

Playful Practice: the Democratic Potential of Reacting to the Past as Experiential Learning

Kyle L. Chong, B.A.¹ | *University of Puget Sound*

ABSTRACT

This paper utilises a theoretical approach to discuss the subversive potential of the Reacting to the Past role-playing game pedagogy to expand experiential learning in higher education. Doing so, this paper asserts, also creates experiences that are not simply focused on the vocational outcomes of university education. Rather, that the soft skills and critical civic engagement enabled by focus on argument and rhetoric. These skills are necessary for radical democratic engagement enable more effective public practices of confronting injustice in a neoliberal curricular climate.

Introduction: The road to power is paved with casualties [and causalities].

“We must make Athens great again...,” I said, to a chorus of vitriol in the Athenian Assembly. The class’ debate was on the threshold of reinstating radically democratic policies, like pay for public service, in 403 BCE Athens to which I was strongly opposed.

I was in character during a game of Reacting to the Past. Reacting to the Past (Reacting) is a role-playing game where students become historical characters, beginning at a political juncture and debate the community’s future. Reacting games are set in Athens in 403 BCE, France in 1791, China in 1587, and India in 1945, to name a few. They are centred around speeches and position papers grounded in a set of core texts like Rousseau’s *Second Discourse*, Plato’s *Republic*, and Confucius’ *The Analects*, to create an immersive experience around debate over political issues, like war with Persia, Caesar’s legitimacy, or Haitian slavery. Games places students in various factions with common political goals (Solonian Aristocrats or Jacobins), and indeterminate players who hold the balance of power and must be swayed to achieve objectives. Reacting also features student-led sessions, extensive group work, and randomised situations keep the game unscripted; a Spartan invasion, for one. Winning happens by surviving, achieving objectives, and faculty assessments.

In this game, I played a Solonian Aristocrat named Aristarchus intent on conserve Athenian oligarchy. Immersing in my character game was an intellectually difficult task to support positions held by a xenophobic, slave-owning, democracy-loathing elite who was existentially antithetical to everything I believed. Gameplay was, however, profoundly insightful into the demanding nature of political discourse. The game helped me learn how others might foil my beliefs, and get into the heads of those with whom I would disagree. The agon[ies] of Athens on *The Threshold of Democracy* were exhausting.

Complicating my task of playing Aristarchus, were sceptical indeterminate players and hostile opposing factions, like the democrats. I had to build consensus without diluting Aristarchus’ views, navigate a menagerie of arguments, and the disorientation of engaging the holistic experience of *becoming* Aristarchus. My holistic immersion into Athens allowed my class to,

¹ This paper was originally entitled “The Better Game Theory: *Reacting to the Past* as play, pedagogy, and consciousness for learning critical citizenship.” Submitted as a Senior Thesis in Political Theory, this paper won the 2017 University of Puget Sound Politics & Government Departmental Outstanding Research Award, and was presented during a concurrent session of the Fourth Quadrennial Race and Pedagogy National Conference in 2018 *Radically Reimagining the Project of Justice at Games as Pedagogy: Resisting Persistent Miseducation*. Kyle L. Chong is a Graduate of the University of Puget Sound, 2018 Robert S. Trimble Distinguished Asia Scholar, and a Doctoral Student at the Michigan State University College of Education. The author thanks Alisa Kessel, Brett Rogers, Eric Orlin, Stuart Smithers, Renee Houston, Diane Kelley, Isiaah Crawford, Michael Ferguson, Kyle Helms, Charlie Bjork, Eileen Mapes-Riordan, Rachel Greiner, Emily Davis, Ethan Markowitz, Tess Fields, Allyson Niitani, Mark Gilbert, Carsen Nies, Kaley Pomeroy, Elena Fulton, Laure Mounts, Kathryn Handick, Kaitlin Cochran, and Rachel Schroder.

intentionally and uncomfortably, depart contemporary American politics for a few weeks epistemologically and institutionally; exposing the contrast between two polities styled democracies. Our classroom, for three weeks, *was* the Athenian Assembly. My faction's survival in the Assembly demanded we 'reconstitute' Athens to constrain belonging in Athenian society to our benefit. In imagining a better Athens, I argued more forcefully than I thought I could ever do because I *felt* the gravity of the role. Such an affective experience, Joyce et al. (2018: 176) argue, is especially important to philosophy and theory students like I was, whose humanistic training is frequently demeaned as disconnected from real world or empirical impacts by other disciplines. Reacting's potential, therefore, is its immersive pedagogy which pushes students to seek practical but ideologically consistent political change, and enact the conditions of a good society empowered by active learning that *simulates* actively engaged public life.

But, why must one specifically seek out education *that simulates* public life, when education's point is to *stimulate* public life? My answer and starting point for this paper, is that higher education has retreated from fleeting Postwar glimpses of service to the *public good*, which I define as the preservation of collective and egalitarian self-governance (Heller 2016, 5). Contemporarily, postgraduate success has been redefined to resemble a decadent individualism, measured in academic capital accrued by hyper-specialising disciplines that grant graduates' competitive advantage and resultant disciplinary hierarchies (Brown 2011) but not their collective betterment. Postwar education sought to be a social equaliser (Heller 2014) and empower those without informal freedom, political power; those without standing in public life.

In short, learning should not be a training ground where skills and titles define a person's economic worth through tacitly consent to a hierarchy of knowledge. Higher education must replace its emphasis on competitiveness with emphasis on critically engaged citizenship such that one's belonging in America is not consent to subjugation under neoliberal capitalism's dominative logic imposed on uneconomic space (Brown 2011). However, many students lack a space within their curriculum to practice critical civic engagement, or hone their critiques. Demanding financial commitment, and America's employment pressure graduates to produce a return on investment in a profitable, high-skill, career. Professional training, styled by neoliberal education as *experiential learning* must be economically practical to be valuable; perpetuating a bourgeois logic under the guise of intellectual engagement that must not be the sole form of educational social engagement.

I seek to reclaim from this economised logic the term *experiential learning*, and redefine it with three characteristics: first, immersion in space where outcomes are uncontrollable; second, capacity for critique in settings where faculty no longer resemble intellectual supervisors; and, third, learning communities that encourage play that *subverts*, or undermines, neoliberal logic. These characteristics yield an experiential pedagogy that resists neoliberalism's adherence to an economised logic driving universities towards what Heller terms *academic capitalism*; where universities behave and fail like corporations. Universities' focus on preparing graduates for careers suggests an apparent satisfaction with consciously reproducing neoliberal adherents rather than critically conscious citizens (Brown 2011, 32). To be conscious of the forces acting upon citizens, learning must be *experienced* to enable *democratic practice*, which I define as the exercise of critical empathy, and active participation in collective decision-making to achieve political change. Based on Strossener et al.'s (2009) psychological study of Reacting concludes that Reacting ensures space for democratic practice because, while students felt helplessness about their political agency, they had higher self-esteem in discovering their *malleability*: suggesting a greater consciousness,

and thus affective efficacy, to political and economic factors acting upon them, empowering student engagement, rather than regurgitate rational apology for the status quo (Strossener et al. 2009, 3).

Postsecondary education, if it seeks student preparation for democratic society, must instruct students to engage ideological conflict and oppositional through experiential role-immersion, granting visibility and humanity to political plurality and difference. Experiential learning should permit students to intentionally weigh multiple ideologies and empathetically engage in politics. The resultant nuancing of sociopolitical binaries enables active subversion of neoliberalism's ghostlike pervasion. Academic role-immersive *subversive play*, or good play that defies present identities and create an alternate world conducive to simulation, external to present selves. Reacting I argue, applies this reclaimed experiential learning pedagogy to counteract neoliberal logic contorting higher education. Mark Carnes, the creator of Reacting, argues that students who see success *and failure* as an inherent and constructive part of their being is what Carnes calls the *malleable self*, as opposed to the *solid self*, I argue is transportable outside the classroom as what I call the *citizen self*. Whereas the *malleable self* sees success and failures as part of students' many identities, the *citizen self* resists the rigid confines of the social order in which the identity of *student* situates them (Robin 2011, 17-18). The *citizen self*, I argue, is capable of consciously rejecting internalised deference to hierarchies, and actively critiquing their political status quo instead of learning by passively. Becoming acquainted with this *malleable/citizen self* is how students can transition from *unconsciousness* to a *reacting consciousness* that departs complacent, passive, inattention to institutions' ideological claims. *Reacting consciousness* is the experience of resonance with their character, empathy for the other, and critique enabling critical democratic practice.

I seek to address the problem, within neoliberal higher education, that graduates resemble consumer-subjects who no longer see education as service to the public good, and that pedagogical modes of resisting corporate epistemology in higher education are seen as insignificant. In this paper, guided by student and faculty experiences with Reacting, I argue that experiential learning pedagogy, by teaching learners to retain and covet their passions and capacity for critique through historical, role-immersive, and subversive gameplay, protects the reproduction radically democratic norms, capacities and learning communities. Learning through subversive play yields potential for *reacting consciousness* in citizens allowing for the instigation of fugitive civic engagement, radical restoration of the public good, and American democracy's critique, repair, and improvement. I assert that political and economic forces acting upon universities problematically corporatise their operation. Then, I discuss the necessity for reclaimed *experiential* learning in order to promote critical citizenship. I argue that Reacting is one kind of experiential learning, that yields consciousness towards public needs and political forces acting upon those needs. Finally, I argue that Reacting structurally promotes the public good=.

Section I: What's the matter with higher education?

Former Harvard President, Derek Bok, in *Universities in the Marketplace*, writes that “universities share one characteristic with compulsive gamblers and exiled royalty: there is never enough money to satisfy their desires” (Bok 2003, 20). After World War II, a revival of political liberalism attempted to reconcile the polarities of raw capitalism and communism, valorising integrity of the *free* market, capital's free flow across borders, and competition between free individuals (Harvey 2005, 18-19, 28) (Robin 2011, 16). Styled neoliberalism by its critics, it sought to act like a ghostlike full moon on the economy and raise tides for everyone—which, for higher education, presented a profitable opportunity seized by administrators to expand university life to

include a holistic experience through student affairs, student employment, and faculty service; rather than investing in marginalised communities. Despite this, recruitment of socioeconomically disadvantaged people, and focus on technological development was a potent narrative for higher education as a social equalising force inasmuch as individuals could expect to gain experience in high-skill professions. Fortified by a narrative of economic revival, and a career pursuing the “American Dream,” higher education changed threefold: creation of new specialised markets inside and outside of the academy, government interest in development to maintain competitive advantage, and newfound demand for skilled labour in the private sector reinforcing a degree’s economic value (Heller 2016, 31). As a result, graduates’ success in the private sector led universities to market themselves as a catalyst to a successful life and resulted in what Heller calls *academic capitalism*; where universities act like for-profit corporations (Heller 2016, 4). Universities, led by those for whom the neoliberal social order is profitable, so-called captains of industry (trustees), pedagogically institutionalised belief in the benefits of corporatised education in order to “obtain consent to its hegemony” through subsequent generations of thought (Heller 2016, 32). Here, I problematise higher education pedagogically, institutionally, and its conception of the self.

Firstly, neoliberal logic, by economising otherwise un-economic spheres, turns these spheres into *markets*. If allowed to continue, disciplines and students within universities risk becoming isolated from each other where general education is forgone for skill-based specialisation. Useful disciplines, Wendy Brown argues in “The End of Educated Democracy,” seek to satisfy “academic market norms,” preventing economically inefficient or unproductive disciplines like the humanities from being viewed by neoliberal education as ‘useful’ (Brown 2011, 33). Henry Heller argues, in *The Capitalist University*, that universities have succumbed to pressures of capital and have altered their aspirations to maintain relevance to the state and accommodate its addiction to stability by producing specialist, high-skill workers focused on profit rather than political critique. As a result, academic disciplines, to Heller, have incrementally become loci of imperial capitalist apology.

Neoliberal universities that prioritise disciplines economically ‘useful’ to the private sector, like business or computer science, further demand specialisation causing undergraduate life to resemble movement between isolated enclosures that consequently temper interdisciplinary critical expression (Brown 2011, 32) (Bok 2003, 17). Oddly enough, the same state that dramatically cut funds to universities simultaneously stringently enforces educational standards, compliance to which avails remaining federal funds through procedures like accreditation preventing universities from being pedagogically reimagined to serve the public good because access to funding and reputation demand accreditation and pedigree (Straumanis 2015, 97). As a result, within the academic market, the means of production, the academy’s authority to transmit knowledge and train students, necessitate specialised marketable disciplines “illegible and irrelevant to those outside the profession and even outside individual disciplines” to tout in admissions propaganda (Brown 2011, 33). Such specialisation has become somehow imperative in order to pioneer new markets to “master” making economic domination ‘useful’ and innovative (Robin 2011, 192). Under capital, disciplinary mastery ensures one’s claim to economic power, thereby making obsolete the public good insofar as a high tide can raise all ships. Without presupposing the necessity of the public good, education need not be purposed or constrained to simulate public life, consequently making private mastery a seductive, yet haunting, alternative to ‘do better.’

Second, to counteract neoliberalism’s structural inequality, requires critique of the institutions that reproduce its social order. Pierre Bourdieu and Henry Giroux argue that education

codifies learning in curriculum and *conserves* the existing social order by equating success with stability of the state which they call *conscious social reproduction*. They argue neoliberal education is problematic because it requires consent to economised logic which it might not have if students had substantive critical capacities. Without learning critique, confidence in public spheres is replaced by complacent faith in neoliberalism because its case for hegemony is codified in university hyper-structured hierarchy. In other words, the school *simulates* the status quo and *stimulates* a successful life therein, conserving the status quo through training deemed preparatory. Further, Bourdieu argues that for schools to maintain their pedigree, they must also be skeptical of people outside the dominant class, the *other* (Bourdieu 1966, 37). This dominant order is institutionalised by “formal equity” which allows indifference to and continuation of *real*, or *informal*, inequity (Bourdieu 1966, 38). Useful skills to neoliberal education consequently becomes securing funding, attracting talent and corporate investment, and so on.

Brown reasonably acknowledges that universities are not inherently democratic spaces; the liberal arts in particular was conceived under monarchy in the 14th century and maintains an elite reputation and intention: to enable men to ascend societal hierarchies, simulated by traditional classrooms, whilst maintaining a demarcation between slaves and those emancipated by knowledge (Brown 2011, 21, 24-25). More recently, “embedded liberalism” of the 1950s and 1960s institutionalised greater market freedoms in the mid-1970s, thus creating “market-driven notions of individualism” that placed focus on individuals’ private enrichment and economic impact (Harvey 2005, 21). Universities, now, risk becoming big corporations seeking to enable America’s economic growth as institutions too big to fail, while faculty, retained for their pedigree and ability to attract funding become “reduced to the status of wage labor,” simultaneously losing university governing authority (Giroux 2002, 444) (Bok 2003, 20). In this view, universities led by administrators might never have democratic potential or capacity insofar as hierarchy persists and an entirely subversive pedagogy would not lend itself to basic wisdom that people need to be intelligent, before they become citizens. In this sense, institutionalising counteracting pedagogy can inject democratic capacity in education to disrupt the reproduction of neoliberal hierarchy reinforcing student need for pacifying lecture-based pedagogy. I argue that universities have democratic potential insofar as they *can* codify democratic practice through pedagogy that seeks to lay these forces bare but face insurmountable hurdles, lacking wide adaptation (Brown 2011, 21).

Thirdly, universities that codify emphasis on specialisation implies that the self can be masterful and successful without heavy reliance on the collective. Individuals became regarded primarily as consumer-citizens with their voting power replaced with purchasing power (Giroux 2002, 427). Universities’ social reproductive intention and assumptions about the self are most evidently codified in mission statements that claim institutions can propel *individuals* to previously unattainable heights in an ecology that mistakes success for competitive marketability. I say ecology because, in the market like the biome, there are scavengers, cannibals, and predators adapting to stay alive. Neoliberalism’s focus on individuals yields a clever misdirection that mistakes privatisation with mastery, rather than isolation. Education, in this logic, is an investment, such that everyone remains ‘the competition’ until they enable further profit. Escaping this logic requires reclamation of the *public good* via refutation of neoliberalism’s decadent individualism.

For example, the University of Puget Sound mission statement makes a curious assertion that a Puget Sound education can “liberate” everyone’s “fullest intellectual and human potential” whilst maintaining the necessity to financially *invest* in their education. Thus, the university implies

a baseline of subject-hood, implicit in the identity of *student*, to which one must conform to derive value from a Puget Sound degree. The baseline requires students to live lives of a certain intellectual potential to be fulfilled, but the demand for ‘useful’ lives requires disciplinary mastery and specialisation enabling competition and development of new markets, increasing one’s economic worth. The university’s curriculum sets constraining intellectual boundaries in missions that optimistically promise students a sublime fulfilment of their “fullest... human potential” *as a result* of purchasing education as if it were commodity. It is unacceptable, yet economically brilliant, that universities produce, as the site of production in *academic capitalism*, a product that is integral to success in life, therefore shaping education into an abominable spectacle of efficiency purchased with tuition, loans, and inhumane postgraduate debt (Heller 2016, 4).

Still, colleges are institutions, albeit static ones. I argue, however, that the difference between malleable institutions and static ones is that malleable institutions contain within them characteristics that seemingly subvert their logic and codify their contradictions. Accessible public spheres, for one, demand learning how to actively participate in order for citizens to participate substantively. Brown writes that, “orientation toward citizenship as a practice of considering the public good” *remains* an aspirational capacity for democratic imagination, requiring education that *simulates* public life because substantive participation therein requires the *practice* of citizenship because self-governance is necessarily critical and incomplete (Brown 2011, 21). Universities that teach critique produce citizens with capacity for political opposition, counteracting neoliberalism by destabilising exclusive claims to political power and enables inclusive democratic practice.

Higher education reproduces a hyper-individualistic and privatised social order that equates economic and political power exclusively for the rich which is neither acceptable, nor justifiable in a state claiming to be *democratic*. Exposed also is the disparity between formal and informal political power, which alludes to differences between formal and informal belonging in American politics. In other words, you might be a citizen in title and you might have the privilege of an education, but it does not *entitle* you to a sense of belonging. Corporate actors therefore naturally “regard with suspicion those who tinker with the ivory tower,” and its safe reproduction, a suggestion that neoliberal education that maintains restricted access to power needs radically reclaimed pedagogy, wrested from the hands of administrators (Carnes 2014, 297). These, I believe, are the problems with contemporary American higher education.

Section II: Experiencing Learning [via Experiential Learning]: It’s all in the Adjective.

Derek Bok further writes that higher education is most profitable when its “highly trained specialists, expert knowledge, and scientific advances” can “transform into valuable new products or... cures” (Bok 2003, 16). To innovate requires disciplinary expertise, which begins with practicums that give students a chance to gain experience in their field. This kind of *experiential learning* is a transmission of knowledge that extends beyond the classroom to impart skills and temperament, positioning postsecondary education as an intermediary between school and labour.

Experiential learning seeks to do two things: address the problem of disinterested learning, and maintain the relevance of university education in relation to finding profitable employment. Experiential learning includes internships and opportunities to apply in-classroom learning to community partners’ real-world problems. While the experience can be profoundly transformative by reaffirming the student’s discipline or career-path, it can also be deflating and mundane because organisations commonly only need unpaid bodies. Occasionally, experiential learning offers students meaningful engagement with their field, but more and more undergraduates are in need of

professional exposure. Thus, organisations, by seeking free labour cut costs; running contrary experiential learning's attempt to break out of passive pedagogies like lectures by creating space for passive mundane work.

Contemporary experiential learning in universities draws on three dominant 20th century models of learning that try to turn observation into reflection and synthesis: Lewin, Dewey, and Piaget suggest departure from passive pedagogies like lecture and 'service learning' (Kolb 1984, 21). For Lewin, action and implication of data were secondary to data gathering itself (Kolb 1984, 21-22). For Dewey, emotion and observation "gives ideas their moving force, and ideas give direction to impulse," such that action can be derived from the experience (Kolb 1984, 22-23). To Piaget, development is a multistage endeavour where "dimensions of experience and concept, reflection, and action form the basic continua for the development of adult thought" (Kolb 1984, 23). In each model, learning is defined "in terms of its outcomes," and knowledge as "an accumulated storehouse of facts or habits," not explicitly serving the public good (Kolb 1984, 26).

If education is to be reframed to serve the public good, *experiential learning* must be reframed to enable radical democratic practice and engagement. Reclaimed *experiential learning*, therefore, has to be an *active* pedagogy supported by an *active* experience for students to unlock their own passions and capacities for public engagement outside of the Deleuzian "societies of control," like the school, or the *oikos* within the *demos* that dichotomises private and public (Deleuze 1992, 4) polities. An active experience is one where the student has both the agency and broad intellectual terrain to survey, encouraging navigation of the ideas at work and play acting upon them. Students who are told what to think and believe lack a productive outlet to channel their critiques and thus are vulnerable to paralysis of ideological or moral opposition, thus yielding status within their epistemic condition. Active deep experiential engagement requires students to have space to play with ideas, and channel their strengths and frustrations against those with with contrary claims to power.

I argue that *experiential learning* needs to be reimagined to be conducive to democratic practice and must include three characteristics: immersion in uncontrollable space, sustained critique, and learning communities. The adjective, *experiential*, I argue, rebalances identities of the learner to be a *malleable*, self, a critical one that does not internalise the deferential identity of *student*, and does not view success as an individual's existential validation. Learning that is experiential also removes barriers separating isolated specialised disciplines, lessens the intellectual monopoly of specialised skills, and disperses governing power (Heller 2016, 16, 31-32).

Exercising collective, critical skepticism of and in the public realm, of course, resists corporate culture's intrusion into universities, according to Giroux. An egalitarian conception of education's public potential, then, ought to turn learning communities into "enclaves of resistance, new public spaces to counter official forms of public pedagogy," and create "tension between civil society and corporate power while simultaneously struggling to prioritise citizen rights over consumer rights" (Giroux 2002, 450). Giroux dichotomises corporate power and political power, suggesting proficiency in skills (not beliefs) of the latter enable responsible opposition to the former. Giroux speaks of a "social responsibility" to enable "students to come to terms with their own sense of power in public voice as individual...enabling them to examine... critically what they learn in the classroom" (Giroux 2002, 451). Creating critical citizens is, therefore, how experiential learning begins to subvert neoliberal logic and institutions that see learning as an informational transaction.

On base, existing experiential learning models suggest, simplistically, that even believing, or observing real life examples supporting one's ideology is experiential. But, one can do that through online classes, or through a set of reflection questions. My first of three characteristics of experiential learning, immersion in uncontrollable space, catalyses students' departure from the safety of passive pedagogies. Carnes calls styles like lecturing "passive pedagogical modes" which inhibit students' "imaginative thinking" (Carnes 2014, 174, 292). Kolb would generally support this claim positing that learning is experiential when it is "holistic," process oriented, and "molar..., describing the central process of human adaptation to the social and physical environment" permitting deep learning resonant with the student (Kolb 1984, 31).

For Deleuze, to escape the enclosed "interior" of the school, one must suspend their reliance on institutions and logic that value standardised exam-based regurgitation of lecture material which maintains the neoliberal status quo in student ideological development (Deleuze 1992, 3-4). To do the work of getting people out of controlled space and into collective existence, they need to have the capacity to imagine democracy's improvement and affectively experience the forces acting on its constraint in order to defend their claim to political power by opposition, should they choose. Deleuze argues that only by breaking free from movement between enclosures (hospitals, barracks, traditional schooling) and experiencing public life without the narrow disciplinary or professional lens, can public spheres be reclaimed as sites of collective self-governance. By developing a concept of what democracy is and is not, through aspiration or critique, students become able to tease out imaginative capacities from immersion in space where the outcomes uncontrollable.

I want to be very clear and state that immersion does not equate to the substitution of the enclosure of the school for the enclosure of an internship, nor is there a strict need to be inside or outside the classroom because democratic practice can be taught in both. Experiential learning should not be a *transactional* experience, nor a modified form unwaged labour, because experience exerts a power dynamic of hierarchical expertise that places executives at the centre of 'real world' problem-solving, and students as petty functionaries. Internships, contributors to the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) publications argue, satisfy neoliberalism's need for cost-effective work to those without the title to denote their skills that correlate to competitiveness. For example, an unpaid internship might yield skill development in exchange for time. When this is the primary intention, internships become problematic because the transaction is between time for *workplace experience*, not experience that deepens learning. Therefore, experiential internships might be understood as unpaid work, and a transaction between time and deep resonance which is pedagogically vague. For example, the aforementioned internship does not grant the same autonomy to tinker with consequential decisions. Rather, it acquaints the intern with a functionary disposition they are to internalise in the workplace, unable to fail.

It is not enough to immerse students in an uncontrollable space. Moreover, students must also exercise substantive critique of classroom hierarchies, my second characteristic of experiential learning. Jessica Kulynych writes that "if students learn how to exercise critical capacities or resistance to their identities as students, they will be better prepared to do the same as citizens" (Kulynych 1998, 144). The obvious implication is that being *student* in the classroom reinforces a rigid intellectual stratification constituted by the need to be 'deferential' and 'respectful.' Subservient hierarchical structures in corporations or the military makes sense, but redress of society's problems cannot wait for those most affected by them to acquire the academic rank necessary for intellectual credibility. With doctors and postgraduates granted vast intellectual

credibility over undergraduates, there is minimal opportunity to struggle with learning, or *experience* it, because it is cheaper and more efficient to employ passive pedagogy that simply tells students what to think. For example, in a case study of co-facilitation with other faculty, Kulynych observes faculty exhibited less absolute control of the classroom, offering students an opening to insert their own voices and cultivate their own opinions from weighing different disciplinary assumptions, lessening the power of the instructor. Kulynych writes that "two teachers in the classroom disrupted this unspoken authority structure and left us with an unusual power dynamic. It is difficult to be king or queen in your castle when you must share power with another sovereign" (Kulynych 1998, 147). Kulynych implies more sovereigns in the classroom does not mean each knows how to act with agency in the face of authority, diminishing the transportability of their knowledge outside the classroom. The problem therein is a curious implication that passive pedagogy conceives of sovereignty being contingent upon expertise.

Critical skills taught in Carnes' pedagogy can be transported outside of the classroom to achieve a similar counteraction of neoliberalism by persistent critical engagement within public life, allowing democratic practice to retain its inherently unstable qualities. Teaching democratic practice in the classroom encourages deep learning and disengages the perceived power of the expert because their claim can be resisted more substantively, sustaining resistance to codified inequity and ataraxy of institutionalisation. Carnes argues *subversive play* teaches democratic practice by creating public spaces that features dissonance between students, and internal dissonance between their student and citizen selves. Students, then, can make their own connections between otherwise isolated specialised disciplines through play to imagine new possibilities beginning with critique (Carnes 2014, 41). Carnes writes that the difference between bad play and good play is that the former exhibits "anti-rationality" or deliberate competitiveness which reaffirms existing power structures through un-educational, capital reinforcing activities, such as fraternity life or beer pong (Carnes 2014, 42-43, 136). Good play, or *subversive play*, by contrast, is educational by creating spaces to test ideology and suspend present epistemology which, in *Reacting*, is done by playing a character. For Carnes, becoming someone else rebalances that student's internalised powerlessness by exposing them to an unfamiliar political epistemological approach. *Reacting's* need for consensus in decision making requires deliberate collaboration between characters, thereby subverting students' sense of self-sufficiency. Stroessner, in psychological research on *Reacting* students, shows this deep immersion yields a consciousness of their political community and causes students to feel higher self-esteem and confidence for their ability to make stronger arguments, (Stroessner 2009, 14, 19). As a result, there is reason to believe that experiencing subversive gameplay is simulative of democratic skills in a learning community conscious of the public good.

My third characteristic of experiential learning, learning communities, complements critique and immersion in uncontrollable space. Empowering institutionalised critical destabilisation that encourages democratic practice in which *everyone* has equal claim to power, rather than an identity-based single group or class, exposes by contrast the status quo and its power holders as problematically inequitable, enabling substantive critique of their hegemony. Those with power obviously see necessity in reproducing adherents who ensure stable continuity of the state as it is. Deleuze might argue that the school, as a society of control, might not be strictly nor exclusively metaphorical of factory labour or prison, but an epistemological constraint where hierarchy and authority are dangerously polymerised. Without inundation in a community of learning, that is, without other students to engage in persistent discourse, learning is an isolating endeavour.

Encouraging this persistence and putting student learning in conversation with others' is the aim of a *learning community* whilst incorporating structurally engaging experiences. George Kuh of the AAC&U argues, the answer to unsatisfactorily low student engagement and undergraduate retention is community-based learning. Kuh identified a series of “high-impact practices” which include learning communities and senior seminars that encourage undergraduates to persist in their learning, maintaining engagement and the efficiency of curriculum, based on the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) and Documenting Effective Educational Practice (DEEP) data (Kuh 2009 688-689) (Kuh and Schneider 2005, 14). I disagree with the idea that anything un-neoliberal, like critique of the status quo, is inefficient and therefore wasteful, or worse, useless. I am not advocating for a curriculum that meanders through concepts. I think that models like Carnes' create spaces wherein students may equally participate in interrogation of a text or ideology, practice collective self-governance, and comprehend their power. Whether group-based experiential learning, simulations, or peer teaching, students of learning communities, Kuh argues, had interactions that deepened understanding and formed interdisciplinary connections, in addition to working closely with faculty and peers (Kuh, pp.689-690). For Kuh, high-impact practices make learning a conversation and ought be used to help “increasingly diverse students acquire the knowledge, dispositions, skills, and competencies demanded by future circumstances” (Kuh 2009, 699) (Kuh and Schneider 2005, 19). Kuh argues that learning communities also encourage students to exercise critical engagement with difficult material instead of reliance on passive pedagogy.

Carnes argues that Kuh's high-impact practices are compatible with his game-based pedagogies being uncontrollable spaces and intentional learning communities. While many games are controlled space (Candy Crush), and others are immersive (Mock Trial). However, Reacting is resonance yielding, or spaces for critique of systems of power, unlike these other games, which research supports (Joyce et al. 2018). Conversely, all passive pedagogy is entirely exclusive of these three characteristics because learning is unilateral (Carnes 2014, 283). Carnes advocates for a pedagogy which I explore in the remainder of this paper: *subversive play*, and notional role-immersion into a character allowing for compartmentalisation of current identities to yield messy, interdisciplinary, intellectual interactions within and between learners (Carnes 2014, 278). Compatible with Kuh's learning communities and first-year seminars, these games place students into the “unfamiliar” to apply and engage of their learning in a simulation of democratic practice (Kuh and Schneider 2008, 22).

Section III: A strange cocktail of knowledge and wisdom: Reacting to the Past.

Playing Aristarchus in Reacting's *Threshold of Democracy*, I learned how to argue for, and defend, my claims to political power as Athenian citizen in 403 BCE. Faithfully playing Aristarchus required *knowledge* of the conditions in Athens, but also required a bit of *wisdom*; knowing the processes of rhetoric, logic, and grammar, to think and read like a civically-minded citizen. In this section, I argue that Reacting, even though it may appear juvenile, chaotic (Joyce et al. 2018: 187), or lacking intellectual depth from afar, embraces the characteristics of experiential learning and encourages students to engage empathetically, and explore citizenship's potential. Reacting's immersion into the uncontrollable space of a character-self and an alternate historical framework counteracts student apprehension, *unconsciousness*, and empowers *reacting consciousness*: re-imagination of the existing political order, and the ideological claim made by higher education. For one, 85% and 96% of faculty who teach Reacting believed Reacting was in line with the AAC&U Learning Education and America's Promise (LEAP) Goals of “Fostering Civic Learning” and

“Connecting Knowledge with Choice and Action,” respectively (Consortium 2017, 2). Fully enabling suspension of the present empirical self and present epistemological conditions through *subversive play* helps turn learning communities into loci permissive of neoliberalism’s critique, to expose students to what I term *reacting consciousness*. Transporting *reacting consciousness* outside the classroom fosters *citizen consciousness* of the demos with individuals able to engage critical democratic practice and subvert neoliberal hegemony. Student interviewee one said, “I only stopped thinking like Etta [Palm] when I physically fell asleep” (#1 2017). That was how much intellectual territory there was to explore and play with. None of this is achievable in the intellectual enclosure of lecture. Active pedagogy and experiential learning must yield critical citizenship.

Reacting games, are temporally contained within their historical context (Carnes 2014, 279). Therefore, Reacting’s suspensive and embodiment characteristics encourage freer interaction with the content and context thereby enabling students to forge their own ideology with less arbitration by conventional wisdom. Student two, for whose game I was Preceptor, said “I’m scared of confrontation, but I’m able to argue harder because I was playing a character, stepping away from myself” (#2 2017). He makes clear that immersive embodiment and interacting with history altered his classroom demeanour because he could no longer fall back on internalised deference as he was fighting for his characters’ survival in the game. The historical context, as a result, constrains the pedagogy for the better because it gives a stimulative and simulative experience of this public sphere. In Reacting, impact comes from the learning community’s practice of self-governance and collective wrangling over issues. The sovereign of the classroom becomes the presiding student(s).

The students, in character, are submerged in different identities and their deferential, student-consumer identity is receded as they “acclimatise” to an environment in which they must *be* someone else and *become* their role (#3 2017). Student interviewee four said “I wish I cared less” (#4 2017). She said “you feel the need to work as if [the history] was real,” which indicates the affective and suspensive qualities of role-immersion (#4 2017). She also suggests that the game itself required constant energy to foil or preempt opposition attacks without guarantee of winning. In this sense, enclosure in a Reacting game does not enclose the breadth of outcomes or inquiry. The immersive simulation of public space was, it seems, an unfamiliar skillset causing her to think harder. It makes sense why this student expressed discomfort with the game’s demands: the internal displacement of present ideology and replacement with a character with different power and within different ideological conditions. Stroessner’s study shows the displacement and externalising of the student’s “locus of control” stems from greater understanding of the forces acting upon them (Stroessner 2009, 26). *Subversive play*, as a result, allows students to conceive of a claim to political power beyond their own, creating a learning experience, featuring my characteristics of experiential learning, that encourages expression of other identities beyond *student*, like *citizen*.

Immersion into uncontrollable space, my first characteristic of experiential learning, occurs both in the suspension of the student self into character, and the immersion of character into historical context, potentially enhancing the learner’s understanding of critical empathy. The immersion of the student into a character environment seated in historical junctions is meant to create a disorderly “flipped classroom,” or “disequilibrium” that engages untapped student energy, often ‘taught-out,’ domesticated, by passive lecture-based pedagogies (Olwell and Stevens 2015, 562, 565) (Slater 2005, 2). Student one, for example, said “you never felt done” in the game because outcomes became less certain as the game progressed and counterargument was difficult to anticipate despite critically respectful thinking, resourceful research and writing (#1 2017). Carnes

argues Reacting's self-containment focuses on active embodiment of an external character "requires them to operate out of a newly constructed, temporally and spatially alien identity" (Slater 2005, 3). Carnes writes that faculty are "no longer obliged to function as authority-bearing dispensers of knowledge," rather, cultivators of conscious *selves* (Carnes 2014, 279-280). Learning contained *in the past* creates an environment where critique and role-immersion prioritises focus on immeasurable resonance sparked by *subversive play*, over grade-based competition.

Uncontrollable outcomes in Reacting also alter the hierarchical relationship between instructor and student. The game permits interdisciplinary prospecting where deep inquiry can begin. Good citizenship and good Reacting gameplay, is the exercise of characters' full claim to political power rather than conformity to a narrow role preclusive of critical empathy. Institutionalising Reacting encourages critique, not naysaying, that enables cultivation of individual beliefs. Put simply, students cannot escape their role economic actor, aspiring only to what is *expected*, decentralises the paralysis of absolute professorial authority by reclaiming students' sense of *student*, encouraging participation in collective decision making (Kulynych 1998, 146).

While exposure to *subversive play* and suspension of students' present empirical self may well reinforce the present self, the *experience* of suspension for the un-critical student provides that validation. Subversive play in Reacting, Carnes asserts, allows students to imagine a better society within the game or the classroom as preparatory of civic life after graduation. Shallow engagement with game topics without consideration of consequences is problematic because it proliferates a kind of inattentiveness to the "spin" imposed upon civic discourse which I call *unconsciousness*. *Unconsciousness* perpetuates the political status quo, as coiled spools of "tight causal sequences," interpreted with finality that precludes ideological pluralism weakening informed collective decision-making (Carnes 2014, 255, 257). Stroessner shows the *unconsciousness* in passive pedagogies which, compared to Reacting students, yield learners with lower self esteem, lower rhetorical skills, and false sense of agency suggesting that critique of existing political conditions needs *reacting consciousness*, or political agency enabled by *subversive play* (Stroessner 2009, 14).

Enhancing critique, my second characteristic of experiential learning, Reacting as active pedagogy demands navigating students' epistemological or ideological differences. To develop critical empathy or respect in collective decision-making, learners must be open to the pull of various political positions. In "Moving Beyond Mozart," Alisa Kessel writes that the *Mozert v. Hawkins* case of 1987, about the tolerance of ideological difference in liberal society, elucidates the lack of democratic education towards ideological pluralistic tolerance. Kessel argues that *Mozert* exposes liberal education's tendency to treat individuals as neoliberalism's adherents and retainers, rather than exercise collective political capacity (Kessel 2015, 1428). Kessel writes that "democratic education has as its aim, not merely to respect diversity, but to teach its future citizens to engage diversity critically and politically, and to make decisions in the context of that diversity," suggesting that education must forgo assertion of power based on a certain identity, and deeply renegotiate claims to power that originates from civic participation and critique (Kessel 2015, 1421). She suggests that education and civic engagement are obviously political, but should also be pragmatic insofar as they should grant the capacity to engage regardless of ideology. This, she argues, is enabled by substantive democratic education that requires two capacities: "critical respect and... collective decision-making" (Kessel 2015, 1428). Critical respect, she articulates, is exercising judgement and accountability that only comes from tolerance and understanding of differing views

(Kessel 2015, 1429). She concludes that this allows for citizens to depart complacent liberal assimilation into a model of engaged collective action in a democratic context.

Kessel's point that "embodiment of difference alters one's encounter with it, and difference does not have to be the source of the encounter;" suggests that difference can be non-threateningly encountered in Reacting and framed as ideological differences between characters within the public sphere, demanding comprehension rather than dismissal of others' logic. Given that these games demand persuasion of indeterminate characters, the game can be an uncomfortable experience for students because they resist the difficulty of respectfully articulating opposition to others's views. Kessel asserts that classrooms should be uncomfortable, and that education should never shelter learners from opposition or "critical responses" (Kessel 2015, 1431). Reacting, Carnes and Stroessner argue, teaches such empathy "when we have internalised multiple selves—when we examine slavery from the perspective of both slave and master—our moral understanding is deeper" (Carnes 2014, 223) (Stroessner 2009, 7, 13). In other words, students' exposure to ideological difference and contrast helps them gain both critical respect and solidity of their beliefs.

Departing passive pedagogy such that the classroom, therefore, allows students to escape *unconscious*, helpless economic actors. Kyle Helms, a professor who teaches Reacting, for example, said students need "as much *freedom from* my arbitration as possible [and] as much *freedom to* decide their own fates" (Helms 2017). He alludes to Carnes' observation that specialised learning cannot be applied outside of the classroom without simulating the exercise of freedoms guaranteed in public life confining knowledge to classroom abstraction (Carnes 2014, 25). As a result, to forgo the identity of *student*, the learner must forgo power structures that reward mastery. Subversion requires dismantling the epitomised perceptions of learning to make *experiential* education not about capture in the ivory tower's spectacle of scholarly accomplishment (Carnes 2014, 297). Such resistance diminishes the indisputable intellectual aristocracy, a class of *professariat* as absolute rulers of learning. Less rigid hierarchies of knowledge resist retreating from critique, strengthening intellectual conversation in learning communities, my third characteristic of experiential learning.

One of the areas in which the scholars cited throughout this project remarkably agree is the use of students in the classroom as "preceptors," one of whom I was. As a student preceptor advising my peers similar to George Kuh's model of embedded student course assistants within first-year courses, I shed the roles of Aristarchus and Sexton for assistant roles like Cicero, and Le Gendarme du GameMaster. Each role has informed my perspective on game play, informing how students, especially first years, react to Reacting as learning community and how they engage more empathetically in collective self-governance. Reacting is a learning community, because no player can win or remain viable in the game without engaging deeply. Demands for active participation counteract students' passive role within the academy. If instructors can sideline their certainty, then the power dynamic begins to be less synonymous with their role. For example, in Reacting, faculty, suspend their instructor role, too. While remaining GameMaster and their divinity as evaluator and assessor, they recede their identity of instructor, to catalyse student comprehension of consequences.

Kulynych's discussion of the classroom authority structure alluded to sovereignty over a castle, suggesting that students have no political agency. But why sovereigns? Harry Boyte argues that professionals' expertise, while well intended, paradoxically "disempower[s]" people without such distinction (Boyte 2008, 11). Again, here, are those with informal freedom defensive of their ability to influence, and a need for learning communities that permit democratic practice to the contrary. He argues that experts' interventions into political problems gradually dulls critical

capacities of those un-pedigreed, which he calls *technocratic creep* (Boyte 2008, 11). Boyte argues that expertise, *technocracy*, valorises excellence in an “apolitical” way (Boyte 2008, 11). The merits of saintly disinterested expertise seeking pragmatic solutions to civic issues seems reasonable. You have a legal problem, you see a lawyer, not a farmer. But, as Boyte asserts, civic solutions can be achieved by popular engagement, or what he calls “civic agency,” a “collective capacity to act on common challenges across differences,” or, the *public good* rather than a disciplinary good (Boyte 2008, 10). Reacting’s suspension of the present empirical self *in the past* permits, as opposed to his *Public Achievement* that crowdsources solutions to civic issues, a temporary escape from neoliberalism allowing students to tinker with ideas free of distracting bureaucracy promoting awareness to conditions acting on civic engagement, rather than paper-pushing. While Boyte and Carnes both argue for collective action, Reacting places greater focus on democratic practice because it demands navigation of the *demos* via *argument* and instability of public discourse. The clear necessity to the *demos* is empowering a deeper engagement and sustained passionate learning in citizenship where rigid constraints of societal roles maintained by pedigree are subverted.

Other immersive activity, on first glance, like Boyte’s Public Achievement, Model United Nations, or student government, models subversive play in a community. The distinction, I want to make clear is that these activities are uncontrollable spaces and educational play, but whose starting point is within a state apparatus or not fully suspensive. I distinguish Reacting from these activities by emphasising Reacting is *to the past* demanding a deliberately constructed learning community to ensure suspension of the student self and their subsequent identities informed by present epistemological conditions. While engagement with *current* issues might be pertinent to *current* civic life, opinions on those issues undergo rigorous spin which further inundates the individual with ideology, grounded in contemporary institutions and logic without a buffer from social stigma for holding contrary opinions threatening their secure social standing. For example, in the Athens game, industrial production or regressive taxation conceptually did not exist, and cannot be introduced into debate without committing an anachronism beyond game’s supported counterfactuals. As a result, grappling the historical period’s assumptions and institutions practically demand suspending contemporary politics so they can be examined externally to fully expose contrasts. Play and interaction in-character counteracts solid conceptions of the self, insofar as the self is split into identities beyond student (Carnes 2014, 163-164). *Subversive play* liberates the learner from their identities repressed by the learner’s need to be *student* rather than citizen.

Departure from *student* is uncomfortable, though. Student one felt unease without a casual and sequential list of objectives correlating to success, like an exam study guide (#1 2017). Consequently, his gameplay was freer, but “precarious” because he took seriously “the depth of his immersion” (#1 2017). Being immersed into someone else realigns learning because students walk the walk of being told to critique, and have space to do so. In this sense, the classroom as “enclosure,” and the scholarly ethos its “interior,” positively compartmentalises the present self so that it may be self-examined from afar (Deleuze 1992, 4, 5). Play is a negative concept of the self elucidating what the learner is *not*, letting the self experience immersion and sidestep themselves.

While measuring psychological *effects* of gameplay empirically is feasible, it is harder to measure *affects* of gameplay through traditional methods of assessment. However, it is clear that Reacting faculty believe the pedagogy to be efficacious (96%), instructive of inquiry and innovation (91%, 79%), and demonstrative of civic learning (85%) (Consortium 2017, 2). In addition, according to Stroessner, Reacting students demonstrated higher self-esteem, empathy, and rhetorical

skills, suggesting that playing Reacting garners greater understanding that human beings are malleable, rather than *solid* and “more likely to persist after failure,” meaning that failure, like losing a vote, is not a paralysing experience (Stroessner 2009, 13). Stroessner implies that this malleability is affective; that despite the external forces acting on the student, failure is not an invalidation of their existence, rather the wrong argument at the wrong time— self empathy. Agency is, as a result, reclaimed insofar as neither the self nor conditions were exclusively to blame. Coupled with *reacting consciousness* to forces acting upon the suspended self, there is greater reassurance that the student is not helpless and unaware, like the neoliberal subject, but rather a citizen able to react to changing conditions that threaten their claim to political power. If Stroessner is right, then universities should institutionalise Reacting and *subversive play* to ensure space for critical democratic practice. Subversive play, helps reclaim spheres for democratic practice, and enduring the onslaught of neoliberal forces that view democratic practice threateningly, and prefers student apathy and passivity which views success as profitable employment.

The destabilising characteristic of *subversive play* resists rote rationalisation of capitalist apology within the ivory tower (Heller 2016, 10, 118). Play merely allows for free experimentation; *subversive play*, therefore, must be active discussion of ideas in and out of the classroom for citizens to cultivate capacity for critique. Empowering students to cultivate both their own and their character’s identity with critical respect allows them to create the conditions for empathetic citizenship *from within*. Pedagogically, cultivating multiple political identities, by contrast to or reaffirmation of the present empirical self momentarily sidesteps the student self, to teach empathy sometimes for the *other* and other times for the self. Gameplay, because it is gameplay, encourages winning. Winning, in Reacting, means, student five said, “less about a grade rather than getting your point across” (#5 2017) Working within the political community to self-govern, players both learn to mitigate their newfound identities as well as learn how to conceive of change, and enact it.

Reacting tends away from *unconsciousness* because it is categorically aspirational, critical, and uncontrollable; seeking to reimagine the status quo and engage democratic practice, allowing students revive ideological pluralism in the demos. What I think Reacting does well, albeit imperfectly, is that it shows that intellectual engagement does not merely reiterate rational apology for capital’s necessity, instead encouraging creative argumentation and critique. The result is the cultivation of a *reacting consciousness* that can arm resistance to neoliberalism’s march towards global capital. *Reacting consciousness* reintegrates political power and capacity into public spheres from private spheres, simulated in active role-play that suspends the student self and reliance on institutions by becoming someone else (Giroux 2002, 428) (Brown 2011, 30). Consciousness is not, locked in the character, and is carried by the student upon return to present realities, and can yield greater agency in public spheres making even a fleeting exposure fundamentally re-situating of learning as intellectual development by awareness to the external forces acting on their citizenship.

I will also acknowledge and defend, briefly, against a reasonable counterargument. I anticipate that critique of my argument begins: does Reacting’s mere existence within the neoliberal university institution undercut its radically democratic potential? Is Reacting as a result, some kind of safe subversion? My answer is that it can retain its subversive qualities even within the neoliberal institutional framework because Reacting needs students who would not otherwise play to gain exposure to active pedagogy because many might prefer passivity. I believe that with a neoliberal reading of Kuh’s high-impact practices, the subversive qualities of Reacting pedagogy remain because, as Stroessner confirms, the pedagogy is immersive. While Kuh argues against the idea of

“hot passion,” or short bursts of intense intellectual engagement which a five-week Reacting game might very well be, he advocates for a “steady fire,” which can be a form of sustained consciousness sparked by experiencing the game’s intensity (Kuh et al., 2005, 111). Carnes’ *minds on fire* can cause a burnout for students that does not encourage them to persist in their inquiry causing *reacting consciousness* to be fleeting. I would challenge this by arguing that fleeting experiences with consciousness have profound impacts to sparking momentum towards sustaining it.

Kuh, further, argues that undergraduate research, in collaboration with faculty, (one potent application of the Reacting pedagogy), teaches mitigation of “messy, unscripted problems” necessary to deepening student learning (Kuh and Schneider 2005, 17). Reacting may further be considered a learning community, therefore can be integral to curriculum design for sustained long-term research because the game encourages sustained engagement with core texts and strong argument. Reacting games further encourage dialogue that can be exported out of the classroom setting, deepening disciplinary inquiry. Kuh reasonably argues from the neoliberal perspective: the 21st century global economy is precarious. Therefore education needs to reflect its challenges and develop practices that efficiently hone skills to react to changing economic conditions, maintaining the malleability of the self (Kuh 2009, 683). *Subversive play*, as a result, can still be a high-impact practice because it subverts helplessness to economic conditions. The existing order may still need to be undercut *from without* to solve the economy’s problems through iterative reform, still demands reimagining the globalist academic norms. As a result of neoliberal institutions’ desire to maintain its own bottom line, it is in their administrators’ financial interest to improve economic conditions disallow students from seeking admission, increasing collective consciousness in the citizenry.

Section IV: “I felt empathy for the Revolution.”

I want to expand my discussion on *reacting consciousness* as good for citizenship from another anticipated neoliberal counterargument. Neoliberal critique of game pedagogy argues, for one, that conventional schooling’s “purpose” is “the transfer of knowledge and skills” (Straumanis 2015, 97-98). A common critique of game-based learning is that outcomes and the immersive quality of the experience are inconsistent, especially when an immeasurable effect, like *reacting consciousness*, is a main benefit of the pedagogy. Anecdotally, there is concern, for example, about an apparent ‘extrovert bias’ in Kuh’s learning communities. For Straumanis, in her review of Tierney, et al.’s book on social media and game-based learning, *Postsecondary Play*, her disagreement with Carnes’ pedagogy is that Reacting is not clearly framed as “competitive” or “collaborative,” inviting different implications for Reacting as practice for active citizenship (Straumanis 2015, 98). Good pedagogy, then, should have clear expectations correlating time, effort, and success; setting explicit means of success to guarantee high-impact (Kuh 2009, 16).

Classrooms that emphasise transmission of knowledge and skills are beneficial to an extent, because arbitrary assessment is simply unfair to students because they do not know on what they are being evaluated. Even in game-based classes, for example, syllabi remain contracts to ensure understanding of expectations. The measurable outcome is the necessary evil to be endured for Reacting to be compatible with the neoliberal university model as a means of unlocking student learning. Straumanis questions the assessment methods of game pedagogies, specifically, points, and winners and losers. She suggests that questions about Reacting’s competitive or collaborative ethos have different impacts on Reacting’s implicit extrovert bias, difficulty to those with social

anxiety, and small scale. Reacting in big classes gestures to a problem of institution size preventing individual attention from faculty, but Reacting can still be led in discussion sections. The problem of discomfort is harder. Inequities and biases implicit in institutions again reflect societal inequities and biases (ablism, for one) but even an introvert needs to react when conditions change that threaten their claim to power. For example, workers need to react to attempts to gut their unions.

A neoliberal reading of Kuh would suggest that Reacting could be used to push students to smart career decisions; making gameplay a professional development exercise (Kuh et al., 2005, 193). A neoliberal reading of Carnes suggests that competition is rewarded such that the self is *malleable* to the needs to the employer. It is also true, in the same reading, that Reacting can encourage entrepreneurial gameplay that subverts and bypasses public spheres (via hiring mercenaries) to achieve ends by force. Immersion in the game suspends ideological constraint by demands for efficiency and productivity because the game, pedagogically, resists solitary learning. Students' exposure to the experience of *reacting consciousness* may yield reassessment and rebalancing of their place within the academy. For the same reasons that my student described the game as chaotic, Reacting can serve as warning as to what is lurking in the swamp.

I believe Reacting pedagogically counteracts neoliberalism because it makes players aware of political and economic factors acting on the student and the character; stigmatising aggressive seizure of power as despotic. Again, I assert that Reacting might shallowly be dismissed as 'cosplay' or historical fan fiction by critics who only see the costumes, unaware of the attempts to make the game as simulative of the historical moment as possible. Reacting faithfully replicates the uncontrollable spaces and conditions in public life and demonstrative of the agency required to achieve political action granting *reacting consciousness*, yet still increasing self esteem suggesting that *reacting consciousness* instructs the intentional use of public space. While the forces acting upon the learner may be beyond their control, they feel confident in their capacity to interrogate the political status quo and, for some, subvert and decentralise neoliberal logic turning students' frustration with their current condition into agency, rather than "float passively on a sea of informational guidance" (Stroessner 2009, 19) (Carnes 2014, 154). Confronting the present empirical self in contrast of character is central to circumventing demands for passive conformity. I find the argument that only a few win, and most lose, an obvious truism neoliberal society.

Stroessner further shows in his study that increased self esteem in Reacting students stems from exercising empathy for others rather than just trying to win the game (Stroessner 2009, 14). Carnes argues that students can still be active within the game but still out of control coalescing around the "fatalistic injunction," which caused students to actively repurpose feelings of helplessness into persistence even if they might not be able to take control over everything (Carnes 2014, 162). For one of my students, student one, Reacting's many dimensions demand constant reinforcement of his empathy for its constituents and opposition research: "I was supposed to be studying," rather than trying to anticipate the next move, he said (#1 2017). Failing to represent your character and factions interests, exposed for this student the discomfort with helplessness, which is perhaps why neoliberalism finds competition so attractive (Stroessner 2009, 14). Reacting students, however, who see their failures as constructive, attribute the emotional intensity of failure to an identity (your character, your faction) instead of their existence (Stroessner 2009, 14) (Carnes 2014, 164, 171). The 'splitting' of selective expression of identities within the learner exposes the potency of the pedagogy. For, by saying that if the student *can* and *will* be subversive within the Reacting framework, then they *can* and *will* consciously do the same as citizens. Students'

assimilation into their character's identity and privilege is precisely the condition where play enables the development of critical capacities because they are malleable (Carnes 2014, 164).

The new identities students are given within the game provide an uncomfortable experiential moment to gain a kind of *reacting*, or *citizen, consciousness* towards the collectivist potential of their critical capacity, and its frustrations. If skills practiced in Reacting can be transported out of the classroom, then both student engagement and civic engagement can lead into one another. Undergraduates, despite the stereotype of being naïve, deferential, and impressionable can, through democratic practice via Reacting, Stroessner demonstrates, can assume greater agency from *reacting consciousness* to reclaim intellectual agency from below. Reacting pedagogy cultivates identities that are comfortable with persistent opposition within the perimeters of the public good and reclaim education to pursue this public good un-beholden to private sector interest. The learner becomes a more human self by suspending her present empirical self and epistemological conditions allowing them to reconcile the domination of their identities by internalising the role of citizen rather than student. For the citizen, the hope is that, win or lose the game, their identity as *citizen* is validated and the impact of their learning and consciousness taken out of the classroom. Such a validation, and the space to play with ideas in the game permits pockets of the school to be a progressive, subversive force, rather than complicit in a *society of control*— counteracting neoliberal logic and the forces that demean collective decision making determining public good.

Conclusion: The experience *should* be loud.

I attempted to show in this paper that higher education's democratic potential is diminished by passive pedagogy and neoliberal logic imposed on universities. However, re-characterising experiential learning that encourages subversive play yields a consciousness to the power of democratic practice. Reacting to the Past embodies three characteristics of experiential learning, immersion in uncontrollable space, enabling critique, and leaning communities that counteract neoliberalism's decadent individualism. Taking critique and democratic practice outside of the classroom aids in substantive and critical citizenship that empowers the public good. The clear necessity to the demos is empowering learning's immeasurable qualities; a deeper engagement that is about igniting a students' resonance with learning, motivating passionate play with ideas.

To play with ideas is to practice their applicability. In so doing, the students, for whose games I was preceptor, got a glimpse beyond the walls of the classroom seeing that if they could problem solve in the game, with deliberate rhetoric and argument, they could achieve change in American politics. Despite the forces acting upon their choices and voices as citizens, some came away from the game with a better understanding of their role within the American politics. A lucky few overcame their feelings of hopelessness and helplessness, realising their potential to have a high-impact on public life by reimagining the capitalist status quo. This work, though is not just imaginative, but active. Beyond the classroom, Reacting is not only indicative higher education's flaws, but demonstrative of neoliberal capitalism's flaws because (Citizens United excepting) speech and consciousness are neither empirical nor property and are therefore inalienable from individuals. Reacting, while no panacea, does not have as high an impact on increased democratic practice without accessibility to universities that support the pedagogy. For some, it takes becoming someone else for three weeks to comprehend the gravity of the present self's power.

Our current political moment, with substantive reservations about globalism's benevolence, conservative authoritarian resurgence, and inflamed racial tensions are dramatic narratives that elicit calls for more robust security apparatuses. As difference is highlighted by the media, peoples'

embodiment thereof and the crystallised identities created and perceived as a result become critical to bridging the deep ending divides caused by political spectacles. The fear of the *other* suggests a defensiveness against the uncertain; deferential to experts and technocrats that can ‘guarantee the best odds.’ Simultaneously, individuals lack substantive public practices of reckoning, anger, grief. Instead, they are told “yes we can,” shocked by immiserate fatigue, which threatens to dull public capacities for radical engagement. Collective engagement cannot become a casualty on the march toward global capitalism, and must maintain its capacity to risk itself and be vulnerable in imagining *otherwise* with creative disorder. The American academy must therefore better empower robust democratic practice and collective self-reckoning through pedagogies of affective and experiential critical play. As students become citizens or subverters, they need consciousness to the threats against their participation in civic life. One student optimistically stated that, in her class, “some people stayed in the mentality of the game,” to which another said “you couldn’t escape” which are hopeful statements for Reacting’s transportability into conscious and critical citizenship.

The minority faction needs more than hope, for democratic backswing or radical upheaval cannot begin without them. Students need a place to practice their outrage, their anger, and engage the injustices and privileges they live purposefully. Therefore, in all its inefficiencies, its emotional heartache, and conspiratorial frustration: playing the game in this landscape of indeterminates, entering the game and doing more than one thought one could ever do is resistance against neoliberalism. Consciousness identifies demagoguery for what it is: corruption of publics, and critique ensures their power ebbs like appeal of their ideas. Subverting power means departing traditional politics and must ensure that democratic practice is protected, despite its imperfect reproduction. And on this, Aristarchus and I completely agree.

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