Neoliberal University, Institutional Diversity, and Pedagogy of Nonattachment for the Left

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DIVISION AND DISCONNECT seem to be defining our times. The Trump presidency, climate change, COVID-19 pandemic, and recent racial justice protests name but a few of the major global crisis moments that have simultaneously laid bare our interdependency and the crushing reality of our fundamental division and disconnection. Within Buddhist and mindfulness communities, conflicts and rifts have also been omnipresent even if they are not always visible. In fact, inseparable from structural racism that has been brought to light by the Black Lives Matter movement, an underlying source of division within these communities has been the pervasive whiteness/Westernness that defines the norms and orientations of their spiritual and contemplative practices.[1] And just as the racial justice protests in the last year have brought the country to a nationwide reckoning with the ongoing white supremacy and systemic racism that are ravaging our shared humanity, there have been many calls from Buddhist and mindfulness practitioners to create greater access, inclusion, and diversity within the practicing communities to heal the rifts and build a bridge with historically underrepresented minorities who can critically benefit from the holistic offerings of contemplative practices.[2]

However, while race/racism remains a core issue that must be critically confronted and engaged in spiritual and contemplative communities, there is yet another underlying ideological force that has been driving a wedge between Buddhists and mindfulness practitioners: neoliberalism. The global ascendancy of neoliberalism has changed the meanings, characters and orientations of spiritual and contemplative practices. As David Harvey defines it, neoliberalism is "a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human wellbeing can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and

skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade."[3] On a deeper, intangible level, neoliberalism has essentially disseminated market values to all spheres of human society such that, as Wendy Brown puts it, "not only is the human being configured exhaustively as *homo oeconomicus*, but all dimensions of human life are cast in terms of a market rationality."[4]

Neoliberal supremacy bears critical implications for spiritual and contemplative practices. While mainstream Buddhist and mindfulness practices may offer teachings that guide participants away from materialistic pursuits, these offerings have in large part been disconnected from any major critical inquiry of structural inequity, economic precarity, and environmental harm that is produced under neoliberalism. Worse yet, these practices have been increasingly put in the service of neoliberalism by business corporations, educational institutions, and nonprofit organizations to defuse disagreement and conflict at the workplace in order to reproduce corporate efficiency, labor productivity, and instrumental harmony.[5] The incorporation of these practices into state apparatuses such as the military and the prison in a context devoid of institutional or structural interrogation of U.S. imperialism, mass incarceration, and the school-prison pipeline also dangerously turns them into a part of the "nonprofit industrial complex" that is dominated by governmental and business agendas.[6] In fact, when mindfulness practitioners and organizations turn themselves into money-making entrepreneurs and enterprises that render their offerings as commercial services to be consumed for healing and wellbeing in a capitalist market, the mindful and contemplative insights they provide can be presented in pacifying or accommodationist ways such that they are aligned with (rather than unsettling and disrupting) capitalist-consumerist norms, values, and logics.[7]

If neoliberalism has the insidious capacity to reach into and colonize the souls of citizen-subjects, how can Buddhist and contemplative practitioners who live, work, and reside within the neoliberal capitalist structure withstand the infiltrating colonization of this ideological force into their practices? How can they respond to those who nonchalantly or actively commodify their spiritual or healing practices through the neoliberal schema? Furthermore, how do we make sure that the calls for access, diversity, and inclusion within spiritual and contemplative communities do not become appropriated or co-opted as yet another instrumental discourse utilized to widen the reach of the market? Instead, how can we ensure that such calls culminate in a genuine path to substantively transform minorities' experiences with inequity, exclusion, and unbelonging in the white/Western world of Buddhist and mindfulness communities? Ronald Purser, in his critique of what he calls "McMindfulness" or

neoliberal spirituality, incisively argues that mindfulness practitioners and participants must be attentive to the structural causes of human stress and suffering rooted in global capitalism and must take on social activism to transform these oppressive conditions.[8] However, his position renders mindfulness as an external object to be transformed through activist political engagement and does not illuminate how we may actually internally draw from Buddhist sources or contemplative insights to confront, engage, and transform the current neoliberal condition.[9]

In this article, I wish to use my own personal location and observation as a faculty member in higher education to specifically reflect on how we may draw on the Buddhist insight of nonattachment as a resistant disposition to contest and transform the neoliberal hegemony that shackles our freedom. I also hope to respond to those who may have subscribed to neoliberal logic and rationality within academic institutions. In fact, the kinds of schisms that are present within spiritual and mindfulness communities wrought by white supremacy and capitalism have also been longstanding in academia. While there has been much attention to the conflict between rightwing students and leftwing faculty on college campuses, I wish to address a much less examined phenomenon: how the insidious infiltration of neoliberalism into higher education has produced an ideological disconnection among faculty on the left in academia.

Specifically, I argue that neoliberalism has splintered the left-leaning force within the university by perniciously drawing some people away from their core values and progressive roots, compelling them to abide by the logic of academic capitalism instead of committing to preserve education as a public good and transforming the university-mandated neoliberal imperatives. These revenue-driven, neoliberal imperatives have entailed raising student tuition; growing class sizes with diminishing or limiting teaching/grading support; increasing the use of part-time adjunct faculty while decreasing the hiring of full-time tenure-track faculty; and commodifying education by underlining its exchange value and financial return in the career marketplace and offering prepackaged online learning programs to broaden the reach of the student consumer market. To be sure, institutional reality means that even those with progressive commitments often need to compromise with the neoliberal administrative direction given limited resources and structural constraints. At the same time, neoliberalism is particularly deceptive and insidious in its ideological power that can induce or pressure some faculty on the left to buy into its logic, leading them to avoid and suppress democratic dialogue and dissent that interrogates the corporatization and commercialization of education.

While many left-leaning faculty support diversity and inclusion initiatives within the institutional space of higher learning, there is a tendency for them

to do so within the existing neoliberal order without challenging the capitalist structure and market rationality that systemically reproduce class power and inequity within the academy itself. This actually has unwitting and unsettling implications for historically underrepresented faculty as they are implicitly constructed or interpellated as the "model minority" who strive for academic professional excellence while accepting and helping to reproduce the white/Western neoliberal order of academic life.[10] In the midst of this neoliberal colonization of the bodies and souls within academic institutions and spaces, how can the Buddhist notion of nonattachment be refashioned as a contemplative political response to this oppressive condition and the ideological rifts among the left? This essay offers my reflection on and response to this question.

In the following, I first stage the stakes of the institutional condition of higher education under neoliberalism, noting that the current state of academic capitalism exerts overwhelming pressure on faculty (including those on the left) to accommodate the changing directions and demands of the neoliberal university. I argue that while strategic necessity and pragmatism often drive this accommodationist approach, faculty can be insidiously induced into an illusory state of attachment to market logic and rationality if their thoughts and actions are not informed and balanced by their deeper values and democratic commitments. For underrepresented minority faculty, the institutional and ideological pressure towards neoliberal attachment has particularly troubling implications as it reinforces the "model minority" myth by surreptitiously instigating underrepresented minority faculty to think that unquestioned conformity to the ordering logic of academic capitalism represents "good citizenship" and a way to acquire inclusion and representation in the master's house of academia.[11]

Next, as Buddhist teachers have often sought to guide their students towards awakening by embodying and deploying the concept of nonattachment, I build on this Buddhist idea to articulate a "pedagogy of nonattachment" as a contemplative political intervention for the left or anyone seeking liberation to respond to the neoliberalization of academic life and to awaken those who may have fallen into the trap of neoliberal attachment to the pernicious effects of academic capitalism on their bodyminds. As a term, pedagogy of nonattachment signals how the way we embody ourselves in academic spaces—in particular, how we break away from and unsettle the deceptive attachment to the neoliberal logic—can serve as a guide, teaching, and transformational learning for others. Since the guiding principle is nonattachment, this pedagogy is amorphous and polymorphous, consisting of an elastic maneuvering of transformative repertoires and resources without attachment to any particular method or fixed outcome. I discuss six possible forms of pedagogy of nonattachment—

including pedagogies of invitation, persuasion, reappropriation, anger, flight, and refusal—to illustrate how this contemplative political intervention can be taken up in varied and fluid ways to subvert, contest, and transform the neoliberal academy. I conclude with a brief reflection on the takeaway of pedagogy of nonattachment for those situated in nonacademic institutions or organizations that are troubled with similar dynamics and schisms under neoliberalism.

Academic Capitalism, Institutional Diversity, and Reinforcing the "Model Minority" Myth

In their *Academic Capitalism and the New Economy*, Sheila Slaughter and Gary Rhoades critically observe that as states withdraw funding and support for higher education, colleges and universities have been shifting from a "public good knowledge regime" to an "academic capitalist knowledge regime" that renders education as a marketable commodity in the global knowledge economy.[12] Chandra Talpade Mohanty argues that in this neoliberal climate driven by the logic of academic capitalism and saturated with "discourses of consumerism, ownership, profit, and privatization,"[13] higher education is turning students into "clients and consumers," faculty into "service providers," and administrators into "conflict managers and nascent capitalists whose work involves marketing and generating profit for the university."[14] Under this neoliberal transformation, academic workers are reconceived as service professionals who can "serve the … [university] best by becoming 'entrepreneurs of the self.'"[15] Hence, "scholars seek support from funders in hopes that the findings will lead to commercial applications, departments market their courses to students as pathways to lucrative careers and universities replace tenure-track positions with adjunct jobs to cut costs."[16] Branding, visibility, and recognition—things that can convert into economic, social, and symbolic capital for the university—become preeminent values for the academic citizens to live by.

As Todd Wolfson points out, this corporatization of academia is a result of "the long-term trend of disinvestment in higher education… [at] both the state and federal levels," and is "marked by the twin developments of eroding faculty governance and… the explosion of… new administrators, many not out of the ranks of the faculty, [who] increasingly control the operations of our colleges and universities."[17] He notes that these higher-education administrators have sought to fix the systemic issue of massive disinvestment with a neoliberal logic by: (1) increasing the precarious adjunct faculty positions while decreasing the number of stable tenure-track faculty positions; (2) raising tuition for both undergraduate and graduate students that leads to "ballooning student debt,"

with portions of the tuition being used to subsidize athletic programs that are meant to increase the university's visibility and reputation even though many of them lose money; and (3) generally speaking, "creating a corporate institution that boasts a public profile while prioritizing the growth of the endowment."[18]

This dominant trend of academic corporatization has driven many faculty, including those on the left, to adopt an accommodationist approach to secure and strengthen their personal and departmental position in the neoliberal "new normal" in higher education. In many ways, this accommodationist tendency is a predictable outcome resulting from the precarious condition of neoliberalism: as academic departments and programs are left to generate their own operational revenues, even left-leaning scholars are compelled to adapt to market logic and rationality in order to compete for scarce resources to bring in tuition revenues.[19] While for left-leaning faculty such an accommodationist stance is often driven by strategic survival and pragmatic considerations, if this stance is not maintained in concert with their core values, then its embedded neoliberal logic can perniciously colonize their minds and draw them away from their democratic commitments and progressive roots. In these situations, the accommodationist approach can surreptitiously slide into a form of neoliberal attachment, leading faculty to focus on the primacy and positives of neoliberal development without considering and addressing its deeper structural issues and detrimental effects.

For instance, since tuition revenues constitute a primary funding source for academic departments,[20] growth in student enrollment is always considered good news while decline is considered bad. In this operational context, when it comes to teaching, even left-leaning departments can have their faculty meeting agendas dominated by considerations of quantity (e.g., how to increase enrollment growth and revenues) with meager or no attention to quality (e.g., how to improve qualitative experiences in the classroom by sharing teaching pedagogies and ways to enhance interactions with students as lived and embodied experiences). At universities that use online education to carve out a wider share of the college student market in a hypercompetitive higher-education climate, some faculty can play into the institutional focus on and celebration of enrollment growth by evading and deflecting questions on the overstretched instructional labor involved in teaching large numbers of students with dwindling or limiting resources or the diluting effect of online education on students' educational and learning experiences.[21] Similarly, there is a tendency for them to avoid and suppress discussion on whether this revenue-driven model of education is really sustainable and healthy for everyone's wellbeing and for the good of society as a whole.[22]

In fact, while many left-leaning faculty support diversity and inclusion initiatives at their academic institutions, they tend to advocate for such efforts within the existing neoliberal institutional frame that does not interrogate or challenge its embedded capitalist structure and market rationality that systemically reproduce class power, system, and inequity within higher education itself. For instance, such initiatives rarely raise concerns about meritocracy and the academic star system; pay inequity; power and status differential across academic ranks; overwork and disparity in workload; or disparity of revenues/funds/resources between academic departments. This has unwitting and troubling effects in reinforcing the "model minority" myth for historically underrepresented minorities. Asian Americans have long been racialized as the model minority in the American imagination, which describes ethnic subjects who are quiet, compliant, and live up to the mainstream expectations through personal discipline and hard work as an ideal for which to strive.[23]

In the neoliberal university, however, the overwhelming force to assimilate into market logic and rationality has created an environment that induces or pressures faculty from any minority background to instinctively adopt the model-minority trope to acquire inclusion and representation within academic institutions. In this context, the model-minority myth predisposes minority faculty to behave in a "good" manner by focusing on achieving academic professional excellence while quietly complying with and not challenging the neoliberal mandates handed down by the university/department. They can be led to think that conducting oneself in this compliant way represents "good citizenship" when it actually reinforces the ideological operation of "neoliberal citizenship" within the university space.[24]

While it is often remarked that the very presence of minority faculty in higher learning—a space that was never intended to include them—is in itself vital and important, it is also critical to note that neoliberalism actually welcomes and absorbs diversity and inclusion in ways that are nonthreatening to neoliberalism's governing logic and beneficial to academic institutional capital and profits. The willing and docile model minority has troubling implications for nonwhite faculty as not only can they not be their truly genuine and diverse selves, but their intellectual, social, and economic values are also extracted to benefit what Cedric Robinson calls the "racial capitalism" of university operations that commit to the perpetuation—rather than the interruption and reconfiguration—of the white/Western neoliberal administrative order and institutional way of life.[25]

This white/Western neoliberal order of academic life limits our institutional imagination to a culture that is driven by individual merit, market competition, masculinist ableism, punitive justice, and growth agenda, all the

while stifling the possibility of a different academic world to come that could place value on collaborative equity, resource redistribution, community care, restorative/transformative justice, and degrowth consciousness in the pluriverse.[26] In the institutional context where diversity and inclusion are melded into the white/Western neoliberal schema, the university actually divests minority faculty (and everyone else) of their ability and freedom to imagine and live otherwise, "[legitimizing] an ideal of social justice shriveled to little more than enhancement of opportunity for individual [and departmental] upward mobility—within the strictures of neoliberal accumulation by dispossession."[27]

As black feminist writer and thinker Audre Lorde famously warned: "The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house."[28] While Lorde was referring to the white heterosexual bias and elision of difference within academic feminism in her time, academic capitalism has become one of the master's preeminent tools in the current context of neoliberal academia. Academic capitalism co-opts, commodifies, and exploits difference for the continuing white/Western neoliberal colonization of academic life. And if we confine our academic mission to the use of this master's tool to secure and enhance minority inclusion and representation in the master's house without seeking to alter and transform the very ideological-structural foundation of the house, we may not have lived up to our critical roles as educators, intellectuals, and democratically-engaged citizens in the university commons. We will also be forever far from reaching the state where we turn "divide and conquer… [into] define and empower" that Lorde so passionately urged academic feminists—and I would extend to all of us on the left—to make happen in our planetary world.[29]

Pedagogy of Nonattachment for the Left

Resisting the dominant neoliberal trend, some faculty on the left have sought to carve out this alternative path towards "define and empower" by expressing their concerns about the commodification of public education and seeking to reorient higher education towards the progressive mission of social and political change. They argue that we cannot bracket off the university from democratic activism and must instead reground the very institutional space where we are situated on social justice paradigms. After all, how can faculty expect to model transformation for students and turn them into change agents when we cannot even change the neoliberal status quo that is pervading our campus and workplace? Mohanty thus argues that there is an urgent imperative to transform the corporate academy by shifting from "pedagogy of accommodation" to "pedagogy of dissent and transformation" and by changing the corporate-consumerist institutional culture into a democratic progressive one.[30] By empha-

sizing activist resistance and democratic activism vis-à-vis the neoliberalization of higher education, this alternative stance comes into political alignment with the liberatory vision of contemplative practices that inspires practitioners to live a life of courage and authenticity.[31] As Adam Lobel puts it, the sense of compassion, interconnection, and loving-kindness derived from contemplative practices of meditation and mindfulness helps evoke "a 'warrior in the world,' training to be engaged and to make a difference in society."[32]

To be sure, operating in neoliberal institutions means that left-leaning faculty also have to negotiate, compromise, and choose their battles. In fact, there is no denying that all of us who identify with the left—whether based in academia, nonprofits, K-12, governmental institutions, creative arts, or media industries—are always already situated in the neoliberal capitalist structure. We have reached a point in time when our research, teaching, cultural production, social advocacy, and political activism "often entail using, and relying on, global capitalist-consumerist circuits of media and information technologies to deliver and disseminate a message, which enable… [their] critical disruption but also perpetually delimit the contours of… [their] rupture."[33] But acknowledging this historical condition does not follow that we acquiescently submit our souls to the sea of neoliberal contamination; rather, it suggests that we need to "stay with the trouble" (in Donna Haraway's words) even as we continue working to generate more spaces of justice, equity, and freedom in a progressive and liberatory direction.[34]

Here, drawing from the Buddhist notion of nonattachment that has long been a critical embodied concept to awaken Buddhist students and laypersons, I articulate a pedagogy of nonattachment to offer a contemplative way for the left or anyone who is committed to challenging academic capitalism to politically respond to this neoliberal condition. It is my hope that this pedagogy of nonattachment can offer a holistic and mindful path for everyone to break away from the claws of neoliberal hegemony and unsettle others' attachment to neoliberal logic and rationality.

While at first glance nonattachment appears to suggest a state of indifference towards worldly affairs or becoming, its meaning is actually irreducible to apathy or disengagement. Nonattachment embodies transformation by germinating our minds into an equanimous and liberatory view. It allows an expansive room for us to be in a state of non-striving where we can just be when we need to rest our minds and bodies. At the same time, it also provides a grounded space for our being attentive to the world—for acting on it and with it—but without clinging onto people, events, and things such that it causes our suffering and undermines our wellbeing. With nonattachment, we can simultaneously exert our efforts in each particular moment and situation

and be willing to let go of any control of the outcome; we can simply live and coexist with whatever that arises from our actions.

To let go of our control of the outcome is to release ourselves from our mental shackles that insist that things must go in a particular way through our actions and efforts. Nonattachment inspires us to see that whatever outcome arises marks only a transitory moment, subject to further change—to which we can respond even without the ability to fully control. In short, the idea of nonattachment trains our minds to focus on the present and flow in tune with our embodied actions in every transitory moment without clinging onto past experiences or future outcomes, for that clinging or attaching inextricably causes our own internal obstacles and suffering, undercutting our transformation in the midst of our transformative endeavors.

As Noah Rasheta states, "Think of non-attachment as a way of not allowing things in your life to own you."[35] Instead of realizing liberation, our attachment—even to as worthy a goal as achieving a just or transformative outcome—makes us unfree as our minds become owned and possessed by things or ideals that remain partial, incomplete, and impermanent "in this changing, fluid, enormous world."[36] Again, this does not mean that we should not endeavor to create social change and transformation; rather, nonattachment implores us to forge ahead with an awareness of our partiality and to show up with an acceptance of our incompletion and imperfection. In other words, we continue to act and advocate, but keep our minds open to multiple possibilities and nonlinear surprises. Loretta Pyles thus suggests that we look at nonattachment as "letting go of the fruits of one's efforts with a kind of detachment that is not cold but rather connected and engaged… [such that] one creates a little space between one's agendas and themselves."[37] By accepting the uncertain outcomes as they are, it can put us "in a more powerful position to make changes when needed—in self, with others, and in social systems."[38]

The political theorist Chantal Mouffe once argued that "radical democracy also means the radical impossibility of a fully achieved democracy."[39] The idea of nonattachment informs us that even progressive activism needs to let go of the desire for political completion and "take the radical impossibility of a fully achieved… [transformation] as its precondition."[40] This impossibility of fullness and completion, while appearing to be politically disappointing, actually contains the radical possibility of ongoing political renewal. Specifically, because practicing nonattachment allows us to accept this partiality and not be fixated on or immobilized by the inescapable state of imperfection and incompletion, it embodies an immanent space for our unending practice, engagement, and action to flow and flourish as they generate possibilities and effects that cannot be fully predicted, calculated, and determined in advance. And

because there is no guaranteed result or determinate outcome, there is no limit to what method or approach we can use to disrupt, subvert, and transform the hegemonic status quo. Here, the motto offered by the martial artist Bruce Lee (whose combat philosophy was influenced by Zen and Daoist thoughts) can be instructive: "Using No Way as Way, Having No Limitation as Limitation."[41]

In facing the neoliberal colonization of higher education, I suggest that left-leaning faculty or anyone who is invested in challenging neoliberalism can build on this Buddhist idea of nonattachment to cultivate and practice what I call pedagogy of nonattachment in order to counteract the insidious effects of academic capitalism and unsettle others' attachment to the market logic and the model-minority myth. Given that things are impermanent and in flux, pedagogy of nonattachment allows its practitioners to flexibly shift gears and vary their approaches to creating opportunities for transformation without being attached to any fixed result or definite outcome. In this way, pedagogy of nonattachment can take on many forms but is attached to no form.

Below, I provide a brief illustration of how pedagogy of nonattachment can fluidly and elastically morph into different forms as pedagogy of invitation, pedagogy of persuasion, pedagogy or reappropriation, pedagogy of anger, pedagogy of flight, and pedagogy of refusal. Each of these pedagogies contains distinctive qualities and serves different purposes in different situations. Each is partial and incomplete. Nevertheless, each—whether used alone or in integration with others—can potentially exert resistant and subversive effects in unsettling and unnerving the neoliberal impasse of the corporate academy. Taken together, these pedagogies can serve as an awakening guide and transformational learning for others to join the collective mission in undoing the prevailing capitalist logic and rationality in higher education. It should also be noted that my discussion below is neither exhaustive nor definitive; rather, it is intended only to signal and illustrate several core forms that pedagogy of nonattachment can take so that others can continue building on and adding to these transformative repertoires in their cultivation and practice of this contemplative political intervention in the neoliberal university.

Pedagogy of Invitation

The first core pedagogy grounded on the insight of nonattachment that may be issued from the left is one of invitation. In her *Transformation Now!*, AnaLouise Keating articulates an invitational pedagogy that is predicated on "post-oppositional resistance and nonbinary forms of oppositional consciousness."[42] Seeking to move beyond binary-oppositional political stances, Keating points out that while critical pedagogy works through "oppositional critical discourse… [that] often relies on negative difference—an antagonistic, dichotomous worldview

and an (unintentionally) essentializing epistemological framework," invitational pedagogy "facilitate[s] movement through and beyond these oppositional modes, enabling us to replace critique with relational, connectionist thinking."[43] For Keating, embracing our "radical interconnectedness" and "complex relational perspectives"[44] can lead us to a broadened and open-ended view of "radical transformation [as a process that] cannot be entirely organized, dictated, commanded, imposed, predicted, or in any other way tightly controlled."[45] When applied to classroom teaching, pedagogy of invitation suggests that we can plant the seeds in students' thinking based on our intention and "invite… [them] to open-mindedly consider an array of perspectives and worldviews" without the expectation that we can necessarily "make them open their minds or change their existing beliefs."[46] She advises:

> "Transformation is optional and always exceeds our conscious intentions and efforts. I can invite transformation into my own thinking, but I can't accurately pinpoint exactly what this transformation will look like or entail. I don't know precisely how I'll be pushed to change…. Transformation can't be known in advance, dictated, orchestrated, or in any way fully controlled, and there are absolutely no guarantees that transformation will occur."[47]

In the context of the neoliberal university, Keating's pedagogy of invitation can offer a welcoming way for any faculty interested in challenging injustice to invite their colleagues to consider the impacts of neoliberalism on academic life. Particularly in situations where heated discussions on departmental policies or directions may arise due to conflicting ideological differences, invitational pedagogy may constructively alleviate the tension by earnestly inviting everyone to share their deeply reflective and open-ended thoughts on the precarious effects of privatization and commodification of higher education. Because of its emphasis on non-duality and post-oppositionality, pedagogy of invitation can enable its practitioners to create a space of open dialogue and mutual understanding that leads to common ground and/or surprising insights.

However, while pedagogy of invitation has its distinguished quality in being non-pressuring and encouraging as a mindful and open-ended way of communication, questions may arise as to whether this approach on its own is often enough to resist and transform academic capitalism and structural precarity in higher education. In fact, Keating eloquently illuminates the nonbinary insights of post-oppositional politics on the matter of identity and difference, but she offers less guidance on how to practice and enact such a non-dualistic pedagogical approach vis-à-vis neoliberal capitalism. And while she provides an insightful reflection on pedagogy of invitation in the context of classroom teaching, it is less clear whether an invitational stance alone is always suffi-

cient or suitable in certain situations where the stakes involve departmental or university policies and directions that bear direct material consequences on faculty, staff, and student lives.

Keating, in fact, expresses reservation about going beyond invitation to persuasion. As she writes: "Rather than persuade, I invite (*Or, perhaps, I persuade through invitation?*)."[48] But while invitation has its indisputable value and serves as a critical reminder that meaningful transformation cannot come from authoritarian imposition, to think that invitation is the only proper or effective way to enact transformation neglects that invitational pedagogy is itself also partial and incomplete, and that very thought may unwittingly become a form of attachment in itself. Although invitational pedagogy constitutes one of the core repertoires of pedagogy of nonattachment, the latter expansively holds space for still other forms of contemplative political engagement that are not limited to and sometimes work in conjunction with the approach of invitation.

Pedagogy of Persuasion

When invitation alone is not enough or suitable, we can always morph our engagement into the mode of persuasion. Although Keating's hesitation about persuasion stems from what she perceives as the tendency of the approach to reproduce binary-oppositional thinking, it is highly possible that we can engage in a pedagogy of persuasion that embodies a holistic (rather than dichotomous) consciousness or positionality that is grounded in nonattachment. What I mean by holistic consciousness or positionality is that it raises the level and stakes of the discussion such that it is not merely about being for or against an issue or policy; rather, it adopts what Pyles calls "systems thinking" by enrolling all interlocutors in seeing "not just the separate parts or units but the interrelationships between the parts and how they work together."[49] Because the grounding basis of persuasive pedagogy is systems thinking, those who are committed to challenge neoliberalism need not negate but can welcome, adapt, and learn from others who may adopt a more accommodationist approach as a way to advance an even more informed, nuanced, or well-articulated position. Additionally, pedagogy of persuasion is grounded in nonattachment so that we can seek to persuade without being attached to its outcome, always returning to the matter at hand rather than turning the engagement into (or being induced into) personal attacks or battles.

In fact, situated in academia, to engage in acts of persuasion is often unavoidable because any discussion of departmental or program bylaws, policies, vision, or direction involves critical reasoning, analysis, and argumentation. At the same time, persuasion does not need to be based solely on rational argumentation but can also take on forms of personal narratives, storytelling, or

critical reflective questions (rather than statements) that inspire or urge everyone to rethink and reexamine their own assumptions.

Importantly, in the institutional context where neoliberal logic can induce many faculty to avoid difficult conversations and attach themselves to an illusory positive atmosphere of corporate professional harmony, it can be critical for the left to engender the necessary dialogic spaces for pedagogy of persuasion to be put into practice as a way to disrupt and transform business as usual. As Lama Rod Owens points out in the context of Buddhist communities that can be relevant for academic spaces: the point of having substantive discussion or deliberation within any community, organization, or institution is not just to "reproduce comfort;" rather, there are crucial moments when we need to "engage in discomfort associated with liberatory practice."[50] While any truth claims can be challenged and contested, pedagogy of persuasion exemplifies the spirit of Dharmic authenticity for the left to express their genuine thoughts and feelings, or, as in Rev. angel Kyodo williams' words, "Give yourself permission to be uncomfortable and to make others uncomfortable in your truth" (even as their perspectives may still remain partial and incomplete).[51]

Here, advocacy for brave space (not just safe space) serves as a critical conduit for pedagogy of persuasion, for it creates a spacious container where difficult conversations and honest dialogues can take place, enabling the left to speak openly about the need for and ways to bring about administrative transparency, shared governance, and an open and healthy institutional space for generative disagreements and conflicts.[52] Informed by systems thinking, authenticity, and brave space, pedagogy of persuasion can lay the groundwork for the loosening or breaking of everyone's existing or potential attachment to academic capitalism and the model-minority myth that clouds our vision and shackles our freedom towards a collective path of holistic healing and transformation.

Pedagogy of Reappropriation

In addition to invitation and persuasion, there still remain other ways for the left to engage and duel with the colonizing effects of neoliberalism on higher education that are rooted in nonattachment. One of these ways is what I call pedagogy of reappropriation. While appropriation typically refers to the use or adoption of a (minority or subcultural) community's cultural symbols, artifacts, or styles by members of the dominant culture for their own benefits and profits, reappropriation describes how subordinate and marginalized communities reclaim or reuse the appropriated forms, discourses, or practices for their own subversive and empowering ends.[53] In the context of the neoliberal academy, the meaning of appropriation can be adapted to understand

how universities use or adopt business terms, discourses, or practices such as enterprise, entrepreneurship, management, supply-and-demand, market, and consumerism (including creating image and representation of student diversity and inclusion) to advance their academic missions. However, faculty committed to disrupt neoliberalism can reuse or reappropriate the same business terms, discourses, or practices as the very means to subvert the neoliberal logic. In doing so, they can be said to exercise nonattachment in a subtle and elastic way, appearing to be attached to neoliberal rationality but only to use its very logic to unsettle and undercut others' attachment to neoliberal ideology and capitalist power.

For instance, while the neoliberal university often encourages students and faculty to become innovative leaders and entrepreneurial changemakers, pedagogy of reappropriation can offer left-leaning faculty a way to reappropriate the entrepreneurial discourse and logic for their own resistant and empowering purposes. Thus, when they are asked by university or department administrators to generate higher student enrollment and revenues in spite of diminishing or limiting institutional resources and support (such as teaching/grading assistance), they can ask a genuine question in return: What is in it for us to increase our workload when it is done at the expense of our own physical and mental health and wellbeing? In other words, they turn the tables on the administrators by conducting themselves like prudent "entrepreneurs of the self" who shrewdly calculate their own costs and benefits—including requesting institutional support and advancing their own self-care and holistic wellbeing—and turn every corporate institutional demand into a contractual or transactional negotiation.

As a contemplative political intervention, pedagogy of reappropriation "approaches the [neoliberal] opponent by seeing what the opponent delivers and then intercepts the attack, appropriates it, and spontaneously uses the logic and force of the attack to exert a counterattack."[54] To be clear, the objective of this metaphoric "counterattack" is not to harm others but to stop or reduce the harms inflicted upon faculty—including defending the precarious contingent faculty and graduate student instructors—as academic workers by the neoliberal market rationality. As such, pedagogy of reappropriation allows the left to reuse the very entrepreneurial discourse to disrupt the neoliberal logic or make progressive gains through that very logic.

Pedagogy of Anger

In her keynote address at the 1981 National Women's Studies Association, "The Uses of Anger: Women Responding to Racism," Lorde carved out a pivotal place for anger in responding to racism: "the anger of exclusion, of unques-

tioned privilege, of racial distortion, of silence, ill-use, stereotyping, defensiveness, misnaming, betrayal, and co-optation."[55] Building on Lorde, I suggest that we can also envision a pedagogy of anger grounded on nonattachment as a contemplative political response to academic capitalism. Particularly in the context of the corporate academy where faculty are often compelled to conduct themselves in a rational, emotionless, and even bureaucratic way, expression of anger towards "the toxic positivity of contemporary [neoliberal academic] life" can sometimes disrupt our attachment to the white/Western bourgeois capitalist ideological norm that underpins the script of academic professionalism and the model-minority myth.[56]

While people often perceive Buddhism and mindfulness as ways "to eliminate whatever difficult emotions one feels to be impeding one's acquisition of peace… and… equanimity,"[57] it is critical to note that peace and equanimity are irreducible to the absence, suppression, or disavowal of difficult emotions, for that desire actually becomes a form of attachment in itself. In fact, it is rather rare for one to be able to achieve a state of equanimity without ever experiencing or going through difficult emotions, thus acquiring empathy, compassion, wisdom, and freedom from the process. Rather than aspiring for a state of depoliticized detachment from human misery and suffering that is produced by the condition of structural inequity in the earthly world, we can learn to embody a state of critical equanimity that involves a nuanced balancing act where one coexists with and holds space for difficult emotions, including anger.

We can thus be equanimous even when we are in a state of anger or expressing anger but without being sucked into this emotional state that overwhelms and debilitates our own bodyminds. For instance, if one uses anger to wound others or make personal remarks rather than focusing on the issue at hand, it reflects a state of imbalance where one becomes attached to the emotional state of anger. To use anger within the context of critical equanimity means that we balance anger with compassion, or use anger out of love, so that the anger we deploy is used to transform rather than to hurt. As such, pedagogy of anger can be embodied to disrupt and unnerve academia's neoliberal attachment without ourselves being attached to anger itself.

When pedagogy of anger is grounded on nonattachment, it can render healing effects. As Owens argues,

> "We must allow the anger to be in our experience… letting ourselves be angry as the first step to healing the hurt that is beneath the anger… [I]f we don't wrestle with anger, we never get to the heartbreak. And if we don't get to the heartbreak, we don't get to the healing."[58]

Anger, in fact, can be present in all the aforementioned pedagogies—invitation, persuasion, and reappropriation—which are all intended to heal the heartbreaks that the neoliberal colonization of higher education is systemically germinating. Anger draws people's "attention back to the woundedness… [on] this really intense, profound path of transformation… [where] the energy of anger makes us feel powerful… feel valid."[59] As Cathryn Bailey also points out, "passively holding onto anger (a hot coal in one's hand) is damaging and therefore one should seek ways of employing anger—of moving its energy along—that do not result in self-harm (after all, hot coals can also function as tools to produce life-giving warmth and tasty food)."[60] Particularly for those who are underrepresented minority, practicing pedagogy of anger opens up a space for them to break free from the "gendered, heteronormative, and raced assumptions about the appropriateness and desirability of anger,"[61] allowing them to use anger in a context of critical equanimity to impart its healing and transformative energy for both themselves and others.

Pedagogy of Flight

In his *Freedom as Marronage*, Neil Roberts draws on the African slaves' fugitive practice of taking flight from slavery to articulate a vision of freedom that is not static but ever-shifting, located in the liminal space of perpetual escape from enslavement.[62] Significantly, it is in the very act of fleeing from slavery by which slaves practice and realize freedom, "in ways that do not presume private property, self-possession, labor, sovereignty, or a figure of whiteness as the universal foundations of freedom."[63] Building on this notion of freedom as a perpetual, liminal flight that is immanent to oppressive condition, I suggest we can cultivate a pedagogy of flight as a resistant practice to realize freedom within the neoliberal university. Of course, one can always take flight by leaving academia, but here I would like to focus on acts of liminal flight when one still operates within the academy. Particularly because neoliberalism colonizes both time and space within the university, I suggest that flight can be undertaken in relation to both colonized time and space, allowing us to practice our freedom in varied and subtle ways.

With respect to colonized time (e.g., many faculty are working seven days a week and often late into the night, underlining the invasive neoliberal colonization of time), one can think of pedagogy of flight as teaching us to flee from time without fleeing the situation. That is to say, while we cannot leave our tasks undone when we still operate within the neoliberal academy, we can use whatever time we have (including worktime) to engage in mindful and contemplative practices that detach our bodyminds from neoliberal demands and bring them back in connection with our whole selves. These practices can

certainly include meditation, but they can also involve what Pyles refers to as mind-body-spirit movement practices, including:

> "archery, aikido, capoeira, tai chi, kung fu, yoga, qigong, and certain forms of dance, such as Sufi whirling… Indeed, any physical activity can be considered a mind-body-spirit movement practice, such as gardening, running, cross-country skiing, swimming, disc golf, and hiking. Essentially… such practices allow one to center one's attention on the movement, engage in personal inquiry, and cultivate a connection to the whole self…. [N]o one can *own* a mind-body practice… everyone has the right to move their bodies, feel, and reconnect."[64]

While such practices are not inherently anti-neoliberal, when understood in the context of flight from colonized time, they take on heightened political significance for the left. As Lorde once wrote, "Caring for myself is not self-indulgence. It is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare."[65] In the neoliberal university, self-care transforms into "a radical act of resistance,"[66] a perpetual flight that allows us to reclaim our right to feel, heal, and reconnect vis-à-vis the colonized time under academic capitalism. Coupling with pedagogy of invitation, pedagogy of flight can be used to invite anyone to join in these holistic mind-body practices as a way to help all of us unlearn our attachment to neoliberal time.

Such resistant flight can also be enacted in relation to colonized space. The most obvious example is when left-leaning faculty use the classrooms, computers, and multimedia technology provided by the neoliberal university to produce teaching and research contents that critique or subvert the neoliberal agenda, thus fleeing colonized space without fleeing the scene. Similarly, flight from colonized space can also be taken when certain forms of mind-body-spirit practices are engaged and taken up within neoliberal academic institutions. This can allow the practitioners and participants to "invite conscious breathing and awareness of sensations" that enables them to achieve mental and emotional flexibility and balance from within an institutional space that inherently produces rigidity, imbalance, stress, anxiety, and depression.[67]

Pedagogy of Refusal

The critical theorist Herbert Marcuse, queer theorist Jack Halberstam, and Indigenous anthropologist Audra Simpson have all identified refusal—a willful negation, disidentification, or disaffiliation with the existing ideological norms and power structures in order to envision and live life otherwise—as a critical political intervention in the respective contexts of their work.[68] Building on this idea, I argue that for our human dignity, sanity, and freedom, there is a

needed place for refusal as one of the repertoires of pedagogy of nonattachment vis-à-vis the colonizing condition of academic capitalism. Refusal is especially to be invoked in situations where the stakes are high and nothing one does can change the (neoliberal) majority's minds, such that things become "politically untenable and thus normatively should be refused."[69] To enact pedagogy of refusal is to take on the role of a conscientious objector in the neoliberal university, where one refuses to endorse or participate in a departmental or university initiative, program, or direction on the ground of one's conscience, integrity, ethics, and/or principles. Even if we cannot stem the tide, we can dissent and refuse to be a part of the tyranny of the (neoliberal) majority. If there is enough collective will, pedagogy of refusal can take on forms of boycott, protest, strike, occupation, or collective abstention; if not, one can still refuse in other ways by taking a leave of absence without pay or by continuing to fulfill other job duties but refusing to perform the new tasks or responsibilities that come with the new (neoliberal) institutional policy, program, or direction.

Because of its outright negation and potential intense effects on rattling the colonizing chains of academic capitalism, there may be more serious risks involved in enacting pedagogy of refusal, and such an approach is not easy to undertake especially for those without tenure protection. However, sometimes there can be high-stakes situations where the left's commitment to their conscience, ethics, or principles is so strong that it overrides conventional rational or strategic considerations or calculations. Like an "'affective stirring of the soul' that does not simply register as a superficial emotion… but rather as 'upheaval of the depths,'" pedagogy of refusal compels us to "[make] a leap of faith" by "opening oneself to the unknown" without "calculating possibilities in advance."[70] It opens up a visionary space for us "to 'see' that [sometimes] we must leap without explicit direction, without knowing where we will end up; in other words, we must embrace the impossibility of knowing the future by simply leaping,"[71] and in so doing, "unleash a creative energy… [and] breathe new life into previously static, and potentially stagnant, modes of thought and life."[72] Herein, while nonattachment creates a spacious container for the left to forge ahead with refusal by letting go of their control of the outcome and just letting things flow, it also allows a flexible and grounded space for them to shift to a different pedagogy in response to whatever outcome or further situation that would be in keeping with their commitment.

Conclusion

This essay has sought to illuminate how the internal Buddhist insights such as nonattachment can serve as the very ground for a contemplative political intervention to disrupt and unsettle the impacts of neoliberalism on academic

institutions. As signaled at the beginning of the article, although my analytical focus is on the corporate academy, the university does not exist apart from the larger society. The kinds of pressuring conditions and effects brought into being by neoliberalism in higher education—such as accommodation to the market rationality and the reinforcement of the model-minority myth—are also showing up in both similar and nuanced ways throughout different social communities, public institutions, and human organizations (including, of course, Buddhist and mindfulness communities and organizations).

Importantly, the recent calls for diversity and inclusion across these various communities, institutions, and organizations cannot be advanced separately from the underlying issue of the political-ideological division and disconnection produced by neoliberalism. As I hope my discussion here has made clear, for historically underrepresented minorities, our collective nonattachment from neoliberal logic and rationality may be a necessary condition to help turn any institutional and organizational efforts at diversity and inclusion into truly meaningful and transformational experiences and journeys. To be sure, this need not mean that we aspire for a state of absolute purity without any instrumental contact with neoliberalism, but we can still try in whatever capacity to skillfully decolonize the instrumentalizing effects of neoliberalism on everyone's bodyminds from within this overwhelming ideological system.

While my offering of pedagogy of nonattachment may not be applicable to every nonacademic realm or situation, it nonetheless provides an elemental basis for any left-leaning subjects situated in nonprofits, K-12, governmental institutions, creative arts, or media industries to take up such contemplative political intervention. People can do so by adapting and expanding it in ways that are particularly suited to their social locations so they can be empowered and equipped to resist, disrupt, and transform the neoliberal colonization of everyday life. Whether for those operating within or outside the university, the six pedagogies discussed herein can be used in fluid rotation or combination in different local contexts and changing circumstances.

It should also be noted that these are not the only possible pedagogies; rather, my intent is to illustrate six possible routes that pedagogy of nonattachment can take while leaving open the undetermined possibilities that others may further build on or add to the existing repertoires in response to the neoliberalizing conditions everywhere. In fact, while I did not address it in my preceding discussion, there is also the pedagogy of letting be—that is, no striving, taking breaks, or bodymind-resting. The left may adopt this approach as pedagogy of nonattachment in any given moment, especially when they cannot sit with certain experiences that may be too overwhelming or triggering, when they are in conditions of burnout or compassion fatigue, or when they are consciously

waiting for the right timing (sometimes to generate internal insights, clarity, or strengths) before taking action. As Pyles points out,

> "In some situations, staying with *what is* actually happening can invite transformation, teaching someone not to run from or fight with what they do not like…. [A]s a result of mindful observations and insights that arise, one can tune into the choices that are available in terms of action."[73]

While pedagogy of nonattachment can be spacious and equanimous in holding space for different kinds of pedagogies, for any pedagogy to be fitted into this contemplative political framework, it needs to be intentionally embodied and deployed as a transformational practice whereby the practitioners work to disrupt, unsettle, and transform neoliberal attachment without themselves being attached to or owned by the transformative outcome in their local contexts and situations. As Pyles also further advises, "because the mind is prone to checking out… one must make *effort*, and indeed cultivate some discipline, to engage in the healing justice inquiries and practices for them to work."[74] Having carved out a critical space for pedagogy of nonattachment, the next step is our praxis: that is, our sustained efforts in cultivating and practicing such pedagogy in its varied and elastic forms to continually refine the ways we embody and apply it in our everyday life. Doing this will enable us to strengthen its transformative effects in freeing our bodies and souls from the enslaving claws of neoliberal hegemony while staying open to unexpected and surprising possibilities as we continue on the path of the left.

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