

**NEGLECTING DEMOCRATIC CITIZENSHIP IN THE NEOLIBERAL
UNIVERSITY**

by

Walker Chavatel

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fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in Political Science
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ABSTRACT

In the wake of neoliberalism, the depreciation of democratic citizenship has become a crisis that corrupts how we interact socially. A role in the market now outweighs a role in the community, and what constitutes a citizen is becoming increasingly unclear. Neoliberalism has successfully penetrated institutions like the university where democratic citizenship may hold its most vital roots. The claim of the university being a transformative institution is now paradoxical as sameness reproduces subjects that pledge unconditional support to the omnipotence of instrumental and technological rationality. Common areas across university campuses that exist to offer an escape from such neoliberal hegemony can additionally no longer be used for democratic stimulation as corporate culture attacks areas of robust socialization. Neutral pedagogical methods utilized by the neoliberal university only further amplify this problem as students are pressured to become unenthusiastic recipients of knowledge. The ramifications of such an intrusion must be studied, as overtaking the most critical of institutions leaves neoliberalism virtually unchallenged.

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Capitalism is defined as an economic system that is often conceptualized through Adam Smith's notion of the free market. This understanding extends to include the private ownership of the means of production and a general lack of government involvement in market affairs as the invisible hand of the markets are suggested to be self-regulating by nature. Given such immense freedom and power, capitalism has since morphed into the all-encompassing worldview that is neoliberalism. Neoliberalism can be a nebulous term to conceptualize, being that it is what Nikolas Rose would call everywhere yet nowhere (Rose, 1997). David Harvey provides a straightforward understanding of the term—"the doctrine that market exchange is an ethic in itself, capable of acting as a guide for all human action" (Harvey, 2005, 5). While neoliberalism and capitalism share an underlying support for the free market, neoliberalism differs in its nature as an all-inclusive rationality rather than a policy specifically utilized within the economic realm (Brown 2015). When conceptualizing neoliberal rationality, Wendy Brown notes the difference between free market capitalism and a "state wholly in service and controlled by it" (Brown, 2015, 40). To Brown, neoliberalism as a rationality is practiced when "Human capital is both our 'is' and our 'ought'—what we are said to be, what we should be, and what the rationality makes us into through its norms and construction of environments"

(Brown, 2015, 36). As neoliberalism develops as a rationality in this manner, markets are extended into all aspects of human life and often to areas where they did not previously exist. This move to marketize everything is pursued with intentions of preserving the control of the capitalist class.

The history of neoliberal theory can be traced back to the critiques that surfaced in response to Keynesian economics in which thinkers like Milton Friedman and Fredrich von Hayek argued that state intervention was a threat to personal freedom. These thinkers felt that personal bias would misguide state decisions and that the state was better off relying upon the omnipotence of market signals (Harvey, 2005, 21). This logic gained significant footing in the late 1970s and early 1980s when proponents like Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Regan put trademark neoliberal policies like deregulation and privatization into practice across the globe. Harvey argues that this response was likely a result of the pressures experienced by the capitalist class during the 1970s when organized labor gained influence and when wealth began to be distributed (Harvey, 2005). The capitalist class realized the volatility of these circumstances and utilized neoliberal policy to restore their class power. Under such policies, wealthy capitalists sought to regain power by extending the market into previously uncommodified areas and by suppressing movements that threatened their status.

In 1980, Ronald Reagan was elected president of the United States and stepped into the aftermath of a wealth crisis in which assets owned by the top 1% were falling dramatically and the gap between the rich and the poor was steadily declining.

Reagan showed little hesitation to act and began his neoliberal initiative to restore class power when he challenged the air traffic controller union, PATCO (Harvey, 2005, 25). After suppressing this labor movement, he went onto deregulate airlines and telecommunications corporations in effort to preserve their market capabilities. Reagan would then cut corporate taxes by nearly 40 percent and decrease real wages (Harvey, 2005, 25-26). Reagan's neoliberal policies set the framework for the restoration of class power in the United State as the wealth gap was larger than ever by 2000 and the capitalist class felt no longer threatened.

At a similar time that Reagan was neoliberally operating, Margaret Thatcher enacted serious privatization measures in the UK where social goods like public houses were now able to be privately purchased. Thatcher famously defended her neoliberal methods by claiming that there is “no alternative” (Harvey, 2005, 40) to the free-market system. As world leaders across party lines pledged support to neoliberalism, citizens began to accept that there very well may not be an “alternative” to free-market capitalism. In the United States today, neoliberalism pays children to read, incentivizes the homeless to wait in lines for the rich, offers college students fast-track degrees, and allows democratic citizenship to be adequately pursued in isolation (Sandel 2012). While neoliberalism is often associated with the policies presented above, I employ neoliberalism as a rationality that our reconstructs social, political, and cultural relations.

As we have seen by now, the legitimization of neoliberalism as “an ethic in itself” is reinforced in many institutions. However, I argue that neoliberalism exerts its

most detrimental effects in the institution that constructs the life trajectories of millions each year—the university. For it is in the university that students begin to refine their goals, develop their identity or “meaningful life philosophy” (Saunders, 2007, 5) and actively consider their life purpose. Throughout this journey, students should be exposed to a variety of extracurricular activities, academic courses, socioeconomic backgrounds, and ideological dissenters that teach them the necessary lessons for democratic life. However, corporate culture has redefined the university as a center of job training and has thus homogenized the university experience at the expense of democratic citizenship.

Numerous thinkers have researched the rise of the neoliberal university, studying trends such as the change in credentials of university leaders (Giroux 2002); the inculcation of corporate culture into student life (Giroux 2002, Saunders 2007); the impact of neoliberal discourses (Urciuoli 2010); the intersection of pedagogy and autonomy (Kodelja 2013, Clack 2019); and the change in research practices (Slaughter and Rhoades 2000). It is my intention to build off the work of these scholars and bring attention to the various neoliberal mechanisms used in the university that inspire market subordination. Using the lens of the university, I argue that neoliberal hegemony creates a one-dimensional view of both citizenship and autonomy. To reinforce this claim, I examine realities within the neoliberal university such as the use of neutral pedagogy, the homogenization of research interests, the marketization of university leadership, and the presence of corporate culture in university common areas. Through these practices, I intend to show my readers how the one-

dimensionality of the neoliberal university trains students to become subjects of capitalist logic. As research concerning this topic has been wide-reaching, my study serves to concretely portray the ways in which capitalist subjects are formed. I aim to emphasize how such subjugation works in direct juxtaposition to what citizenship in a democracy requires, for this straightforward juxtaposition has been somewhat hazy in work offered by recent scholars. This is in hopes that my readers can, without hesitation, acknowledge how the university is failing our democracy.

Chapter 2

CONCEPTUALIZING DEMOCRATIC CITIZENSHIP

“Democracy must begin at home, and its home is the neighborly community” (Dewey, 2016, 229)

Before beginning our conversation concerning the crisis of democratic citizenship within the neoliberal university, it is important that we share an understanding of what a democratic citizen really is. It is common knowledge that active citizenship is at the heart of a healthy political system. But what does it take to be a citizen in a democracy? Prevailing forms of contemporary citizenship are becoming increasingly concerned with the efficiency of everyday life and correspondingly less concerned with democratic ideals. It is my intention in this section to highlight three fundamental qualities of democratic citizenship that neoliberalism neglects—public association and activism, diversity, and intellectual autonomy. In reference to the progression of this paper and the development of these concepts, it is important to note that as democratic citizenship is a nonlinear process, these qualities are often intertwined and practiced simultaneously.

Insofar as citizenship entails a group setting in its most fundamental sense, public association constructs the framework for many democratic practices. Through public association, citizens discover the value of interdependence in which collective troubleshooting allows individuals to acknowledge the potentialities of democratic citizenship (Dewey, 2016). Such potentialities refer to the various achievements and personal developments that can only be recognized through the presence and efforts of

other citizens. In a general sense, these potentialities broaden what the democratic citizen understands as possible. The discovery of new potentialities permits the democratic citizen to find value in other citizens, as the perspectives and skills of each citizen offer unique value to communal projects and goals. This public association therefore requires a citizen willing to be both intellectually and culturally vulnerable, as they recognize that their own logic can rarely serve as the ultimate truth and must be consistently scrutinized.

Through the democratic citizen's experiences with public association, they additionally become inclined to be both publicly and politically active. As democratic citizens recognize the subjective worth of other citizens, they are inclined to observe how other citizens live in order to better understand how their neighbor's worldviews are formulated. This is done through the belief of potentialities in which the democratic citizen understands that cooperating with others serves both individual and collective interest. To observe the worldview of others, the democratic citizen must step outside the biases created in privacy and be democratically involved in discussions on the ground. John Dewey will argue in this sense that "vision is a spectator: hearing is a participator" (Dewey, 2016, 233). When "hearing" fellow citizens, democratic citizens are able to humanize their neighbors as they are presented with the authenticity and intimacy of first-person experiences. Dewey writes in critique of the "spectator" stating that, "A man who has not been seen in the daily relations of life may inspire admiration, emulation, servile subjection, fanatical partisanship, hero worship, but not love and understanding, save as they radiate from

the attachments of a near-by union” (Dewey, 2016, 229). Here, Dewey suggests that first person experiences create a sort of relationship that is unachievable in isolation. This sort of communal experience creates a sense of intimacy that make the relationships of the democratic citizen meaningful and relatable.

Experiences with empathy and sympathy motivate democratic citizens to assemble politically to reform inadequate forms of government that they feel are detrimental to their fellow citizens. This can form interest groups that engage people of different backgrounds united under similar causes. Democratic citizens correspondingly realize that political activism is an imperative feature of expanding potentialities and are encouraged to engage politically as they realize their strength in numbers. Such interaction with government signifies the development of the democratic citizen’s social influence, as they recognize their power to formulate policies that can effectively deconstruct biases and surface social issues on a larger scale. This move to engage in politics thus works to legitimize the concerns and relationships of the democratic citizen to the rest of society.

Through public association and activism, democratic citizens therefore develop a dedication to diversity as they recognize that all worldviews offer unique value to the expansion of communal potentialities. When practicing diversity, democratic citizens are confronted with issues of discrimination and stigmatization that are rarely understood in privacy. Concern over these issues inspires participation from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds where the worldviews of all are adequately valued. This pledge to value all citizens works to erode the biases of the democratic citizen

and creates a sense of selflessness where the democratic citizen realizes the luxuries they take for granted. Similar to themes presented in the discussion of public association, diversity motivates democratic citizens to venture into conversations of ideological dissent as they recognize that “we understand each other only through whole areas of misunderstanding and contradiction” (Marcuse, 1964, 199).

With the practices in mind above, one can begin to understand how the democratic citizen possesses the ability to think autonomously. In this sense, intellectual autonomy refers to the ability to step beyond the one-dimensional logic of the prevailing hegemonic apparatus. Those who think autonomously critically analyze the totality of life and refrain from blindly accepting contemporary norms. This form of thinking allows the democratic citizen to step beyond presupposed reasonings concerning the organization and social issues of society and further motivates them to uncover the structural flaws that foster such issues. In doing so, the democratic citizen is exposed to the long-term implications of their actions that remove them from the immediate returns of the present.

Democratic citizens employ intellectual autonomy and freedom of thought in order to broaden the scope of their worldviews. This practice is engaged with the belief that humans are not infallible and that prevailing worldviews should not dictate what is accepted as true (Mill, 2001, 19). When recognizing that human beings are fallible, yet correctable, democratic citizens can establish the ongoing accumulation of new ideas as a process that moves towards a real understanding (Mill, 2001, 36). This move towards a real understanding requires the democratic citizen to be experimental

by nature rather than absolutistic (Dewey, 2016, 220). For it is through the experimental stages of discovering a real understanding that democratic citizens recognize the necessary ethical and cultural trials that can create the most transformative and applicable notions of knowledge.

The democratic citizen is a citizen that foremost acknowledges what can be achieved in the public. For it is in public settings that these citizens can expand their potentialities and acknowledge the worth of fellow citizens. After recognizing the benefits of public association, the democratic citizen becomes publicly active and holds a participant role in society in order to develop intimate democratic relationships. Such activism motivates democratic citizens to legitimize their concerns through political engagement where the concerns of their fellow citizens can be recognized by greater society. This engagement in the public and political sphere exposes the democratic citizen to diversity in which they are able to better sympathize with the struggles of fellow citizens which would go unnoticed in privacy. This exposure to diversity congregates people of various cultural, socioeconomic, and intellectual backgrounds. When presented with such diversity, democratic citizens are then encouraged to meticulously analyze how others formulate their worldviews. This requires the democratic citizen to step outside prevailing contemporary logic and to experiment with critical thinking to uncover the reasoning behind discrimination and social issues. Such a form of thinking develops the intellectual autonomy of the democratic citizen as they are able to consider the long-run effects of actions and recognize that no ideology is infallible.

In society today, neoliberalism has undermined many qualities of democratic citizenship. As neoliberalism relies upon a homogenization of fellow market actors who network with one another, the public sphere has increasingly become a place that glorifies capitalist association rather than democratic association. Citizens who fail to show uptake in market life struggle to gain access to the public sphere, and those who are granted access are stripped of their autonomy by the hegemony of larger ideological forces. When this occurs, the intimacy and uniqueness of democratic relationships is corrupted by an underlying presupposition that discussions should include market applicability. Numerous thinkers have shown concern over how the hegemony of capitalism has affected public life. The first generation of the Frankfurt School of Thought; namely, Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno and Jürgen Habermas, provided much of this initial discussion. While these authors wrote during the age of late capitalism, I believe much of their concern over the media, the bourgeoisie public sphere, the arts, and a generally homogenized culture can be fortified through a study of contemporary neoliberalism.

Conversations within the Frankfurt School concerning market conformity began with Horkheimer and Adorno's concept of the culture industry. To these thinkers, the culture industry was a term used to describe a conformed society where, under the passivity and sameness of capitalism, all things creative and spontaneous were in reality quite uniform. They write that, "Each branch of culture is unanimous within itself and all are unanimous together. Even the aesthetic manifestations of political opposites proclaim the same inflexible rhythm" (Horkheimer and Adorno,

1947, 41). Here, Horkheimer and Adorno critique the American capitalist system where even political dissenters work together on a similar project of maintaining the status quo. Much of their discussion concerning capitalist sameness was rooted within a critique of massively produced art in which under they believed the culture industry stripped art of its distinctive and transformative qualities. Pop culture often generated through romanticized Hollywood films intensified this problem as individuals glorified cliché stories of love and heroism at expense to their own understandings of such concepts.

Habermas introduced the concept of the public sphere to extend the discussion of cultural homogeneity. Habermas conceptualized the public sphere as a place where individuals “neither behave like business or professional people transacting private affairs” (Habermas, 1964, 1). In this regard, Habermas notes how the public sphere should be a distinct area of association where citizens can congregate and deliberate rationally outside of private affairs. The public sphere was thus a place where citizens could freely exchange ideas and develop public opinions regardless of their socio-economic status (Habermas, 1964). However, Habermas argued that the public sphere became a tool of the affluent in the age of capitalism as newspapers and mass media adhered to profit maximization. In consequence, those who displayed market proficiency were granted easier access into the discussions occurring within the public sphere. As the public sphere glorified capitalist logic, rational and critical discussions declined and demarcations between the private and the public sphere were blurred.

Larger hegemonic forces like the state and mass media were thus given the tools to skew public opinion in adherence to capitalist logic.

The themes presented above by the first generation of the Frankfurt School outlined much of the theoretical framework for research concerning the intersection of democratic citizenship and neoliberalism. Horkheimer and Adorno's critique of capitalist homogeneity surfaced a lack of critical action and artistic individuality that currently plague the uniqueness and intellectual autonomy of our society. Habermas's discussion of a public sphere where demarcations between private and public life are muddled can be traced to a contemporary neoliberal movement that commodifies everything through privatization. For these reasons, I believe it is imperative to further investigate how the theoretical concerns of these thinkers have unfolded in the contemporary United States.

Chapter 3

THE NEOLIBERAL UNIVERSITY

“Higher education should be engaged as a site that offers students the opportunity to involve themselves in the deepest problems of society. To acquire the knowledge, skills, and ethical vocabulary necessary for modes of critical dialogue and forms of broadened civic participation” (Giroux, 2002, 451).

Instead of producing the type of democratic citizen presented above, the university has transmogrified into a construction site of capitalist subjects that undermines many democratic practices. The capitalist subjects produced are anything but intellectually autonomous, publicly involved, and diverse citizens. Rather, they are constrained within a system that dictates what they should think, where they should associate, and who they should associate with.

The neoliberal university corrupts the type of public association that is fundamental to democratic citizenship. Cultural areas that exist as an escape from the dominant hegemonic apparatus are becoming increasingly subject to organizational reason as everything must hold uptake in capitalist society (Horkheimer and Adorno, 1947, 46). The demarcations made between intellectual, technical, and public areas are thus muddled as neoliberalism is welcomed at every doorstep (Horkheimer and Adorno, 1947, 43). The neoliberal university has become a victim of this trend as common areas across campus exist as a mere reflection of corporate culture. Locations that were previously neutral to hegemony, that encouraged the cultural and intellectual development of the democratic citizen, and that inspired spontaneous democratic

relationships are now denied such transformative opportunities by the hegemony of neoliberal homogeneity.

Common areas like bookstores, dining halls, and residence halls are targeted during this process due to their ability to attract robust populations as the neoliberal university realizes that “the more strongly the culture industry entrenches itself, the more it can do” (Horkheimer and Adorno, 1947, 57). Following the neoliberal agenda, Giroux notes how universities across the country have begun to “privatize a seemingly endless array of services that universities used to handle by themselves” (Giroux, 2002, 446). This trend is readily visible as Barnes and Noble now operates 773 of campus bookstores across the country and private companies like Aramark dedicate themselves exclusively to providing food services on college campuses (Barnes and Noble College, 2020). As of 2014, Starbucks also operated 300 stores across US campuses that often resided within academic buildings (Tamara 2014). Urban outfitters has additionally set up shop in numerous university bookstores. As these corporations take over the university campus, the demarcation between student and consumer is muddled (Giroux, 2002. 446).

Common areas that offer basic necessities are chosen strategically due to their ability to attract large populations. The effects of corporate culture have worked to reinvent the purpose of these areas, with bookstores closely resembling shopping malls and dining halls being comparable to



Figure 1 A photo taken at the University of Delaware bookstore illustrating the presence of corporate culture in university common areas.

food courts (Trend cites in Giroux, 2002, 446). In shopping sections labeled “accessories” in university bookstores, it is not uncommon to find items like cologne and Vans shoes for sale—two items that have virtually zero academic value. Messages like the one placed above are also not uncommon in university common areas across the country.

When common areas are structured this way, the neoliberal university creates a presupposed image of what public association should look like. In a space where the democratic citizen is supposed to find their own path through the necessary trials of in person observation, these type of market pressures corrupts a space that, in order to be democratically transformative, must remain free of bias. These areas therefore “lose their character as a qualitatively different reality, as areas of contradiction” (Marcuse, 1947, 66). Further, when students are presented with messages such as “we are all business majors” they are institutionalized into accepting the omnipotence of the

market. Believing in such an omnipotence is an essential practice of neoliberal hegemony as it inculcates students into accepting that their political and democratic needs can be satisfied in the realm of the market. The neoliberal culture in the university is thus “infecting everything with sameness” and “presents the same everyday world as paradise” (Horkheimer and Adorno, 1947, 41, 55)— a practice that constrains the student’s perception of what a good college experience should look like.

A lack of intellectual diversity is likely the most visible flaw of the neoliberal university. The polarization of undergraduate research interests and goals vividly portray this problem. In a 2015 study conducted by Georgetown University’s Center on Education in the Workforce entitled, “The Economic Value of College Majors”, economic statisticians published a list of the 20 most popular majors chosen by students and their corresponding market value. The Business Management and Administration major emerged on top with 814 degrees per 10,000 students, followed by General Business with 539 degrees per 10,000 students, followed by Accounting with 463 degrees per 10,000 students. Liberal arts placed 19th overall on the list with 162 degrees per 10,000 students, followed only by Sociology with 158 degrees per 10,000 students. In correspondence to these findings, a study done by A.W Astin shows that 80% of university students in the late 1960s noted “developing a meaningful life philosophy” (Saunders, 2007, 6) as an essential priority, with only 45% noting financial well-being as an essential priority. In the contemporary neoliberal university, these statistics have traded places. 74% of students now note financial stability as a top priority and only 42% of students prioritize the development

of a meaningful life philosophy. With this said, the homogenization of university studies is just one of the many practices that signifies neoliberal conformity.

A neglect of diversity within the neoliberal university is fortified in many different areas. One of many fortification mechanisms is the intellectual conformity generated through the neoliberalization of university leaders. Henry Giroux elaborates on this ongoing issue writing, “Today's college presidents are known less for their intellectual leadership than for their role as fundraisers and ribbon cutters and coat holders, filling a slot rather than changing the world” (Giroux, 2002, 439). Giroux’s concerns are becoming an increasingly common reality. In an article from *The Atlantic* Laura Mckenna notes statistics from the American Council on Education where researchers have concluded that “Twenty percent of U.S. college presidents in 2012 came from fields outside of academia, up from 13 percent six years earlier” (Mckenna 2015). As these presidents lack a history in academia, their ability to lead effectively is justified through their potential market return to the university. Mckenna substantiates her argument by noting various presidents that fit this classification, namely University of Missouri president Timothy M. Wolfe. Mckenna notes Wolfe’s background as an executive at IBM and quotes the Chair of Missouri’s Board of Curators who states that Wolfe was hired because he could “sell the importance of the school to others and run the school efficiently” (Mckenna 2015). The justifications behind hiring a president like Wolfe are not uncommon throughout the United States. President of Hampshire College, Johnathan Lash, comes from a background in law. Bruce Benson, president of the University of Colorado, has his claim to fame in the oil

industry. Janet Napolitano, president of the University of California, was previously the Secretary of Homeland Security (Mckenna 2015). However, and as shown in the statistics above, hiring presidents who come from non-academic backgrounds was not always common practice. As Benjamin Ginsberg shows us in his article from *The New York Times* “Cornell’s founder and first president, A.D. White, was an English professor. Johns Hopkins’s founder and first president, Daniel Coit Gilman, was a geography professor. The University of Chicago’s founder and first president, William Rainey Harper, was a professor of Greek, Latin and Hebrew” (Ginsberg 2016). With this said, the rise of university presidents from non-academic fields over the past decade is not a mere coincidence. This trend is one of the many side effects of neoliberalism’s assault on public goods. As the neoliberalization of university leaders continues to unfold, the university labels these presidents as educational prophets and teaches students that business is inherently intertwined with academic success (Giroux, 2002, 440). When universities are neoliberally structured from the top-down in this fashion, the entirety of the student body and faculty operate within a neoliberal agenda.

The discourses utilized by the neoliberal university also aid in corrupting the diversification of the university experience as “words which are not a means seem meaningless” (Horkheimer and Adorno, 1947, 58). Capitalist phrases placed within university mission statements and commencement speeches highlight this issue. Wendy Brown offers President David Skorton’s commencement as an example of such a practice. In his commencement, Skorton states, “I hope you’ll carry with you...a

continuing commitment to build human capital so that more will have opportunities to pursue their dreams” (Skorton cited in Brown, 2015, 175). Such rhetoric utilized in a commencement speech teaches the university student that they are expected to possess this ability of “building human capital” and if they do not, they have failed the desires of the president. Students are thus confronted with the dilemma of “conforming or being assigned to the backwoods” (Horkheimer and Adorno, 1947, 59). Subtle capitalist remarks that construct an image of what university life should look like are also used by the University of Delaware in their “University Vision and Strategic Practices”. In this statement, UD aspires to “Foster a spirit of innovation and entrepreneurship”, noting this as one of their “top five priorities”. The University will state, “Our graduates must be able to introduce entrepreneurial thought and approaches in everything they do”. This deeply embedded imperative of “entrepreneurial thought” has worked to presuppose the university experience prior to actual involvement in the university, thus trajectorizing students into what the university sees an ideal path. When capitalist remarks are consistently utilized by the neoliberal university, students whose interest lie beyond potential market returns are encouraged to understand their interests as invalid in which “disconnected from the mainstream, he is easily convicted of inadequacy” (Horkheimer and Adorno, 1947, 50). It follows that the discourse utilized in the formal communications of the neoliberal university silently coerces students into pursuing socially acceptable studies.

Perhaps the most explicit yet overlooked practice of how the neoliberal university discourages democratic diversity is how the university employs skills discourses (Urciuoli, 2010). The neoliberal university redefines the skill of diversity as “an individual’s contribution to the organization” (Urciuoli, 2010, 163). In doing this, the neoliberal university forgoes the social connotation of diversity that challenges students to offer such diversity to society at large, and rather offers it as a skill attributable to an individual’s market uniqueness. Thus, “what started as an inclusive social movement becomes a market-valued line on an individual’s resume” (Urciuoli, 2010, 164) as students only partly comprehend the experiences that truly fulfill diversity (Horkheimer and Adorno, 1947, 71) and cliché terminology “precludes genuine development and meaning” (Marcuse, 1964, 97). This form of commodified diversity that can only exist through the presence of the market therefore becomes “symbolical of the apparatus used to detect or produce them” (Bridgman cited in Marcuse, 1947, 86-87). This adherence to the neoliberal apparatus correspondingly ignores the non-market values of cultural and economic diversity that are fundamental to democratic citizenship. The intimacy and spontaneity of democratic relationships is in turn corrupted as social differences are seen as manageable by technical solutions (Marcuse, 1947, 70-71).

Further, and like many other neoliberal mechanisms, commodified diversity sets a generalized framework for what diversity should look like—everywhere. It instrumentally offers students a linear process of guidelines that ignores spontaneity and cultural outliers. Under such an understanding of diversity, students are taught that

proficiency with program X and experience with minor Y are what truly constitutes diversity. This predetermined guideline for diversity requires little democratic creativity or individual interpretation. This type of commodified discourse is utilized by UC Berkeley's Career Center as they state, "With careful planning, you can develop career-related skills and experiences that can prepare you for almost any job or graduate school field" (UC Berkeley, 2018). When adapting this instrumental and corporate understanding of diversity, universities like Berkeley dismiss the public requirements of diversity in which participant observation, vulnerability, and serendipitous learning experiences prove that diversity can never be a fully planned or accomplished process. As diversity becomes commodified in this way, students are no longer taught to experiment with the cultural and socio-economic diversity that is fundamental to democratic citizenship as commodified diversity can be achieved with actors from homogenized backgrounds.

A lack of intellectual autonomy also aids to the ongoing conformity of the neoliberal university. This process is noticeable within the pedagogical methods of professors. Most the issues I present here cannot be entirely attributable to the professor as their methods are merely an embodiment of a larger hegemonic project that is the neoliberal university. Hence, professors are pressured into following the neoliberal logic of their department and are rarely given a chance to question such higher authority.

In disciplines that hold exceptional neoliberal uptake, power hierarchies often arise as professors with experience in the neoliberal world are understood as an

epistemic authority by both the university and student body (Kodelja 2013). Questions such as “Who educates the educators, and where is the proof that there are in possession of the good” (Marcuse, 1947, 40) are being suppressed under such conditions. This epistemic authority formulates an unconditional subordination from students due to their understanding of the professor’s success in the neoliberal world. This authority is particularly visible in departments such as business and law. Successful businesspersons or distinguished judges are designated teaching roles due to their knowledge of “how the world really works”. Neoliberalized students thus unconditionally accept the pedagogical methods of the professor as they understand their knowledge as “accurate due to their experiences with company X”. Such a presence of epistemic authority creates a classroom where the professor is not required to prove themselves academically and where “expert knowledge is all that counts” (Horkheimer and Adorno, 1947, 60). This surfaces one of the many realities within the neoliberal classroom that corrupts the intellectual development of students.

With this said, it then becomes imperative to analyze the type of pedagogies that are being practiced in such coercive atmospheres. Before doing this, it is important to note the type of pedagogy that is most in line with democratic citizenship—that of critical pedagogy. For in the most fundamental sense, critical pedagogy is skeptical of the status quo where conventions are blindly followed. This form of pedagogy inspires students to engage critically with history, question hegemony, and break conventions. This creates an atmosphere where no perspective is deemed out of bounds. (Peck, 2001, 446). Critical thought thus, “becomes historical

consciousness...[that] searches in the real history of man for the criteria of truth and falsehood” (Marcuse, 1964, 100). In response to this form of thinking, the student learns that predetermined scripts for classroom learning do not exist and is correspondingly more likely to voluntarily participate in discussion. Through such participation, the student is exposed to ideological challenges that allow them to reconceptualize their logic as they acknowledge their fallibility. Critical pedagogy therefore plays a vital role in being a transformative and politically inspiring learning mechanism (Giroux, 2004, 38).

With that said, the neutral pedagogy utilized by the neoliberal university is far from critical. Such passive pedagogy constrains the educational opportunities of students and discourages critical thinking (Saunders, 2007, 5). Under such methods, students are encouraged to accept contemporary norms as they fear being an outsider in a world so dominated by neoliberalism. Students therefore begin to hold trust in the worldviews of fellow classmates who display success in the neoliberal world. Professors are additionally encouraged to maintain a neutral classroom atmosphere where political affiliations are disguised, even when curriculum holds clear political messages (Saunders, 2007, 5). Correspondingly, students are taught that democratic life is a repetitive and unenthusiastic place where citizens are unrequired to speak for themselves or question conformity. This unenthusiastic atmosphere is a key tool in maintaining power within the neoliberal university as such practices “sweep aside objections to itself along with those to the world it neutrally duplicates” (Horkheimer and Adorno, 1947, 59).

Similar to how the neoliberal university uses common areas to target the widest range of students, the university employs neutral pedagogy to suppress the now widely controlled student body. Such pedagogical methods construct students who blindly accept the realities of the neoliberal university and who struggle to recognize its shortcomings. This allows the neoliberal university to go virtually unchallenged and undermines the suggestion of pedagogy being a transformative and autonomous practice as “the spontaneous reproduction of superimposed needs by the individual does not establish autonomy; it only testifies further to the efficacy of controls” (Marcuse, 1947, 8).

Chapter 4

WHY IT MATTERS

When neoliberalism permeates the university experience, higher education cannot serve the role as a transformative institution that prepares students for the unpredictability of democratic life. This claim is reinforced as the neoliberal university denies the democratic practice of unbiased public association and surrounds the student body with implicit market coercion wherever they venture. Students can no longer demarcate areas that exist outside of neoliberalism and the entirety of their university experience is plagued with one-dimensionality and sameness. In an institution where neoliberalism targets the most communal places, the neoliberal university ingrains students into neglecting democratic diversity. This neglect of diversity is most visible in homogenized intellectual ventures that conform students to capitalist reasoning and is fortified in discourses of commodified diversity that reward diverse students who paradoxically forgo the social experiences associated with actual democratic diversity. This commodified understanding of diversity further inculcates students into accepting a linear and technical understanding of diversity that neglects democratic spontaneity and cultural outliers. Students are pressured into reciprocating this understanding and are taught that social activism is unnecessary due to the omnipotence of the market. As this occurs, their intellectual autonomy becomes targeted by the forces of neoliberalism as neutral pedagogy coerces students into accepting mere technical reproduction as authentic autonomy.

Such democratic unpreparedness poses serious threats to the future of our democracy as our political system relies upon actively engaged citizens who acknowledge intellectual humility and who are dedicated to both trial and error and alternative perspectives. When we become obsessed with market conformity, we lose value in the uncommodifiable realms of intimacy and emotional expression that are essential in building meaningful relationships. It follows that such market conformity alienates the subject from discrimination and bias as capitalist diversity does not require democratic engagement on the ground. Further, when the neoliberal university fails to grant students intellectual autonomy our society is threatened by an incoming demographic that ignores historical analysis and their own fallibility. Discussions concerning a solution to this problem may rest outside of the neoliberal university, yet the university must be acknowledged as a construction site of neoliberal hegemony as millions of students pass through these extremely coercive conditions each year. In order for us to confront such widespread hegemony and move forward as a cohesive political unit, we must acknowledge the potentialities of democratic citizenship and install it as the most crucial university practice.

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