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REVIEW OF *BEYOND THE CORPORATE UNIVERSITY: CULTURE AND PEDAGOGY IN THE NEW MILLENNIUM*

edited by Henry Giroux and Kostas Myrsiades
Rowman & Littlefield, 2001

A sequel of sorts to “university in crisis” collections like Cary Nelson and Michael Bérubé’s *Higher Education Under Fire* (1995), the 16 essays in this book take a renewed look at the intensifying incursions of corporate money, influence, and ideology into the university. Divided into four sections, the essays range from theoretical overviews to specific suggestions for radical pedagogies that resist the pressure to adopt a vocational training model of higher education. The common theme of the essays is the problem of creating engaged public citizens in a university increasingly influenced by private corporate ideologies, amidst a society in which the public mission of universities has been largely forgotten by citizens and their elected representatives.

The essays center around English departments and their Rhetoric/Composition and Cultural Studies siblings, so the book is primarily focused on the effect of corporatization in the humanities. It would be wonderful to see an essay or two from the point of view of a biologist or chemist examining the effects of corporate culture in the sciences, where the grants and corporate partnerships have numbers with far more zeroes, and the pressure and temptation to play along is certainly far greater than it is in the Philosophy department. But the humanities focus is apt, as these departments are often the only ones to offer students the tools to question and critique the corporate ethos, and are also the most besieged by legislators seeking to cut the “fat” from university budgets.

The English-department bent of the collection also means that the critical theory and canon wars are still a vestigial concern, although these topics receive only about an essay and a half worth of attention each—an amount that feels about right. The question now seems to be whether or not these battles were a distraction that diverted attention from legislative repossession crews that carted away the funding from humanities departments throughout the 90s. One of the most incisive comments about this misdirection game appears in a footnote, where Jeffrey Williams quotes an acerbic Michael Bérubé saying “The discipline thinks it’s moving from literature to culture [i.e. cultural studies], while the [job] market tells us we’re moving from literature to technical writing” (27).

The first of the four sections, “Higher Education and the Politic of Corporate Culture,” takes the highest-level view of these problems and also proves to be the most thought-provoking and rewarding. Williams’ essay “Franchising the University” leads off the collection and summarizes its concerns. Two issues—the attenuation of the university’s mission to create public citizens rather than corporate specialists, and the corollary dilemma of the corporatization of the university structure itself—are problems that have haunted professors in the humanities for decades, but never more immediately than they do now. As Williams writes, “Universities are now being conscripted directly as training grounds for the corporate workforce. . . . In fact, university work has been more directly construed to serve not only corporate-profit agendas via its grant-supplacant status, but universities have become franchises in their own right, reconfigured to corporate management, labor, and consumer models and delivering a name-brand product” (18).

Williams puts a useful face on the dilemma when he compares the 1963 Jerry Lewis film *The Nutty Professor* to the 1996 Eddie Murphy remake. In the original, the distracted Professor Kelp is chastised by the dean for neglect of his teaching, while in the remake Murphy’s Professor Klump is reprimanded for the very different reason of neglecting his potentially lucrative research duties. Williams reads into this subtle difference a change in public assumptions about the role of the university and the professor’s mission—it didn’t need to be pointed out to the film going public in 1963 that Kelp’s first duty was teaching, just as it goes without saying in the remake that the professor’s primary job is in the lab. Further, in the remake the assumption is that these experiments are valuable because they can make Money for the university, which is seen less as an institution for educating the young than as a business seeking a big sale. Williams contends that in the American mind the missions of the corporation and the university have elided—both are profit-motivated organizations that are ultimately concerned with the bottom line. It follows then that appeals to public sentiment to support the common good through education funding are less likely to find sympathetic ears than the competing conservative messages of efficiency and self-reliance.

In Hollywood U’s real-world counterpart, the change has been less amusing but just as pronounced. Another essay traces the enormous rise in corporate contributions to the university—from \$850 million in 1985 to \$4.25 billion just a decade later—a trend that highlights the indebtedness of the modern university to private business (Kumar, 218). Williams discusses the effect of the shift in mission from universities as public institutions to private partnerships, and the various carrots and sticks used to encourage professors to seek out these partnerships and the grant money that accompanies them. In a telling instance, one of Williams’ teaching institutions offered publication credit to faculty members for grant proposals submitted: four grant proposals equaled one article. Williams recounts his dismay as the dean “by fiat seemed to rewrite our professional self-definition, from scholarship to salesmanship” (16). These kinds of profit-driven, top-down managerial decisions by university administrations—increasingly hierarchical and corporate in structure and independent of professorial control—are just as great a threat to the mission of the university as the dependence on private funding.

Williams also addresses the often-overlooked demand side of the corporate university equation: the increasing leverage that loans have over students’ educational opportunities and choices. Our students are incurring levels of debt undreamt of by previous generations. Student loan payments can linger for a decade after school is completed, and, unlike credit card or mortgage debt, must be repaid even in the event of bankruptcy. The effect of this debt is to close off many avenues of opportunity that don’t involve a corporate paycheck, like public service, the arts, and other culturally central but low-paying occupations. Students’ limited career options in turn affect their choices of majors, courses, and their attitudes towards the role of the university in their lives and society at large. The growing financial commitment to a college education also increases the pressure to vocationalize career tracks in the university to guarantee that the student’s investment is repaid. This in turn further marginalizes the humanities—already stigmatized by burger-flipping punch lines—and makes them even less appealing and credible to students who can do the math for payments on \$40,000 worth of student loans.

The lines of argument in this and the other introductory essays will be familiar to those who have followed the literature of the last decade or two that examines corporate influence on academia. Indeed, many of the essays reference the work of Gerald Graff, Paul Lauter, Stanley Aronowitz, Cary Nelson, and Michael Bérubé, and build on their conclusions. Some of the authors examine longer patterns of influence, invoking Kant and Matthew Arnold to establish the changing historical conceptions of the university and its roles of both reproducing society and promoting the public good—roles that even Arnold admitted were not always in alignment. Phillips' essay, "Culture, the Academy and the Police," explores this history at length as he examines the duality of Arnold's concern with education as a means of promoting the "project of freedom" that would elevate citizens through education, and his somewhat contradictory interest in the "project of social control" that would keep a lid on any revolutionary impulses that might arise in an educated populace (110).

In sections three and four of the collection, "The Responsibility of Literature and the Possibility of Politics" and "Making the Pedagogical More Political," the dominant critical framework is Marxist, whether it is the postmodern Marxism of Christopher Wise's "The Case for Jameson," the more straightforward critique of the hegemonic university in Barbara Foley's "Subversion and Oppositionality in the Academy," or the feminist Marxism of Lynn Worsham's "Going Postal." While there are many points of interest in these essays, it would be helpful to have some more diversity of approach in the chorus of voices decrying the corporatization of the university. While the tools of Marxist analysis are useful to describe the processes by which capital can hold the university in thrall, the non-Marxist left certainly has something to say about how to challenge or modify the reproduction of power structures through the educational system. Perhaps more to the point, it seems unlikely that smash-the-corporate-state rhetoric will improve any state university's chances of maintaining funding levels during a recession.

While some might criticize more moderate approaches as self-censoring genuflections to the university's new corporate overlords, the "radical" viewpoint can just as easily lapse into an embrace of marginality safely contained in a few isolated classrooms rather than expressed through the fiscal and public policy of the university. These latter functions, Rod Strickland points out in "Curriculum Mortis," are increasingly beyond the grasp of professors in the hierarchical corporate structure of the modern university. "Political and intellectual conflicts among faculty and students are displaced to the level of administration," where "power struggles are hidden behind closed doors as administrators negotiate funding levels" (75). Strickland's essay reminds us that we need to fight the corporate university on at least two levels. In the long term, we can help produce thoughtful citizens—who can then shape public policy—as we make visible for our students the imperatives of capital. But we must also act in the short term, by regaining the power relinquished by the professoriate.

Finally, while Roger Simon examines the Canadian university system in "The University: A Place to Think?," the rest of the collection is focused on the United States and noticeably lacks comparisons with the current status of the academy in other countries. Has Britain's tiered education system or France's test-dominated approach proven more or less effective in resisting corporate influence? Does democratic access (however imperfect that access may be) to university education in the United States come with costs that are unique to our social and educational systems?

Although the trend toward a corporatized academy continues, the takeover is far from complete and the critical tools for examining and discussing the problem have grown considerably more sophisticated. *Beyond the Corporate University* is a valuable addition to the literature and contains many thought-provoking discussions of issues that should concern any professor in the humanities.

