



How can Marxist HER help us regain the future in the age of uncertainty?

17 October 2025, The 8th International Higher Education Studies Conference

Dr hab. Krystian Szadkowski

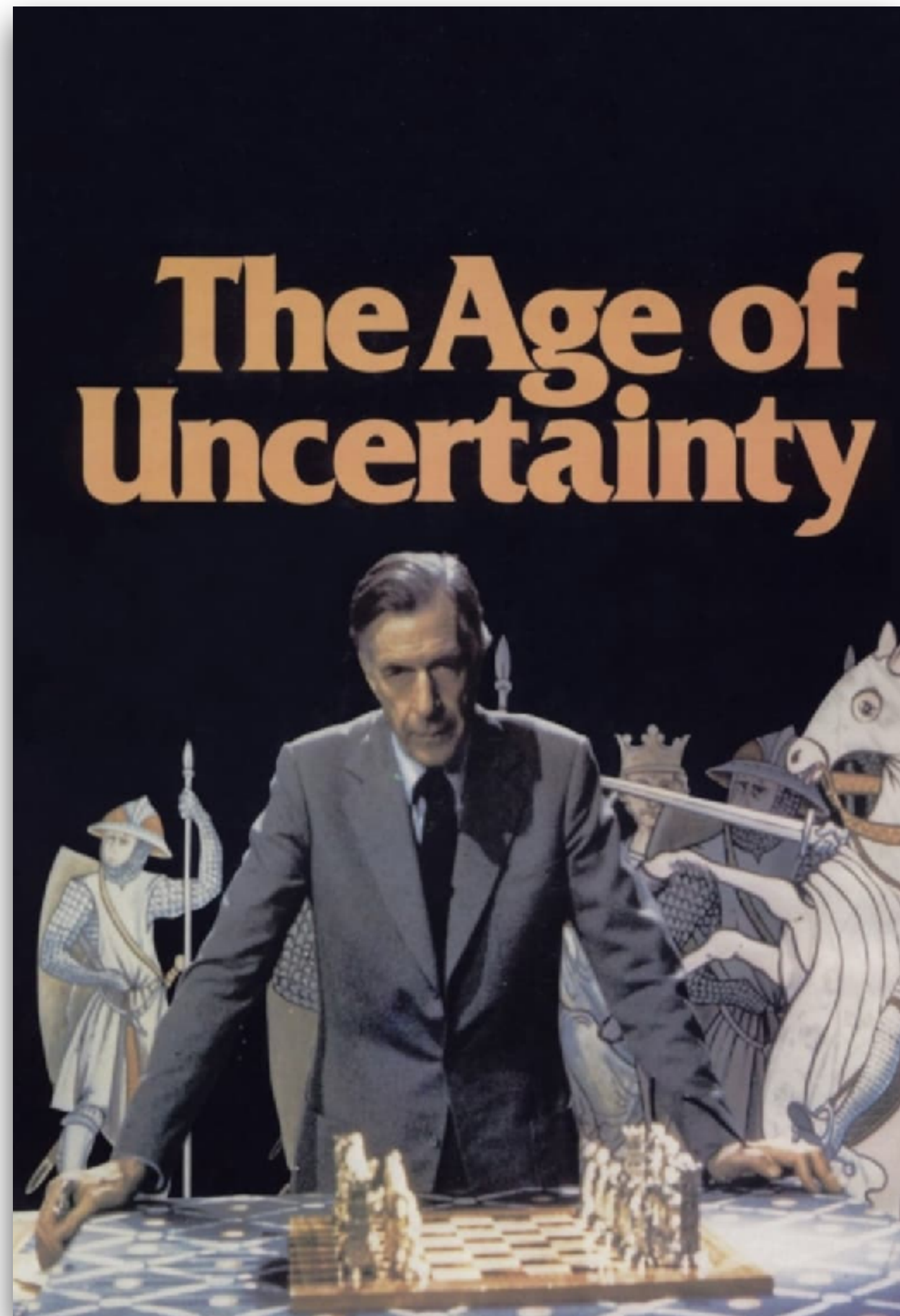


Nazim Hikmet (1902-1963) - in 1951 lost his Turkish citizenship and became Polish citizen.



Communist University of the Toilers of the East
Main building on Pushkin Square (on the left, no longer in existence).

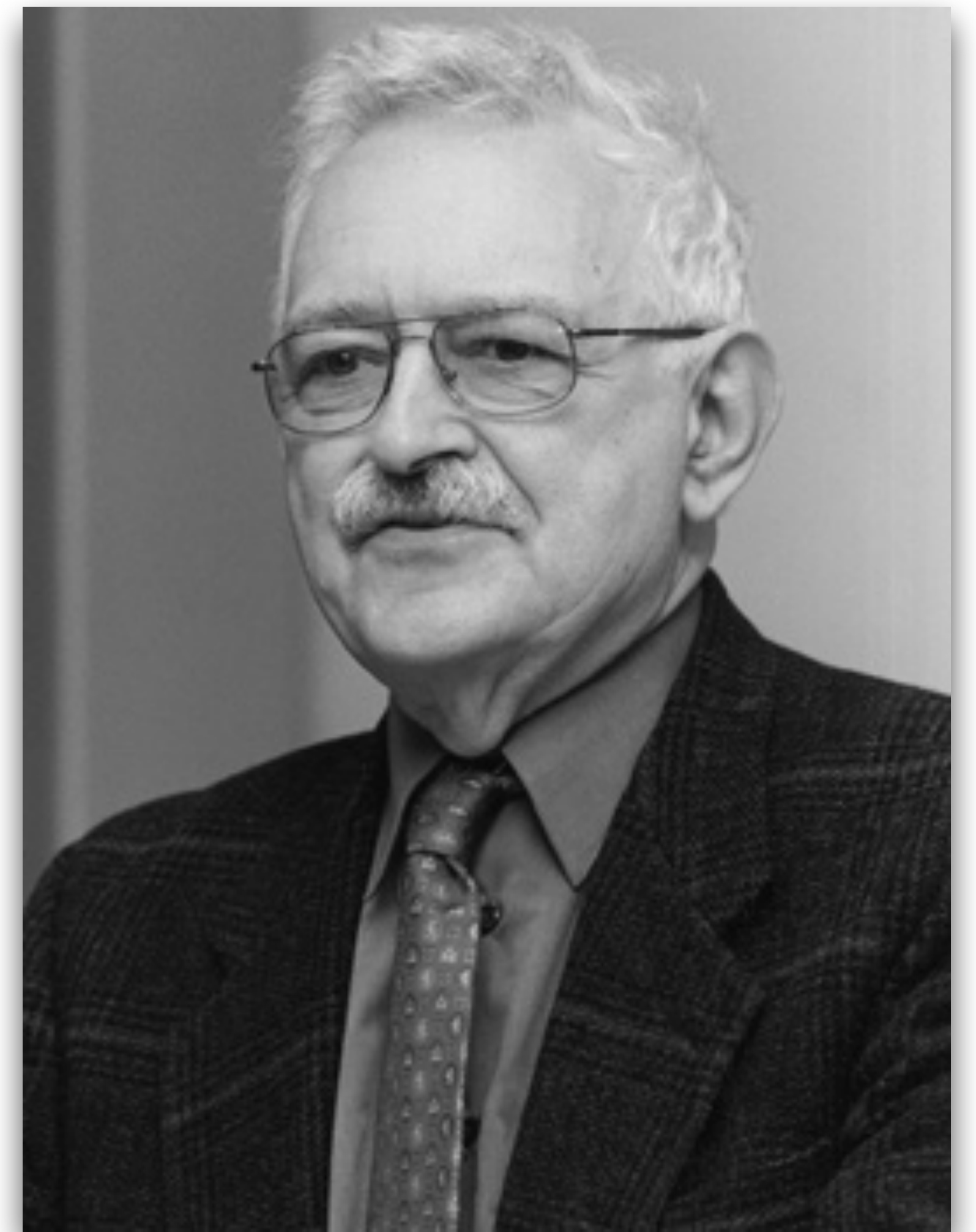
Graduates in the 1920s: Hồ Chí Minh; Tan Malaka; Liu Shaoqi; Ren Bishi; Nazim Hikmet



John Kenneth Galbraith (1908-2006)



Zygmunt Bauman (1925-2017)



Immanuel Wallerstein (1930-2019)

The age of uncertainty and the lost future of higher education



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I. From Uneven Uncertainty to Hardening Certainties

- The “age of uncertainty” is not equally experienced: in the global South and East (e.g., Poland, Turkey), uncertainty has long been structural—rooted in dependency, volatility, and precarity.
- What once appeared as instability now solidifies into certainties: climate disaster, technological unemployment, extractivism-led wars, and the erosion of higher education’s social role.



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- Universities in semi-peripheral societies face not only neoliberal pressures but the deepening of academic dependency and the foreclosure of alternative futures.



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3. Higher Education as a Node in the Global Valorisation of Capital

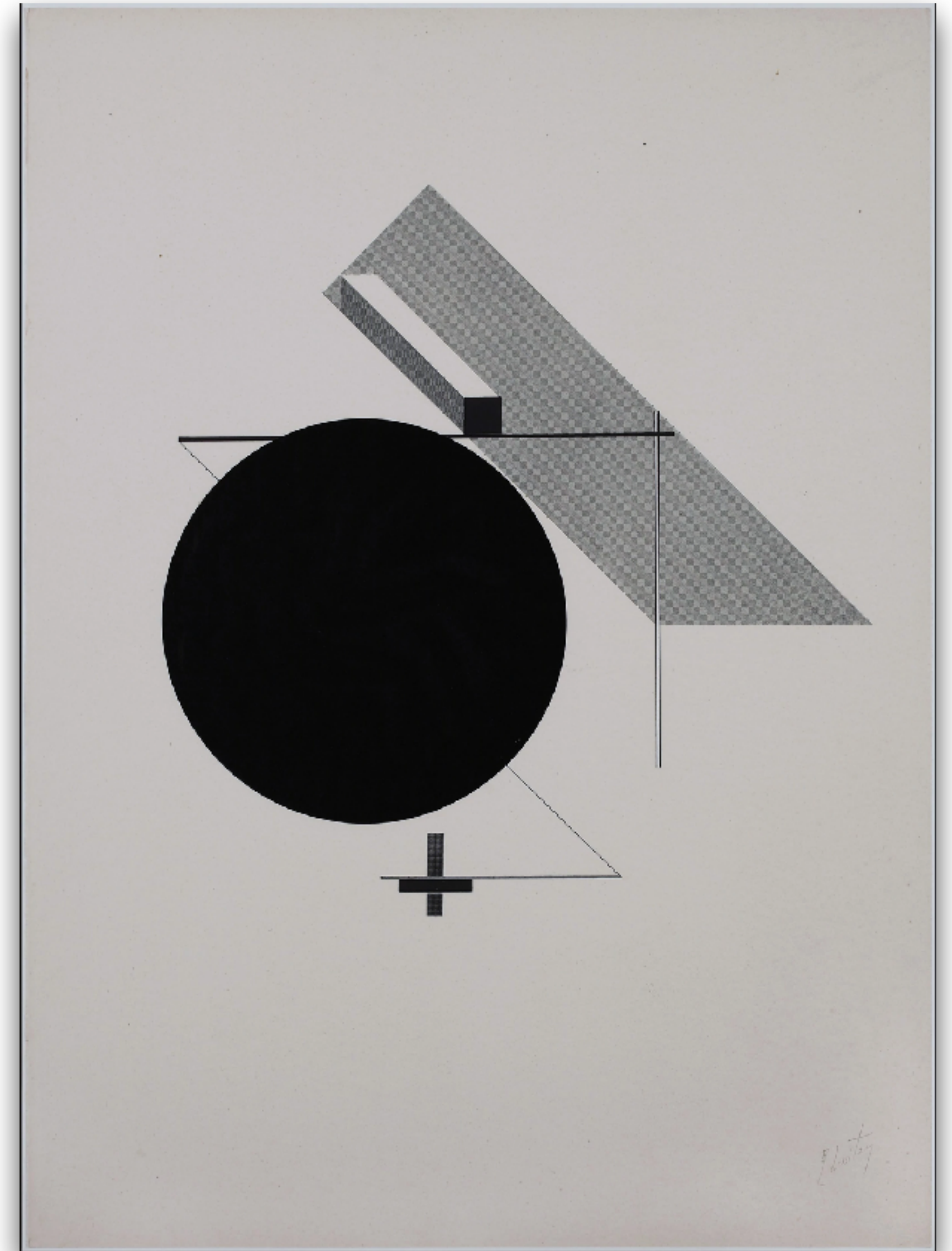
- Universities are no longer *outside* capital; they are *within* its circuits of accumulation — sites where human capacities are commodified, indebted, and managed.
- Higher education operates as part of capital’s global infrastructure: producing labour-power, innovation, and legitimacy for accumulation.
- In semi-peripheries, universities are inserted into dependent circuits — subordinated to global hierarchies of knowledge, funding, and recognition.





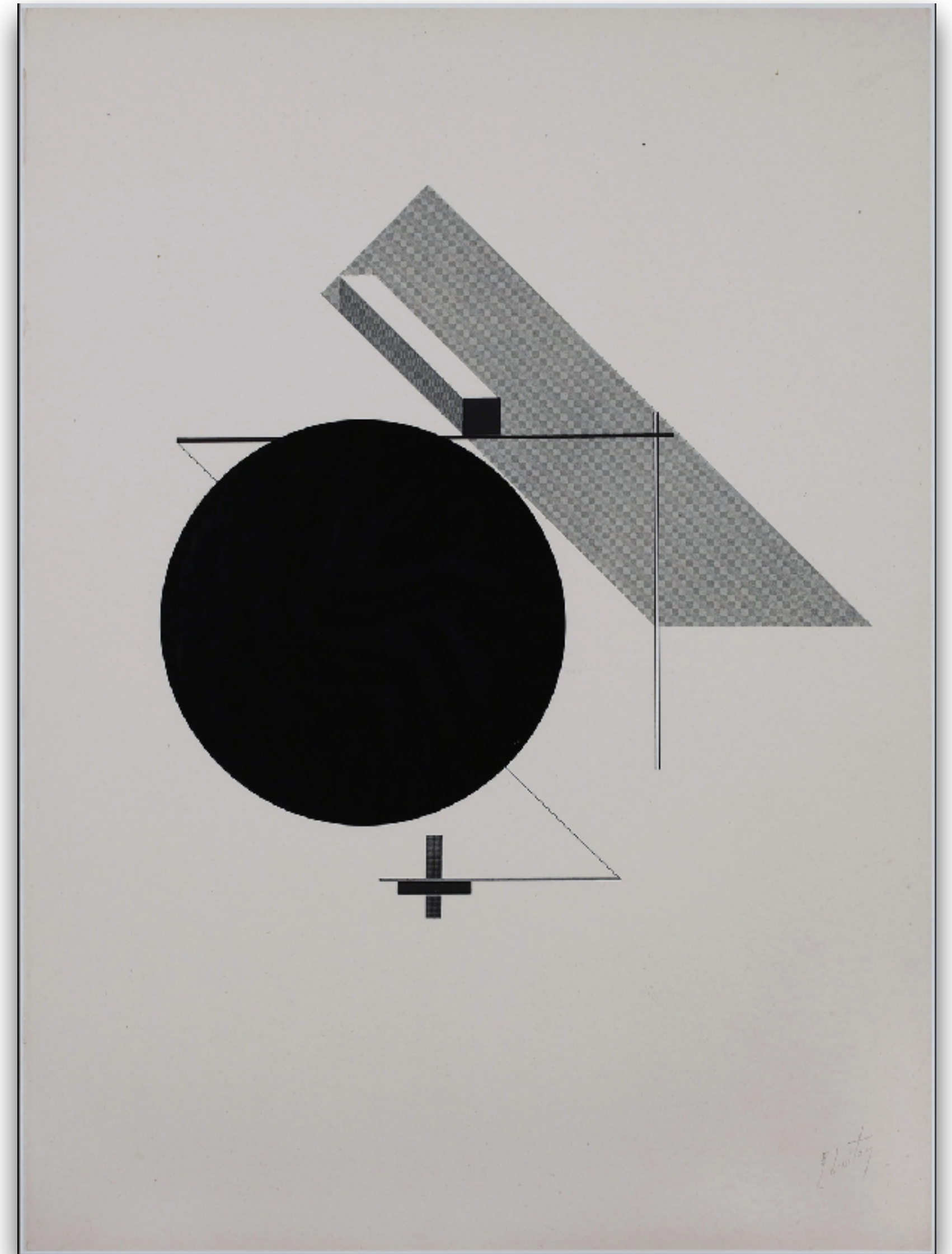
Are Higher Education Research
Up for the Challenge?

Higher Education Research: Conservative and Undertheorised



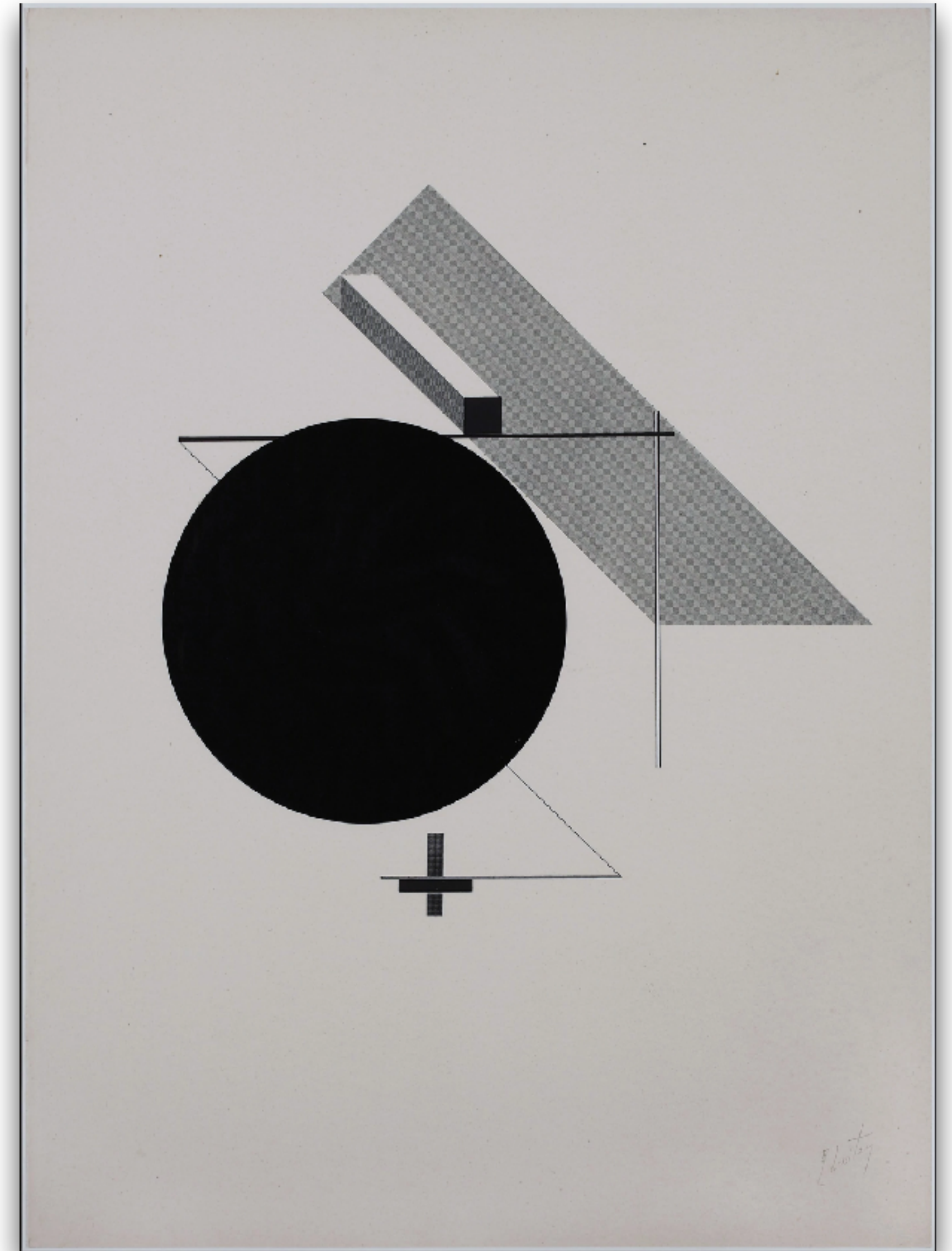
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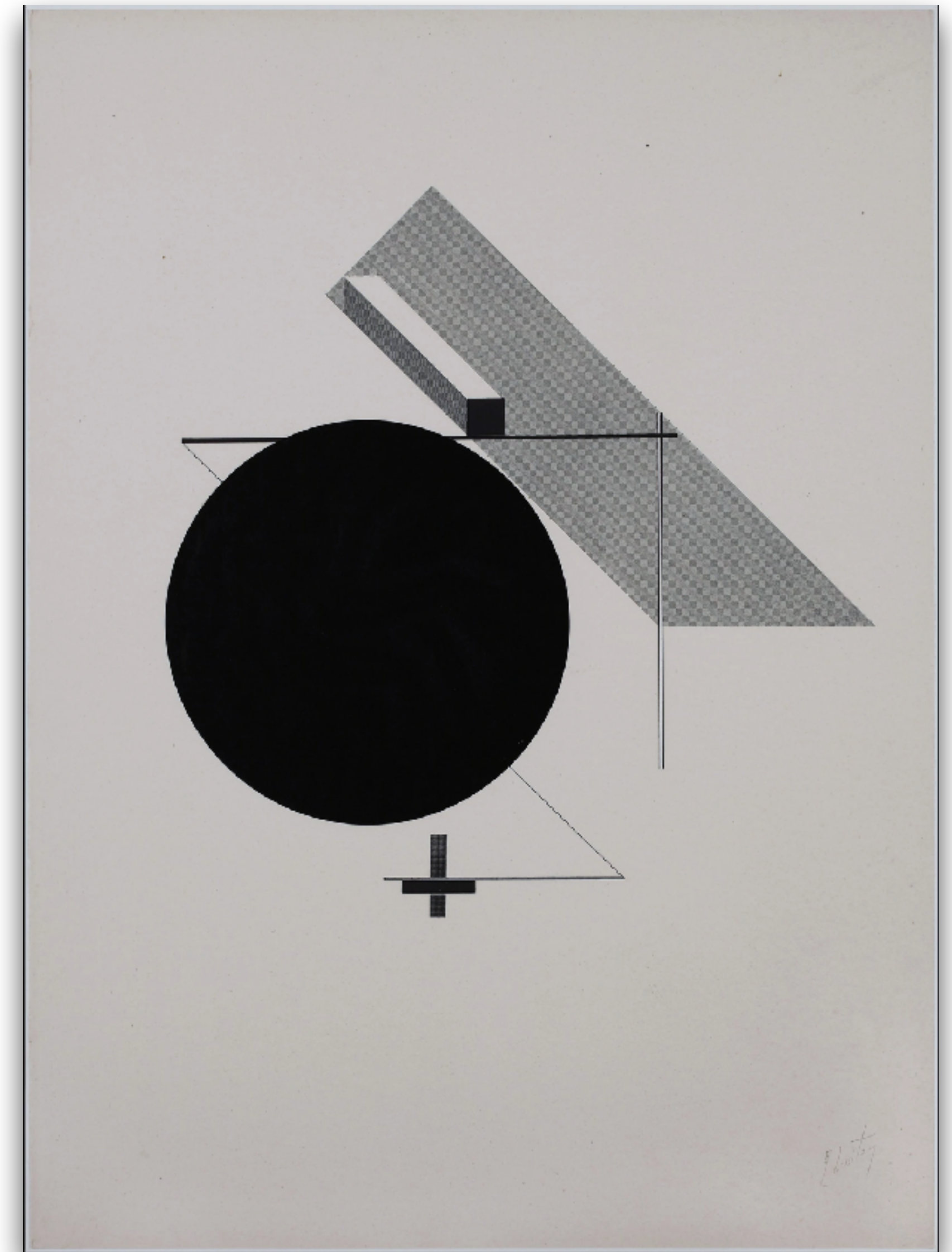
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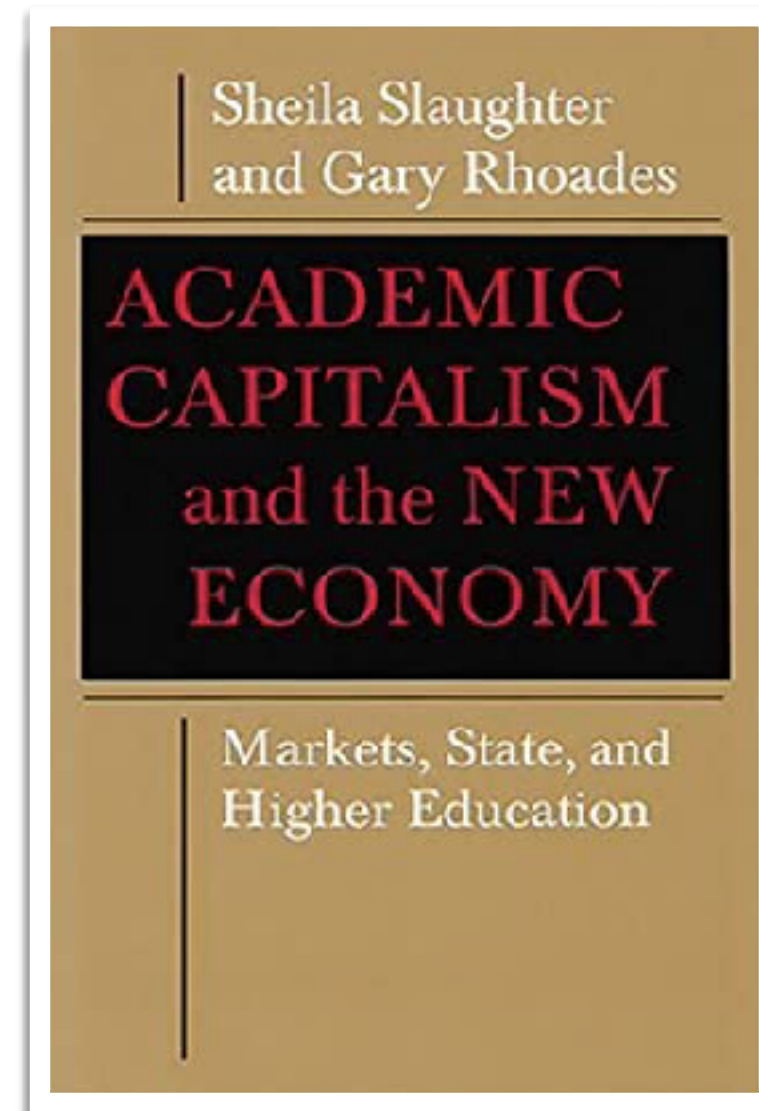


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3. HER has very **little achievements** in the area of generating its **own theories**. Small share of purely conceptual works. Severe **undertheoretisation**.

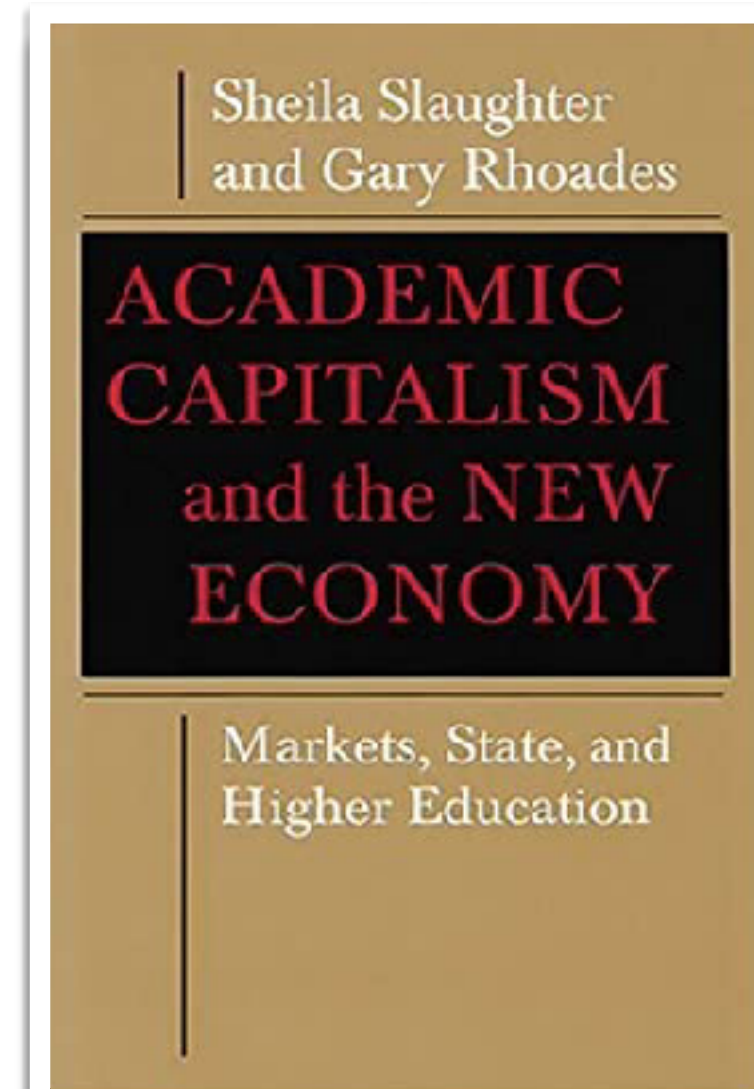


Academic capitalism and exceptionalism



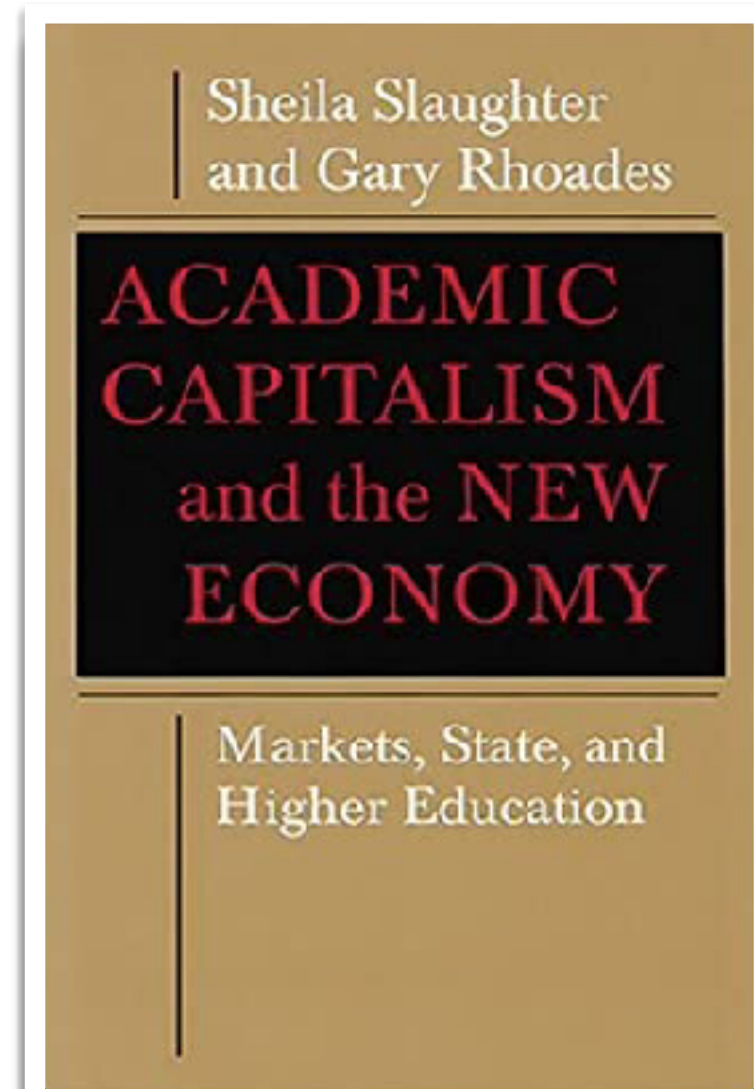
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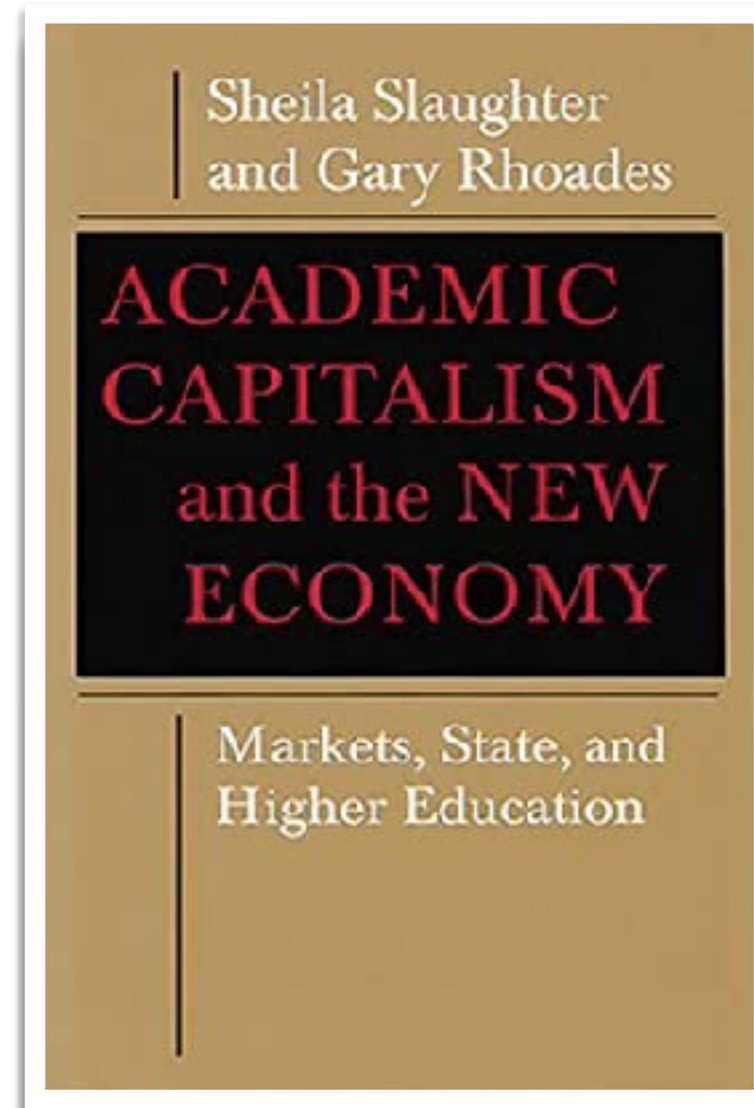
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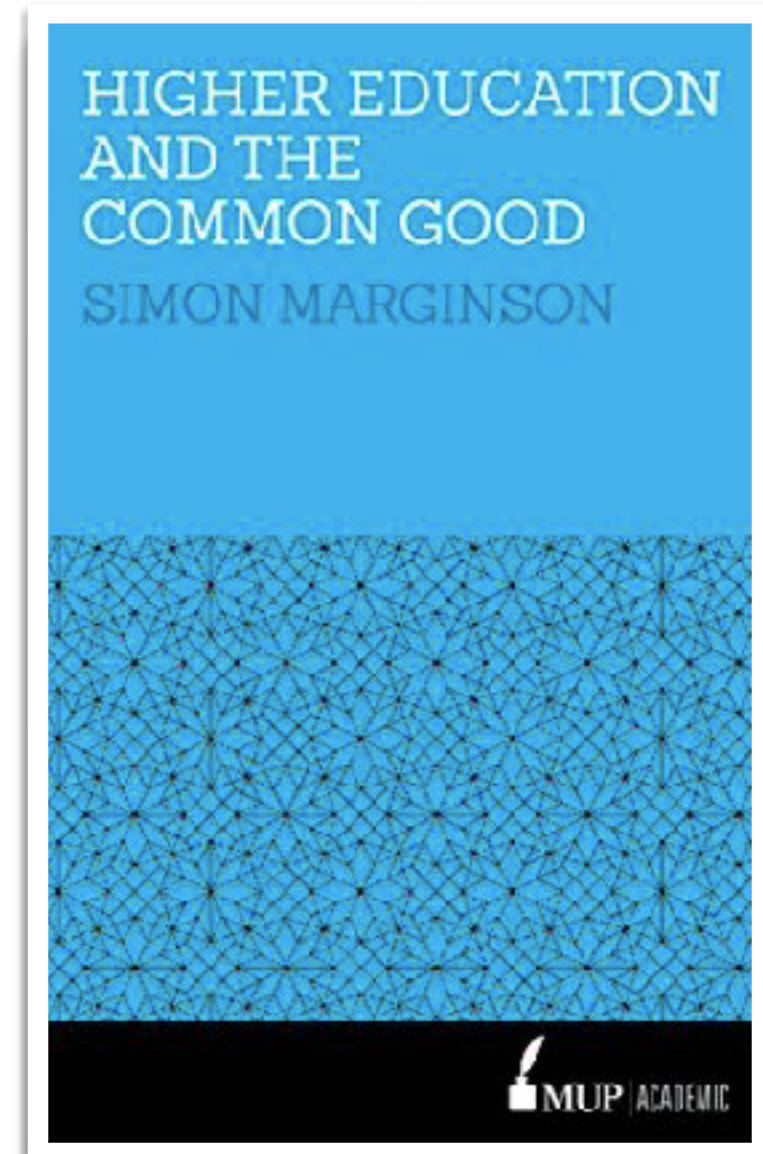
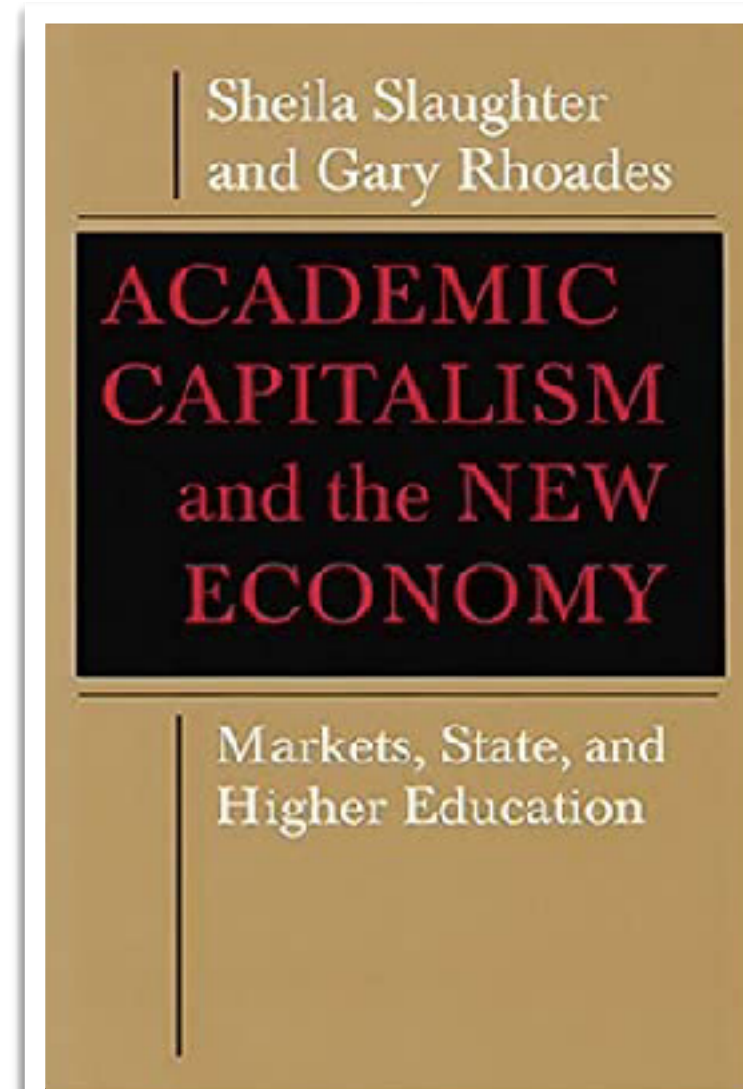
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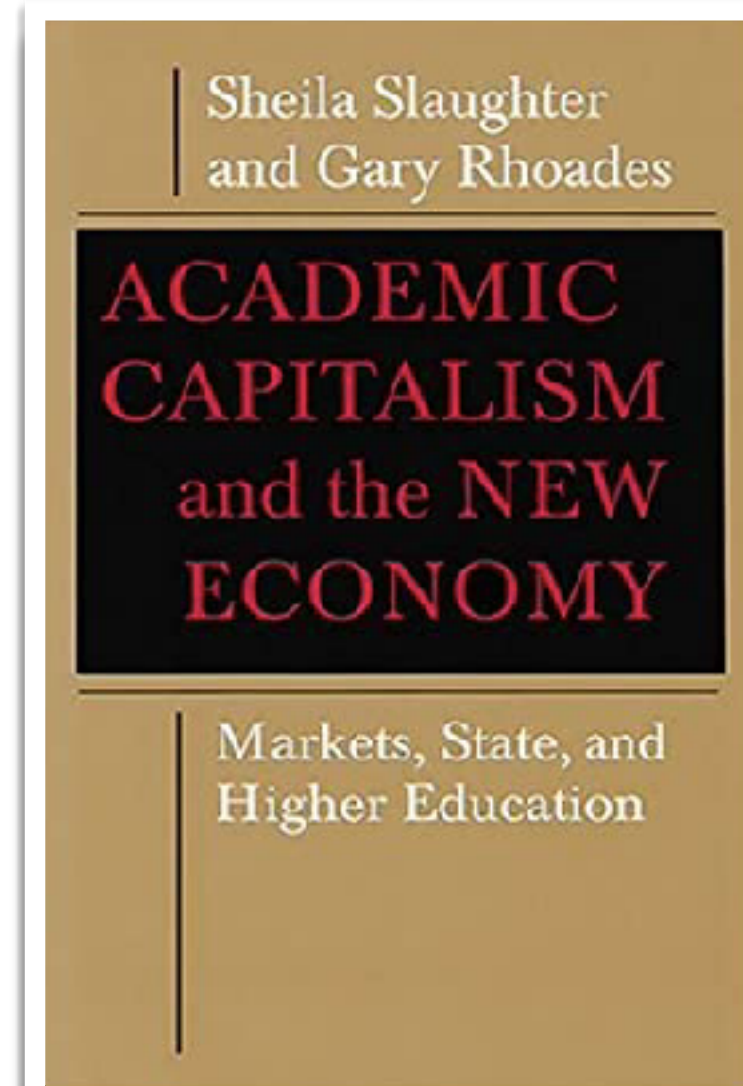
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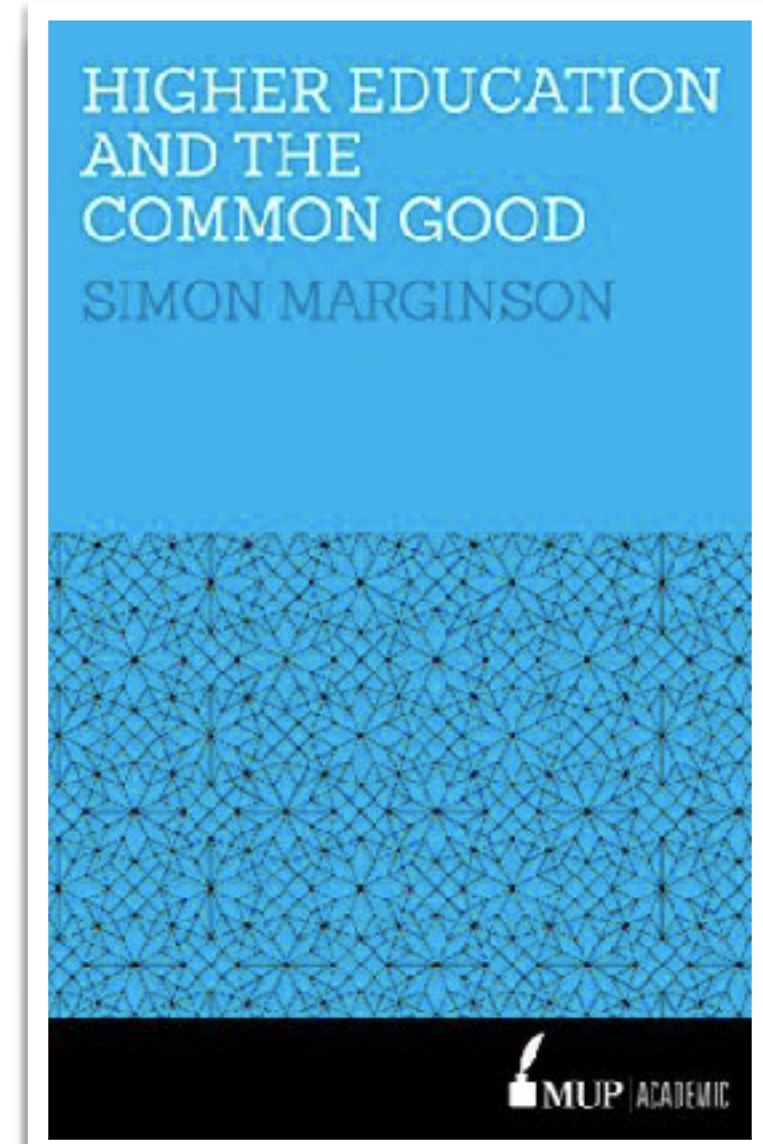


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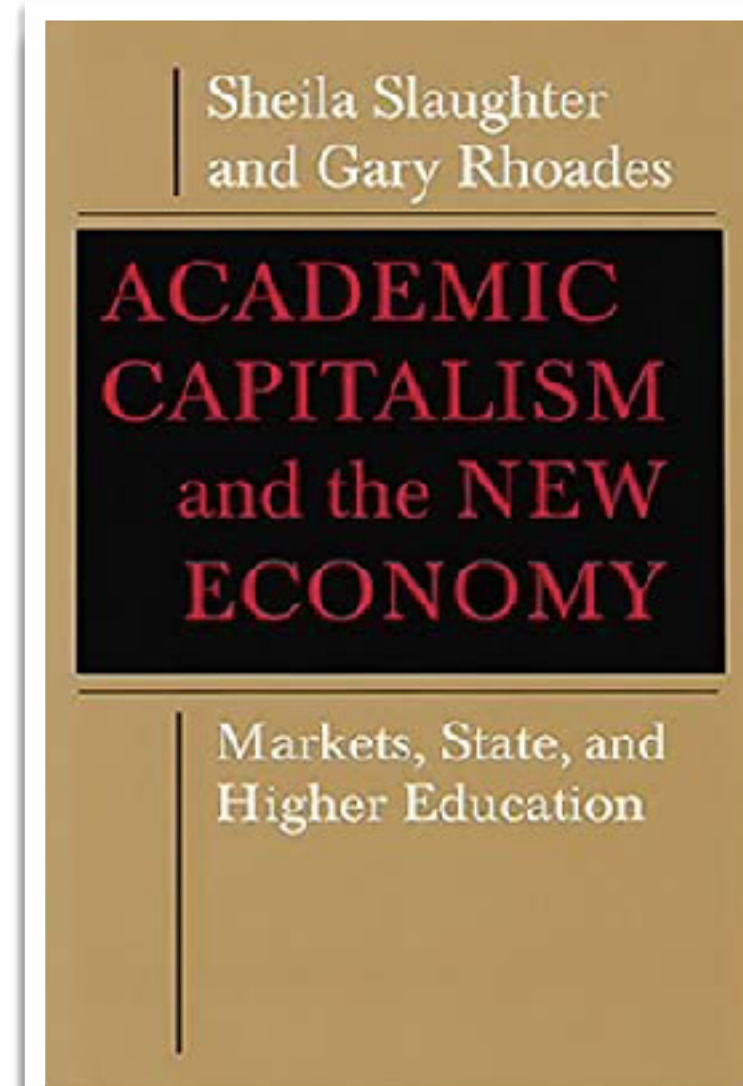


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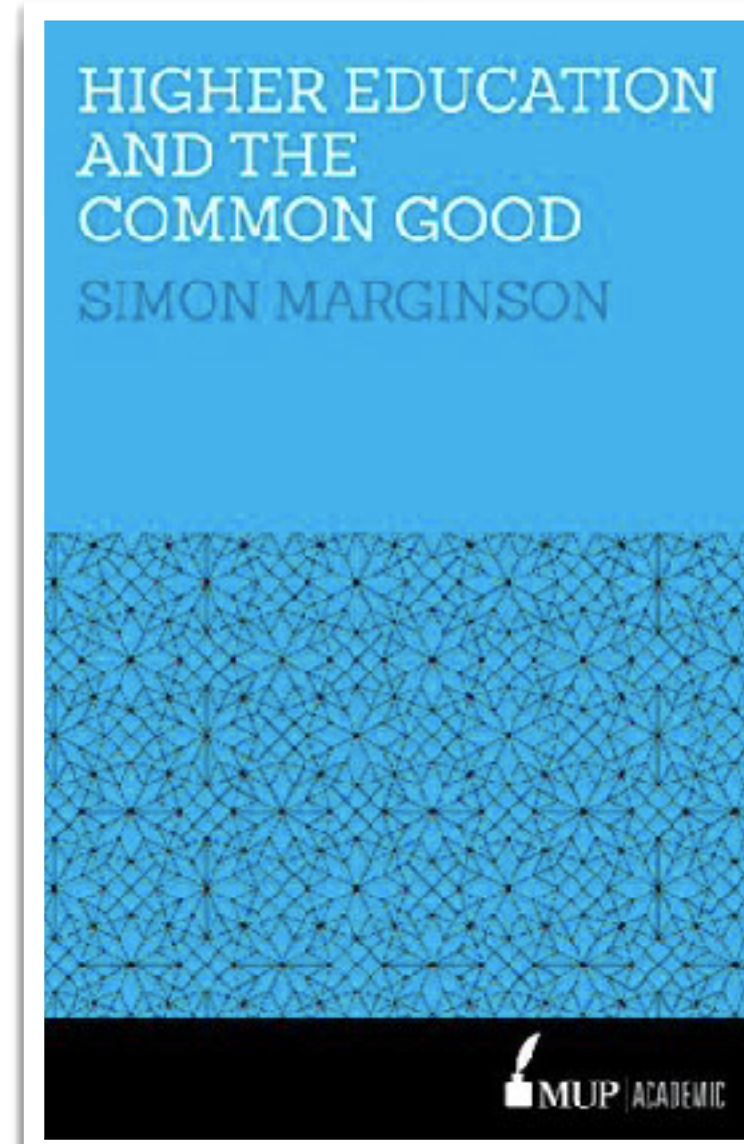


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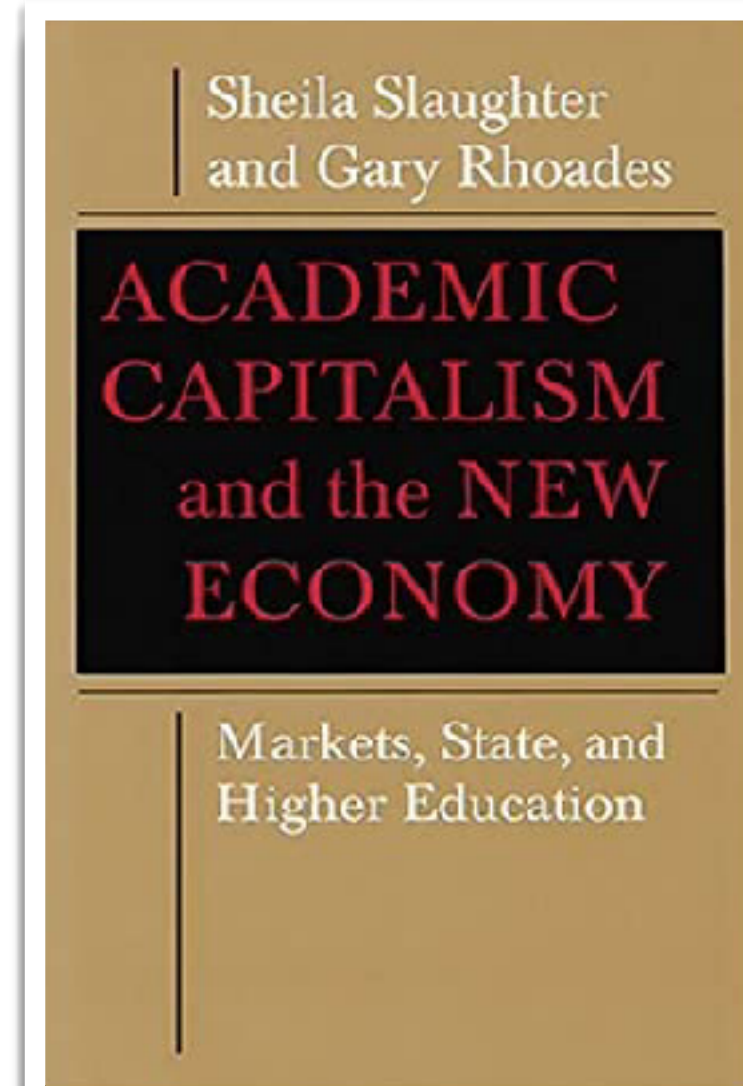


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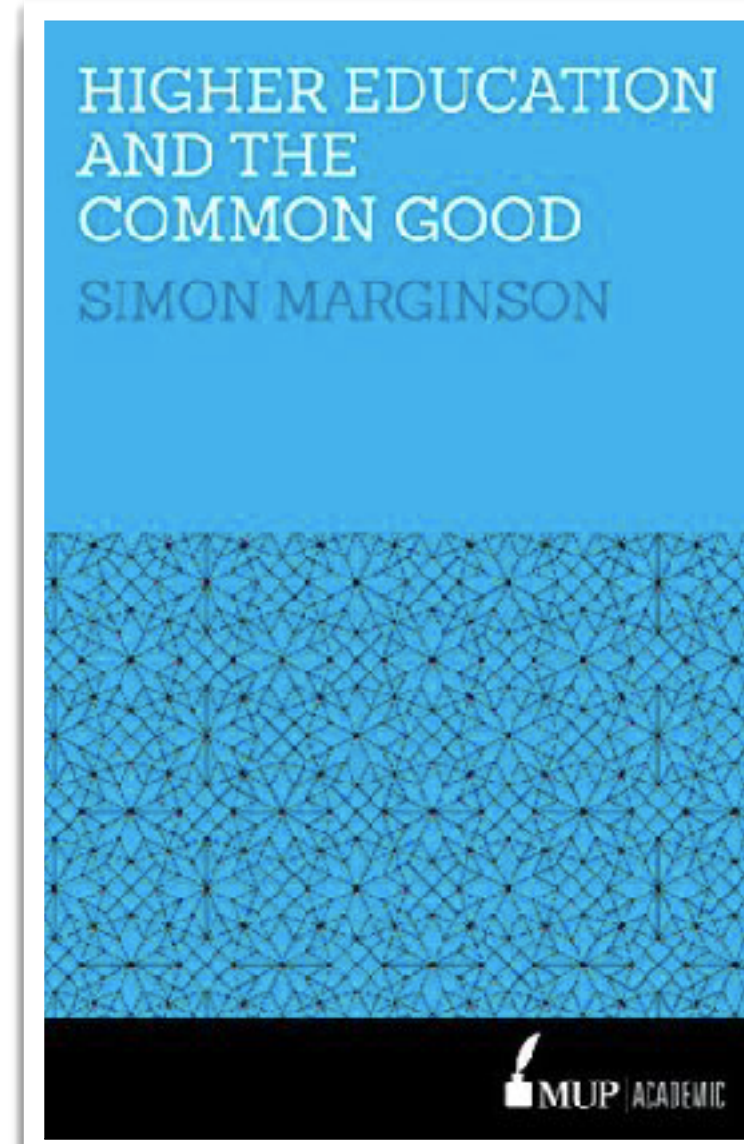


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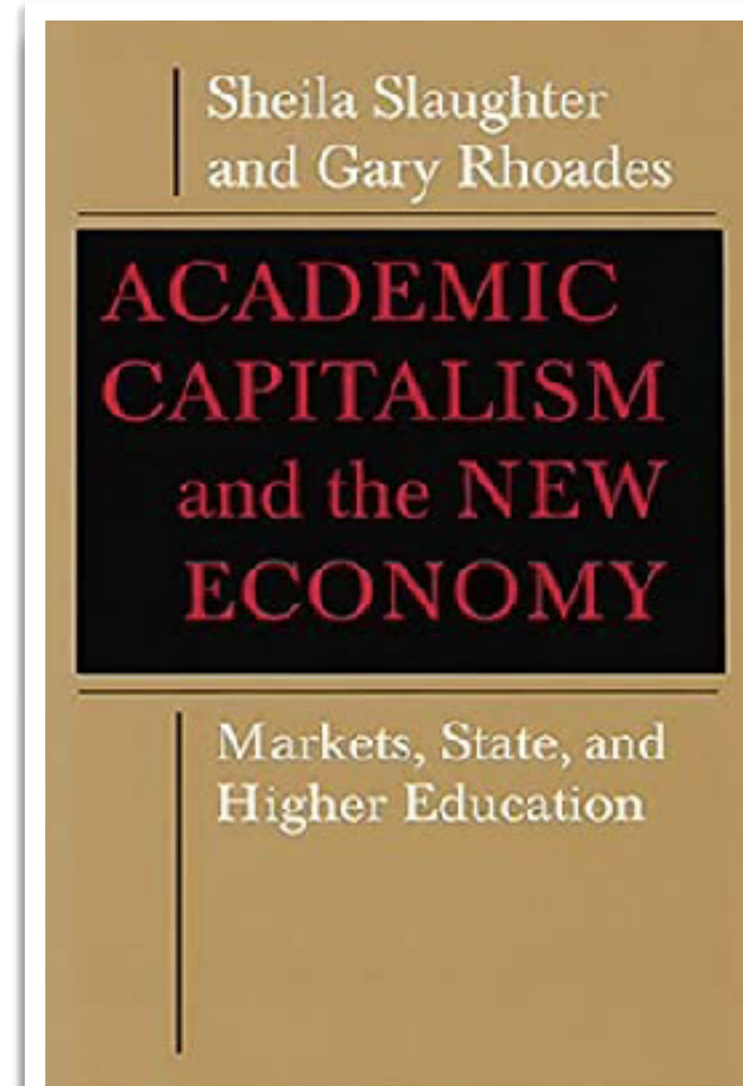


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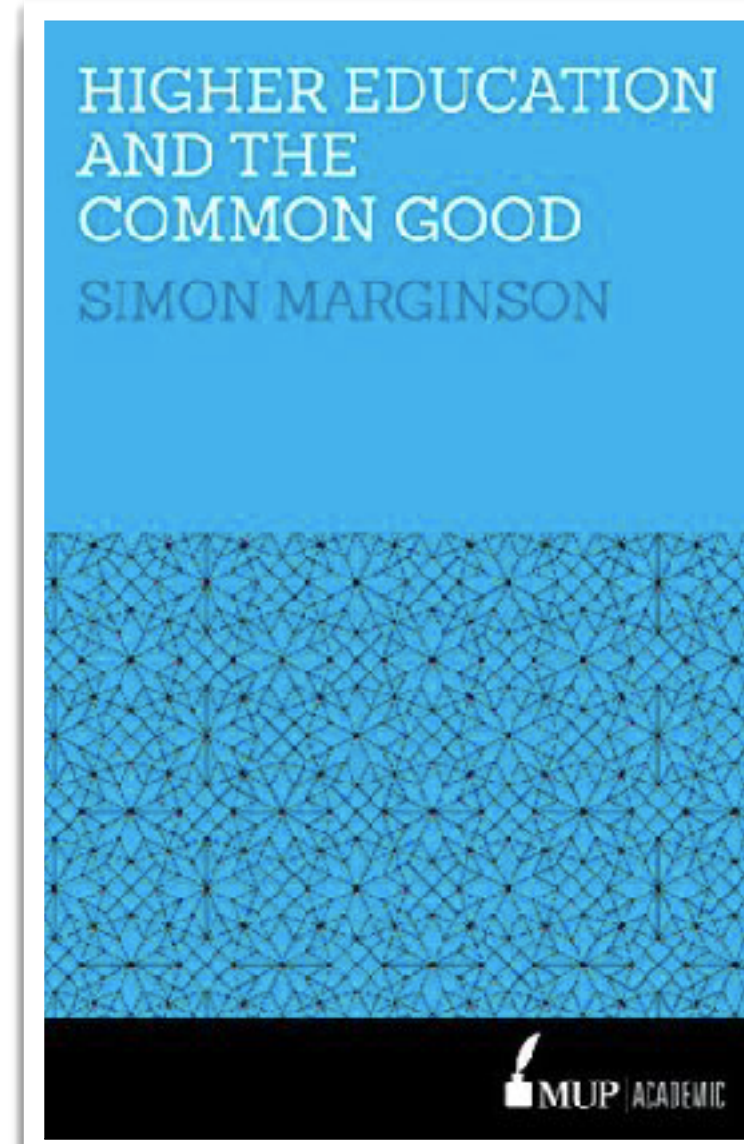


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4. Knowledge **resists privatisation**.





Can Marxist Higher Education Research Help Us Regain the Future?

Marxian Integral Critique as a Method for HER

„The real movement which abolishes the present state of things. The conditions of this movement result from the premises now in existence”

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4. **Political ontology** - A type of reflection that uncovers hidden and ideological presuppositions while establishing ground on which critique can operate.



Political ontology



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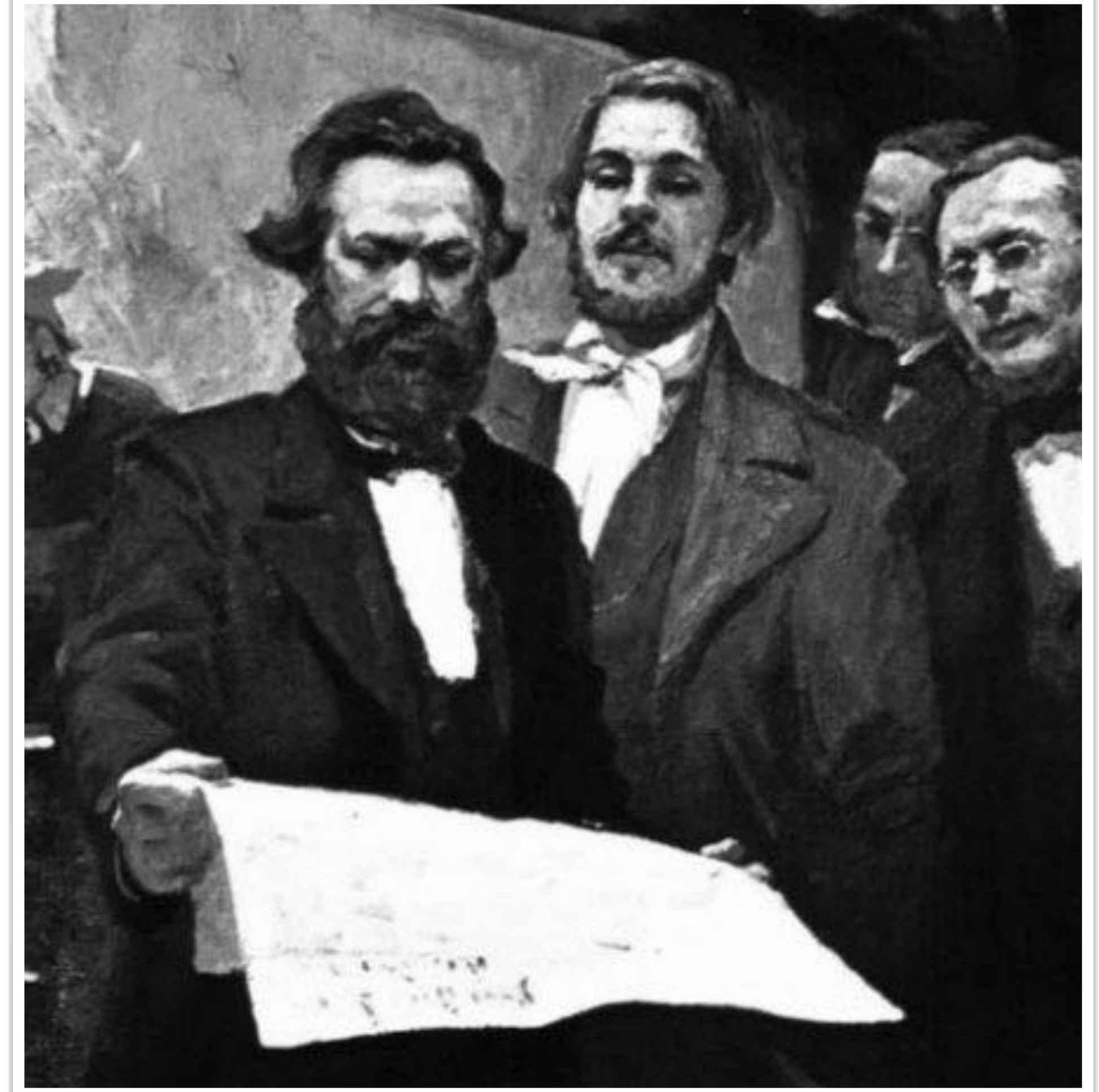
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3. The two hegemonic narratives on higher education, ostensibly form a particularly clear-cut opposition. However, **Marxist political ontology** reveals, that this is just an apparent contradiction, as they are both underpinned by shared features – the static conception of being and the resulting essentialism.



IN - Critique of the political economy

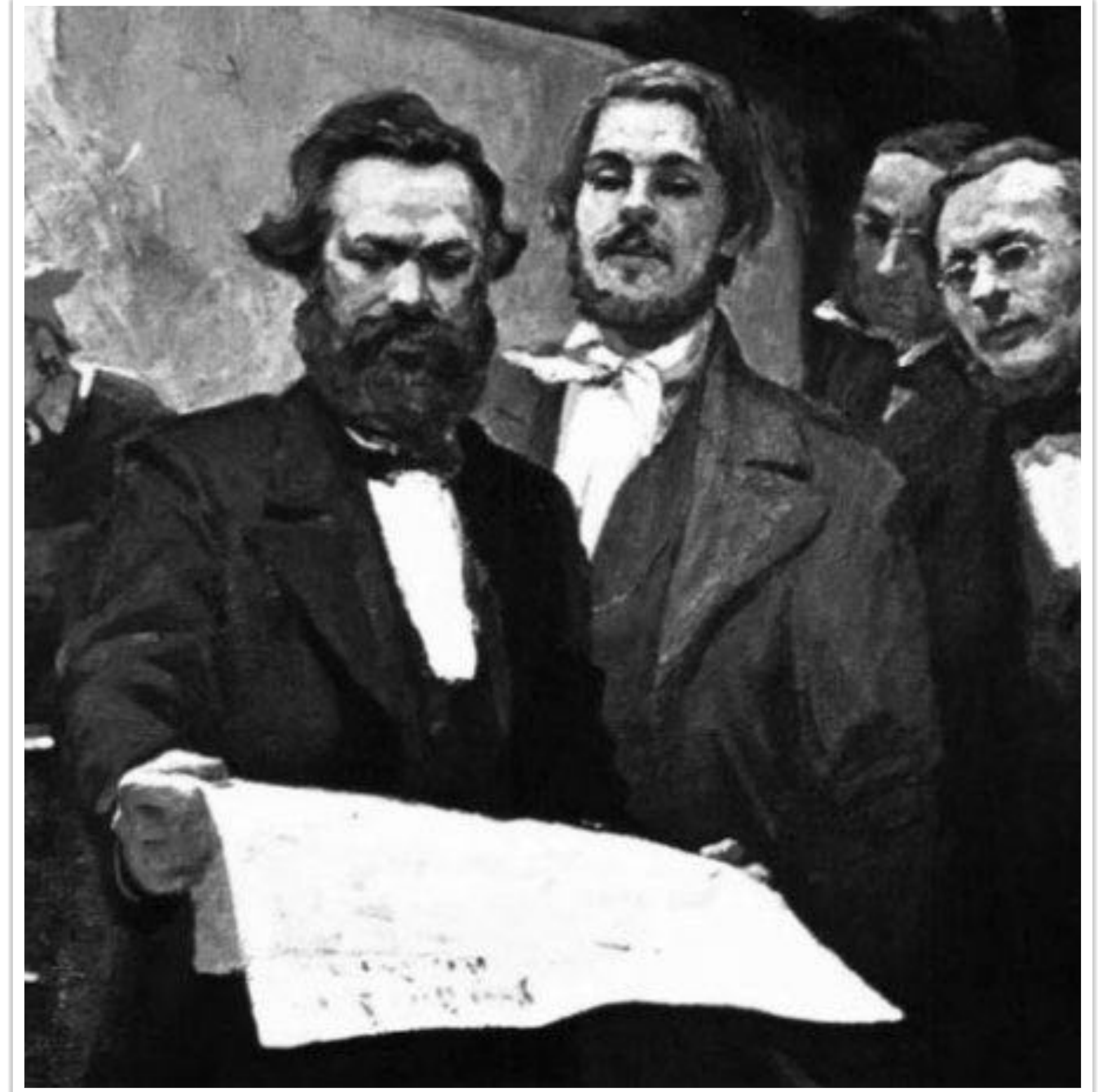
Capital is a totality striving to enclose and subsume the whole of social and biological life under its self-expanding movement. Capital is not a thing, but **a commodity-mediated social relationship**. Capital is **a value in motion**.



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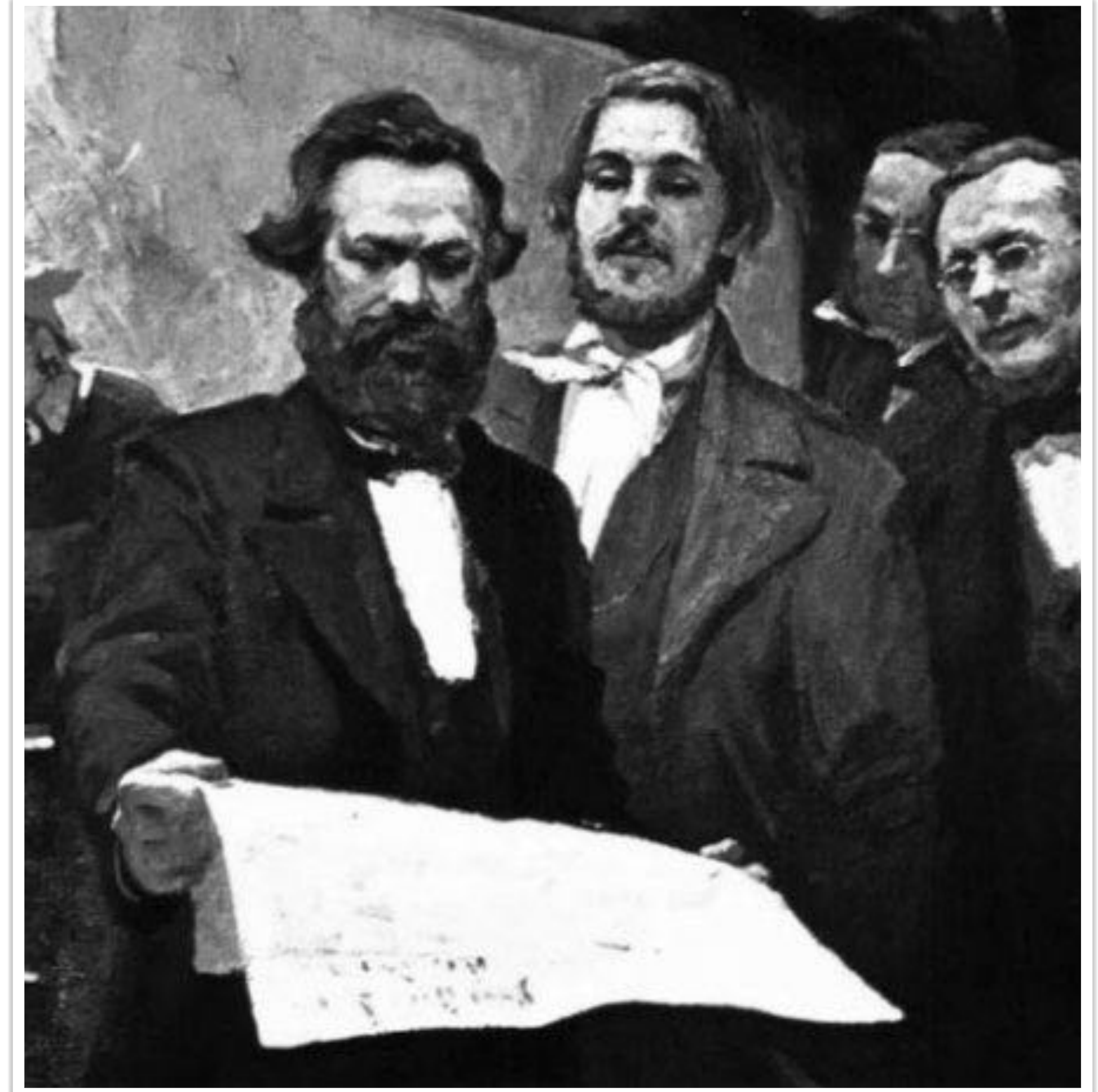
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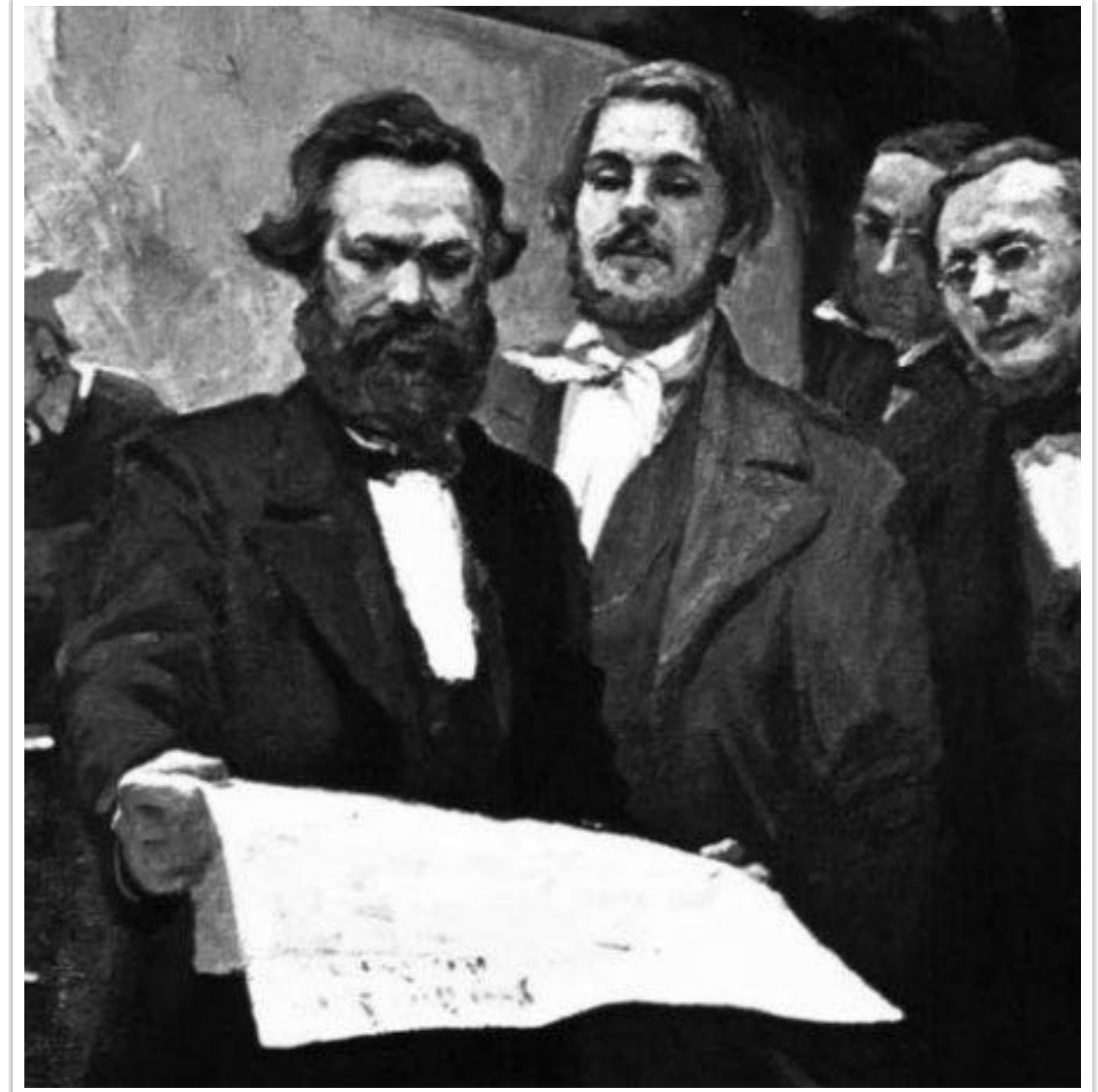
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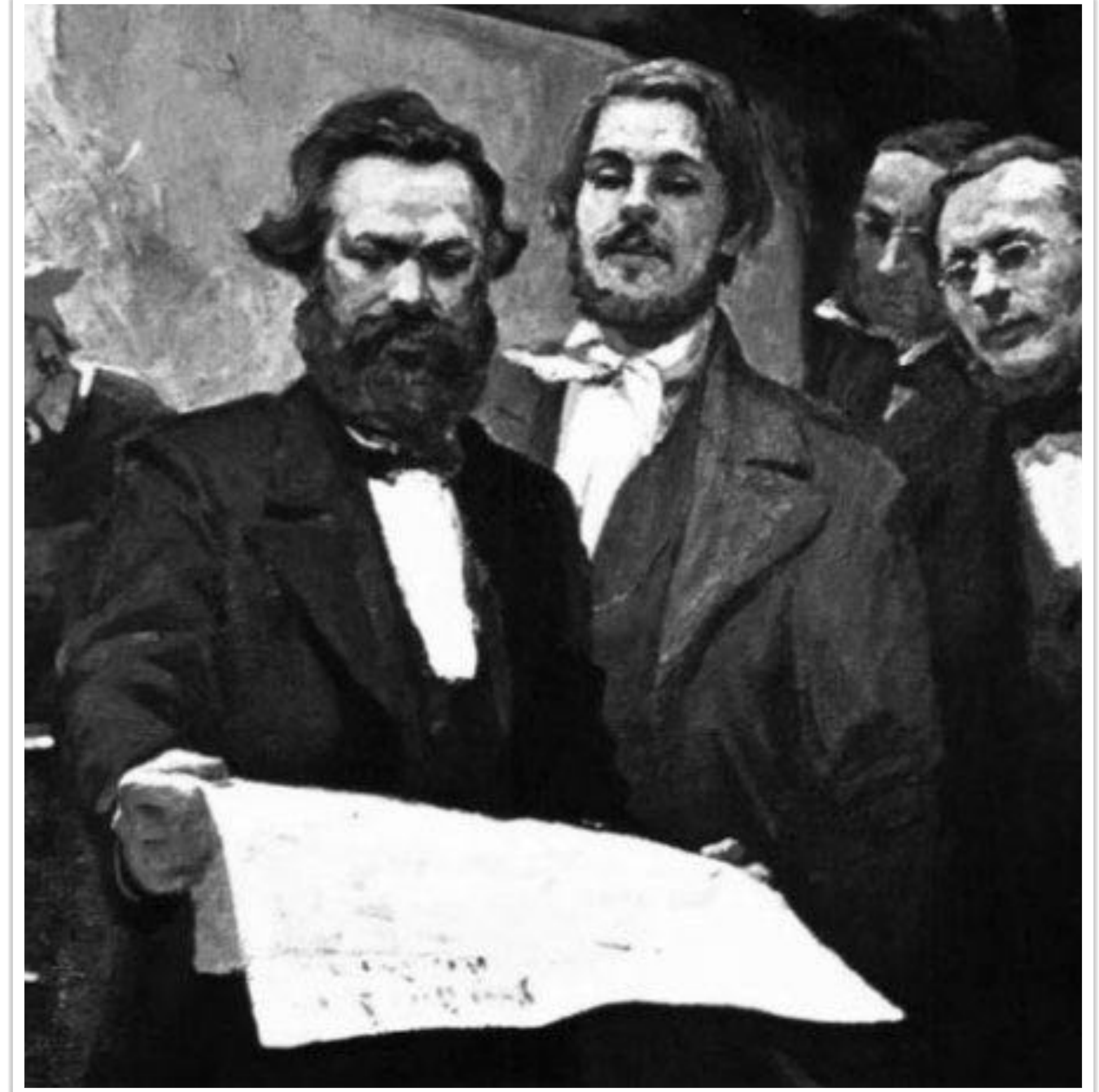
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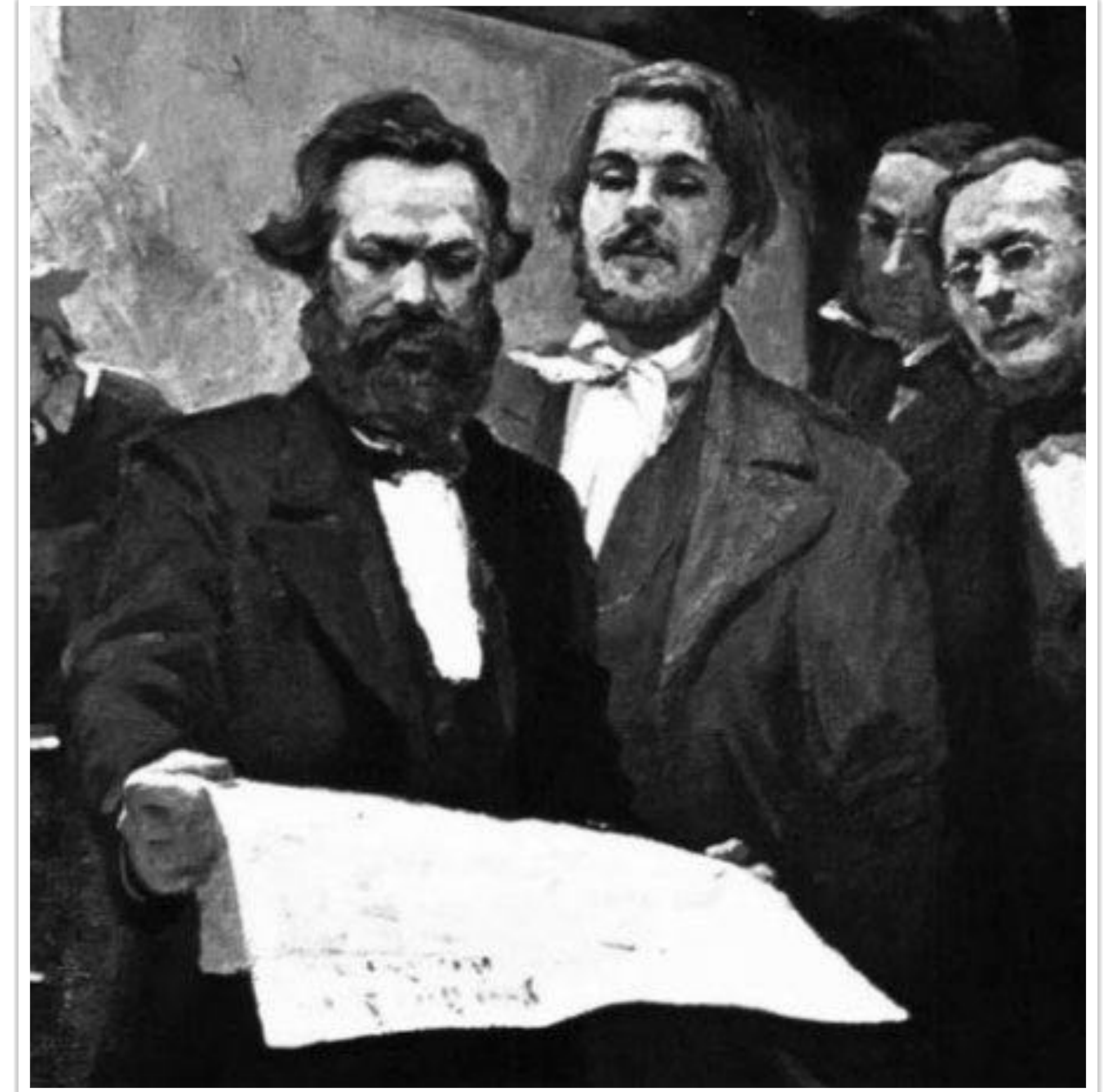
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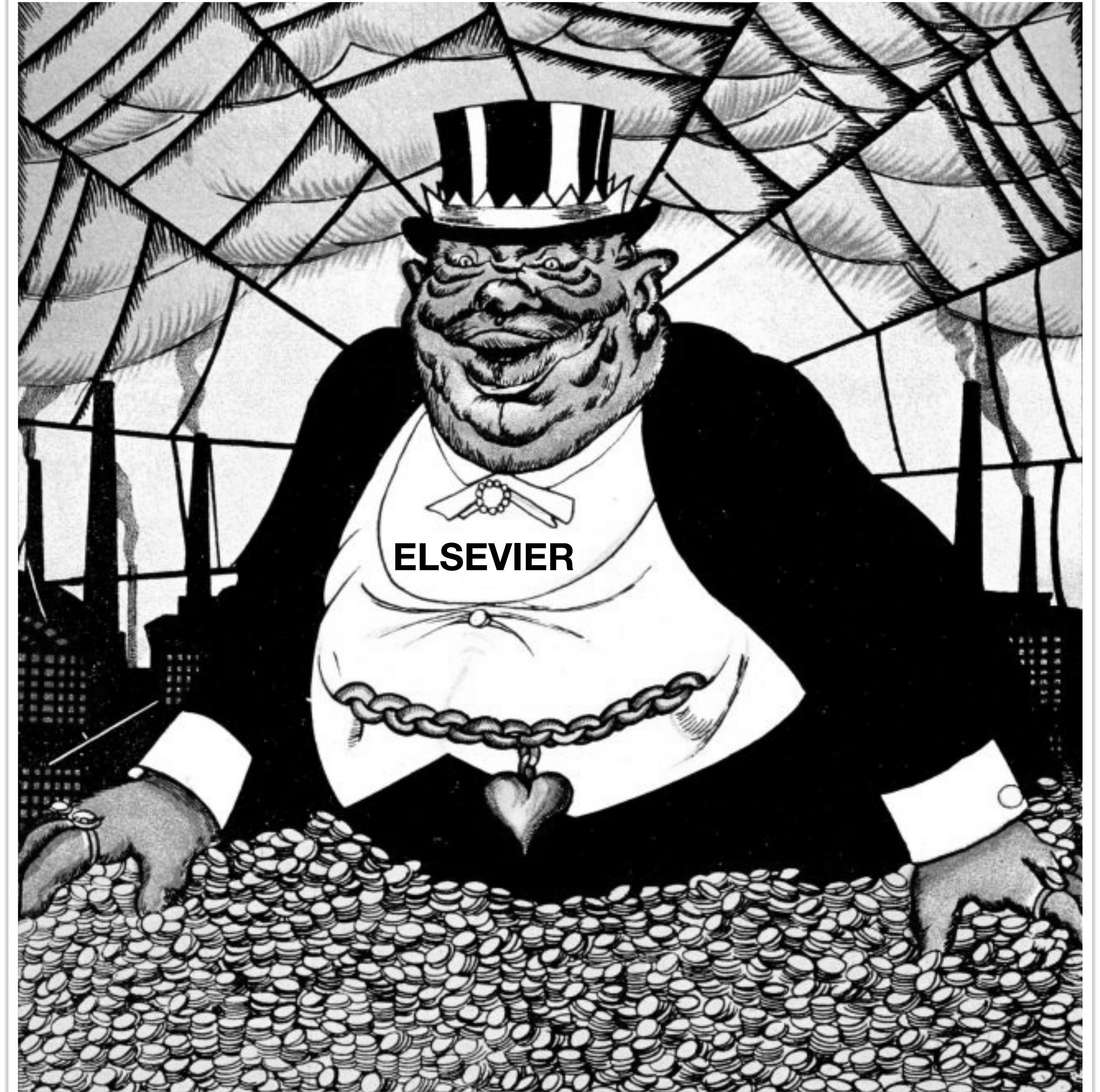
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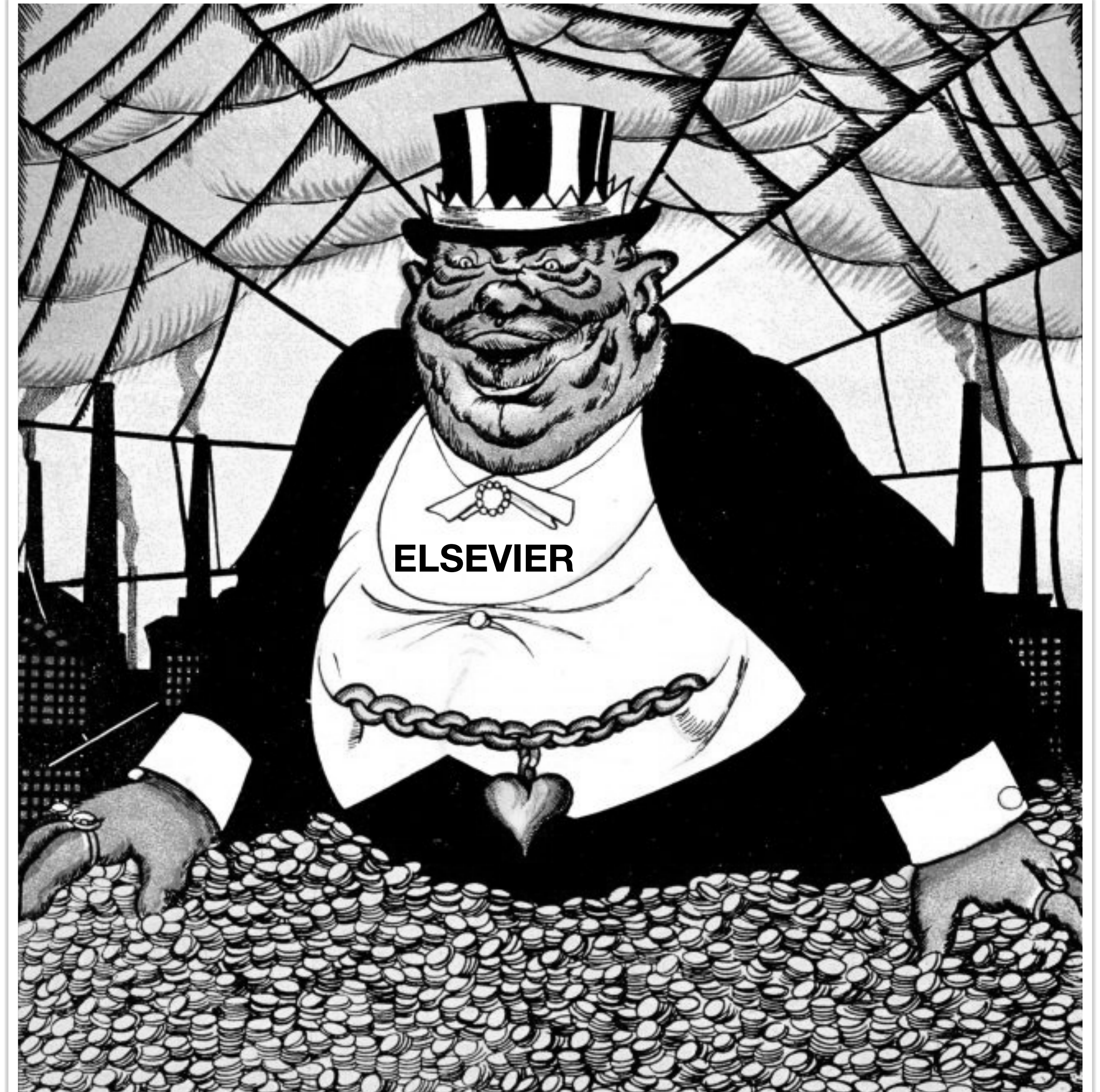


Capital in higher education



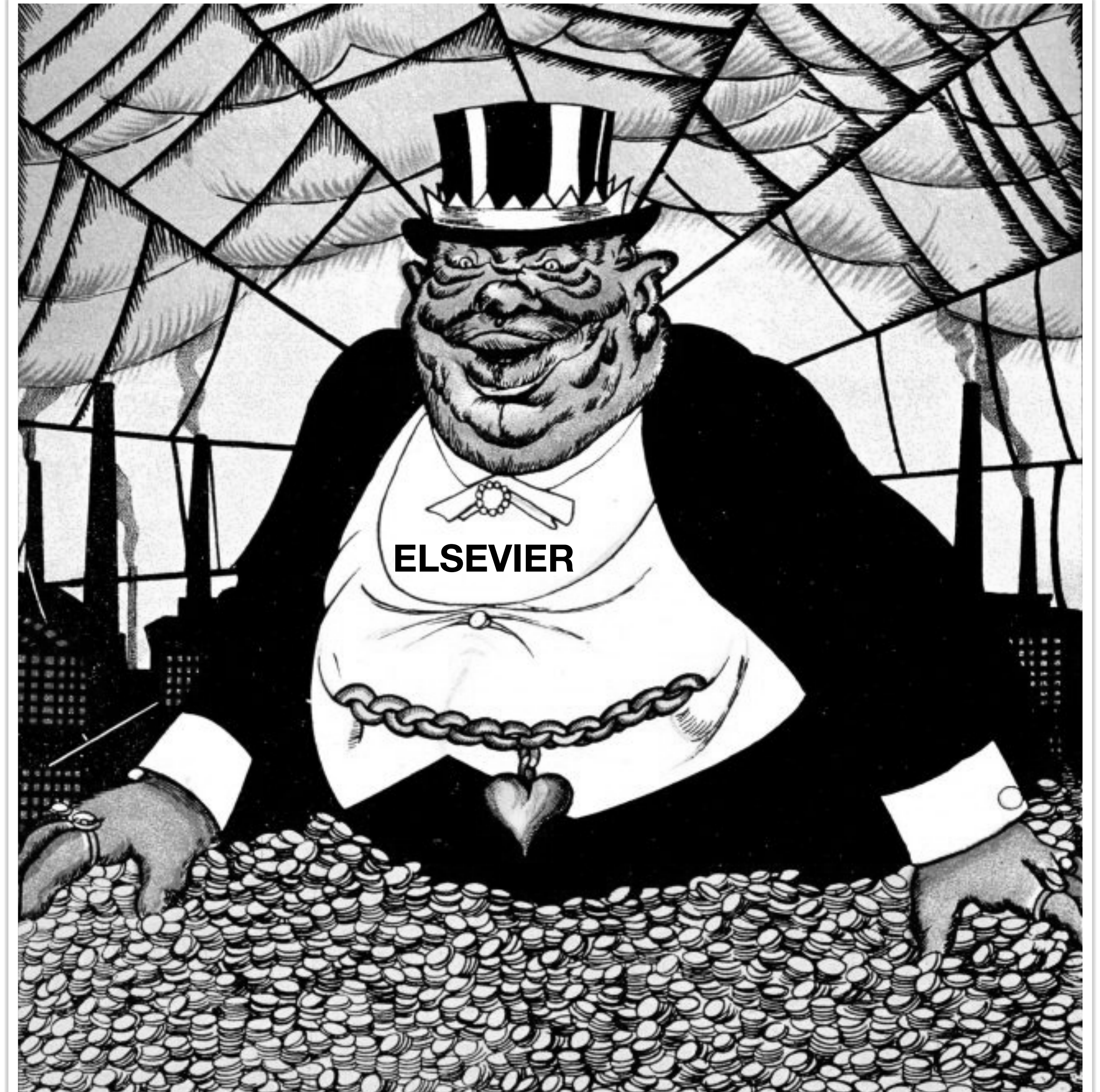
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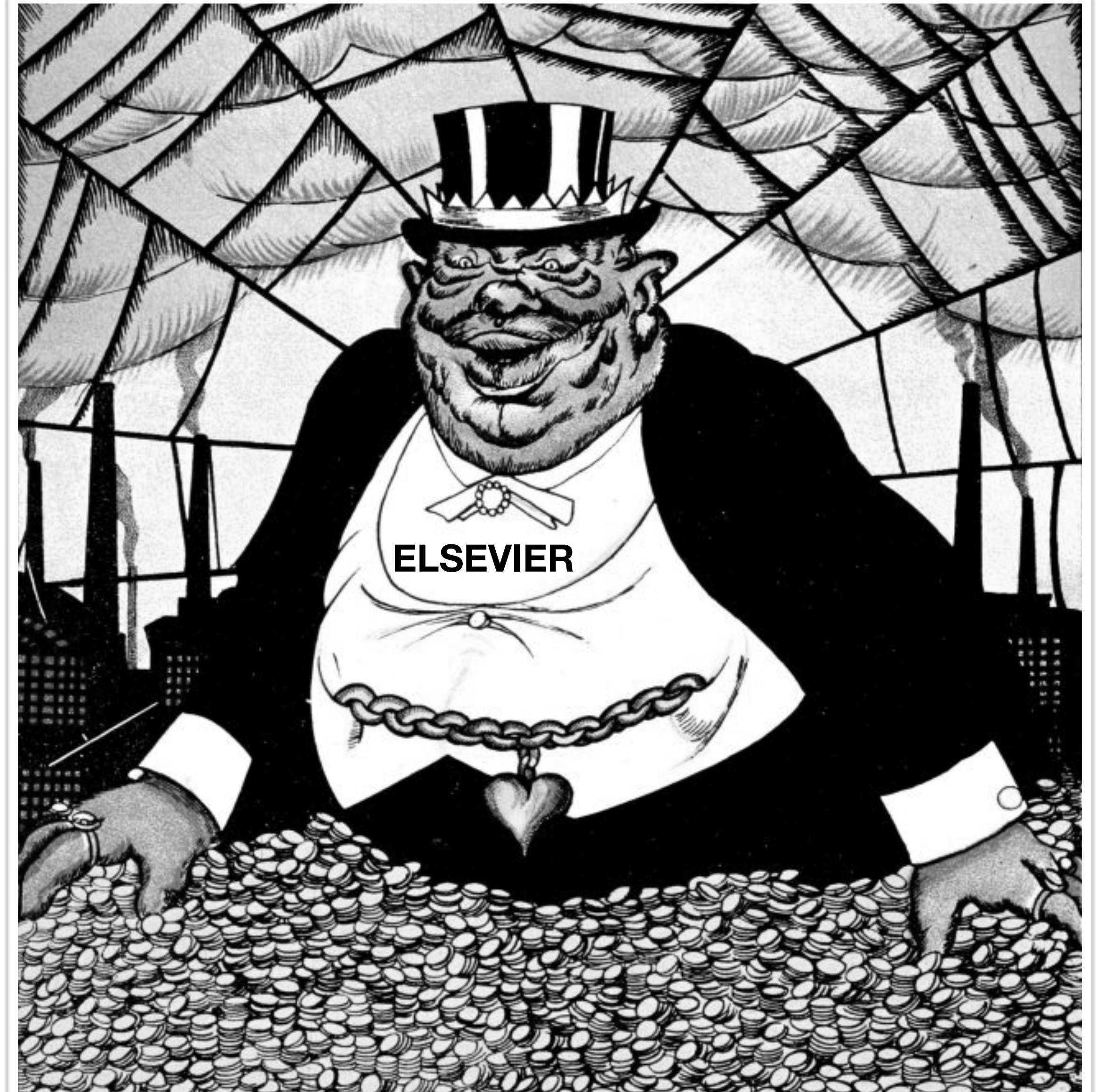
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3. Presence of commercial entities boils down to the use of the valorisation methods existing in the higher education sector and subordinating them to self-valorisation of capital.



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Occupation of the students' dormitory - 8th December 2023, Poznań (Poland)

Co-research with students

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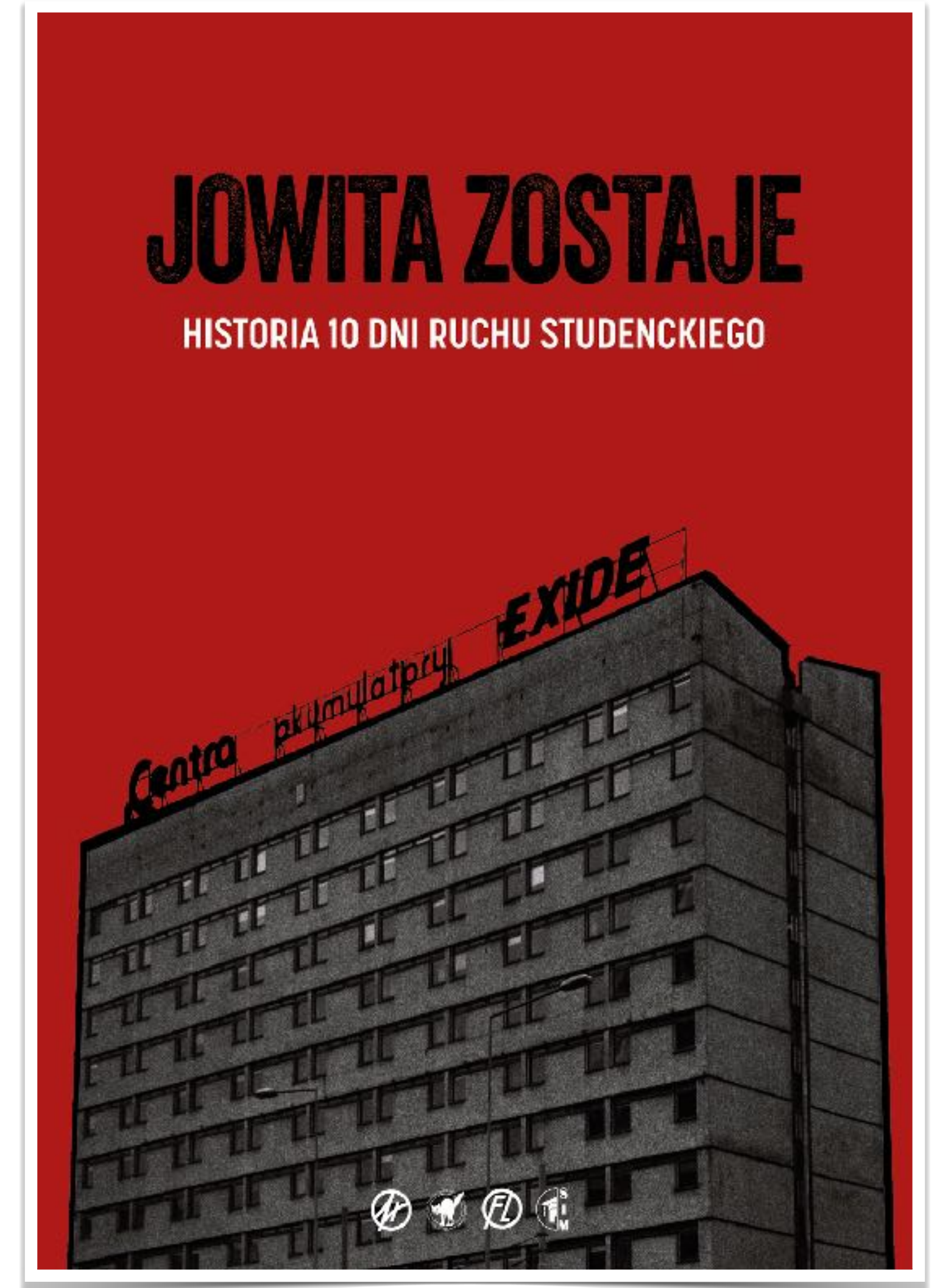
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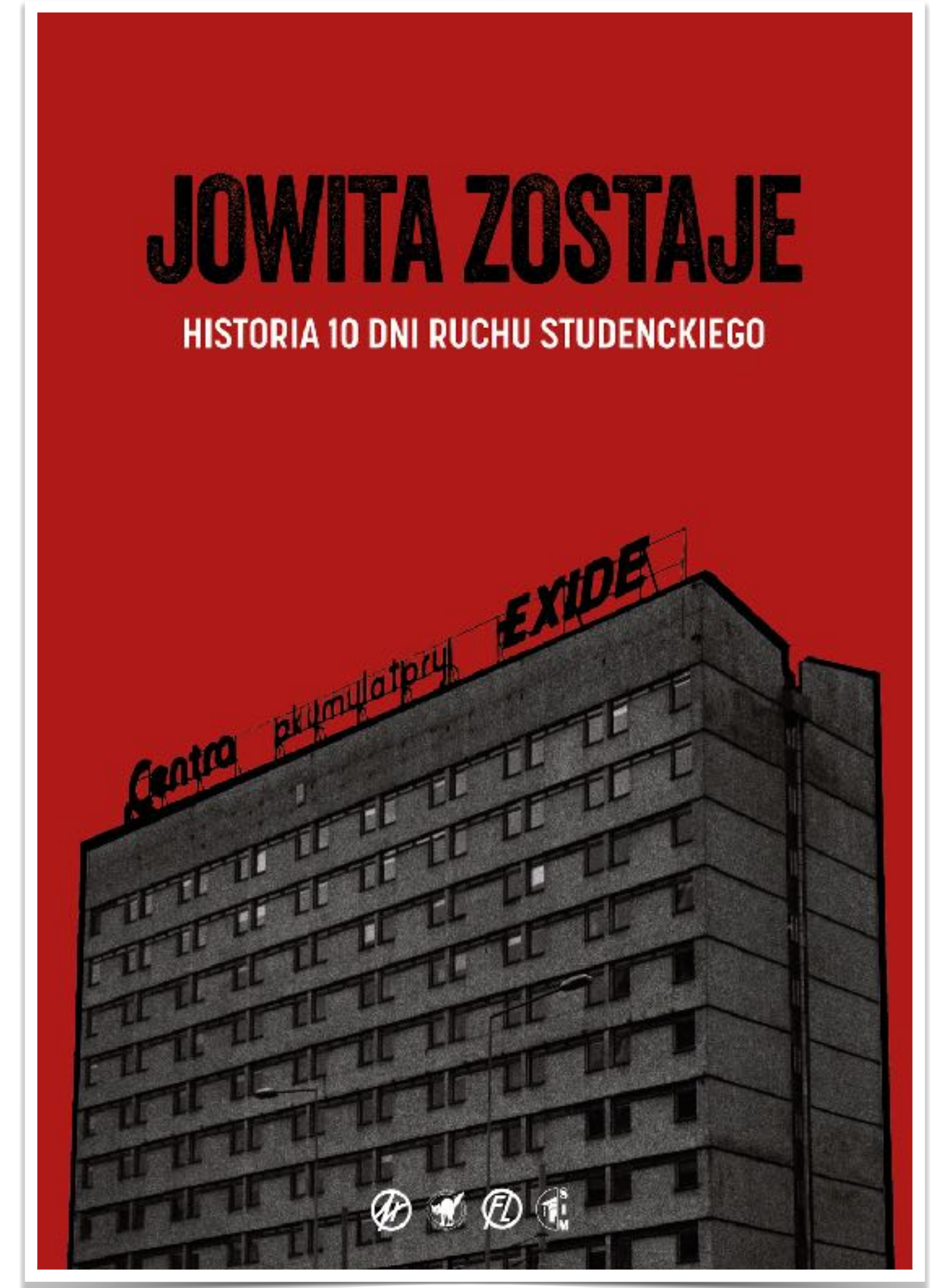
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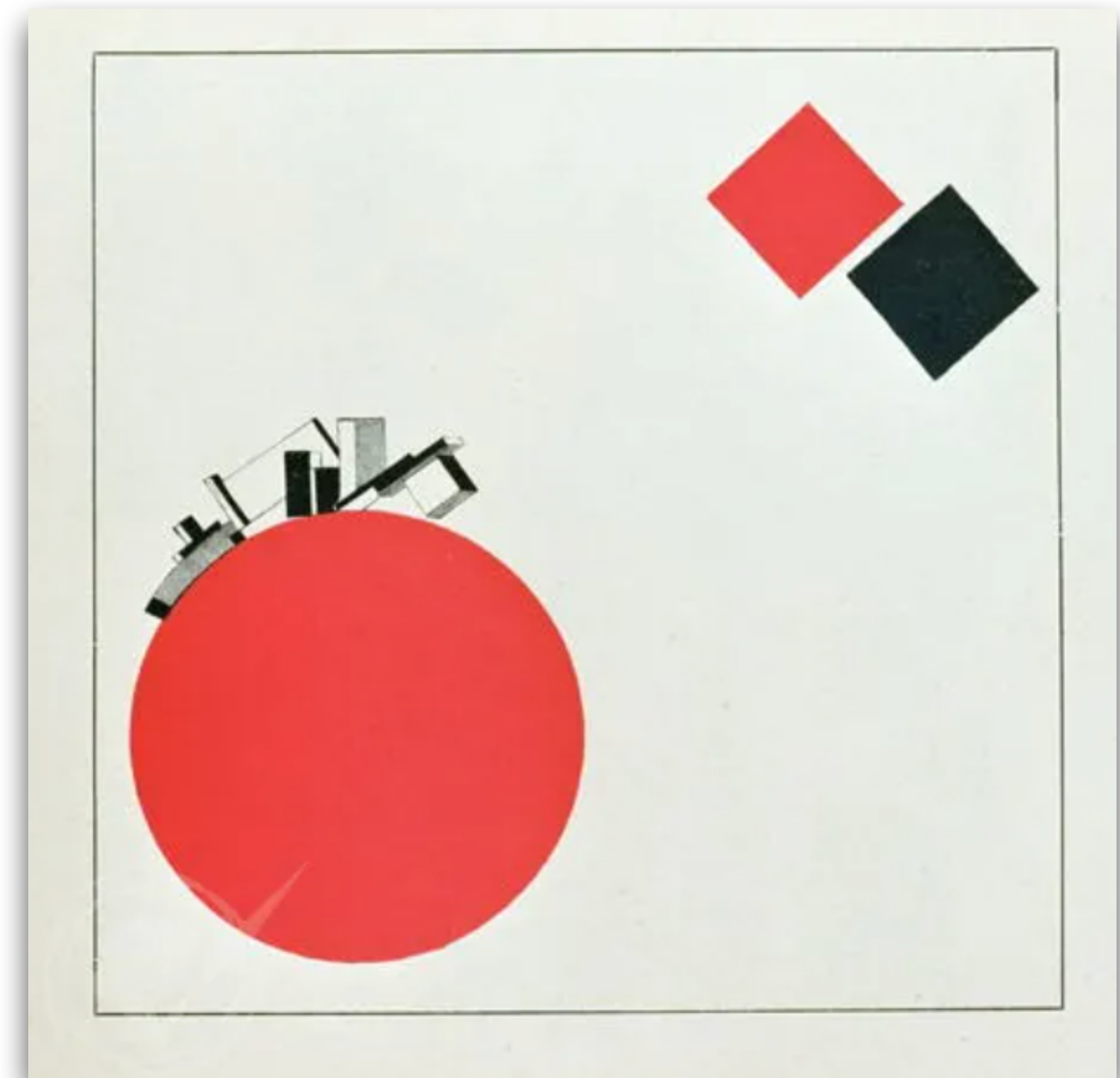


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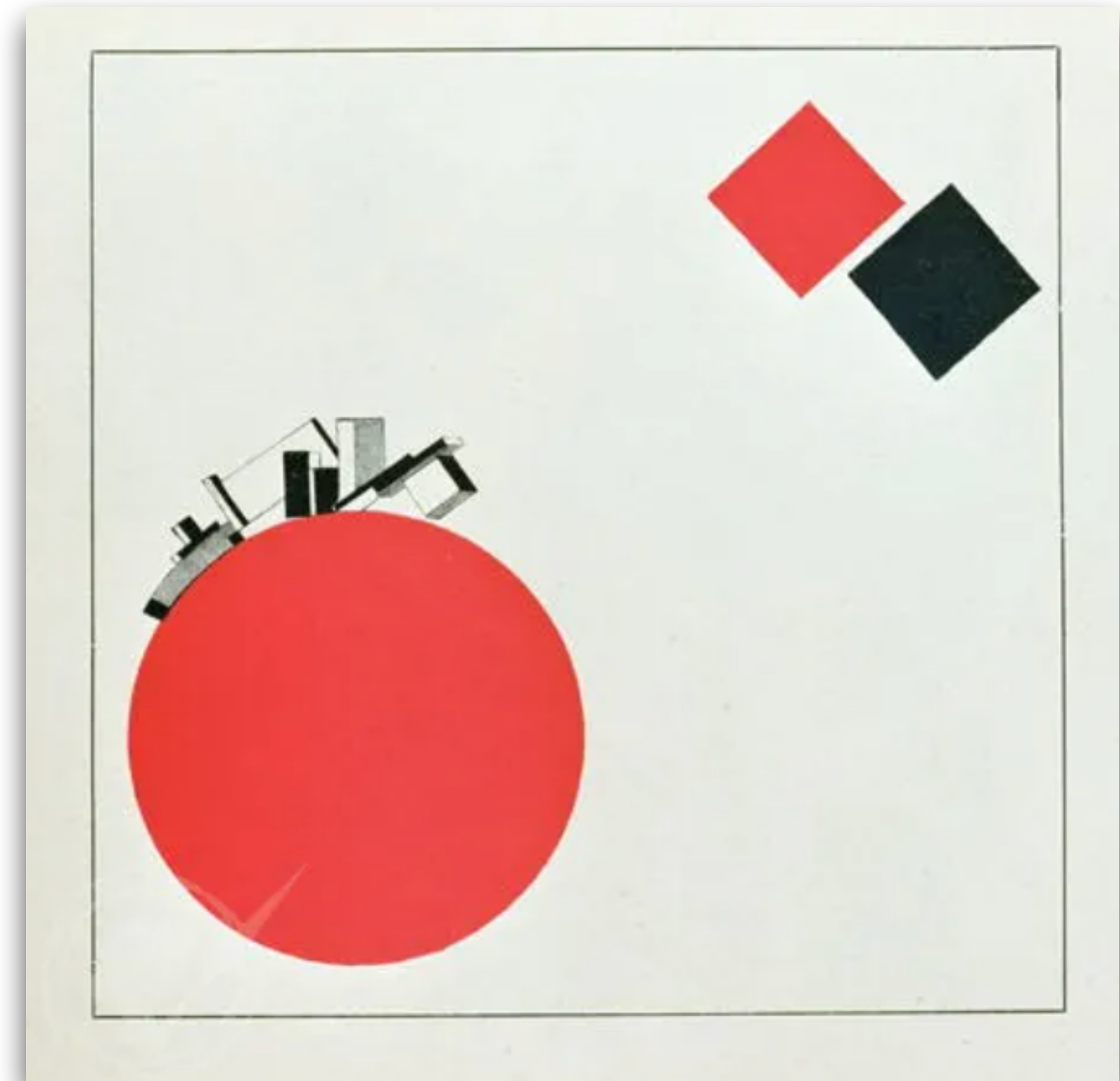


BEYOND - Alternative to Capitalist University



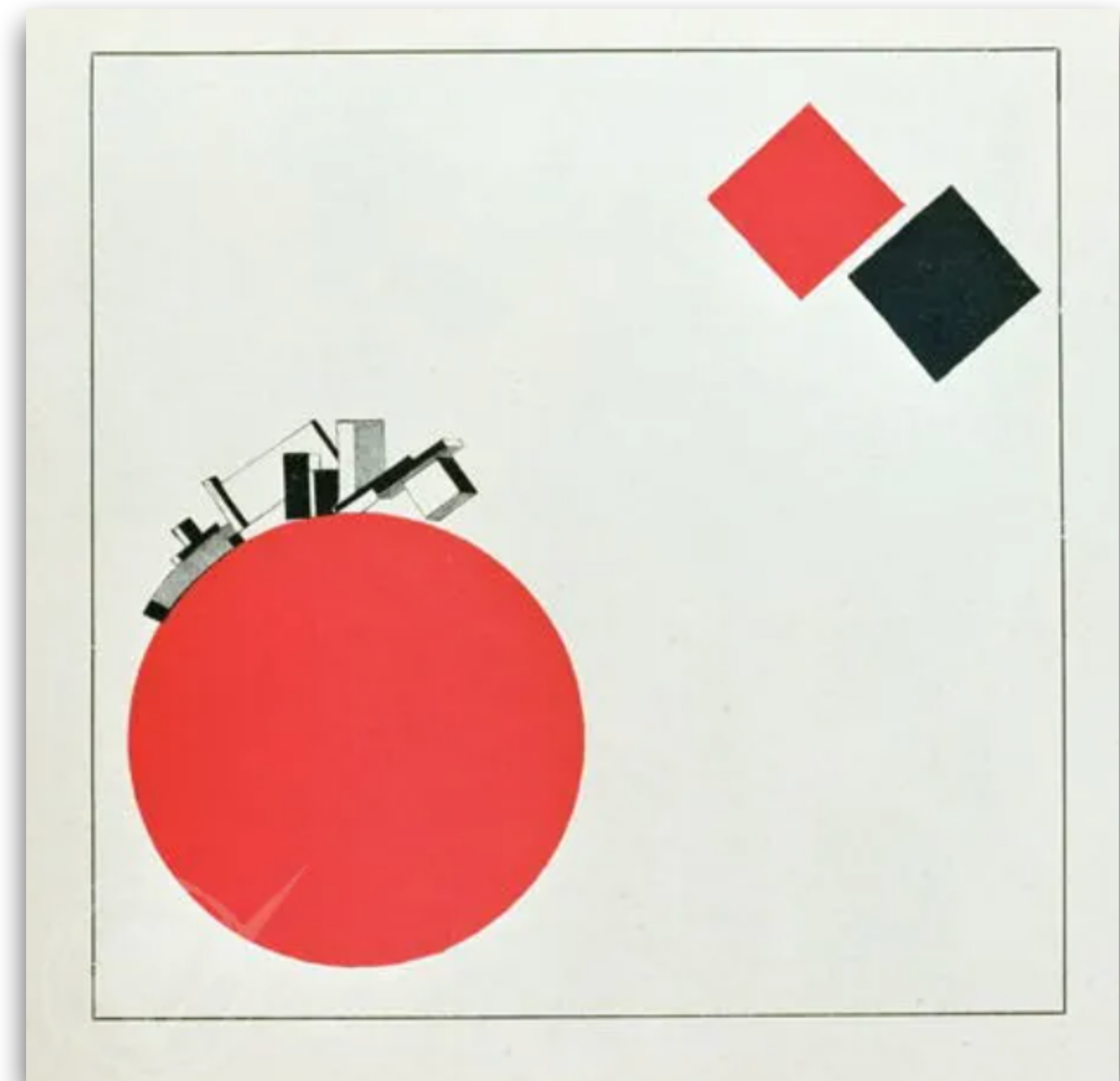
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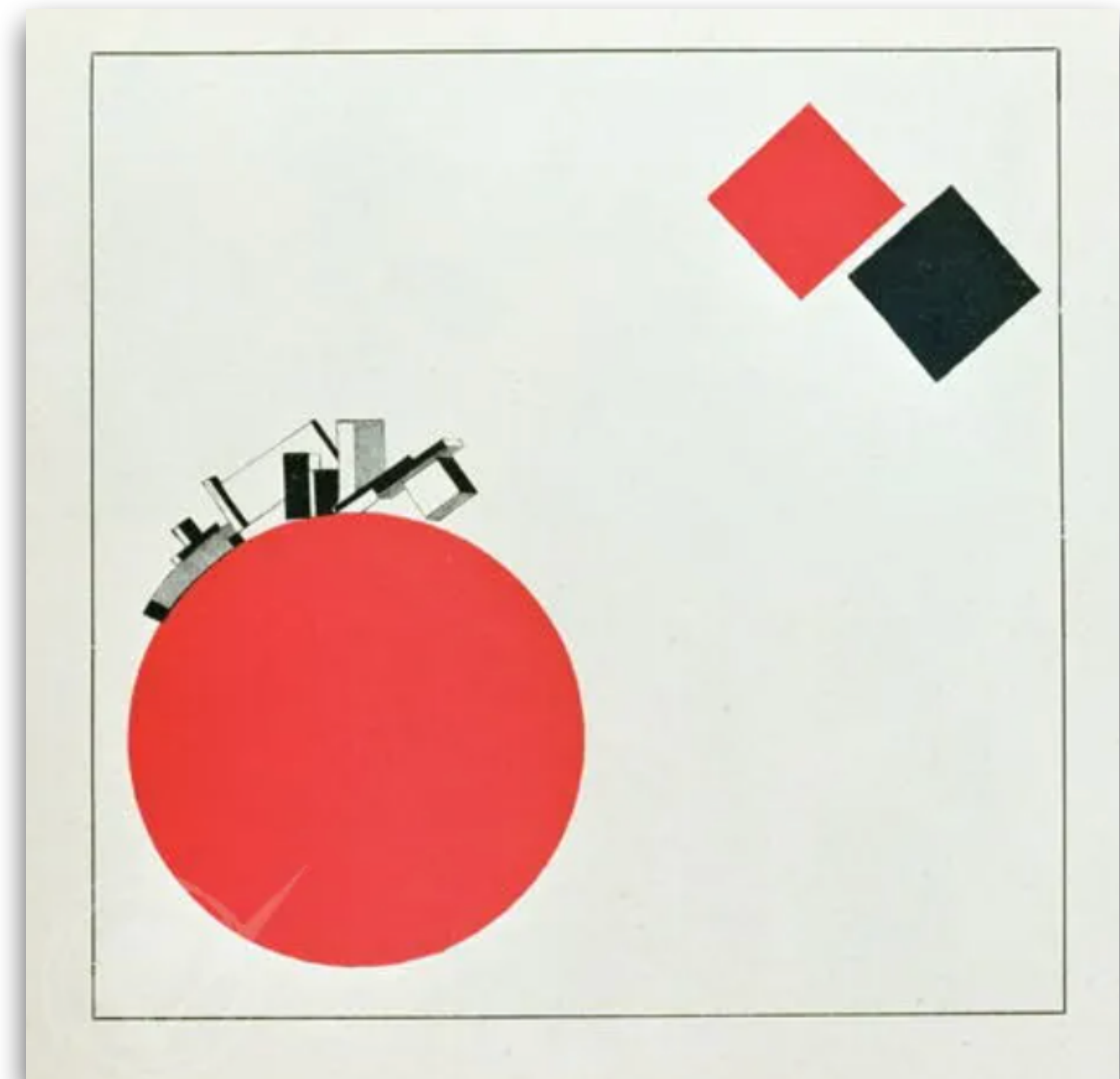
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2. **The commons** surround us, especially in higher education, where they permeate almost every aspect of its daily functioning. We notice commons when it is too late—when they are threatened by enclosures and destruction.



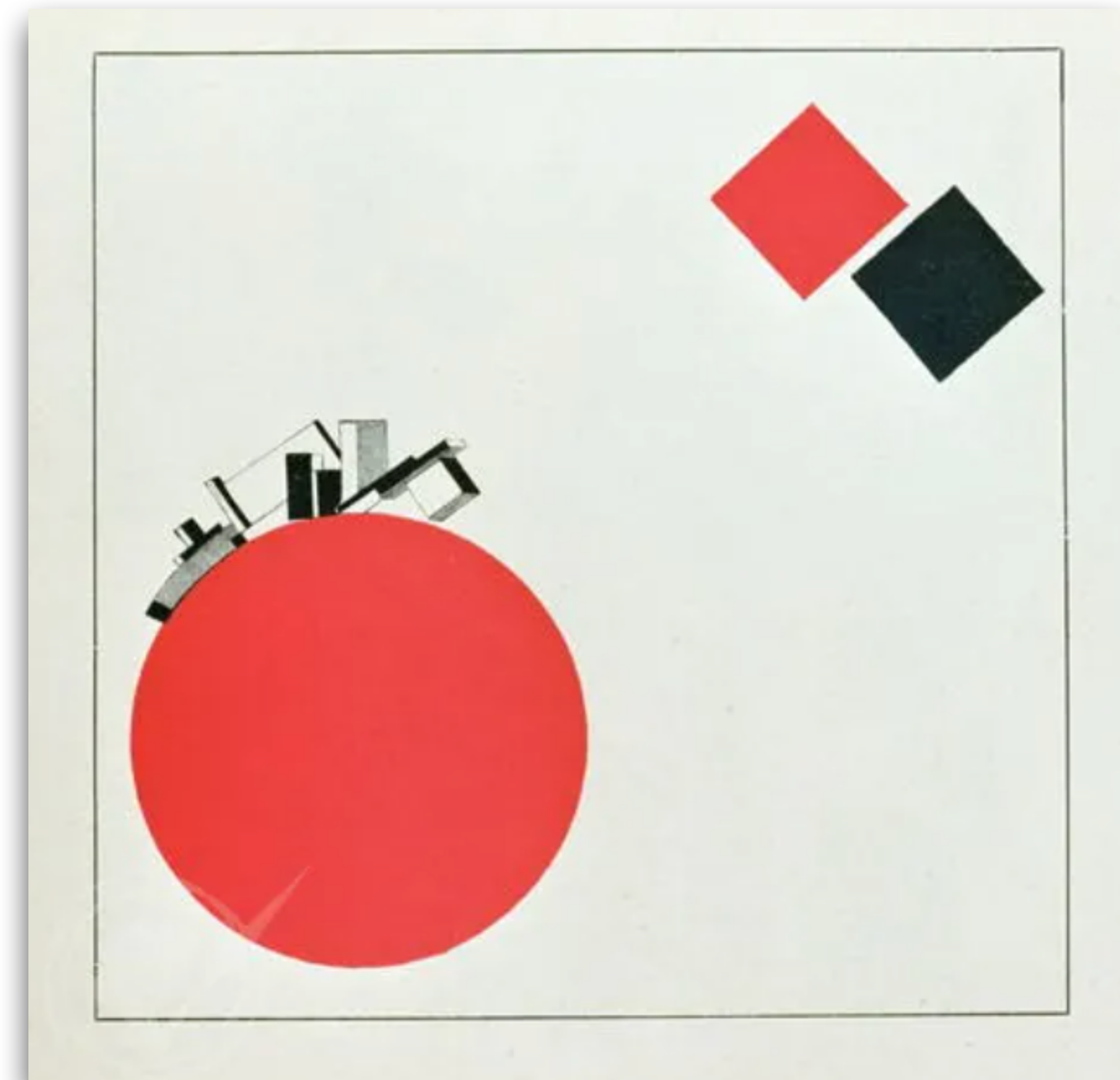
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4. **Diachronic perspective** - looking at the development of the commons over time; **Synchronic perspective** - researching the dynamics of conflicts ongoing around higher education commons.



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En güzel deniz: henüz gidilmemiş olandır.
En güzel çocuk: henüz büyümedi.
En güzel günlerimiz: henüz yaşamadıklarımız.
Ve sana söylemek istediğim en güzel söz:
henüz söylememiş olduğum sözdür.

Saat 21-22 Şiirlerinden (1945)



Nazim Hikmet

Thank you!



ADAM MICKIEWICZ UNIVERSITY IN POZNAŃ
Scholarly Communication Research Group

