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The politics of space in the neoliberal university: The University of Warwick and the Free University, Berlin

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ABSTRACT

This article provides an auto-ethnographic analysis of my spatial experiences as an undergraduate student at two different universities with contrasting systems of higher education. I compare my experiences at the University of Warwick (Coventry) and the Free University (Berlin) to unpack the effects of current changes to higher education in the United Kingdom. This provides a necessary student voice in the academic literature on the neoliberalization of higher education. It helps unpack how the introduction of tuition fees and related changes has affected the lived experience of the university in the United Kingdom, and especially the idea of learning that underpins the university. In calling for a focus on our own stories of the university, instead of the elusive 'neoliberal university', this article argues that it is our real student experiences that will allow us to situate ourselves and protest the changes taking place in higher education.

Keywords: Student experience, narrative, space, higher education, neoliberalism, universities, spatialization

Introduction

My experience of university has been spatial. This is perhaps boringly obvious, yet it is only after three years that I have realized this. The relationship and ramifications of an economic system, higher education and space are, however, far from boring. Marc Augé wrote that "We live in a world that we have not yet learned to look at. We have to relearn to think about space" (1995, 36). My year abroad spent studying at the Free University in Berlin showed me what learning can be within higher education. This relearning of 'learning' itself made me turn my eyes on my own world and follow Augé to think about space.

I had previously understood the introduction of higher education fees in the UK as political only to the extent that it was a decision made by the government. I had not seen how this political decision drained through to every nook and cranny of the university. However, for my third year at the University of Warwick (Coventry, United Kingdom) studying Politics, Philosophy, and Economics (PPE), I spent the year 2014-2015 at the Free University in Berlin, Germany, thanks to the ERASMUS European Union student mobility program. Most strikingly, I couldn't understand how I experienced such a different concept of learning underpinning the two universities. I had taken my experience of the University of Warwick as the definition of a university, as a neutral, set and stable concept. Yet the spatial displacement of being on a new campus broke up my internalized notion of the university, opening up my imagination to the potential of higher education. I began to rethink all facets of what we mean by 'university' and I recognized that if I wanted to undo my experiences of university, I had to do so through the lens of space, since my experiences were unavoidably spatial: from our everyday routine at university to our definitions of the university; from the relation we feel as students to the buildings of the university, to the social relationships we are afforded through the university. What follows is a spatialization of my experiences of these two different universities through auto-ethnography.

The 'neoliberal university' in my title is the University of Warwick (or Warwick University Ltd., as made famous by E.P. Thompson [1971]), which I contrast with the system of higher education of the Free University in Germany, a publicly funded university with no tuition fees. This sets my story within recent critical scholarship on higher education in the UK, which focuses on processes of neoliberalization (see for instance Canaan 2011, Shattock 2012, or Radice 2013). In such scholarship, the neoliberalization of the university is seen to have been set in motion by the introduction of tuition fees for international students in 1979, and enshrined by the 2010-2011 government reforms that restructured universities' funding and fees, which most notably cut state funding for universities so that student fees rose to up to £9000 a year (Brown 2013). However, processes of neoliberalization are understood to have much wider ramifications than students having to pay tuition fees. Formal changes that are seen as the key elements of the 'neoliberal university' include a reliance on metric-based consumer information such as the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF), National Students Survey (NSS), and surveys of graduate earnings as embodying universities' quality assurance (contra quality enhancement); the casualization of staff in higher education with an increase of zero-hour, hourly-paid and teaching or research only contracts; and the replacement of maintenance grants (bursaries) with further student loans for the poorest students in the UK (which adds to student debt and the normalization of debt in general among young people).

Whilst academic research on the neoliberalization of the university provides a starting point for elucidating what has changed in our system of higher education, I argue that it does not allow us to fully understand the university today. Reciting definitions of

neoliberalism, space, higher education, and their relationship to one another may be useful, but the real range of human experience cannot be diluted into these three terms. Over and above the words on this page, I have not experienced neoliberalism, higher education and space separately and I do not think it is possible to do so. Here, I have analyzed my experiences to bring to life my story of the formal changes that amount to the 'neoliberal university'. Researching and writing through auto-ethnography, I found the means to

explore my terrain.

The 'relationship' between neoliberalism, higher education and space, can be better understood, in my view, through Tim Ingold's interpretation of the term 'meshwork', taken from Henri Lefebvre (Ingold 2010, 11). Instead of writing interconnected points, I am writing interwoven lines like Ingold's explanation of the spider web. To quote at length;

> The lines of a spider's web, for example, unlike those of the communications network, do not connect points or join things up. They are rather spun from materials exuded from the spider's body and are laid down as it moves about. In that sense they are extensions of the spider's very being as it trails into the environment. (Ingold 2008, 210-11)

Comparing my experiences of the University of Warwick and the Free University, this writing is unavoidably an extension of me. It is a continual process consisting of both my past and present experiences of both universities. This follows the work of postcolonial, postmodern and feminist scholarship, which has engaged with narrative techniques and analysis for a long time (see Inayatullah 2011), and narrative approaches specifically used to unpack imaginations of space such as Gaston Bachelard's auto-ethnographic work (1992). Through this work, I have come to understand that using my own narrative recognizes openly and loudly that I am negotiating the position of 'knower' of the world, and my position as part of the world. This means I cannot spell out neoliberalism, higher education, and space to start with; instead, they will un-weave themselves through the telling of my account. I started analyzing my spatial experience of university and writing up this research whilst in my final year at the University of Warwick (2015 -2016). My method of enquiry thus consists of my past and present experiences of Warwick and memories of the Free University. For this, I used the literature on understandings of neoliberalism, higher education, and space, to frame and prompt what experiences I chose to include and how I chose to analyze them. I did this alongside distilling what I saw as the central tenets of space, and what I felt to be the most important elements of being a student at the University of Warwick and the Free University. Finally, my auto-ethnographic method also included taking photographs during this time, analyzing both universities' websites and conducting interviews, for which I returned to the Free University in spring 2016.

One might expect that a spatial account of the university would be limited to looking at the physical campus. However, this would not truly confer what space is, nor what it means to spatialize my story. Henri Lefebvre (1991) clarifies our experiences of space in his triad for thinking about space: as material space, representations of space and spaces of representation. Firstly, the physical campuses of the universities are the material spaces we experience such as the accommodation, faculty buildings and sports facilities. Secondly, the space of a university is also conceptualized in different ways to create representations of space. For instance, this can be seen in how the campus is mapped, or how the university represents its position in the local area, country, or the world. Finally, Lefebvre shows how we build up spaces of representations for ourselves, which constitute the lived space of the everyday. This encompasses our fears, imaginations, dreams and emotions such as feelings of anxiety around the library or senses of frustration waiting for the bus. Lefebvre has helped show me that to spatialize my story I must think beyond the physical campuses of the universities. Instead, I must first attend to the term 'student experience,' due to its dominance in the discourse surrounding universities in the United Kingdom today. As the

University of Warwick states itself in the University Strategy (University of Warwick 2016b):

Objective 1: Outstanding student experience

When I look back at my time at university, I judge it through the 'student experience' I have had. Only by being able to compare the University of Warwick to the Free University have I been able to look outside of a specific reading of these two words – student experience – which have come to narrow my criteria for assessing my time at university.

Changes in the structure of higher education in the UK have been accompanied by a focus on 'student experience' in how universities are ranked and marketed. At Warwick as a PPE student, my 'experience' is managed by a Director and a Deputy Director for Student Experience and Progression in Political and International Studies (PAIS), a Director for Student Experience and Progression in Philosophy, and a Leader of Student Experience in Economics. Clearly, valuing and recognizing students' experiences is positive. But why is it important that 'student experience'– from making new friends to trying new sports – is given such attention now? After all, surely students had these experiences before we had directors to manage them. This cannot be taken out of the context of broader changes to higher education, and the motivations for and ramifications of these changes. Moving from Warwick to the Free University, I often felt that I was left to fend for myself by the University, as there was no expectation that the University would cover or organize all aspects of my life. In turn, I missed the readymade societies and social life that comprised much of the two years I had already spent at university at Warwick. However, I also felt that students had lives outside of the Free University covering their interests, jobs, or friends. And this left a specific role and focus for the University, for why we were attending and what was expected. At the Free University, I felt I was treated as an adult, in the same way as if I were moving from high school to a job. I had been assigned a specific role – to study and learn – and the rest of my life was my responsibility. Returning then to Warwick, I saw how the insistence on 'student experience' dilutes this focus on the quality of learning. This is in line with Walter Benjamin's writings on students. In his words, "The entirely irrational period of waiting for marriage and a profession had to be given some value or other, and it had to be a playful, pseudo-romantic one that would help pass the time" (Benjamin 2011). This can be read as a warning against reducing the idea of youth to a merely frivolous, meaningless time in life.

To understand how student experience came to be something that needed to be managed, I interviewed a Director of Student Experience and Progression and winner of a Staff Award for Student Experience within the University (who wishes to remain anonymous). In the interview, this person rooted the creation of their job in the "realization that there were higher expectations – students would be paying £9,000 fees and they needed to do something about it to meet those higher student expectations." When I asked how one does a good job in managing student experience, they replied that the National Students Survey (NSS) was the overriding factor. The interviewee stated that "if you've got buy-in and loyalty from your students, then students probably will want to perhaps be even nicer in the NSS." Buy-in and loyalty, however, were not discussed as stemming from the content or quality of learning. Instead, they come from such things as branded water bottles: "it is only a water bottle but it's branded with the department and that gives them that sense of identity" (Anonymous 2016a). This reaffirmed for me the need to view the use and definition of 'student experience' within the changes to higher education in the UK, including the rise of surveys like the NSS. Such surveys are framed as allowing students the opportunity to provide feedback. But this only allows me the chance to critically view my experiences as a student through quantifiable, circumscribed expectations. As such, many aspects of my experiences as a student are silenced, by defining which experiences are relevant and curtailing what criteria I should use to classify them. Why was my feedback during tutor hours, seminars, module feedback forms or the staff awards not enough? The difference for me was a clear demarcation in the purpose of such

feedback channels. My 'student experience' was to be the deciding factor in how Warwick would be perceived in league tables comparatively to other universities.

What I had not expected was the interviewee's questioning of me once we had formally finished the interview. It was important for them to find out whether their department offered a better student experience than others (since I am part of not just one department but three: Politics, Philosophy, and Economics). This gave me an insight into the competitive regime of student experience, not limited to between universities but between departments within universities too. At the Free University, however, I was able to take modules from the other public universities in Berlin – the Humboldt University or the Technical University – which could count as part of my studies. In contrast to the open policy of public universities in Berlin, Warwick explicitly references the competition between universities. During my exam briefing for politics (an informational presentation given each year before exam period begins), the lecturer (who wishes to remain anonymous) took the opportunity to promote the NSS survey. We were shown a photo of Coventry University (the nearest university to Warwick) with the punchline that the NSS could sometimes "throw up some interesting results" since they somehow managed to score 97% on overall satisfaction (Anonymous 2016b). This is perhaps ironic given that the University of Warwick was initially planned to be the University of Coventry, to serve the local community. Initial designs were for "a close association between 'town and gown', open door facilities in library services and playing fields" (Thompson 2014, 18). Some Warwick students have themselves challenged this by creating the Instagram account 'coventryisbeautiful' to visually resist the expression of disdain for the city of Coventry. However, this incident in the lecture strikes me as showing that Warwick does not see other universities as partners in learning for its students but as competitors to be managed.

Unfortunately, such reductive categorization seems to be being managed well. Even as a student opposed to the NSS, I found it hard to avoid filling it in. Students are not just asked to fill it in. We were given shout-outs before lectures, sent an email a day and offered prizes from both the PPE department and the Politics department to fill it in. Posters also cover the walls of all areas of the PAIS building, from academics' corridors to the Politics common room. One such poster promotes the department as having the highest library spend across the University. Since the posters cover the walls outside academics' offices, I had assumed that all academics agreed with these, until one critical academic (who wishes to remain anonymous) pointed out to me what really lay behind this statistic: the extremely high cost of academic books and the 'open access agenda', in which academics have to pay very high fees to make their published work available to a broader public. They suggested that this silences certain questions; why, for instance, do we pay so much for access to knowledge? Before this, however, I had already experienced the 'politics of posters' as a student. During my second year at Warwick,

Figure 1: Politics of Posters on Warwick Campus (Source: personal collection February 1, 2016.)

poster boards were introduced, curtailing areas where students are allowed to put up posters. These are cleared weekly during term-time, of which there are gentle reminders present all around the campus (see Figures 1 and 2). Both postering examples hint at the limited autonomy of students and academics in deciding who controls the walls of our campus. Through this I see how students and academics

Figure 2: Politics of Posters on Warwick Campus (Source: personal collection February 1, 2016.)

are prevented from certain affordances of interacting with one another. I see the outlines of Warwick's

understanding of learning.

Judith Condon, a student at Warwick in the 1970's, wrote; "the new universities of the 60's created breathing space" (Thompson 2014, xii). However, working on Warwick campus today, and comparing it to the Free University, a feeling of inescapability strikes me. In his topoanalysis of the house, Gaston Bachelard writes that the "calendars of our lives can only be established in its imagery" (1994, 44). If asked to picture my learning experience at Warwick, I would picture either my seminar rooms, lecture halls, or the library, among which places my time is carved up. The in-between time can be a rush from one destination to the next to find a seat at the library. As such, I have developed the ability to map out in my head the quickest time between all my main buildings and I have set paths through the campus that I can easily map (Figure 3). I leave campus often feeling heavy from the air conditioning, artificial lighting, and window reflections.

In comparison, the way I remember the Free University is through walking. It was sometimes a time to digest, alone in the world, and at other times, a chance to carry on discussions with my fellow students. Frédéric Gros's work on the philosophy of walking helps frame the importance of this for me within the university. He writes; "The freedom in walking lies in not being anyone" (Gros 2014, 7). Walking across campus and thinking about what I was learning, I felt I did not posit myself outside of the ideas, arguments or histories, but truly engaged with them whilst walking. This would be in line with Thoreau's principle of spending no more time writing than walking, "to avoid the pitfalls of culture and library" (Gros 2014, 95). Walking rendered my presence accessible and necessary in my learning. I was situated in it. This is akin to Paolo Freire's definition of learning, by which "people develop their power to perceive critically the way they exist in the world with which and in which they find themselves; they come to see the world not as a static reality but as a reality in process, in transformation" (Freire 1996, 83).

This may be explained away by the observable differences at play. The Free University has a sprawling campus with fifteen minutes timetabled into student's schedules to account for the journey between classes. As I was also studying in a new country, there was a feeling of holiday which must have affected my

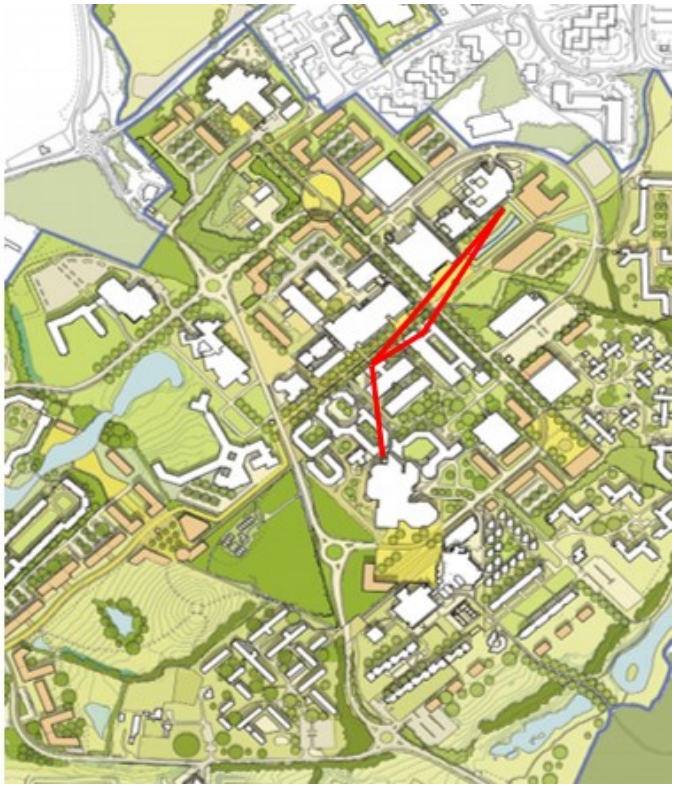

Figure 3: Map of University with my daily itineraries (Source: University of Warwick Main Campus Masterplan 1 2007, 1.)

framing of time and my approach to the everyday. However, what I find striking about this comparison is the different focus: one on the end product and the other on the process of learning. The mantra in my head when on Warwick campus is that if I don't produce anything at the end of the day, I have not learnt anything. Within this, I define productivity as the time spent inside and either the number of pages I have read or the number of words I have written. I link this to a change in the focus of the university in the minds of students in the United Kingdom. Since we graduate with such levels of student debt, what is valued is the degree certificate at the end of the degree, which shifts emphasis to assessments and examinations to get us there. When a student movement, Warwick For Free Education, protested over the cuts to maintenance grants, they chose to block the road through campus with posters of 'No Grants= No Road'. The outrage from fellow students (Pickard 2016) about the disruption of their day shows how strongly they felt about this need for efficiency in their learning.

However, I can now also sense how the time cycles of the different universities play an active role in accentuating this. My time at the Free University was split into a winter and summer semester from October-March and April-September, with two months written into each semester for assessments. The prolonged duration of the semesters and assessment period gave me the feeling of having the *need* and *luxury* of time to focus on understanding rather than consuming what we were learning. I could view my semesters as learning curves with both ups and downs, in which my assessments were a means and not an end to my learning. At Warwick, the academic year is split into three ten-week terms, with the autumn and spring terms mostly dedicated to teaching and learning, which is then assessed in the summer term. Learning more easily becomes an efficient practice, with a quick turnover of terms focused on the summer term's assessments and examinations.

Concurrently, I have experienced a knock-on effect of perceived competition between students. Since I understood learning as being embodied in my final grades at Warwick, I assumed that students could compare one another's learning by means of this shallow differentiator. I think this could also be explained by the pressure of thinking that the value of my degree is relative, only as a comparison to my competitors as I enter the job market after university. An alternative view would be that "when people work together for a common cause, one man *[sic]* does not deprive the other of space; rather he increases it for his colleague by giving him support" (Tuan 1977, 64). At the Free University, all the students with whom I had seminars were at different points in their degrees, since students could choose which semester to start their studies. As such, I did not feel that I could compare my progress to that of my fellow students in a competitive sense. Learning was given extended time and we were explicitly at different points in the process. For instance, for every essay, we had to present research proposals to be critiqued by our fellow students. Instead of comparing my final grades with other students, I was comparing ideas, understandings and the arguments that went into them as we went through the modules. Situating myself in my learning has now led me to question my position at Warwick:

where am I?

Entitled 'Looking Forward,' the University of Warwick Strategy furthers my understanding of my experience of time at Warwick. The strategy tells me that at Warwick "we're forward looking, fast-moving" and "pursuing ever greater forward momentum," that "Warwick has made outstanding progress in a very short time," and that "we'll explore all appropriate opportunities for increasing the pace of growth" (University of Warwick 2016b, n.p.). As a student of the university, I find myself asking what direction is forward.

Warwick has also recently introduced a 'Keep Campus Moving' initiative. This includes roadworks to keep people moving in the everyday sense of the university, but also building work such as the Warwick Business School (WBS) and Law School Extension, New Conference facility, National Automotive Initiative Centre (NAIC), and the Advanced Steel Research Centre (University of Warwick 2016a). Here, I found an answer to which way is

forward: the improvements in the University's research, training and commercial activities that propel the pace and momentum of the university. As the University's Masterplan states, "The Government's vision for the higher education sector requires it to meet the needs of the economy in terms of trained people, research, and technology transfer. The University of Warwick shares this vision" (University of Warwick 2007a, 15).

It is not just the idea of the university that has been propelled into the market, but also the physical campus of the university. Quite literally then, as ex Vice-Chancellor Nigel Thrift states, "Universities are no longer on the outside looking in… Universities have become a fundamental part of the dynamics of contemporary capitalism" (Thrift 2014, 134). Warwick now has a WBS campus in the Shard building (one of London's newest skyscrapers in central London), where Executive Education and Postgraduate programs are taught. I found out that this is a trend within universities in the UK: universities with campuses in London include Anglia Ruskin, Bangor, Coventry, Glasgow Caledonian, Liverpool, Sunderland and the University of Wales (Parr 2014). Writing on the commodification of time and space, David Harvey has linked capitalism to a time-space compression. As Eric Sheppard explains, Harvey detected one of capitalism's spatial 'fixes' as "eliminating any spatial transactions costs associated with transportation and communications, in order to minimize temporal barriers to the turnover of capital" (Sheppard 2006, 128). Perhaps Warwick's move to the Shard can be seen as achieving this goal.

To try to understand, I interviewed a Vice Chancellor from the University of Warwick (who wishes to remain unnamed). In the interview, they said that the Arts Centre used to define the University when it was founded in establishing "what type of institution Warwick was supposed to be – public engagement not just to the student body but to the region" (Anonymous 2016c). They believed the equivalent today was the NAIC which they described as an "absolutely enormous building, the largest investment in a UK university at the moment from outside of public investment resources –50 or so million quid – it's a huge statement" (Anonymous 2016c).

Here, I identified how a change in the role of the university and the material development of it intertwine. Evaluation of the University is equated to its continual, material development and thus in part to how good the University looks to the outside world. There is a need to show that the university is always expanding, with more students and more buildings. The temporal focus on speed is coupled with a spatial focus on growth. The very idea of having a 'Masterplan' highlights a need for vast spatial scale (Jeinic 2013). As Vice Chancellor Stuart Croft stated, "New buildings are and will continue to be a part of our everyday existence. We need to open one new academic building a

Figure 4: I Heart Warwick (Source: personal collection February 1, 2016.)

year from now until at least 2023" (Croft 2016b). The University then is being marketed as a safe and profitable investment, akin to a corporation. Indeed, the creation of the Strategy Committee can be traced back to the creation in 2003 of the 'University Strategic and *Corporate Plan*' (Strategy Committee 2003 emphasis added). However, this is being done by focusing on specific functions of a university – here, its research and training.

As a student, the effect of these changes in their abstract and physical manifestation means I cannot envisage myself in this projected university. There is an inevitability built into such fast-paced developments that makes me feel co-opted into them. If the plans run until 2023, how can any current student locate themselves if they are only at university for three years? Conversely, how can the University be genuinely responsive to the student body? After all, the first question of the Masterplan is "How much Development is needed?" not *whether* or *what* development is needed (University of Warwick 2007a).

I see a vital aspect of this in the development of the University of Warwick as a brand. As described in a report by the Institute for Public Policy Research, universities now "create brands which are among the most powerful in the world," which "instantly provoke *images* of academic excellence" (IPPR 2013, emphasis added). As students, we are all part of the image. When I started at Warwick, students on sports teams could design aspects of their team's kits. Now, however, all teams must have the same kit in keeping with the Warwick brand. This is used to advertize to both current students and visitors to the campus. As shown in Figures 5 and 6, 'Team Warwick' cut-outs and banners span the campus, using the branded uniforms to reinforce our brand identity. Beyond the campus, the Warwick brand can also be exported to "badge" activities and campuses abroad in future ventures from Singapore to California (University of Warwick 2007b, 44). This stands in stark contrast to architectural critic Alan Temko's comment that most importantly campuses provide "freedom from the automobile and from advertizing" (Temko 1993,137). When I last went to the University of Warwick shop, I saw that it now sells 'I heart Warwick' memorabilia. Funnily, the 'I heart NY' symbol is now commonly recognized as the beginning of urban place marketing and the commodification of the city, to make New York City a commonly recognized symbol and a more widely appreciated place. It's not hard to imagine Miriam Greenberg's book, *Branding New York: How a city in crisis was sold to the world* retitled as *Branding Warwick: How a University in crisis was sold to the world*. Within this, if the University's vision is based on material growth and perception, then the student's tuition fees are also seen to improve the perception of the University. The student is part of the tale of inevitability. Potential students must judge the University on what the value of the University will be when they enter the job market with a Warwick degree in hand. Even if I don't agree with the changes to the University, my fees help enact them, and it feels as though this is all set in inevitable motion. These forward-looking emphases deny me the option of reacting to the changes that are affecting the university in the present.

Indeed, the University of Warwick has a rich history of protesting similar changes. In *Warwick University Ltd*, E.P. Thompson (2014) describes the protests at Warwick in the 1970s, which began as demands for a social building for the academic community. Those involved soon realized that the social building itself was

Figure 5 & 6: Team Warwick Banners outside Warwick Business School (Source: personal collection February 1, 2016.)

Figure 7 & 8: top to bottom: Warwick Law School (source: University of Warwick 2016[check in reference list]) and Free University building Habelschwerdter Allee 45 (source: personal collection February 17, 2016.)

not the real issue, but a symptom of the bigger issue: the whole concept and structure of the University. However, the disjuncture that they were protesting against feels very distant to me. The university that I have experienced is so far away from the definition of the university that E. P. Thompson and his comrades were fighting against, that I feel guilty for wanting simply to learn. Sometimes, my objection to the neglect of actual learning in my university changes from 'I am paying for an education' to 'I am not even paying for an education – £9,000 should buy me more'. I move away from the notion that education should never be commodified.

Thompson's portrayal of the role of the social building in protests mirrors Lefebvre's understanding of the importance of the architecture of university campuses. Lefebvre argued that the events of May 1968 were in part generated by the design of the campus of the University of Nanterre, in which students experienced many forms of segregation (Kaminer 2013). Harvey's work on Lefebvre reminds me that "While it is always open to reconceptualize the meaning of that material form so people can learn to live it differently, the sheer materiality of construction in absolute space and time carries its own weight and authority" (Harvey 2005, 114). Spatializing my story, I must still address

the physical University.

By day, a lifted study-storehouse; night
Converts it to a flattened cube of light.
Whichever's shown, the symbol is the same:
Knowledge; a University; a name.

Philip Larkin, 1983, on the University of Hull's Brynmor Jones Library, from Collected Poems (Larkin 1988, 220)

Larkin's quatrain helps shed light on the role of the University in its physical manifestation.

As Campus Planner, Perry Chapman, accepted, "the institutional story is told through the campus… The campus is an unalloyed account of what the institution is about" (Chapman 2006, xxiii). For Larkin, the library was a symbol of the university, enough on its own to stand for and understand the university. I would question whether, were he a student there today, Larkin would have written about the library as the perfect symbol of the University of Warwick. Instead, I imagine the buildings and facilities of the Keep Campus Moving Initiative such as Warwick Business School (WBS) would take its place.

As Paul Temple writes, "the ordering of space in buildings is really about the ordering of relations between people" (2014, 4). My understanding of the ordering of relations at play on the campus has come from looking more widely and comparatively at the ordering of space in buildings. One way I understand this is through the use of Warwick as a brand name. The selection of disciplines that Warwick brands does not feel like mere coincidence. The Free University consists of a huge variety of buildings; each one, however, normally has the name the 'Freie Universität' on the building

Figure 9: Freedom to roam:, University of Warwick, Arts Centre (Source: personal collection February 1, 2016.)

itself. At Warwick, the Social Sciences and Humanities buildings do not have 'Warwick' branded on the outside, yet academic units such as Law and Business have been distinguished through awarding them the Warwick brand such as the 'Warwick Law School', 'Warwick Medical School' and 'Warwick Business School'. The value of the discipline in the eyes of the institution seems clear seen comparatively in Figures 7 and 8.

My reaction to this selective naming may originate from the sentiment I felt reading Warwick's Masterplan for development. When reading it, I could have easily been persuaded that the Arts and Humanities were not taught at

Figure 10: Free University Habelschwerdter Allee 45 (Source: Giovanazzi 2015)

Warwick, since it is hard to see how they fit with the focus on research, training and commercial activities. On this subject, Terry Eagleton has forecast the death of universities as *centres of critique* if we are to lose the humanities. "Neither can there be a university in the full sense of the word when the humanities exist in isolation from other disciplines. The quickest way of devaluing these subjects – short of disposing them altogether – is to reduce them to an agreeable bonus" (Eagleton 2010, n.p.). It is interesting to compare this critique against a statement made by Sir Richard Lambert, Chancellor of Warwick and former director general of the Confederation of British Industry, who stated that "At an early stage of this institution, it was things like having a business school, things like having Warwick Manufacturing Group (WMG) which have enabled the university not only to be confident overall, but which have created the environment in which other disciplines have been able to thrive" (Morgan 2014). I also see this demonstrated implicitly when I walk through the campus every day. The new layout of the buses due to the 'Keep Campus Moving' initiative means that the Social Sciences building has become a thoroughfare that

students walk through to get to the main campus.

The runway style layout of the Keep Campus Moving Initiative is complemented by airport-style security elsewhere. Arriving at the Free University, I was surprised how relaxed the security was. My student card was a piece of A5 paper, which I used just to get books out of the library. I did not have to scan a student card to get into any building, unlike at Warwick where a card is required to access any study space, which restricts students from different departments from entering and sharing certain facilities. This stops students from being able to see the inequities between disciplines and demarcates learning in definitive ways. Only after three years was I allowed into the WMG Building for an interdisciplinary module, during which we had to be scanned through every door and weren't allowed to take photos. This sense of exclusion seems strong even when it is not evidenced through building plans. Two rumours I have repeatedly heard are that the University House, the administration building at Warwick, is reminiscent of Michel Foucault's Panopticon and that the Social Sciences and Humanities Buildings were designed to prohibit congregation of students.

I have also read this into the new 'shared space' design of the Warwick piazza (the University's main square), which is part of the Keep Campus Moving Initiative. 'Shared Space' refers to the urban design technique of using a single surface for both cars and pedestrians. After the design was deemed dangerous, Warwick responded by hiring security guards to patrol the side of the road. As fellow undergraduate student Luke Dukinfield has explained, "A zebra crossing would disrupt the flow of that metropolis on a sustained basis – this cannot be tolerated." (Dukinfield 2016, n.p.). This management of the freedom to roam

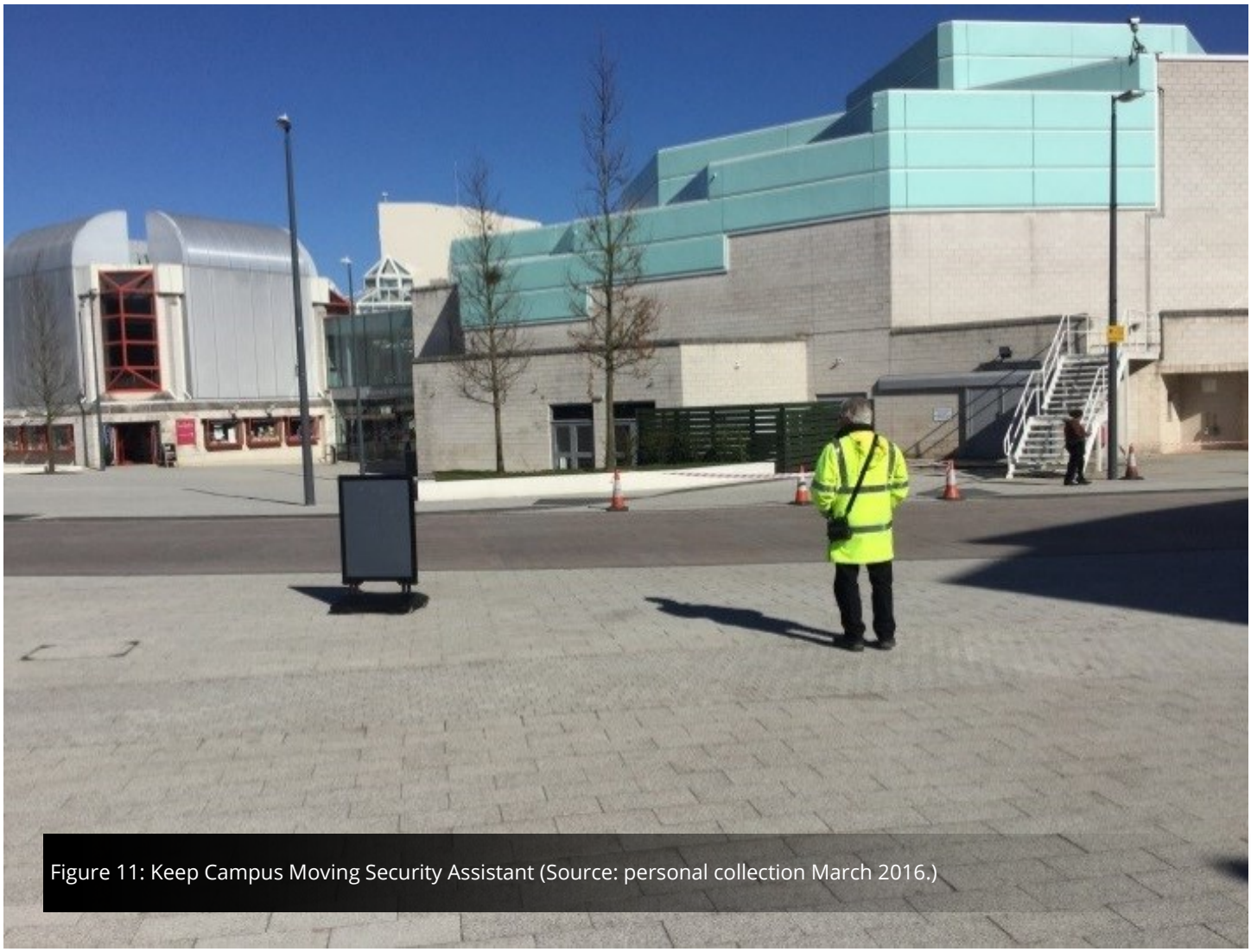

Figure 11: Keep Campus Moving Security Assistant (Source: personal collection March 2016.)

is seen in Figure 11. But the increased role of security and control on Warwick campus is symptomatic of a much more encompassing trend, epitomized by the webcam placed in the Big Screen overlooking the piazza, or, more worryingly, by the injunction the University placed on December 3, which physically prevented certain students from protesting or spending time on campus, and did so indefinitely (Warwick for Free Education 2016).

In comparison, it feels like the freedom to roam was built into the Free University. Figure 9 shows the use of free space at the University of Warwick. The equivalent is shown in Figure 10, in which rooftops, balconies, and cracks between buildings were social places and were intermixed with the café culture of the Free University campus. Hidden throughout the departments and buildings were many cafés, bringing together students and academics. They were used in different ways, from reading to listening to music, and not just for eating or drinking as there were already two official subsidized canteens. Warwick's cafés are run very differently: the Costa Coffee branches on campus are part of a nationwide corporate chain, not the Students Union's catering system (in UK universities, student unions typically run a good number of the cafés and bars on

Figure 12: Rotes Café (Source: personal collection February 17, 2016.)

campus.) A Facebook group that I am part of, '4th Years Milk Da System' reflects my views on this matter (4th Years Milk Da System Facebook Group 2016). It encourages students to post about where there is free food on campus left over from conferences or companies promoting their businesses. The name of the group points to students' feeling that the system is not designed for them: instead of feeling part of a community, they perceive a barrier between the students and the University system, and the resulting feeling of injustice warrants wanting to milk the system. This can be seen more potently if I compare this to the 'Frei Raum' (free room) initiative at the Free University. This includes places like Café Tricky, which is run by students at the Free University and consists in a room, a kitchen and outside seating. The kitchen is stocked with fair trade coffee, drinks and snacks which are sold not-for-profit, through an honesty box (Freie Universität Berlin date unknown). There is also the Rotes Café (Red Café) shown in Figure 12, which is a pay-as -you-feel student café. This is a visible sign that the University is not scared of having political students, and that space is explicitly accepted as being political. This leads me to ask; is it

time to protest?

In a lecture entitled 'Occupy and Assemble' in 2011, Judith Butler spoke of the importance of spatiality in protests within universities: students are "insisting on gaining literal access to the buildings of public education precisely at the moment, historically, when that access is being shut down" (Butler 2011, n.p.). The Student Audimax protests in Vienna, for instance, were named after one of the main lecture halls that they occupied. Occupations and direct action have also played an important role historically in the University of Warwick, and continue to do so (see Warwick For Free Education). However, this year it seems that protests across campus have been motivated by explicitly spatial demands. Warwick Fossil Free, a divestment group at Warwick, is campaigning to get BP (British Petroleum) off campus, asking specifically for the BP Archives in the University's Modern Records Centre to be made open to the public and put under University control. At Warwick Anti- Racism Society's Decolonise Our University Conference, I attended a workshop in which a popular call was made to rename a building on campus the Fanon building. What I identify here is students' need to physically reclaim space on campuses and to do so visually in resistance to the

advertising of the Warwick brand. Butler defines protest as "bringing attention to the way that politics is already in the home" (2011, n.p.); it seems that students are now questioning whose home their university is. Reading Gaston Bachelard's topoanalysis of the house in The Poetics of Space showed me the importance of unpacking our learned modes of

coping with space.

As a child, I never felt able to question the practices of space within my house. Moving to the University of Warwick, I felt the same. It was only changing universities that threw open the "enormous reality of space" (Massey 2005, 8), both in the extent to which we can affect space and the extent to which space can affect us. Curtailing my exploration of space to the university specifically has been important because of the crucial role university has played in my life so far. As for many students, the campus was a temporary home for me in my first year of university, and it was my first experience of living outside of my family home, throwing open the everyday life that I had normalized and internalized for eighteen years. Lefebvre's understanding of the spatiality of our social lives emphasizes the significance of this. "Social relations… have no real existence save in and through space. *Their underpinning is spatial*" (Lefebvre 1991, 404). Naomi Klein agrees: "University campuses in particular – with their residences, libraries, green spaces and common standards for open and respectful discourse – play a crucial, if now largely symbolic role: they are the one place left where young people can see a genuine public life being lived" (Klein 2000,105). As Bachelard wrote, "All great, simple images reveal a psychic state" (Bachelard 1994, 72). To Bachelard's discussion of "great, simple images" such as the house or landscape, I hope to have added the case for the university.

But how do we bring to life such "great, simple images"? Radical pedagogue Paolo Freire regarded neoliberalization as the "demon of the world today", seeing the focus on merely training students as insinuating "the dream is dead, the utopia is finished, and history has ended" (Canaan 2011, 13). This is often found in discussions of neoliberalism, which centre on it as a doctrine of total-pretention, like a sponge (Jeinic 2013, 7) or like a zombie (Crouch 2011).The discourse of inevitability surrounding neoliberalism is summed up by Daniel Stedman Jones, who wrote of neoliberalism that "it is hard to think of another utopia to have been as fully realised" (2012, 82). The ideals of the 'neoliberal university' have seemingly been thoroughly put into practice. Yet when I try to explain my auto-ethnographic account to friends outside of academia, its basic idea is lost due to the 'anonymity' of neoliberalism, a concept of which many have never heard. This shuts down conversations before they even begin. And since it is impossible for me to find any self-proclaimed 'neoliberals', how can I then pinpoint who to protest against? Concentrating solely on the discourse of the 'neoliberal university' has left me feeling incapable of resisting the processes of its neoliberalization.

But I have found that each of our lived experiences shows that the dream can be resuscitated, utopia is not finished and history has not ended. Valuing my own experience of university has allowed me to situate myself in the university and the changes taking place there. The personal narrative of auto-ethnography has carved out a space of learning for me, recapturing the all-encompassing 'student experience' within the 'neoliberal university'. This is in line with Owed Löwenheim (2010), who writes that incorporating individual stories in our work deconstructs the process of becoming the governable person. Following the advice of Ernesto Laclau that "only if we conceive of the future as open can we seriously accept or engage in any genuine notion of politics" (Massey 2005, 11), I hope my narrative conveys an open future, not fixing the facts or telling a timeless tale of the world. This is not the end of my story, but shows the importance of understanding our own stories and the role we play in them. This allows for an open conversation from my research, open to the future potential of higher education.

The importance the University has played in my life must also be framed within the wider picture that the university as an institution plays. Whilst space has been an intrinsic element of critical pedagogy scholarship, research on the neoliberalization of higher

education in the UK largely seems to have missed the "spatial turn" in answering these questions. However, it should not be overlooked. After all, when addressing the university, we are unavoidably addressing relations of knowledge and power, since the university defines itself as a site of knowledge production. For example, postcolonial thought has shown the need for a focus on the university as "itself a site of inequity that emerged from the very systems of oppression… such as white supremacy and colonialism" (Debanne 2015, 1263). And as Michael Foucault accepted, we need to understand space to call into question the links between knowledge and power (1980, 177). Space can help tease out the university as a site of knowledge production, rigged with hierarchies of power that lie within and stretch far beyond the physical campus.

Exploring and situating our own stories of the university is even more urgent today, given the current limited response to changes in UK higher education. The lack of critique is perhaps not surprising. Re-imagining the university from within Warwick is hard. It has called into question my everyday practice, from my spatial practices to my social interactions and how I represent myself. However, the absence of critical thinking or resistance among students is worrying. It is this cohort of students who I would expect to be most angry. The government hiked tuition fees to £9000 a year just before we applied to university, and has continued to cut student grants during our years at university. Before moving to Berlin, I had expected the Free University to be second class and disorganized, since it is a public university. My inability to imagine the potential of free education in Berlin as compared to Warwick may more gloomily be seen as an aspect of Terry Eagleton's diagnosis of "the death of universities as centres of critique" (Eagleton 2010). Conjuring up the dead is never easy. I myself could not fathom how a university could be good if I wasn't 'investing' in it. I now squirm at the extent to which the ideal of the marketized university had impregnated my brain, such that I saw only economic values whereby the more you pay, the more you get. It wasn't comfortable for me to recognize in myself the effects of a system that sees me as a consumer, buying a service from academics. Painfully, I had to recognize my passive acceptance of this mentality and own up to the feeling of incapacity to resist.

Conclusion

My auto-ethnographic account openly positions myself in the world, by accepting that I myself am still part of space and time, and that I am contributing to this "innate multiplicity of spaces" (Rustin 2013, 59). This in turn leaves room for others' experiences. Other stories of the university can be found that frame, overlap, and contradict my experience; however, it is not for me to tell their stories. Within this, I should also make clear that I not only recognize that space contains multiplicity, but that the 'I' from whom I write is interrelated with other people. My story contributes to and is constituted by many others' stories. And it is these stories that will re-open the conversations that the discourse of neoliberalism often shuts down, breathing life into the relationship between higher education, neoliberalism, and space. I have contributed to this by unpacking the relationship between these three words, making a case for why this is needed and how this may be done. Finally, by recognizing multiplicity and the relational construction of my subjectivity I want to underline the unavoidable interdependence of the 'I' from which I have written. As succinctly stated by Naeem Inayatullah (2012, 2), "my tale is thoroughly embedded within a collective story". Edward Soja writes that "there is too much that lies beneath the surface, unknown and perhaps unknowable, for a complete story to be told" (Soja 2000, 12). To move nearer to the complete story of the relationship and ramifications of an economic system, higher education, and space, we must each write our own stories.

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