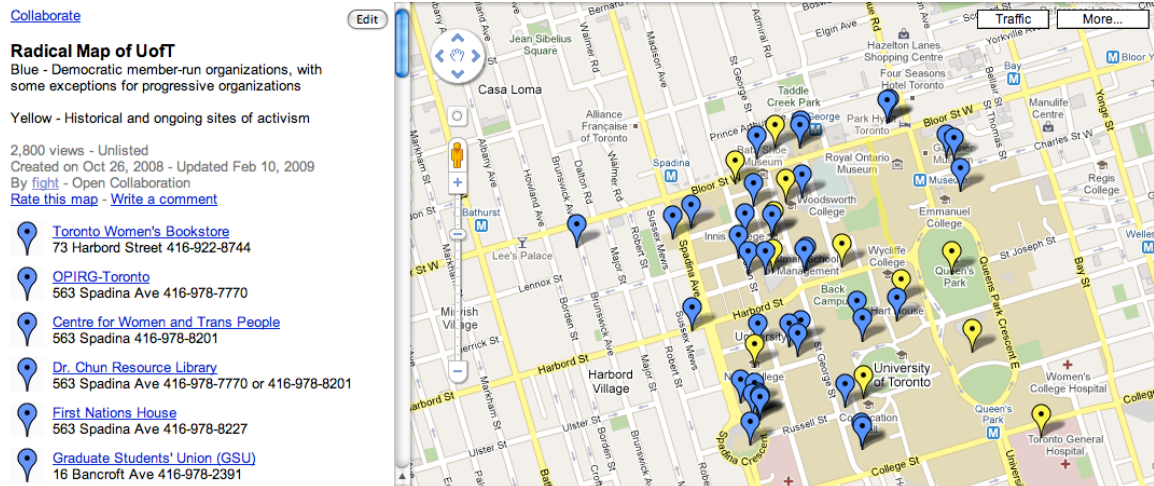


## Unmapping the Corporate Campus: Cartography of a 'Free University of Toronto' (2008)

Ryan Hayes



Map viewable at:

<http://maps.google.ca/maps/ms?ie=UTF8&hl=en&msa=0&msid=117362478201313979226.00045a2aed61e03312edd&ll=43.663743,-79.394674&spn=0.017106,0.038581&z=15>

This paper argues that a radical map of a “Free University of Toronto” embodies critical ideas of space, society and culture, and can be used as a theoretical and practical anti-hegemonic tool for contesting the dominance of the corporate university model. The first section of this essay provides context by examining the spatial aspect of neoliberalism and the corporatization of universities, while the following section contextualizes recent activism that has contested these processes and sought to reclaim the university as a liberatory space. The third and final section introduces a radical map of a “Free University of Toronto” as a concept and resource and discusses the possibilities it suggests for future activism.

### Neoliberalism and the Corporate Campus

When the University of Toronto (UofT) announces a new endeavour such as the construction of a new building or the creation of a new academic program, it is increasingly common for that endeavour to bear the name of a major private donor [1]. We are told by university administrators that these initiatives would be impossible without private donors. Even established academic units, in the face of chronic underfunding, have turned to branding themselves with the name of a donor for one-time-only cash infusions [2]. While administrators decry the lack of public funding, we are told not to worry about growing dependence on private funding. Guidelines are in place to ensure the academic freedom of the university is

not affected, just as policies are in place to ensure skyrocketing tuition fees do not impact accessibility.

These assurances could not be further from the truth. Neoliberal government policies do not just make universities poorer and stop there, they remake universities in the image of neoliberalism. Universities are starved of public funding, then encouraged to increase user fees and gear research towards developing more private partnerships to make up for the loss of public funding [3]. Complicitous administrators are appointed to *corporatize* the university: to restructure research, education, services and the physical space of the university according to profit-driven business models [4]. The ideal of the university as a liberatory space for critical thinking, even as articulated in the UofT's own *Statement of Institutional Purpose* [5], is further undermined by these efforts to privatize education and make universities much more explicit instruments of corporate interests.

Changes to the spatial organization of the campus are one indicator of the course of corporatization. Recent developments at UofT clearly demonstrate that corporatization is an active force. We have seen expansions of two corporate food chains in Sidney Smith Hall at the expense of student space [6]; CIUT.fm and Sexual Education Centre (SEC) are being displaced for a \$92 million expansion of the Rotman School of Management, which is already eyeing further expansion plans [7]; and the Association of Part-time Undergraduate Students (APUS), who already lost their space once before to the Commerce program, is now being evicted to make way for the elite \$53 million Centre for High Performance Sport (CHPS) that all students will be asked to pay the operating costs for [8]. With the passage of UofT President David Naylor's *Towards 2030* synthesis document, further redrawing of the campus map according to the corporate university model is likely to occur [9].

### **Reclaiming the University**

Just as the corporatization of space – through naming, renaming and physical transformations – is an indication of how material conditions can produce change, when student activists reclaim space it is also an indication that a boiling point has been reached with worsening conditions. On March 20, 2008, following a rally against a proposed 20% residence fee increase, a peaceful sit-in was held at Simcoe Hall, the main UofT administrative building where the office of the President is located [10]. Rather than meet with the demonstrators, the administration called in campus police. In the days leading up to a subsequent anti-tuition demonstration planned for April 10, 2008, 12 students were informed that *Student Code of Conduct* investigations were being initiated against them for their alleged participation in the sit-in. Soon after, 14 alleged participants including students, alumni and campus staff were contacted by the Toronto Police who informed them that they were being charged and needed to turn themselves in. The 14 were arrested and released on strict bail conditions including non-association with all the other co-accused.

In response to this repression, an organization was formed called the Committee for Just Education (CJE). After an emergency meeting that was attended by over 120 supporters at Steelworkers Hall, an open forum was planned where the CJE discussed and approved three demands: the elimination of tuition fees, student and worker parity in decision-making, and an end to the repression of dissent. Since April, the campaign has reached thousands of people through the efforts of supporters, a website, online petition, joint letter signed and circulated by faculty, poster campaign, countless hours of outreach, public events, and demonstrations organized to coincide with meetings of the UofT Governing Council, the first court date of the “Fight Fees 14” [11], the UofT President’s annual garden party at his Rosedale mansion [12], and the annual meeting of the UofT Alumni Association [13]. The April 10, 2008, meeting of the Governing Council where tuition fee increases were to be voted on was relocated to a secret location after a student member of the Governing Council and other students in attendance took turns reading from a petition signed by several thousand UofT students attesting to their debt-loads and opposition to any fee increases [14]. By continuing to assert their right to “take up space”, students and their allies have resisted the corporatization of the university.

Before considering strategy and tactics for resisting corporatization, which is the focus of the next section, I would like to ground the discussion in the following section by developing a deeper understanding of political objectives. The three demands of the CJE reflect an understanding that the struggle against corporatization is about more than tuition fees, that it is also about how the university is run and by whom, and what happens when those in power are challenged. Any fight for a reinvestment of public funding is an anti-neoliberal one, however to effectively challenge neoliberalism there must be an analysis of the wider effects of corporatization on the university as a whole beyond just increasing user fees, including how not only students, but faculty, campus staff, alumni and community members are affected. Further, links must consciously be made with other struggles against neoliberalism locally and globally.

As much as this is a campaign *against* the corporatization of the university, it is also a campaign *for* something, namely free education. Free education must be understood in the broadest sense, recognized as a right for everyone and connected to wider struggles for social justice. There is a rich history of activism at UofT where free education in the broadest sense has been put forward as a political objective:

In 2003, major campus groups including APUS, ASSU, CUPE 3902, GSU, OPIRG, SAC (now UTSU), and the Women’s Centre (now the Centre for Women and Trans People) formed a Coalition for Free Education and organized a Free Education Week from February 10-14 in order to encourage discussion and have students, staff, faculty, and community members realize the “possibility and need for free education in Canada”. Also included in their analysis was the broad interpretation of “free” to mean more than just without a cost, “Free education means free minds,

freedom from physical and cultural barriers, freedom from corporate agendas, and freedom from oppression.”

Using a similar analysis but taking a much more grassroots approach, in 1999 students, staff, faculty, and community members created the Free UofT in order to tangibly work towards the goal of an “open, accessible, inclusive, non-corporate, no-fees UofT.” In the summer of 2000, Free UofT offered 50 facilitated courses ranging from participatory action research in Kensington Market to African studies to street theatre. [15]

Free education is meant to be liberatory: not just the right to a seat in a classroom, but the right to participate fully and equally – education as the practice of freedom [16]. In addition to broadly defining free education, there is also a large amount of campus activism that connects wider struggles for social justice to the struggle for free education, such as campaigns for non-status students to access post-secondary education in Canada, for Palestinian students to access education under occupation in Palestine, for students to demand reparations from universities that supported South African Apartheid, as well as broader anti-war, anti-poverty, First Nations solidarity and student-worker solidarity organizing [17].

### **Radical Map of a ‘Free University of Toronto’**

In the spirit of revolution as everyday life [18], free education can be understood as not just a political objective, as just a demand to be put forward at demonstrations, but as a strategy that can be progressively built from the ground up. I take this lesson from the example set by the Free UofT – by creating their own courses for a free university, activists demonstrated their collective ability to organize towards the realization of their political objectives. I see this as a complimentary strategy to mass mobilizations that primarily focus on university administrators and politicians and trying to make them accede to demands. We know that the administration and government will not give in to our demands overnight. In the meantime, as part of our organizing work, we can find strategic ways to take power back and reduce our dependence on these bodies. These projects can feed into organizing work as part of a growing base, or network, of support and can serve as living examples of our demand for a free and democratic university.

By expanding the focus of the Free UofT from courses to a university-wide perspective, one can look at the present conditions and find that there is already a surprising amount of infrastructure for a potential free university: student unions and labour unions with their own space and buildings, well-established housing and daycare cooperatives, student-run food operations, student-run newspapers, campus radio station, anti-oppression resource library, and student and worker-run organizations that collectively hold hundreds of lectures, events, and skill-building workshops each year. While the agenda of corporatization implemented by a small group of administrators may seem to have a totalizing grip on the university, this anti-hegemonic perspective focuses on the agency of students and workers, who

form the overwhelming majority of the university population, and the legacy of their history of organizing.

As a representation of this, I used Google Maps to create a radical map of a “Free University of Toronto” [19]. The map is a work-in-progress that will continue to evolve over time. The current map is primarily focused on the downtown UofT campus and assigns blue markers to sites considered to be potential elements of a free university. Generally, these sites are democratic student or worker-run spaces, however some exceptions are made for spaces with a history of being progressive such as the Transitional Year Programme, First Nations House, and the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. Yellow markers are used to denote spaces significant to the historical and ongoing struggle for free education like Robarts Library, Hart House, and Simcoe Hall – all sites where previous sit-ins have been held. The radical map invites the viewer to re-envision the UofT campus by seeing it in a way that emphasizes sites of resistance that are generally omitted or included without proper historical context on the official university maps – for instance noting that the Centre for Women and Trans People was not given space due to the benevolence of the administration, rather because of a camp-out held outside of Simcoe Hall in 1986. In this way, the radical map is a practical tool for learning about the wide array of progressive spaces on campus and the respective histories of struggle that they are rooted in, but it also represents the powerful idea of a free university, with real, existing examples to suggest what a free university might look like.

In closing, I would like to discuss how this concept and tool could be used as part of a wider strategy of organizing for free education. But first, I would like to recognize one of the limitations of the map, which is that many of the sites included are not fully autonomous, in that they are tied to the existing university structure in some way, for instance through employment or collection of membership fees, however this does not preclude the possibility of their participation in mobilizing for change. To continue organizing against the effects of neoliberalism on education and towards free education, the concept of a free university could be used by an organizing coalition to bring together groups that may not typically see themselves as part of activism for free education, such as the Hot Yam, a student-run vegan food collective, and many more of the sites identified on the radical map. Moreover, relationships could be developed with groups like the Anarchist Free University that offers regular free courses, and campus events highlighting critical perspectives could be brought to a larger audience by filming for a Free UofT Youtube channel. Finally, exercises could be organized in re-mapping, taking a cue from students at Trent University who colloquially renamed their library after anti-apartheid activist Steve Biko from donor and South African apartheid supporter Thomas Bata [20].

## Notes

[1] For just a few of many examples see “Max Gluskin House launches new era of international economics at U of T”, *News @ Utoronto*, October 17, 2008, <http://www.news.utoronto.ca/social-sciences-business-law/max-gluskin-house-launches-new-era-of-international-economics-at-u-of-t.html>; “\$20-million gift creates Canada’s largest hub for public health education”, *News @ Utoronto*, April 30, 2008, <http://www.news.utoronto.ca/health-and-medicine/20million-gift-creates-canadas-largest-hub-for-public-health-education.html>; “Gift to establish constitutional centre at Faculty of Law”, *News @ Utoronto*, November 29, 2007, <http://www.news.utoronto.ca/bin6/071129-3531.asp>

[2] See for instance “Social Work Receives \$15 Million”, *University of Toronto Magazine*, Summer 2007, <http://www.magazine.utoronto.ca/07autumn/gifts.asp>; “New name, new curriculum for U of T commerce program”, *News @ Utoronto*, April 11, 2008, <http://www.news.utoronto.ca/social-sciences-business-law/new-name-new-curriculum-for-u.html>; “\$14-million gift launches transformation of architecture education at U of T”, *News @ Utoronto*, May 27, 2008, <http://www.news.utoronto.ca/lead-stories/14million-gift-launches-transformation-of-architecture-education-at-u-of-t.html>

[3] Mackenzie, H. “Funding Postsecondary Education: Beyond the Path of Least Resistance”, Ontario Coalition for Postsecondary Education, 2004, <http://www.usw.ca/program/adminlinks/docs//Funding%20Post.pdf>; “Students slam McGuinty for breaking tuition freeze promise”, *CBC News*, September 25, 2007, <http://www.cbc.ca/canada/ontariovotes2007/story/2007/09/25/ot-tuition-070925.html>; “Ontario Research Commercialization Program”, Ministry of Research and Innovation, 2008, <http://www.mri.gov.on.ca/english/programs/ORC-Program.asp>

[4] Hayes, R. “Second Cup forced down students’ throats”, *The Varsity*, September 20, 2007, <http://thevarsity.ca/article/414>

[5] “Statement of Institutional Purpose”, University of Toronto Governing Council, 1992, <http://www.utoronto.ca/govcncl/pap/policies/mission.html>

[6] Hayes, R. “Second Cup forced down students’ throats”; Bovee-Begun, A. “Tim Hortons’ Sid Smith scheme rolls out discontent”, *The Varsity*, February 25, 2008, <http://www.thevarsity.ca/article/2087>

[7] Ali Husein, N. and Bovee-Begun, A. “Rotman Shuts up CIUT”, *The Varsity*, September 20, 2007, <http://thevarsity.ca/article/406>

[8] Ali Husein, N. “APUS out, again”, *The Varsity*, July 16, 2007, <http://thevarsity.ca/article/94>

[9] “Planning for UofT’s Future”, *Towards 2030*, 2008, <http://www.towards2030.utoronto.ca>

[10] Committee for Just Education. “Events Summary”, *Fight Fees*, 2008, <http://fightfees.ca/events-summary/>

[11] Loreto, N. “Student unions join forces for Fight Fees 14”, *The Muse*, June 19, 2008, <http://www.themuse.ca/view.php?aid=41204>

[12] Colbert, J. “Partying for a cause”, *The Varsity*, July 8, 2008, <http://thevarsity.ca/article/3817>

[13] Committee for Just Education. “Racist Harassment at UofT Alumni Meeting Goes Unrectified”, *Fight Fees*, June 24, 2008, <http://fightfees.ca/2008/06/24/racist-harassment-at-uoft-alumni-meeting-goes-unrectified/>

[14] Ali Husein, N, "Governors shouted out of Simcoe Hall", *The Varsity*. April 15, 2008, <http://www.thevarsity.ca/article/3239-governors-shouted-out-of-simcoe>

[15] Quoted from Hayes, R. "The University as a Space of Resistance", 2007. For more info on the Coalition for Free Education, see <http://web.archive.org/web/20030213091814/http://freeeducationact.org/>. For more info on the Free UofT, see <http://web.archive.org/web/20001003093659/www.utoronto.ca/acc/freeu/>

[16] hooks, bell. *Teaching to transgress: education as the practice of freedom*, 1994

[17] Ontario Public Interest Research Group. "Action Groups", 2008, <http://opirguoft.org/index.php?cmd=ShowData&section=3&subsection=12&type=1>

[18] Situationist International. "Questionnaire", 1964, <http://www.bopsecrets.org/SI/9.questionnaire.htm>

[19] To view the radical map, see <http://maps.google.ca/maps/ms?ie=UTF8&hl=en&oe=UTF8&msa=0&msid=117362478201313979226.00045a2aed61e03312edd>. At present it is not publicly listed.

[20] Phillips, C. "Flag lowered for Bata", Trent Arthur, September 29, 2008, [http://trentarthur.ca/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=851&Itemid=33](http://trentarthur.ca/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=851&Itemid=33)