There is a secret about the body: most (white) US queer scholars don’t like it. This claim is a provocation based on what I perceive to be a trend in queer scholarship produced over the last couple of decades in the US. By “body,” I mean the body in its material existence, the body as a kind of physical substrate cut across and informed by material socioeconomic histories, technologies, affects, experiences, needs, desires and pleasures. That is, the body approached in its worldly thingness—in its fleshiness—with its holes, inner tubes, and protuberances; the body that needs food and shelter in order to stay alive; the body as it exists as a node in a set of material relations that way too often remind us not only of our own finitude and the fragility of our surroundings but also of our existence as part of a collective that has historically been deemed to lack value, to be base, low and abject, a threat to the order of ideas, taxonomic systems, pure thought, of human-all-too-human potential; the debased body which the hegemonic white bourgeois European tradition of thought has sought for centuries to overcome.

If it is controversial to posit that most white US queer scholars don’t like the body thus conceived, particularly given the centrality of the body in queer lives and histories, white US queer scholarship has approached the body as text, circumvented it by abstracting it, approached it primarily as an idea rather than as a living, breathing thing in a world shaped by very material relations of production, conditions of labor, and patterns of consumption. The reasons for doing so derive from the fact that queer studies have developed on the back of a longer tradition of textual and literary analysis animated by the so-called linguistic turn and its dependence on poststructuralist and deconstructive approaches and methodologies.

The progressive institutionalization of queer studies also required a certain sanitation of the field, one that led queer scholarship away from the material conditions that bodies inhabit, from the messy and base nature of sex, and from the material conditions of the body itself. The price white queer studies paid to access the academy and to forge a space within it was therefore to compromise on, perhaps even surrender to the systems of value, taste and distinction marking colleges and universities as sites ensuring social reproduction. With a few notable exceptions, US queer scholars seldom acknowledge the material systems of class privilege sustaining their scholarship, careers and livelihoods.

Matt Brim’s *Poor Queer Studies* grapples with this unacknowledged history of institutional elitism that has propelled the careers of “queer status agents,” the stars of “Rich Queer
The problem queer studies faced as it settled in and started radiating from rich institutions was the perennial one of class and racial segregation characterizing US higher education, where a tiered system of universities ensures that it is predominantly today’s most privileged students who become the stars of tomorrow’s scholarship. For Brim, the historical iteration of this pattern of lineage has led even scholars working in the inherently “antinormative” field of queer studies to accept the class dynamics sustaining their institutions, their labor conditions and pedagogical models, ultimately defining who prospers. When queer scholarship has featured class, Brim argues, it has primarily been in relation to the world outside of academia, leaving undisturbed the class-segregated realities that have sustained that scholarship: “If the disruptive democratization of higher education has been Queer Studies’ goal, dating back perhaps to the first conference of the Gay Academic Union in 1973, we have since failed” (9).

To offer a different vantage point onto the field and perhaps a way out, Brim grounds his study on his own experience as a professor of queer studies at the College of Staten Island (CSI), among the most diverse and least funded colleges of the CUNY system. He examines how the material histories of Rich Queer Studies institutions—with their large endowments and highly selective admission policies—impact the queer thinking that takes place in them. Rich Queer Studies, he shows, differ radically from queer teaching and scholarship being produced at “Poor Queer Studies” institutions like his, with more variegated student populations and where social class, in both its economic and racialized dimensions, is very much a lived quotidian experience with important consequences for staff and students’ understandings of queerness.

For both Brim and his students—who are often workers, poor, Black, Latinx, and/or caregivers—the language of “Rich Queer Studies” poses a pedagogical challenge that is dramatized in often poorly resourced, at times poorly heated classrooms to which studying mothers have frequently to bring their children for lack of safe or affordable options. In a highly class-segregated higher education system, students at CSI remind us that, despite what Eve Sedgwick may have said, not everyone can write their way out of anywhere (64); that upward mobility is a Rich Queer Studies myth. Poor Queer Studies aims to inflect a “class-conscious reorientation of Queer Studies” that asks, “What does the work of Queer Studies look like from the point of view of regional or mid/lower tier or unranked schools that occupy the margins of—or don’t figure at all in—influential Queer Studies narratives and field assessments” (33).

One of the places in which Poor Queer Studies sets itself apart from the hegemony of Rich Queer Studies is its focus on what Brim calls “Vocational Queer Studies.” While queer status agents often join in criticizing the corporate university and its increasing investment in marketable employment skills to the detriment of knowledge for
knowledge’s sake, Brim reminds us that to most of his students a university degree is a pathway out of poverty to better working conditions. In that context, “Poor Queer Studies can help negotiate a queer-class reconciliation” (114) by making students aware of how sexuality, gender and race affect labor relations. Poor Queer Studies takes job training seriously as queer pedagogy, “to make imaginable new queer rooms beyond the classroom and the porn theater” (120). It can serve the organization of labor by centering queer precarity, facilitating the queering of unionism, and framing solidarity as queer work.

The reach of Poor Queer Studies also extends to students’ families through what Brim calls “queer home schooling” (147) or the way that his students take their learning on their daily commute, making queer studies circulate through kinship networks often seen with suspicion by Rich Queer Studies. Poor Queer Studies “illuminates a different parent/child relation” (148) in which queer knowledge can be shared with parents and friends who would otherwise have no access to it. More than Rich Queer Studies, Poor Queer Studies highlights how academic, domestic, and geographical boundaries can sometimes be transgressed, negotiated, or even ignored, creating queer publics in unexpected places.

In focusing on the margins of the US higher education system, Poor Queer Studies concentrates on the importance of considering how queer pedagogy intersects with minority race and class formations. Such “fugitive pedagogies” (177) “can negotiate the complex intersections of race, class, desire and knowledge making” and confront the segregating institutions and practices of Rich Queer Studies (181). Poor Queer Studies urges democratizing education by making public education free and by bringing an end to selective and private institutions with a call for “equal public education for all” (197), one in which “queer ferrying”—that is a “cross-institutional knowledge-producing movement” (199)—can truly thrive as “a pedagogical method for producing relationships that resist class and race stratification in higher education” (200).

While Brim’s book is centered on US higher education, it resonates a lot with me. As a queer working-class southern European working in a research-intensive British university, I regularly face problems of translation: first, because the language in which I work is not my first language; and more importantly, because the predominantly Anglo-American queer scholarship I work with mostly addresses experiences radically different from my own. It is also scholarship I find myself teaching to students whose class background differs from mine. That class alienation I feel working in a research-intensive UK Russel Group university is dramatized in my classrooms where I must articulate my subject position, questions, problems and knowledge with a language whose markers of
class privilege are not the ones I grew up with. I find myself having had to learn how to speak myself out of my class background, or at least feeling compelled to do so.

I thus find Poor Queer Studies to be an important but incomplete project. Even as it attends to the very material inequalities in the US academy where queer studies flourishes—inequalities that Rich Queer Studies also reproduce by omission—the book leaves untouched the global hegemony of US and, more broadly, anglophone queer studies. My challenge to Brim’s important project of Poor Queer Studies is to ask what could queer studies look like if it ceased to radiate from its Anglo-American centers and started instead to be written from its global margins. This question—ultimately one of translation in its widest sense—is the one that a decolonial Poor Queer Studies must urgently address.