

(6), “unrivaled opportunities” (20), “ample opportunities” (22), “many opportunities” (34), “new opportunities” (32), and “endless opportunities” (35). In terms of academics, the brochure explains that students “can choose from among 37 concentrations” (7) and “can choose from among 53 certificates of proficiency” (9), but the individual choice seems almost secondary, since “[a]ny field you choose will teach you to think critically, solve problems, express yourself clearly” (6). Students can choose where they want to live, where they want to eat, which clubs they want to join; in short, they can “choose from a multitude of experiences” (37)

The rhetorical and ideological architecture of neoliberalism is thus certainly adopted, but only partially. While vocabulary from the semantic field of ‘creativity’—as described by Boltanski and Chiapello above—is frequently used (choice, freedom, flexibility, multiplicity, etc.), the materials eschew the language of corporate business, which is such an important part of the culture of neoliberalism: competition, efficiency, cost-effectiveness, supply and demand, etc. Princeton’s self-representation creates a new paradigm of elite education that merges traditional, liberal-humanistic notions of learning and self-fulfillment with the neoliberal frames and scripts described by Boltanski and Chiapello. This new paradigm, I want to suggest, reflects Princeton’s knowledge of its core audience: members of the upper and upper middle class, who value achievement and financial success, but at the same time betray a strong nostalgic penchant for college as a haven of learning and self-fulfillment in the tradition of liberal humanism.

#### 4. Epistemological Frames: Diversity, the Good Life, Community

The meritocracy of affect is embedded in and bolstered by three different epistemological frames that further mark and inform Princeton’s self-representation: the diversity paradigm, the notion of the good life, and the trope of community. These frames help to situate and actualize the meritocracy of affect, and alleviate the tension between elitism and egalitarianism. The three categories that form the core interest of my book—merit, class, and eliteness—are negotiated in particularly interesting ways in the context of these frames. Meritoriousness is the central implication of the diversity paradigm, but it is rarely made explicit; class or, more specifically, upper-classness is the central implication of the notion of the good life, but it is translated into a certain aesthetic and spatial experience; and eliteness, finally, is the central

implication of the trope of community—it is an elite community, after all, marked by exclusivity, excellence, and power—even though it is not explicitly articulated as such. The epistemological frames thus allow for the communication of different types of eliteness: academic eliteness in the context of the diversity paradigm, economic eliteness through the notion of the good life, and, finally, social eliteness in the frame of elite community building. In the following, I discuss all of these dynamics in more detail.

There are important ruptures in this self-presentation, however, which I also want to address. For each epistemological frame, I highlight a way in which it is undermined or challenged: First, the insinuation of class diversity that the brochure and other materials create is exposed as fraudulent when one considers the findings of the Equality of Opportunity Project. Second, the notion of the good life, which is aestheticized and thus de-politicized through the campus tours and the official staging of the campus space, is exposed as problematic by one of the newest additions to that campus, Whitman Hall, and the “obscene” wealth it represents (cf. Woodhouse). The trope of community, which Eisgruber creates in his speeches, and which assumes that differences of any kind dissolve into the singular and homogeneous identity of a Princetonian, is revealed as defective by the continued debates about the legacy of Woodrow Wilson at Princeton, as my reading of the building of the Wilson School demonstrates.

## Diversity

The cover of the 2001–2002 admissions brochure of the University of Wisconsin shows a group of students at a football game, appropriately clad in the red and white of their team, the Badgers. One of the students in the picture is black—Diallo Shabazz, a senior whose photo had been included in promotional materials time and again. This time, however, there was a crucial difference: Diallo had never actually been to a UW football game. University administrators had photoshopped his face into the original picture, thus manufacturing a fake image of diversity. Diallo Shabazz sued the University of Wisconsin and “asked that, in compensation, the University put aside money for *actual* diversity recruitment of minority students” (Wade). He won, and a total of ten million dollars was supposed to flow into diversity initiatives across campus—until the Governor “vetoed part of the earmark and many initiatives wore off without turnover” (ibid.).

For years, staging diversity has been a staple of college advertising. As Lisa Wade points out in an article about the Shabazz case, “we have a commodification of diversity”—racial and ethnic diversity is relatively easy to visualize and helps to sell an institution. In their attempts to capitalize on the notion of diversity, colleges—along with businesses, travel guides, and movie producers—do not shy away from fabricating what Wade calls “cosmetic diversity,” even if the reality of these institutions often speaks quite a different language. In a recent paper, aptly titled “We’ve Got Minorities, Yes We Do: Visual Representations of Racial and Ethnic Diversity in College Recruitment Materials,” a team of sociologists analyzed more than 10,000 photographs from 165 US colleges in order to assess the accuracy of the visual depiction of diversity in promotional materials. Their research shows that the institutions are “inaccurate in their symbolic representations of race and ethnicity,” both in the sense of over-representing minority students in general, and in over-representing black students specifically in comparison to, for instance, students of Asian descent (278). This misrepresentation, the researchers point out, can have very real consequences for students with minority backgrounds, who may find themselves in an environment that is much less diverse than anticipated.

### The Diversity Paradigm in Princeton’s Self-Representation

Princeton does not have a Photoshop scandal similar to that of the University of Wisconsin, but likewise relies heavily on the paradigm of diversity in its self-representation. A case in point is the section “Student Stories” in *Experience Princeton*, which features eight students, all of whom are marked as ‘diverse’ either visually (by the color of their skin), via their surnames (Hispanic, Asian, Indian), or through their own narratives. The only white student, a senior from Indiana, talks about her involvement with the LGBT center. This insistence on diversity is mirrored in the numerical presentation of facts about Princeton quoted in a previous section, which positions the national and ethnic diversity of the student body prominently, and insinuates socio-economic diversity by stating that more than half of all Princeton students receive financial aid. To showcase its commitment to diversity, Princeton furthermore created *Experience Princeton: Diverse Perspectives*, an additional publication meant to illustrate “how our community comes together.”

Our driving philosophy is to ensure an environment where you will be comfortable and challenged. We spend many months seeking students who will

help us build a community that is as diverse and intellectually stimulating as possible. Living and learning in such a rich cultural environment will transform your life. (1)

What is interesting about this publication is that it represents a broad understanding of diversity. In the article “Finding Her Niche,” for instance, student Lily Gellman explains that she is “queer, white and Jewish, and all those inform my worldview and my politics as well” (16). The brochure includes articles focusing on race and ethnicity (“Understanding the Impact of Race on Public Education” (36); “What Does It Mean to Be Asian American?” (9); “Multicultural Organizations and Campus Centers” (12)), but there are also some engaging with religion (“Being a Muslim at Princeton” (18)), regional and national background (“Testing My Texan Beliefs” (27); “Staying Engaged on Two Continents” (31), being a woman (“Breaking the Glass Ceiling” (51)), and how to cope with disabilities (“Building Bridges Between the Deaf and Hearing Communities” (11)).

Though it is arguably one of the central goals of the diversity paradigm to present the college as an institution committed to the ideals of equality, fairness, and social justice, it is not necessarily framed in that kind of rhetoric. Instead, there is a lot of emphasis on pleasure and enjoyment, and on how diversity contributes to a pleasant educational experience. The brochures also do not explicitly state that diversity has become a crucial part of the conception of merit, even though the college clearly views a student’s ‘diversity factor’ as an asset he or she brings to the institution. Meritoriousness, then, is a central theme in the subtext of diversity.

A particular focus of both brochures, in line with the Office of Communications’ mission to highlight Princeton’s financial aid policy, lies with students from low socio-economic status families. “I’m on full financial aid,” explains freshman Ricardo Diaz in *Experience Princeton*, before describing his daily routine, which neatly encapsulates the twin imperatives of endless opportunities and passionate intensity: “I decided once I came here I wanted to take full advantage of what’s offered. I’m involved with seven student organizations, run my own startup company, have three campus jobs and take four classes. [...] Princeton has been a dream come true for me” (20). Two other current students talk about their precarious financial backgrounds: Lukas Novak describes how he thought he would never be able to go to college at all, because “the money just wasn’t there”—until he received Princeton’s financial aid offer (47). Daniel Sprull likewise expresses his gratitude for how Princeton allowed

him to overcome the impossibilities of his background: “My family literally couldn’t pay anything for me to go to college. Not only am I here on a full aid package, but Princeton also helped me purchase a laptop, iPad and health care!” (49). Princeton’s diversity brochure likewise includes a number of articles focusing on the issue of class: “How to Prepare Low-Income Students for College” (14), “Ensuring the Affordability of a Princeton Education” (20), “From Newark’s Inner City to Princeton” (22), and, finally, a professor’s account of her own experiences: “Professor Sandra Bermann Reflects on Her First-Generation Journey” (25).

Combined with the nodal points opportunity, possibility, and passion, which I have described above, the rhetorical and narrative mobilization of the diversity paradigm indicates a twofold commitment to core American values: The ‘anything is possible’ narrative, on the one hand, signifies equality of opportunity and fairness, thus creating legitimacy for the institution. On the other hand, the ‘endless opportunities’ narrative alludes to choice and individual freedom and thus serves as a highly effective strategy of marketing and selling a product. As counter-discourses that aim to contradict the overall discourse of impossibility, the materials are free to talk about the institutions in a quasi-egalitarian way, one that implies that they fulfill their role as engines of mobility, as ‘great equalizers’. They can do so only because the markers of exclusivity needed to establish the elite status that is so important for these institutions’ success are manufactured elsewhere—in the “anxiety articles” and the rankings, for instance.

### Rupture: Class

The brochure also offers some statistics regarding class at Princeton: “The average grant for households with incomes up to \$65,000 covers 100% of tuition, room and board,” and “60% of undergraduates received aid in 2014-15,” and “83% of recent seniors graduated debt free” (21). In their polysemy, these numbers communicate different things to Princeton’s primary audience, upper- and upper-middle-class families. On the one hand, they offer reassurance about the financial burden of paying for a Princeton education—the institution’s financial aid policy is generous, consisting of grants rather than loans, and the majority of students are eligible. On the other hand, the fact that sixty percent of undergraduates receive financial aid seems to indicate a solid degree of socio-economic diversity, and the average grant for families with incomes up to \$65,000 sounds very generous. The inclusion of these numbers

achieves a similar effect as that of those indicating racial diversity; it reassures the reader of the general fairness of the admissions process, and emphasizes Princeton's efforts at addressing class-related issues, such as affordability.

And yet, if we compare these numbers to those published by the Equality of Opportunity Project discussed in the previous chapter, the image changes considerably. If 83 percent of recent seniors graduated from Princeton without any debt, it might be because 72 percent of Princeton undergraduates come from families in the top fifth of the income distribution (more than \$110,000 per year), and 17 percent—918 out of the 5,400 undergraduates—grew up in top one percent families, making about \$630,000 or more per year. The number of students receiving the full coverage because their families made less than \$65,000 (incidentally, a cutoff that is \$10,000 above the median income in the United States) is necessarily small, very likely smaller than that of students from the top one percent. Given the prominence given to matters of class and financial aid in the materials, the actual degree of socio-economic diversity at Princeton is so astoundingly small as to be almost negligible. The institution's emphasis on affordability points to a blind spot in its engagement with class-related issues, since an even bigger problem is that most students from low-income families are either disadvantaged through their lack of access to important educational resources, or they do not even come up with the idea of applying in the first place. In her aptly titled article "The Ivy League was another Planet," Clare Vaye Watkins compares the recruitment strategies of elite colleges with those of the military, and finds that the latter is far more successful in reaching out to students with low-income backgrounds. Elite colleges, by contrast, do not make much of an effort to make themselves known to students outside of their traditional clientele, meaning that, as Watkins points out, "even the most talented rural poor kids don't go to the nation's best colleges. The vast majority [...] do not even try."

To sum up: The diversity paradigm is one of the central frames in which the meritocracy of affect presents itself. Princeton is a multicultural space, it suggests, a space in which everyone can fulfill their dreams and aspirations in accordance with the guiding principles of the meritocracy of affect—flexibility, passion, collaboration. With regard to the central questions of this study, the diversity paradigm plays a particularly important role since it is the institution's primary means of negotiating the tension between elitism and egalitarianism. The insistence on diversity is meant to communicate that there is no discrimination against specific groups in the admissions process, im-

plying, in turn, that the admissions process is fair and rewards merit rather than privilege or other forms of capital. The very fact that this assumption still carries so much weight is another example of the merit fallacy. The emphasis on diversity is thus particularly important for those students who do not fall into the paradigm, since it assures them of the legitimacy of their own place at Princeton by suggesting that they gained access via a just process of selection.

### The Good Life

A recent promotional brochure published by Princeton University welcomes its students by explaining that “[a]t Princeton, you will study hard and play hard, in a beautiful place, where you will live well, eat well, and get the financial support you need” (*Experience Princeton*). At the center of the institution’s official self-conception, then, is a holistic notion of what the ‘Princeton experience’ entails: not only hard work and intellectual challenges, but a good life, full of extracurricular activities, friends, food, and fun. This notion is tied, inextricably, to the campus itself—the ‘beautiful place’—and it is consolidated and embellished rhetorically and performatively in a number of different ways and contexts. In this section, I explore the notion of the good life as the second epistemological frame that situates the meritocracy of affect in the self-representation of Princeton University.

I began this chapter with the premise that Princeton has to be many things to many people, and has to communicate different types of eliteness in different contexts and to different audiences. While the diversity paradigm revolves around the nodal points of meritoriousness and equal access, the notion of the good life reassures the parents of prospective students that their children are in good hands and that life at Princeton is governed by the same principles that govern their own: a life lived in a safe and beautiful place, offering pleasures for mind and body, without scarcity or need. In part, this emphasis on the good life can be seen as a response to the discourse of pathology I discussed earlier in this chapter.

In the following, I want to concentrate on the ways in which Princeton presents its campus as a means to communicate the notion of the good life to prospective applicants and their families. Building on a brief theoretical excursus on the practice of reading space, I discuss in some detail the meanings produced via the campus itself and campus tours, drawing on a tour I took in December 2015 as well as the so-called *Guide for Guides*, a publication

intended for student tour guides. In its official staging of the campus, I argue, Princeton translates the implications of upper-classness and wealth into an aestheticized spatial experience, informed by the beauty of the campus landscape and its architecture. In so doing, it communicates a form of social and economic eliteness that is absent from the instantiations of the diversity paradigm discussed earlier, and yet vital to its recruitment of solvent students. As I want to suggest in the concluding section, however, the frame of the good life has its limitations as well: I use one of the most recent additions to the campus, Whitman College, as a legible symbol of what Anthony Bianco has called the “dangerous wealth of the Ivy League.” Moreover, Princeton’s decision to build Whitman Hall in the style of Collegiate Gothic can be seen as problematic, suggesting that the university feels comfortable returning to an aesthetic tradition that echoes a history of imperialism, colonialism, and white supremacy.

### Theory: Reading Space

For reasons of scope and feasibility, the theorization of the practice of ‘reading space’ will necessarily be limited; nonetheless, I want to pause for a moment to briefly contextualize my approach. My interest in the role of place as a constitutive component of Princeton’s official practices of image cultivation is situated within the framework of what is commonly referred to as the ‘spatial turn’. The phrase describes a paradigm shift that has been recognized as such since the beginning of the 1990s, as the categories of space and place increasingly gained currency across several disciplines, among them cultural studies. The preoccupation with space can be traced further back as well, however; Michel Foucault diagnosed the shift from temporal to spatial concerns as early as 1967 in his lecture “Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias.” While “the great obsession of the nineteenth century was [...] history,” Foucault argued, the twentieth century “will perhaps above all be the epoch of space. We are in the epoch of simultaneity: we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed” (1997: 237). This sentiment is echoed by Mike Crang and Nigel Thrift, editors of the volume *Thinking Space* (1999), who assert confidently in their introduction that “[s]pace is the everywhere of modern thought. It is the flesh that flatters the bones of theory” (1).

In an article connecting the ‘spatial turn’ with the notion of textuality as it is employed in cultural studies, Jürgen Joachimsthaler stresses the importance

of reading space as a culturally inscribed and meaningful structure: “Kein Ort ist nur er selbst. In den Bewusstseinen ist Raum untrennbar verknüpft mit Sinnzuschreibungen, mentalen Repräsentationen, ‚Texten‘ aller Art, Lokalisierungen und lokalen Verknüpfungen von Bedeutung(en)” (247). Space is thus an integral part of the Weberian ‘webs of significance’ that constitute the realm of cultural experience. Drawing on the French philosopher Gaston Bachelard, Edward Said describes this appropriation of meanings as “a kind of poetic process” during which “space acquires emotional and even rational sense” and “the vacant or anonymous reaches of distance are converted into meaning for us here” (55). Sigrid Weigel, in her influential essay on what she calls the “topographical turn,” points out that space should no longer be thought of as that which “occasions events and their narration, but rather [as] a sort of text in itself whose signs or traces necessitate semiotic, grammatical, or archaeological decoding” (194). These three positions demonstrate that the production of meaning in and through space(s) can and has to be subjected to the same kind of analyses as other cultural formations—texts, practices, or artifacts.

The increased focus on spatial aspects does not mean, however, that one should disregard the temporal dimension. In the case of the Princeton campus, for instance, both the place itself and its discursive articulation have evolved, changed, and grown more complex in the course of the decades and centuries of the institution’s existence. The temporality of such a place causes meanings upon meanings to accumulate, displacing, contradicting, informing, and reinforcing one another. The issue of simultaneity raised by Foucault thus has to be accounted for: what does it mean for a place to exist in time and thus for different meanings to exist contemporaneously? In this context, Aleida Assmann’s notion of the city as palimpsest proves to be helpful, since it allows me to conceptualize the various layers of meaning coexisting in and through the collegiate space at Princeton:

Der Palimpsest ist eine philologische Metapher, die Parallelen zur geologischen Metapher der Schichtung aufweist. Die Architektur der Stadt lässt sich als geronnene und geschichtete Geschichte beschreiben und somit als ein dreidimensionaler Palimpsest aufgrund wiederholter Umformungen, Überschreibungen, Sedimentierungen. Wir können hier auch mit Reinhard Koselleck von „Zeitschichten“ sprechen. Die Formel von der Gleichzeitigkeit des Ungleichzeitigen gilt als paradigmatisch für die unterschiedlichen Schichten urbaner Bausubstanz. (18)

As I will argue in more detail below, the notion of the campus as a palimpsestuous structure can be implemented productively in a number of contexts, ranging from the different grand narratives about itself that Princeton is distributing to the meanings accruing from individual buildings.

It follows from this brief contextualization that space—understood as both physical structures themselves and the practices and experiences that make them meaningful—is more than just background or setting. Spatial configurations such as buildings, pathways, landscapes, and vacancies assume meanings that go above and beyond their mere utility; they can thus be read as one would read any other legible system of signification. A place like the Princeton campus moreover becomes meaningful not only when it is experienced immediately but also through its various representations and discursive manifestations; both dimensions will figure in my discussion of the institution's utilization of space below.

### 'An One-Hour View of Paradise': Elite Spaces and the Good Life

Princeton's campus is open to the public; anyone interested can simply walk around the college grounds and have a look. Close to 50,000 visitors annually—primarily prospective students and their families, but also “retirees, foreign travelers, job applicants, nostalgic alumni” (Maynard 2009)—choose a more structured approach to experiencing the place by taking a student-led campus tour. In the professionalized machinery of college advertising, campus tours play an increasingly important role by presenting the institution, along with its facilities and resources, and allowing prospective applicants and their families to meet current students and catch a glimpse of their daily lives on campus. Since the majority of candidates from well-to-do families tend to apply to at least a handful of schools, and tend also to visit most of them, guided campus tours have become an important means of communication for elite educational institutions. So important, in fact, that universities and colleges can now book private consulting firms to optimize their tours in the hopes of boosting application numbers. Journalist Jacques Steinberg, who has written extensively on elite education, refers to the “remaking of the campus tour” as “the latest development in the pitched competition among colleges to woo the most talented applicants” (2009).

In 2006, Princeton officials, aware of the importance of attractive and persuasive campus tours, responded by moving Orange Key, the student organization responsible for the guided tours, from University Services to the Office

of Admissions in an attempt to streamline the university's concerted efforts at presenting itself to the public (cf. Maynard 2009). According to the university website, Orange Key Tours are an enjoyable as well as informative way of familiarizing oneself with the college; they are led, after all, "by student volunteers who enthusiastically share their love and knowledge of Princeton" ("Orange Key Tours"). Prospective applicants and their families are interested not only in the academic resources an institution has to offer, but also in the everyday life of current students, in social activities, and the general flair that characterizes the campus. The more direct and unfiltered their access appears, the more likely they are to be convinced by the information given. Participants can choose among a number of guides who introduce themselves briefly before starting the tour in order to ensure that everyone feels comfortable. With regard to the institutional self-presentation, it is vital that the members of Orange Key represent the diverse student community and thus communicate to prospective applicants Princeton's commitment to diversity and inclusion. In this and in other respects, the organization caters to the needs and desires of its 'customers', and has long done so: When the Campus Guide Service, as it was then called, was founded in 1932, two out of the three original members hailed from the South, so as to appeal to Southern applicants. Today, in turn, guides are expected to "represent the panoply of a transformed student body," as Maynard puts it (2009)—the college's commitment to the diversity paradigm thus extends beyond the brochures and videos.

Princeton particularly prides itself on Orange Key because unlike its equivalents at Harvard and Yale, Princetonian tour guides work on a voluntary basis and are not paid for their efforts. This, members claim, enables them to speak freely and without official interference about the Princeton experience: "What we say is from the heart and not regulated in any way," as one guide puts it (quoted in Maynard 2009). The objective of the tours, according to the guides themselves, is thus not only to welcome people to campus and introduce them to Princeton, but to "give students a realistic vision of the University, to decide if they should expend the time, effort, and money to apply" (tour guide quoted in Maynard 2009). This gesture of establishing authenticity is a crucial aspect of Princeton's self-presentation; advertising, after all, is always more likely to be successful if the endorsement is perceived to be honest, heartfelt, and independent.

Orange Key tours draw on the so-called *Guide for Guides*,<sup>5</sup> an eighty-page publication that describes itself as “the atlas of significant places, the encyclopedia of legends and lore, and the Bible of trivia for Princeton University” (Kogler 5). The *Guide* includes relevant information on architecture and history, sample tours, and a collection of questions frequently asked by participants. Several times, the “important responsibilities” of Orange Key guides are emphasized; since the guides may be the only Princeton students prospective applicants meet and talk to, their experiences during the tour “may generate their lasting perception of Princeton” (*ibid.*) and thus play a vital role in their decision-making process. In addition to asking the guide to dress appropriately and “save the gym shorts, ratty jeans and bare feet for another time” (Kogler 8), the pamphlet also points out that “the best tours are informative, entertaining and fun,” qualities which “come naturally if you just let your enthusiasm for Princeton shine through” (Tan 2). Guides are expected to perform a form of affective labor in the name of their alma mater.

The *Guide for Guides* provides fairly specific suggestions for the route to take along campus, and while the individual guides are “allowed to modify the route to their liking,” they are at the same time “discouraged from taking tour groups south of the Frist Campus Center to the more recently constructed parts of campus” (tour guide quoted in Lian). The usual tour starts out at Clio Hall, walks past Nassau Hall and Alexander Hall to the famous Blair Arch, then via the Dillon Gym to the Wilson School, pausing at the monumental Chapel and at Firestone Library, and going past East Pyne Hall before returning to Clio. Each stop is used to address aspects of the Princeton experience—academics, social life, sports, campus activities, and others. Aspects that are stressed are the excellence of the faculty, the vastness of the resources available to Princeton students, the university’s global reach, and the strength of the campus community and the resulting alumni network.

If the typical Orange Key tour, then, encourages a distinct reading of the place, it does so not only by selecting the information given at any point during the tour but also by selecting the very route itself. Orange Key does not provide its participants with a genuinely comprehensive experience of the place, but instead with an elliptical one—an experience that is carefully orchestrated to maximize certain impressions and minimize others. The resulting spatial experience, I want to suggest, revolves around the notion of

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5 I have had access to several versions of the *Guide* in the archives at Princeton.

the good life—the quality of the food, the beauty of the built environment, the abundance of opportunities to find self-fulfillment.

In a recent article in the *Princeton Alumni Weekly*, Maynard describes the work of Orange Key as offering an “hour-long view of paradise” (2009). While this may be a hyperbole of sorts, Princeton’s campus is indeed beautiful, and reliably makes the countless lists of the most attractive campuses across the US. Princeton, through Orange Key, presents visitors with a place that is characterized first and foremost by harmony and coherence; the tour creates the seamless experience of an aesthetically consistent space without undue disruptions. The few spatial features that could be perceived as disruptive due to their style or position strengthen rather than undermine the coherence of their surroundings. The purpose of this selective approach to staging the campus space seems to be an avoidance of dissonance in terms of both style and substance. Creating a place that is beautiful and makes sense to those traversing it, this spatial practice reflects the visitors’ expectations and desires, and it is not a stretch to assume that it makes prospective applicants want to claim it as their own.

The Princeton campus is not only beautiful and coherent, however; it is also compact and composed, a place that suggests shelter and safety. The semi-open courtyards signify community and belonging while at the same time denoting privacy and discretion. The neatness and cleanliness of the paths and gardens indicates that this is a place populated by neat and clean people. This dimension of spatial communication is particularly important when one takes into account that it is not only prospective students that Princeton wants to woo; it is their parents, as well. Parents who, more often than not, are the ones to pay the steep tuition bills and thus want to be assured that they leave their children not only to receive an excellent education but also to live in a safe and pleasant environment.

Despite these dominant characteristics the campus does not, as one might assume, seem boring. Marked by two centuries of history and development, the Princeton campus is an organically grown web of buildings, paths, and landscaped areas; its layout does not immediately reveal itself to the observer. In fact, a sense of mild disorientation prevails during the first visits, but because the place is well groomed, lovely, and safe, this disorientation is enticing rather than disconcerting—there remains room for exploration, discovery, surprise. This also means that it takes time and a little effort to fully familiarize oneself with the place, thus offering a process of spatial initiation, of sorts, to each incoming freshman class. The element of pleasurable

mystification is moreover mirrored in the discursive renditions of the place in the promotional materials I discuss below. Here, the campus is repeatedly referred to as a ‘magical place’ with spiritual qualities.

What, then, is the overall spirit of the place presented during the Orange Key tours? In the section of the campus featured during the guided tours, Princeton exhibits a moderate degree of architectural diversity within an overarching frame of aesthetic coherence. When Nassau Hall was completed in 1756, then-president of the college, Aaron Burr, Sr., explained proudly that it had been built “in the plainest and cheapest manner, as far as is consistent with decency and convenience, having no superfluous ornaments” (quoted in Maynard 2012: 13). It is safe to say that this notion of humility and thrift no longer characterizes the spatial spirit at Princeton. On the contrary, while the place is undeniably charming and attractive—even, as some would have it, “exhilarating” (Maynard 2009)—it is at the same time certainly imposing. With regard to the size and aesthetics of most of its landmark buildings, the place first and foremost bespeaks the institution’s enormous wealth, and quite ostentatiously so, as recent additions such as Whitman College, discussed in detail below, demonstrate. The humility and practicality invoked by Burr is a thing of the past.

Interestingly, none of the three central categories on which I focus in this study is addressed or mobilized to any great extent. While the ethnic and racial diversity of the student body as well as the gender dynamics are mentioned briefly, there is no discussion of socio-economic factors. While ‘excellence’ is a dominant feature of the self-description, ‘selectivity’ or ‘exclusivity’ are not emphasized. And lastly, while both academic and extracurricular activities are discussed at length, potential competitiveness is played down, and the characteristics of admitted students are not really a topic of discussion. Major parts of the Southern and Eastern campus are left unexplored; the issues identified as controversial by Liz Lian in her critical article about Orange Key Tours—those that guides are expected not to “get into:” sex, alcohol, stratification, and the subpar accommodations in some of the residential colleges—are not addressed.

It is no surprise that the tour guides leave out or de-emphasize certain facets of the Princeton experience and certain parts of the campus in the interest of creating an overall attractive image of the university. After all, the tours are intended not only to inform but also to convince, and to prompt prospective applicants to become actual students. Not all guides feel entirely comfortable with this practice, however; one tour guide explains that until

she became more familiar with the college, she “didn’t realize how much we commodify [...] and sell Princeton” (cf. Lian). She claims that even though the Office of Admissions does not “outright say stretch the truth and bend it,” the guides are expected to “manipulat[e] the material of Princeton to sell the product of Princeton” (ibid.).

### Spiritual Meanings and the Power of Place

In addition to the actual experience of the physical space during the campus tours, the epistemological frame of the good life is also actualized in a number of discursive renditions of the campus space. Princeton’s official Youtube channel, for instance, features a number of videos that dramatize the campus; place figures prominently in the longest introductory video, “Experience Princeton,” which consists mainly of various impressions of the campus, and place is the main protagonist in shorter films such as “Summer Scenes Unfold on Princeton’s Campus” or “Fall Color Transforms the Princeton Campus.” The cinematography and the selection of the buildings shown mirrors the aesthetic paradigm of coherence, harmony, and beauty I have outlined in the last section. In *Experience Princeton*, President Eisgruber describes the significance of the campus as follows:

An intense love for Princeton’s campus is one of the most powerful bonds shared by students and alumni—myself included. Students are awed by the majestic vistas, inspired by the historic footprints, and embraced by the warm living and learning spaces found throughout our campus. This is truly a magical place. (“Experience Princeton” 14)

Framed by a number of different visual impressions of the campus, this statement touches upon several dimensions of meaning. According to Eisgruber, students are “awed,” “inspired,” and “embraced” by the collegiate space, its landscaped courtyards, its architecture and art. His description is rendered in the rhetoric of the sublime, and thus bespeaks not only the aesthetic qualities of the place but also its power, majesty, energy, and strength (cf. Novak 29-30). Oscillating between the closeness of being embraced and the distance of awe, this bespeaks a strikingly emotional, perhaps even spiritual relationship between people and place. Eisgruber’s description furthermore concisely summarizes the pillars upon which Princeton’s self-conception rests: history and tradition, community and communality, authority and excellence. All of these qualities, the brochure suggests, are reflected in and generated by the physical presence of the university. The interplay of the sublime, historical

significance, and the affective bonds it inspires is what turns the Princeton campus into a place that exhibits a very particular kind of charisma—“a *magical place*” (my emphasis).

The topographical approach and the evocation of spiritual meanings are echoed in Toni Morrison’s aptly titled “The Place of the Idea; The Idea of the Place,” a speech delivered at Princeton’s 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary convocation in 1996. Morrison launches her speech by articulating her hope “that those of us gathered here by simple love of the place and allegiance to its mission would be receptive to some meditation on genius loci—the ‘spirit of the place’—Wordsworth’s eloquent use of the conceit that certain sites, natural sites, held genii which ‘spoke’ to the contemplative passerby.” Here, too, the collegiate space is presented as one that is loaded with meaning, or, to use Morrison’s words, “redolent with the breath of the emotional life lived here and the intellectual life made manifest here.” The campus itself plays a vital part in binding institutional, national, and personal concerns and bridging past, present, and future, as Morrison explains: “The place of the idea represents the value of tradition, of independence; the idea of the place is its insightful grasp of the future.” The buildings, the gardens, the art—the entire physical fabric of the university—thus figure prominently in the institution’s self-presentation, and in the story Princeton tells us about itself.

In attributing spiritual meanings to the campus, Eisgruber and Morrison can be seen as emblematic of the ways in which the institution and its affiliates make sense of the place. The collegiate space thus provides a physical and symbolical center for those affiliated with the school. Current and former students, administrators, and professors alike have traversed and marked this space, and many of them return regularly for a variety of events. Perhaps the most significant example of this is the continued success and popularity of Princeton’s annual Reunions Weekend, which attests to the “intense love” the institution inspires in its graduates. Once a year, on a weekend in early summer, 25,000 Princetonians convene to march in the so-called P-Rade, dressed entirely in orange and black, and celebrate each other and their alma mater. It is not surprising, then, that among its elite peers, Princeton boasts the most loyal alumni crowd. This is reflected not only in the \$60 million donated to Princeton during the Annual Giving Campaign 2014/15, but also in the annual giving rates, which at roughly 60% reliably beat those of comparable institutions by a landslide—Harvard, for instance, only has 19%. The power of place, I argue, is harnessed to create ties that bind, and the emotional attachments

thus formed are translated easily into the less sentimental terms of philanthropic giving.

In striking a balance between the storied past and the dynamic present, Orange Key tours have over the years proven to be a very successful element in Princeton's self-presentation machine. Harold Dodds, former Princeton president, captures this success poignantly when he states that "[t]hese undergraduates are our best ambassadors" (quoted in Maynard 2009). The epistemological frame of the good life, as it is created through the campus tours, has implications the brochures would never openly acknowledge: In complete contrast to the diversity paradigm, the notion of the good life promises homogeneity and cohesion, and in particular socio-economic homogeneity and cohesion. The campus space and all its attendant qualities—harmony, beauty, sublimity, safety, pleasure—are physical expressions of the institution's wealth, and of the wealth of its community. Upper-classness is not something Princeton would overtly advertise, but it certainly plays an important role in the recruitment of students. The staging of the campus space as the locus of the good life functions as a tacit means of communicating this upper-classness to the respective audiences.

### Rupture: The Spectacle of Wealth at Princeton, or: 'The House that Ebay Built'

In 1977, Margaret Cushing Whitman, called Meg, graduated from Princeton with a bachelor's degree in economics. She went on to receive an M.B.A. from Harvard and, ultimately, became the CEO of Ebay, turning the "small U.S.-focused Internet trading site [into] a global marketplace with 42 million registered users" in the process ("Meg Whitman"). In 2002, Meg Whitman, by now a Princeton trustee and member of the board's Executive Committee, pledged \$30 million toward the construction of a new residential college, to be named after her. In a statement, she explained that she "had a great time as a Princeton undergraduate" and that she is "pleased [...] that my gift will benefit the University for years to come" (ibid.). Whitman College was completed in 2007 and caused something of a stir within the university community and beyond. After "a very hefty debate" (Whitman quoted in Maynard 2012: 233), the trustees had decided to build the new complex in the style of Collegiate Gothic, even though it would be more expensive, not to mention anachronistic. Noted traditionalist architect and Princeton alumnus Demetri Porphyrios, who had done similar work at Oxford, if on a decidedly smaller scale, was

commissioned to design the buildings; construction began in 2004. Unlike other such 'retro' projects, however, Whitman College was not only meant to look Gothic, but to actually be built according to its principles, as Maynard explains:

In what Porphyrios calls a remarkable 'renaissance (on American soil) of traditional construction', the one-and-a-half-foot thick walls were all masonry, without a steel skeleton. [...] Against a backing of cement block, seventy-seven workmen laid six thousand tons of facing stone, 150,000 blocks total. Great care was taken in hiring talented masons (over 250 applied) and in erecting twenty wall-mockups. In imitation of the old Princeton stone, five types of fieldstone that resemble it were quarried in New York and Pennsylvania. (2009)

Whitman College is a physical expression of the epistemological frame of the good life: beautiful, luxurious, and a lasting emblem of Princeton's insistence on giving its students the best that money can buy. In fact, Whitman College can be seen as an escalation, almost a caricature of this notion—in terms of its aesthetics and its costs, then, the building also represents a stumbling block in this epistemological frame by exposing its covert commitment to class homogeneity and its indifference toward the more problematic aspects of its history, exemplified in the use of the collegiate gothic.

Not surprisingly, responses to the completed buildings varied. Meg Whitman, whose "fondest memories" of her time at Princeton include having lived in Blair and Holder Halls, was very happy with the result, as were university officials. Architecture critic Catesby Leigh likewise praises Princeton's audacity: "The fact remains that a rich institution has placed a huge bet on a truly unconventional vision, and by and large the bet paid off. Whitman College provides Princetonians with ample cause for celebration, and it's well worth a visit from architecture aficionados of all stylistic proclivities." Praise also came from the home of the Gothic, when English architecture critic Ellis Woodman stated that "Princeton University's new Whitman College uses the American collegiate gothic with such skill it makes modernism pale in comparison" (quoted on the website of Porphyrios Associates).

Not everyone agreed that Whitman College "will stand as an exemplar for the future and as an indictment of the recent past" of modernist architecture, as *Traditional Building* concludes (quoted in Maynard 2012: 235). Among the most vocal critics was MIT's former dean of architecture, William Mitchell, who called the entire project "silly" and "stultifying," and argued that it signi-

fied “an astonishing lack of interest in architecture’s capacity to respond innovatively and critically to the conditions of our own time and place” (quoted in Bernstein, “Dorm Style”). Architect Frank Gehry, who designed the stylistically antithetical science library that was completed around the same time, showed himself surprised that “a forward-looking institution would go mucking around in the past” (quoted in Bernstein, “One Campus”). Stephen Kliment found the most drastic words of criticism when he called Whitman “deflowered Gothic” and “a sad effort at compromise between full-fledged Gothic, and Modernism” (quoted in Maynard 2012: 235).

Leaving aside for a moment these valid, if conflicting, positions on the (in)adequacy of traditionalist architecture in the twenty-first century, the question remains what Princeton wants to communicate through Whitman Hall. The institutional reasons for building another residence hall were Princeton’s desire to increase its student body and to introduce a new form of housing that would allow students from all classes, including graduate students, to live, work, and play together. Commenting on the news of Meg Whitman’s impending donation, then-president Shirley Tilghman explained: “The changes set in motion by this gift will allow Princeton to strengthen the educational experience of undergraduates in a number of ways and will permit us to expand and enhance the residential college system, which is at the heart of student life” (“Meg Whitman”). But why did Princeton choose to build the new college in the style of Collegiate Gothic? Which meanings does the institution generate about itself through this new spatial configuration?

Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, Princeton trustee and dean of the University of Miami School of Architecture, explains that one of the major reasons for the decision was that the historic parts of campus were growing smaller in relation to the modern parts. The university community, and especially the students themselves, were concerned that Princeton would lose parts of its identity. The decision to re-activate the Collegiate Gothic was thus seen as a consciously compensatory attempt to “expand the historical image of the place,” as Plater-Zyberk puts it, to strengthen institutional identity and emphasize continuities of style and mission. Edward Tenner, historian of science and Princeton alumnus, summarizes the attractiveness of Collegiate Gothic for the Princeton community as follows: “I can see Whitman as a way to affirm something students really want [...]. Other schools also have great professors, great teams—what we have here is tradition. Whitman emphatically says ‘Princeton’” (quoted in Maynard 2012: 253). What, then, does it mean for Whitman College, in its Gothic aestheticism, to “emphatically say[] Princeton”?

Architecturally, Collegiate Gothic is indeed the most continuously dominant style found on campus, in particular in those sections that are subject to the Orange Key tours I have described above. Drawing on “paradigms in Oxford and Cambridge” (Kidder Smith 311), the style became popular in the late nineteenth century, reflecting an attempt “to return to the traditions of medieval humanism and learning” (ibid.). Most of Princeton’s famous buildings—Blair Hall, the Graduate College, the Chapel, Firestone Library, and Dillon Gym—follow the aesthetic imperatives of the style. The late nineteenth-century shift to Collegiate Gothic was no coincidence, in fact, but part of a carefully orchestrated effort at institutional self-positioning; Princeton trustees “mandated that the Collegiate Gothic style alone was to be used for all future construction” (Coulson et al. 103). This aesthetic change “belonged to a period of institutional reinvention” that began when the College of New Jersey gained full university status and became Princeton University. The period of intense building activity that followed, and the aesthetic paradigm that dominated this activity signified a “heightened self-confidence and a desire to proclaim its scholastic prowess and stature” (Coulson et al. 103).

The decision to coordinate all future development along the aesthetic lines of Collegiate Gothic was part of the institution’s efforts to change its outward appearance to better match its new institutional identity. Ralph Adams Cram, the leading architect responsible for the transformation, “sought to liberate Princeton from what he described as its ‘pleasure park’ appearance, a random coalition of buildings of varied styles and little cohesion, and transform it into a coherent entity unified both in its architecture and layout” (Coulson et al. 103). Tilghman defended the use of Collegiate Gothic as a return to a path of coherence and allegiance to an architectural expression of the values that mark a scholarly community:

Some may argue that a cutting-edge research university with a distinguished School of Architecture should be promoting modern architectural forms, just as we encourage new kinds of scholarship and research. But from my perspective, the language of Collegiate Gothic architecture has endured since the Middle Ages for a reason. Its beauty and solidity evoke quiet contemplation and seriousness of purpose, while its imaginative flourishes and interconnected yet separate spaces reflect the individuality and solidarity to be found within a community of scholars. (4)

Demetri Porphyrios, the architect responsible for Whitman College, emphasized that it is not only a matter of style and aesthetics, but also one of sub-

stance and longevity: A “modernist building envelope is designed to fail and must be replaced in fifteen to twenty years; whereas, the stone masonry wall will have a life of 300 years and upwards” (quoted in Tilghman 4).

There are two ways to read the use of Collegiate Gothic at twenty-first-century Princeton that go beyond criticizing its architectural or aesthetic trajectory. One is to take a look at the semantics of the style and the cultural work its implementation in the American context performs. Wilson’s reasoning for supporting Gothic was that it signified “the historic traditions of learning in the English-speaking race” (quoted in Kemeny 137). For an American university to use this style, then, was to implement an architectural language that promised legitimacy and authenticity, or, as Paul Fussell puts it: “Deeply engraved on the American consciousness is the superstition, abundantly visible in the Gothic flourishes of our university architecture, that institutions of the higher learning are the more authentic the more they allude to their two great British originals” (73). Wilson’s statement also demonstrates something else, however, namely that the Collegiate Gothic is a style that is comfortably situated within a tradition of Anglo-Saxon dominance, and echoes a long history of imperialism, colonialism, and white supremacy. Architect Henry N. Cobb thus argues poignantly that Wilson’s rationale, “with its overtones of culturally arriviste insecurity, class-consciousness, and racial superiority would seem grotesquely dated and out of place in today’s university” (quoted in Maynard 2012: 137). Porphyrios and others hold against such criticism that “Wilson’s reading of the Collegiate Gothic need not be ours today” and that the style is meant to evoke the intellectual tradition of the universities of Great Britain rather than its imperialist program. But these problematic aspects remain written into the aesthetic language of Collegiate Gothic; they cannot simply be erased from its semiotic structure. One way of reading Princeton’s neo-Gothic buildings, then, is as a renewed visualization of the institution’s commitment to its past, including the racism and sexism that were part of it.

A second and complementary way of reading Whitman College and its meanings for Princeton’s institutional identity is through the lens of cost. Princeton spent a total of \$136 million on the project; fifteen percent more than it would have on a modern structure. The triple-glazed mahogany windows made from leaded glass and other such amenities resulted in a price of roughly \$272,000 per bed—more than twice as much as colleges usually pay for housing, as Bernstein points out (“Dorm Style”). Anthony Bianco thus calls Whitman College “a billionaire’s mansion in the form of a dorm” and argues poignantly that its “extravagance epitomizes the fabulous

prosperity of America's top tier of private universities." In its monumental, anachronistic, and imposing physical presence, then, Whitman College does not merely conjure up visions of humanistic education and sober scholarly pursuits. Nor does it only mobilize markers of imperialist exploitation and pseudo-scientific claims to racial superiority. Whitman College also signifies Princeton's immense wealth. It can thus serve as proxy for the "fabulous prosperity" (Bianco) of elite colleges and universities and, by extension, points to the plight of the severely underfunded public schools struggling to make ends meet. Bianco argues in this context:

However, the increasingly plush Ivy Plus model casts into sharp relief the travails of America's public institutions of higher learning, which educate 75% of the country's college students. While the Ivies, which account for less than 1% of the total, lift their spending into the stratosphere, many public colleges and universities are struggling to cope with rising enrollments in an era when most states are devoting a dwindling share of their budgets to higher ed.

The buildings that make up Whitman College thus point toward blind spots in Princeton's self-representation by serving as embodiments of class-conscious elitism and its attendant socio-cultural costs. They thus point to the economic foundations of the good life and reveal the necessity of wealth to guarantee its continued upkeep. In so doing, Whitman College articulates what otherwise remains implicit in Princeton's self-representation: that eliteness is almost always underwritten by affluence, and that the institution is as committed to courting economic and social elites as it is to academic excellence.

## Community

In March 2013, Susan Patton '77 published a letter in the *Daily Princetonian*, titled "Advice for the Young Women of Princeton: The Daughters I never had." She describes how she learned, from many conversations with current and former students, that female Princetonians are more interested in talking about dating and friendship than about their professional careers, and promptly encourages her metaphorical daughters to "[f]ind a husband before you graduate." The older a woman gets, Patton cautions her readers, the smaller the pool of suitable husbands becomes—men regularly marry younger women, after all, while women rarely marry younger men. This predicament is particularly dire for female Princeton students, who by virtue

of being just that have “almost priced [themselves] out of the market.” During their time on campus, however, they are “surrounded by this concentration of men who are worthy” and thus, Patton recommends, should make good use of it.

Patton's letter provoked a range of responses, marked overwhelmingly by varying degrees of outrage, first in the *Daily Princetonian* itself but eventually in major national news outlets such as *The New York Times*, *The Huffington Post*, and *The Washington Post*. Despite the vocal criticism, however, Patton remained adamant and shortly thereafter published *Marry Smart: Advice for Finding the One* (2014), a book-length version of her initial letter. On the cover of her book and in most of the headlines it inspired, Patton is identified as ‘The Princeton Mom’, in reference to the maternal gesture of her initial intervention and her elite addressees. In her various public appearances, she frequently presented herself clad in Princeton's trademark orange and black, thus unmistakably appropriating her alma mater's name and iconography in her self-marketing.

A few months later, Patton again made the headlines with a number of provocative statements about date rape, which she alternately referred to as “a clumsy hookup drama” and a “learning experience” (Gillman). Understandably, not all Princetonians agreed; a group of more than one hundred alumni published an open letter distancing themselves from Patton's view and criticizing her use of Princeton regalia: “The wider world continues to see this woman dressed in orange and black associating her out-of-touch personal beliefs with our alma mater. We—along with many other alumni—see these views as outrageous and unworthy of being associated with Princeton” (“Date Rape”). Through her appropriation of the institution's name and colors, Patton's statements seemed to communicate something about Princeton; the outrage this caused within the university community turned the letter and the book—neither of which were particularly original in their line of argumentation—into a full-scale controversy that spurred publicity and sales. Patton's arguably strategic utilization of her connection with a famous elite university thus proved to be as successful for her as it was problematic for Princeton.

The Patton controversy represents a minor rupture in the last epistemological frame I want to discuss in this chapter: the notion of community. This frame is especially important in the context of generating loyalty and affection among graduates, which in turn are needed to secure generous donations and other kinds of involvement. The social capital and network structures the university is known for are likewise closely related to this frame. The trope of community is particularly prevalent in the writings and speeches

of Princeton's president, Christopher L. Eisgruber, which will form the core of my analysis in this section. The rhetoric of belonging and togetherness is furthermore put into practice quite effectively by means of a number of recurring collective rituals that structure the school year and engage the entire Princeton community: Opening Exercises, Commencement and Graduation, and, most importantly, Alumni Weekend. These formalized festivities constitute an integral part of the college's intra-institutional epistemology and of the ways in which the community makes sense of itself.

The elite community provides the social frame in which the meritocracy of affect can unfold. Eisgruber uses hyper-affective and dynamic language along with a set of rhetorical modes I discuss in detail below, and in so doing creates a quasi-spiritual framework of institutional self-conceptualization. In conjunction with the ritualistic practices of celebration mentioned above, this manner of self-making instills a strong sense of belonging and affiliation with the institution in those who participate in it. Princeton, students are told over and over again, is not merely a place of learning and research; it is a charismatic institution with ontologically transformative powers. In the course of their four years within its walls, students will change not only with regard to their minds or skills, but will be transformed entirely and, ultimately, become 'Princetonians'. In line with this framing, the dominant mode of self-representation is a surplus logic: Princeton is always 'more than...'. This notion creates an elusive and almost mythical factor of distinction that sets Princeton apart, at least in the minds of the community.

In some ways, these dynamics are not specific to Princeton, nor even necessarily to elite universities. Many colleges capitalize on the trope of community in order to bind graduates to their alma mater and thus ensure long-term involvement, financial and otherwise. A crucial difference, however, lies in the specific institutional assets that are mobilized in these processes. Whereas a large state university might rely heavily on its football team to create cohesion and identification, Princeton draws on its history, its prominence and involvement in the process of nation-making, its excellence in research, the tightness of its community, and the overall influence its graduates command in all kinds of contexts. Princeton's efforts at self-creation are thus rooted, fundamentally, in its eliteness: in its exclusivity, its excellence, and its power. The trope of community furthermore implies that the different types of eliteness that come together in a place like Princeton—academic, social, financial, and cultural—merge into one.

In his speeches, Eisgruber thus creates a notion of an all-encompassing community that dissolves all difference into a cohesive identity as Princetonian. Meritoriousness is not articulated explicitly but assumed as a common point of departure. Important markers of cultural, social, and economic structuration and stratification—class, for instance—are not acknowledged at all. Despite its professed celebration of difference, then, Princeton expects the members of its community to privilege their ‘Princetonianness’ over their other identity affiliations. As I show below, however, there are ruptures in this frame that go beyond largely trivial cases such as the Patton controversy: A closer look at another building, the one that houses the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs, reveals it as the center of debates that challenge and destabilize the notion of a homogeneous elite community. Princeton’s commitment to honoring Wilson’s legacy prominently and permanently in its very physical fabric is seen by student activists as emblematic of the continuous problem of racism on campus and the institution’s failure to adequately address it. The meritocracy of affect, which assumes an attitude of post-racial color-blindness toward the issue of race at Princeton, is exposed as fraudulent through these dynamics.

### Elite Community Building

In line with what I have written about the meritocracy of affect so far, Eisgruber frames his conception of the Princeton community in a language that is both dynamic and affective. This is not a rhetoric of rigid hierarchies and relentless competition, but one that mobilizes the tropes of flexibility, creativity, warmth, and movement. The Princeton campus, then, is not a quiet community of solitary scholars, on the contrary; it “buzzes with fresh energy, high hopes, and dazzling possibilities.” Movement, energy, and transformation characterize life and work on campus, and the underlying conception of excellence, as I show in more detail below, is not exclusively or even primarily intellectual. The Princeton experience, accordingly, captures the individual whole, touching her mind, body, and spirit.

The relationship between students and professors is similarly conceptualized not in the framework of utilitarian knowledge transmission, but rendered in a language of spiritual guidance and intellectual awakening. Professors at Princeton, Eisgruber claims, transform their students’ lives: They “fire their imaginations, dispel their misconceptions, explode their prejudices, stir their spirits and guide their passions.” These phrases neatly exemplify the af-

fective and dynamic language Eisgruber uses—teachers at Princeton do not merely teach, they ‘fire’, ‘explode’, and ‘stir’, and their work does not merely affect students minds, but their ‘imagination’, ‘spirits’, and ‘passions’. Fittingly, the four years of undergraduate education are described not as a period of hard work and sacrifice—as they often are in public discourse—but in a rhetoric of affection and love: “While you are here,” Eisgruber tells incoming students, “you will have extraordinary opportunities to do what you love and to explore passions new and old—passions for ideas, for the arts, for service, for athletic competition, for spiritual growth, for what matters most to you.” This abundance of passion is mirrored in the work of the professors, who seek to “share [...] the joy of scholarship and discovery that is so thrilling to us.” Their goal, Eisgruber explains, is not only to educate and transmit information about any given subject, but to “kindle deep and persistent love of learning” within their students. Studying, teaching, and research at Princeton, it becomes clear, are matters of affect as much as intellect.

In addition to rendering the campus experience of the Princeton community in this affective and dynamic language, Eisgruber employs a number of rhetorical modes in his speeches to discursively create and strengthen the trope of the elite community. The first is the mode of *initiation*, which marks the new students’ inclusion in the community. Eisgruber expresses his joy at this task; he repeatedly mentions that he is “thrilled” and “excited.” Entering the Princeton community marks a decisive and permanent shift in the students’ identity; they “have now become, and [...] shall forever be, Princeton’s Great Class of 2017”—or any other given year. A collective walk “into campus through the FitzRandolph Gate” marks this shift performatively. The freshmen, Eisgruber insists, have entered “a quite extraordinary community,” a “special community,” which he refers to as “Princeton’s honor world.” Pairing the rhetorical with the performative initiation thus marks the transformation from high school graduates into Princetonians, and serves as an indication of Princeton’s self-conception as more than an educational institution.

A second rhetorical strategy employed by Eisgruber, and supported by the collective rituals mentioned above, is that of *unification*. In the speeches as well as in his other writings, Eisgruber posits the notion of a unified Princeton community, comprising a diverse group of people held together by their shared identity as Princetonians and the emotional affiliation with the institution they share in common. This notion is actualized not only in Eisgruber’s recurrent use of the collective “we,” but also articulated quite explicitly on a number of occasions, for instance when the freshmen are told that in becom-

ing part of Princeton they become part of “a community devoted [...] to sustaining a warm and inclusive network that has its heart on this campus but extends across geography and time, binding together alumni of all generations.” Eisgruber’s rhetoric of belonging and togetherness is supported by rituals of what he calls “joyous return”—“We go back to Nassau Hall for Reunions, for Commencement and Baccalaureate, for Alumni Day and the Service of Remembrance, and occasionally for special ceremonies.” The purpose of this rhetoric and these rituals of return is to strengthen the bond between the people and the institution, or, as Eisgruber himself explains: “[W]e renew the camaraderie that enlivens our commitment to this University, and we rededicate ourselves to the principles for which Princeton stands and upon which it depends.” The implicit assumption of this mode of unification is that the community is unified in its eliteness: Eliteness brings them together, keeps others out, and marks their identities beyond graduation.

A third rhetorical mode that serves a similar affective purpose is that of *historicization*. Here, Eisgruber situates the current Princeton community in the illustrious history of the institution; group identity and unity are thus created also through the commemoration of a shared past. This insistence on historical significance and national prominence is one of the key factors that distinguishes Princeton’s efforts at self-making from that of non-elite institutions. Eisgruber begins by pointing to the long tradition of Opening Exercises, which “dates back at least to 1802,” thus adding the gravitas of history to the ritual of initiation. Eisgruber also locates Princeton within the larger context of American history, stressing the importance of Nassau Hall as the “interim home of the Continental Congress, and so the seat of this nation’s government,” and pointing out that Princeton was “the site where James Madison [...] acquired the learning that eventually made him the father of America’s constitution.” For the students about to begin their time at this old and venerable institution, Eisgruber explains, “this means joining the storied tradition of students who have left their marks on the Princeton campus—and the world—through their intellect, creativity, and passion.” To support this claim, he mentions a number of famous Princeton graduates, ranging from John Alexander to Woodrow Wilson, from Alan Turing to Sonia Sotomayor. Ministers, statesmen, scientists, and Supreme Court justices—Princeton’s diverse historical legacy adds a distinctive and powerful layer of authority and legitimacy to the institution and its affiliates.

A last rhetorical paradigm occurring in all of Eisgruber’s speeches is a *rededication* to the university’s mission. “Through our teaching and research

endeavors,” Eisgruber explains, “we seek to educate the next generation of leaders, to unlock knowledge for the betterment of society, and to encourage all of our students to examine questions about what it means to live a life of purpose.” Princeton self-professed mandate, then, operates on several levels: the level of the individual student and her life and career choices; the level of society in general, along with Princeton’s contributions to its betterment; and, more specifically, the level of educational politics in the US. Here, too, eliteness plays a major role, not only in optimizing the individual member of the elite community but also in the institution’s claim to influence on a national and even global level.

With regard to individual students, Princeton aims to help them to find out “what it means to live a successful human life,” which, according to Eisgruber, can be summed up as a life that adheres to the twin imperatives of individual happiness and service to others. As part of the individual pursuit of happiness, students are encouraged to make use of the university’s many resources, not only to build a satisfying professional career but also to develop and deepen extracurricular interests—sports, music, politics, among others. While doing so, however, students are also asked to reflect on possible ways to contribute meaningfully to society—“not just on holidays and special occasions, but every day.” Princeton does not actively encourage its students to join the public service sector, however, since “[n]early any honest vocation will enable you to make a contribution to the world if you do it right.” Importantly, Eisgruber also asks the freshmen to not only focus on “what is practical, functional, and utilitarian” but to “dream audaciously” and keep an “eye toward the beautiful and the profound.” Encouragements such as this implicitly point to the privilege enjoyed by Princeton students by virtue of their membership in the elite community.

The triad “learning, leadership, and service” sums up Princeton’s self-professed role in society. Eisgruber encourages all Princetonians to “marshal their interests and talents to find their own ways to contribute to the well-being of society,” since “all Princetonians have a responsibility to try to make a difference by confronting difficult issues that affect citizens of America and the world.” Again, this notion does not negate conventional professional success, as Eisgruber’s only specific examples of how one might be able to achieve this contribution is rendered in a rhetoric of excellence: “[The Princeton student] may end up being a pathbreaking scientist, a celebrated writer, a dedicated public servant or an influential business leader.”

A third dimension on which Princeton's mission operates is that of its "obligation and opportunity to play a leadership role in public discussions about the value of research and collegiate education today." It does so not only by championing the value of a traditional liberal arts education in the age of MOOCs and for-profit colleges, but also by supporting the public universities, in a continuous attempt "to realize more perfectly the ideals to which we are committed"—diversity, equal opportunity, excellence in teaching and research, among others. Eisgruber asks his audience "to join me in recognizing that, in the decade to come, one of the most important things that we as Princetonians can do to be 'in the nation's service' is to continue to make the case for this country's public universities."

To sum up: Using decidedly affective and dynamic language, Princeton's President Eisgruber employs a number of rhetorical modes—initiation, unification, historicization, and rededication the institution's mission—that together establish a strong affiliation with the elite community. Princeton as the alma mater is conceptualized as a holistic institution whose objectives go beyond the merely utilitarian—the Princeton experience is not a means to an end. The meritocracy of affect is thus embedded in a surplus logic of institutional transcendence that incessantly tells its participants that Princeton is 'more than...'—it is more than a university because it is also a home; but it is more than a home because it is also the place where students find "the closest friends of [their] lifetime," but it is more than that, too, because it is also a place that "build[s] characters" and allows students to find and transform themselves. It is still more than that, however, because it offers students to immerse themselves in a whole array of extracurricular activities; and more than that since it also connects students to their country and the world.

This entire surplus logic is furthermore mirrored in Eisgruber's conception of education as more than "a purely intellectual or utilitarian activity involving nothing more than the transmission of information from one brain to another." Instead, he argues, the Princeton experiences includes and "requires qualities of character and feeling and judgment: motivation, engagement, initiative, persistence, resilience, curiosity, and daring." Research at Princeton should "generate insights of surprising and transformative power"; teachings should "provid[e] students with transformative educational experiences." But it is not only in the professional or educational realm that the notion of transformation is employed; it is more than just the minds of the students that the institution seeks to affect. Eisgruber uses the metaphor of the "exciting new Princeton journey" when he talks to the students about what lies ahead,

and he emphasizes the transformative powers of the Princeton experience: “You are at the beginning of a Princeton adventure that will challenge you, thrill you and transform you.” This claim to influence and change the whole person, the very being of the student is also reflected in the notion of becoming a ‘Princetonian’ or a ‘Tiger’, as Eisgruber often puts it. Princeton thus presents itself as a charismatic community with ontologically transformative powers—it changes the very identities of its members and binds them to the place and the name forever.

### **Rupture: Woodrow Wilson, the Black Justice League, and the Issue of Racism**

As my brief discussion of the Patton controversy has shown, the actual Princeton community is not quite as cohesive as Eisgruber’s deliberations might lead us to believe. While the disagreement over Patton’s claims indicates more general differences of opinion with regard to the gendered experience of the elite educational space, there are other ruptures in the community that are arguably even more profound. In accordance with the frame of diversity discussed above, Princeton’s official image is one of multiculturalism and the mutual acceptance and even celebration of difference. A number of recent developments suggest, however, that not all the undergraduates feel that the frame accurately reflects their realities on campus. In 2014, for instance, a blog project was started at Princeton that aimed to give students of color a public forum to address their grievances and raise awareness about the many ways in which racism still informs the lives of non-white Princeton students. Modeled on the first of such projects, *I, Too, Am Harvard*, the blog’s agenda is described as follows:

In the wake of a post-racial ideology circulating in our society today, it is imperative that the light of the struggles that categorize this nation is not erased. With this circulation also comes the muting of the voices that make up the sound of the U.S. This is an opportunity to turn the volume back up. We hope to offer the opportunity to build a stage on which men and women of color can be included in the atmosphere of this campus. Most of all, we want to continue the momentum pushed forth by other I Am movements across the nation and the world. We strive to inspire and motivate other marginalized peoples in all communities to push through invisible boundaries and make their voices heard. We, Too, Are Princeton. We, Too, Are Human. (“I, too, am Princeton”)

The project signals on the one hand that Eisgruber's notion of a collective elite identity that takes primacy over all differences does not capture the lived experiences of Princeton students. Race-based discrimination, prejudice, and various forms of social, cultural, and political oppression continue to shape the elite educational space as they do the United States in general. On the other hand, the organizers' claim that "We, Too, Are Princeton" seems to indicate that there is a possibility of this collective identity, if it were only possible to rid it of its underlying racism. The valid critique voiced in *I, Too, Am Princeton* thus in some ways contributes to the epistemological frame of community building.

The blog is not the only instance that reveals ruptures in the elite community. In late 2015, debates began on campus that challenged the university's uncritical celebration of the legacy of Woodrow Wilson. These debates congealed around the demand to change the name of the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs, which eventually were denied by the school's Board of Trustees. In the process of the debates, however, the building that houses the school and its iconic look had become physical embodiments of Princeton's history of racism and discrimination, and remain visual reminders of the continued problem of racism to this day. In the following, I want to use the building as a point of departure to discuss this important rupture in Princeton's self-making in order to illustrate one of the ways in which the epistemological frame of community is destabilized through the very physical fabric of the university.

First, though, a brief architectural excursus: "Modern architecture died in St. Louis, Missouri," writes architecture historian Charles Jencks, "on July 15, 1972 at 3:32 pm (or thereabouts) when the infamous Pruitt-Igoe scheme [was] given the final *coup de grâce* by dynamite" (9). The city of St. Louis had found itself in the midst of a severe housing crisis two decades earlier, and had responded by building a large complex of high rises, consisting of thirty-three buildings of fourteen stories each. The first occupants moved into Pruitt-Igoe—named after Wendell O. Pruitt, who had been a fighter pilot in World War II, and William L. Igoe, a former US Congressman—in 1954, and the initial impressions were overwhelmingly positive.<sup>6</sup> Pruitt-Igoe was designed and built in the modernist spirit of creating an architectural idiom that would

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6 A recent documentary, *The Pruitt-Igoe Myth* (2011; dir. Chad Freidrichs), chronicles the development and ultimate destruction of Pruitt-Igoe, and includes many interviews with former residents.

speak to its inhabitants and change their lives; its purist aesthetics, its clean and clear style, and the wideness of the spaces in between the buildings were all “meant to instill, by good example, corresponding virtues in the inhabitants,” as Jencks puts it (*ibid.*). These aspirations, however, did not come to fruition. In the years leading up to their eventual destruction, the buildings had been “vandalized, mutilated and defaced” (Jencks 9) and the sense of hope and excitement that had characterized the move-in days were long gone. A good twenty years after its completion, then, the complex was “finally put out if its misery” (*ibid.*). The story of Pruitt-Igoe has come to signify the comprehensive failure to respond to the crises of racism and poverty, and demonstrates quite impressively, among other things, the impotence of architectural didacticism in the face of systemic oppression.

What kind of bearing does all of this have on the poetics and politics of the elite collegiate space, however? Before modern architecture died, it turns out, it found its way to Princeton. In fact, the architect who had designed Pruitt-Igoe in the late 1940s, Minoru Yamasaki, was chosen to build a new home for the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs. This is noteworthy insofar as the institution Yamasaki’s building houses has recently come under scrutiny in the Princeton community for its connection to systemic racism—thus establishing yet another link between Yamasaki’s two structures that goes beyond their architectural patrimony.

The Woodrow Wilson School describes itself as “a major center of education and research in public and international affairs” and offers a range of degrees and certificates related to public policy. Founded in 1930, it was originally called the School of Public and International Affairs; in 1948, upon initiating a graduate program, it was “renamed to honor Woodrow Wilson,” as its website explains (“About WWS”). In 1961, Princeton received an initially anonymous donation of \$35 million, which, among other things, enabled the erection of a new building to house the Wilson School, subsequently named Robertson Hall in honor of the donors, who by then had been identified. This is the extent of historical information available on the Wilson School’s website.

Intending to make “a dramatic statement” that would “instantly [...] raise [the Wilson School’s] profile and prestige” (Maynard 2012: 185), then-president of Princeton, Robert F. Goheen, commissioned architect Yamasaki, who designed the building itself and the adjacent plaza in the early 1960s. Yamasaki was at the height of his career—he had made the cover of *Time Magazine* in January 1963; representing a modern, worldly approach to architecture, he would

go on to design the World Trade Center. When it was completed, Robertson Hall differed markedly from its Gothic surroundings:

Prominently sited at the western gateway to the precinct, it was a concrete temple that elegantly blended the strikingly modern with echoes of Antiquity. A soaring atrium inside was enclosed on the exterior by a ribbon of slender, tapering, concrete columns that marched in locked step around its perimeter. Brilliantly white in sunlight, at night light radiated luminously out from its soaring vertical expanses of plate glass. (Coulson et al. 109)

Responses to the finished building varied, however. President Goheen proudly “hailed Yamasaki’s ‘brilliant and monumental design’ that celebrated ‘the high aspirations we hold,’” and many observers commended its confidence and uplifting spirit (Maynard 2012: 188). Others, in turn, were quite critical, lamenting the building’s aloofness, its lack of contextualization and substance. Hugh Hardy called it “fairly absurd,” Michael Graves “thought it was a very thin piece of architecture” and Paul Goldberger felt “saddened” by it (all quoted in Maynard 2012: 188). Alumni were likewise disappointed.

Yamasaki’s design was meant to signify a sense of globalism—citing Japanese gracefulness as well as classic Greek influences—and a spirit that transcended mere functionality and utilitarianism (cf. Maynard 2012: 187). The architect himself explained that he wanted the building to be “monumental” in spirit, so that it “would stimulate students of government to higher aspirations” (ibid.). Again, the modernist conception of an architecture that would have an impact of people’s thoughts and behaviors becomes discernable. The modernist didacticism of Pruitt-Igoe ultimately failed, among other things, because of the structural and individual racism that governed mid-century St. Louis; the destruction of the complex was a testament to a very general failure of attempts to alleviate the consequences of systemic racism. Here, it was both the formal characteristics of the buildings themselves that were charged with failing their purpose and the “politics, economics, and such things as the presence or absence of prejudice” (Moore) that determined their context. At Princeton, the situation was, and is, different. The initial criticism leveled against the building originated largely from its stylistic otherness; the stark aesthetic discrepancy between Robertson Hall and its immediate architectural environment, the old campus beloved by many, was deemed inappropriate and unsatisfactory.

Tracing the building’s trajectory, however, demonstrates that, in the manner of a palimpsest, various competing meanings accrue over time and be-

come attached to the building itself as well as to the institution it houses. The building's aesthetics are no longer subject to critique; it is now the institution—or, more specifically, the institution's name—that has come under scrutiny. At Princeton, the debate about the Wilson School started in late 2015, when the Black Justice League, a student organization formed in the aftermath of the Ferguson police shooting, began to voice their concerns about the university's "deep adulation" of Woodrow Wilson, as one representative of the BJJ put it:

It is impossible to be a student at Princeton without being constantly confronted with Wilson's legacy, or at least a counterfeit reproduction meticulously engineered by our University. Despite his extensive presence on campus, Wilson's legacy—one distinctly rooted in racism and bigotry—is rarely discussed. However, just as our nation reevaluated its bizarre attachment to the confederate flag, it is time for our University to reevaluate its blind veneration to its deeply racist demigod. (Tanjong)

In the course of the following weeks and months, the BJJ and their allies formulated a list of demands and engaged in different kinds of activism on campus in order to be heard. The university responded by appointing a special committee "to consider Woodrow Wilson's legacy at Princeton, and, more specifically, whether changes should be made in how the University recognizes Wilson's legacy" ("Report of the Trustee Committee"). Comprising ten members, the committee considered a variety of sources on Wilson's biography and political career, including the expert opinion of nine scholars and more than 600 submissions from the university community. Furthermore, a number of discussion groups took place on campus during the investigation. The committee's final report, published in April 2016, acknowledges that the debate about Wilson is "emblematic of larger concerns about the University's commitment to diversity and inclusivity" and "emblematic of a failure to acknowledge the pain and sense of exclusion that many people of color have experienced, and in some cases continue to experience" on campus. The report also admits that this is in part due to "the narrow lens through which the University presents its history." For reasons that remain relatively vague, however, the committee reached the decision not to change anything about the presence of Wilson's name on campus. Instead, they advocate for more "transparency in recognizing Wilson's failings and shortcomings as well as the visions and achievements that led to the naming of the school and the college in the first place." The report claims, moreover, that the original reasons for

using Wilson's name still remain valid today. One of the central recommendations the report makes is to "make a concerted effort to diversify campus art and iconography, and to consider the possibility of commissioning artwork that honors those who helped to make Princeton a more diverse and inclusive place, or expresses the University's aspiration to be more diverse, inclusive, and welcoming to all members of its community." In President Eisgruber's response to the report, he explains that he "concur[s] fully with the committee's analysis and recommendations" and acknowledges that he, too, now has "a deeper appreciation for Wilson's failings and for what those failings have meant to this country and our campus" ("Statement on the Wilson Legacy"). Eisgruber follows the report's recommendation of striving for transparency and critical openness when it comes to the problematic aspects of Wilson's (and Princeton's) past, and claims to "agree wholeheartedly" with the report's conclusion that "our most significant and enduring challenges pertain to enhancing the diversity and inclusivity of our community." Eisgruber concludes by urging the university community to "strive energetically and imaginatively to make this campus a place where all of our students, faculty, staff, and alumni can feel fully at home" (*ibid.*)

It is hardly surprising that the Black Justice League was not satisfied with the committee's decisions. In a statement issued after the publication, the BJL criticizes the "various, largely meaningless platitudes" found in the report as well as the institution's impotence in dealing with the persistent issues of racism on campus—the "initiation of yet another committee" to address these issues is not deemed sufficient. The BJL's disappointment and anger at the outcome is articulated clearly and forcefully:

Princeton remains unable to even reckon and wrestle with its white supremacist foundations and its ongoing role in perpetuating racism, instead delivering shallow words and hollow promises. [...] Princeton's decision today demonstrates unambiguously its commitment to symbols and legacies of anti-Blackness in the name of "history" and "tradition" at the expense of the needs of and in direct contravention with the daily experiences of Black students at Princeton. ("Statement on Trustee Report")

The board of trustees declined to change the name of the Wilson School, and the building that houses it still stands and now serves as a physical reminder of the debates described above. The charges of racism and the institution's inability and unwillingness to face these charges in a way that activists such as the member of the Black Justice League would accept are now part of the

building's iconicity—the newest layer of the palimpsest, as it were. Yamasaki's Japanese and Greek aesthetics no longer merely signifies modernism, globalism, and the venerability and seriousness of government; it also demonstrates that space and place are not neutral. It matters to the experience of individual students to whom a place is dedicated and whom it serves to remember; it matters because it determines who can feel safe in this place and who cannot, and because it determines who feels confident enough to claim and mark a place as their own. Ultimately, it matters since there is a distinction between history and heritage, as James W. Loewen argued eloquently in the debate about the renaming of Yale's Calhoun College, a distinction that Princeton refuses to address adequately. The Wilson School's website, it should be mentioned in this context, does not offer any indication of its eponym's racist attitudes and politics. Since Robertson Hall has assumed all of these meanings during the months of the debate around the Wilson School, it now constitutes a stumbling block in Princeton's self-representation and a continued challenge to the epistemological frames that situate the meritocracy of affect.

## 5. Concluding Remarks

In this chapter, I analyzed an array of self-representational materials produced by Princeton University in order to assess the epistemological contribution of the affirmative mode to the discourse of elite education. My guiding questions were how the affirmative mode negotiates the tension between elitism and egalitarianism, how the three categories of merit, class, and eliteness figure in these negotiations, and what role the criticism of elite education plays in these dynamics. While I had initially assumed that Princeton would use a traditional meritocratic framework of effort and hard work to explain and legitimize its prestigious and privileged status, my research showed that the university instead relies on a modulation, of sorts, of this framework, a modulation I have called the 'meritocracy of affect'. The meritocracy of affect, I have argued, is a response to two main tensions that inform the communicative situation Princeton finds itself in as an elite, private college in the beginning of the twenty-first century: First, the institution is part of a highly competitive marketplace in which it has to communicate different, and at times contradictory, visions of eliteness to different segments of its audience. Second, Princeton is at the center of a critical media discourse that dramatizes elite education along the lines of the impossible and the pathological.