Book Reviews

The Capitalist University: The Transformations of Higher Education in the United States since 1945. Henry Heller. Pluto, 2016.

In *The Capitalist University*, Henry Heller, a Professor of History in the University of Manitoba, presents a critical analysis of the American higher education from the post-WWII era, when it became a key institution in American society, to the current time period. In his analysis, he focuses on the major disciplines of the humanities and social sciences, and shows how they functioned as "ideological tools that helped support the liberal and capitalist pillars of the American state during the period of U.S. global ascendancy" (xiii). He uses a Marxist methodology by constructing a historical narrative of the transformations the American universities have gone through in the last half century. He aims, in this way, to bring to light how they have transformed into private, profit-making corporations serving the interests of the market. Although the book offers a rather pessimistic—though realistic—account of the current state of the higher education in America, it cultivates optimism in its emphasis on history and temporality through a revival of Marxist politics, which has the potential to draw the universities back to their founding mission of serving the public good instead of the market.

Heller divides his account of the recent history of American universities into five distinct periods, each dealt with under a separate chapter. The first chapter "The Birth of the Corporate University," traces the evolution of the universities in the first half of the 20th century. During this time, there was an increasing infiltration of big businesses and private foundations into the universities and colleges mainly through philanthropy, grants and funding. As a result, universities slowly turned into ideological apparatuses of the capitalist state and worked to foster social stability through the dissemination and indoctrination of ruling ideas. This situation was interrupted during WWII as universities came under the influence of the military. As Heller writes, "[U]niversities began to receive unprecedented amounts of cash from the military, and as a result the universities became an integral part of the emerging military-industrial complex" (27). The following years saw the coming of the Cold War and the rise of McCarthyism, both of which

greatly affected the university disciplines. "[P]urging and inoculating campuses against Marxism" resulted in a "depoliticization of faculties" which created a climate of political and intellectual conformity that lasted for about a decade.

The second chapter "The Humanities and Social Sciences in the Cold War (1945-1960)" details the effects of the Cold War and McCarthyism on the humanities. One of the most important of these effects was "the suppression of a sense of historicity" which plagued different disciplines in a way that resulted in the downgrading of the role of history in understanding culture, society, literature, politics, and so on. (90). In academe, Political Science, Anthropology, and Sociology took a systematic view of society which tended to view it "atemporally or without a sense of historicity" (90). English Literature adopted the view of the aesthetization of literary works which "divorced [them] from social relations and historical change" (90). As history was erased, Heller writes, "[s]ociety seemed frozen in time with no apparent historical exit from the existing repressive order of things" (91). However, as the third chapter "The Sixties" recounts, this claustrophobic situation started to change during the revolutionary activity in the 1960s. Influenced by the social unrest of the period when the Civil Rights, Women's Liberation, and Antiwar movements coalesced into a rebellion against the state policies, students in large numbers joined the ranks of protest. Starting with the protests at Berkeley, the student uprising spread to other university campuses and for a short time brought back the radical potential which universities were emptied of. As a result of these protests, as Heller pinpoints, the notion of identity politics emerged which initiated the opening of new programs and departments such as Black Studies, Chicana/o Studies, and Indian Studies.

The fourth chapter "The Retreat from History (1980-2008)" explores how the radical potential of universities was contained in the following counter-offensive period. The resurgence of capitalism in the aftermath of the defeat of communism (in Russia and China) fostered a cultural environment that prepared the ground for the emergence of postmodernism. The postmodern distrust of master narratives, including history, "swept through academe, the effect of which was to cast doubt on knowledge which could aspire political action" (137). The ahistorical and apolitical character of postmodernism was intensified

with what came to be called "the cultural turn" or the introduction of Cultural Studies into the university campuses. As a result, like in the times of McCarthyism, Marxism turned into a "politically neutered form" that was stripped of its emancipatory potential. The fifth and last chapter "The Neoliberal University" deals with the final stage in the transformation of higher education in America. Here Heller shows how universities have yielded to the hold of the free market by turning into businesses. He writes, "As the new millennium dawned, American universities increasingly assumed a corporate character" (173). They now operate on a business model, controlling, monitoring, standardizing, and assessing the labor of academics and students. In conclusion, American universities have completed their fifty year transformation by gradually moving away "from their ostensible mission of serving the public good to that of becoming as far as possible like private enterprises" (2).

By constructing a chronological narrative of the transformation that American universities have gone through in the last half century, *The Capitalist University* demonstrates that the revolutionary potential remains in the re-insertion of history into the humanities and social sciences, and the university discourse in general. It works to uncloak the myth that universities are noble institutions which produce knowledge that is good for people by showing how they function hegemonically to perpetuate the capitalist political economy. However, as Heller occasionally mentions, the picture is not all doom. American universities have also produced excellent scholars and specialists who run against this tide. I believe by writing this book, Heller wants this not to remain an exception but to become the norm.

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