Learning to [bear it and] Smile: Surveilled Labour, Taylorised Work, and the Contradictions of College Readiness

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Abstract

This paper sets out to understand the process of service industry subject formation as read through a combination of charter school policy handbooks and fast-food employee training manuals. I draw from the experience of teaching and organising in order to theorise two functions of subject formation, and a third ideological continuity holding that relation together. Looking at both the surveillance of labor and the reemergence of Taylorism, as a guiding principle within education, I theorise the function of these concepts and connect them with the narrative and contradiction of college readiness-as-economic mobility.

Keywords: *College-Readiness; Cultural Studies; Paul Willi; Labor Commodities; Post-Industrial*

Introduction

I first came to the work of Paul Willis (1977) during a time of change. Working as an organiser for minimum wage movements in the U.S. South, I was caught in a moment of contrast; trying to reconcile popular messaging of low-wage service work (i.e. lazy, unconcerned and unskilled) with the dignity, perseverance, and resistance I saw in these mostly black, female, and working-class laborers. Forced to look inwards and outwards at the same time, I found

my work shifting from exclusively activism towards praxis, or more poignantly put by Paulo Freire ([1972] 2018, p. 51), “reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it”. This paper represents the product of action and organising alongside fast food workers in the fight for a living wage, as well as and reflection and theorising in order to better understand labor commodity production in low-wage economies of service.

First engaging the work of Willis directly, I read the applicability of his text *Learning to Labour* (1977) within an economy, defined more by the service provided, than the product produced. This analysis extends aspects of Willis' theory into a world where emotional labor has altered the foundation of work and redefined labor possibilities for the working-class. At its core, this paper explores two instances of subject formation, and a third ideological continuity holding that relation together. It targets the ‘parameters of potentiality’ for working-class students and takes seriously the project of service work as foundational to neoliberal economies of service.

To fully engage the institutional skeleton of service labor, I turn towards a synthesis of experience with the procedural documents governing the institutional relation of fast food workers to service and students to schooling. Combining U.S. employee training manuals, charter school handbooks, and national policy platforms, I examine the variable ways in which these sources can be read as both procedural documents and larger cultural text. I argue that the narrative and material attached to labor and schooling tells us something unique about the fundamental contradictions of our time (Harvey, 2007; 2009), and that by engaging these contradictions, as they exist in the world, we can hope to transcend their limiting properties through historicised praxis. While this is read within the context of U.S. schooling and labor policy, these

processes speak to a globalised world and illustrate the same essential, if distorted, function of capitalism as carried out on a global scale.

With nearly 3.5 million food service workers earning a median hourly wage of $9.35 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016), the importance of fast food (as labor standard) is in the relation it establishes between capital and labor. Investigating the productive process for those, most likely to be trapped within the generational churnings of poverty, allows for a set of critical insights into the processes of mystification that shroud labor production and limit the potentialities for students and laborers to critically engage their reality with a mind towards transformation.

If we are to effectively challenge the means-end (Horkheimer, [1947] 2013) relation of educational policy to practice, and create meaningful, humanising, and just social institutions, we must first reinsert ourselves within the historical process of labor production and class formation. As Willis (1977) so rightly understood in his time, the school has been and continues to be a contested space within the ideological battleground of class conflict. Opening critical moments for understanding our labor, both inside and outside the school, moves towards a praxis that seeks to integrate, not dislocate, illuminate, not obfuscate, and fulfill, not limit, the engagement of students/workers within the social fabric of our world. It is towards that project that this paper now turns.

Willis in a Messy World, What's Left?

Paul Willis' work *Learning to Labour* (1977) remains a foundational text in the field of critical educational theory and research. His study of the "lads" in Hammer town, England, provides an opening through which we can understand how working-class students are prepared for working-class jobs. He engages

"the lads" as partial creators of their own subcultural realities and demonstrates the capacity for youth to challenge and leverage their position as workers to oppose, in their own ways, deterministic structures of power. Similarly, where industrial youth seemed to understand and derive power from labor's centrality within industrial capitalism (p. 120), contemporary discourse has marked youth as 'deficient', in need of 'modernising', and perpetually 'behind' in the global economic race towards productivity (Hein, 2016; DeSilver, 2017; Bauer-Wolf, 2017). This shift in the ideologies of work leads to the question: How have we learned to labor in a world that, above all else, asks us to [bear it and] smile?

In the opening portions of Willis' ethnography, he traces the parallels between "counter-school culture" and "factory culture". Each of these comes to represent the fundamental social relation in school (counter-school culture) and work (factory culture), illustrating the cultural development of resistance through the continuities embedded within industrial culture. He argues that "counter-school culture", fostered within schools, serves as preparation for the social relations and work unique to the factory. He focuses particularly on the ways that the "lads" resist schooling and generate meaning in an environment that marginalises their "futures" as a natural product of working-class culture. Willis writes of factory workers:

> They exercise their abilities and seek enjoyment in activity, even where most controlled by others. Paradoxically, they thread through the dead experience of work a living culture which is far from a simple reflex of defeat. This is the same fundamental taking hold of an alienating situation that one finds in counter-school culture and its attempt to weave a tapestry of interest and diversion through the dry institutional text. (1977, p. 52).

It becomes easy to understand, then, how working-class labor is reproduced in opposition to the "institutional text". Willis makes the argument that working

class discontent is portrayed through an antagonistic relationship with the authority that resides over them. Factory workers, like the lads, are able to see the futility of their institutional position but are unable to fully "penetrate" their subjectivity and move towards transformative action.

Given the parallels between "factory" and "counter-school" culture, Willis turns towards the lads' subjectivities and their role(s) in creating various forms of working-class ideology. He argues in his analysis that ideology, as a central concept, functions to turn "uncertain and fragile cultural resolutions and outcomes into a pervasive naturalism. The least challenging and most mystified cultural productions […] form a real and lived common denominator which is the basis for reproduction of the status quo" (Willis, 1997, p. 162). Ideology, within this context, ensures that "cultural productions" become understood as "natural" consequences of who we are. It immerses 'the lads' within a paradoxical relation to power where "the manual giving of labour power" comes to represent "both a freedom, election and transcendence, and a precise insertion into a system of exploitation and oppression for working class people" (Willis, 1977, p. 120).

Through this understanding, Willis works to define what I will refer to as the 'parameters of potentiality' for working-class youth. These parameters lay the paths of resistance made available to 'the lads' and govern the "partial penetrations" (1977, p. 165) that sit at the heart of Willis 'analysis. This interchange between structural limitation and individual resistance becomes the force that simultaneously generates critique, while also funneling resistance into labor pathways that assure the social reproduction of an industrial working-class. Willis' work is rooted in this dual critique: targeting on the one hand, structures designed for social reproduction and the domination of working-class

students, and on the other, the alternative possibilities of a critique, founded in the culturally mediated self-knowledge of working-class subjectivities.

Carrying this focus on social production, into an economy defined by declining trade unions, an increasing domination of financial/technological capital over labor, and the systematic dismantling of social welfare programs, requires a reckoning with the massive shifts in labor possibilities for working-class youth (Dolby, Dimitriadis and Willis, 2004). The "manual work", which 'the lads' understood as "stand[ing] for something" and "contributing to and substantiating a certain view of life" (Willis, 1977, p. 119), no longer exists in its western, industrial form[1]. What remains is a culture, economy, and manifestation of labor that localises economic productivity within the subject and seizes that production through the increasingly regimented control over personal dispositions, emotional responses, and subjective orientations towards the world.

In a world with a nearly totalising discourse of economic mobility and an even more totalising practice of economic immobility, "dislocation" (Willis, 1997, p. 165) no longer functions as the passive, ideologically laden displacement of student ambition that Willis originally theorised. Instead, I conceptualise dislocation as an institutional force for decontextualising the student. As schools recite in unison the promise of moving students out of poverty, they simultaneously draw from the ideologies of an economy that depends upon low-wage service labor to maintain the dividends of immense inequality. It is this contradiction that necessitates dislocation and employs webs of managerial policy to displace students from the context in which the narratives of schooling contradict the reality of their lives. It is towards this string of the social formation that I direct my analysis, expanding and contracting upon a broadly interdisciplinary body of literature so as to root my work within a particular

manifestation of subject formation imbedded within fast-food work and charter school policy.

Towards a Methodology: Engaging Willis and Cultural Studies through Conjuncture

When my work of reading Willis turned towards the process of writing about Willis, I found myself drawn to the creation of a study that 'connected the dots' between industrial and postindustrial education. Using the existing corpus of social scientific methodology, I planned to "translate" Willis' theory, and overlay that translation atop an understanding of low-wage service labor.

However, as that project took shape, and I began to think more purposefully about the complexity of Willis' writing and the multiplicities of power embedded within the "conjuncture" (Gramsci, 1971; Hall, 1988; c.f. Grossberg, 2010), I started to come to terms with fundamental contradictions between this work and the act of translation as a methodological concept.

In alignment with the strain of "radical contextuality" (Grossberg, 2010) that has defined both the Birmingham School and the discipline of cultural studies, this paper departs from a strict reproduction of Willis' study, while retaining commitments to his theoretical and methodological core. It draws from work in cultural studies, curriculum theory, sociology, and geography in an attempt to articulate segments of the 'parameters of potentiality' for youth within the problem-spaces of schools and service industry labor sites.

The articulation of these parameters focuses on the process by which possibilities are produced (and limited) within the context of a 4-year participant observation study. It engages the formation of educated/working subjects through a combination of empirical reflection (Willis, 1977; 2000) and

textual analysis (Williams, 1978; 1983; Hogarth, 1984; Hall, 2006) in an attempt to better understand the never fully formed, but always guided, paths of social reproduction. This draws from Willis' (1977) understanding of power as a porous and culturally mediated concept but extends that critique towards the institutional manifestations of power that can feel unknowable, unchangeable, and disembedded from the everyday work of teaching and organising.

It is in this way that I both depart from and am indebted to Willis' original work. Where Willis chose to focus on the cultural mediation of labor commodity production vis-a-vis students, I approach the work from the position of the teacher/organiser, targeting the process by which teachers, students, and workers become enmeshed within a web of managerialism designed to dislocate and relocate students/workers-as-commodities.

The documents illustrating this process are drawn from the worksites where I organised and the schools in which I taught. Representing the policies of low-income schools is an intentional sampling of the *Knowledge is Power Program's* (KIPP) platform for "no excuses" charter schooling. KIPP represents one of the largest and most radical school choice programs in the United States, with a focus on reducing the "achievement gap" across a variety of demographic "variables" (Lack, 2009).

Aside from being a site of my own work, KIPP's policy platform has remained one of the largest, most influential models and has had a substantive impact on the direction of school choice policies throughout the U.S. (Ravitch, 2011). Combined with this sample of education policy is a mirrored, intentional sampling of the largest fast food chains in the United States. Organisations like Pizza Hut, McDonalds, Starbucks, and Subway have had a profound impact on the structure and politics of food, work, and consumerism (Guthman and

DuPois, 2006). By combining these sites with a methodological approach that both reflects upon experience and theorises power, I hope to tell a better story about the functions of policy that I found myself pushing against, as well as about teachers'/workers' movements across the country that continue to resist.

Following this dual approach, teaching and organising within a mid-sized city in the southern United States constitutes the empirical locus of this study. I put in motion Willis' statement (via an interview with Sassatelli and Santoro, 2009) that "the body" represents the "research instrument" and the "way you put it under the same regimes, controls, rules and regulations, urgencies and problems as the people you're trying to understand" (2009, p. 274) functions to root academic production within the "nitty-gritty of how social actors experience and attempt to penetrate and shape their conditions of existence" (Willis and Trondham, 2000, p. 400).

Grounding policy studies within the "nitty-gritty" allows for the production of knowledge that is always-already in conversation with the ongoing forms of critique that have destabilised structural interpretations of power[2] (Derrida, 1976; 1978; Foucault, 1978; 2003; c.f. Cusset, 2008). Willis himself has regularly pushed for an expansion of ethnographic possibilities (Willis, 2000), arguing for a form of ethnography that blends the empirical knowledge of field work with a correlative theory immersed in the form of literary and cultural studies (Kleijer, Tillekens and Willis, 2003, pp. 4-5). I direct this work towards the "rules and regulations" (Sassatelli and Santoro, 2009, p. 274) of schooling and the implicit and explicit formations of power articulated within the everyday, managerial control over human resources (Dumenil and Levy, 2018).

Finally, in establishing the analytical foundation of this study, I draw from the work of Raymond Williams, Stuart Hall, and the intellectual tradition of

Cultural Studies to position the 'social text' in a way that tells a story about contemporary schooling, labor and economy. Targeting the continuities imbedded within each, I articulate an opening through which social reproduction is inscribed within the everyday and looks towards the reification of policy as a bridge between institutional text and lived experience. This interwoven story, mirroring that of the diverse intellectual tradition within the Birmingham School, relies upon the analytical techniques of scholars like Williams (1978; 1983) and Hogarth (1984), while simultaneously drawing from Willis' (1977; 2000) commitment to what Hall (1996) calls the ''concrete''.

The above enables the generation of a textual analysis that theorises service industry labor preparation at the level of the concrete. Always in conversation with the lived frustrations, collective resistances, and individual projections of hope that sit at the heart of teaching and organizing, I find this paper to target the 'parameters of potentiality' for students/workers, but maybe more directly, to articulate the mechanisms by which subjects are formed, and hope is controlled within spaces of low-income schooling and low-wage service work.

The proceeding sections analyse two functions of subject formation, and a third ideological continuity holding that relation together. Looking at both the surveillance of labor and the reemergence of Taylorism as a guiding principle within education, I theorise the function of these concepts and connect them with the narrative and contradiction of college readiness-as-economic mobility. In and of itself this work constitutes a story, one that is not meant to trace every potentiality, but rather to articulate a formation of schooling that challenges present, ideologically laden understandings of what it means to work and learn, and how these are distilled within contemporary service labor. As Grossberg (2010) notes, a better story does not guarantee the formation of a just social

reality; that work is left to us; but it does provide fertile ground upon which we can root our organising, teaching, and praxis in the fight to form a better world.

Surveilling the Subjects of Service: Consuming Emotional Labor

Existing research has illustrated the direction of labor in meeting the demands of a postindustrial economy (Bulan, Erickson and Wharton, 1997; Cooper, 2007; Nixon, 2009). Feelings of inauthenticity (Bulan, Erickson, & Wharton, 1997), gendered tensions (Kenway & Kraack, 2004), and an acceptance of bodily harm have all come to typify the experience of surveilled, low-wage service work (Curtis et al., 2007). Where industrial, masculine youth culture was defined by an obfuscated sense of resistance circuited backtowards the aims/ends of production (Willis, 1977), the service based, feminized[3]cultures of a postindustrial economy have come to be defined by a hyper vigilant policing of dispositions towards the consumer (Bulan, Erickson, & Wharton, 1997). This shift has seen labor come to be defined less by the product produced and more by the service provided.

Focusing on the continuities between school and workplace discipline, policy-saturated environments of surveillance are looking to codify and standardise the social relations of school and work. Mirroring the findings of Bulan et al. (1997), Starbucks' employee training manual dictates that "with every cup of Starbucks comes service that will make a human connection, from you, to your customer" (Starbucks Employee Training Manual, 2014, p. 3). This work draws from the well of emotional labor that instrumentalises worker subjectivities in order to meet the emotional demand of consumers. The aim of the product is not to simply provide a cup of coffee, or even a smile to a customer, but rather to condition subjects (employees-objects) most conducive to the generation of "human connection[s]" between consumers and the disembodied image of the corporation. Workers learn to regulate their subjectivity, assuming the

corporatised messaging of service experience as way of impressing a sense of "[individual] and company success" (2014, p. 3).

The deindividuation of service work aligns with a larger desire for continuity between service locations. Experiencing a Subway in Atlanta is designed to reflect an identical, corporatised image in Wichita, as service workers come to embody the image of the corporation. If consumers recognise that continuity, then experiences with the deindividuated worker are not contained to the individual franchise, but rather extrapolated onto the company brand. In pursuit of that continuity, companies have established rigid polices of surveillance to govern employee behavior:

> Bracelets of any kind and loose or visible necklaces are prohibited. Only the MIC [manager in charge] may wear a watch. Dangling or loop earrings are not permitted; only a single set of ¼-inch posts may be worn. Male employees may not wear earrings. Nose rings, tongue rings, ear gauges or any other visible body jewelry may not be worn while at work…fingernails are to be neat, clean-trimmed, and unpolished… clothing and/or bandages must cover tattoos. (Pizza Hut Employee Training Manual, 2011, p. 34)

By regulating the means of human expression (on the body), more direct paths are opened for the manipulation of emotional labor. Control over human dispositions like "charisma", "energy", and "helpfulness" (Starbucks Employee Training Manual, 2014, p. 11) functions to fragment agency within spaces of work, and replace it with a pre-packaged corporate 'consciousness' imbued within and transmitted through policy-saturated environments of surveillance. This process is rooted in an ideological conception of service labor that understands "character" as being malleable to the demands of consumption, and moves to commodify character as a product of and for consumption.

The essential continuity here is the always-ongoing surveillance of the subjects' emotional production. In the same way that service work is policed through the standardisation of emotional and bodily labor; neoliberal educative projects surveil student "character" for the maintenance of authoritarian ideologies in emerging labor markets. To ensure that process, schools move to institutionally define what constitutes "proficient" emotional labor (i.e. character). "Self-control" becomes understood as "remaining calm even when criticised or provoked"; "grit" as "kept working hard even when s/he felt like quitting"; and "optimism" as "stayed motivated, even when things didn't go well" (Character Growth Card, n.d., p. 1).

By controlling the standard of emotional labor, schools instrumentalise these definitions towards institutional objectives for student conduct. Much like service labor, "self control", "grit", and "optimism" become emotional tools for meeting the demand of consumption. That demand, within the context of schooling, is labor; specifically, a form of labor willing to "persist" in spite of the deadening conditions and deindividuation of low-wage service work.

To analyse the aims/ends of surveillance necessitates an examination of the continuities imbedded within the service sector's mode of production. Conceptualising the school as a sort of prolonged employee orientation, as done here, helps us to understand labor's inculcation within ideologies of consumption, and unveils the reciprocal relation of school and work. As the corporation packages human character into a service commodity, a mirrored process is reflected through the school. Teachers come to consume student character through the increasingly complex mechanisms for "tracking" the "mindset" of the student (How Do We Create Positive Institutions, n.d., p. 3). The ritual imbedded within the practice of tracking, affirming/redirecting, and then recording student behavior, carries overconsumption into the formative

spaces of classrooms. As the student's emotional labor is distilled into the markings of a report card, the institution (re)forms that labor into products (i.e. students) prepared to meet the demand of postindustrial economies of service.

Tying together the relation between surveillance and production, emotional labor is increasingly codified, standardised, and policed as a product of and for consumption. Students are formed within a context that understands them as resources to be molded, rather than as autonomous subjects with real, material stakes in what they learn. Consequently, emergent workers are no longer required to simply 'do the work', but rather become tools for the projection of an embodied company brand. This manifest itself within a discourse of discipline and character, as ideological understandings of work are leveraged to ingrain concepts of consumption within workers that position themselves as commodities to be consumed vis-à-vis interpersonal interactions with the consumer.

Taylorism in Work, Teacher Education, and Back Again

Wayne Au's (2011) article *Teaching Under the New Taylorism* offers a framework for understanding the process of skill acquisition in education. Au is directly concerned with the standardised control over curriculum, and the rise of a "New Taylorism" within educational policy. Citing Noble (1977), Au defines Taylorist practice as:

> efficient production rely[ing] upon the factory managers' ability to gather all the information […] systematically analyze it according to 'scientific' methods, figure out the most efficient ways for workers to complete individual tasks, and then tell the worker how to produce their products. (Au, 2011, p. 26).

He traces the emergence of these principles in education to the work of Franklin Bobbit (1912, 1913) and the emphasis he brought to 'social efficiency' as a standard for production. It is in this way that the school is initially understood as a space of production, harnessed towards the ends of industrial capitalism and its call for skilled labor.

Au's (2011) turn towards high-stakes testing and standardised curriculums as the basis for the "New Taylorism" remain particularly important to analyses of service industry labor preparation. This reconceptualisation separates from the factory and turns towards teaching as the emergent subject of scientific management. Borrowing from the work of Michael Apple (2000, 2013), Au confronts the 'de-skilling' of teachers through technical control over curriculum:

> Technical control operates through the curricular structures being directly shaped by the norms and expectations associated with high stakes testing as US teachers are compelled to rely less and less upon their own knowledge and expertise in the educative process and instead are required to take direction from outside educational 'experts' who develop the standardized tests and/or pre-packaged curriculums. (Au, 2011, p. 34)

National curriculums and high-stakes testing have sought to simplify the educative process, diminishing the skills and proficiencies required for teaching (Crocco and Costigan, 2007; Kumashiro, 2010; Casey, 2016). This shift has seen a displacement of agency from local control to national authority. The 'de-skilling' of educators is significant because it both diminishes the capacity for meaningful content in curriculum, while also limiting the capacity for local control and resistance in/through education. For a system of production (i.e. Taylorism) that seeks to de-individualise the practitioner and establish a

controlled product, delegitimising the skills of teaching and the autonomy of teachers remains essential to that project.

A consequence of this fragmentation in teacher agency is a subsequent dislocation of knowledge in K-12 settings. As we delegitimise teaching, script the schools relation to curriculum, and submit students to nationalised forms of authority, knowledge becomes "a collection of disjointed facts, operations, procedures, or data mainly needed for the rote memorization in preparation for the tests" (Au, 2011, p. 31). Disjointed, incoherent, and removed from processes of meaning making, students become resources within the larger system of commodity production:

> The decontextualization, objectification, and subsequent quantification of students through standardized testing do[es] not stand alone… turning students (and, by extension, teachers and teaching) into decontextualized numerical objects also frames students-as-products and places education firmly within the paradigm of factory production. (Au, 2011, p. 38)

Conceptualizing students as objects of measurement allows for the numerical justification of liberal reform; by establishing the classifications of 'proficient' and 'deviant' the school becomes a site for the social reconstruction of equilibrium. This logic understands numbers as accurately representing reality. Therefore, targeted interventions directed at numbers, not people, becomes the method (Taylorist) by which we address material deficits in schooling.

To draw a continuity between the skills of school and work requires an examination of the texts embedded within each. The routinised and decontextualised curriculums of Au's "New Taylorism" directly channels the deadening conditions of contemporary service work. For example, Pizza Hut

outlines 12 “guidelines” for “creat[ing] a pizza to spec” (Pizza Hut Employee Training Manual, n.d., p. 11-12), with the aim being not to make the best pizza, but rather to create a product completely in line with the institutional standard. This requires a strict adherence to the “specifications” of the store, as the company ties a “deviation from these specs” to “a shortage in food” and increased costs for the individual franchise (and subsequently the worker) (p. 11). Similar to the Taylorist curriculum, workplace success comes to be defined by meeting the standard of an external policy. In relation to the development of skills in labor, curriculum comes to stand in for the process by which workers learn to accept the deadening routinisation of work and develop the capacity to continuously adjust action towards the script of a standard.

A second, but equally important Taylorist continuity can be understood in the objectification of the worker through the productive process. Where schools objectify students as numbers for the purpose of measurement (Au, 2011), service industry labor harnesses that continuity to mold the objectified student into a regulated instrument of production. While this is not unique to the service industry, and analyses of capitalist exploitation have long understood the objectification of the worker (Marx, [1867] 1992), it bears repeating to understand the distortions in how objectification applies to service work.

Managers replace the teacher as an agent of surveillance, quantifying labor into numbers (objects) with institutional meaning and impact. For example, most service franchises have some form of write-up that standardises the disciplinary process of work. Upon the first violation “employees will… be given a warning […] after that you [the employee] will be written up”, taking only “a total of 3 write-ups to be terminated” (Subway Employee Training Manual, n.d., p. 9). In this relation, the employee’s actions are objectified into a set of numbers designed to encapsulate their “value” as a worker. The process of transcribing

employee behavior into a write-up, much like in schools, becomes the responsibility of the supervisor (teacher) who utilises this instrument for the regulation and decontextualisation of employee (student) labor harnessed towards the aims/ends of an institutional standard.

As students are mandated to adapt to the productive process of Taylorism, they emerge commodified, with skills and proficiencies suitable for Taylorised work. It is in this way that low-income students become uniquely qualified for low-wage jobs. Not meeting the so-called standards of college readiness, and divorced from our industrial past, these emergent labor markets come to be defined by their skill in adjusting action towards the parameters of a standard. Understanding the self-as-object and work-as-object becomes a skill in itself, one that translates seamlessly to the non-existent job security, harsh conditions, and manipulation endemic to the low-wage service sector.

Contradictions in College Readiness: Towards the Ideological Linchpin of Service Labor

Tying together the complex systems of education and production necessitates a venture into the capacity for capitalist, ideological regulation. This paper has used the term continuity to get at the ongoing interchange between low-wage service work and contemporary schooling; this was done with a theoretical understanding that ideology has come to 'broker the relations' between school and work, constructing a justification that is always-already enforcing the pathways of labor (Willis, 1977). It becomes the task of this section, and more broadly this paper, to identify the ideological narrative holding low-wage labor production together and ensuring that emergent systems of production are not challenged by the students/workers bound and produced by these policies. When we ask to what end the policies of Taylorism and surveillance are directed, we receive an answer that invokes the promise of economic mobility.

College, in our present moment, has become an instrument for projecting and controlling hope, particularly for schools populated by working-class students of color (Crocco and Costigan, 2006; 2007). While this paper does not address the long and troubled history of reform in urban schools, it remains important to understand the totality of college as a discoursal tool. Even in schools with the harshest material conditions, college continues to be conceptualised as the great equaliser for improving the life chances of working-class black and brown students.

In the words of Richard Barth, CEO of KIPP schools (Knowledge is Power Program), "a college degree is the most proven engine of freedom that we have, and right now too few students have access to it" (Barth, 2014, p. 1). This narrative is braced by the organisational rhetoric of the school. For example, in a description of their program, KIPP understands their mission as "prepar[ing] students in underserved communities for success in college and life" (The Promise of College Completion, n.d., p. 1). It is worth noting here that "life" comes to be positioned as a subsidiary part of "success in college". The ontological mission of the student is directed within the institutional parameters of the school, and narrowly defined as being synonymous with the attainment of college. This remains important because when we narrowly understand what students 'are', it becomes far easier to define what students 'need' and subsequently what they 'become' within processes of schooling and economy.

Developing this critique is the work of Zachary Casey (2011) and his attention to the webs of value embedded within education. Beginning with the work of Marx (1990) before turning to Baudrillard's critique (1981), Casey (2011) positions Baudrillard's (1981) articulation of commodity fetishism as a force that "divorce[s]… actual human needs" from a system that constructs value in alignment with "the needs of the capitalist economy" (Casey, 2011, p. 79).

Framed another way, both use and exchange value become socially mediated in order to facilitate the optimal transaction of commodities; we learn the utility (and value) of an object as it engages and derives meaning from "social reality" and the "conditions that determine(d) that reality" (2011, p. 79).

For a paralleled example, we need not look further than the political economy of food production in the United States. As agriculture boomed in the mid-twentieth century, corn surpluses found themselves funneled into the mass production of high-fructose corn syrup, and a subsequent need for artificially sweetened beverages manifested in consumer markets (Brownell, 2004; Critser, 2004; Guthman and DuPuis, 2006). Following Casey (2011) and Baudrillard here (1981), the 'needs' of a contemporary economy reflect the demand for stratified funds of labor, along which value is formed in alignment with the educated, high wage, and highly profitable labor of the information, finance, and technology sectors. The subsequent production of 'needs' reflects this construction of value, erecting the demand for college as a totalising discoursal, cultural, and economic sign for what it means to achieve success, security, happiness, citizenship, general well-being, and so forth and so on.

Particularly, within the confines of education, the 'needs' of students, often understood as natural, necessary, and self-evident, become fundamentally destabilised by a critique that disrupts the ideological singularity of college-readiness. If student 'needs' are not objective, calculated assessments of what provides the best quality of life for students, but rather the "warp[ed]" (Casey, 2011, p. 79) needs of an economy extrapolated onto the lives of students, we come to an impasse in the purpose of schooling. As Casey writes:

> needs emerge as a concept in schooling because of the seemingly natural proclivity of needing an education. The value of such an education, however, is rarely elaborated in

> terms of the individual student in and of herself, but rather value is given to education because of the collective social good(s). (2011, p. 80)

As evidenced by the KIPP platform, there is little doubt over the centrality of college as one of these "collective social good(s)". From schools, to media, to the cultural significance a degree bestows, we understand college-readiness as synecdoche for larger, social success before understanding the actually existing implications of this project for individual students, communities, and emergent laborers.

It is within this space that the contradiction emerges; as discourse divests from reality, the totalising ideological effect of college-readiness can be felt as a naturalising force, overlaid atop the production of student' 'needs'. It tells us of the necessity for college while simultaneously channeling an economy that demands the profits of low-wage service labor; channeling what Hall (1981) has called "the popular" and what Williams (1978; 1983) understands as the "structure of feeling" in order to link the semiotics of college-as-survival. Notice how KIPP leverages this in the distillation of 'economic needs' into 'human needs':

> College graduates are more likely to earn more, vote more, volunteer more, hold onto their jobs, be healthier, and use public assistance less than people without a college degree. (The Promise of College Completion, n.d., p. 6).

By instrumentally defining the problem as a need for "more… more… more" (p. 6), college-readiness becomes the only potential solution to a social equation of dispossessing student/worker potentiality. Within this frame, the project of college-readiness generates student 'needs' that are incontrovertible; leveraged by the broad, existential anxiety of being human in a society that punishes the poor and erases the value of those who cook our food, care for our elderly,

operate our airports, deliver our mail, and provide the basic services upon which contemporary life is built.

Consequently, and with nothing less than the life of the student at stake, what becomes lost at the altar of student ‘needs’ is a sustained, critical engagement with the economic (material) practices forming education. The economic ‘need’ for service industry labor instrumentalises education, erasing alternative ways of working/learning and establishing college as the singular, hegemonic pathway for students.

It is in this way that the punishing schedules, scripted curriculums, and emotional surveillance of contemporary schooling can be understood as anything other than a direct inscription of the service industry labor process. With skills and proficiencies directly contradicting those required for success in college, I propose a simple, yet seemingly radical idea, that schools are functioning exactly as they are intended to, preparing labor commodities in alignment with the stratified ‘needs’ of an economy invested in the profits of low-wage, exploitable labor.

Emergent Thoughts on a Critical Consciousness in Education

Engaging the ideological obfuscation of production must become the work of scholars, practitioners, and activists concerned with critical interpretations of schooling, labor, and economy. In a culture struggling to reckon with the material shifts away from industrial capitalism, these interpretations hope to open cracks within the obfuscated social totality, and push practice towards a penetrative recognition of the materiality forming educational inequity.

This work fundamentally believes in schools as incubatory spaces for the emergence of “critical consciousness” (Freire, [1973] 2013), and argues for an engagement with the factors that would obfuscate that process. With an

acceptance of the fact that all education is already a political process, the work becomes both personal and structural, meaning that we have to find our own reasons to take a stance, to intervene; but at the same time we must look outwards from those experiences and theorise the ways in which schooling and schools can work to build a more insightful, just, and humanizing social world.

In the pursuit of that project, I first worked to better understand the emotional labor of service economies, looking towards the ways in which "character" has become a discursive and ideological tool for commodity production. This understanding of labor has allowed for the marketing of human dispositions as products of and for consumption. As a result, we have become comfortable in purchasing both the material product and the emotional response. This economic process, I argue, has reflected itself within the contemporary school's attention to "character". Emergent educational commodities learn through ongoing forms of surveillance that they should position their emotions, dispositions, and humanity in a way that aligns most fully with the specter of consumption. This is seen in the relation of teachers-students to managers-employees, as emergent commodities learn the service ethic of production, moving towards the projection of external qualities like "self-control, grit, and optimism" (Character Growth Card, n.d., p. 1).

I next engaged the history of Taylorism, illustrating the ways in which the school has been, and continues to be a site of production (Bobbit, 1913; c.f. Au, 2011). This history, as argued by Au, is imbedded within the processes of high-stakes testing and standardisation. Specifically, the establishment of numerical relations, scripted curricula, and decontextualised practitioners, works to imbed the Taylorist process within student's self-concept.

Further, this paper builds upon that foundation to argue that there remain requisite skills and abilities suitable to Taylorised work. The implementation of Taylorist curriculum is not just a means of assaulting democratic teacher education, but also a process of production that prepares students/workers for the transition into low-wage service work. That recognition necessitates a reconceptualisation of what qualifies as skilled-labor, as service workers learn to continually adjust action towards the parameters of a standard and understand their work-as-object.

I conclude by looking at the production of student 'needs', investigating the process by which consciousness is dislocated from the materiality of school and work. Targeting college-readiness, I theorise the ways in which "college" instrumentalises the stakes of schooling in order to blot out the productive process in education. That ideological effect allows us to accept, unquestioned, the merits of a system that "prepare[s] students in underserved communities" (The Promise of College Completion, n.d., p. 1) in radically different ways from their upper and middle class, white peers. Nowhere in the contemporary moment do we find a movement to reform the "character" of suburban public schools, or to script the curriculums of the U.S.' most prestigious private schools, yet "college" persists as a sort of obfuscatory film, masking the wide array of practices and policies differentially applied under the banner of college-readiness.

Recognising the obfuscatory power of college-readiness, and the neoliberal character of labor production, calls for a praxis grounded in the alternative possibilities of historicising education. For activists, practitioners, and researchers operating at the intersections of labor and education, contextualising the present, seemingly totalising ideologies of college-readiness, can allow for a re-embedding of the productive process within education. Grounding our work

within the multiplicitous forms of resistance exhibited by students, teachers, and workers offers insight through the thickets of ideology and towards the actually existing practices of education that Willis (1977) so rightfully understood as mirroring the fundamental contradictions of our time.

1Or has become an increasingly small proportion of the working-class under western, deindustrialized capitalism.

2See Willis' conversation in Kleijer & Tillekens (2003) on the development of "an ethnographically based post-structuralism" (p. 4).

3 By "feminized labor" I am referring to the oppressive gender relations that have historically governed labor. While an analysis of the gendered histories of work is beyond the present project, I will direct readers towards the field of critical black feminism for a more thorough investigation of gender and the ways it comes to form our ideas and practices on labor (Collins, 2008).

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