

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.

While the college certainly benefits from the relentless iteration of its own eliteness, it also has to respond in some way to the critique raised in this discourse. The meritocracy of affect, I suggest, is Princeton's answer to these multiple tensions.

Characterized by a commitment to opportunity, passion, flexibility, creativity, and choice, it is in many ways in line with what Eve Chiapello and Luc Boltanski have described as 'the new spirit of capitalism'. Among the central tropes structuring this paradigm is the metaphor of the student as agent and customer, the absence of competition, a strong emphasis on love and passion as guiding principles of work and life, and the promise of limitless opportunities. In all of these conceptions, affect trumps effort. Neoliberal imperatives account only for parts of this paradigm of meaning-making, however; the meritocracy of affect also owes a debt to a vision of eliteness more in line with humanistic conceptions of learning and self-fulfillment. This modulation gives evidence to the flexibility of the ideological structure of the meritocracy, which is able to adapt in subtle and not-so-subtle ways to changing circumstances without losing its potency. It also demonstrates Princeton's knowledge of its core clientele: upper- and upper-middle class families, whose expectations of the collegiate experience are informed by two primary imperatives—on the one hand, social and economic success, and on the other hand, a somewhat nostalgic notion of the collegiate experience as a time of self-fulfillment and self-development in the tradition of liberal humanism.

The meritocracy of affect, as I have argued in the last major section of the chapter, is embedded in three epistemological frames that allow for a more differentiated and adaptable negotiation of key issues: the diversity paradigm, the notion of the good life, and the trope of elite community building. The diversity paradigm is Princeton's primary response to the tension between elitism and egalitarianism. Its commitment to multiculturalism, social justice, and the celebration of difference is meant to communicate fairness and legitimacy. A student's diversity factor—racial, ethnic, socio-economic, or otherwise—thus becomes a form of meritoriousness. As I have also outlined in this section, however, there are ruptures in the presentation of the diversity paradigm: Taking into account the findings of the Equality of Opportunity Project, for instance, exposes the insinuation of class diversity as fraudulent.

The notion of the good life, which I have discussed primarily in the context of Princeton's staging of its own campus space, can be seen as a response to the discourse of pathology on the one hand, and as a counterweight to

the diversity paradigm on the other. The ways in which Princeton utilizes its physical space, I argued, translates upper-classness and wealth into an aestheticized spatial experience, and thus communicates a commitment to social and economic eliteness that is all but completely absent from the content informed by the diversity paradigm. The rupture I have discussed in this context is embodied by Whitman College, one of the most recent additions to the Princeton campus. Whitman College can be seen as an escalation of the frame of the good life, a caricature, almost, of its tenets: Its aesthetics are an arguably somewhat ill-conceived homage to an architectural tradition that has been associated with imperialism, colonialism, and white supremacy, and its astronomical cost symbolizes the unequal dispersion of funds in the American educational landscape and demonstrate Princeton's covert commitment to class homogeneity.

The trope of community building constitutes the social frame for the meritocracy of affect. Drawing on speeches and writing of Princeton's president, Christopher L. Eisgruber, I have traced his conception of the elite community, modeled along the rhetorical modes of initiation, unification, historicization, and rededication to the university's mission. The image of the elite educational space that is part and parcel of this notion is that of a charismatic institution with ontologically transformative powers, framed in a surplus logic that posits that the institution is always more than the sum of its parts. The premise of Eisgruber's elite community, as I have argued, is that the cohesion of this elite community is strong enough to dissolve or render meaningless all other distinctions, which is why the diversity paradigm, for instance, plays no major role in this conception. Here, too, ruptures can be found: I have used an extended reading of another building—the one that houses the Wilson School of Public and International Affairs—as a point of departure to discuss racism as a major disruption of the trope of community. The debates stirred by Princeton's continued celebration of Wilson's legacy on campus expose the post-racial attitude inherent in the meritocracy of affect as fraudulent, especially in light of the continued race-based discrimination and prejudice shaping the lives of students of color at Princeton.

As my remarks have shown, the three epistemological frames manage each other and create a flexible and adaptable *mise-en-scène* for the articulation of the meritocracy of affect. In so doing, they allow for the amalgamation of the seemingly opposed imperatives of humanistic and neoliberal eliteness and thus provide the university with a number of effective cultural scripts to employ in different communicative contexts. The frame of commu-

nity building, for instance, complements and complicates the other two in crucial ways: It acts as counterbalance to the notion of diversity by assuring students and parents that despite their differences, all Princetonians share the same core identity. This cohesion is needed to create loyalty and generate ties that bind, which is an important part of the institution's efforts at guaranteeing long-term funding and involvement. It is not surprising to note, in this context, that the frame of diversity occurs more frequently in Princeton's external communication, whereas that of community building dominates its internal conversation. With regard to the notion of the good life, the frame of community adds the important elements of togetherness and belonging. The good life at Princeton, after all, is not an individual endeavor but a collective effort. This also counters the implications of the eliteness-as-pathology discourse outlined in the first section of this chapter. Life in the framework of the meritocracy of affect, the materials maintain, is not governed by relentless competition, anxiety, and loneliness; instead, it is full of pleasure and ease, self-fulfillment and collaboration.

