

Call for Papers– Book Project:
Dark Academia: Definitions, Theories, and Prospects
Edited by Cody Jones & Nell Pach

We are seeking essays and papers for an edited collection which engages the concept of ‘dark academia.’

At the center of the dark academic sensibility lies a paradox: though dark academia enjoys the cosmetic trappings of the pursuit of higher knowledge, it is at its core a celebration of the university as a place of occultation and performativity. The dark academic’s taste for mystery, history, and a distinctly Anglophone, Romantico-Modernist canon – coupled with an equally distinct early 20th century sartorial and lifestyle model – runs inevitably into exclusivity, elitism, and reactionary nostalgia. Indeed, the case can be made that these very elements are in fact constitutive of dark academia, as such.

At the same time, one could argue that in its recognition of something sinister and obfuscated/obfuscating at the heart of the aesthetic it valorizes, dark academic discourse contains the seeds of a critique of these very problems and the modern university itself. Across social media, dark academia is frequently invoked as a community-building common interest for self-proclaimed oddballs or introverts who love learning – a characterization that would seem to put it in direct tension with its actual content. What can we make of this tension? Is dark academia inherently, irredeemably reactionary? In its original, social media incarnation – running as it often does to showing off outfits of the day, retro accessories, beautiful architecture, and carefully curated playlists – does it become, simply, a consumerist phenomenon? Or can we use it to think radically? If radical, does it become something other than dark academia? Whither light, gray, and chromatic modes?

What might dark academia – and its current popularity – tell us about the contemporary moment of noisy, perhaps diversionary, cultural warfare over the university and education more generally: “wokeness,” the “fearless pursuit of truth,” the sophistic invocation of “reason” in defense of the unreasonable, and the insistence on keeping schools open in the face of a pandemic? Can it direct us back to considerations of class, resistance, hegemony, epistemology, and art as a critical practice?

We are particularly interested in definitions, conceptualizations, delimitations, and troublings of the idea of ‘dark academia’ as both an aesthetico-political project and a narrative genre. We are interested, too, in writing on all forms of art and literature, including both art/literature associated with dark academic aesthetic taste and art/literature that narrativizes or thematizes the dark academic. We are also interested in cultural and media critique.

Possible topics and styles include but are not limited to:

- Definitional and conceptual proposals that seek to delimit dark academia from other phenomena
- The campus novel, research noir, and other fictional depictions of university life

- Analyses of digital and social media objects involving any aspect of dark academia (TikTok, tumblr, Pinterest, Spotify, Facebook, Twitter, Reddit, etc.)
- Theories of reception engaging dark academia's archive (Modernism, Neoclassicism, Romanticism, etc.)
- Musicological and sartorial analyses of dark academia
- Environmental humanities perspectives
- Performance studies perspectives
- Religious studies perspectives, including those that link academia, theory, and knowledge to esoteric, encrypted, or occult aesthetics and practices (e.g., *The Secret History*, *The Tunnel*, writings by the CCRU)
- "Bad" reading and dark academic presentations of the "canon"
- Connections between dark academia and the COVID-19 pandemic
- Critiques of dark academia, from ethical, political, and aesthetic angles, in particular those which engage anti-Eurocentric thought.
- Theory-fictions and autotheory engaging dark academic tropes
- The aesthetics of nostalgia and the modern university
- Critiques of the modern university which may shed light on the rise of dark academia
- Intellectual genealogies, archaeologies, palimpsests, or traces which attempt to ground dark academia in prior materials
- Explanations of why dark academia doesn't exist at all
- Light academia
- Genre analyses, making explicit dark academia's relationship to other literary constructs (the Cthulhu Mythos, Weird fiction, horror, speculative fiction, detective and crime fiction, the philosophical novel, etc.)

Please send a proposal of approximately 250 to 350 words and a short biographical statement to both editors, Cody Jones (codyjones@nyu.edu) and Nell Pach (npach@uchicago.edu) by April 1, 2022. Accepted proposals will be notified by May 1, and drafts will be due by September 1. Feel free to reach out with questions or proposal ideas.