

Transformative Environments: Neoliberalism and Sculpture at Purchase College

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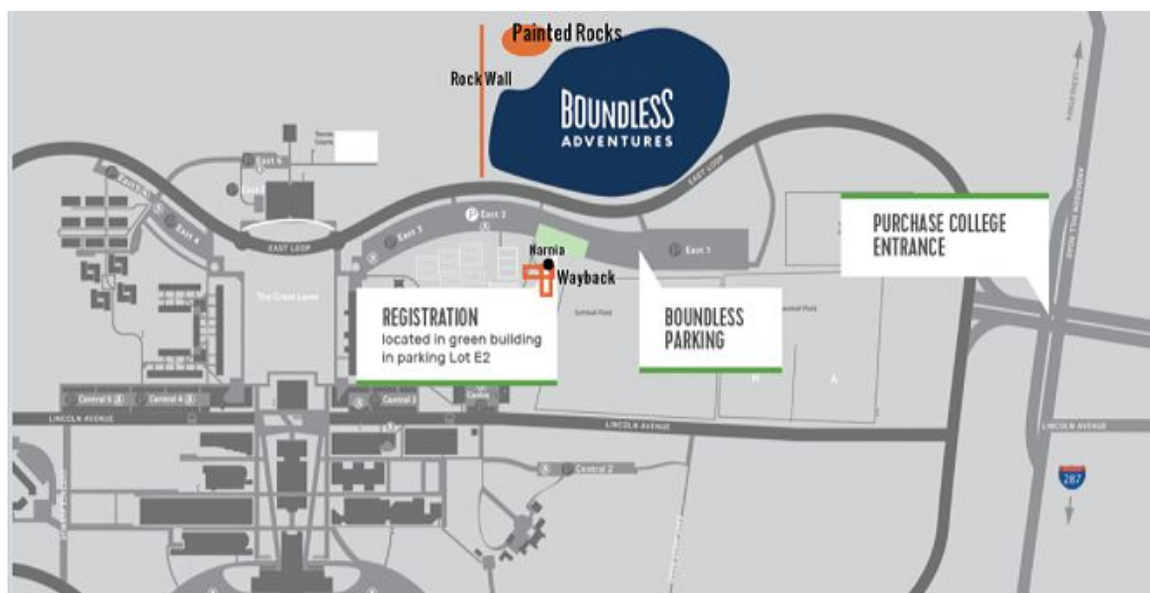
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INTRODUCTION

I grew up in upstate New York, right at the base of Hunter Mountain in the Catskills. The mountain is actually a dissected plateau; the lengthy ridge gently lays back into the bed of the valley, welcoming visitors and locals all the same. It's an area that occasionally booms in and out of tourism, as people seem to visit in spurts of a few years and then dying out again. I'm currently experiencing my first boom, my mom's second, and my grandma's third. People come in the summer to hike, camp, and swim, and in winter to ski or snowboard. Nature, or "unproductive" land is a neutral space that can be used as whatever the visitor might want it to be used in the moment- it has no business being anything specific. Green space that I once saw as just a normal thing in my backyard became much more. I think maybe everyone else telling me indirectly that they loved the beauty of where I live made me begin to think of green space differently, but also the experience of the hussle and bussle of the city, making me come to terms with the fact that that life wasn't the one for me. Public use of green space is tricky, as preservation is often lost. People misuse it by leaving trash, doing illegal activities, parking where they shouldn't and generally disrespecting the area. What does one do or think in these situations? Coming to college I learned that it's a privilege to have green space freely available for public use, and because it's not *your* land, it can be policed and taken away and redistributed for a determined use.

I committed to Purchase before even visiting it. It was my last choice, a safety; I would've much rather gone to a private college like my friends were. When I first came to the campus, I was shocked by the greenery surrounding the buildings that I would later learn in class were brutalist. Thinking of that little tour then reminds me of how curated the spaces we were brought into were. The Performing Arts Center, and the Student Services building stand out the most. The PAC had, I think, gray carpeting, reminiscent of the 90's with high ceilings and large stairwells with a beautiful bathroom. The student services building had huge walls of blue-tinted glass, with a red circular enclosure inside of it. Those spaces were chosen because they were so impressive, and I remember being so impressed with the spaces it was hard to focus on any of the information they were going over.

Over the course of my time at Purchase, I've made installation work trying to create a space to direct the viewer to have the same feeling as I do while looking at a green space. The first time I presented work on the topic was in March 2019. I brought river rock from my house and stacked them into a wall like my dad and I used to do, and had been used historically to separate properties. I used the wall to separate the viewer from the beauty, as well as a close range projector showing a river I grew up swimming at that one would have to stand in front of if they wanted to get close, thus casting a shadow over the video of the 'beautiful thing' so they couldn't get closer. In the past, I had thought the best way to preserve something is to make people look from afar, and prohibiting interaction with the objects. The gallery space intruded on the critique; people don't get close to art because they think they shouldn't, as most large gallery spaces and artists don't want you near it, so no one went close to begin with. This is the limitation of art and aura and its aloofness- the presence of works in time and space is always lacking, and is never perfect (see Benjamin 1968). The piece would have been more successful if I was less specific to my own experience, and opened it up to a discussion that was more universally understood. I was determined to keep pushing my idea, but through a lense that isn't

unique to me. It's common-place for people to have their homeplace, or really anything they love and feel passionate over, taken for capitalistic consumption and/or personal benefit--just look at New York City. All I knew was that I was witnessing things change, and it's hard to validate change with other people when it's going on in front of you. Nostalgia felt like the wrong word to describe what I was experiencing in the Catskills. When I came back to school from home, I realized that right in front of my eyes I was witnessing a similar thing here, just in a different location, and that a lot of '90s alumni from my college felt the same. Memorable art pieces had been moved, the buildings were different looking and used for different things, green space was given a purpose for profit, resulting in a distortion of the physical, real-life aspect of memories we held.

THE “CULTURAL GEM” OF THE SUNY SYSTEM¹

The college was established during the early 70's with its first graduating class of all transfer students in 1973. Plans began in 1966, with then governor Nelson Rockefeller's idea of a learning community that combined liberal and fine arts. He hoped this combination which equalized the two areas of study would foster easier experimentation, collaboration, and exploration between students and faculty. The plan submitted to Samuel B. Gould, then president of SUNY unofficially stated that SUNY Purchase wanted to provide “flexibility in the approach to instruction and the organization of classes”. This meant providing many courses of individual study to meet individual interests under faculty guidance, even to the point of planning an entirely individual college program and getting the appropriate degree. The goal was to “give great attention to the individual and his ability to learn”, based on understanding the “demands placed upon faculty scholars and students by the accumulation of knowledge and varied means of disseminating it”, thus “testing new assumptions regarding the nature of learning and the many approaches to higher education”. In brief, SUNY Purchase had the goal of an individual, flexible experience with a community of areas of study that weren't separate but one entity, and according to Rockefeller, would be the cultural gem of the SUNY system. In 1971, the official “Master Plan” was published. Everything was going well, but there was doubt in the college's ability to implement the aforementioned mission due to budgetary problems they were experiencing. SUNY Purchase felt as if the New York State Division of the Budget (DOTB) put them into an economic starvation, which they expressed at the end of this Master Plan. The New York State DOTB, SUNY Purchase believed, was promoting “uniformity among the colleges”, rather than looking into the individual missions of each institution. By 1973, the official mission statement was to “develop an excellent liberal arts college utilizing innovative means but maintaining the objectives and values of a classic liberal arts education”.

In 1984, the Independent Commission was formed by the SUNY Chancellor, Clifton R. Wharton. This Commission declared that “SUNY is not yet good enough,” as they hadn't

¹ Researching the SUNY system and Purchase College has been a rewarding experience, providing me with the ability to look at primary sources, secondary research, and archives, including @sunypurchasehistory on instagram. Much of this material from the section is indebted to two very rich senior projects, *From Revolutionary War Homestead to Purchase College: A Landscape Transformed* by Heather Bullard (1995) and *Neoliberalism: The Price of a College Education* by Harris Kaye (2013). A tremendous thank you to the SUNY Purchase Library staff, especially Darcy Gervasio, Mustafa Sakarya and Erik Landa for helping me get access to Bullard's paper during the COVID-19 outbreak when campus was shut down.

realized the “tremendous impact on economic development”, and “deprived the state's economy of substantial benefits that other states had already realized from their public universities”. Ultimately, the university system began to monitor, as well as reallocate resources based on an assessment of state needs. Simply put- how should the money be spent to best benefit the economy and growth of New York State; SUNY must now provide for not only their own communities, but local ones outside of it, as well as the entire state. As the years passed, SUNY kept getting budget cuts, so they quickly proposed and passed a legislation allowing the universities budgetary control they hadn't had prior in hopes of creating a “stronger personnel authority” in carrying out the mission of boosting the NYS economy. This is the beginning of the withdrawal of state support.

As the Independent Commission kept working, a neoliberal logic became more evident, and the SUNY system came to be focused around economic impact and cost efficiency. SUNY 2000 was born, communicating a vision that claimed to be knowledgeable of the state's fiscal and political climate, and what had to be done as the year 2000 approached steadily. The Board of Trustees of SUNY and the Chancellor stated that “instruction and teaching, research and creative activity, service to the university and its community” are each “shaped and focused by SUNY's responsibility to address the needs and aspirations of the people of the state”. In short, SUNY 2000 wanted to enhance the productivity of learning, maximize the value of its resource base, and to provide clear learning outcomes. SUNY 2000's aim was compartmentalizing and making data of students through enrollment rates, retention rates, graduation rates, student to teacher ratio, and how long the individual takes to graduate- Things that I hear about as a worry today during the Budget Planning and Assessment Committee that I'm a voting member on as a student representative, as all our numbers decrease, including our yearly budget. John Brennan states public institutions are now expected to be “strategic actors”, meaning they must set clear goals and strategies to achieve those goals. Ultimately, this acting makes its way into the portrayal of the college to the visitor, and how it's capable of articulating its value to get money. Why does the college deserve funding if it isn't having enough students enroll and graduate from the institution, thus, it isn't pushing out people into the industries that will directly benefit the economy of NYS?

From 1995-1997, Purchase implemented a strategic planning committee asking the simple question of how to create the ‘unified college’ Purchase was meant to be. The interactions integral to the original mission weren't encouraged like before. SUNY Purchase was under pressure to align itself with the dominant framework expected of them, and of course they would adjust it's policies to align with the type of economic neoliberal policies that were emerging in the 80's and throughout the 90's, and that are even more powerful and prevalent today. I don't think their goal was to stray so far from their original mission- it wouldn't have survived if they didn't align to the ultimate goal of the higher-ups at SUNY as a whole. The health and economic growth of the state reflects on what the SUNY system has developed into. Present day, the mission of the college is stated as the following, “Purchase College will be recognized nationally and internationally as the leading public institution to pair conservatory programs in the arts with liberal arts programs. We will continue to create opportunities for transformative learning and training in a community where disciplines connect, intersect, and enhance one another”.

WHAT ARE THEY PROTECTING?

How to bring a discussion of privatization of public land in public spaces, as well as the more difficult topic of the withdrawal of the state from areas such as market regulation and social services has been on my mind for the past few years. I could do that in writing, but visually and artistically, it was a bit more difficult. A virtual representation could have manifested through a video in 360°, but the feasibility of the project at my skill-level wasn't realistic. Even then, it might not have been able to capture the conceptual ideas behind the weakening of regulatory apparatuses, per se--just the effects of deregulation. Because I have an anthropology background, I found myself falling back to theory to find the answer to my questions on how to display what we're all seeing in an accessible way. My own research into neoliberalism began with two well-known texts that discursively outline what it is, in addition to offering substantial critique from a Marxist stand-point: David Graeber's *An Extremely Brief Introduction to Neoliberalism* (2010) and David Harvey's *A Brief Introduction to Neoliberalism* (2005). For some, neoliberalism is the apex of economic man; it is a utopia that's not only been imagined, but posited as achieved--what Francis Fukuyama once referred to as the "end of history". Most Americans, when they hear the terms "free trade" and "globalization" think of generation of wealth, but don't think of how the words are actually entwined with neoliberal ideology and often operate as corporate-driven propaganda (2010: 2). There are winners and losers-- as Isaiah Berlin puts it, "freedom for the pike is death for the minnows". Graeber lays out "The Roots of Neoliberalism", with the first item on the list saying that "governments should minimize their engagement in economic planning" (2010: 5).

State Police on Campus

The school administration had pushed off a new economic endeavor for a ropes course onto the gym director, stating that every decision was up to him, which is highly unlikely. Contracting and leasing private companies to unused land is a very sound economic decision, if you weren't considering, of course, the student use of the land, and the history attached to the space. Graeber contextualizes this when he writes about CUNY being compelled to charge tuition, paralleling the yearly cost hike I experienced at SUNY (2010: 7). There's a personal responsibility that falls on me, the student, to be able to continue to figure out payment-- it isn't the original price I thought it was going to stay. I've DIY'd my experience by taking approximately \$1,000 from a different family member for each semester, because at least when I take out a loan from them, there isn't any interest. David Harvey writes about the years of 1978-80 as a turning-point in the world's social and economic history (2005: 1); SUNY embraced neoliberal policies with state interests in mind, and Purchase likewise followed suit. The question is, however: if Neoliberalism means a withdrawal of the state, what role does the police have in filling the gap left in the withdrawal, which is particularly important in relation to college campuses. Neoliberalism says that the state has to withdraw, but in particular to where? The state has to withdraw from the sectors that inhibit the free market, but then asserts itself in other areas to assure the market will run smoothly. The state has shifted from supporting macro orientations such as the health and welfare of its citizens to micromanaging people in a way that increases their ability to consume and participate in the market--it withdraws from anything that has to do with economic regulation. Policing has transformed from white collar crime to

protecting property (broken window crime), and policing the proletariat, whose contributions are undervalued at best and perceived to be on the wrong side of a system that values so-called winners over marked losers. This underclass is likewise connected with a propensity for self-failure and laziness, which extends into criminality (Bourgeois: 2011). Graeber wrote on cleaning up Times Square-- New York City wants these beautiful markets to be able to show off, for visitors to consume them, but the state, and through hegemonic modes, visitors, also want certain people, such as the homeless, to be anywhere close by (2010: 7-9). The spread of democracy is really the spread of a hegemonic expansion of entrepreneurial liberal democracy. The term liberal is often associated with reform, but in this case it doesn't mean that- a liberal subject is a neoliberal subject. "Deregulation, privatization, and withdrawal of the state from many areas of social provision have been ... common" (2005: 3).

I go to a state institution, where the state isn't withdrawing from anywhere, especially when the police on the campus are state police, not campus police. As Harvey notes, the state is appointed to guarantee structures and functions of defense and police to secure the tenants of the liberal subject and through that, assure the market is functioning properly (2005:2). What is the role of the state at SUNY Purchase, other than making sure that all policies implemented must be followed even if it doesn't benefit the student population. It's infused with neoliberalism, the idea of personal gain and achievement for profit. The cops aren't here to protect the student body from anything, rather they're here to protect the property we're living in. From the 70's to now, I'd say that it's certainly been long enough for neoliberalism to be set in stone, as the culture of the market is internalized and hegemonic that one might think it's inherently embedded within us. The market will never create for everyone, so I'd assume it might be clear that there's a need for a fundamental difference to be made in the market. But, the hierarchy of civilization has been 'natural' since the enlightenment, and the 'natural' progress of man is the market subject. To be able to continue this progress, the market must continue to be deregulated. This improves efficiency and competition, while allowing the opportunity to anyone with enough money to get into the field as an entrepreneur. This benefits consumers in terms of lower prices, but overall benefits the corporations involved much more by allowing them more freedom, as the word deregulation implies.

MY WORLD

Sculpture students and my professor scutter into "The Barn". There are some podiums for displaying littered in the corners of the room, and people find their spots to stand or sit for the 15 minute slot that's allotted to to present my work. The Barn is a decent sized makeshift room that used to hold junk in the sculpture studios which was converted to an easily accessible exhibition space. The classes of 2019 and 2020 cleared out the space in early fall of 2018 and hung sheetrock onto the 2x4's we had put up. The screws are exposed, as everyone thought it was too much work to cover them up with spackle when only we'd be using the space anyways. A few friends and I signed a 2x4 before hanging up a wall, sharing a small secret that leaves our presence in our space forever [include citation about placemaking with little secrets!]. The lights are clamped to a bar that runs across the top of the room, projecting uneven lighting across the space that often is criticized during the critiques we hold in the barn, but not as often when placed in other areas in the visual arts building.

The first comment is on the odor of the room, which isn't typical- but today, it smells like an aquarium. I've been growing grass in a planter box I built. My goal was to build the entire project by sourcing every material I'd use locally, or through a transformation of the material done by me. I had wanted to drag in logs and cut the pieces of wood out for the box, but the wood around was rotted, wet, heavy, and also couldn't be cut by any of the shop machines, as it isn't permitted due to the possibility of machine damage. I went to Home Depot to try to find the cheapest wood possible. It was a rainy day in early October of 2019, and the floors near the entrance were wet and shiny. I found my wood, 3 pieces of 2x8 pine, and brought it to go and get cut so it would fit in my Honda Civic coupe. I left the building with six cut pieces. I felt guilty about getting the pieces pre-cut as a sculpture student, but assured myself I had no other choice. This was my second time ever working with wood, so I was a bit intimidated at how I would put the pieces together and make sure they were stable enough to maintain the dirt I would get in the future. It proved to be difficult; I had to connect two flat pieces of wood, and didn't have an angled drill bit to do it. I tried nailing *and* screwing them together, and adding staples for support, but it eventually broke when moving it. Glue didn't work either because my clamps were too small. Refusing to accept defeat, I realized fasteners would solve my problems, so I purchased some and got to work, building my approximately 4x8 planter box, the approximate size of a sidewalk. I stapled vinyl that I had used for a collaboration piece with another sculpture student to the bottom, and poked holes in it so that water could drain out, and mold wouldn't grow, and raised the box off the ground using some slabs of stone used by a student who graduated the previous year and left them behind for other people to make use of.

I reached out to the head of the compost service at my school, Greg, to get some dirt, and we arranged a good time to meet up. We vaguely knew each other from a mutual friend freshman year that had dropped out, and we hadn't spoken since. The conversation was light, and picked up in a way that was just like we were freshman again. Luckily, the compost machine had been running for quite a while and we were able to get 100-150 pounds of dirt, which ended up being the perfect amount for my planter. He told me that there had been a larger pile composting for much longer, but a construction company contracted by the school accidentally emptied a load of gravel on top of it. The dirt was more like a mulch, due to it only decomposing for about 2-3 weeks. By the end of the project in November, it was much more like dirt but still not there.

While all this was happening, I was researching the proper lights for a space like the studio I was going to be placing it in for growth. I discovered that blue light makes the plant stronger, while pink light promotes germination and growth, so I chose the latter. I was still hoping to include some sort of video element, and thus, work began on the process of how to photograph the grass growing. My advisor, Raphael Zollinger, and I worked on an arduino board coded to take photos once an hour. My camera battery would only last three hours at a time, so I purchased a battery that could plug into the wall to assure it would be there the whole time. Raphael was concerned with someone stealing my camera, but I was completely comfortable leaving it out; The people in the studios are kind and genuine, and I trust them. I was trying to figure out conceptually who I wanted to implicate in the matter, or if I even wanted to be so direct. My mind was limited to thinking only about small matters, and I was urged by Raphael to think more about the bigger picture- things/people that used their power to alter the landscape

without regard to anyone. I thought of EXXON, Walmart- all with people who I couldn't put a face to, and I realized I never needed to in the first place.

With all of this done, it was time to plant the grass. Originally I had just spread the seeds, but I got some tips from a student whose dad works in landscaping on how to make it more dense, which was simply poking holes with my finger into the dirt and adding more seeds, because I didn't have the professional tool to do so. I made a 'watering can' out of a tropicana lemonade bottle from the potluck shared between the faculty and students in the studios, and spread 5 bottles worth on the grass each day, sometimes twice a day. The day after I planted my grass and left it to do its thing, I went to a budget meeting and took note of everything that's going on in our school: declining state support since the Great Recession, unreliability of enrollment, updated laws on targeting students enrolled in college for transfer, general issues with enrollment retention, and the excelsior student becoming a financial issue for lack of better words. I also paid attention to what people were wearing in the (dominantly male) room; blue gingham short sleeve button up, maroon button down and black pants, gray button down and black pants, beige button up and gray pants. I figured out during that meeting that it would make sense for me to wear something that wasn't as business casual as the professors that were there. I began to think of caricatures, and the elements of the clothes of people in power that are played up for fun; broad/angular shoulders, pants that are too long and bunch up in all the wrong places such as your thigh crease, a tie that isn't the right length, etc. Altering a suit that already existed would be perfect, and I went to the thrift store to find one that had already had a history. I found a navy blue suit with large shoulder pads, and a pair of black pants to match, a fashion *faux pas*!

I planned the performance, I was going to pour the cement on top of the grass and record it, and have a ribbon cutting ceremony to welcome people to the new Visual Arts sidewalk, in the gallery space. I wanted to provide a history for the viewers inclusive of the grass growing, and a video of me pouring while I wore a suit that reminded me of the dean of the school, and greeted and welcomed people. I learned more about the on-campus parking program, Park 2 Fly, with the nearby airport and how the changes in financials would affect the school, and that it was via state force that the change happened. The school's association couldn't be the highest bid, so they lost it. The association has no say on what happens, and they know now that prices will go up, and that we, the association, need to work hard to make sure that we get what we want from this now for profit enterprise. The money won't go through the association, but we were assured the school will still get some portion of the profit.

I began the alteration of the suit, slicing the shoulders and adding more navy blue fabric to lengthen them further, and stitching messily together the unhemmed pieces. I was hoping that someone could find meaning behind what I was doing, because if I'm being completely honest, I wasn't loving how the work was looking. A suit as a symbol means a lot, and connotes thoughts of power and privilege, but there was something that I couldn't put my finger on as to why it felt like it was lacking. Now, I know the issue wasn't the suit itself, but the placement of it. At this time, I was still wondering if I should wear it or not. Placing it on the floor, a suggestion from a student after the critique changed my entire view on that part of the piece. The suit on the floor gave rise to ideas of equalizing the power dynamic of both man and nature, and to some visitors, thoughts of the death of both, and what that would mean if it happened at the same time. I moved

to working on the pants, and made a very sticky paste out of flour, sugar, and water in my apartment. It was a yellowish-beige, and I scooped it into a coffee can and went on my way to my studio. With it still warm, I started spreading it down the legs of the pants to stiffen them enough to hopefully make them stand on their own. Some students helped me, and one commented that she also had a recipe for glue that was similar, although we discovered her family recipe had a bit more sugar. I left them to dry, and came back to a pair of pants that could stand on their own! Sadly, they couldn't support anything other than themselves, and if I walked by too fast, they fell over. A few days later, I stuffed the shoulders with foam and called it a day on the suit- I was completely done.

Right around this time I began to feel very uninspired and discouraged. Time was ticking, and I hated the aesthetic of the suit. I was wondering if what I was doing was conveying anything at all. I was wishing that I had done something different, like focusing only on the grass or only on the suit. I started wishing that I had only majored in anthropology, so I could just do a normal senior project like a normal college student. I was being so dramatic, and 8 days later, all was fine. In retrospect, I was frustrated because I felt like I wasn't being granted the same period of time to think and consider what the work could be for my senior project as the other artists around me. I was thrust into beginning my work immediately, ultimately leaving me with a lot of confusion about the meaning of my work and what impact I was trying to make. In addition to that, I was struggling altering the suit because I had never worked with something so close to a readymade and was used to creating clothing from the ground up.

The grass began to grow; It took 8 days. The small sprouts reported to me by numerous picture messages from my friends before I had seen them poked their tiny heads out of the ground, peeking around to scope out the scene. It didn't seem very dense though, so I added more seeds and figured it would add a bit of density as well. A few days later another transformation happened over night, and my camera missed the entire evening. I checked through the photos and realized how bad the lighting was in the studio, and cursed the 30 foot ceilings, with their draining green color and continuous hum from the crappy lights.

Nonetheless, it was bright green, adding a bit of vibrancy to our dominantly gray and white studios. In an effort to beautify our studio space, our professors and the heads of the sculpture department asked us to paint our lockers a dark green that there was an excess of, but some people still have fun colored lockers, and have begun a new process of "defacement" by painting their own ideas onto the lockers. Sculptures and materials litter the space, and there isn't anywhere without a bit of dust. The smell they were talking about was actually the ammonia from the cement mixed in with the smell of dying microorganisms and worms.

When I showed the work, it had been three days since pouring the cement and it still reeked of death. The "weird amalgamation of cement, dirt, and grass" is approximately four feet wide and eight feet long, about the width of two friends walking side by side, and just under the legal width for wheelchair accessibility. It was very grey-- so different from its appearance days ago, and you could see the pebbles from my cheap cement. The cement and the natural materials began to define one another through its own process of decay.

The students critiquing it had been watching the grass grow for weeks. The growth would often be brought up in passing, especially in the beginning when the transformation of seed to shoot began- everyone I knew in the studios pulled me aside to let me know how “cute” the shoots were or just to assure themselves that I saw them and took note of it- from two separate growths, it takes on average 6 days to see the first shoots. Once destroyed, many students were wondering about the future life of the once-grass-now-slab, as the way it was processed without the sealant could possibly allow for life to begin again. Their sadness transformed into hope for the future.

The suit I made is hanging from the bar with clear, but also clearly visible due to the lighting, fishing line off of a hanger. It was previously stuffed with polyfil but I didn't like it not being able to stand on its own (reflecting on this, I feel that maybe that would've been interesting as political figures don't really stand on their own anyways). My slab of soil cement was in an area near the door to be out of the way for anyone needing to use the space other than me, as where I had it before was a fire hazard, and I had to move it immediately, with the help of a few friends. The suit jacket was a dark navy blue with faint, vertical stripes on it. The inside of the sleeves had a cheap white polyester lining, disregarded on the tag claiming the jacket was made with 100% wool. The pants were black, a fashion faux pas, and stiffened using homemade glue, containing flour, sugar, water and baking soda which had a very yeasty odor. By the end of my working on the articles of the suit, the pants were filthy, and the jacket looked constructed by an external force that was separate from what had originally constructed it. I had sliced open the sleeves and shoulders to add in larger shoulderpads and widening the arms to make the figure naturally look more stocky and take up more space; often when trying to make space for themselves, people will inflate themselves in these areas. I allowed the seams to remain on the outside rather than the inside, revealing the often hidden and concealed stitches, although keeping the thread an identical color to the added fabric, which didn't match up with the hue of the original jacket.

These seams provided the gateway for thoughts of death. When clothes are cut off and put back on, they're often sewn like this. Ego was also brought into play, and the idea of an ego so large it's bursting at the seams and has blown out the torso. The dirtiness created a feeling of discomfort and abjection, as something that they inherently wanted to suit the stereotypical aesthetic of what a suit is. The discussion moved along, transforming the suit into an apocalyptic object from a world where “shit is fucked”. The students agreed that in this imaginative messy world, there's still a person trying to wear their suit, perhaps still participating in their “everyday capitalistic whatever”, and thus, crushing the glorified idea of the suit entirely. Corporate greed came up, as the person who's often pictured to be wearing these clothes has a “fancy” stigma around them and their jobs. One student brought up that yes, while there is that, there is also the reality that the people in these positions often abuse their power, which is exemplified and shown but not limited to people taking over land that wasn't really ever theirs. There isn't anyone embodying the work- can anyone really put a face to a widely upheld, consumption-based hegemonic form? Assuming no one can pinpoint one person, there isn't any reason to focus on who it is, but what it represents- I'm not trying to hide my opinions here on power heads who wear suits and make decisions behind closed doors for their population. As my work is being displayed in a space designated by students for students, I'm also actively taking away a space

that was communally enjoyed, watered, and given pink light to induce faster germination by the same people.

How do I bring this background into my sculptures? It's certainly possible to represent a devastation of resources, and show that capitalism isn't sustainable- but how do I show the withdrawal of the state? One artist who kept being brought up to me during my meetings with advisors was David Brooks. He had done an installation in MOMA PS1 called *Preserved Forest* in 2010 where he had transplanted a representative piece of the Amazon Rainforest in the gallery space. The trees were twenty feet tall planted on a simulated hillside displaced within the gallery space. He covered them all with 20 tons of concrete. The piece was ever changing as it decayed in its different rates. It was a clear protest to the treatment of the environment by industries interested in capital growth. He is taking an old story of deforestation, and the intangible idea of it, and bringing the materialism to the viewer. Approximation, as David Brooks calls it, within art creates a way for the viewer to see what is happening in an accessible manner, and can be used to garner sympathy or create an afterthought or internal discussion within oneself or others. *Preserved Forest* lamented the unsustainability and devastation of capitalism, and speaks to the inevitable intensification of strain on natural environments due to neoliberal politics. If you aren't knowledgeable about the subject of neoliberalism, then you probably wouldn't derive an idea of the withdrawal of the state within this piece, nor mine. And along these lines how does an artist capture deregulation? Not just its effects, which might be easier, but the concept itself, which is connected to a set of processes and ideologies. Is it even my job to capture policy and critique it? From my notes on the installation, I was thinking about that, but from the statements put out about the work, I'm not sure if it was even intended. Sustainability collides with the withdrawal of state simply because it is due to the withdrawal that such harms are intensified. When everyone has a different point of view on a piece of art, especially a piece that's a social critique, it's hard to be able to tell if the idea gets across. My piece might have not been successful in talking about neoliberalism, but it was successful in a similar way to Brooks. Not a lot of work is made specifically on neoliberalism. There's lots of work on capitalism, which has something to do with neoliberalism, but neoliberalism has its own specificity, own moment, own logics and own intensities. Neoliberalism is a different stage of capitalism that's post industrial and very affective. Museums and galleries are becoming more and more privatized, and there is a lack of funding available for the arts. How can an artist make the distinction between a critique of capitalism and neoliberalism? That the art industry itself is entwined within neoliberal ideals and logics further complicates this task.

I noticed that within printmaking, the topic is seemingly easier to talk about. Printmaking has a history of critiquing capitalism. It leads into an old discussion of reproducibility of art and its connection to socialism. Because it's reproducible, and is a part of the logic of reproduction, there's a larger potentiality for political impact (Benjamin 1968). A zine is a lot more effective than a great work of art as it can get into so many more hands and spread much more rapidly. This works within the modality of capitalism, repeating itself, sending messages out, and the coding and dissemination of ideas; Maybe this idea of critiquing neoliberalism works through symbols and coded registers because it makes a more sophisticated argument. Image art, like zines, printmaking, etc is representational in a further codified sense, in a way that is easier to disseminate and easier to reproduce. The easier it is to produce, the easier it is to send itself

politically as a message. Antiquated ideas of sculpture, of the viewer's confrontation with the work in 3D like David by Michaelangelo isn't what sculpture is anymore. But, if sculpture moves into a reproducible field, it also moves closer to commodification, and reveals everything that's problematic, and becomes a chatche. Sculpture provides certain problems with reproducibility because of the tangibility and materials it uses. Is it resistant to reproducibility in a way that other forms of representation aren't? Maybe, but the ability to reproduce it makes it fungible, and the distinction between a commodified object and that which is meant to critique it becomes difficult. Sculpture is entwined with neoliberal institutions and dependent on them. Perhaps working alone is the problem too, as it could fold too quickly back into neoliberalism's idea self-sufficiency and reliance. It needs to be collaborative. Maybe we have to go against a singular voice being the one to lead the way, and instead engage with one another in a more polyvocal way. Art that puts the negative effects of capitalism and commodities on bodies and subjects isn't the same thing as one that critiques neoliberalism. Art that critiques the problem of neoliberalism is critiquing a hegemonic mode, which is a bit harder as there isn't necessarily a finger to point, and isn't as easily identifiable as 'good' or 'bad.' Neoliberalism is a crisis of value.



(Figure 1, taken in the bad Barn lighting.)
Two days post concrete, left corner



(Figure 2, taken in the bad Barn lighting.)
Two days post concrete, right corner



(Figure 3, taken in the bad Barn lighting)
One week post concrete, side view.



(Figure 4, edited white balance)
Two weeks post concrete, broken chunk of slab from deinstallation

IT'S ALL ABOUT ALTITUDE

Boundless Adventures is “the ultimate aerial experience” with locations in Wisconsin, Massachusetts, and Purchase, New York. The specific location of it is on campus, off the side of the east loop, slang for the eastern side of the road that leads all the way around campus. It’s surrounded by a chain link fence, leading down a hill into the woods alongside a stone wall that is composed of large stones, some are granite, native to Westchester. The park has a parking lot across the street from it, and a red-mulch path that leads down to the ready-made shed that serves as an information booth, but also a registration area. The homepage of their website boasts that they’re located less than an hour drive from NYC, and if you decide to come you’ll find “an aerial adventure unlike anything you've experienced before. With 9 total courses, you'll find yourself challenging your boundaries as you swing, climb, balance, traverse and zip-line through our treetop adventures”. The course itself is composed of ziplines, balance beams and bridges, and rolling elements, all of different difficulties and curated for each individual's skill level, mounted on trees. They state that you should plan 3.5 - 4 hours within the park.

The entry cost for an adult is \$59, and children (12 and under) are \$54. On Thursdays, Purchase students can use the course for \$15. They also offer group pricing for birthdays, camps, schools, non-profits, and corporations. This aerial experience, they claim, will be able to boost your bravery and self-esteem when you complete them. For a corporate group, it’ll make your work-team better, and create trust between your employees, for \$49 on weekdays and \$51 on weekends with a 15 person minimum, all ages. Oddly, a birthday party on a weekday is \$48 for ages 12+ with a 10 person minimum. The reasoning on the price differences are not clearly outlined on the website, which is expected. The owners are ex Wall Street people, and they drop in fairly often to visit and check in on the location as they live in Rye, the town over. I talked to a few students about their experience on the course; Was it completely transformational? No. But it made them feel good. The video on their website titled “What it means to “be boundless” at Boundless Adventures?” is filled with glowing reviews from kids saying they faced their fears, got “grit” and felt a lot more confident, and their parents being happy for being able to provide them with a fun, active experience. They have another video lamenting that “Boundless Adventures is not just for kids!”, which leads me to wonder if they ever have groups of ‘corporate’ as it’s called on their website, or if that’s a path that they’re trying to explore as they didn’t have anything uploaded on that experience.

If you decide not to visit the ropes course, but instead follow the rock wall down the hill, you’ll find yourself at Painted Rocks, two boulders spray painted alongside Blind Brook, a body of water that has been continuously taken advantage of by the nearby airport through their dumping. When you reach the end of the wall, it’s pretty muddy. There's a makeshift fire pit, and some trash littering the area. The location will never be as glorious as it truly is on paper, compared to visiting and seeing it as a student, especially those students who want to get away from the bricks. I’ve experienced parties and fires with near and dear friends but also new people here. The visitation of Painted Rocks slowed down upon the construction of Boundless Adventures. The fence being beside you made it feel less natural, more institutional. The woods, a place of solitude and separation from everything SUNY Purchase except the student community, was infiltrated through the leasing of land to the ropes course.

There are a lot more examples of land being redistributed for different uses after students had already applied uses to the land themselves. Beside the tennis courts, which if you were leaving the rock wall to Painted Rocks and walked straight, you would arrive at them, is another student space called Narnia. The footpaths that lead you there were created dominantly by students and lesser so the visitors who attend sports games at the field through the brambles concealing the area. Decorating the area when you arrive is a beige metal folding chair, a chair from what looks like the visual arts building which is plastic with thin metal legs folding around it, and a stolen traffic cone spray, painted in red white and blue colors and signed by visitors who happened to have sharpies. There are two large concrete tubes left in the area, providing shelter from the rain and snow when students dropped in during bad weather, likely being the foundation for the why and how this spot was chosen over somewhere else. During my freshman year, I did an outdoor installation work about home in the tube, and the comfort the space provided me in a foreign environment. I placed blankets and pillows inside, along with photos that were familiar to me and represented the rural experience contrasted with the busyness of White Plains.

I adored Narnia, and I say this in past tense because it no longer exists. In 2019, Purchase began construction of a new dorm building, currently called Wayback. The school provided the student body with an opportunity to name the building, like they had before with a different dorm called Fort Awesome, and they would pick from all of the options and create a survey for everyone to vote. A lot of applications ended up saying the name should be Narnia, even RA's backing the situation, but the ultimate result was in a survey with names provided by administration personnel. After Boundless Adventures infringing upon a student space, how could I not take this as the same thing? The stories of cops hiding out in the bushes of that area to try to catch students doing things they maybe shouldn't have become a real experience when it happened to me after wanting to drop by to see the installation I mentioned previously. My friend noticed the cop in the bush, and we ended up leaving, where they followed us to the great lawn where we were sitting and hanging out. Nothing fishy on our end, but they did separately question us. It leads me to the question: is Purchase purposely targeting student used spaces where they dictate what the space is used for? I think I've shown the answer is yes. Now I'll explore the why.

A friend who transferred out from Purchase to Hofstra recalls the places in the woods, like Painted Rocks and Narnia fondly. He tells me about one of his co-workers, who's around 30, at the bookstore in Hofstra who went to Purchase. He remembered the spaces like Narnia, and it made them closer friends, and displays that these spaces are important generationally to the culture of Purchase college, and create a bond through alumni and students of any age. To him, they were "a big part of the culture. I could just show up to any of those places and find friends. It was almost a safe place to put it in modern terms". A safe place, that the university could not provide itself, without its community who creates the spaces under their noses. Another safe space is the Dunes, once you get to them. Cops constantly loop by the entry/exit during their night parole. A past student from Purchase had told one of my informants about the Dunes when they were at PF Chang, creating a small community based on a shared experience in a space in the blink of an eye. As we continued our discussion, they brought up an experience that I was so shocked by, I thought it was my own; they were going to the Dunes, and were watched by two

cops hiding in a bush, but unlike me, they weren't questioned. Both experiences happened at night, which leads to the question of why suspicion of students arises when it's night and they're hanging out in public spaces on the 500 acre property (Davis 2011: 246).

The decisions of the administration mirror what Graeber discusses in "Neoliberalism: An Extremely Brief Introduction". When New York became a brand, it started to care less about average citizens, and catered towards corporations and consumers. Governments and administrations no longer care for their people, but rather corporate and entrepreneurial entities. Such entities are able to make money from consumers who, in SUNY Purchase's case, rent out the lawn for sports events, visit the ropes course, and who park in our lots before they fly out of our airports. Night time is when most crime often happens on campuses. SUNY takes great effort to hide these incidences from the public. While it's true, students shouldn't be doing things that aren't legal on campus, "this feature of neoliberalism in its articulation in spheres connected to the state, are forms of governance in which subtle intimidations manipulate the citizenry" (Davis 2011:45), which makes spaces that were not that long ago typically understood as safe, which are now under watch by not only staff, but the eye of the school, due to its contractual relationship with these institutions and companies, unsafe.

IMPACT AND CONCLUSION

After the completion of this project, a few things had changed in the studio space that I feel I owe the reader to be aware of. The work has fossilized to a degree. By this I mean, it's still fragile, but upon breaking it contains blades of grass and wood chips that weren't fully composted like the two materials had been combined recently. The spot where I had grown my grass was now roped off, with a sign saying to not put anything there as it's a hazard. It's funny in a way, as storing things there was often overlooked prior, so I'm glad I could help create a safer space, although it stinks I ruined it for everyone. The floor of the Barn has a bit of concrete attached to it from the bottom of my piece, and I sincerely apologize to anyone that it may create an issue for. There is also a large pile of dirt outside mixed with concrete from the slab I made and planned to dispose of until, as of March 2020. It began to grow some moss on it, the visual beginning of a new ecosystem in the making. I hope that it's left there as a little mound of memory, that hopefully I can visit someday in the future when I drop by.

Neoliberalism, as Harvey suggests, "values market exchange as 'an ethic in itself, capable of acting as a guide to all human action, and substituting for all previously held ethical beliefs', it emphasizes the significance of contractual relations in the marketplace" (2005: 3). Relationships that are created through interaction in spaces are fundamentally changed by neoliberal processes. In Narnia, relationships are less tit-for-tat and more about contact with not only people, but also things that are brought there and the nature surrounding it. It was a place for sharing names, majors, cigarettes, laughs and stories that will no longer be able to grant students access to the remarkable experience I had. Neoliberal, disunited practices undermine the original conceptual foundation of the school. Purchase as public space is now readily modified to make space for profit, without regard to the usage of the space, or what importance, camaraderie, or memories it invokes. Ultimately, SUNY has turned Purchase into a neoliberal institution through suggestive and financial means. Purchase, or any SUNY school for that matter, should

not bring anything in a bad light to the public as it makes the public education system, but even more so the state look bad, which snowballs into less people enrolling into a SUNY school, thus altering and injuring the economy of NYS which heavily relies on the SUNY system. There isn't much resolution. To put it straight, 'now' SUNY Purchase is not 'then' SUNY Purchase. It never will remain stagnant, as most colleges don't. But, as one alumni commented on a post about the new architecture that had sprung up since they graduated in the mid 80's, "[Purchase was] a magical memory that refuses to be forgotten yet will fade and no longer be remembered by those that will pass". My fear is that my shared time at Purchase will not be remembered, and that people will believe that no one saw how much change was happening, or no one cared-- I do. Our familiar spaces may have been replaced, but new ones will arise. I hope that you refuse to allow this history to fade as I am attempting to do, and that in the future, someone might continue this work.



(Figure 5)
Narnia, 2018



(Figure 6)
Narnia, 2018

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