoralizing experiences with me, and I hope the resulting play did them justice.

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Introduction

Introducing...the theatrical professoriate

This book argues that today’s professoriate has become increasingly theatrical, largely as a result of neoliberal policies in higher education, but also in response to the anti-intellectual scrutiny that dominates U.S. society and finds global audiences through American cultural production. In this book, I offer the concept of a “theatrical professoriate” in order to understand the increasingly artificial and spectacularized experience of being an academic, particularly in the United States but also throughout the Western academy. I argue that being a professor feels theatrical because of the following experiential dimensions new to contemporary higher education: the “impostor syndrome” epidemic triggered by scripted precariousness and academia’s pervasive audit culture (e.g. “performance-based funding”), the influence of Science/Technology/Engineering/Mathematics (STEM) on individualistic competition and self-promotion throughout academic disciplines, and the administratively controlled diversity charades and spectacular gatekeeping that maintain the scholarly myth of meritocracy.

*The Theatrical Professoriate* takes its cue from Pierre Bourdieu’s political economy of the French professoriate, *Homo Academicus* (1984), a book whose critical reception seemed to invite an American analog explaining what Bourdieu (most famous for his theory of *habitus*—the embodied experience of a given social class or profession) was “telling us about American professors by talking about their transatlantic cousins.” If Following Bourdieu’s lead, I argue that the steady flow of recent academic dramas—post-1990 plays and films that represent higher education and its professors—should be read as theories that model the American professor’s habitus by using the human scale of theatrical representation to reveal how contemporary academia commands professorial performances that appear merely “for show.” I also approach this theatrical habitus through my earlier theory of the “spectacle-archive”: a public record of otherwise-ephemeral performances that record an ambivalent fascination with, in this case, the professoriate. This spectacle-archive documents the scrutiny of entities spectacularized by the larger public, such as the commonly held belief that academia represents a spectacle of elitism and liberalism that controls upward social mobility. While performance studies scholar Diana Taylor has
rightly questioned scholars “who decry the dark power of theatricality,” I argue that today’s professoriate is commanded to enact alienating performances that utilize scripting, characterization, surrogation, and spectacle (the hallmarks of theatricality) toward neoliberal ends which end up inhibiting empathy, resulting in a habitus that I have dubbed the “theatrical professoriate.”

In part owing to digital technologies’ intimate reach into every corner of our lives, the ability to experience empathic concern and perspective taking (two key subscales of the Interpersonal Reactivity Index used by psychologists) has seen a precipitous decline among college-age students since 2000. But The Theatrical Professoriate contributes to the growing awareness that this decline in empathy is also being driven by structural changes in the institution of higher education itself that can be measured by the evolution of professorial performance. In her book Being an Academic, Joelle Fanghanel has examined recent concerns “that the language of performativity and rationality is nefariously colonizing the academy as a whole as universities are led into impression management and lose the ability to communicate genuinely,” and as “academics internalize performativity habits” by connecting to the academic institution in a manner resembling the affiliations of corporate culture. While these changes in the academy are manifested in practices that metaphorically deploy the hallmarks of theatricality, they have also led a range of playwrights and other artists to create cultural productions that literally stage the structural issues driving the professoriate to perform in increasingly artificial ways.

At a time when “statistical evidence suggests that American universities have never been stronger or more prominent in public life than they are now,” the theatrical nature of today’s professoriate and the resultant glut of performances about academia being produced on stage and screen have contributed to a highly ambivalent public fascination with academia that scrutinizes the corruption and wastefulness of higher education as well as the dysfunctional lives of its professors. As Peter Wood, president of a conservative American advocacy group, said in a 2019 Chronicle of Higher Education article, recent debates about free speech on college campuses have “mainly acted as a spotlight, fixing the public’s attention on higher education.” The United States’ polarized political landscape, mirrored by ideological polarization around the world, heightens the glare of this spotlight. Moreover, the public’s heightened awareness of academia and its gatekeeper role in the mythos of unfettered social mobility (also known as the “myth of meritocracy”) has spectacularized the social actors seen as its lead players: professors themselves. In other words, the ambivalent attention characteristic of the spectacle-archive leads the fascinated American public to spectacularize professors as a minoritized group seen as highly privileged and out-of-touch with “the real world.” Of particular interest to this project is the way in which professors are spectacularized through their representation in academic dramas, a longstanding genre encompassing stage plays and screenplays that has become increasingly prominent since the 1990s. By analyzing these academic dramas as well as their audience reception, I show that these staged professors are positioned as stand-ins (or what Joseph Roach might call “surrogates”) for the institution of
higher education itself, which is seen as hiding deep conflicts and contradictions behind an idealized façade of meritocracy. Throughout *The Theatrical Professoriate*, I address two types of conflicts seen as undergirding the academic system:

1. The first type of conflict emerges from the maintenance of academia as what higher education scholars have recently described as a “historically white institution,” despite the shifting demographics of majority/minority racial dynamics that are occurring as whites lose their majority status: this contradiction is aided by the dismantling of affirmative action for many public universities, despite the public sentiment, such as the fact that the majority of Americans (61%) currently favor policies that redress historical discrimination. Higher education administrators often attempt to obscure this contradiction through “diversity charades” that make campuses appear to be racial utopias.

2. The second type of conflict emerges from the slow-motion “death of the humanities” that has been remarked upon for decades, as the neoliberal impulse to embrace the market and deregulate anything in its way shifts academic resources from humanistic disciplines to what are understood as the more rational and financially lucrative disciplines of STEM. This disciplinary shift has infiltrated every corner of the academy with STEM-associated values such as disembodied knowledge, individualistic competition and self-promotion, and clinical distance.

I examine how these two thematics of conflict—a failure to diversify and the STEM takeover—manifest in a range of academic dramas for the stage and screen.

At the same time, I look at what could be called the “theatrical turn” that many academic institutions have taken in order to intervene in these conflicts and address their disparities by commissioning theatre-centered workshops, theatricalized presentations of research, and theatre-related training. I demonstrate this theatrical turn through three campus trends toward using applied theatre: commissioning interactive theatre for diversity work (which arguably began with the widespread use of interactive theatre by the recipients of the U.S. National Science Foundation’s ADVANCE grant), hiring actors as “Standardized Patients” (SPs) for medical education in order to help academic medicine develop greater empathy in its clinicians, and the ubiquity of faculty TED (technology, entertainment, and design)-style talks on campus and off. I am a theatre historian and performance scholar, as well as a practitioner of interactive diversity theatre in the University of California system, and in the Conclusion I will briefly discuss my own productions of academic drama.

**A crisis of representation**

By examining these on-campus theatrical interventions alongside publicly consumed plays and films about professors, I reference Theatre and Performance
Studies’ still-unsettled debates over the differential impact of live versus mediated performances. Theatre and Performance Studies scholars have long debated whether the ephemeral nature of live performance is integral to the medium itself or whether liveness is merely an effect produced by the embedded nature of what Philip Auslander calls “performance in a mediatized culture.” In the second edition of his book *Liveness*, Auslander refers to “live performance’s ostensible curative powers” as positioned against technological reproduction, particularly televisual media (which, these days, are further amplified by digital distribution). Auslander both deconstructs the longing for liveness as a cultural cure and seems to long for it himself. While Auslander’s analysis accurately depicts the circumscribed position of live performance in a massively mediatized age, it does little to explain the power that audiences continue to find through spectacles of liveness. Therefore, I approach the liveness debate through Shannon Jackson’s 2011 book *Social Works: Performing Art, Supporting Publics*, which shifts the focus from live product (the performance itself) to live process (how the performance was created). Jackson’s focus is on socially engaged art that turns to performance, in part because “performance both activates and depends on a relational system” that short-circuits neoliberalism’s pressure to disavow support systems and other sociopolitical contingencies. By contrast, Jackson shows how “the frictions of performance” and “the highly fettered space of the theatre” that is visibly contingent on a collectivity of live bodies (both onstage and in the audience) interrupt the individualizing experience of digital seamlessness by “exposing the supporting actions that produce the experience of seamlessness.” Live performance and theatricality call attention to the collectivities and support systems disavowed by the neoliberal individual because the “backstage labor of coordination” remains as present for the audience as the “more visible practices of extroverted display.” Importantly, Jackson starts *Social Works* by glancing at the “precarious public funding” of higher education institutions such as the University of California, seeing academia’s loss of public funding as symptomatic of our society’s fetishization of the self-sufficient individual unfettered by infrastructural support.

Indeed, as Ronald Brownstein put it in a 2018 *Atlantic* article about the “dangerous milestone” that the United States had reached in which more of state universities’ revenue came from tuition than from tax dollars, “nowhere is the nation more conspicuously failing to recognize its shared destiny than in states’ faltering commitment to public higher education.” Brownstein quotes an HBCU (historically black college or university) president who argues that state legislatures, which continue to mostly comprise white men, fail to see themselves in the increasingly black and brown faces of today’s diverse college bodies. This crisis of representation creates an empathy gap that feeds the public’s distrust of academia, and in turn the public witnesses “an enormous shift in cost from the public collectively to parents and students individually.” Brownstein shows how counterproductive such a shift really is because aging white Americans “will depend on an increasingly nonwhite workforce to pay
the taxes that fund their Social Security and Medicare in the years ahead”—so failing to recognize the “interdependence of ‘the brown and the gray’” ends up abetting the lack of access to education, and thus economic security, of non-white American youth who will need to support the legislators voting to defund public education. The Theatrical Professoriate argues that live performance can help untangle the counterproductive binds facing American higher education because theatricality can foreground the human collectives and structural systems that contemporary debates about academia have forced underground. By documenting the rise of academic plays on stage and screen as well as on campus and off, I demonstrate that 21st-century academia’s “theatrical turn” holds great promise for meaningfully redressing both its diversity conflicts and its STEM conflicts.

In his book In Defence of Theatre, Barry Freeman emphasizes the importance of performance practices “that don’t necessarily have a place in the world of the institutional fine arts,” highlighting what Clarke Mackey’s Random Acts of Culture refers to as “vernacular culture.” Mackey honors amateur performance practices such as telling bedtime stories or hosting Christmas dinner, and draws the distinction between the social exchange taking place at these sites versus the commodification of professional performances by pointing out how strange it would be to repeat a vernacular practice (such as telling the same bedtime story every night) and commodifying it by selling tickets to the resultant event.

Likewise, the following chapters show that academic dramas are more akin to vernacular performances insofar as they position their audiences and performers alike as interdisciplinary amateurs, which is a radical gesture in a professional world that eschews the amateur and the generalist in favor of the highly specialized professional. These vernacular performances also make visible Jackson’s “backstage labor of coordination” through their disinterest in production values that would otherwise render such labor opaque. The academy’s and the public’s embrace of academic drama signifies the growing recognition that the dysfunctional demands of the theatrical professoriate might be redressed through the collaborative, embodied, and critical experience of face-to-face theatre, as well as the humanizing power of participating in live performance.

The spectacle-archive of the public’s professoriate

I chose to focus this book’s inquiry on performances of professors (rather than undergraduates or other college and university constituents) because, as Barbara F. Tobolowsky contends in Anti-Intellectual Representations of American Colleges and University (2017), “unlike students who filter through and exit every few years, [professors] are embedded in college life. They become stand-ins for the institution itself. Thus, these portrayals are closely linked to attitudes about higher education more broadly.” In addition to the constantly matriculating nature of the student body, Tobolowsky notes that professors “are the direct embodiment of the notion of scholarship,” which has come under increased
public scrutiny as taxpayers in the United States and abroad question the academic freedom that faculty enjoy to conduct research that distracts if not detracts from teaching students. The public fascination with staged and filmed representation of professors takes on a highly ambivalent tinge not only because the professoriate stands in for an institution seen by many as damaged, but also because most academic dramas portray professorial bodies as diseased or themselves damaged, yielding portrayals that in turn condition the public’s perception of the institution of higher education itself.

While the public spectacularizes academia as a prerequisite to upward social mobility, recent studies have demonstrated the ambivalence of this spectacularization as the American public becomes increasingly skeptical of higher education’s value as an institution. For instance, in 2017, Gallup and the Pew Research Center both published national surveys that “found significant public doubts—more than in previous years—about higher education and its role in American society,” particularly how the institution of academia is run. Such mixed feelings toward an institution seen as a powerful gatekeeper for social and economic mobility produces a high volume of both journalistic scrutiny and ostensibly fictional representations of academia. For instance, as discussed in the next chapter, the spectacle-archive created by public fascination with the professoriate was on full display at the 2015 Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences awards, also known as the Oscars. Upon Googling the search term “2015 Oscars,” photographs showing four white actors holding Academy Awards statuettes appear at the top of the search results, standing in as the public faces of that infamous ceremony: J.K. Simmons, Patricia Arquette, Julianne Moore, and Eddie Redmayne, who each won their acting Oscar for playing a professor on screen.

Sweeping the 2015 acting categories not only showcased a remarkably strong public interest in representations of professors (and a willingness to recognize the playing of professors as a virtuosic feat), but also, in their total erasure of non-white academic experience, marked academic films as complicit with Hollywood’s larger racial crisis as indicted by the #OscarsSoWhite movement. The 2015 Oscars marked the advent of this movement, eclipsing the fact that all four acting awards went not only to white artists but also to white artists playing professors. Simmons won Best Supporting Actor playing a jazz professor in Whiplash, Arquette won Best Supporting Actress playing a non-traditional college student turned psychology professor in Boyhood, Eddie Redmayne won Best Actor playing Cambridge physics professor Stephen Hawking in The Theory of Everything, and Moore won Best Actress playing a linguistics professor in Still Alice. As my analysis of The Theory of Everything and Still Alice demonstrates in the following chapter, the public fascination demonstrated by these cinematic professors sweeping all four acting categories exhibited an ambivalence that paralleled the racial critique which made the 2015 Oscars infamous. At the same time, The Theatrical Professoriate argues that academic dramas and other public representations of professors that foreground professorial
bodies (however damaged or diseased) make important interventions in the dominant understanding of the professoriate. I resist the notion that critical representations of professors and administrators “make a spectacle” of an otherwise noble academic enterprise. Theatre is always already a spectacle: it is produced to draw attention from a crowd, usually the bigger the better, and its “fleshly facticity” (to borrow Elizabeth Klaver’s apt alliteration) confronts audiences with three-dimensional embodiments whose very presence asserts a kind of truth claim: they are representative and symbolic characters, of course, but staked by real, historical bodies. Moreover, to understand the contemporary experience of being a professor as an embodied one—scripted by contemporary pressures such as economic precariousness, a pervasive audit culture, the contagion of individualistic competition and self-promotion, administratively controlled diversity charades, and the spectacular gatekeeping that maintains academia’s myth of meritocracy—entails joining feminist and critical race scholars, as well as colleagues in disability studies, in resisting the dominant professorial self-representation of a mind without a body. This self-image proffers an unmarked “disembodiment of the person” that always sat most easily with the white, male scholars who fit what Dana Polan has called the “gentlemanly tradition” of academia. Writing in the early 1990s, Polan notes that this self-image diverges significantly from professors’ public image:

[If intellectual self-representation endlessly imagines knowledge and the knower together as transcending the brute physicality of the everyday world, that world itself endlessly imagines intellectual culture as physical, as embodied […] Professors often imagine that they are ignored by the nonacademic world [but] are in fact endlessly represented, endlessly figured, and that representation and that figuration may work according to tightly coherent patterns.

Most relevant to the theatrical professoriate is the “tightly coherent pattern” that Polan identifies as “a general suspicion in popular culture that professorial activity is a sham, a game,” in which the “professor appears as a figure of duplicity, an actor who mimics the real seriousness of everyday life [and] can shift roles, who can become anyone but without any real commitment to anything.” Writing decades later, film scholar Elizabeth Marquis dubs this “academic performance” the “academic as disembodied expert.” The public image of professors as seemingly disembodied but tightly scripted and surveilled reflects the theatrical expectations of the academic habitus targeted for analysis in the chapters that follow.

Since Polan proffered his analysis and Pierre Bourdieu published *Homo Academicus*, there has been a steady increase in the number of academic plays and films produced outside the academy, as well as an increasing demand for theatre professors to mentor non-theatre colleagues and produce interactive
performances on campus ("applied theatre") for/with cross-disciplinary colleagues, particularly in the privileged fields of STEM. Many of the new plays and films being produced about professors focus on issues salient to our field—black studies, feminist studies, the fate of the humanities, and political economy—but very few of them have received scholarly attention from theatre and performance scholars. And the fact that STEM colleagues are leveraging the power of theatre as they effectively overtake the neoliberal university has garnered little sustained attention from performance scholars despite its clear implications for arts and education policies. This theatrical turn positions performance people as both experts and amateurs, an ambivalent position that needs to be better understood.

At the same time, while popular culture often portrays professors as, in Polan’s words, “taking on a superficial role” and thus “wracked by a guilt” over this unauthentic performance, the prevalence among academics of an affective structure known as “impostor syndrome” means that this theatrical feeling is endogenous as well as exogenous. First diagnosed by psychologists Pauline Rose Clance and Suzanne Imes in 1978 using a sample of 150 high-achieving, professionally successful women, impostor syndrome or impostor phenomenon (IP) has arguably reached epidemic proportions among the professoriate, with faculty in one study characterizing IP as “the fear of not living up to an ideal image of what it means to be an academic.” Simply put, those who wrestle with impostor syndrome experience pressure to maintain a façade because they attribute their job performance to external factors such as likability and luck rather than intelligence or preparation; this inability to internalize achievements results in debilitating self-doubt and constant fears of being discovered as a fraud.

In the Journal of Higher Education and Theory, Anna Parkman argues that IP “has been well documented in the academy” and notes that “the continual creep of the corporatization of the academy” exacerbates intellectual trends that make IP a constant feature of the professoriate. According to Holly M. Hutchins, the “academic environment” mirrors the “highly competitive, stressful occupations” that Clance and Imes identified as breeding grounds for impostor syndrome, and these environmental risk factors may be “further heightened” by the contemporary academy’s occupational pressures, including scholarly isolation and individualistic competition, a “publish or perish” value system that prizes product over process despite reduced access to funding and research opportunities, and increased levels of performance scrutiny from peers and other audiences. Hutchins’ research suggests that IP is “an artefact of careers where the ‘appearance of intelligence is vital to success,’” but also that those professors whose embodiment fits less easily with Polan’s “gentlemanly tradition” wrestle with IP more than their white, male colleagues. For instance, women and other underrepresented minorities in STEM fields often face bias that questions “their professional inclusion and legitimacy.” Job security tends to mitigate IP to some degree: in one study, contingent faculty
and tenure-track professors “recorded higher median scores on the impostor scale than those in the tenured faculty group.” As Sindhumathi Revuluri noted in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, such recent studies demonstrate that IP poses a threat to all academics but

the phenomenon hits especially hard among scholars who are members of minority groups and/or are studying topics that are marginalized in academic culture. In other words, some academics don’t just feel like impostors, they are made to feel like impostors, no matter how self-assured, smart, and confident they are.31

In other words, as the result of rising experiences of impostor syndrome and related experiential dimensions of working in contemporary higher education, professors not only consume spectacles in which their profession is portrayed as theatrical; they also navigate an academic ontology that increasingly feels theatrical. The feedback loop between these spectacularized professors and professorial ontology has yet to be fully understood.

Therefore, *The Theatrical Professorate* argues that the glut of post-1990 plays and films that represent higher education and its professors, which I’m calling “academic dramas,” should be read as embodied theories not dissimilar to what Steven S. Taylor has referred to as “aesthetic theorizing.” Taylor contrasts “intellectual theorizing,” which “reduce[s] our experience to its analytical essence” and “strips away the felt meaning of our experience,” to *aesthetic theory*, which entails “thinking with our guts” and “grasping the whole in a way that is accessible, perhaps humorous and enjoyable for its own sake, and gives us a sense of connection.” 32 Recent academic dramas present staged theories that reveal a professorial habitus as drawn from the most dehumanizing aspects of theatricality. While a steady rise in the number of academic stage plays brought fictional professors to theatres across the United States and around the world, these staged professors used the human scale of live performance not only to humanize an often-vilified professoriate but also to showcase an academic institution seen as dangerously out-of-touch with the so-called real world. As “the direct embodiment of the notion of scholarship” that has come under increased public scrutiny, the theatrical professoriate becomes the punching bag for much larger sociopolitical concerns, many of them around the hegemony of neoliberal market arrangements.33 As Wendy Brown explains in *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism’s Stealth Revolution*, the prevailing opinion in Western society holds that “the more the university remakes itself through and for the market, the better off everyone—except overpaid, underworked tenured faculty—will be.” In other words, representations of “overpaid, underworked tenured faculty”—the public’s stereotypical image of professors—can tell us a great deal about today’s academy and its place in society insofar as professors seem to stand as the last obstacles to its neoliberal makeover.34
Introduction

The theatrical turn of academia’s diversity crisis

While I spend the majority of *The Theatrical Professoriate* analyzing post-1990s academic dramas on stage and screen as well as their audience reception, these exogenous representations should be considered in relation to the theatrical turn taking place on many university campuses. It may seem ironic that academics would embrace even more theatre to help mitigate a professional climate that Stephen J. Ball aptly describes as a “culture of competitive performativity,” but throughout this book I argue that the humanizing potential of live performance may, indeed, convert the poison of a theatricalized professoriate into the same phenomenon’s cure. Such irony would come as little surprise to Brown, who defines neoliberalism as “an order replete with contradiction and disavowal” that “seeks to privatize every public enterprise, yet valorizes public-private partnerships that imbue the market with ethical potential and social responsibility and the public realm with market metrics.” The neoliberal “move to the market” witnessed in contemporary higher education thus activates both sides of theatricality: not only the often spectacular professorial performances staged “just for show,” but also the theatrical turns being taken on campus as well as off that attempt to counter these same performances.

Increasingly since the turn of the 21st century, university campuses across the United States have been hiring theatre artists and commissioning theatre productions in order to mitigate the conflicts that have resulted from the ascendance of STEM (including the dearth of women and people of color in STEM fields) and from what Sara Ahmed refers to (using the language of performativity) as the “infelicity” of academic diversity. In *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life*, Ahmed sketches academia as a space of inversion in which institutional “commitments” to equity and inclusion too often become empty promises that create an absurd “gap between words and deeds.” To reflect this inversion, Ahmed inverts speech act theorist J. L. Austin’s famous concept of performative utterances, which include speech acts like “I apologize” and “I promise” that materially enact a deed in the saying of it (another famous example is the wedding vow: “I do”). For Austin, insincerity or other underlying conditions on the part of the speaker can mean that the performative utterance will fail: the speech act will be unhappy, or in Austin’s parlance, “infelicitous.” Ahmed allows that such infelicity might sometimes explain the gap, in so many academic institutions, between the diversity they claim to value and the lack of actions that support these claims. But Ahmed also writes, based on her years of experience doing “diversity work” in the trenches of universities in Britain and Australia, that she believes there is another category of speech acts that Austin didn’t imagine—non-performatives:

In my model of the non-performative, the failure of the speech act to do what it says is not a failure of intent or even circumstance, but is actually what the speech act is doing. Such speech acts are taken up as if they are
performatives (as if they have brought about the effects they name), such that the name comes to stand in for the effects. As a result, naming can be a way of not bringing something into effect.\textsuperscript{39}

Ahmed characterizes many institutional claims about academic diversity as theatrical rather than performative: for Ahmed, these spoken and written commitments are “performances in a theatrical sense” that, following Austin’s infamous dismissal of theatre, are hollow because spoken in the manner of a character on a stage, before an audience.\textsuperscript{40} The institution allows white academics and administrators to be playful\textsuperscript{41} in how they deploy these non-performative commitments to diversity, but Ahmed shows how academics of color are typecast as “the race person” because they already “embody diversity by providing an institution of whiteness with color,” and therefore any efforts on their part to create change are taken for granted and pre-scripted as lacking value for the institution. Moreover, the way in which non-white bodies are marked makes it nearly impossible to do diversity in a space where they are clearly not “at home,” insofar as they inhabit “institutions that assume certain bodies as their norm.” In these inhospitable climates, talking about racism constitutes an often threateningly different version of the campus narrative.\textsuperscript{42}

Ahmed rightly notes that to even talk about racism in many academic institutions is “heard as an accusation that threatens the organization’s reputation as led by diversity,” and so the psychic injury to a body of color becomes inverted as, instead, an injury to whiteness.\textsuperscript{43}

Many other scholars echo Ahmed’s theatrical descriptions of the representational violence inflicted on non-normative bodies in academia. Cheryl Wall writes of the 1970s “image of a college professor” as a gray-haired white man with elbow patches and how, as a 23-year-old African American woman joining the English faculty at Douglass College, she “did not look the part.”\textsuperscript{44} Rick Bonus, University of Washington professor and author of \textit{Locating Filipino Americans}, writes of “the persistence,” decades later, “of a certain kind of racial/gender/class stereotyping that places people like myself outside of a usually imagined category of affluent, White, male ‘professor.’” Likewise, Bonus relates that some family members regard the professoriate as an inappropriate place for non-whites and that many faculty of color feel they were merely “hired as decoration.”\textsuperscript{45} Such hypervisibility of non-normative professorial bodies is a problem in an institution that problematizes embodiment to such an extent that its practitioners openly refer to an academic couple as having “a two-body problem” (with the trailing spouse usually assumed to be a female academic without real value to the campus). Moreover, as Diane Freedman and Martha Holmes put it, the professor’s body is ideally “both present and irrelevant,” kept “out of speech, sight, and investigation” so that all focus can be on the intellect—and on the student “body.”\textsuperscript{46}

Seemingly harmless stereotypes of the graying, absent-minded (white, male) professor may come from highly ambivalent pop culture images of professors that range “from bookworm to monster, loner to superstar,” but they bleed into
the academy itself where the objectification of other bodies serves to justify and naturalize a status quo that the tradition-serving tendencies of academic institutions find very comforting. But no one is safe from this regime of stereotyping and othering, which has produced what John Kramer calls “a growing bitterness” in recent novels written by academics, particularly minoritized academics “who describe a sometimes unfriendly world of higher education.” Adding to this growing body of popular literature depicting what Susan Edderton and Paul Farber dub “destructive relations in the halls of academia” are professorial accounts of “academia as a greenhouse of rare types” that are often written in mean-spirited, small-minded ways. The Chronicle of Higher Education published an unfortunate example of such othering in the form of a 2005 article by Mikita Brottman titled “Nutty Professors,” in which the author armchair-diagnosed two of her former “difficult” colleagues as possessing neurological conditions on the autism spectrum akin to Asperger’s syndrome, and noted that the Viennese physician who discovered the condition in 1944 suggested that academia was the best place for Asperger’s patients to find employment. Obviously, Professor Brottman assumed she could distance herself from this characterization of other academics as having a “character disorder,” but such representational violence cannot be contained so easily, and this pattern of stereotyping and othering has reached epidemic proportions in academia.

Of course, just as the university circumscribes its academic employees, the state disinvestment in higher education circumscribes academic institutions, and this budget crisis has been accompanied by a simultaneous withdrawal of state support for diversifying the university. It’s a classic Catch-22: just as the economic crisis in higher education “crank[s] up the volume on our most self-destructive cultural tendencies,” suddenly remedying toxic climates and campus inequities is “repositioned as what the nation cannot afford to have.” Ahmed has noticed how in Britain the state has repositioned the university’s commitment to equality as just another bureaucratic procedure that should be trimmed in order to focus on higher education’s core mission of providing excellent instruction. In the U.S. context, the Manhattan Institute’s Heather Mac Donald made a similar claim in her critique of the University of California’s spending on a “diversity apparatus” (administrators focused on improving diversity, equity, and inclusion on campus) despite its recent budget crisis, arguing that diversity administrators’ salaries should instead be spent on more instructional staff. In addition to being framed as “what the nation cannot afford to have,” institutionalized diversity efforts on campus and off are generally measured in an oversimplified fashion that focuses only on compositional diversity—the “showcase model of diversity management” that Pushkala Prasad identified with executive seminars and workplace training modules that transform race and gender into “trendy consumer items” that appear as “little more than a fad.” In other words, the pervasiveness of non-performative diversity showcasing and the persistent questioning of meaningful change efforts may be making academia’s equity and access issues worse.
The STEM takeover and academia’s makeover

In the face of such non-performative commitments to diversity, many universities ironically view interactive theatre and other professional performances as more overt deployments of theatricality that might produce institutional change toward greater demographic accountability, in STEM fields particularly, but often in other academic fields as well. Sometimes, these overt deployments of theatricality are pursued in the interests of “extending basic research findings into a creative theatrical production” that disseminates and popularizes scholarly interventions for the non-academic public, as in the case of scholar Wayne Beach’s educational play *When Cancer Calls*…, which stages transcribed phone calls within a family dealing with terminal cancer as a means of better understanding cancer journeys as a collective experience “rather than individual cancer patients in isolation.” Beach and his colleagues point out that “change agents increasingly use theatre as an educational tool for a wide range of topics,” and, in particular, the “use of theatre in health care settings is an emerging phenomenon that weds art with science to reshape the way we think about medicine and the healing potential of the arts.”

While such theatricalizations of scholarly interventions merit deeper analysis, *The Theatrical Professoriate* is more interested in theatrical productions that act as interventions into scholarly structures themselves, which sometimes take the form of professional performances in purpose-built theatres on campus and off, but increasingly also materialize in an Augusto Boal-inspired (Forum Theatre-esque) educational genre often seen on university campuses called “interactive theatre.”

Simply put, interactive theatre entails brief sketches of academic life followed by different types of audience interaction including “hot-seating” (where the actors stay in character and answer questions from the audience about their motivations and behavior in the sketch) and improvised replays of moments from the scene using spectator suggestions. Interactive theatre workshops are generally performed as professional development for faculty, staff, and students, so much so that two major research universities—the University of Michigan and Cornell University—have institutionalized the practice in the form of their own in-house interactive theatre troupes. The Cornell Interactive Theatre Ensemble, or CITE, was founded in 1992, and Michigan’s Center for Research on Learning and Teaching’s CRLT Players (CRLT connotes the Center for Research on Learning and Teaching) was founded in 2000. Interviews with the artistic directors of both CITE and CRLT Players are analyzed in the Conclusion of this book, and both companies report that their ability to accept performance invitations from off-campus clients has been reduced by the increased demand for performance interventions on their own campuses. Indeed, three CRLT staff members (including the CRLT Players’ former artistic director) wrote in a 2006 *Change* magazine article that academia may be making up for lost time by finally embracing interactive theatre as a tool for institutional change, writing that

Most people think of theatre as a form of entertainment—a diversion from our daily lives that inspires, amuses, or provokes us and that engages our
creative imagination. But theatre has long served as a powerful educational tool as well. At colleges and universities, theatre is often used to facilitate student affairs training: sketches on topics like date rape and substance abuse are common now at orientation sessions. The marvel is that we faculty and consultants engaged in professional development have come so late to the idea of theatre as an effective teaching tool.

These interactive theatre troupes housed in academic institutions recognize that university employees, particularly senior faculty and administrators otherwise resistant to such interventions, are more likely to be open to theatrically embodied training events because

the playful nature of a theatrical experience can draw them to an event on a topic they would not otherwise address in a public setting. That theatre is typically regarded as entertainment, not education, makes attendance more acceptable—it does not indicate that one is facing a problem or needs assistance.

This Trojan-horse quality of interactive theatre is particularly important because many of these theatrical interventions relate to diversity issues that often provoke suspicion, defensiveness, and apathy from audiences, particularly in STEM fields “where the subject matter appears ‘objective’ and discussions of identity (gender, race, and disability) or power dynamics can seem irrelevant to faculty and graduate students.” As STEM disciplines become more and more powerful in the academy, this suspicion becomes even more pronounced, resulting in more commissions for interactive theatre companies such as the CRLT Players.

However, the blindspots produced by the illusion of STEM objectivity are far from the only collateral damage facing contemporary higher education in the thrall of non-humanistic disciplines and their methodologies. When critics decry the neoliberal occupation of the academy, they are often referencing a forced privatization and evermore competitive research landscape that is inseparable from the gradual displacement of the humanities’ position in higher education by increasingly powerful STEM disciplines. This shift from the humanities to STEM arguably began during the Cold War as the former Allies and Axis nations from World War II stockpiled scientific and technological discoveries by retrofitting academic infrastructure. In the article “The STEM Crisis Is a Myth,” Robert Charette, a contributing editor to the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE) magazine Spectrum, cites demographer Michael Teitelbaum’s research on “alarm, boom, and bust” cycles including the cycle of STEM mania that Teitelbaum dates back to World War II. Teitelbaum writes that such cycles start when someone “sounds the alarm” that a nation is falling behind in producing engineers, mathematicians, and scientists, thus endangering national security as well as economic progress. An early instance of this rhetoric occurred in the 1950s, when “Americans worried that the Soviet Union
was producing 95,000 scientists a year while the United States was producing only about 57,000.” Charette goes on to show how Japanese competition revived this rhetoric in the 1980s, followed by economic competition with China and India in the early 21st century. Despite the cyclical and easily disproved nature of this longstanding rhetoric, fears of a STEM production shortage drive the decisions that dramatically reshape the landscape of contemporary higher education.

Moreover, as state legislatures have withdrawn financial support from public universities and colleges, non-humanistic fields have grown in privilege because they are seen (somewhat erroneously) as subsidizing the academic enterprise through the federal grants and other extramural funding that STEM research attracts. In an article posted under the headline “STEM Funding Dwarfs Humanities, But Only One Is in Crisis,” Nora Caplan-Bricker of The New Republic argues that recent U.S. administrations have encouraged the creation of an oversupply of STEM graduates in order to suppress the wages of U.S. companies’ foreign competitors, which amounts to an economic “cold war” that intellectually siphons students away from the humanities and other non-STEM areas of the university. Caplan-Bricker cites the American Academy of Arts & Sciences’ 2013 report “The Heart of the Matter,” which shows that the U.S. federal “government pays for well over 50 percent of the scientific research done in universities, and close to 75 percent in some disciplines. Meanwhile, the humanities are fronting all but 20 percent of their own costs.” From that perspective, humanistic disciplines are more than carrying their own weight in the academy, yet as long as governments are content to spend, in the U.S. case, upwards of “$3 billion each year on 209 STEM-related initiatives overseen by 13 federal agencies” (not to mention the billions of dollars that major corporations contribute to STEM education programs), academic institutions seem likewise content to prioritize STEM disciplines over the humanities because such taxpayer subsidies enable universities and colleges “to expand their [student] enrollments.” Such prioritization creates a complex shell game that ends up recouping the budget cuts inflicted by state governments through increased tuition dollars squeezed from parents and their students desperate to land ostensibly high-paying and plentiful STEM jobs after graduation. For all these reasons, higher education scholar Steven Brint recently proclaimed that while “philosophiae ratio once in spirit reigned, numerorum ratio now in practice counts. Engineering and the life sciences have replaced philosophy as anchors of academic life.” At the dawn of this century, two other higher education scholars, Sheila Slaughter and Gary Rhoades, predicted this shift in their seminal article “The Neo-Liberal University,” writing of public universities in particular that neoliberalism’s “moving to the market has meant at the margins turning away from the liberal arts toward professional and vocational curricula.”

The seemingly endless growth of STEM’s academic hegemony has coincided with (and likely resulted in) concerns that the human capacity for empathy—arguably a hallmark of humanity itself—has deteriorated in measurable ways.
As mentioned earlier, the advent of digital technology has contributed to a decline in the ability of young people (so-called “digital natives”) to experience empathic concern and understand others’ perspectives, both key indicators of dispositional empathy.\textsuperscript{64} The\textit{ Theatrical Professoriate} mines the structural changes in higher education that have also contributed to this alarming decline in empathy, and the contribution of STEM mania to this decline is at least tacitly acknowledged in many STEM disciplines’ embrace of theatrical interventions intended to teach empathic concern and perspective-taking to their students and faculty. Sometimes, this theatrical turn merely reinforces the neoliberal condition of the academy, such as commissioning acting training for scientists so they can better communicate their research to prospective industry collaborators. For instance, in 2009 actor Alan Alda (most famous for playing Hawkeye Pierce on the long-running 1970s television show \textit{M*A*S*H}) established the “Alan Alda Center for Communicating Science” at Stonybrook University in order to help STEM professionals communicate with the lay public. In an NPR interview with Alda, interviewer Lulu Garcia-Navarro proclaims that, through the center, “Alda explains why empathy is crucial to successful science conversations.”\textsuperscript{65} But other coverage of the Alda Center suggests that, for these theatrical interventions, communicating with the public is less important than securing funding; for instance, the coverage of an Alda Center workshop at Boston University quotes Gloria Waters, BU vice president and associate provost for research, explaining the value of acting training in the academy as follows: “It’s really important for scientists to be able to communicate with laypeople, especially given the current funding climate. It’s incumbent upon us to explain why our work is important.”\textsuperscript{66}

But many other theatrical interventions in academic STEM appear to resemble institutional soul-searching more than mere public relations (PR), particularly the increasing use of professional actors for training purposes in medical schools. \textit{The Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA)} defines “SPs” (also known as “simulated patients”) as “trained actors who portray patients during an interview and physical examination with a medical student or doctor in training […] to depict realistic patient interactions and presentations of disease.”\textsuperscript{67} Writing in \textit{Canadian Theatre Review}, Sebastian Samur traces the use of medical simulation with actors to University of Southern California professor Howard Barrows’ introduction of professional actors to medical training in the 1963. “Though controversial at first due to cost and subjectivity concerns,” Samur explains, “their use has since become widely accepted.” Samur claims that SPs introduce a “human factor” to academic medicine that has only increased in popularity and “has yet to be replaced by artificial simulators”; in fact, he points out that academia seems to be doubling down on the use of actors insofar as “some schools, such as Penn State’s College of Medicine, have gone so far as to incorporate ‘invisible’ SPs—SPs that a medical student believes to be an actual patient.”\textsuperscript{68} Likewise, theatre professors George Pate and Libby Ricardo argue that the rise of simulated patients, which they differentiate from SPs by the former’s use of unscripted improvisation, “can at least in part be
attributed to recent research suggesting that clinical skills are not ancillary to medical care but in fact affect healing and recovery in measurable ways.” Pate and Ricardo therefore claim that simulated patients “provide practice in performing empathy.”

Scholarly articles in medical journals, such as the international journal Medical Teacher's 2018 essay “Twelve Tips for Teaching Empathy Using Simulated Patients,” admit that “empathy levels among medical students show a trend to fall between the early and senior years of undergraduate training”—and that SPs’ signature phrase “being human” represents “a crucial component of connection with the patient” that is otherwise missing from contemporary medical education. Margaret Edson’s play Wit (discussed in Chapter 2) has become a frequent tool in medical education, particularly the 2001 film adaptation starring Emma Thompson. For instance, Bioethics professor M. Sara Rosenthal calls Wit a crucial part of the “hidden curriculum” (highlighting bedside manner and other so-called “soft skills”) in medical education as well as “the quintessential teaching film in American medical schools regarding end of life, code status discussions, nursing ethics, moral distress and death and dying.”

Professorial performance in the neoliberal academy

Academics find themselves not only compelled to work with actors but even to act themselves, as demonstrated in the widespread appearance of professors appearing onstage for TED talks, an important part of what Andrew Wernick calls the “promotional culture” that in recent decades has led universities around the world to command that its actors (i.e. faculty) produce “ambiguous performances” that closely resemble the commercial imperatives of popular cultural production. As literary scholar Julia Ludewig defines them, TED talks are “a new media success story”: “characteristically short talks (which often deal with issues of technology, entertainment, and design, or TED for short) [that] have attracted much attention in the news, and increasingly, in academe.” TED conferences started in 1984 and have since spawned independent TEDx conferences that take place around the world and have digital afterlives reaching millions of viewers (Ludewig notes that monthly TED views hover around one billion). As Ludewig shows, today’s TED talk has expanded far beyond the fields represented in its acronym to include “presentations about themes such as architecture, mental health, history, and popular culture.”

With the tagline “Ideas Worth Spreading,” the TED website (ted.com) launched in 2006, creating two distinct but overlapping audiences for the academic and non-academic speakers alike: the spectators present at TED conferences to hear the live speaker, and the virtual spectators who watch the TED talks posted on the website and other video sharing sites. Despite the fact that TED talks are mainly used for product launches and other business purposes (only a quarter of presenters are professors or academic experts), Ludewig argues that the genre has “an educational undertone” or “academic impression”
bolstered by scholarly citations (the widely circulated reference to “recent studies”) and frequent use of higher education campuses to provide performance venues. For instance, Physics professor Brian Keating, whose memoir *Losing the Nobel Prize* was adapted for a staged reading discussed in Chapter 3, performed a 2015 TEDx talk titled “Going to the Ends of the Earth to Discover the Beginning of Time” that has more than 80,000 views on YouTube. At the beginning of his 15-minute performance, Keating makes the connection between academic TED talks and the medium’s primary use for unveiling commercial products when he conjures the spirit of the late Apple CEO Steve Jobs himself. Like Jobs unveiling the newest iPhone as a theatrical prop punctuating his sales pitch, Keating introduces the important cosmic discoveries of Galileo, by pulling from his pocket a replica of Galileo’s small telescope, remarking that this famously persecuted scientist made his discoveries “with an amazing scientific instrument, a revolutionary product that, as Steve Jobs says, just fits in your pocket.” This blurring of the boundaries between industry and academia and between lecturing and theatrical performance characterize the TED genre, which has reset the expectations for professorial performance in the classroom as well.

Such expectations constitute part of the pressure around today’s theatrical professoriate, but these same expectations also demarcate the pinnacle of professorial performance in the neoliberal academy insofar as only the most successful academics receive invitations to deliver TED-style talks. Some of this was anticipated by Derrida’s characterization of the academy as “une puissante de lecture,” which performance studies scholar Jon McKenzie leverages to declare that “the lecture has been the dominant performance of modern pedagogics” and that “lectures are not only a popular and powerful pedagogic performance, they stand as a crucial educational norm”—this despite the academic consensus in the field of Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SOTL) that lectures are remarkably ineffective modes of teaching, particularly for today’s generation of students who expect learning to be an interactive experience rather than a unidirectional delivery of knowledge (the so-called “sage on the stage”). In other words, the theatrical turn on today’s higher education campuses is both part of the problem and part of the solution, a *pharmakon* entirely appropriate to the two-faced quality of neoliberalism replete, as Brown puts it, “with contradiction and disavowal.” Brown points out that “[m]any professions today—from law to engineering to medicine—require analytical capabilities, communication skills, multilingualism, artistic creativity, inventiveness, even close reading abilities.” But the motivation behind acquiring these so-called “soft skills” is to double-down on neoliberal values:

[such] knowledge is not sought for purposes apart from capital enhancement, whether that capital is human, corporate, or financial. It is not sought for developing the capacities of citizens, sustaining culture, knowing the world, or envisioning and crafting different ways of life in common. Rather, it is sought for ‘positive ROI’—return on investment.
McKenzie echoes these concerns when he notes that performance management theorists "champion theater's potential for humanizing organizations." Nonetheless, I maintain that theatre is a highly effective Trojan horse because, in addition to seeming like an entertaining diversion that promises "positive ROI," the theatrical turn in academia presents an epistemological model that provides welcome relief from the order that dominates most academic institutions. As Dwight Conquergood argued,

The dominant way of knowing in the Academy is that of empirical observation and critical analysis from a distance perspective [...] a view from above the object of inquiry: knowledge that is anchored in paradigm and secured in print. This propositional knowledge is shadowed by another way of knowing that is grounded in active, intimate, hands-on participation and personal connection [...] This is knowledge that is anchored in practice and circulated within a performance community, but it is ephemeral.

Conquergood connects this alternative, performance-based way of knowing to what Donna Haraway calls the “view from a body,” emphasizing the centrality of embodiment in the here-and-now, rather than “textual fundamentalism” destined for the archive. Moreover, theatre and performance foreground the interplay of necessarily situated and subjective bodies, presenting a multiplicity of perspectives in dialogue that can seem antithetical to the hallowed objectivity of Enlightenment modernity, which privileges science and reason. But as Kandice Chuh and Karen Shimakawa point out, “[t]he body is crucial for thinking about discourse and epistemology, for it locates the stakes involved in the production of knowledge.” To take but one example, scholars such as Lisa Lowe and Robert Teranishi have shown that the demographic category of “Asian” is an artificial and arbitrary marker that has material stakes for the remarkably diverse group of ethnicities that it homogenizes. Chuh and Shimakawa likewise show that “Asia” is “an epistemological object of area studies [that] emerges out of American modernity’s characteristic imperialist ideology and concomitant belief in the possibility of objective knowledge.” In other words, it has very little to do with the embodied experience of “Asian” peoples. Moreover, as Soyini Madison has argued, this chimerical pursuit of objective knowledge historically positions “some human beings by nature [as] capable of reason and other human beings by nature [as] not,” with scientific objectivity and rationality seeming to offer “the justification for designating certain human beings as more worthy and more valuable than other human beings.” By foregrounding human embodiment and creating a space to question scientific objectivity and the demographic disparities that become offerings at the altar of rationality, the theatrical turn uses embodied performance—on campus and off—to offer contemporary higher education another way of knowing that may prove necessary, if not to the academy’s survival then at least to the academy’s humanity.
While this Introduction has sketched the landscape of the theatrical turn on campus—a landscape to which I will return in the Conclusion, where my own on-campus theatrical interventions will be discussed—the many academic dramas produced on stages and screens, off-campus in the so-called real world, have received little to no scholarly attention to date. Most scholars who have examined popular representations of higher education overlook theatrical representations entirely, focusing instead on how film, television, and novels have perpetuated a negative image of academia that threatens the academy’s PR. Even when the authors of these cultural texts are academics (or former academics), scholars treat these critical depictions as PR problems that make a spectacle of the academy, rather than as earnest institutional diagnoses. For instance, in his latest edition of *The American College Novel*, John Kramer attributes the “growing bitterness” he finds in academic fiction to “the growing number of novels written by openly gay and lesbian writers, and by members of racial, ethnic, and religious minorities, who describe a sometimes unfriendly world of higher education through characters much like themselves.” Kramer concludes, rather nostalgically, that “[p]rior to the 1980s, these voices were largely absent from the college-novel genre.”  

Likewise, even as the editors of *Imagining the Academy* note that, as of late, popular representations of higher education have become increasingly unflattering, they refuse to dwell on what might have changed in academia and instead focus on external factors. They seem almost to sulk: “one might hope,” they write,  

for the advent of more popular cultural artifacts or forms that can represent with greater complexity, and perhaps a measure of sympathy, the institution that we believe still stands as one of the pillars of our democratic aspirations as a nation.

Pauline Reynolds seems more open to the critiques she finds in “higher education popular culture,” but still sees critical representations of the academy as a “(mis)education” of the public and seems almost to blame the rise of these “darker narratives” on the “increase in the diversification of higher education.” Rather than bemoaning the negativity or critical edge of contemporary representations of higher education, I attend to recent academic dramas as theatrical theories that both visualize the crises facing today’s academy and imagine ways to intervene and address them.

Chapter 1, “#OscarsSoWhite and Historically White Universities,” examines the theatrical professoriate’s spectacle-archive through the case study of the 2015 Academy Awards, which marked the advent of the #OscarsSoWhite movement by awarding all four acting Oscars to white performers playing professors: J.K. Simmons won Best Supporting Actor for his portrayal of a jazz
instructor in *Whiplash*, Patricia Arquette won Best Supporting Actress for her portrayal of a community college professor in *Boyhood*, Julianne Moore won Best Actress for her portrayal of a Columbia University linguistics scholar in *Still Alice*, and Eddie Redmayne won Best Actor for his portrayal of Cambridge University physicist Stephen Hawking in *The Theory of Everything*. This telling coincidence pointed to the hegemonic whiteness of both Hollywood’s and academia’s myths of meritocracy, as well as a public fascination with portrayals of professors on screen that, I argue, stems from a “golden age of higher education” that is riven by contradictions.87 Although these critically acclaimed “cinematic professors”88 used the human scale of live performance to humanize an often-vilified professoriate, they also showcased an academic institution seen as damaged and dangerously out-of-touch. I demonstrate the ambivalence of this public fascination with professors by analyzing how both *Still Alice* and *The Theory of Everything* adapt source material by academic exiles (Lisa Genova’s 2007 novel and Jane Wilde Hawking 2007 memoir) to portray professors’ mind-body conflicts as well as the structural constraints academia places upon professorial embodiment. *Still Alice* spectacularizes the expulsion of its protagonist’s body when her mind is compromised by Alzheimer’s disease, and *The Theory of Everything* spectacularizes the haven that academia provides for its protagonist’s disembodied mind. By comparing the film adaptations with their source texts, I demonstrate the spectacularization made possible by the cinematic medium and suggest how it shifts the public’s perception of blame from the structural issues undergirding the neoliberal academy to the personalities portrayed by Oscar-winning actors.

The remainder of *The Theatrical Professoriate* predominantly focuses on live performance in order to read plays about academia (academic drama for the stage) as theoretical texts that attempt to communicate to their audiences something urgent and insightful about the state of higher education. Reading theatre as theory points to an exceptional quality of the theatrical medium: whereas written and recorded media excel at presenting information and data, live performance embodies the experience of this information and data, modeling for an audience the relationships and dynamics that undergird them.89 Chapter 2, “Academic Drama on Stage and Screen,” presents a constellation of four modern classics that sketch the contours of this theatrical theory of academia: David Mamet’s *Oleanna* (1992), Margaret Edson’s *Wit* (1994), David Auburn’s *Proof* (2000), and Rebecca Gilman’s *Spinning into Butter* (1999).90 These four American plays were selected because (1) they prominently feature professors and academic administrators among their lead characters; (2) they have gained national and even international prominence in measurable ways, either through awards or other forms of notoriety; and (3) the playwrights created their respective theatrical worlds from deep knowledge of the academy that elevates their dramas to theoretical levels. Chapter 2 thus connects previous analyses of fictional professors to the academics embodied in the underexamined genre of academic drama for the stage. The chapter also argues that the unsettled
debates about live versus mediated performances can find fertile ground in the adaptations of the professor’s body from stage plays to screenplays. This chapter thus establishes the subgenre of live “academic drama” as an expansion but also provides a comparative analysis of the extant categories of academic novels, films, and television. Each of these plays has been adapted into mainstream motion pictures by Hollywood production companies: Mame’s *Oleanna* was adapted by Channel Four Films/Samuel Goldwyn in 1994, Edson’s *Wit* was adapted by Avenue Pictures/HBO Films in 2001, Auburn’s *Proof* was adapted by Miramax Films in 2005, and Gilman’s *Spinning into Butter* was adapted by Screen Media Films in 2008. *Oleanna* addresses the “political correctness” and sexual harassment crises interpreted as outgrowths of a diversifying academy. *Wit* shows a childless female academic questioning her devotion to English literature as she battles terminal ovarian cancer at the University Hospital, as well as the apparent inhumanity of the scientists and clinicians overseeing her treatment. *Proof* examines the academic ex-communication of a brilliant but mentally unstable male mathematician, whose self-taught daughter bests his brilliance while rejecting the academy’s unwillingness to recognize the humanity of its scholars. And *Spinning into Butter* (the least acclaimed of the bunch) takes a flawed but fascinating look at the spectacularization that a historically white university enacts upon students of color, and the drama that one of them stages to teach his professors and administrators a lesson.

By comparing each academic drama in its theatrical and cinematic versions, I am able to isolate how the medium effects the message, which allows me to argue that academic dramas onstage and onscreen do very different work. Namely, when staged, academic dramas denaturalize the “theatrical professoriate”—a habitus which demands that its human actors replicate Hollywood’s star system and pursue selfish individualism to succeed—and also denaturalize the suspension of disbelief that sustains academia’s myth of meritocracy, by instead highlighting the symbolic violence that minoritized subjects experience in higher education institutions. When presented onscreen, however, filmed academic dramas mirror the longstanding “star system” critiqued through the #OscarsSoWhite movement, a system emulated by the academy’s equally problematic academic star system. The films analyzed in Chapter 2 spectacularize the diseased academic body as a synecdochal surrogate for academia itself, thus presenting a compelling argument for the massive withdrawal of public support from higher education that Americans have recently witnessed. However, the same dramatic texts onstage allow performed professors to be seen on a human scale rather than as institutional stand-ins, and thus hold the door open for theatre as social change. Likewise, the slick production values of the Hollywood screen project academic dramas as pacifying spectacles that further spectacularize the theatrical professoriate rather than demystifying it, as many academic plays do on stage. As a result, adapting academic dramas such as *Proof* and *Wit* for the screen seems to short-circuit theatre’s potential for social change in the institutional context of higher education, and in its public reception.
Chapter 3, “Behind the Scenes of Academia’s Diversity Charades,” segues from the media comparison of Chapter 2 by opening with the satirical film-turned-television series *Dear White People*, created by Justin Simien, which was in part inspired by a racial crisis at my institutional home (the University of California, San Diego’s 2010 blackface fraternity party dubbed the “Compton Cookout”). In the wake of this racial emergency, in which an off-campus fraternity party invited participants to don blackface in order to pose as imagined residents of the infamously gang-ridden Los Angeles neighborhood of Compton, the institution marshalled a typical response that higher education scholars T. Elon Dancy II, Kirsten T. Edwards, and James Earl Davis characterize as an extension of anti-Blackness. Like many other campus responses to such racist incidents, UC San Diego disavowed the Compton Cookout as what Dancy, Edwards, and Davis call “incidental or anomalous,” rather than acknowledging “the history of trauma experienced by Black bodies on White campuses”—a history that leads the authors to dub American higher education a “historically white” institution (in pointed opposition to the HBCUs established prior to the passage of the Higher Education Act of 1965).91

Distributed by Lionsgate/Roadside Attractions as a feature-length film in 2014 and by Netflix as a television series since 2017, *Dear White People*’s mediated representations of mostly African American student experience on an elite American college campus further spectacularize the racial dysfunction in U.S. higher education rather than opening their audiences to the institutional change required to redress it. I compare these mediated representations to the contemporaneous *I, Too, Am Harvard*, a 2014 stage play based on interviews with Ivy League students of color that was adapted into a student-led photo campaign which went viral. The mass media’s subsequent erasure of the theatrical origins of what became a performative photo campaign is symptomatic of our culture’s tendency to overlook the resistant potential of live performance. I contrast this tendency by analyzing three case studies of recent stage plays by women of color that present diverse academic experiences and productively engage their live audiences in an affective structure conducive with social change: Eleanor Burgess’s *The Niceties* (2017), Lydia Diamond’s *Smart People* (2016), and Rachel Lynett’s *Well-Intentioned White People* (2018).

*The Niceties* takes place on an unnamed Ivy League campus, obliquely reimagining *Oleanna* as a duet of racial discomfort between a white female Ivy League professor and her black female undergraduate student; despite its brutal depiction of white fragility, Burgess’s play has been produced around the country and for mostly white audiences to great acclaim. In a groundbreaking 2011 article that has since been expanded to a bestselling 2018 book, education scholar Robin DiAngelo writes that North American society comprises an “insulated environment of racial protection [that] builds white expectations for racial comfort while at the same time lowering the ability to tolerate racial stress,” leading to what she refers to as “White Fragility.” DiAngelo succinctly defines white fragility as “a state in which even a minimum amount of racial
stress becomes intolerable, triggering a range of defensive moves.”92 The Niceties presents the theatricalized theory that the white professor’s “defensive moves” toward her black student’s critique of institutionalized racism stem not only from the professor’s white privilege, but also, even more saliently, from the structural demands made on her by the gatekeeping mandate of her “scholarly community” and by academia’s myth of meritocracy.

The McCarter Theatre originally commissioned playwright and professor Lydia Diamond’s play Smart People, which went on to be produced at regional theatres across the United States as well as off-Broadway (with an all-star cast including Mahershala Ali as a black surgical resident, Joshua Jackson as a white neurobiology professor, and Anne Son as a Japanese-Chinese-American psychology professor). Diamond’s play takes place at and around Harvard, where its white neurobiologist’s tenure case is in jeopardy because he refuses to capitulate to the academic administrations’ racial discomfort about his research, which sets out to prove the biological basis for whites’ racism against African Americans. His best friend, played off-Broadway by Ali, is the target of ceaseless microaggressions as he navigates Harvard Medical School’s systemic racism in order to become a surgeon.

An up-and-coming playwright, Rachel Lynett’s Well-Intentioned White People had its August 2018 world premiere in the Berkshires region of Massachusetts at Barrington Stage Company. The play’s depiction of the hate crimes directed against an African American professor of literature at a predominantly white college—who must respond by absurdly ensuring the racial comfort of her white female dean—was partly inspired by Lynett’s own experience working in an academic dean’s office during graduate school. Throughout Chapter 3, I argue not only for the social-change affect that is transmitted to audiences through these three plays (one that I produced as a staged reading for an audience of academics, one that I discussed with the playwright as she revised it for its world premiere, and one that I participated in as an audience member), but also for each academic drama as a theoretical meditation on the racial crisis facing academia writ large, as the professoriate’s regressive lack of diversity and the slow but steady diversification of its student body collides with the rapidly changing racial demographics beyond the ivory tower. These plays suggest that this racial crisis is exacerbated rather than ameliorated by the diversity charades produced by higher education administrators.

Chapter 4, “Framing Science for the Death of the Humanities,” has a structure that mirrors Chapter 3, but instead focuses on the decline of the arts and humanities as disciplines and values in the academia. The individualistic competition, disembodied knowledge, and clinical distance championed by increasingly powerful STEM disciplines have not only coincided with budget cuts in arts and humanities disciplines, but have also resulted in an infiltration of these STEM-associated values into every corner of the academy as well as into the expectations placed on the theatrical professoriate. Counter to STEM rationalism is the disruptive potential of the amateur, which has inspired
several recent books and articles in Theatre and Performance Studies. Taking the stance that interdisciplinary work that positions academic collaborators as always-already amateur is by definition a radical intervention in the values of the theatrical professoriate, I also acknowledge that the instrumentalization of theatre implicit in academia’s “theatrical turn” might be complicit in the corporatization of today’s university (as Jen Harvie has argued in her 2013 book *Fair Play: Art, Performance, and Neoliberalism*). Likewise, I argue that the value placed on teaching empathy through these interventions might be complicit in what performance studies scholar Patrick Anderson has called “neoliberalism’s economy of affect.” Within this web of amateur entanglements, I analyze three case studies of plays that dramatize the STEM takeover of higher education: David Abramson’s *Purely Academic* (2013), Will Cooper’s *Margin of Error* (2017), and Todd Salovey’s adaptation of Brian Keating’s memoir *Losing the Nobel Prize* (2018).

Australian computer scientist (and amateur playwright) David Abramson’s *Purely Academic*, which premiered at Oxford University, represents the evolution of a hapless computer science graduate student into an academic predator guilty of plagiarism, bullying, and sexual harassment. The twist comes when the audience realizes that the academic predator’s lack of humanity results from his discipline’s reward system, not necessarily some inherent character defect on the part of the academic himself. In 2018, I produced a staged reading of *Purely Academic* for two audiences of academics, and I analyze audience response data from the public readings in the chapter.

American playwright (and amateur scientist) Will Cooper’s *Margin of Error* was the premiere production of a new San Diego-based theatre company, the Roustabouts, and centers on a renowned but heartless University of Chicago physicist whose time basking in the spotlight of an imminent Nobel Prize is cut short when his lack of research integrity and his sexual harassment of a female graduate student are revealed. In 2018, I also produced a staged reading of *Margin of Error* with the original Roustabouts cast for an audience of academics, and those response data are also analyzed in this chapter.

Finally, real-life physics professor Brian Keating’s memoir of his own brush with the elusive Nobel Prize—mournfully titled *Losing the Nobel Prize*—was adapted by director and professor Todd Salovey (whose brother, Peter Salovey, is the President of Yale University) for its June 2018 premiere as part of the San Diego Jewish Arts Festival. While critiques of Keating’s memoir have noted the unacknowledged but toxic masculinity driving Physics as a discipline to emphasize winning its highest prize at any cost, the stage adaptation of *Losing the Nobel Prize* theatricalizes Keating’s contention that academic institutions profit from Nobel-winning professors in a manner very similar to how Hollywood production companies make money off the backs of Oscar-winning actors. But both interpretations of what’s wrong with coveting the Nobel emphasize the dehumanization of scholars that results. Having come full circle to my initial comparison between #OscarsSoWhite and academia as a historically white
institution in need of reform, I conclude Chapter 4 by noting the irony that STEM has become theatre’s newest patron, even as academic STEM’s takeover of the arts and humanities nears its completion. I segue to the conclusion by suggesting that this patronage may enable theatre to act as a Trojan horse in defying the death of the humanities.

Finally, in the Conclusion, “Diagnosing Academia’s Theatrical Turn,” I summarize the ambivalent spotlight the academy enjoys through the recent theatrical turn on American university campuses. I start by exploring the theatrical experiment of Karen Zacarias’s *Just Like Us* (2013). Latinx playwright Karen Zacarias adapted *Just Like Us* from white journalist Helen Thorpe’s autobiographical account of her time as a journalist and first lady of Denver (her husband was mayor), as she engages in long-term fieldwork studying the lives of four Mexican American college students, two of whom are undocumented. Zacarias’s stage adaptation problematizes the “white savior” implications of Thorpe’s memoir, and has also been an important engine for protesting President Trump’s campaign to end the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program (DACA) protecting “Dreamers” (undocumented immigrants brought to the United States as children, many of whom are now college-age). When Trump’s plans to end DACA were announced in 2017, Zacarias announced that she would give free rights to anyone who wanted to produce *Just Like Us* in order to raise DACA awareness or raise funds to help undocumented immigrants losing their DACA protection. Since then, the play has been produced all across the United States, on and off college campuses.

I compare the political function of Zacarias’s donated production script with the impulse to use interactive theatre within academic spaces to spark discussion of the crises facing higher education as well as to hold academics accountable for producing change. I argue that the rise of interactive theatre companies at institutions such as the Cornell University, the University of Michigan, and the University of California offers a path toward institutional change, and share insights and advice from practitioners of this form including my own takeaways from two years of performing this type of work for the ten campuses in the University of California system. I conclude that the theatrical turn in academia is best understood as a philosophical pharmakon—both poison and cure—requiring an intricate negotiation through the interdisciplinary hierarchies of today’s academy in order to produce important stage interactions that might help us imagine solutions to the demands of the theatrical professoriate, and ways to redress the racial and disciplinary inequities that undergird it.

**Notes**


4 This is by no means a US-only phenomenon. Scholars in the UK, Australia, and Canada have addressed similar themes; for instance, British education scholar Stephen J. Ball has diagnosed some of these trends as a "culture of competitive performativity." Stephen Ball, "The Teacher's Soul and the Terror of Performativity," *The Journal of Education Policy* 18.2 (2003), 219.


8 Peter Wood quoted in Karin Fischer, “For a Dissatisfied Public, Colleges’ Internal Affairs Become Fair Game,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education* 22 February 2019, B6. As Fischer points out,

> At a time when there is no surer way to guarantee economic security than to earn a college degree, President Trump ran for office appealing to the resentments of the left behind. At one point, he announced his love for the ‘poorly educated,’ and he won two out of three white voters without a college degree.

Indeed, according to Fischer, three quarters of Republicans disapprove of the direction in which they perceive American higher education heading—and, perhaps more surprisingly, half of Democrats feel the same.


10 T. Elon Dancy, Kirsten T. Edwards, and James Earl Davis, “Historically White Universities and Plantation Politics: Anti-Blackness and Higher Education in the Black Lives Matter Era,” *Urban Education* 53.2 (February 2018), 176–195. The *Chronicle of Higher Education* notes that this support for higher education is a “record high […] up from 54 percent in 2016. For the first time, a majority of white respondents (57 percent) supported affirmative action.” However, this same Gallup poll administered in 2016 found that 65% of respondents disapproved of the U.S. Supreme Court’s *Fisher v. University of Texas* decision, which upheld universities’ right to consider race and ethnicity in college admissions. A 2019 Pew Research Center survey revealed similarly mixed attitudes: nearly 75% of Americans in that study “believe colleges should not consider applicants’ race or ethnicity when considering them for admission.” In other words, Americans want a diverse student body on college campuses, but cling to the belief that metrics of success such as standardized test scores are unaffected by race and other socioeconomic factors—an attitude traditionally described as “the myth of meritocracy.” Eric Hoover, “What Do Americans Think About Affirmative Action? It Depends on How You Ask,” *Chronicle of Higher Education* 27 February 2019.


12 TED stands for “technology, entertainment, and design”; TED conferences began in 1984.


Ibid., 34–35. Polan traces these representational patterns as far back as the early 20th century.

Ibid., 40.


Polan, “Professors,” 41. For a qualitative study showing the majority of faculty experiencing feelings of inadequacy linked to academic climate see D. Knights and C.A. Clarke (2014), “It’s a Bittersweet Symphony, This Life: Fragile Academic Selves and Insecure Identities at Work,” *Organization Studies* 35.3 (2014), 335–357.


Steven S. Taylor, “Aesthetic Knowledge in Academia: Capitalist Pigs at the Academy of Management,” *Journal of Management Inquiry* 9.3 (September 2000), 309–10. More recently, Taylor has published a collection of his own plays that he calls “a way to stage organizations—to put them up on stage where we can see it, experience it, and critique it, all from the safe distance of the audience. They are my personal theories about organizations and work.” Steven S. Taylor, *Staging Organization: Plays as Critical Commentaries on Workplace Life* (Cham: Palgrave 2018), 8.


Ball, “The Teacher’s Soul and the Terror of Performativity,” 219. Slaughter and Rhoades refer to this culture of competitive performativity as the neoliberal phenomenon of “managed professionals,” pointing out how academic administrators cite “a need for greater accountability and global economic competitiveness” in order to push faculty toward greater “productivity in ways that affect faculty’s work units and ways of using time.” Sheila Slaughter and Gary Rhoades, “The Neo-Liberal University,” New Labor Forum 6 (Spring/Summer 2000), 77.

Brown, Undoing the Demos, 49.


Herein lies my only major quibble with Ahmed’s otherwise excellent book. Ahmed basically peddles a bias that Andrew Parker and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick have associated with J. L. Austin himself and the “range of predicates he associates narrowly with the theatre” when he dismisses any utterances performed onstage as incapable of being performative. On the other hand, as Parker and Sedgwick point out, in his famous essay “Signature Event Context,” Derrida determines that both ordinary utterances and an actor’s utterances on stage “are structured by a generalized iterability, a pervasive theatricality common to stage and world alike” that unites rather than separates theatrical behavior with everyday behavior. Parker and Sedgwick, Performativity and Performance (New York: Routledge, 1995), 3–4.

Here, I invoke Soyini Madison’s discussion of unplayful worlds that “are not simply formal or competitive, but spaces that perceive arrogantly,” invoking in turn Marilyn Frye’s notion of “arrogant perception” as “the failure to identify,” which “objectifies the Other and casts the Other as an inferior being.” Soyini Madison, Critical Ethnography: Method, Ethics, and Performance (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2012), 121–22.


Ibid., 146.


Rick Bonus, “Transforming the Place That Rewards and Oppresses Us,” in Brett Stockdill and Mary Yu Danico, eds. Transforming the Ivory Tower: Challenging Racism, Sexism, and Homophobia in the Academy (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2012), 30, 34, 37. Indeed, later in this collection, Christina Gómez writes,

“I never imagined myself as part of the academy, and neither did anyone else, I guess. Over the years during my climb up the academic ladder I have been shocked by the tokenism, stereotyping, and outright discrimination I have seen displayed toward faculty of color, myself included.

Gómez, “Telling Our Stories, Naming Ourselves,” in Transforming the Ivory Tower, 54.


50 Edgerton et al., *Imagining the Academy*, 9; Ahmed, *On Being Included*, 111.


54 Matthew Kaplan, Constance E. Cook, and Jeffrey Steiger, “Using Theatre to Stage Instructional and Organizational Transformation,” *Change* 38 (May/June 2006), 35.

55 Ibid., 39.

56 Ibid., 35.


58 Teitelbaum cited in Charette, “The STEM Crisis Is a Myth.”

59 Charette, “The STEM Crisis Is a Myth.”


61 Charette convincingly demonstrates that the assumption of plentiful and high-paying STEM jobs in the United States, at least, is also a myth.

62 Brint, “Is This Higher Education’s Golden Age?” B10.

63 Slaughter and Rhoades, “The Neo-Liberal University,” 73–79. The “liberal arts” are often conflated with arts disciplines, a conflation I do not intend to reinforce here. But a cornerstone of any liberal arts education includes ample studies in the arts and humanities, which often lead to the terms being used interchangeably, as Slaughter and Rhoades seem to do here.

64 Konrath, et al., “Changes in Dispositional Empathy”; Neumann, et al. “Empathy Decline and Its Reasons.” Dispositional empathy, also referred to sometimes as “cognitive empathy,” is an other-oriented ability to understand other experiences, whereas situational or affective empathy is centered on experiencing and expressing emotions, a self-oriented form of empathy that closely relates to sympathetic understanding.


Erin Brender, Alison Burke, and Richard M. Glass, “Standardized Patients,” *JAMA* 294.9 (7 September 2005), 1172. The use of actors has become mandatory insofar as physician licensing examinations now require “a clinical skills assessment with standardized patients.”


Ludewig, “TED Talks as an Emergent Genre,” 2.


McKenzie, *Perform or Else*, 87.


Ibid., 33, 35.


Edgerton et al., *Imagining the Academy*, 10.


Brin, “Is This Higher Education’s Golden Age?”


I credit Jeffrey Steiger with clarifying this idea for me. Steiger is the founding artistic director of University of Michigan’s CRLT Players and currently heads the Center for the Application and Scholarship of Theater at George Washington University. He is considered one of the forefathers of interactive theatre in academia.

The precise title of Edson’s play is *W*t, but for the sake of elegance, I will follow the mainstream transcription of it as *Wit*.


1 April Reign, Twitter, 15 January 2015. Reign revived #OscarsSoWhite the following year, when all 20 actors nominated for Oscars were again white. In 2016, Reign told the Huffington Post “The response this year was so much more than last year. My hypothesis is that one time is a fluke and two times is the beginning of a pattern—that's when people latched on.” www.huffpost.com/entry/april-reign-oscarsowhite_n_56d21088e4b03260bf771018.


6 Fitch, *The Cinematic College Professor*.

7 Brint, “Is This Higher Education's Golden Age?”


9 In her 2009 book *Faculty Towers: The Academic Novel and Its Discontents*, Elaine Showalter shows that many academic novels treat the professoriate in mocking or comedic terms. By contrast, academic drama often takes a more serious or critical look at faculty characters, as evidenced by these roles sweeping the 2014 Oscar acting awards, which have historically gone to dramatic rather than comedic performances.

10 *Still Alice* and *The Theory of Everything* are “most prominent” because their cinematic professors won the leading acting categories (Best Actress and Best Actor), whereas the professor characters in *Boyhood* and *Whiplash* are supporting roles.


12 For a genealogy of these stereotypes in Hollywood films up to 2005, see Mari Dagaz and Brent Harger, “Race, Gender, and Research: Implications for Teaching from Depictions of Professors in Popular Film, 1985–2005.” *Teaching Sociology* 39.3 (2011), 274–89.


Reynolds points out that “[s]traight, White, male professors overpopulate popular culture higher education,” amplifying a “professional imbalance that already exists” in terms of white men’s participation in the professoriate. Reynolds, *Representing “U,”* 64–65. Arguably the fact that two of the high-profile depictions of professors awarded at the Oscars were played by women mitigates the gender overpopulation, but their whiteness remains largely unquestioned. Indeed, in his recent analysis of how female academics are represented on film, Killian Kyle found that while 57% of tenured professors are female, “they do not gain this level of representation in Hollywood cinema.” Kyle, “Mona Lisa Smile, Wit, and Teacher’s *Pet:* Three Depictions of Female Academics,” *Journal of Feminist Family Therapy* 29.4 (2017), 226, 228.


Such tenured faculty statistics sharply diverge from these demographic groups’ representation among the overall population of the United States: Asian/Asian Americans represent 5.4% of the overall population of the United States, Black/African Americans represent 12.7%, and Hispanics/Latinos represent 17.6%. Julian Vasquez Heilig et al., “Considering the Ethnoracial and Gender Diversity of Faculty in US College and University Intellectual Communities,” *Hispanic Journal of Law & Policy* (2019), 1–31.


Kerr designed the Master Plan, which articulated the mission of California’s colleges and universities as providing the opportunity for every Californian to have access to higher education regardless of income or background. Kerr famously guaranteed “every Californian a shot at higher education” by charging no tuition, only “fees,” fees that by 2015 reached unaffordable heights. Christopher P. Loss, *Between Citizens and the State: The Politics of American Higher Education in the 20th Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 165, 1.

Another recent study argues that in academic science particularly “the ideal professor is still perceived to be a man whose first commitment is scholarship, and provides the origins for one notorious dismissal of female academics: ‘She’s on the mommy track.’” Likewise, this study shows that despite the influx of female academics into the professoriate, the more than outdated practice of having “faculty wives” provide “the child care that allowed their husbands to work hard and still be fathers” continues to hold sway as part of the mythology of academia. Mary Ann Mason, Marc Goulden, and Nicholas H. Wolfinger, *Do Babies Matter? Gender and Family in the Ivory Tower* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2013), 51, 70.
Johnstone et al., “Public Pedagogy and Representations of Higher Education,” 27. The researchers selected from the top 100 films at the North American box office plus all films nominated for an Academy Award for 2014. The 11 films they identified were: Neighbors, 22 Jump Street, The Imitation Game, The Gambler, God's Not Dead, If I Stay, Big Hero 6, and the four films examined in this chapter (Still Alice, Boyhood, The Theory of Everything, and Whiplash).


Ibid., 30, 32.

Ibid., 96. Sharon O’Dair and others have dubbed this phenomenon “academos­tars.” See O’Dair, “Academostars Are the Symptom; What’s the Disease?” Minnesota Review 52–54 (Fall 2001), 159–74.

Jeff Maskovsky, “Beyond Neoliberalism: Academia and Activism in a Nonhe­gemonic Moment,” American Quarterly 64.4 (December 2012), 820.


Fisanick quoted in Marquis “Beautiful Minds and Unruly Bodies,” 831.


Brody, “Getting Jazz Right at the Movies.”


The film clearly implies that Maslach was not just a student but Zimbardo’s stu­dent (Zimbardo tells his girlfriend “you were a great student of mine” and Maslach expresses needing to go out on her own in order to prove herself as a scholar). But, according to the long-married couple, Zimbardo waited to court Maslach until she was finished with her dissertation. See Katie Worth, “When Scientists Are Mad About Each Other: Science couples who overcame the two-body problem collaborate in the lab and the home,” Scientific American 14 February 2014. www.scientificamerican.com/article/when-scientists-are-mad-about-each-other/.


Konnikova, “The Real Lesson of the Stanford Prison Experiment.” Zimbardo would not publish the first scholarly article on his experiment until 1973, long after his fame was established.
To avoid confusion with Stephen Hawking, Jane Hawking is often referred to as “Jane Wilde.” I will use “Wilde Hawking” for clarity’s sake but simply “Hawking” in references.


The other two 2014 films are Neighbors (a fairly raunchy comedy starring Seth Rogen as a new dad living next to a college fraternity house), and The Gambler (a remake of the 1974, this time starring Mark Wahlberg as a literature professor with a high-stakes gambling problem).


Although the Hawking biopic begins in the 1960s, before neoliberalism took hold in the UK and other parts of the Western world, the film’s retelling of this era is solidly informed by contemporary market thinking about society in general and academia in particular.


Marquis, “Beautiful Minds and Unruly Bodies,” 832.


Fanghanel, Being an Academic, 15.


Hawking, Travelling to Infinity, 424.

Marsh quoted in Sofge, “A Brief History of Stephen Hawking.”


Genova, *Still Alice*, 230–31. To date, all of Genova’s novels depict neurological disorders such as Alzheimer's.

E.M. Forster, Epigraph to *Howard's End* (1910).


Ibid., 235.

Ibid., 34, 189.


Hawking, *Travelling to Infinity*, 73.

Ibid., 196.

Ibid., 70, 43–44.

Ibid., 196–97, 204-5, 201.

Ibid., 270.


Ibid., 464. British Conservative Party leader Margaret Thatcher was Prime Minister of the UK from 1979 to 1990. Her administration pursued a platform described as Thatcherite capitalism in order to transform the British economy into a “free economy” that deregulated markets, privatized services, centralized power while emphasizing small government, and removed labor protections. “Thatcherism” paralleled Reagan's 1981–89 presidential administration in the U.S. and similar movements of economic rationalism around the Western world seen as producing “a culture of greed and selfishness” “Evaluating Thatcher's Legacy,” *BBC News* 4 May 2004. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/politics/3681973.stm.


Ibid., 276.

Ibid., 298.

Genova narrates Alice’s familial attachment to academia in a remarkable passage occasioned by her department chair’s holiday party in which she explains that her colleagues felt like family despite the individual competition of contemporary academia:

While the holy grail of this quest carried individual power and prestige, at its core it was a collaborative effort to know something valuable and give it to the world. It was socialism powered by capitalism. It was a strange, competitive, cerebral, and privileged life. And they were in it together.

Once Alice’s disability is revealed, the capitalism powering this communal feeling very much overtakes the socialism. Genova, *Still Alice*, 51.


104 Glazer and Westmoreland, *Still Alice*.
105 Cassandra M. Guarino, “Faculty Service Loads and Gender: Are Women Taking Care of the Academic Family?” *Research in Higher Education* 58.6 (September 2017), 672–94.
107 Hawking, *Travelling to Infinity*, 447.
108 For another testimonial to how graduate students underwrote Hawking’s care, see Marika Taylor, “I Was a Student of Stephen Hawking’s – Here’s What He Taught Me,” *The Conversation* 17 March 2018.
109 Matt Ryan interview with Anthony McCarten and Lisa Bruce. McCarten and Bruce also reveal in this interview that *The Theory of Everything* had an unusually luxurious amount of time to shoot (48 days on set versus the 27 days in which *Still Alice* was shot). While they had plenty of time, technically, to shoot scenes showing the labor required of Jane and other unpaid help supporting Stephen, Bruce maintains that Eddie Redmayne’s labor of performing Hawking’s disability with technical precision meant that the production team attempted to save him from performing in any scenes they considered extraneous.
110 Hawking, *Travelling to Infinity*, 81.
112 Ibid., 96.
114 Elizabeth Marquis and other scholars and critics have made much of Lydia’s refusal to attend college, which causes tension in her relationship with her professor mother (but strangely not with her professor father). By contrast, Marquis interprets Alice’s other two grown children—a medical student and an attorney—as “representatives of higher education” who become “increasingly detached and distant.” However, it is important to note that in Genova’s original, Lydia ends up attending college to study acting as a way of returning to her hometown of Boston to care for her mother, which undercuts this argument somewhat. Marquis, “Beautiful Minds and Unruly Bodies,” 834.
115 Balliett, “Total Transformation.”

2 Ibid., 5.
4 The Chicago production of *Still Alice* relocated the play's action to Northwestern University, the Chicago-area campus where many Lookingglass ensemble members (including Dunford) studied theatre and performance studies.
5 Dunford, *Still Alice*, 81.
8 Linda A. Deloney and C. James Graham, “*Wit*: Using Drama to Teach First-Year Medical Students about Empathy and Compassion,” *Teaching and Learning in Medicine* 15.4 (2003), 250.
9 Garner, “Framing the Classroom,” 42.
David Mamet, *Oleanna: A Play* (New York: Vintage, 1992), 79–80. Although the published version ends this way, the culminating violence and the characters’ reactions have varied slightly depending on the production. Throughout *Oleanna’s* production history, Mamet tried out several different endings for the play.

Naomi Morgenstern, “The University in Crisis: Teaching, Tenure, and Transfer in David Mamet’s *Oleanna*,” *Cultural Critique* 82 (Fall 2012), 16–17.

The significance of John’s office window becomes overdetermined throughout the film, including one moment near the end when the professor is begging his student to withdraw her charges of sexual harassment (unaware that Carol has escalated her charges to sexual assault) as it rains outside. John finally notices that the rain is coming through the window and moves to close it, but only wipes the rainwater from the fine wood windowsill, ignoring the water damage to the open book sitting by the window. Mamet’s direction seems to suggest that the professor is more concerned with the luxurious infrastructure of academia than with the intellectual ideas and educational mission contained therein. *Oleanna*, dir. David Mamet, 1994.

Richard Badenhausen, “The Modern Academy Raging in the Dark: Misreading Mamet’s Political Incorrectness in *Oleanna*,” *College Literature* 25.3 (Fall 1998), 14; Mamet quoted in Morgenstern, “The University in Crisis,” 1. This sentiment is repeated nearly verbatim by Carol at various points in *Oleanna*.


Ibid., 38, 157.

Mamet, *Oleanna*, 35.

Ibid., 33.

Ibid., 23.


Dan Kulmala, “‘Let’s Take the Mysticism Out of It, Shall We?: Habitus as Conflict in Mamet’s *Oleanna*,” *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism* (Spring 2007), 116.


Margaret Edson, *Wit: A Play* (New York: Faber and Faber, 1999 [1993]).


See for instance Catherine D. Clark and Janeen M. Hill, “Reconciling the Tension between the Tenure and Biological Clocks to Increase the Recruitment and Retention of Women in Academia,” *Forum on Public Policy Online* 2 (2010), passim.
38 Joan C. Williams, “The Glass Ceiling and the Maternal Wall in Academia,” *New Directions for Higher Education* 130 (Summer 2005), 99–100.

39 Williams, “The Glass Ceiling,” 99–100, 97. While many people are familiar with the statistic that American women make only 78 cents for every dollar that their male counterparts earn, Williams and Nancy Segal parse salary data differently, writing that “mothers’ wages are only sixty percent of those of fathers.” Moreover, they identify three points in a woman’s career when the maternal wall prevents her advancement: getting pregnant, giving birth (or adopting a child), and shifting to a flexible work arrangement (such as maternity leave or part-time hours). Joan C. Williams and Nancy Segal, “Beyond the Maternal Wall: Relief for Family Caregivers Who Are Discriminated against on the Job,” *Harvard Women’s Law Journal* 26 (2003), 77–78.

40 Ibid., 100.

41 Jacqueline Vanhoutte, “Cancer and the Common Woman in Margaret Edson’s *Wit*,” *Comparative Drama* 36.3–4 (Fall/Winter 2002–3), 404. This tendency to blame Vivian for her illness because of her personality flaws even extends to some of the scholarly treatment of Edson’s play as well; for instance, in her book *Science on Stage*, Kirsten Shepherd-Barr claims that

it would be too simplistic to read this scene [in which the young Vivian ignores her professor’s advice to connect with human beings rather than cloister herself in research] and the play as a whole as a criticism of academics. Edson’s heroine may be cold, tough, and uncompromising, but it is not because she is an academic; it is not because she engages in intellectual pursuit, but because she has not understood its purpose.


42 Edson, *Wit*, 28. Professor Bearing’s name is also heavily loaded with symbolism: she must “bear” the pain of this horrible disease, presumably because she did not “bear” any children.

43 Mary Ann Mason, Marc Goulden, and Nicholas Wolfinger use this term in their chapter about tenured women faculty, significantly titled “Alone in the Ivory Tower.” They point out that “[f]ull-time work in general appears to reduce the chances that women have children, with female faculty incurring an extra professor penalty.” According to their study of US census data since 2000, both female and male academics have far fewer babies than doctors and lawyers do, partly because doctors and lawyers finish their training earlier than professors do (at which time they feel freer to start families) and also because doctors and lawyers earn higher salaries, making the cost of American childcare a less formidable obstacle to consider when planning a family. “Perhaps more important,” the authors suggest, doctors and lawyers don’t face ‘up or out’ promotion decisions. Striving to make partner in an elite law firm is certainly no less stressful than trying to get tenure, but unsuccessful candidates don’t lose their jobs and face relocation. This is the traumatic fate in store for failed tenure candidates, and it almost certainly weighs on the minds of assistant professors pondering parenthood.

Mason et al., *Do Babies Matter*, 66–68.


47 Rickard Danell and Mikael Hjerm, “Career Prospects for Female University Researchers Have Not Improved,” Scientometrics 94.3 (March 2013), 6, 8.

48 Edson, Wit, 22.

49 Ahmed, On Being Included, 149.

50 Instead of seeing this as an institutional critique, Therese Jones critiques what she sees as Vivian’s “unfortunate stereotype of the repressed and isolated English professor,” who is [d]evoid of friends, lovers, and family,” “so obsessive about scholarship […] that she fails to connect meaningfully with other human beings.” Jones, “Ending in Wonder: Replacing Technology with Revelation in Margaret Edson’s Wit,” Perspectives in Biology and Medicine 50.3 (Summer 2007), 400.

51 Edson, Wit, 12–15.

52 Ibid., 79.

53 Bertie Bregman, for instance, says that Vivian’s mentor leaves the audience with “a more redemptive vision of intelligence coexisting with tenderness and love.” Bregman, “Blame the Scholar, Not the Discipline,” Lancet 353.9155 (6 March 1999), 851–52. Vanhoutte, who strongly dislikes Wit, is more guarded about Ashford as a noble character, arguing that “Edson regards intelligence and kindness as mutually exclusive propositions. The only character in the play who demonstrates both qualities is E.M. Ashford; in her first appearance, she is scholarly, and, in her second appearance, she is kind.” Vanhoutte, “Cancer and the Common Woman,” 406.


56 Ibid.

57 The late Stanford mathematician Robert Osserman, for instance, was critical of the early 21st century high-water mark for stage and screen depictions of his academic field, noting that the spectacularization of mathematics incurred by the 2001 Tony awarded to Proof and the 2001 Oscar awarded to A Beautiful Mind was a double-edged sword. He wrote that such plays and films both reflected and reinforced the popular stereotype that “intense and sustained mental efforts such as those required for wrestling with mathematical problems can lead to mental breakdown.” Robert Osserman, “Mathematics Takes Center Stage,” in Michele Emmer, ed. Mathematics and Culture II (Berlin and Heidelberg: Springer, 2005), 190–92.

58 David Auburn, Proof: A Play (New York: Faber and Faber, 2001), 47.


61 Reynolds, Representing “U,” 22, 24, 111.


63 Mason et al., Do Babies Matter?, 51, 70. The authors note that maternal discrimination “is a primary consideration in the lawsuits that women denied tenure have brought under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964,” and that academic departments “need to be directly advised about the illegality of using motherhood as a hiring criterion.” Ibid., 43. As the authors point out, even if mothers clear the hiring hurdle, once employed in academia the bias against caregiving is well documented. See, for instance, Robert Drago et al., “Bias against Care-Giving: Faculty Members Rarely Take Advantage of Family-Friendly Workplace; What Are We So Afraid Of?” Academe 91 (2005), 22–25.
Mason et al., *Do Babies Matter*, 70.

Ibid., 51, 55.


Ibid., 64.


Ibid., 64.


Ibid., 64.


Ibid., 64.


Ibid., 64.


Ibid., 64.


Ibid., 64.


Ibid., 64.


Ibid., 64.


Ibid., 64.


Ibid., 64.


Ibid., 64.


Ibid., 64.


Ibid., 64.


Ibid., 64.


Ibid., 64.
5 Andrew Kushir, “If You Mingle: Thoughts on How Theatre Humanizes the Audience,” in Kathleen Gallagher and Barry Freeman, eds. *In Defence of Theatre* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016), 85–86.
6 Ibid., 87–89.
8 Harvie, *Fair Play*, 5.
10 Ibid., 231.
16 The closed captioning reads: “The end credits include photographs of the real-life black face (and brown face) college parties that inspired the films climax.” Simien’s decision to include multiple campus parties reflects the reality that college students continue to don blackface with a regularity that suggests that academia as an institution tolerates and even encourages such behavior. See, for instance, Emma Pettit and Zipporah Osei, “The ‘Great College-Yearbook Reckoning’: Why Scholars Say Blackface Images Aren’t Outliers,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education* 7 February 2019. www.chronicle.com/article/The-Great-College-Yearbook/245643.
19 Ahmed, *On Being Included*, 100–1. Ahmed allows for diversity work that is meaningful and efficacious, but catalogs the many institutional pressures, including image management, that prevent this happening more often. Likewise, Cheryl Wall argues that diversity work “is too often seen as a ‘service’ that is totally unrelated to the teaching and research that are at the core of the faculty role,” and framed as a type of “institutional housekeeping” [that] further diminishes work that is more often than not performed by women and people of color” who already don’t “look the part” of a normative (older white male) professor. Wall, “Faculty as Change Agents,” ix–xi.

Ahmed, On Being Included, 86.

Black Student Union Statement reprinted in Alvarez, Another University Is Possible, 1–8.

Petition from UCSD’s Faculty of African Descent reprinted in Alvarez et al., Another University Is Possible, 96–98.

University Liberation Coalition, The University Is an Apparatus, reprinted in Alvarez et al., Another University Is Possible, 142.

Carlos Moreno et al., Independent Investigative Report on Acts of Bias and Discrimination Involving Faculty at the University of California, Los Angeles (15 October 2013), 18.

“Afternoon Updates at the Chancellor’s Complex Occupation (1 March 2010),” reprinted in Alvarez et al., Another University Is Possible, 134, 136.

Bonus, “Transforming the Place,” 35.

University Liberation Coalition, The University Is an Apparatus, 146.

Ebony Magazine interview with Justin Simien, 22 May 2018. www.youtube.com/watch?v=WeeQJOGj4nQ.

Dear White People screenplay.


Dear White People screenplay.


Bavaro, “Taking Back One’s Narrative,” 19, 23.


Dominique Baker has documented that, “[s]ince the original unveiling of the I, Too, Am Harvard campaign, more than 40 other student-led initiatives have developed similar campaigns at their institutions.” Dominique J. Baker, “Beyond the Incident: Institutional Predictors of Student Collective Action,” The Journal of Higher Education 89.2 (2018), 184.

Sue also excludes theatre from the long list of “mediums of communication” that have spread his term, writing that “Microaggression examples and explanations have flooded the airwaves through television, talk radio, public service announcements (music television [MTV]), and editorial and opinion pieces in newspapers and magazines, blogs, social media, and political conversations.” Sue, “Microaggressions and Student Activism,” 230–31.

Jackson, Social Works, 9.

This is not to say that spaces of theatre-making escape national histories of racism or welcome participation by all groups; as I will discuss later in the chapter, Kimiko Matsuda-Lawrence (the Harvard student who researched and wrote the play I, Too, Am Harvard) turned to theatre in part as an intervention in the medium itself. As Matsuda-Lawrence put it, “at Harvard, the theater scene is very white.” Joseph Kahn, “‘I, Too, Am Harvard’ Campaign Highlights Black Students’ Frus-

Ibid.


Ibid., 192.

Kahn, “I, Too, Am Harvard’ Campaign.”


Ibid., 230.


Kaan, “*The Niceties* Playwright Eleanor Burgess.”


Ibid., 87, 119.

Ibid., 125.


Lynett, “First Person.” Emphasis added.


Rachel Lynett interview with author, 26 January 2018.

Colin Ley quoted in Michael Apple, “Education, Markets, and an Audit Culture,” *Critical Quarterly* 47.1–2 (June 2005), 15. Apple argues that this has become a global phenomenon, and similar analyses have circulated about the United Kingdom particularly.


Ibid., 12–13.


Ibid., 26–27.

Likewise, on page 57, Cass confesses her fear that if she reveals that these hate crimes have traumatized her and “admit[s] that I’m not okay, it becomes a spectacle. Like a game of who can care the most.”

Ibid., 34.

Ibid., 17, passim.


Lynett interview with the author.


Sandra Larson, “Playwright Lydia R. Diamond: A Chicago Transplant Talks about Her Transition to the East Coast, Her Mission as a Writer, and the Challenges of Juggling a Creative Career with Motherhood,” Exhale Health and Lifestyle Magazine (Fall 2010), 42.


In a notable reference linking Jackson’s treatment to the theatrical treatment of black men in Spinning into Butter and the film Dear White People, Diamond has Jackson remark at one point that “every now and then I don’t feel like being treated like Sambo.” Lydia Diamond, Smart People (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2017), 52.

More specifically, this study found a “relative lack of mPFC [medial prefrontal cortex] activation when participants viewed pictures of low-low social groups,” meaning groups judged as low in warmth and low in competence (two of the four quadrants of the stereotype content model [SCM] that Brian teaches his undergraduates in Smart People). Lasana T. Harris and Susan T. Fiske, “Dehumanizing the Lowest of the Low: Neuroimaging Responses to Extreme Outgroups,” Psychological Science 17.10 (October 2006), 852.

Huntington, “Inside the Brain.” Wooden interprets Brian’s research very differently, characterizing it as methodologically flawed and politically dangerous, not because it threatens academia’s self-identity as a bastion of liberal tolerance, but because it harkens back to academia’s disturbing history of underwriting scientific studies that support a biological basis for racial difference.

Lydia R. Diamond, Smart People, 6.

Ibid., 8.


97 Yan and Museus, “Asian American and Pacific Islander Faculty and the Glass Ceiling,” 260.


103 Ibid., 40.

104 Ibid., 89.

105 Ibid., 56–57.

106 Ibid., 89.

107 Ibid., 93.

108 Ibid., 95.

109 Ibid., 7.

110 Ibid., 57.

111 Green, “*Smart People* Is Better Read Than Seen.”

112 Soloski, “*Smart People* Review.”

113 Wooden rightly notes that *Smart People’s* regional productions were far more favorably reviewed.


1 I calculated these proportions by excluding students who were undeclared, had “other/interdisciplinary” majors, or multiple majors. This left 15,307 undergraduates at Berkeley (out of an overall headcount of 30,853); it also left 23,418 undergraduates at San Diego (out of an overall headcount of 30,285). Berkeley also has many more undeclared majors than San Diego—12,062 versus 826—many of whom will end up in non-STEM majors. www.universityofcalifornia.edu/infocenter/fall-enrollment-headcounts.


4 The letter “A”—standing for “Arts”—is sometimes inserted into the acronym “STEM” in order to suggest the arts’ importance alongside science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, but this inclusion often overshoots at a superficial level.

5 Shepherd-Barr, *Science on Stage*, 128.


8 Keating and Abramson are far from the only STEM professors who have become amateur dramatists. For instance, Stanford chemistry professor Carl Djerassi, who developed the first oral contraceptive (“the Pill”) and won the National Medal of Science in 1973, co-wrote the play *Oxygen* with Cornell chemistry professor and 1981 Nobel Prize winner Roald Hoffman. Their play portrays the discovery of oxygen in 1777, alongside an imagined 2001 meeting at which the Nobel committee attempts to agree on the recipient of the first “Retro-Nobel” (for a scientific breakthrough that occurred before the Nobel Prize began). The San Diego Repertory Theatre staged *Oxygen* in March 2001, to coincide with the annual meeting of the American Chemical Society in San Diego. Dan Bennett, “Experiments in Human Nature: ‘Oxygen,’ Written by Two Chemists, Examines the Personal Conflicts at the Heart of Research,” *LA Times* 25 March 2001. Likewise, in 2010 UC San Diego physics professor Ivan Schuller used a similar dramatic structure (and focus on the Nobel Prize) for his play *W=S (The Transistor Shock)*, which centers on the controversial racial beliefs of 1956 Nobelist William Shockley (“Father of the Information Age”) and their repercussions on a university campus in the present day.


13 Galileo did make a few changes before passing off the Dutchman’s telescope as his own invention, such as changing the green casing to a red one and improving the magnification power from 3 to 20 times, allowing him to observe the surface of the sun, moon, and other celestial bodies.


15 Ibid., 12, 22.

16 Ibid., 19–20.


19 Collini, Introduction to C.P. Snow’s *The Two Cultures*, xx.

20 BICEP stands for Background Imaging of Cosmic Extragalactic Polarization.

21 Brian Keating interview with the author, 16 May 2018.


23 Keating interview with the author.
Shepherd-Barr, for instance, writes that French neuroscientist Alain Prochiantz, who collaborates with theatre director Jean-François Peyret, “finds the way scientists are trained to write up their results not only deadeningly but misleadingly opaque about the hesitation and uncertainties that characterize most scientific endeavor, but get erased in the process of publication.” Shepherd-Barr posits that this opacity around the meaning and human agency of scientific research “is where the playwright steps in.” Shepherd-Barr, Science on Stage, 48.


Todd Salovey interview with the author, 6 September 2018.

Ibid.


Knight, “Scientific Lectures,” 221, 223.

Holdsworth et al., “Theatre, Performance, and the Amateur Turn,” 5–6, 11.

Todd Salovey email to the author, 7 September 2018. The 17 March 2014 one-hour BICEP2 press conference held at Harvard can be viewed in its entirety on YouTube.


Todd Salovey interview with the author; June 2018 staged reading of Todd Salovey and Brian Keating’s Losing the Nobel Prize at Congregation Adat Yeshurun (La Jolla, California).

Todd Salovey interview with the author.

June 2018 staged reading of Losing the Nobel Prize.

June 2018 staged reading of Losing the Nobel Prize; Keating, Losing the Nobel Prize, 177.

Keating, Losing the Nobel Prize, 276. In an excellent critique of his book that Keating admirably recommended I read, cosmologist Chanda Prescod-Weinstein notes that Keating problematically accepts the sharp reduction in federal funding that has prompted academics to seek out “modern-day Medici” to support scientific research, a capitulation that Lave et al. argue results in “a downward spiral of appropriations and the de facto privatization of the American public university system.” Prescod-Weinstein also points out that “Keating takes great care to ensure that women astronomers—such as Caroline Herschel, Henrietta Leavitt, and Vera Rubin—get their due in his retelling of the history of cosmology” but also argues that he fails to recognize the lack of gender diversity on the BICEP teams, which may have exacerbated the toxic masculinity that hastened the endeavor’s downfall. Prescod-Weinstein, “Toxic Masculine Cosmology,” Public Books 10 May 2018. www.publicbooks.org/toxic-masculine-cosmology/. Lave et al., “Introduction: STS and Neoliberal Science,” 665.
Haynes, From Faust to Strangelove, 211–13. Indeed, Haynes notes that “more recently feminist critics have introduced a new perspective by identifying the above factors with the culturally induced suppression of male emotions in accordance with the inherent values of a patriarchal society.”

David Abramson interview with the author, 10 May 2018.

Abramson interview with the author.

Ibid.


Brown, Undoing the Demos, 195.


Abramson, Purely Academic, 18.

Ibid., 13.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid., 13.

Abramson interview with the author.

Ibid.

Abramson, Purely Academic, 24.

Ibid., 30–31.

Abramson interview with the author.

Ibid.

Abramson, Purely Academic, 34, 22.


Keating, Losing the Nobel Prize, 265–66.


Cooper, interview with the author, 11 May 2018.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Shepherd-Barr, Science on Stage, 10–11.

Cooper, Margin of Error, 8. I would be remiss if I didn’t point out that audience members found the play’s presentation of toxic masculinity less effective than it could have been for two related reasons. First of all, Cooper writes Sunita’s character as South Asian and uses her heritage as a foil—a common Orientalist trope of contrasting the gender oppression of nations such as India to the supposed liberation of women in the West—while casting a non-Asian woman (Roxanne Carrasco) in the role. Secondly, this approximation of “yellowface” casting (complete with a sometimes off-putting Indian dialect) was compounded by the play’s apparent argument that Britt was the one who pursued a sexual relationship with Anton in order to advance her academic career. While Britt’s claim that she struggled to be taken seriously in a male-dominated field like Physics garnered audience agreement, Cooper’s decision to seemingly ignore the power differential between Britt and her professor in order to frame her as the relationship’s initiator struck some in the audience as blaming the victim and distorting historical trends in the academy.

A total of 130 surveys were voluntarily completed (32 were returned for Margin of Error and 98 were returned for Purely Academic). Michael Kalichman, David Abramson, Sue O’Brien, and Emily Roxworthy, “Ethics, Theatre, and Science: Cross-Disciplinary Fostering of Ethics and Science Conversations.” Poster presented at: 6th World Conference on Research Integrity, 2–3 June 2019, Hong Kong.
3 Denver Center for the Performing Arts, Interview with Karen Zacarias, 4 September 2013. www.youtube.com/watch?v=yfD4doP4w3I.
6 Cindy Cruz quoted in Huber, “Disrupting Apartheid of Knowledge,” 649.
7 Ibid., 648.
9 Pressley, “A Playwright Responds to DACA.”
13 Yael Levitte interview with the author, 6 February 2019. The CITE interventions required of faculty search committees include a filmed 15-minute recruitment scenario followed by a 90-minute campuswide workshop. Cornell also offers follow-up programs that include a 60-minute program about the interview process, and 75-minute tenure and promotion program.
14 Dane Cruz interview with the author, 26 January 2019.
15 Levitte interview with the author.
16 Cruz interview with the author.
17 Ibid.
18 Dane Cruz email to the author, 26 July 2019.
19 Ibid.
21 Armstrong interview with the author.
22 Ibid.
23 Ibid.
24 Cruz interview with author.
25 Ibid.
26 Ibid.
I conducted hour-long interviews with current and former University of California faculty who were women and/or people of color. The anonymized interview transcripts were composited for the seven characters in the one-act play, with research assistance provided by my former Ph.D. student, Dr. Heather Ramey Konowal, who also originated the role of Judy in Ready to Vote.


Like most interactive theatre performed in academic settings, Ready to Vote is generally performed in a presentational fashion, rarely in purpose-built theatres and never with much in the way of production values. In the audience response surveying conducted for the Spring 2018 staged readings discussed in the last chapter, campus audience members expressed little interest in fuller production values such as professional scenery and costumes.

The University of California's faculty are 74% white, 14% Asian American, 5% Latino, and 2% African American. UC Office of the President, "The Facts: Diversity," March 2010.

Teranishi, Asians in the Ivory Tower, 10.

Interestingly, scholars have posited that racial battle fatigue might explain “a lack of action on many students’ parts” in response to racially themed parties such as the Compton Cookout. Garcia et al., “When Parties Become Racialized,” 14.


In addition to the monstrous glass lift he had to use at UC Riverside, the audience witnessed Glen having to navigate an array of environmental barriers that a truly accessible society would not permit. Some campuses had neither ramps nor lifts, so the stage could not be elevated and the cast performed on the same level as the audience (destroying sight lines). Other campuses erected makeshift accessibility features because they were given advanced notice that one actor would be using a wheelchair, but these had unforeseen side effects (including wired microphones whose cords obstructed the actor's path, inadequate clearance to navigate the wheelchair around the stage, and hospitality staff unsympathetic to the presence of the actor’s assistance dog). Glen’s presence displayed the powerful force that academia’s institutional ideology exerts in order to ignore such environmental barriers.

The social model of disability is currently dominant in academic and policy discourses, which respond to the fact that “[d]espite being simply an aspect of social diversity, impairments are often cast by law and culture as something inherently negative.” Paul Harpur, “Embracing the New Disability Rights Paradigm: The Importance of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities,” Disability & Society 27.1 (2012), 2.

Mason et al., Do Babies Matter, 76.


Ahmed, On Being Included, 159.


Reynolds, Representing “U,” 114.


Mason et al., Do Babies Matter, 35.


Ahmed, On Being Included, 150.