

Book Review: Nocella II, Anthony J., Steven Best, and Peter McLaren, eds.
Academic Repression: Reflections from the Academic-Industrial Complex.
Oakland CA: AK, 2010. Print.

Reviewed by **Samuel Day Fassbinder**
DeVry University, USA



THE POLITICAL-ECONOMY PREFACE

Signs of the American university's economic constriction can be found throughout the US., such as might deflate the most earnest idealism of university life. Here are two meaningful statistics: A recent (May 2010) Wall Street Journal article (Tuna 1) about cutbacks in funding to the University of California system tells us that "adjusted for inflation, state funding per UC student has fallen 54% since the 1990-91 fiscal year." Meanwhile, we are told in "CNNMoney.com" (Wang 1), with Bureau of Labor Statistics data, that college costs have risen on average by 439% since 1982, vastly outpacing inflation. Students have doubtless found, moreover, that recent crises in state funding beginning in 2009 have compounded the increasing expense of university educations. Yet a certain narrowing of college opportunity had existed even before then: as Vijay Prashad writes, quoting a College Board publication, "A 2005 study by the College Board found that both public and private colleges are increasingly unaffordable to all US students" (177). Thus the idealism of the affordable education has taken some serious hits.

The increased pricetag of the universities is supposedly offset in an economic sense by the supposedly advanced earning power of graduates with degrees. However, there is a more prominent left critique of the universities in this era which addresses a money issue, but in a different way: what is addressed in this other critique is the increasing obsession with money by university administrations at the expense of academic programs deemed unprofitable. Pessimistic analyses of the commodification of university life (e.g. David Kirp's Shakespeare, Einstein, and the Bottom Line) typically question the ability of traditional universities to maintain the spirit of the liberal arts in light of the "bottom line" ideology infiltrating even public universities. Kirp:

Maintaining communities of scholars is not a concern of the market. It is axiomatic that entrepreneurs must balance the books in order to survive, which is why for-profit universities like DeVry are acting rationally when they support only research designed to strengthen their institution. But when show-me-the-money accountability becomes the mantra not just of the stock market but of the politicians who oversee public universities' budgets, who will

underwrite the inquiries that academics pursue in the name of intellectual curiosity, with no hope of a quick return on investment? If the market truly reigns, will entire fields, and the intellectual capital they represent, wither away over time? Will sociology and comparative literature, and pure mathematics too, become the “dead languages” of the new millennium? (261)

In this critique, “show-me-the-money” accountability is said to push aside the purpose of the university as a place in which knowledge is pursued as “its own end,” the goal traditionally associated with John Henry Newman’s classic text The Idea of a University (76).

The David Kirp critique of the increasingly “bottom-line” focused university is shared by Frank Donoghue, author of The Last Professors: The Corporate University And The Fate Of The Humanities, in which the humanities (among other disciplines in the modern university) are imagined to be doomed because they are not that part of the university which turns a profit. A more recent piece in the Wall Street Journal (Simon and Banchemo) reflects a recent trend in this regard – doing “cost-benefit” analyses to measure the extent to which university departments are “paying their way.” “Paying their way,” in these instances, is typically measured in terms of numbers of graduating students and (as Texas A&M University has done) of the cost of operating each department as measured against the money each department pulls in.

Financial pressures placed on universities in recent times can be understood in a materialistic sense in light of the larger context of the circulation of commodities in the university. The knowledge-commodities produced by universities – their research products, as well as the professionals produced by universities – are well “paid for” in the process of university funding: by states, by other funding, and by student and parent payment of fees and tuition. With the traditional liberal arts university, students can be said to purchase degrees, with the increased chances of higher job earnings they are said to bring – and in exchange they pay for the services of a professional class, specifically professors and administrators. In light of this payment, student economic advancement as such is perhaps the most significant motivation for degree-getting in this era, according

to David F. Labaree, author of How To Succeed In School Without Really Learning (1997: 250). Labaree dramatizes the rationale behind degree-accumulation as follows:

When students at all levels see education through the lens of social mobility, they quickly conclude that what matters most is not the knowledge they attain in school but the credentials they acquire there. Grades, credits, and degrees – these become the objects to be pursued. The end result is to reify the formal markers of education and displace the substantive content. Students learn to do what it takes to acquire the necessary credentials, a process that may involve learning some of the subject matter (at least whatever is likely to be on the next test) but also may not. After all, if exchange value is key, then it makes sense to work at acquiring the maximum number of markers for the minimum investment of time, money and intellectual energy. The payoff for a particular credential is the same no matter how it was acquired, so it is rational behavior to try to strike a good bargain, to work at gaining a diploma, like a car, at a substantial discount. (32)

Doubtless as America's universities are put under further economic pressure, their professors can expect to see more of this thinking from their students, with consequent devaluing of the university product.

Some historical context might clarify, in this regard, how the commodification of university life builds upon previous commodity-forms of academic existence. In the 19th and 20th centuries, especially, the growth of the class of professionals was tied to the growth of the capitalist system, and the growth of these two entities conditioned the growth of the modern university as a breeding-ground for professional classes. The history of the university is deeply intertwined with the creation of professionals from its early days – Willis Rudy (The Universities of Europe, 1100-1914) tells us that medieval universities were largely popular for their professional training, regardless of their connection to the Catholic Church and their prescription of the “trivium” and the “quadrivium”: “They were in business primarily to train civil and ecclesiastical administrators, lawyers, and medical doctors, not philosophers, pure scientists, or literary scholars.” (31) Thus the university, regardless of its pretensions, was into the business of business even before the capitalist system had arisen.

The intimate entwining of the growth of the universities and the growth of the capitalist system is examined in detail in William Clark's history of the universities, Academic Charisma and the Origins of the Research University. In Clark's book, the rituals of the academy are shown to combine archaic tradition and bureaucratic mandate with a rather secure adaptation to the bureaucratic order of the capitalist system

The most recent history of the university, then, places what were already- commodified universities under a further subservience to the discipline of the capitalist system, in which bureaucracy and business triumph over the disinterested pursuit of knowledge. This is the rather un-idealistic contest in which political-economic thought about universities today chooses sides.

THE BOOK REVIEW: ACADEMIC REPRESSION VERSUS ACADEMIC FREEDOM

Enter Nocella, Best, and McLaren's (2010) edited volume Academic Repression: Reflections from The Academic Industrial Complex. This long, comprehensive (500+ pages even without the notes) book is dedicated to academic scholars who are "repressed" – who are, in short, persecuted for having published or taught controversial opinions within the academy. This persecution does not necessarily arise out of the reorientation of the universities to corporate profit in the age of neoliberalism; often, universities also become vulnerable to ideologically-based political forces such as those which forced Ward Churchill out of his tenured position at the University of Colorado in 2007.

Now, of course, other multi-author volumes have been compiled on this topic: most interestingly Malini Johar Schueller and Ashley Dawson's (2009) Dangerous Professors: Academic Freedom and the National Security Campus and (from a right-wing libertarian perspective) The Shadow University: The Betrayal of Liberty on America's Campuses. These are volumes that attempt to ward off the ideological policing of the academy, from a number of perspectives. The editors of Academic Repression, however, come at the

ideological politics of the university in a direction that readers might attribute to the Gramscian concept of the “war of position.” From the introduction:

To be sure, as human animals are not ethereal beings without bodies, interests, and deep roots in social life and natural evolution, the university is more like a battlezone than a grazing pasture, a prisonhouse than a polis. And while the prevailing corporate values and political ideologies favor conformity and acquiescence, the threat of the Id of subversion, counter-hegemony, and anti-hierarchy, as well as the pulse of resistance, rebellion, and revolution, always threaten to break through. (27-28)

The ultimate aim of Academic Repression, then, transcends the university as a mere site of production for professionals: as the editors put it, “*for just as universities may train tomorrow’s CEOs, generals, weapons makers, and CIA agents, so can they breed the next generation of visionaries, thinkers, activists, and agents of social change.*” (88) Thus the “war of position” envisioned in this volume takes on a sort of Romantic dimension, as universities are imagined to “breed” academic visionaries and activists. To be sure, genuine academic visionaries and activists author much of what is written in Academic Repression; yet the hint of Romantic idealism which colors the end of the introduction to this book could have been fleshed out further. (To a certain extent this essay is an attempt to do just that.)

The editors of Academic Repression have also previously made names for themselves as activist educators. Best and Nocella are perhaps most famous (already) for their edited volume of writings by a wide variety of environmental activists, Igniting a Revolution; Best is at UT El Paso, Nocella at Syracuse. McLaren is a professor of education at UCLA, and a global activist for “revolutionary critical pedagogy” whose stock in trade at your local Borders is likely to be his (2000) book Che Guevara, Paulo Freire, and the Pedagogy of Revolution.

In this review it must be said that the logic of political economy, intimately intertwined with the business of the university (as shown above), lurks in the background of this

volume, which is about academic freedom. As I will argue here, academic freedom is about the resistance to academic repression (as the volume's contributors will show) and about the resistance to the restrictive commodification of the university (as discussed above and as some of the contributors will also show). But academic freedom is also about the creation of a cultural space outside of the political-economic imperatives of university life, an ideal social space defined neither by political economy nor by its urgent critique. The theoretical justification for this space will be justified in the language of "liminality" and "communitas" of the texts of the anthropologist Victor Turner (1977; 1982) , and by Cornelius Castoriads' (1987) concept of the "social imaginary," as discussed in the conclusion to this essay. "Academic freedom" can best be defended, I argue, as an intellectual "liminal" space, as a force outside of the structural imperatives of political economy.

By this thesis, academic freedom is a topic in significant need of unpacking from the political economy perspective: the freedom of professors to publish research upon controversial issues without being penalized by their university supervisors is not typically a freedom granted to alienated labor under capitalism. But the product of the university is knowledge, or more specifically the knowledge-commodity (as discussed above) – specifically, the research by which professors and graduate students earn their keep, and (by extension) the academic degrees which are said to merit "value-added" advantages in job placement for their holders. The editors enter into the process of knowledge-commodity production as follows:

Knowledge cannot advance within conditions of intimidation, self-censorship, constraint, and penalties. In this stifling environment, knowledge dies. In an atmosphere of freedom, respect, diversity, tolerance, and open dialogue and debate, in contrast, knowledge grows and thrives. Both faculty and students must be able to experiment with ideas, test them in concrete interactions with others, unperturbed by artificially imposed ideological and political constraints
(25)

Thus academic freedom constitutes a preferred condition for the production of knowledge-commodities within the university, which (under capitalism) is a specific designated site for the production of said commodities. There is, of course, a corresponding discipline of academic production, which (for the editors) falls under the heading of “academic responsibility”: “Academic freedom is a right so long as it is attached to duties to respect relevant standards and ethical practices in research and teaching” (26). Knowledge-commodities thus are said to differ in this respect from, say, bags of potato chips or cans of soda pop, which are produced under conditions of mechanized standardization and capitalist discipline, neither of which require any degree of freedom.

In defending academic freedom, then, Nocella, Best, and McLaren rely upon the AAUP’s standard for such freedom, which implicitly asserts privileges of artisanal production for academic workers against the alienation of productive design as it typically governs the production of cans of cola, potato chips, and other such commodities.

Overall, the 75-page introduction to this book itself charts the history of academic freedom, of student activism, and of academic repression (with specific emphasis upon the activities of people such as David Horowitz and Lynne Cheney and organizations such as ACTA) from their beginnings. In reciting this history, the editors proclaim solidarity with forces of social change and in opposition to the reactionary forces that have sought to repress intellectual life throughout American history. In this context, then, we have academic freedom, which from a particular materialist perspective appears as a liberal assertion of professional worker’s rights, being used here to promote openness to radical change.

The other essays in this edited volume come from a variety of different perspectives. What they share in common is the struggle for academic freedoms and the opposition to the forces, whether they come from political reactionaries or financial crises, which would shut down such freedoms. Henry Giroux, who is also important as the author of The University In Chains: Confronting The Military-Industrial-Academic Complex,

begins the first essay by discussing the efforts by organizations of ACTA and of David Horowitz to target “left-wing” academic thinkers for their beliefs. Also in this section Michael Parenti’s solidly-marxist critique of university political life reminds us that “repression in academia is as old as the nation itself.” (113).

The second part of this volume features Robert Jensen and Ward Churchill, as well as newer yet powerful writers such as Richard Kahn and Bill Martin. It is about academic figures who have been denied tenure, hounded out of universities, or otherwise persecuted for voicing their opinions. It’s useful in reading this section to remember what is at stake. The universities are, among other things, factories for degrees wherein the professional class can claim its stamp of approval as a professional class. The question at hand with all cases of academic repression is one of the versatility of the society as a whole: the question “is society versatile enough to allow dissidents in its universities?” is intimately connected to another question – “is society versatile enough to allow dissidents in its managerial class?” Put another way, we might ask: is the political atmosphere in our society characterized by democratic, open exchange of thought and opinion, or are the liberal, democratic trappings of society a cover for domination and persecution? Academic Repression shows how the latter can be the case in an academic context.

The next two sections of this volume are about subaltern perspectives upon the university. Part 3 is about the Middle East and Africa; one impressive piece in this section is Micere Githae Mugo’s reflection upon her years as an academic in Kenya (1973-1982) in “The Role of African Intellectuals and Their Relevance to the US.” Mugo’s discussion of academic (and political) repression in Kenya is illustrated by some rather ferocious abuses of justice; her narrative further highlights the problem of the politicized “war of position” within (and outside of) the academy. The author vividly portrays the various roles played by Kenyan academics (conservative, liberal, radical) as coping strategies with this “war of position.”

Part 4 is about gender, race, and (dis)ability. One especially holistic work in the fourth section is Maria E. Cotera's "Women of Color, Tenure, and the Neoliberal University," which suggests that activism was actually an impediment to the achievement of tenure for a deserving "woman of color" professor. Her discussion of the economic background of this tenure denial highlights the tension between "public" and merely economic roles for the university. If the university is no longer a "public good" but rather an appendage of a knowledge-commodity business, then activist scholarship will be seen as not marketable for tenure. This inspiration is fleshed out further in Caroline K. Kalterleiter and Mechthild E. Nagel's "The Carceral Society: From The Prison Tower to the Ivory Tower," later in the book.

Part 5 is subtitled "Fast Times at Corporate Higher Ed." and includes a variety of perspectives upon the larger, institutional issues of the university. Especially interesting in this section is Deric Shannon and William Armaline's "A Working Class Student Is Something to Be: Anarchist Reflections on the Academy." Shannon and Armaline are fully in touch with the inner commodity-producers of the academy. They emphasize various resistances to the "web of domination" which exists in the academy and in world society, and they endorse the idea that academics should focus upon organizing to change the whole society, and not just its college component.

Part 6 has the quizzical title "Twilight of Academia: Critical Pedagogy, Engaged Intellectuals, and Political Resistance": there are a number of articles here by famous academic personages (Carl Boggs, Howard Zinn, Bill Ayres, Peter McLaren.) Here I'd like to concentrate upon Cary Nelson's piece: "The Three-Legged Stool: Shared Governance, Academic Freedom, and Tenure," and Gregory Tropea's piece: "Contingent Faculty and the Problem of Structural Repression." These authors provide an apposite focus upon how the liberal strategy of "academic freedom" can advance general goals of social change.

Nelson's and Tropea's pieces are critical to the discussion in the whole of Academic Repression because they deal with the background of institutional power in which faculty

compete for power with administrators. Cary Nelson is the President of AAUP, the American Association of University Professors – his “three-legged stool” is composed of academic freedom, tenure, and shared governance. Tenure is obviously a right of academic stakeholding for those few who can earn it; the placement of tenured academics within the university can also be the placement of inspirational ideas within the university, incarnations of academic freedom. Shared governance is the granting of some power to faculty members over decisions that are important to their lives as professionals. Nelson believes in a version of shared governance in which faculty power is in some sense real.

Shared governance, then, is the basis of the AAUP’s attempt to find a place for faculty power in universities. Radical readers may wish to test whether the AAUP ideal of collegiality will work against the economic pressures of the age of neoliberalism: Nelson hopes that it will give faculty a chance, and suggests the faculty strike as a backup plan. Tropea, on the other hand, deals in his argument with that two-thirds of faculty members who are mere “contingent faculty” – temp professors – and with efforts to unionize them (or at least to create “mediating structures” (481-483) so as to grant them some degree of employment rights against the power of universities.

Gregory Tropea’s contribution is critical to this volume because he examines the “worsening structural threat to academic freedom that came with the dramatic increase in part-time and full-time contingent appointments in the second half of the twentieth century” (481). He conceptualizes the problem as follows: “as the contingent workforce has grown, so too has a set of attitudes among administrators and tenured faculty that the contingent faculty are disposable laborers who have no entitlement to fair pay, office space, access to instructional technology and supplies, class preparation time, professional development opportunities, and shared governance” (484). How this list of denied privileges is related to academic freedom per se is left unclear. What is clear from a political economy perspective, however, is that temp faculty may be regarded as artisans in the vague sense that they are “professors,” but that they are denied the

accoutrements necessary to be artisans in real life – and that defines the battle to be fought.

Nelson’s (and Tropea’s) reflection brings this edited volume to a close with a focus on local, immediate struggles about tenure and employment status. Whereas the long introduction to Academic Repression brings forth the larger historical, social, and political economy context of academic repression and dissent, the struggle itself is a matter of engagement with conservative institutions for the sake of small-scale political goals, one professor and one academic privilege at a time. Institutional change, then, is (in this volume) largely conceived in terms of a framework of institutional continuity. Despite their often-bitter criticisms of university life, the authors appear to have an ingrained respect for universities as places of work and of social life, and in the following summary reflection I will reflect upon that respect as a prerequisite for engagement in present-day battles against “academic repression,” and upon what social goals such engagement would then be based upon.

THE SUMMARY REFLECTION: ACADEMIA AS LIMINOID PRODUCTION

At the end of the introduction, the editors of this volume argue for a “materialist” approach to the study of the academy:

This volume addresses not only overt attacks on critical or radical thinking, it also engages the broad structural determinants of academic culture, and the socio-economic trends unfolding for decades since the emergence of neoliberalism. It is not just about discursive issues of free speech and repression, as if academia would become a utopia should universities actually adhere to their mission statements. This idealist illusion is only corrected through a materialist emphasis on the formidable economic and institutional barriers to academic freedom, critical pedagogy, enlightenment, and citizenship in the global and economic communities. (86)

The editors’ defense of academic freedom, however, is inseparable from a defense of the academy, even though from a materialist context the academy appears to be a rather conservative institution, a pillar of the existing power structure. Skeptical readers might

ask about the appropriateness of the editors' claim that "the university can be a key ground on which to forge not only new educational institutions but also new social institutions as well"(88) in light of the role of the university, of academic repression, of the economic constriction of the university in the present era, and especially in light of the repressive nature of the larger society in which academic repression occurs. One does not get from this volume a vision of a society continually inventing new social institutions – this is not to say that one isn't happening, but that it's not being reported in stories of academic repression.

The question remains: should activists focus their efforts upon university reform, especially when universities are considered in light of the business-oriented nature of the university (as discussed above)? There are plenty of good reasons to suggest that universities aren't really special places for the instigation of social change. A good deal of the academic repression discussed in Academic Repression is not merely specific to the academy, but, rather, reflective of repression in the larger society – thus "academic repression" appears as an epiphenomenon of general repression, which is the real problem. The section of this anthology dedicated to "Contextualizing Academic Repression" (part 1) was ostensibly about this, but could have gone further. The discussions of Bill Martin ("Postmodern Fascism and the Long Arm of Israel," pp. 216-226) and of Stephen Sheehi ("Teaching in a State of Fear," pp. 262-279) also highlight tendencies in the American mainstream media which tends to hide stories critical of Israel from the public view. Christian Davenport's discussion of the academic repression of scholarship on the Black Panthers ("Scholarship Under the Gun, Lawsuit, and Innuendo," pp. 233-246; see especially pp. 241-242) is reflective of repression directed against the Black Panthers in mainstream society; Richard Kahn's piece "Operation Get Fired" (200-215) details the academic end of the FBI's mainstream-society war on environmentalists. Indeed, the whole section on "Fast Times at Corporate Higher Ed." is full of contextualization of academic repression against the backdrop of the repressive "real world." So when we talk about combating academic repression, then, we are talking about combating the social repression of American society as a whole. Why just focus on universities?

Moreover, a standard critique of the “ivory tower” positions the academy as isolated from, and thus irrelevant to, actual political practice,. One recalls Todd Gitlin’s famous remark that “while the Right was occupying the heights of the political system, the assemblage of groups identified with the Left were marching on the English Department” (Gitlin 148) Must agents of social change use colleges and universities as stepping stones? One can see from the whole of Academic Repression how fragile the hold of the “Left” is on academic power. And if the academy is largely concerned with its own arcane version of business, what connection does it have with the mass public? In light of the fact that academic repression is significantly a reflection of the repression currently occurring in mainstream society, what good does it do to become a professor, and why have so many of the creative souls anthologized in Academic Repression devoted their lives to being professors? The title of Ward Churchill’s essay in this volume (“The Myth of Academic Freedom”) is especially question-begging in this regard – if there is no real academic freedom for activist professors, wouldn’t it be better just to organize outside of the university? There are, of course, other places in the interstices of present-day capitalist society for members of the “Left” to do academic work – as public intellectuals, for instance, or working in “think tanks” affiliated with political organizations, or in journalism. The university, then, is an object of political contention for goals which reach beyond the tough state of political and economic reality prevailing in many (or perhaps most) universities today.

Here, then, I would like to suggest that if the ideal of academic freedom is to be defended, then something other than the “materialist” corrective recommended by the editors of Academic Repression must be applied. Indeed, we will need an idealist, Romantic corrective to materialism if we are to promote academic freedom in universities in this ugly era of political economy. The idealist corrective I think is necessary to make academic freedom matter, now, can be traced to an irreducibly “anthropological” social critique, which sees human societies entwined in myth and ritual, out of comes the Romantic celebration of the academic imagination.

The university, then, is a place where topics of social change can be broached – if one dares. Ultimately, though, what makes the universities in early 21st-century America important sites of social change is what the anthropologist Victor Turner called “anti-structure.” The concept of “anti-structure” was connected, in Turner’s anthropological imagination, with the rites of passage which traditional, pre-industrial societies used to mark the passage into adulthood for their members. During times in which members of society are said to have a “liminal” status – in transition between different roles in a social structure, such as is commonly experienced during rites of passage – the social structure can be said to be especially open to mass sentiments of social change.

Now, the process of getting a college education can be granted what Turner calls “liminoid” characteristics. High school and college graduations are typically recognized as rites of passage – but if the college experience itself is constructed as neither full-fledged “adulthood” (as it perhaps is for many community college students who are educated while working full-time) or “childhood” (as it perhaps is for students who regard college as an extended “playtime”), then it acquires the “in-between” characteristics associated with liminality. The liminal character of college, for instance, would explain why the college experience is often regarded as “the best years of one’s life” without reference to the college lifestyle as it is typically measured in material terms.

In the Turnerian context, the idea of liminality is important because liminality can be productive of what he calls “anti-structure” – the spaces within the social imaginary in which individual human beings are allowed to step outside of their social structures in order to change them. Victor Turner outlines the socially and politically radical implications of “anti-structure” in a short passage in The Ritual Process:

Yet in order to live, to breathe, and to generate novelty, human beings have had to create – by structural means – spaces and times in the calendar or, in the cultural cycles of their most cherished groups which cannot be captured in the classificatory nets of their quotidian, routinized spheres of action. These liminal areas of time and space – rituals, carnivals, dramas, and latterly films –

are open to the play of thought, feeling, and will; in them are generated new models, often fantastic, some of which may have sufficient power and plausibility to replace eventually the force-backed political and jurial models that control the centers of a society's ongoing life. (vii)

The "models" of a society's structure, as described by Turner, are organized cognitively by what Cornelius Castoriadis calls the "social imaginary." The social imaginary, in those terms, is that aspect of the social order which cannot merely be represented by material things but which is symbolic, which thus has to form within the group psyche and has to be imagined. It is curious, then, that one of Castoriadis' more important demonstrations of the necessity of a social imaginary, of a symbolic imaginary binding society's members to each other, involves rites of passage. Colleges and universities figure in terms of Castoriadis' concept of rites of passage as indicators of the social imaginary, as well as in terms of Turner's concept of anti-structure, as I explain below.

Now, within every society there must be some form of ritual in which new adults are, as Castoriadis put it, granted "certification" (230). That is the point at which the functional explanation of the rite of passage ends. Beyond that, then, there is an "imaginary" component to the rite of passage, in which all of the reasons for deeming once-children to be now-adults are invested with arbitrary symbolic meanings as agreed upon by a society. In our society, the distinction between children and adults has been reduced to a distinction of age (18, or perhaps 21), but is also marked by educational rituals (graduation from college, or high school).

Even in 21st century America, the (undergraduate) college experience is still not yet a mere exercise of functional training for its young graduates (who are supposed to enter the job market thereafter), nor is it a mere formality in which graduation marks the entry into adulthood. It still attains something of the "magical" character which Castoriadis attributes to the rites of passage in pre-industrial societies. In this light, the magic of college life is captured in part by the notion of the "pursuit of knowledge for its own sake," as Nocella, Best, and McLaren endorse it. As Victor Turner (1982) argues, the activity of pursuing knowledge for its own sake has a "liminoid" ritual character to it:

As scientists we are interested in demarcating a domain, not in taking sides with one or other of the groups or categories which operate within it. Experimental and theoretical science itself is “liminoid” – it takes place in “neutral spaces” or privileged arenas – laboratories and studies – set aside from the mainstream of productive or political events. (Turner 1982, 33)

The defense of academic freedom and counterattack against academic repression, which rages through the pages of Academic Repression is thus in part a defense of the “liminoid” character of science, or of scholarly pursuit in general. As pointed out above, the academy does not “produce” politically, and it’s fundamentally a “business” institution – but that’s really beside the point. Colleges and universities are outwardly conformist institutions because they are invested with powers to open other spaces in the lives of their students. The academy is a socially transformative institution because it contains liminoid spaces, spaces in which the functioning of the system does not determine the products of human thought. Turner continues:

Universities, institutes, colleges, etc., are “liminoid” settings for all kinds of freewheeling, experimental cognitive behavior as well as forms of symbolic action, resembling some found in tribal society, like “rushing” and “pledging” ceremonies in American college fraternity and society houses, for example. This, of course, does not mean that liminoid products have no political significance; think of the Rights of Man and the *Communist Manifesto*, for example. Or Plato’s *Republic* or Hobbes’ *Leviathan*. (33)

The academic repression, then, of David Horowitz and Lynne Cheney is thus an incursion upon such behavior, and the radical potential of this behavior is substantiated in the liminoid nature of the college experience. In plain English: college is optimally a place where young students go to escape the pressures, both economic and social, of society, and to engage in “the free and experimental expression of ideas”(Best, Nocella, and McLaren 27) so they can reinvent adulthood for themselves prior to experiencing it. The “pursuit of knowledge for its own sake” also operates as a catalyst for the creation of other experimental products (“visionaries, thinkers, activists, and agents of social

change” (Best, Nocella, and McLaren 88)) which come out of universities and colleges. Thus is the university complex defensible on radical grounds.

In the golden age of American capitalism (1948-1971), a vast university and college complex was created in the US so that every American would have the right to go to college – regardless of his or her educational or economic status. Within this context, the university experience acquired “liminal” characteristics, in the sense in which all Americans could at least potentially withdraw from the pressures of capitalist discipline and (with at least the aid of student loans) rethink his or her relationship to the larger society in a way that could foreshadow the mass instigation of social change. The university complex as a whole, then, can potentially operate as a site for a mass experience of “anti-structure,” involving the envisioning of multiple utopian visions for social change.

The extent, then, to which the university functions as a site for social change, is the extent to which it can offer this “anti-structure,” this suspension of social norms which contains within itself utopian potentials. Of course, the “anti-structure” is going nowhere if it is merely the ritual of spring break – but if the “anti-structure” can be combined with actual efforts at social change, then and at that point does the university become a site for social change. Conversely, academic repression can be explained as motivated by a fear of anti-structure – what else would explain the fear of “indoctrination” among Horowitz, Kimball, and so on, if the beliefs which are supposedly being “indoctrinated” have so little traction in the American political landscape? On the positive side, the discussion of the efficaciousness of radical academia goes through anti-structure as well – radical academics can promote social change to the extent to which they make effective use of the anti-structure.

The editors of Academic Repression could just as well have turned out a liberal volume in which academic freedom is defended in a bland, liberal manner – in which the freedom of the thinker is defended without regard to the actual thoughts under review. They didn’t do this. They created a volume in which academic thought is portrayed in motion

against the backdrop of a “war of position” – a culture war – and in which the university is placed in (albeit incomplete) historical and political-economic context in which the connection between “academic freedom” and the political health of society is made explicit.

The idea of “academic freedom,” however, does not itself constitute a weapon in anyone’s hands. Rather, “academic freedom” is an abstraction for the intellectual “freewheeling experiment” in the universities, within a context of “liminoid” experience which marks the passage through university life. The economic constraints which mark American universities today, and the political enemies of academic freedom, threaten that “freewheeling experiment.” Academic Repression, though it needs the above theoretical elaboration, offers a thick, deep slice of dialogue about the freedom and the threat, from a comprehensive variety of perspectives. Recommended.

References

- Clark, William. *Academic Charisma and the Origins of the Research University*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2006. Print.
- Castoriadis, Cornelius. *The Imaginary Institution of Society*. Trans. Kathleen Blamey. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1987. Print.
- Gitlin, Todd. *The Twilight of Common Dreams*. 1st ed.,. New York NY: Henry Holt & Company, 1995. Print.
- Kirp, David. *Shakespeare, Einstein, and the Bottom Line: The Marketing of Higher Education*. 1st paperback. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2003. Print.
- Labaree, David F. *How To Succeed In School Without Really Learning: The Credentials Race In American Education*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997. Print.
- Newman, John Henry. *The Idea of a University*. Rethinking the Western Tradition. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1996. Print.
- Nocella II, Anthony J., Steven Best, and Peter McLaren, eds. *Academic Repression: Reflections from the Academic-Industrial Complex*. Oakland CA: AK, 2010. Print.
- Prashad, Vijay. "'Oppression Pedagogy: Some Reflections on Campus Democracy'" Print. Rpt. in *Dangerous Professors: Academic Freedom and the National Security Campus*. Ed. Malini J. Schueller and Ashley Dawson. Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan, 2009. 175-86. Print.

Rudy, Willis. *The Universities of Europe, 1100-1914: A History*. Cranbury NJ, London:

Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1984. Print.

Simon, Stephanie, and Stephanie Banchemo. "Putting a Price on Professors ." *Wall*

Street Journal 26 May 2010: n. pag. Web. 27 Oct 2010.

<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748703735804575536322093520994.html?mod=wsj_>.

Tuna, Cari. "University of California Plans to Slash Spending." *Wall Street Journal* 19

May 2010: n. pag. Web. 10 Sep 2010.

<<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748704314904575250710618322500.html>>.

Turner, Victor. *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*. 1st Cornell

Paperback. Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 1977. Print.

Turner, Victor. *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play*. Baltimore

MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982. Print.

Wang, Penelope. "Is college still worth the price?." *cnnmoney.com* 13 April 2009: n.

pag. Web. 10 Sep 2010.

<http://money.cnn.com/2008/08/20/pf/college/college_price.moneymag/>.

Samuel Day Fassbinder

Reviewer's Details: Samuel Day Fassbinder has lived for most of his life in California, in the United States, and currently teaches English online with DeVry University. He has a Ph.D. in Communication from The Ohio State University and a Master's degree in English from Sonoma State University. He is well read in all of the social sciences and hides in the interstices of society. He works with Food Not Bombs.

Correspondence Details:

1150 N. Indian Hill Blvd.,
Claremont CA 91711 USA
(909) 731-3229

cassiodorus.senator@gmail.com