

The Interpellative Crises of Critical Thinking

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THESIS

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To my mom, Sharon Ann Carey, who told me, “Just get it done.”
And I did.

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SUMMARY

Both in academia and in the public sphere there is a strong sense that higher education today is imperiled. While critics from right, left, and center understand “the crisis of higher education” differently, most agree that the cultivation of critical thinking is a (if not *the*) central purpose of undergraduate education. Despite their ideological differences, these groups understand critical activity to be essentially productive, and that critical thinking is a skill to be taught or produced. My dissertation challenges what I call the “production paradigm” of critical thinking, offering in its stead an interpellative account. I argue that the cultivation of critical citizens entails an ethical and political – i.e. a material – commitment to providing them with the resources generative of such development, as opposed to simply access to quality education.

Louis Althusser developed the notion of interpellation in the late 1960s/early 1970s as a way of describing how humans come to know themselves as subjects, and as precisely the kind of subjects that they are. He locates the shaping forces of identity in a matrix of material and discursive experiences that give rise to a person’s ideas, desires, and practices. In examining differing accounts of higher education and its crises, I illuminate how each of them depends implicitly upon the logic of interpellation in making their analyses, while at the same time neglecting to address the material and discursive concerns entailed by such analyses. I frame my understanding of interpellation within the classical notion of the liberal arts. There, “liberal” did not refer to a course of study that would emancipate a person; rather, it referred to the condition of liberty (a material and discursive condition) requisite to pursue and profit from such a course. Thus

I argue that if we are truly committed to the value of critical thinking, this obligates us to providing and securing the material and discursive conditions requisite to liberty.

Introduction: The Birth of an Inquiry

When I began writing this dissertation on the crisis of higher education and critical thinking in the summer of 2012, little did I know that Jeffrey J. Williams had just christened the field of *critical university studies*.¹ In his now famous *Chronicle* article, “Deconstructing Academe: the Birth of Critical University Studies,” Williams describes this emerging field thus:

“Critical” indicates the new work’s oppositional stance, similar to approaches like critical legal studies, critical race studies, critical development studies, critical food studies, and so on, that focuses on the ways in which current practices serve power or wealth and contribute to injustice or inequality rather than social hope.

“Studies” picks up its cross-disciplinary character, focused on a particular issue and drawing on research from any relevant area to approach the problem.

“University” outlines its field of reference, which includes the discourse of “the idea of the university” as well as the actual practices and diverse institutions of

¹ Not that I didn’t have plenty of scholarship to draw upon – historical accounts and institutional critiques of higher education in the US have a long lineage, almost as long as what we have come to know as the American university itself. (See, for example, Thorstein Veblen’s *The Higher Learning In America: A Memorandum On the Conduct of Universities By Business Men*, 1918.) If we broaden our scope beyond our shores, the university has been the subject of critical attention at least since the Enlightenment. While Kant’s 1784 essay *Was ist Aufklärung?* is most often hailed as a clarion call to the ascendancy of reason over prejudice, it is no less, as Michel Foucault has pointed out, a kind of contract proposed to Frederick II of Austria as to the proper relationship between the university and the state. The centrality of this relationship to the purpose and functioning of the university was such that in 1798 Kant published a collection of essays on the topic, *The Conflict of the Faculties*, wherein he outlined the various relationships between “the higher faculty” (theology, law, and medicine); “the lower faculties” (philosophy, which for Kant included what we call the humanities or liberal arts); government; and political subjects. In all, he insisted on the necessary autonomy and authority of the lower faculty, which authority is guaranteed and safeguarded by the sovereign himself, looking after the state’s best interests.

contemporary higher education.

When I began my inquiry I certainly took an oppositional stance to, as Williams puts it, “what was happening to higher education,” which at the time I would have readily characterized, again in Williams’s words, as consequences of “the rise of corporate managerial policies in place of traditional faculty governance.” In addition to identifying with the “critical” aspect of this new field, I felt that Williams’s unpacking of “studies” as “drawing on research from any relevant area to approach the problem,” fit well with my own method of *bricolage*. My academic trajectory spans philosophy, literary studies, and rhetoric, and I use methods and concepts from all of these fields in conducting my analyses.² Finally, I had already identified my project as a historical and rhetorical inquiry into the idea of the university through an examination of one of its key value terms, “critical thinking.” I also appreciated Williams’s article because it announced a shift in focus that mirrored the evolution of my own scholarly interests. While I entered graduate school with a keen desire to teach, my research agenda was wholly literary. But by the end of my first year, I had serious questions about the projects of both studying and teaching literature. Williams articulates this transition nicely.

In some ways, critical university studies has succeeded literary theory as a nexus of intellectual energy. A dominant tenor of postmodern theory was to look reflexively at the way knowledge is constructed; this new vein looks reflexively at “the knowledge factory” itself (as the sociologist Stanley Aronowitz has called it), examining the university as both a discursive and a material phenomenon, one

² I must note, however, that despite the current fervor for interdisciplinary work, my experience of this has been less a loosening of the strictures of academic fields to allow for other voices and perspectives, and more a widening of the circle of those who can call you a dilettante.

that extends through many facets of contemporary life.

While my own project is intimately related to both of these questions – how knowledge is constructed and how the university discursively and materially authorizes this construction – my focus is distinct from the question of knowledge as I am concerned with that which is supposed to make knowledge valuable and productive – the faculty, more or less, of “critical thinking.” While the postmodern turn did much to undermine our epistemic complacency, and while critical university studies forces us to rethink the goals, methods, and working operations of higher education, the essential nature and intrinsic value of “critical thinking” yet remains an unexamined piety by both academic workers and the larger public. On one hand, contemporary accounts of the crisis of higher education regularly depict critical thinking as imperiled. On the other hand, these accounts themselves are often at odds about what critical thinking is and how to cultivate it. Indeed, Stanley Fish has gone so far as to claim that critical thinking is “a phrase without content.” I take this claim seriously, and this inquiry attempts to provide a rhetorical and historical analysis of the conditions that warrant it.

My appreciation of Williams’s article notwithstanding, there are a few aspects regarding “critical university studies” that give me pause.

First, claims about critical university studies’ interventionism (as Williams says, it “goes a step further” than “reporting on and analyzing changes besetting higher education” and “takes a stand against some of those changes”) seem somewhat dissonant in light of announcing the joyous arrival of it as a legitimate academic field. According to Clark Kerr, whose seminal work *The Uses of the University* (1963) might be considered an inaugural text for what has now become the field of critical university studies,

“Universities are among the most conservative of all institutions in their methods of governance and conduct and are likely to remain so” (210). Richard Ohmann, whose *English in America* (1973) and *The Politics of Knowledge* (2003) are central works of CSU’s canon, warns that “[P]rofessionalization leads to privatization or depoliticization, a withdrawal of intellectual energy from a larger domain to a narrower discipline. Leftists who entered the university hardly invented this process, but they accepted and even accelerated it. Marxism itself has not been immune; in recent years it has become a professional ‘field’ plowed by specialists” (65). While Kerr’s and Ohmann’s observations are certainly not the last word on the subject, at the very least they ought to give us pause in considering the possibility of a discipline’s autonomy from the authority that grants it. While I take this up in more detail in chapter 5, we might say the difficulty here involves the too easy and oft-made conflation of ideological independence with material authority. As Clyde Barrow puts it, “One must therefore draw an empirical distinction between physical ‘possession’ of the means of mental production by faculties and the legal ‘ownership’ of these tools by public and private governing boards” (13).

Another aspect of Williams’s description of critical university studies that I find problematic is the implicit conflation of critical work with a leftist (or at the very least, progressive) agenda. While this may be the case for the works he cites³, a cursory google

³ Lawrence C. Soley's *Leasing the Ivory Tower: The Corporate Takeover of Academia* (South End Press, 1995), Bill Readings's *The University in Ruins* (Harvard University Press, 1996), Sheila Slaughter and Larry L. Leslie's *Academic Capitalism: Politics, Policies, and the Entrepreneurial University* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), David F. Noble's *Digital Diploma Mills: The Automation of Higher Education* (Monthly Review Press, 2001), Jennifer Washburn's *University, Inc.: The Corporate Corruption of Higher Education* (Basic Books, 2005), Joe Berry's *Reclaiming the Ivory Tower: Organizing Adjuncts to Change Higher Education* (Monthly Review Press, 2005), Marc Bousquet's *How the University Works: Higher Education and the Low-Wage*

search of “critical thinking” reveals the popular notion of what is critical to be a much more conservative affair. Besides the numerous calls of advocacy for and claims to teach “critical thinking skills” (one of the hallmarks of which is political disinterest), one finds a marked and consistent interest in these skills on the part of employers, corporations, and business leaders. If critical university studies is drawing scholarly and public attention to the crisis of higher education, it is certainly not alone in this undertaking. Williams gives voice to an ardent strain of what we might loosely term Neo-Marxist accounts of the crisis of higher education. Competing with those accounts, however, are at least two other well-established and popular articulations of this crisis: a neo-classical account, as given by liberal arts advocates for whom the crisis of the university is the crisis of the humanities; and a neoliberal account, proffered by business folk, policy experts, and various government workers who see the crisis of higher education in terms of technical innovation, job skills, and global competitiveness. Regardless of where one’s sympathies lie here, it is clear that we cannot in good faith talk about “the” crisis of the university, but must examine the various articulations of its crises.

Finally, even if we were to assume that critical work is essentially leftist or progressive (which we should not assume), there remains the question of what commitments are entailed by such critical work. Williams’s description of critical university studies implies that to be engaged in critical scholarly work means (or ought to

Nation (New York University Press, 2008), Christopher Newfield's *Unmaking the Public University: The Forty-Year Assault on the Middle Class* (Harvard University Press, 2008), Michele A. Massé and Katie J. Hogan's *Over Ten Million Served: Gendered Service in Language and Literature Workplaces* (State University of New York Press, 2010), as well as Williams’s own "Debt Education: Bad for the Young, Bad for America" and "Student Debt and the Spirit of Indenture" in *Dissent* magazine (Summer 2006; Fall 2008).

mean) being engaged in political activism as well. “Critical university studies is not only academic. Part of its resonance comes from its organic connections to graduate-student-unionization and adjunct-labor movements. That is probably one reason that it draws literary and cultural critics, because those in English and foreign-language departments typically do a great deal of introductory teaching (rather than, say, working in a lab or under one professor on a particular project financed by grants)⁴ and lead union efforts.” While I agree with Williams that English and foreign language departments are hotbeds of discontent, from my own experiences in an English department in a state university where the graduate students and faculty are unionized, I would say that most of my colleagues (including myself), despite being very critical of the current state of our working conditions and the job market, are yet more interested in getting ahead in the current system than working to radically change it. The problem here is in attempting to coopt a critical disposition into a political activity, especially when such activities may threaten not only one’s livelihood but the very conditions of critical activity as well. Remember Kant’s famous injunction of the enlightened despot, “Argue as much as you will, about what you will, only obey!” It is one thing to be critical of authority; it is quite another thing to defy it.

To be clear, I am not trying to critique activism here. I am, however, attempting to gauge its efficacy as a strategy for reforming the university. Besides the fact that many graduate students and adjuncts are overworked and underpaid (which, if this is a situation that should motivate them to act, is just as much a condition that leaves them with little

⁴ There is an implicit assumption here that science folks’ relative scarcity in campus labor organizations is indicative of a lesser critical apprehension of/concern with the university.

material resources – time most importantly – to do so), if the university itself is an exploitive institution, why should we want to preserve it, reformed or otherwise? That is to say, why is so much activism being directed at winning better working, teaching, and/or research conditions in locations and within traditions that we have identified as oppressive as such, rather than thinking about how we might inaugurate new institutions and traditions that could work differently? In “The Sea Island Citizenship Schools: Literacy, Community Organization, and the Civil Rights Movement,” Stephen Schneider prompts those intellectuals who would seek to use the university as a site for social change “to think about the work we might perform outside the classroom and the ways in which we relate our pedagogical concerns to cultural and economic issues of our surrounding community” (144). This move to reposition ourselves and our efforts to spaces outside of traditional academic institutions would seem particularly apt if we accept Schneider’s claim (via Gramsci) that, “Counterhegemony is achieved by the establishment and growth of alternative institutions built around marginalized ideologies, particularly those capable of producing a more democratic social order (such as trade unions)” (145). As Schneider elaborates,

Traditional classrooms are, for Gramsci, already articulated in hegemonic terms; that is, they are necessarily a part of the social and economic structures governing a society. While this articulation does not mean that classrooms correspond directly to capitalist work formations, it does mean that formal classrooms and the educational practices that attend them are seldom capable of directly threatening the dominant social order. As a result, counterhegemonic education must be built within nonformal educational institutions such as adult education centers and

union halls. These institutions are, in turn, central to the development of competing ideologies capable of supporting broader struggles for social change. (145-146)

In making my critiques of critical university studies as Williams defines it I am attempting not so much to distance myself from it, but to both identify myself within this field as well as to articulate some of the ways in which I find this identification (as is indeed the case with all identifications) troubling. The problematic assumptions I draw attention to above I understand not as errors or flaws of Williams's theorizations but as antinomies constitutive of critical activity as such. In this way, critical university studies affords me not only a field and a methodology, but a rhetorical and historical construct that brings together the twin foci of this inquiry: "critical thinking" and "the crisis of the university." The words "critical," "criticism," and "crisis" all share the same Greek root, *kritos* – a judge. In what follows I will be concerned both with what is materially⁵ and discursively entailed by notions of a critical faculty or faculty of judgment; as well as the ways in which articulations of "the crisis" of the university reveal conflicts among different faculties (not solely academic) over who has the authority to judge what is best for the common good.

⁵ A quick note on my terminology. While I take discursive forces to be inherently material (after all, the language ways one is exposed to in their formative years, as well as the network of synaptic associations they create are both material things), I find that the terms "material resources" and "material forces" tend to get reduced in common parlance to income. My use of material and materiality is much broader, and includes things like time, space, and affect. While the term "class" is a convenient shorthand and heuristic for making predictions about the relative availability of such resources to people located on different ends of the socioeconomic spectrum, class in itself is not determinative. Rather, material and discursive conditions are constitutive of subjects.

My concerns with Williams's claims about critical university studies are to be understood as concerns with what is meant by the critical as such, and will be running concerns throughout this inquiry. Allow me, then, to briefly rearticulate the three problems.

First, the critical is typically assumed to be a species of, or to generate, *autonomy*.

Second, the critical is never reduced solely to an activity, but always associated with a certain *disposition*.

Third, the *autonomy* and *disposition* of the critical necessarily yield a kind of *productivity*.

Two concepts will be particularly important to me in addressing these concerns: *fetish* and *interpellation*. To the extent that discourses of critical thinking tend to exclude discussion or occlude the conditions of the above three problems, I assert that critical thinking operates largely as a fetish in these accounts. To the extent that wherever we encounter these discourses we cannot make sense of them without inquiring into the material and discursive forces constitutive of a subject's *autonomy*, *disposition*, and *productivity*, the question of critical thinking is less the question of a skill or faculty, than of the conditions for interpellating critical subjects. In what follows I will be examining various crisis narratives of higher education. I locate in their articulations of the university's crisis constitutive rhetorics of the critical as such. For each I give an account of the ways in which questions of *autonomy*, *disposition*, and *productivity* are assumed, elided, and/or occluded in order to produce a *fetish* of the critical particular to each discourse, as well as the ways in which they work to interpellate particular kinds of critical subjects.

In Chapter 1 I provide an account of this project's genesis. I begin with an anecdote from my graduate teaching experience and how it led me to articulate the double-bind of college English teaching.⁶ In particular, I highlight the ways in which attempts to cultivate critical thinking in students are often hampered by the ideological and material conditions interpellating both teachers and students. These frustrations compelled me to inquire into contemporary accounts of the university and its problems. However, I found that rather than illuminating or untangling these binds, these accounts merely reconstituted them. The second half of this chapter voices three distinct crisis narratives of the university – neoliberal, neoclassical, and neo-Marxist – and locates within them similar formal structure and assumptions.

Chapter 2 begins with a reading of Robert Arum and Josipa Roksa's *Academically Adrift: Limited Learning on College Campuses* (2011), a report touted by the *Chronicle of Higher Education* as "[a] damning indictment of the American higher-education system."⁷ Arum and Roksa's diagnosis is interpellative: they look to social, economic, cultural, and institutional forces in accounting for the status of critical thinking in colleges today. Their prognosis, however, is hortatory: they call for a "recommitment" to the "moral imperative" of "instilling in the next generation of young adults a lifelong love of learning...and a willingness to embrace and assume adult responsibilities." I claim that the simplicity of the remedy is disproportionate to the complexity of the problem. What is more, this dissymmetry is structural, located in the antinomy between

⁶ In *Token Professionals and Master Critics: A Critique of Orthodoxy in Literary Studies*, James Sosnoski describes the double-bind as a kind of cognitive dissonance between what one feels one should do ethically and what one knows one ought to do according to their professional ethos.

⁷ Glenn, David. "New Book Lays Failure to Learn on Colleges' Doorsteps." *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. January 18, 2011. Web.

two moments of the critical: the analytic and the affective. I pursue this tension in the next chapter by way of another crisis narrative prevalent today in higher education – the crisis of the humanities.

In Chapter 3 I examine two strains of liberal arts discourse: *instrumental* and *intrinsic*, looking at representative texts from Martha Nussbaum and Stanley Fish, respectively. Instrumental accounts vaunt the liberal arts' role in inculcating key democratic values: civic mindedness, independent thinking, personal responsibility, and economic productivity. Intrinsic arguments rely upon the fundamental uniqueness and invaluable-ness of great texts and works of art as well as the disciplines required for appreciating them. Both instrumental and intrinsic arguments rely upon logics of interpellation in making their cases. This implies: 1) that in order to accept their premises, one must already share their value systems; 2) that the cultivation of critical subjects entails a larger project than can be addressed by education, higher or otherwise. In addition, both accounts invoke a false binary in their conceptualization of the crisis of the humanities, the so-called antithesis between *the market* and *the university*. I take up this line of analysis in the next chapter.

Chapter 4 takes to task current conceptualizations of higher education's crisis for invoking a false binary between the values of the market and the values of the university. I argue that both scholarship and teaching in the academy operate according to paradigms of production and competition and are thus constituted by the economic as such. I begin with a case study of how changes in the funding of scholarship shapes and conditions scholarly being, creating what Patricia Harkin has called a "culture of grantsmanship." I then broaden my analysis by providing a brief historical sketch of the larger geopolitical

situations that have given rise to different iterations of the University from Enlightenment Germany to today. Here I rely upon Bill Readings's *The University in Ruins*, which examines the university through the contexts and frameworks that call forth, constitute, and shape it and its logics of operation. Finally, I return to *Academically Adrift* to illustrate how Arum and Roksa's analyses evidence less a conflict between critical thinking and market values than an already existing framework in which critical activity is interpellated by economic values and paradigms. I further develop this analysis in the final chapter.

In the different accounts that I look at there is a consensus that freedom or autonomy is a necessary condition of the critical, especially vis-à-vis "the market," or economic interest and constraint. In the final chapter I explore the institutional and professional autonomy of the university and its workers in three contexts. The first is the historical development of the university in general, with attention paid to the ways in which it has identified itself and articulated its values. The second context I look at is the restructuring of higher education in the UK during the second half of the twentieth century. Finally, I discuss the origin and development of academic freedom as the concept appeared in the US at the turn of the twentieth century. Throughout, I make three claims: 1) that the interpellative missions of universities cannot be separated from beliefs about who or what body shall authorize subject formation and which kinds of subjects ought to be produced; 2) that there is considerable evidence to support the claim that the market is just such an author of interpellation even in the space of the academy; and 3) that the academy itself grounds its authority in the same source or mechanism as the

market: the spontaneous generation of truth provided by conditions of freedom or autonomy.

Raymond Williams once suggested that as the term *criticism* “depends, fundamentally, on the abstraction of response from its real situation and circumstances: the elevation to judgment, and to an apparently general process, when what always needs to be understood is the specificity of the response, which is not a judgment but a practice, in active and complex relations with the situation and conditions of the practice, and, necessarily, with all other practices” (76), that we ought just do away with the habit of criticism in general. Sharon Crowley makes a similar case for getting rid of the universal composition requirement in universities. As she argues, “it is not students but the academy that is served by the universal requirement, insofar as the requirement fulfills the gatekeeper function...and insofar as the symbolic capital accrued by the requirement relieves academics from the responsibility of teaching literacy in their own classes and programs. In addition, composition teachers’ willingness to speak for their students’ needs entails a suspicious politics of representation” (260-261). In the Conclusion to this inquiry I suggest that *critical thinking* operates under the same constraints and with the same functions as both aesthetic criticism and academic prose. I end by reflecting on what might be gained and lost by abandoning the concept of critical thinking altogether.

Chapter 1: What is Critical Thinking?

My first semester teaching freshman composition I was responding to and grading students' second formal writing assignment for the class – the analysis paper. The assignment was to take a chapter from the work we were reading – Peter Singer's *One World: The Ethics of Globalization* – and provide an analysis of it. Leading up to this assignment we had discussed the chapter, read some articles, discussed analysis, gone over critical terms for writing analyses, etc. The students were, as I imagined, prepared. As I began to read their work, however, I noticed that most of my students were simply either agreeing or disagreeing with Singer; very few critically engaged with him. Somewhere about halfway through the stack of papers, I realized that I was responding almost identically to each one: "Needs more analysis." Two things immediately struck me: one, that it was completely contradictory (and unhelpful) to tell a student who did not yet know what analysis was or was unable to perform one, that what her work needed was "more analysis"; second, that I myself did not know what analysis was. When I tried to explain it, I could not give an acceptable definition of it, one that did not simply replace "analysis" with other words equally opaque: "critical thinking," "judgment," "breaking down," etc.

I got up and made the rounds of my colleagues in the office asking them if they could explain to me what analysis was. I spoke with five people, and the results were the same: each time my question either produced a bemused silence after a series of false starts, as it had with me, or a circular argument. *What is analysis? Thinking critically. What does that mean? To read closely. How does one do that? By breaking things down. How does one know which things to break down and what to break them down into?* This

got us nowhere, until finally someone offered that analysis requires a critical distance, a standing outside of the thing analyzed. Something about this spatial imagery helped me to articulate my next question: *What constitutes the “outside space” from which I am able to analyze texts?* My answer was that it could only be my own experiences, including (or especially) all the texts I had read and all my thinking, talking, and writing about them. So I asked myself, *What kinds of experience do my students have? What texts and textual experiences do they have at their disposal to give them the critical outside space from which to perform the analyses I'm asking of them?* I didn't know. But I realized that talking about analysis as if it were some abstract, coherent function of mind independent of experience made no sense. That is, when I analyzed something, I didn't think about it in some general way, but applied to it a series of questions or categories that I had developed or learned to ask over time from my experiences with other, similar things. Further, my ability to ask “good” questions – critical, provocative, deep – was not the result of having mastered a universally applicable analytic process or strategy, but depended almost entirely upon prior experience and familiarity with the subject. Given a literary or philosophical text I was confident and insightful. Faced with something outside my realm of experience – thermodynamics, aioli, a work of art – and I could do little more than to like or dislike it or ask “what is it?” or “what is it for?” Why was I expecting from my students that upon their first encounter with a scholarly approach to such topics as economics, politics, and ethics, they would be able to write about them from a “critical distance,” which is what is assumed in another all too common comment I found myself making: “Don't just agree or disagree with the author – analyze their arguments.” At the time, I articulated the contradiction thus: that my course was at cross-

purposes in trying to teach a content that required for its appropriation the very skills that it was also trying to teach. In hindsight, however, I realize I had gotten it backwards. The problem was not that my students were lacking in critical thinking skills, which was impeding their ability to master the content of the course. All of them were past masters at being able to summarize, analyze, and synthesize⁸ information consonant with their own experiences and goals. The problem was rather that I was conflating critical thinking with an abstract, disembodied faculty of mind; that I was imagining a skill as something in itself, rather than the possession of a matrix of context-relevant experiences from which to make distinctions. Basically, I was abstracting from a material condition – the possession of knowledge and experiences of the subject at hand – to an essential quality of mind that could be generally critical about it. In short, I was making a fetish of critical thinking.

This experience raised all sorts of questions for me: *If critical thinking is a material construct then how is it produced? From what raw materials? In what sequence? Over how long a period of time? Assuming that at each stage the student is thinking critically, at what point does she arrive and become a critical thinker? If, as we often claim, the goal is a process and not a possession, then why do we assign grades? If, as we also often claim, critical thinking is a good in itself, an intrinsic good, how do we claim to measure it? What is critical thinking good for, specifically?* Driving all of these questions, however, was a more basic concern: *How do I, as an English teacher, act in*

⁸ Summary, analysis, and synthesis are the holy trinity of critical writing skills in composition courses. While not the object of this inquiry, one might well ask why these three tasks take primacy over others. While they are key functions in making and critiquing arguments, many have come to critique the hegemony of argument culture in both composition programs and the academy.

light of these findings?

If I seem to be making a big deal about critical thinking, I'm not alone. "90 percent of faculty consider [critical thinking] the most significant goal of higher education," writes Miriam Marty Clark in her essay, "Beyond Critical Thinking," citing Derek Bok's study of undergraduate education in the U.S., in his book *Our Underachieving Colleges*. And while it's been pointed out that Bok only looks at residential 4-year colleges, the rhetoric of critical thinking can be heard across institutions of higher learning: public and private, community colleges and research universities, religious and secular. "Critical thinking" may not be the term of choice. It could be close reading or analysis, critical literacy or citizenship. Or, as articulated in the language of university mission statements, "equipping students to live in a complex world," or "preparing them to think and deal with complex issues."

If my hunch about critical thinking being a matrix of contextually relevant experiences is correct, then it would seem that all we're really talking about is technical proficiency or disciplinary competence. But it's clear from the way in which the term is used that something more is being claimed about the student or person who has learned to be a critical thinker than about the student or person who has simply mastered their trade or profession.⁹ So what is the value added or surplus value of critical thinking?

⁹ And it is not only liberal arts professors who think so. The Republican Party of Texas caused quite a stir when it stated on its 2012 Platform regarding education that, "We oppose the teaching of...critical thinking skills and similar programs that are simply a relabeling of Outcome-Based Education (OBE) (mastery learning) which focus on behavior modification and have the purpose of challenging the student's fixed beliefs and undermining parental authority" (2012 Republican Party of Texas Report of Platform Committee). The outcry raised by this proposal was shared by liberals and conservatives alike. (See John T. Harvey's - Professor of Economics at Texas Christian University - opinion piece, "The Terrifying Texas GOP Platform," in *Forbes* online, July 1, 2012.)

Fetish and Interpellation

The subject of my thesis is critical thinking. I assert that by examining this term and the beliefs surrounding it we can gain a better understanding of what is being decried from various quarters today as “the crisis of higher education.” I have named such accounts “crisis narratives” to designate the way in which they all conform to similar conventions such that they constitute a distinct discourse.¹⁰ As I mentioned in the introduction, I identify three strains of this discourse: neoliberal (concerned with technical innovation, job skills, and global competitiveness); neoclassical (concerned with the state and future of the humanities); and neo-Marxist (concerned with socioeconomic and power disparities). Furthermore, I claim that what ties these accounts together is more than the generic affinities of crisis narratives; at heart they are concerned with intellectual production – the development of knowledge *and* students – and as such they function as constitutive rhetorics of the critical.¹¹ By *the critical* I mean to name a confluence of factors not limited to the discreet act or skill of thinking, but constitutive of it as such. In doing so, I am employing a rhetoric of historical materialism. Catherine Chaput describes the rhetoric of historical materialism as a model of investigation that traces the complex imbrication of political, economic, and cultural factors and discourses in constituting an object of analysis. It is a mode of inquiry that does not assume or even ask what a thing is (in Chaput’s case, the U.S. public research university; in my own, critical thinking); rather it asks what are the material and discursive conditions in which

¹⁰ As we saw in the introduction, Jeffrey Williams has already dubbed critical university studies a distinct academic field.

¹¹ Throughout this inquiry I will be using the terms *critical thinking* and *the critical* almost synonymously, with the slight (albeit significant) difference that I understand the former to be a particular instance of the latter.

the object appears and operates. As Chaput argues, “If we truly believe that reality is discursively constituted” – and, as a rhetorician, I most emphatically do – “we must examine fully the spaces of its constitution, as well as the exchange and negotiation among the...constituting spheres [of politics, economics, and culture]” (21). Thus I claim that a study of the rhetoric of critical thinking will not only yield insight into contemporary “crises” of higher education; I make the complementary assertion that an examination of crisis narratives of higher education reveal implicit theorizations of the critical.

In this first chapter I examine scholarly and public accounts of higher education’s crises in order to flesh out the various theorizations of the critical that they imply. In doing so I aim to map some of the material and ideological coordinates constitutive of the term *critical thinking* as it operates in higher education today. My examination both in this chapter and in the project as a whole is not exhaustive. Rather than try to define critical thinking, I look to discern its material and discursive conditions of intelligibility and possibility. Two concepts will be central to my analysis throughout this inquiry: *fetish* and *interpellation*.

By fetish I mean an ahistorical, decontextualized, immaterial apprehension of a thing. For example, in the preceding anecdote, when I responded to students who, in their analysis papers had done no more than agreed or disagreed with an author, that what they needed was more analysis, I committed what I believe to be two fundamental errors. The first was a conflation of quality with quantity. What I wrote on their papers was that they needed *more* analysis, insinuating that they had indeed engaged in *some* analysis, only not enough. However, what I really meant was that they had not engaged in analysis

proper at all; my gripe was actually with the quality of their analyses. The second error had more to do with my preconceived notions about what I was teaching than with their actual papers. In thinking that I had somehow adequately “taught” analysis, and that my students could now go forth and do it, I was oblivious to the fact that the quality of an analysis really is largely a matter of quantity: again, the total number of context relevant experiences from which the student could draw on in making the kinds of distinctions called for in an analysis of the matter at hand and the type of discourses it engaged. The fetish, then, is a species of ontological fallacy, wherein the result of a long and complex confluence of factors is regarded as a thing in its own right, and as the source of the effects that are actually its cause.¹²

By interpellation I mean the material and discursive practices that define and delimit the kinds of subjects we are allowed to become in a given context. As concerns me here, I am particularly interested in the interpellation of college students as critical thinkers as well as of those who bear (at least, they are imagined to) the brunt of the responsibility for these students’ critical development: university English instructors.¹³

¹² The ontological fallacy consists of taking the effect for the cause, an activity for a thing, a result for a purpose. We assume that something called critical thinking exists, ideally, somewhere; that it has a knowable, essential nature to it; and that we can get it right or wrong. We thus judge its present state by an assumed essential, original nature, rather than imagining the distinct possibility that the state of things *is* the thing, and not an aberration of it. Lifting a line from Foucault, but replacing “madness” with “critical thinking,” one articulation of my project might be the following: “Let’s suppose *critical thinking* does not exist. If we suppose that it does not exist, then what can history make of these different events and practices which are apparently organized around something that is supposed to be *critical thinking*?” (*Biopolitics* 3)

¹³ While this category includes professors, adjuncts, and graduate students whose experiences and working conditions are not identical, I believe that they possess enough similarity in terms both of the material realities of their workplace and the ideological commitments of the profession to discuss them as a whole.

So, for example, imagine what kind of composition teacher is cultivated, both ideologically and materially, by the following circumstances: teaching five classes of 26 students every semester, each class requiring 5 writing projects from each student, which means responding to at least 130 papers every three weeks, yet with the requirement of revision and multiple drafts, actually means responding to 130 student texts at least every 1.5 weeks? We might be tempted to say here that a teacher in such circumstances cannot be very good. But we would be wrong. To the extent that these circumstances constitute the given reality of composition teaching at a university, so long as the teacher regularly produces grades in a timely fashion, such a teacher's performance will be a good one, not because he will have succeeded in giving his students the amount of individual and critical attention they require, but because the nature of good teaching itself is indexed to the circumstances it takes place in. We might similarly ask what kinds of students are cultivated in such classes, especially when many of them are themselves taking five or six classes and working part-time. The concept of interpellation, then, will be operating throughout this inquiry as a historical materialist corrective to fetishized accounts of critical thinking and the crisis of the university.

Finally, I feel the need to make a caveat. While my analyses are indebted to social reproduction theory in many ways, for the most part I will not be engaging those discourses, at least not directly; they form more of a backdrop for this inquiry as a whole. I believe that social reproduction theory is familiar enough that I don't need to reproduce such arguments here. I also feel that, to a large extent, social reproduction is beside the point. The problem – if we agree that there is one – is not that education reproduces the

social structure – after all, that’s its main function. The problem is that our socioeconomic system contains structural, material inequities and inequalities that cannot be adequately ameliorated by institutions that function according to that very same structural logic. Here I agree with progressive pedagogues like Jean Anyon (*Radical Possibilities: Public Policy, Urban Education, and a New Social Movement*) John Marsh (*Class Dismissed: Why We Cannot Teach or Learn Our Way out of Inequality*), and others who argue cogently and passionately that education cannot redress social and economic disparities; that we cannot teach our way out of poverty or inequality. This is not an all or nothing game; the fact that education cannot solve structural social, economic, and political disparities does not mean that teaching or our system of education cannot be improved. And yet I also take seriously Richard Ohmann's cautions regarding reformism, “[T]he trouble with reformism is this: that as soon as you identify a situation as a problem you have endorsed the perspective from which it is problematic – generally that of the economic and political status quo – and committed yourself to making it work better. ...Since our woes derive from the system's working all too well to serve those it serves, even an actual solution of a problem – rare as that may be – is a long-term disservice, if it helps to conceal the deeper causes of trouble to let the system continue its inhuman work less self-consciously” (*English* 315).

The sketch I provide below begins an attempt to map the topoi of current crisis narratives of higher education. I have highlighted three broad strains of this narrative, each characterized by a distinct discourse and rhetoric that I identify as the neoliberal, the neoclassical, and the neomarxist. My goal is to better understand these narratives by unpacking both the material and the ideological contexts that drive them. To this end I

seek to historicize and to complicate these discourses. Historically, I take as a touchstone the Morrill Act of 1862 that led to the creation of land-grant colleges in the United States. Like today, the late nineteenth century in the US was a time of social, political, economic and technological upheaval. The creation of public research universities was seen by many as a way to alleviate those tensions. Economically, it would produce more skilled and efficient agricultural and industrial laborers. Technologically, it would spawn scientific invention and innovation. Socially, it would create class mobility by giving those who wished to advance access to the skills and knowledges deemed necessary to do so. Politically, the effects of such an education would lead to a more informed and robust democracy. While these were the touted goals of higher education reform at the time, there were then, as now, competing narratives for what this new paradigm of education ought to look like. Industrial, liberal, and populist interests, articulations, and advocates painted a scene strikingly similar to our current ideological constellation.

As to complicating these narratives, I employ a rhetoric of historical materialism in analyzing the values driving these various articulations, both then and now, as a way to better understand what is new and what is not so new about how the University functions in the current milieu of global capitalism. One of the chief values to be explored is “freedom.” All three narratives, then as now, are structured by conceptions of the potential and productivity of freedom as it inheres in three spheres of human activity – economic, intellectual, and political, respectively; and each posits a privileged locus or product as its telos – free markets, free thinkers, free subjects. And all three of these production paradigms of freedom are themselves largely shaped by three other historical

material phenomena: the discourse of efficiency; the concomitant rise of the American corporation and the American university; and professionalization of academia.

The Crisis of Higher Education: Three Iterations

Neoliberal

On March 31, 2011, The Chicago Council – “one of the oldest and most prominent international affairs organizations in the United States...committed to influencing the discourse on global issues through contributions to opinion and policy formation, leadership dialogue, and public learning” – (“Chicago Council on Global Affairs”) released a report, “A Master Plan for Higher Education in the Midwest: A Roadmap to the Future of the Nation's Heartland,” written by James J. Duderstadt, president emeritus of the University of Michigan, a professor of science and engineering, and director of the Millennium Project, a university research center studying the impact of rapidly evolving technologies on society. According to Duderstadt, “Today the forces of change upon the contemporary university, driven by social change, economic imperatives, and technology, may be far beyond the adaptive capacity of our current educational paradigms. We may have reached the point of crisis in higher education when it is necessary to reconstruct the paradigm of the university from its most fundamental elements, perhaps even to reinvent the university” (67). The context of this crisis is globalization, specifically: the confluence of an increasingly globally interdependent and competitive market; the growing support since the 1970s for economic deregulation from both the left and right ends of the mainstream political spectrum; and the steady losses to both public and private streams of funding to institutions of higher learning over the past

40 years (Harvey, Ohmann). In response to this crisis, Duderstadt argues for regional collaboration among Midwest institutions of higher learning in the development of their human capital: “[R]egions must create and sustain a highly educated and innovative workforce and the capacity to generate and apply new knowledge, supported through policies and investments in developing human capital, technological innovation, and entrepreneurial skill” (21-2).

Cuyahoga Community College president, Jerry Sue Thornton, and then president of the University of Illinois, Michael Hogan, served as respondents to the report at its release event. Thornton formulated one of the chief difficulties as that of changing the mindset and culture of “the people.”

Many of our communities are waiting for Godot. They really are waiting for manufacturing to return. Many still don’t believe they have to have a degree, certainly beyond K-12. And so I think part of the onus for community colleges and our universities will be to collectively change the mindset and the culture of the people in our communities to the acceptance that we’re going to have to be part of the leading edge of innovation. Today I was with...Bruce Katz from the Brookings Institution, and Cleveland State University, Case Western University, ourselves, business community people were coming together, talking about what we need to do in terms of being part of the innovation supply chain. How can we together with businesses make a difference in our communities in helping them to understand how important innovation is... And how can we take that excitement... and the talent that was once part of our industrial based economy, farming based economy, take that talent, redirect that talent so that it is engaged much more in

innovation. ...One of the businessmen in this large discussion finally said, “You know, we either innovate or die.” ...I don't think it's death, but I certainly think it's decline in what we've known as prosperity in the middle class. (“Reforming Higher Education to Compete in the Global Economy”)

Hogan echoed Duderstadt's concerns, claiming that “the state can no longer afford the university.” He called for a lightening of the burden of regulation and increased university control over their revenue streams (Ibid.).

Duderstadt, Thornton, and Hogan might all be said to represent what David Harvey would call a “neoliberal” view of education. (While there are problems with this term, I use it here as general descriptor.) According to Harvey, this is “a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets and free trade,” with “[t]he role of the state [being] to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices” (2). Within this framework, institutions of higher learning function to develop human capital according to the needs of innovation-driven knowledge and technology economies.

Neoclassical

While it is safe to say that the neoliberal perspective framed the discussion which took place at the release event, the moderator, Donald Stewart, Visiting Professor at the University of Chicago's Harris School of Public Policy, and former president and CEO of the College Board, as well as former president of Spelman College, voiced the following concern: “I'm a little uncomfortable with the emphasis on job preparation and skills. I'm

a graduate of Grinnell College in Iowa, and we are a four-year liberal arts college, which really seeks not to prepare our graduates for jobs, but prepares them to think and deal with complex issues... I hope in this new system of ours, that we're envisioning, that there's a greater emphasis placed on the liberal arts, small colleges, and the fact that we're not just preparing students for jobs" ("Reforming Higher Education to Compete in the Global Economy").

Stewart voices here the classical liberal arts view of education. While historically, proponents of this view have made concessions to a certain usefulness of humanities training – typically, the production of critically thinking and/or civic minded individuals – what drives these arguments is a core belief in the intrinsic value of the pursuit of truth, the seeking of knowledge for its own sake. According to Stanley Fish, former dean of liberal arts at the University of Illinois at Chicago, “higher education, properly understood, is distinguished by the absence of a direct and designed relationship between its activities and measurable effects in the world.” Rather, it aims at “understanding and explaining anything as long as the exercise is not performed with the purpose of intervening in the social and political crises of the moment, as long, that is, as the activity is not regarded as instrumental – valued for its contribution to something more important than itself” (“The Last Professor”). From this perspective, the current crisis of higher education consists in what is felt to be the impending demise of the liberal arts, the crisis of the humanities. According to this outlook, knowledge as an immediate, rather than a mediated pursuit, is compromised by both economic and political interests. The culprits here, according to Fish, are not only dwindling public and private funds, for-profit universities, and lily-livered university presidents and chancellors who shrink from

defending the liberal arts on their own ground, but resort to trying to rationalize them according to criteria of “productivity, efficiency, and consumer satisfaction” (“The Crisis of the Humanities Officially Arrives”). “Progressive academics” equally draw Fish’s ire, as they “have argued that traditional disciplinary departments were relics from the past kept artificially alive by outmoded requirements,” thus paving the way for corporatization. Depending on whom you talk to here, the scope of this crisis ranges from the decline of western civilization (Martha Nussbaum) to the loss of a unique, venerable institution, the university itself. (For Fish, a university that is not in the “disinterested pursuit of truth business” is no more than a trade school.) Fish’s prescription (not that he has much hope in its success in our current social, political, and economic climate): “I say, and have been saying for years, that colleges and universities should stop moving in those directions — toward relevance, bottom-line contributions and social justice — and go back to a future in which academic inquiry is its own justification” (“Vocationalism, Academic Freedom and Tenure”).

NeoMarxist

Yet a third articulation of the crisis of higher education focuses on the working conditions of the university. Three broad and overlapping areas of concern drive these narratives: academic labor, knowledge production, and pedagogy/students.

According to Richard Ohmann, the academic labor crisis is neither new nor unique, but coordinate with the general pattern of labor in the United States for the past 40 years.

[T]he market for academic labor collapsed over thirty years ago and in many fields, including language and literature, has remained dismal ever since. This is a

story, not of crisis, but of long decline and maybe permanent restructuring. ...[I]t is no coincidence that [this decline] set in at just about the same time when other crises – a rapid increase in debt of all kinds, the peaking of real wages in the United States, declining corporate profits, a negative turn in trade balance, daunting competition from Japan and Europe, and a cresting of the dollar's value – signaled a crisis for American capital and led it to adopt new strategies. (*Politics* 95).¹⁴

The new strategies adopted by capital that Ohmann refers to are generally what we have come to associate with neoliberal political economic policy. As regards the academy, one trend in particular has received a good deal of critical attention – the casualization (i.e., a greater reliance upon contingent – adjuncts, graduate students – labor than on permanent, tenured faculty, with a consequent lowering of professional status and wages) of the academic labor force. In *How the University Works*, Marc Bousquet provides a critical analysis of the labor practices of American universities along with an account of the academic labor market for the last quarter of the twentieth century. In contrast to the conventional view that there is an overproduction of Ph.D.s in this country, Bousquet finds that the well-established and growing trend of staffing undergraduate courses (the amount of new college students to be taught every year, by the way, is consistently large, and rising) with graduate students or part-time lecturers, points rather to a failure of the profession to provide jobs for its junior members, a failure which is in no way an error, or mistake, or even – according to Bousquet – inevitable, but rather a function of the way in

¹⁴ One through line shared by all these crisis narratives is the driving force of economics, specifically, “a decline in the portion of the whole social surplus going into higher education via state appropriation and private philanthropy” (Ohmann 96).

which the academic job system has evolved in response to the logic and necessities of flexible capital accumulation since 1970. The result is a schism between research and teaching that yields an ever-shrinking number of expert researchers paid professional salaries, and an ever-increasing field of deskilled teachers vulnerable to the vicissitudes of the market. One of the interesting tensions that Bousquet's account raises, and that I will discuss in more detail later, is the schism between scholarship and teaching in the academy; specifically, the way in which the gradual undercutting of the professionalism of teaching results from academic professionals retreating further and further into rigidly disciplinary accounts of their work. This suggests then, at least in terms of academic jobs, that professionalism itself becomes a contributing factor and driver of casualization.

NeoMarxist accounts that signal a crisis in knowledge production focus on the ways in which departments and individual scholars are increasingly held to paradigms of scholarship that stress competition and (though often indirectly) profit, over values internal to the discipline. Patricia Harkin, in her essay, "Excellence is the (Ideological) Name of the Game," discusses the threat to scholarly identity that such a shift poses. Framing the issue in terms of interpellation, she asks what kind of scholars we are called to be in this new, post-ideological era of "excellence."¹⁵ To begin with, as she points out, the rhetoric of excellence that has taken hold in technical, bureaucratic, and business circles, including the university, is anything but politically neutral. As she succinctly claims, "in the context of the contemporary academy, the content of the word 'excellence' is competition, and its referent is winning" (4). As interpellation works not

¹⁵ This is a reference to, and Harkin explicitly discusses, Bill Readings' *The University in Ruins*.

only to call into being a particular type of subject, but also to delimit other types, Harkin is concerned that today

a university personnel committee calls upon us to compete internally and externally for grants, and we know ourselves to be members of the university insofar as we answer that call. “Funded researchers” get jobs and keep them, and so we strive to become funded researchers. In answering the call, we find rewards of sorts—raises, tenure, promotion, invitations to dinner at the Dean’s.

But...something also is lost in this imaginary relation we forge to the real conditions of life in the academy. What is lost, I think, is a different sense of identity—a way of knowing ourselves as researchers into questions that we ourselves raise as a consequence of actual problems we encounter in the classroom, library or culture. ...The terms of our inquiries change when we follow the money. As we construct our inquiries to follow the money, we also construct our “selves.” All there is of you, according to Althusser, is what ideological state apparatuses call forth. There is no essential you beyond the reach of interpellation. (6-7)

A similar concern for knowledge making and knowledge workers is the focus of David Downing’s *The Knowledge Contract*. Downing investigates the relationships between the economic restructuring of the university in the past 30 years and the rise of the disciplinary model of knowledge production, providing a critical narrative and analysis of the impact these phenomena have had upon intellectual products, society, and particularly knowledge workers – mostly graduate students, lecturers, and professors – as well as recommending ways to combat and counteract the deleterious effects of such

changes. The central theme of Downing's argument is that the currently privileged epistemological paradigm embraced by the university – theoretical knowledge produced in strict conformity to an insular discipline – both threatens the legitimacy and existence of nondisciplinary forms of knowledge, knowledge no less vital to the formation of ethically responsible human subjects, communities, and the world than discipline-specific knowledge; at the same time it also obfuscates the various kinds of labor performed by knowledge workers such that only that specifically concerned with adding to the discipline gets valorized and rewarded.

NeoMarxist narratives of the crisis of higher education that focus on student issues and questions of pedagogy, though a diverse and unwieldy array of discourses, generally agree that knowledge/learning can or ought to be liberating. The bulk of these discourses come from fields such as composition studies and English education. Interestingly, they tend to recreate the “professional/liberal” educational divide. That is, while their rhetoric tends to eschew the overtly oppressive economic rationales of education, as well as the implicitly elitist liberal arts agendas, their models of liberation tend toward the cultivation of professional and critical subjects in ways that reproduce in different terms the values that drive professional and liberal models. Key to these discourses is the belief in literacy as a means of empowerment. As Sharon Crowley puts it, “Leftist composition teachers desire that their students be alerted to the oppressive and debilitating means by which their culture defines them and their relations” and that “students be empowered by their awareness of oppression to change the means by which it is maintained” (235). As she points out, however, “The role of literacy in achieving these desires is only fuzzily mapped out.” Further, “the argument for literacy as

empowerment begs a number of important questions: can we impart literacy in a quarter or a semester or a year? what is literacy, anyhow? and whose literacy do we teach? can literacy in fact empower anyone who has achieved it? how does this work? what sort of empowerment are we talking about – political? ethical? intellectual? financial? and if in fact literacy does empower people, for what purposes does it do so?” (234)

Efficiency, Corporations, and Professionalization

In examining the preceding crisis narratives of higher education I will pursue three closely interwoven themes: the rhetorical agency of discourses of efficiency in helping to shape public thinking about the role and value of higher education; the evolution of corporations at the beginning of the twentieth century and the exportation of their organizational structures and values to American universities; and the rise of professionalization in academia.

Efficiency

Neoliberal articulations of the purpose of higher education and its current crisis are those that concern themselves with the maximization of resource input to product output in streamlining universities to both be competitive and to increase the US’s competitiveness in the global market of goods and services. Therefore, they are the most logically associated with rhetorics of efficiency, and they often elicit charges of “the corporatization of education” or “the commodification of knowledge.” While I do not deny these charges, I believe that without historical context, they remain (to borrow Crowley’s term) a bit fuzzy, if not anachronistic. While neoliberalism may be a relatively new way of theorizing contemporary political and economic logic and trends, the logic

itself and the values which inform it are old hat. Key to neoliberalism is a conception of freedom that is at once both static and dynamic, that seeks to liberate greater productive potentials through greater control of the productive process. This articulation of freedom is itself beholden to a complex of ideas surrounding the notion of efficiency. In *The Mantra of Efficiency: From Waterwheel to Social Control*, Jennifer Karns Alexander traces the evolution of notions of efficiency from the late 17th century waterwheel experiments of John Smeaton; to Darwin's theory of natural selection and Alfred Marshall's economics; to the complicity of Frederick Taylor's time-motion studies with American Progressives' calls for greater efficiency in managing public wealth; to the rationalization movement in late Weimar Germany; through to global efficiency today as "an enduring industrial value in a postindustrial world" (148).

On a basic level, efficiency concerns itself with ratios of input to output, seeking the greatest possible output for the least amount of input. Key to achieving this is regulating extraneous movement. Whether human or machine, motion spent in activities or directions not immediately conducive to the ends of the task is viewed as wasted energy. The political corollary of this view is a belief in the rule of the expert. Witness Morris Cooke's report, "Academic and Industrial Efficiency," commissioned by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching in 1910 for the purpose of applying theories of scientific management to university work. Besides analyses of time and resource management, management style itself comes under Cooke's scrutiny.¹⁶ In his critique of how universities at the time made decisions by committee, Cooke clearly

¹⁶ Higher education has Cooke to thank for, among other things, the credit hour, the cornerstone of measuring and regulating academic labor, as well as of comparing and evaluating institutions of higher learning.

links democratic decision making (at least within the context of “large enterprises”) with inefficiency, as it interferes with the best and most fit for the job making the necessary decisions to which their expertise entitles them.

The first great object of organization in the art of management is to make each individual in the whole body count for his maximum. A small amount of thought will show that this can be done only when each man does those things for which he is best suited.¹⁷ This leads directly to the reference of most questions up for settlement to the best single expert, or perhaps to the best two experts, obtainable for decision. In a committee this can never be done. Almost invariably under committee management there is the spectacle of three or more men, experts in their own specialties, all simultaneously wasting precious time in deciding questions outside of their own field, which could be better and far more quickly decided by a single expert whose time may be worth less than that of any one of the three or six men on the committee. (Cooke 13-14)

The concern with “wasting precious time” and resources was not particular to corporate interests. As Alexander discusses in her work, the discourse of efficiency in the United States during the Progressive Era (roughly 1890 to 1920) “became a tool of reform, as one of a cluster of ‘languages of discontent’ that underlay Progressive thought and practice. ...Efficiency became ubiquitous. It described not only technical matters, such as the thermal economy of an engine, but personal ones as well: finding a mate, rearing children, or respecting one's boss. It also spoke of honest government, fair

¹⁷ We might also note here that this is more or less Plato's theory of justice in the *Republic*, as well as a logical corollary of the communist maxim: “from each according to their ability, to each according to their needs.”

industrial policy, and far-sighted resource management” (78-79). This was “an era of efficiency experts, in a time when people preached efficiency like a gospel.” And while Alexander points out that this was “a society increasingly aware of expertise but not certain how much to trust it” (81), her study of professional journals and popular magazines at the time reveals the prevalence of efficiency both as “a technical matter...offered by experts for use by managers, of projects, departments, or enterprises,” as well as a personal matter, “also offered by experts but for use by people on themselves” (81).

It seems clear that “efficiency” in the Progressive Era functioned as what Richard Weaver dubbed in *The Ethics of Rhetoric* a “god term.” According to Weaver, all terms carry rhetorical force to the extent that they function as “incipient propositions” (211). As Weaver explains, the term “hot,” for example, sets up expectations of “sun” or “stove,” etc. As he points out, the automatic ascription of such linkages is what is at stake in the power of naming. While all terms have this power, some are further up the hierarchy of a culture’s values than others. In the case of “hot stove,” for example, the value will depend on the context – is one trying to cook something or did one accidentally bump into it and burn oneself. Other terms – “god terms” – have a value that is more absolute.¹⁸ “By ‘god term’ we mean that expression about which all other expressions are ranked as

¹⁸ Weaver makes clear, however, that a culture’s “absolute” values can shift over time and according to historical context. It must be noted here that Weaver’s thinking was significantly influenced by a faculty seminar he attended in 1949 led by the renowned rhetorician and philosopher Kenneth Burke. In particular, Weaver’s coinage of god and devil terms is a distillation of Burke’s discussion of “ultimate terms” in *A Rhetoric of Motives* (1950), which, along with his *A Grammar of Motives* (1945), made of the focus of the seminar that Weaver attended. I am grateful to Richard A. Johannesen’s 1987 article, “Richard M. Weaver’s Uses of Kenneth Burke” (*Southern Communication Journal* 52:3. Web.) for providing me with this connection.

subordinate and serving dominations and powers. Its force imparts to the others their lesser degree of force, and fixes the scale by which degrees of comparison are understood. In the absence of a strong and evenly diffused religion, there may be several terms competing for the primacy” (212).

Like gods, god terms act as arbiters in discursive exchanges. The closer a term is to the term of terms, the more axiomatic its value and authority. Weaver named “progress” the god term of his own day (*The Ethics of Rhetoric* was published in 1953), and his description of how he saw it functioning is worth quoting at length.

Yet if one has to select the one term which in our day carries the greatest blessing, and – to apply a useful test – whose antonym carries the greatest rebuke, one will not go far wrong in naming “progress.” This seems to be the ultimate generator of force flowing down through many links of ancillary terms. If one can “make it stick,” it will validate anything. It would be difficult to think of any type of person or of any institution which could not be recommended to the public through the enhancing power of this word. A politician is urged upon the voters as a “progressive leader”; a community is proud to style itself “progressive”; technologies and methodologies claim to be “progressive”; a peculiar kind of emphasis in modern education calls itself “progressive, and so on without limit. (213)¹⁹

While on one hand god terms seem to offer a sense of certainty and security, their value and authority residing in a culture’s doxic tissue rather than prescribed edicts of

¹⁹ We should note that both Weaver and Alexander make clear that the reasons for the predominance of the particular term they discuss – “progress” and “efficiency,” respectively – are neither arbitrary nor obscure, but can be located in the particular historical material conditions of their time.

orthodoxy, on the other hand these gods are remarkably profligate with their benisons. In Weaver's example, "any person" or "any institution" could acquire authority and value to the extent that they could be identified as progressive. Similarly, Alexander's analysis reveals the protean nature of efficiency's political affiliations. "Economic depression and strikes in the 1890s had convinced many people that government should take a greater role in regulating economic and business life, and increasing evidence of corruption convinced them that government needed also to better order itself" (78). One sect of efficiency prayed to the productive potential of streamlined labor, while other denominations lauded its conservative and corrective functions. "Technical features such as quantification and calculation jumbled together with social, governmental, and personal concerns to produce a word resonating technical expertise, personal integrity, and good government. Efficiency expressed both sober qualities of hard and patient work and enormous hopes for remaking society and the world" (79).

I think that we can isolate three essential functions that efficiency is supposed to accomplish or produce. The first is clearly a productive function – efficiency unleashes untapped potentials of productivity. Equally obvious is a conservative function – efficiency polices the maintenance, preservation, and responsible management of resources. Less explicit, but nonetheless distinct from the other two, is a corrective function – efficiency notions mobilize social, economic, and political action to curb excess and ameliorate damage due to excess. While I identify these as three distinct functions, none actually exist independent of the others, and wherever one is found, so are the rest. Optimal production can easily be viewed as the ultimate conservation of resources; perfect conservation yields optimal resources for production. Either emphasis

can serve as a corrective principle to perceived aberrations of order, policy, or method. The difference among these three functions is a matter of emphasis, not essence.

If we accept such a schema of efficiency notions, then I believe we can now get a better sense of the ligatures between competing crisis narratives of higher education. With the same caveat that I made about the functions of efficiency – that none of them is pure, but that each is rather a matter of emphasis – I claim that neoliberal articulations of the crisis of higher education are driven by productive iterations of efficiency; neoclassical articulations with efficiency’s conservative function; and neoMarxist accounts with efficiency as corrective. Each of these narratives in turn offers an articulation of the critical: the critical as innovation, decisiveness, problem-solving; the critical as cultured appreciation, expert analysis, disinterested pursuit of truth; and the critical as demystifying, problematizing, and intervention. Again, none of these accounts is unadulterated; each is a matter of emphasis – yet there are some very real antagonisms. Problem solving vs. problematizing. Innovation vs. reverence for *the best that has been thought and said*. Disinterest vs. both productivity and intervention. Despite these tensions, however, each articulation of the critical shares in a belief regarding the essential productivity and value of freedom. Only a free market can produce the wealth of resources necessary for advancing our individual and national interests; only a free thinker can produce the truths necessary for the dignity and quality of human life; only a free subject can engage in productive political action and struggle.²⁰

In the preceding paragraph I moved very quickly from efficiency to the critical to freedom, and I want to take a moment now to examine the relationships between these

²⁰ We might also note that each of these articulations privileges a particular sphere of human activity: economics, epistemology, and politics.

terms in more detail. While they are not identical, neither are they separable. They share three traits. First, they all function as god terms. Freedom today is more operative and widely articulated than efficiency, but the latter still holds considerable sway. Likewise, the critical and critical thinking mobilize rhetorical force in both academic and public discourses. Second, all three terms function as measures of value. Efficiency measures the value of input to output. Freedom diagnoses the capacity of a system to maximize its productive potential: the relative freedom of the market determines its productive potential; the relative freedom of the scholar determines her truth seeking/finding potential; the relative freedom of the subject determines her/his political potential.²¹ While the critical and critical thinking evaluate the strength of a proposition and the mind that formulates it. Finally, each term functions as a value in itself. To show that something or someone is efficient, liberating, or critical is to assume its value as such.

Of these three traits, we might say that the latter two – a term that functions both as a value and its measure – are what constitute the particular nature of god terms in general. Only God or a god can serve as the ontological ground of itself. Likewise, these terms begin by assuming their value and primacy and then proceed to judge the world according to their own image. There are two problems here.

The first is that a term whose function is to measure quantities of a given value cannot also be a guarantor, testament to, or measure of that value's quality. The economist Frank Knight's critique of "efficiency" in his essay "The Ethics of Competition" (1923) is particularly apt here, and worth quoting in full.

²¹ In terms of freedom's evaluative function, it would be more apt to say that the relative amount of a system's freedom determines not so much its potential, but the limit to that potential's development.

It is impossible to form any concept of “social efficiency” in the absence of some general measure of value. Even in physics and engineering, “efficiency” is strictly a value category; there is no such thing as mechanical efficiency. It follows from the fundamental laws of the indestructability of matter and energy that whatever goes into any apparatus or process comes out *in some form*. In purely mechanical terms, all efficiencies would be equal to one hundred per cent. The efficiency of any machine means the ratio between the *useful* output and the total output. In simple cases the distinction between useful and useless may be so sharp and clear as to give rise to no discussion – as in the case of the mechanical energy and the heat generated by an electric motor. But when more than one form of useful output (or costly input) is involved, the necessity arises for having a measure of usefulness, of value, before efficiency can be discussed. The efficiency relations of a steam engine may be much changed when the exhaust steam is applied to heating. In so complicated a problem as that of social efficiency, where the elements of outlay and of return are both infinitely numerous and diverse, it is no wonder that the process of valuation has become the heart and core of the study. It must ultimately be recognized that only within rather narrow limits can human conduct be interpreted as the creation of values of such definiteness and stability that they can serve as scientific data, that life is fundamentally an exploration in the field of values itself and not a mere matter of producing given values. When this is clearly seen, it will be apparent why so much discussion of social efficiency has been so futile. (34-35)

In brief, evidence of subject's or system's efficiency, freedom, or critical acumen is not in itself sufficient to warrant a claim to its value or good.²² To believe so is to invoke a fetish.

The first problem with god terms, then, has to do with their function as values – they claim absolute or intrinsic value that they cannot define or defend except in reference to other values. The second problem has to do with their evaluative function. As Knight aptly illustrates above, far from an objective standard of measure, efficiency implies a value judgment between useful and useless output. The distinction, however, is arbitrary to the extent that “the useful” is only in reference to the desired outcomes of the producer. A machine's or a worker's movements are extraneous to the extent that they cannot be calculated to result in useful output. In the case of the worker, however, such extraneous movement may serve needs no less valuable: a good stretch, a break in monotony, human contact, a feeling of autonomy in the face of encroaching automation. It is not that we couldn't make arguments for why all these movements are valuable; the point is that in order for them to register as valuable from the standpoint of efficiency, we would need to be able to quantify the extent to which allowing the worker such autonomy yields greater productive output overall, either immediately, in terms of, perhaps, preventing muscles from stiffening, or over time, in terms of motivation. In a sense,

²² Knight's analysis is all the more significant here considering that he was a renowned free market economist and the acknowledged mentor to Chicago School luminaries Milton Friedman and George Stigler. However, while he maintained a commitment to free market economics to the end of his life, as Angus Burgin points out in “The Radical Conservatism of Frank Knight,” Knight's advocacy was more a tragic resignation than a utopian idealism. “As Knight's student and Friedman's contemporary Paul Samuelson observed, ‘if Doctor Friedman is one of those optimists who thinks that capitalism is the best of all possible worlds, Dr. Knight was one of those pessimists who is afraid that this is indeed the case’” (535).

according to this reasoning, only that which can be measured has value, but that value itself is largely an effect of its measurability. As Alexander points out, “The question regarding efficiency is how, historically, people tried to make an intellectual conception into a materially effective process or tool” (10). “Efficiency was not primarily about knowledge; it was a method by which intellectual constructions could be given material force” (166). The same could be said about freedom: freedom does not function as a value in itself, but only in reference to the desired outcomes of those who invoke it. Which or whose desired outcomes get to articulate the standard iteration and value of freedom is an effect of material and ideological power. In a free market society, “the free movement of capital and materials, supported by physical and legal structures” takes precedence over “the freedom or self-determination of workers, who could resist or facilitate central productive activities” (161).²³ While the flexibility of the labor market can be measured in terms of individual profits and GDP, the constraint of workers does not register as something measurable.

Efficiency then, as Alexander demonstrates throughout her work, is not only the relationship between input and output; it is the relationship between stasis and motion. More specifically, efficiency names a value judgment regarding which motions are “extraneous,” therefore requiring control, and which are free (or ought to be so) because they are believed to be inherently productive. Alexander returns throughout her work to the figure of the water wheel. The water wheel must be tightly constructed and

²³ As we will see in Chapter 5, this will become the substance of the wrangle over academic freedom at the turn of the twentieth century, a rift between those in the academy who saw it as a professional necessity for producing new knowledge and “offering training for success within the existing order” and those who saw it as a political exigency in “agitating for a new arrangement” (Veysey 73).

vigorously monitored in order to capture the full productive potential of the free flowing stream. Thus we might ask of each articulation of freedom under consideration here, what needs to be in place – materially and ideologically – in order to capture the particular productive potential under consideration? What and who needs to be in place in order to create the conditions of a free market or mind or human subject such that we can capture its potential? The laws that need to be in place to free up the potential of the market are not the same as those that need to be in place for freeing people from the excesses of that same market. Liberal arts advocates might rightly admonish administrators to know their place and not presume to judge the value of humanities scholarship; yet from an administrative point of view it is no less an overreach of authority for professors to imagine they have the right (much less the expertise) to weigh in on complex matters of institutional management. Freedom from the perspective of efficiency is never a value in itself, but always the freeing up (or releasing or making available) of energy or potential for work of some kind. This requires mechanisms to be in place for capturing, directing, and utilizing this potential and protecting it from entropic loss. In this way freedom under the aegis of production becomes a form of tyranny.²⁴

If it has not become clear already, it will become more so as this inquiry progresses that there is nothing in contemporary discourses of the critical or critical thinking that is not already prefigured and at work in discourses of efficiency. The critical names the contemporary iteration of efficiency discourses (though these still remain, albeit as lesser divinities than they were during the Progressive Era). The critical, like

²⁴ In such a schema pensioners become free riders and children's playtime becomes waste. For this last, see Matt Ritchell's article "Wasting Time is New Divide in Digital Era," *New York Times*, May 29, 2012. Web.

efficiency, is held to be both a measure of value and a value in itself; something we believe to be inherently productive and something we seek everywhere to produce; something that requires a certain ratio of fixedness to freedom in order to produce it, and which likewise re/produces freedom through mechanisms of control and liberation. While it is clear that the terms “efficiency,” “freedom,” and “the critical” can be invoked for various and even contradictory purposes, their uniform concern with measurable productivity of whatever sort lends them a distinctly economic register. As a way of better understanding how this economization of values has come to operate in higher education, I turn now to a discussion of two institutions that developed hand in hand and whose logic, values, and structures cannot be thought apart from each other: the corporation and the American University.

Corporations and the American University

In 1816 the Republican-controlled New Hampshire legislature attempted to transform Dartmouth College (a small private school and a “bastion of Federalist orthodoxy”²⁵) into Dartmouth University, a large public institution. An act was passed that nearly doubled the size of Dartmouth’s board of trustees, while investing the governor with the power to appoint new members to the board. Almost immediately the new Republican-dominated majority met with resistance from the old trustees. At issue was whether the university was a public institution, in which case the legislature had the right to alter the school’s charter, or whether it was a private corporation, in which case the rule of contract and the original charter were sacrosanct. When the case first came

²⁵ I am indebted to Kent R. Newmeyer’s *John Marshall and the Heroic Age of the Supreme Court* (LSU P, 2007), for the details of this account of the infamous *Dartmouth vs. Woodward* case.

before the New Hampshire Supreme Court, while the Court accepted the rule of contract as it applied to corporations, it held that it only applied to those corporations whose sole purpose was the profit of private individuals. To the extent that Dartmouth College was chartered with a mission to “Christianize Indians,” the court declared it a public corporation and subject to legislative control. In 1819 the US Supreme Court reversed that decision, ruling that Dartmouth was not a public university, but “a private charitable institution, which meant that the state had no more authority to regulate it than it did any other form of private property” (246). Similarly, since the charter “created a private corporation, not a public one, [it] was a private contract even though the state was party.”

While private institutions of higher learning multiplied after this decision, the growth of corporations went viral. By 1819 there existed roughly 50 business corporations for every one private educational corporation like Dartmouth. By 1830 there were nearly 1900 business corporations in New England alone (247). As Newmeyer explains:

Armed with immortality by its charter, unlike the earlier joint-stock companies organized for a single venture, and limited liability, provided gradually during this period by legislative enactment, the corporation was an increasingly attractive investment vehicle for entrepreneurs, provided the investment could be secured against state regulation. ...For the remainder of the nineteenth century, the college decision was a potent legal and ideological weapon for corporations who sought to defeat regulation and establish the primacy of laissez-faire capitalism. In the process, the business corporation came to be seen as just another enterprising individual, the personification in law of the individual stockholders who

composed it. As such, it was made the beneficiary of the Anglo-American legal tradition, which equated property rights with individual liberty. (247-48)

While it is commonplace today to bemoan the corporatization and commodification of higher education, the Dartmouth case illustrates how in the nineteenth century in the US, legally and ideologically both corporations and private institutions of higher learning were understood as enterprising individuals with primary obligations to private shareholders and not to the public. Though the rise of public universities following the Morrill Act of 1862 might be seen as an important countermovement here, they relied for their structural logic and management upon the same principles as their private counterparts. By the turn of the twentieth century, corporate values and organizational logic, chief among which were efficiency and the authority of the expert, were indistinguishable from what counted as responsible management in administering colleges and universities, public and private alike.

The growing prevalence of a belief in the socially progressive potential of efficiency, along with its concomitant (even if at times wary) belief in the role of expertise characterizes for Clyde Barrow one of the ways in which corporate values and logic took root in the university.

The progressive emphasis on the role of the expert meant that once education questions were reformulated as problems of business organization and the investment of public capital, then presumably experienced businessmen – and not educators, farmers, workers, students, or the general public – could rightly claim to be experts. This defined a scenario...in which not only did appointing businessmen to boards of trustees or educational reform commissions seem

legitimate, but in which doing the contrary would seem like mere “politics” instead of good public administration. (97)

In *Universities and the Capitalist State: Corporate Liberalism and the Reconstruction of American Higher Education, 1894-1928*, Barrow details the development of the American university as governed by the organizational logic and values of corporations. One indicator of the level of influence which corporate logic exercised upon universities was the composition of their boards of trustees. “By and large, these state universities shared the same educational orientation as major private universities in the Northeast, and indeed, were often consciously modeled on those institutions. Moreover, the patterns of development one finds in the social composition of their governing boards parallel their eastern counterparts in nearly every respect. By the turn of the century, state universities were generally governed by a political bloc of bankers, heavy industrialists, and corporate attorneys” (54).

Another way in which corporate values exerted pressure upon universities in the early twentieth century was through the research and funding of philanthropic institutions. In 1906, Andrew Carnegie established the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (CFAT) with the modest goal of providing pensions for professors of private nondenominational colleges and universities. As Barrow tells the story, given the limited funds of the foundation (at least, initially) and the large, sprawling and chaotic proliferation of institutions of higher learning at the time, in order to determine which schools best qualified for the funds it became necessary to develop both systems of classification for differentiating schools (public/private, denominational/independent, college/university, etc.) and ranks (professor, associate

professor, assistant professor, adjunct professor, instructor, demonstrator, tutor – the list goes on), as well as metrics for evaluating the performance of institutional units and individuals. In time, the data being produced by CFAT and similar foundations (such as the General Board of Education, chartered by John D. Rockefeller in 1903) became a powerful force in framing educational discussions and policy. The only federal agency responsible for overseeing higher education at the time was the U.S. Bureau of Education, established in 1867 to supervise the land-grant colleges, and even then its role was limited to “the collection and distribution of statistics on education” (101). And yet, as Barrow describes,

the bureau had early on established the institutional goal of becoming “a national clearinghouse for opinion” on educational questions. As the sole institution [circa 1870] in the country gathering current and historical national data on education, the bureau wanted to use its legislative mandate as a vehicle for becoming a dominant authority on the interpretation of national trends, problems and policies in American education. The powers which the bureau lacked in direct constitutional or statutory authority it hoped to achieve through leadership. The authoritativeness of its recommendations would rest upon the ability to establish an overwhelming hegemony in national education data. (101-102)

Initially successful, the USBE quickly succumbed to increasing demand for its services and decreasing support for its work. By 1910 “the USBE was receiving an average of more than 1,200 letter requests per month and sending out more than 7,500 documents per month in response,” whereas federal support had dissipated such that “[t]he bureau was eventually so understaffed and underfunded that its clerical staff could

barely catalogue the endless streams of information and empirical data, while its specialists were overwhelmed with answering routine letters and requests for information” (104). By this time a pattern had long been established of “outsourcing” work to the philanthropic foundations like CFAT and GEB in order to keep up with demand. “Frequently, the bureau relied entirely on foundations to conduct specialized studies which the bureau then published in lieu of its own works. ...Policy recommendations accepted and publicized as official government positions on higher education were more often than not formulated with little or no modification by finance capitalists and other corporate intellectuals” (105). Barrow is quite explicit in claiming that this process was part of a larger effort on the part of these philanthropic foundations to ideologically colonize the U.S. Bureau of Higher Education. Today, we have only to look to the Gates Foundation and Pearson Publishing for contemporary manifestations of this trend.

Professionalization

The final thread I want to weave into this tapestry of the economization of the critical is the story of professionalization in academia, which may very well be a case of winning the battle while losing the war, at least as far as the humanities are concerned. The Morrill Act of 1862, which set aside federal lands to be used by states in raising money to create and fund public universities,²⁶ played a key role in creating conditions conducive to the rise of academic professionalism. Up to that point, with the exception of the normal schools, the specific purpose of which was the training of elementary and secondary school teachers (and attended almost exclusively by women) the liberal arts

²⁶ To be clear, not all public universities are land-grant universities, nor are all land-grant universities public (e.g. Cornell, and MIT).

served as the sole model and mission of higher education in the United States. This all changed with the land grant movement, inaugurated by the Morrill Act in 1862. Clark Kerr, in his now classic study of the modern American research university, *The Uses of the University*, claims that the Morrill Act “was one of the most seminal pieces of legislation ever enacted,” and that it “set the tone for the development of American universities, both public and private, for most of the ensuing hundred years” (35). As Kerr tells it,

The land grant movement came in response to the rapid industrial and agricultural development of the United States... Universities were to assist this development through training that went beyond the creation of “gentlemen,” and of teachers, preachers, lawyers, and doctors; through research related to the technical advance of farming and manufacturing; through service to many and ultimately to almost all of the economic and political segments of society. The land grant movement was also responsive to a growing democratic, even egalitarian and populist, trend in the nation. Pursuing this trend, higher education was to be open to all qualified young people from all walks of life. It was to serve less the perpetuation of an elite class and more the creation of a relatively classless society, with the doors of opportunity open to all through education. (35-6)

Others have been more skeptical about the egalitarian motives and accomplishments of the Morrill Act. As Thomas Miller tells the story in *The Evolution of College English*, it was Jonathan Baldwin Turner, a lobbyist for the Illinois Industrial Association, “who was instrumental in persuading Congressman Justin Morrill to introduce the Land Grant College Act” (261). In imagining the type of education fit for

the farmers and laborers who were to become the bulk of the new student body, “Turner promoted the values of ‘INDUSTRIAL LITERATURE’ to align workers and capitalists against the monopoly imposed on higher education by the ‘PROFESSIONAL’ class. ...Turner assumed that only ‘the literary and clerical classes’ really needed to become ‘writers and talkers’” (261). This tension between the democratization of education, granting wider access to more and more people, while yet keeping the relative class positions of students mainly intact, forms one of the pillars of emancipatory discourses of the purpose and crisis of higher education.

While land grant colleges had a radical effect upon the demographics of higher education, they also effected no less sweeping changes (albeit, perhaps, unintentionally) in its paradigms of scholarship. Though the Morrill Act is explicit in its aims to “provide colleges for the benefit of agriculture and the mechanic arts,” it also stipulates that “scientific and classical studies” are not to be excluded, and that it aims “to promote the liberal and practical education of the industrial classes in the several pursuits and professions in life.” And yet, while land grant colleges included liberal arts education, as Gerald Graff points out in *Professing Literature*, “land grant institutions tended to measure all subjects by vocational yardsticks” (92-3). Indeed, Graff suggests that the very concept of “research” as a value in and model for humanities scholarship only arises with the need for traditional liberal arts professors to defend the utility of their work in the profession-oriented context of land grant universities. If the notion of research as being antithetical to liberal arts education strikes us today as strange, it is largely the result of this very shift which the rise of land grant universities effected in scholarship paradigms, and we would do well to remember here John Henry Newman’s views on research as it

pertained to liberal arts education. According to Newman, the University's mission was “the diffusion and extension of knowledge rather than the advancement. If its object were scientific and philosophical discovery, I do not see why a University should have students” (xxxvii).

If research posed a threat to the intellectual purity of the liberal arts, it was in any case a boon to its practitioners. Shifting its mission from the cultivation of a generally philosophical habit of mind to the induction into various fields with discipline-specific methods for producing knowledge, American universities in the latter half of the 19th century became the birthplace of professionalism. While the land grant colleges played an instrumental role here, so too did the successful model of the German university, which “gave academic respectability and content to the ‘land grant’ idea” (Kerr 37). Nor did the professional model remain confined to land grant institutions, but quickly spread to traditional American universities, such that even “Harvard, a private university with a long academic tradition, could travel much the same path as Cornell, a newly established land grant institution. German intellectualism and American populism were merged in the new university. Pure intellect and raw pragmatism made an unlikely but successful alliance” (37). Discussing the rise of professionalism, Richard Ohmann, in *The Politics of Knowledge*, claims that “no line of work is intrinsically a profession,” pointing out that people settled disputes, healed the sick, and built bridges long before there were any certified lawyers, doctors, or engineers (66). Rather, “professions are socially made categories and processes. A group that is doing a particular kind of work organizes itself in a professional association; appropriates, shares, and develops a body of knowledge as its own; discredits other practitioners from performing similar work; establishes definite

routes of admission, including but not limited to academic study; controls access; and gets recognition as the only group allowed to perform that kind of work, ideally with state power backing its monopoly” (66). Indeed, it was the fear of just such a monopoly of higher education by a professional class which in part motivated Turner's call for land grant colleges in the first place, in order to align workers with the interests of capital.

Eventually, however, professionalism's very success was to lead to later dysfunctions. Perhaps most significantly, according to Ohmann, it effected the transformation of (public) intellectuals into (private) professors. Whereas the former, according to Ohmann, thought, wrote, and spoke on a variety of issues in an accessible language to a broad public of educated readers, as to the latter, “[c]ampus are their homes; colleagues their audience; monographs and specialized journals their media. Unlike past intellectuals they situate themselves within fields and disciplines – for good reason. Their jobs, advancement, and salaries depend on the evaluation of specialists, and this dependence affects the issues broached and the language employed” (65). More sharply, quoting Russell Jacoby's *The Last Intellectuals*, “professionalization leads to privatization or depoliticization, a withdrawal of intellectual energy from a larger domain to a narrower discipline” (65). Even inherently political subjects are disarmed through the processes of professionalization and disciplinarity, such that (again, borrowing Ohmann's citation of Jacoby), “Marxism itself has not been immune; in recent years it has become a ‘field’ plowed by specialists.” While Ohmann is careful to qualify Jacoby's claims, and to criticize what he considers a rather facile conception of the relationship between the public sphere and intellectual work (74), he yet identifies three broad problems raised by professionalization in academia: the casualization of academic work; the

commodification of knowledge; and the depoliticization of academic work and higher learning. Indeed, I find myself very much in sympathy with his observation that, “...for all our efforts to connect our teaching with the world outside – to insist that there really was no inside – many, many students who now learn to demystify power, injustice, male supremacy, capitalism, you name it, have little idea how to change any of these things or much hope that it’s worth trying” (46).

The depoliticization of teaching in academia would also seem to stem, at least in part, from professionalization. As many critics have pointed out, teaching is usually not accorded the same level of attention and esteem as scholarship in American universities. This is so both because of its utilitarian aims and its conflation with “women's work.” The rise of professionalism in universities exacerbated this schism, especially in the humanities, most notably English. As Miller notes, “the historical opposition of liberal and professional education...worked to undercut the professionalism of teaching” and “to shape the political economy of higher education” in significant ways (122). One reaction, of which Yale was a prime example in the early 19th century, was to strengthen admission requirements that relied upon knowledge of classical languages. As Miller writes, “A classically grounded liberal arts education was seen to be necessary to limit access; otherwise the value of a college degree would be undercut” (106). On the other hand were reformers who wanted to accommodate those students who, though they did not have a background in the classics or classical languages (nor did they care for them), yet wanted the distinction of a liberal arts education, and thus did liberal arts education give birth to “general education” (122). One of the most deleterious effects of these changes, according to Miller, is how “professors of classical literature and languages

came to adopt a studied impracticality to distance themselves from those who looked to education to gain practical advancement, including the rising numbers of working-class and women students looking to teaching as a means to social advancement” (123). The irony in all of this, of course, is that in the service of protecting what was felt to be the essential values of a liberal arts education from its encroachment by the narrow interests of professionals, liberal arts professors reduced the scope of their disciplinary interests and concerns in lock step with the process of professionalization in general. In doing so they not only narrowed the subject matter of their field (which Miller cogently argues includes *literacy*, not just literature), but greatly abridged their sphere of effect and power. As Miller puts it, while positioning “the liberal arts on a higher plane divorced from the menial concerns of working people...may serve the needs of those who work in elite institutions, ...defining literature by its impracticality undercuts the teaching of literature and literacy by denying their pragmatic uses and political power.”

The Uses of the University

In 1963 Clark Kerr, then president of the University of California, Berkeley, published his magisterial study of American higher education, *The Uses of the University*. Generally acclaimed as prescient and insightful, this work provoked attacks from both the left and the right. The former accused Kerr of wanting to turn the university into a factory, indeed that his work even provided a template for doing so. The latter saw him as a dangerous liberal.²⁷ The reactions to his handling of the 1964 protests that broke out all

²⁷ In 2002 it was revealed that the FBI had had Kerr blacklisted, as well as provided false information about him on a background check when Lyndon Johnson

over Berkeley's campus are illustrative. On one hand, the protesters and their supporters criticized Kerr for not giving in to their demands. On the other, conservatives attacked him for his leniency toward the protesters – no one was fired or expelled. What had Kerr touched on in his critique of the university that raised the ire of both liberals and conservatives alike? It may be less about what he said than how he said it. In his analysis, Kerr neither indulges in nostalgia about what the university was, nor stridently critiques it for what it is not, nor makes sweeping claims about what it ought to be. Rather, in good historical materialist fashion (although he would probably refute this designation), Kerr paints a picture of what the university must be given the context in which it arose and in which it exists.²⁸

There are two great clichés about the university. One pictures it as a radical institution, when in fact it is most conservative in its institutional conduct. The other pictures it as autonomous, a cloister, when the historical fact is that it has always responded, but seldom so quickly as today, to the desires and demands of external groups – sometimes for love, sometimes for gain, increasingly willingly, and, in some cases, too eagerly. The external view is that the university is radical; the internal reality is that it is conservative. The internal illusion is that it is a law unto itself; the external reality is that it is governed by history. (71)

And, to be clear, to be governed by history is to be governed by economics; at least it is so in the latter half of the twentieth century, and so far in the twenty-first. “What the railroads did for the second half of the last century and the automobile for the first half of

picked him to become Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare. Needless to say, he did not get the post.

²⁸ Kerr's analyses draw the same type of criticism as do Foucault's. No one likes a descriptivist.

this century may be done for the second half of this century by the knowledge industry: that is, to serve as the focal point for national growth. And the university is the center of the knowledge process” (Kerr 66).

If it is true that the university is the center of the knowledge process, it is just as true that the value of knowledge is limited to the number of those who can make use of it. The creation of knowing subjects – that is, beings imbued not only with information but with protocols for evaluating and making use of it – is concomitant with, and logically prior to the production of knowledge itself. The production of knowledge – always an economic affair, regardless of whatever political, social, cultural, and ethical ends it might aid in – cannot be thought of or made separate from the formation of knowledgeable subjects. Thus the university’s centrality in the knowledge process is at the same time its hegemony in the articulation of critical values and the interpellation of critical beings. As we have seen, the development of the American university after the Morrill Act of 1862 occurred in response to a number of historical forces that in shaping it as an institution would work to shape the very nature of the critical and critical work as such. With this (albeit brief) historical backdrop in place, I now proceed to examine contemporary accounts of the university, in particular, those that evaluate the status of – and warn of a crisis concerning – critical thinking.

Chapter 2. Critical Thinking and Critical Subjects

Born too soon without knowledge, and yet born too late to live that knowledge except as tradition received from elsewhere, students name the temporal predicament of modernity. On the one hand, too soon: they are born into culture, but they still have to learn to speak its language. On the other hand, too late: the culture they are born into precedes them, and they cannot make its anteriority their own; they can only handle the fragments of its language.

Bill Readings, *The University in Ruins*

[W]hat is the present crisis in values?

Michel Foucault, "What is Critique?"

In the very first lecture of *The Birth of Biopolitics*, Foucault raises the question of method and lodges a critique against historicism for its reliance on universals.

Historicism starts with the universal and, as it were, puts it through the grinder of history. My problem is exactly the opposite. I start from the theoretical and methodological decision that consists in saying: Let's suppose that universals do not exist. And then I put the question to history and historians: How can you write history if you do not accept a priori the existence of things like state, society, the sovereign, and subjects? It was the same question in the case of madness. My question was not: Does madness exist? ...The method consisted in saying: Let's suppose that madness does not exist. If we suppose that it does not exist, then what can we make of these different events and practices which are apparently organized around something that is supposed to be madness. (3)

In my inquiry into the nature of higher education, I begin with a similar theoretical and methodological decision. As one of the hallmarks of higher education is its dedication to the development of critical thinking and critical thinkers, I propose at the outset the following presupposition: Let's suppose that critical thinking does not exist. If

we suppose that it does not exist, then what can we make of these different events and practices which are apparently organized around something that is supposed to be critical thinking.

That the cultivation of critical thinking is a defining (though not the sole) mission of the university is uncontroversial. In her testimony before the Pennsylvania General Assembly's House Select Committee on Student Academic Freedom on November 9, 2005, Professor Joan Wallach Scott, Harold F. Linder Professor of Social Science at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton N.J., and then chair of the American Association of University Professor's Committee on Academic Freedom and Tenure, claimed that:

The best teachers...are usually those whose commitment and point of view, grounded to be sure in a command of information and knowledge of a field...inspire students to think differently about the world; whose teaching calls into question the pieties and certainties students have imbibed elsewhere. It is precisely the experience of this kind of education that opens students' minds and engages them in learning, sets them out on paths they never knew they could take. That has been the critical thinking that is the hallmark of American education—an education designed to create thinking citizens for a free society.²⁹

Derek Bok, former president of Harvard University concurs, "With all the controversy over the college curriculum, it is impressive to find faculty members agreeing almost unanimously that teaching students to think critically is the principal aim of undergraduate education" (109). Indeed, in 2009 the Cooperative Institutional Research

²⁹ Scott, Joan W. "Professors as Liberators." *Los Angeles Times*. Jan. 22, 2006. Web.

Program at UCLA's Higher Education Research Institute published a brief which detailed the responses gathered from 22, 562 full-time faculty members from 372 four-year colleges and universities nationwide regarding attitudes about the value of higher education and its missions. 99.6% stated that developing the ability to think critically was very important or essential to the mission of undergraduate education.³⁰ More recently, in 2011, sociologists Richard Arum and Josipa Roksa released a report on the state of critical thinking in undergraduate education – *Academically Adrift: Limited Learning on College Campuses*.³¹ The subtitle summarizes the general drift of their findings.

It is this last report that I want to take some time here to untangle and respond to, and which will make up, in the main, the major point of reference for my analysis of critical thinking, or the rhetoric of critical thinking. I choose it both for its timeliness and its representative status.³² It encapsulates most of the major tropes and topoi of critical thinking discourse as it appears in both public and professional venues. I will highlight consonances between it and other representative texts on the topic and eventually hope to show that what this phrase – critical thinking – refers to is less a faculty of mind than a type of subject. To be more precise, critical refers to an intellectual capacity under the

³⁰ The remaining very important or essential goals were as follows: Help master knowledge in discipline (95.1%); Enhance students' knowledge and appreciation for other races/ethnic groups (75.2%); Instill basic appreciation of liberal arts (72.8%); Instill in students a commitment to community service (55.5%).

³¹ I thank Arum and Roksa here for providing me with the previous three sources of information concerning attitudes toward the goal of critical thinking in academia.

³² The *Chronicle of Higher Education* touted *Academically Adrift* as “[a] damning indictment of the American higher-education system;” while *U.S. News and World Report* claimed that “[t]he time, money, and effort that’s required to educate college students helps explain why the findings are so shocking in a new blockbuster book—*Academically Adrift: Limited Learning on College Campuses*—that argues that many students aren’t learning anything.” *Academically Adrift* is this generation’s *Why Johnny Can’t Read*.

direction of a political will. The critical subject, then, is not a unique species but a general type, whose particular attributes and characteristics are defined by the values driving the discourses which conjure her. This being the case, I maintain that Arum and Roksa's report is less persuasive as an account of critical thinking and higher education's role and performance in inculcating it, than it is illuminating of the type of critical subject assumed in its analyses. While ostensibly concerned with the status of a technical discursive skill among college students, this report reveals a much more deep seated anxiety about the moral and political state of almost all of higher education's "shareholders": students, parents, teachers, administrators, and government. The metaphor of "being adrift," which is initially invoked to critique colleges students' supposed dearth of discursive skills and lack of scholarly zeal, quickly proceeds to indict society and culture at large for lacking political will and moral courage. Such accusations are seldom ideologically innocent. The charge of lacking morals or political will most often means nothing more than not holding the same morals or political agenda as the one making the charge. In what follows I attempt to do two things: 1) to flesh out the critical subject as it is being defined both implicitly and explicitly in Arum and Roksa's report, and thus to reveal the interpellative project at work here; 2) to unearth and examine the particular values which animate this project: Why this articulation of the critical and why now? Ultimately, I want to reveal a schism at work in this text, one that, if we follow Foucault, begins to take form with the Enlightenment in 18th century Germany. In a number of lectures and interviews devoted to Kant's short essay, "What Is Enlightenment?", Foucault describes a relationship, a kind of fault line between reason or the Enlightenment project and the project of critique. Or perhaps more simply, between

reason or reasoning and its use. It is within this framework that I undertake the following analyses.

A Tale of Two Discourses

Arum and Roksa's report does three things: it provides a quantitative analysis of students' gains in critical thinking skills in college; it points to a number of factors conducive to and collusive in keeping these gains low, as well as the conditions that promote these factors; it articulates a program of reform to rectify the situation. The dataset for their findings is comprised of test results taken from 2,322 college students who were subjected to the same assessment in their first semester as freshman in 2005 and again at the end of their sophomore year in 2007. Students were tested at a wide variety of institutions and steps were taken to ensure that the results were broadly representative of the state of higher education as a whole in the U.S.³³ The test used was the Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA).

This test purports to assess not specific knowledge but general skills, the broad competencies regularly referred to in Arum and Roksa's report as "critical thinking, complex reasoning, and writing skills."³⁴ Arum and Roksa focus their attention on the performance task component of the assessment, in which students are given 90 minutes to

³³ For those with the interest and/or expertise, a methodological appendix is included in the report.

³⁴ While it is not the subject of this essay, both the CLA as well as Arum and Roksa's use of it here have drawn strong criticism from those both within and outside the field of educational testing. Not the least of these critics is Alexander Astin, a professor emeritus of higher education and organizational change at UCLA, who is himself a strong proponent of the philosophy and practice of assessment and evaluation in higher education. See, Astin, A.W. "In 'Academically Adrift,' Data Don't Back Up Sweeping Claim." *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. (2011, February 14).

evaluate the information provided in an assortment of documents related to a problem or task outlined in the writing prompt, and to which they must provide a plan or solution, in writing, which adequately addresses or resolves the issue.³⁵ Based upon students' gains in their abilities to complete these tasks between the first and second assessment, Arum and Roksa conclude that: "[t]hree semesters of college education thus have a barely noticeable impact on students' skills in critical thinking, complex reasoning, and writing" (35).

Arum and Roksa present a complex array of factors at work in retarding the growth of students' critical thinking skills in college. At the core of their analysis are three groups: students, professors, and administrators. Less central, but still significant, are parents and government officials. Finally, they also briefly discuss primary and secondary education, as well as "the culture" in general. I want to describe their method as "interpellative"; that is, their critique lies not at the level of individual actors but at the institutional environment and conditions that influence and constrain their behavior.

A&R claim that students lack skills, a sense of purpose, and an understanding of and

³⁵ A description of this task is worth citing in full: "'You are the assistant to Pat Williams, the president of DynaTech, a company that makes precision electronic instruments and navigational equipment. Sally Evans, a member of DynaTech's sales force, recommended that DynaTech buy a small plane (a SwiftAir 235) that she and other members of the sales force could use to visit customers. Pat was about to approve the purchase when there was an accident involving a SwiftAir 235.' Students are provided with the following set of documents for this activity: newspaper articles about the accident, a federal accident report on in-flight breakups in single engine planes, Pat Williams's e-mail to her assistant and Sally Evans's e-mail to Pat Williams, charts on SwiftAir's performance characteristics, an article from *Amateur Pilot* magazine comparing SwiftAir 235 to similar planes, and pictures and descriptions of SwiftAir models 180 and 235. Students are then instructed to 'prepare a memo that addresses several questions, including what data support or refute the claim that the type of wing on the SwiftAir 235 leads to more in-flight breakups, what other factors might have contributed to the accident and should be taken into account, and your overall recommendation about whether or not DynaTech should purchase the plane'" (21-2).

respect for academic pursuits. But, they reason, this is because of an educational climate of teaching to the test; the pressure from peer groups; and education's reneging on its purpose to provide training in moral character. We are told that college standards have become lax: work loads are less and grades are inflated. But, A&R argue, this has to do both with a professional ethos that values research over teaching and an economic imperative to maintain high enrollments by keeping students satisfied. Not to mention the trend toward manning more and more classes with adjuncts and graduate students, who are chronically undertrained and overworked. Arum and Roksa also find that administrations have shifted priorities from undergraduate teaching to whatever brings in the cash, usually research. But then, as A&R are quick to point out, both federal and state funding for higher education (and even private funding sources) have been shrinking for years. I'll stop here. Suffice it to say, that even if one were to dismiss their findings about limited learning on college campuses, Arum and Roksa raise a number of issues in higher education which are themselves worthy of concern and scrutiny.

Their final chapter, "A Mandate for Reform," discusses steps that might be taken to ameliorate the situation: improving elementary and secondary education; a renewed commitment to character training in college and a revivification of the spirit of public service and sacrifice among its faculty and administrators; encouraging high expectations and rigorous standards in the classroom; making teaching as important (if not more so) than research; and increasing institutional transparency and accountability.

On the surface, and in classic form, *Academically Adrift* defines a problem in higher education, produces likely causes, and offers appropriate remedies. And yet it is clear from the language and the tone of the report that something deeper troubles the

waters here. What is at stake is nothing less than society's ability to produce morally responsible, free-thinking, and civic-minded citizens. The last page of the report calls for a "recommitment" to the "moral imperative" of "instilling in the next generation of young adults a lifelong love of learning, an ability to think critically and communicate effectively, and a willingness to embrace and assume adult responsibilities" (143-44). In this regard then, the abiding concern is the fulfillment of the Enlightenment project: to help man emerge from his self-imposed nonage.³⁶ And yet, whereas Kant's essay, while critical, is full of the spirit of optimism at the historical possibility of an *ausgang* (an "exit" or "way out," a difference from what has gone before³⁷), one cannot avoid the sense of pessimism lurking throughout Arum and Roksa's text. Having said this I am immediately struck by the difficulty of explaining what I mean. This abiding pessimism resides not at the level of what is said (nor even, although this hits closer, at the level of tone); rather, it emerges and gains strength as the report progresses at the level of form, and the daunting enormity of what is left unsaid in the report. Arum and Roksa amass an impressive edifice of historical, material, and ideological data that frame the current state of higher education. And yet, in response to this, they offer nothing more than a call to renew our commitment to the moral imperative of undergraduate education. The sheer disproportion between the enormity of the articulation of the problem and the simplicity and brevity of the solution itself attests to an unconscious realization of the solution's futility. Such a solution, I suggest, is marked as *rhetorically doomed*: a condition in which the failure of a plea is not because it goes unheard, but precisely as it is heard it

³⁶ Kant, Immanuel. "What is Enlightenment?" *The Politics of Truth*. Ed. Sylvère Lotringer. Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e), 2007.

³⁷ Foucault, Michel. "What is Enlightenment?" *The Politics of Truth*. Ed. Sylvère Lotringer. Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e), 2007.

seals its own fate. The form of the plea itself rhetorically constructs a response incapable of addressing the problem, and in the process reconstitutes the problem as one that requires nothing more than just such a response.³⁸ I have in mind here Foucault's critique of dialectical logic in the *Biopolitics*:

Dialectical logic puts to work contradictory terms within the homogeneous. I suggest replacing this dialectical logic with what I would call strategic logic. A logic of strategy does not stress contradictory terms within a homogeneity that promises their resolution in a unity. The function of strategic logic is to establish the possible connections between disparate terms which remain disparate. The

³⁸ I am trying to open up a discursive paradigm here, but as yet I am not sure how to articulate it. The term that comes most readily to hand is *tragic*. Tragic discourse is concerned with freedom and necessity. While it often concerns the clash of two opposing worldviews or ethical demands each with equal claims, the figures representing each side just as often possess disproportionate amounts of power. Whereas Ancient Greek tragedy took place in the context of a more or less cohesive society bound together by shared cultural values and meanings; contemporary tragedy takes place in a fragmented society in which metanarratives no longer hold sway, or only do so in competition with a host of others, thus relativizing them. Contemporary tragedy then is often a struggle against meaninglessness. In all cases, tragedy concerns human agency; as such, it is always also an ethical and political discourse. As Raymond Williams writes, "The real key, to the modern separation of tragedy from 'mere suffering,' is the separation of ethical control and, more critically, human agency, from our understanding of social and political life" (*Tragedy* 48-49). That is to say, that the category of "mere suffering" relates to those experiences that are the results of mechanical causality, a senseless determinism. Tragedy is always an invocation – however embattled or attenuated – of human will. Williams continues, "The events which are not seen as tragic are deep in the pattern of our own culture: war, famine, work, traffic, politics. To see no ethical content or human agency in such events, or to say that we cannot connect them with general meanings, and especially with permanent and universal meanings, is to admit a strange and particular bankruptcy..." (49). Thus, to articulate an event or situation in a tragic register is not only to bring it within the compass of moral censure; it is to make a claim as to its susceptibility to human action. Thus I argue that we read Arum and Roksa's text as tragic invocation: in illuminating the preponderance of interpellative forces lined up against critical thinking, their tragic discourse itself reduces those forces to human affairs and calls forth heroes to set things right.

logic of strategy is the logic of connections between the heterogeneous and not the logic of the homogenization of the contradictory. (42)

I maintain then, that the dialectic at work in Arum and Roksa's report is the tension between purpose and being adrift, a conflict that the text ultimately intends to resolve through the discourse of moral commitment. We might say, then, that there are two distinct discourses at work in the report: the discourse of sociological analysis and the discourse of moral chastisement and exhortation. Whether these two discourses themselves form a dialectical opposition is a question I'm not quite sure how to answer as yet. To assume for a moment that they do, I would point out that binaries are never neutral. They line up along an axis of positive and negative according to the prevailing truth regime of the time. That is to say, that the positive or negative values of the units in any binary are not static, but interchangeable depending upon the discursive logic in which they are mobilized. I would say that today in our culture (and not just popular culture, but, surprising as it may sound, within the academy as well) moral discourse trumps knowledge/truth discourse.³⁹ This rhetorical inequality between the terms constitutes the fault line between the said and unsaid of the analysis. In Arum and Roksa's report, the unsaid is at its most voluble in those moments where the analysis cogently articulates the interpellative forces at work in goading subjects to act in such and such a way, and then keeps mum about what drives the values of those forces. *Why has the culture shifted such that students are treated more as consumers than as youth in need of moral training? Why do universities prioritize research over teaching, and why*

³⁹ Granted, within the academy "moral" discourse gets a facelift and steps out as "political" discourse. And yet I suspect that they function in the same way and that the latter term is an attempt to conjure up verbally an efficacy that the moral is supposed to lack.

do professors, in general, tend to accept rather than challenge this role? Why do administrators subscribe to the logic of the bottom line, and not keep true to higher principles? Why is higher education losing funding? These are just some of the questions screaming for answers that are yet muted by the discourse of the text.

Foucault said of critique that it “is not a matter of saying that things are not right as they are. It is a matter of pointing out on what kinds of assumptions, what kinds of familiar, unchallenged, unconsidered modes of thought the practices that we accept rest” (155). I cite these lines both as a way to sum up, finally, my overall critique of Arum and Roksa’s report, as well as to invoke the methodology with which I would like to further explore this text.

On the Interpellation of Subjects and Institutions

Let’s begin with the book’s central, organizing metaphor – the state of being adrift. Most of what I have to say here can be summed up by the following: Arum and Roksa, while going to great lengths in showing to what extent higher education today is in a state of being adrift, have very little to say about the not insignificant fact of the being adrift of the state. They clearly understand that institutions, for the most part, trump individuals. That is to say, that while not denying the individual a certain amount of agency, that agency itself – its quality, quantity, and potential – is circumscribed by both history (the individual’s field of experiences) and context (the material conditions – including institutions – in and with which to act). Thus their findings confirm what has been known for a long time: both that prior academic performance is a strong predictor (and itself highly correlated with socioeconomic status) of future education gains, and

that even with these differences among students, individual institutions can make a difference in learning outcomes. Indeed, we would be shocked if they came back with an analysis that put the blame on the intransigency or delinquency or frivolity of today's youth or the laziness or self-interest of administrators and teachers. In fact, while they do indeed make all of these charges (all except for delinquency), they are quick to show how these attitudes and behaviors are informed and encouraged by the institutional contexts in which the actors are placed. And yet, precisely because of this, the blame circulates through the institution and back onto the individual. Thus, though one of the “pitfalls” that Arum and Roksa explicitly claim they want to avoid is that of “scapegoating students, faculty, and colleges for the current state of affairs” (2), they in fact fall prey to in scapegoating “the institution” as a whole. While seeming to avoid the fetish of individual agency by considering the actors within the context of their institutional milieus, they simply displace this fetish onto “the institution” by treating it like an individual rather than contextualizing it within the greater material and ideological frameworks in which it operates. Their disavowal of scapegoating is troubled somewhat by claims like the following: “No actors⁴⁰ in the system are primarily interested in undergraduate student academic growth, although many are interested in student retention and persistence. Limited learning on college campuses is not a crisis because

⁴⁰ A&R indict a full cast of characters here: Parents who are less concerned about learning than they are about tuition, and who mostly “want colleges to provide a safe environment where their children can mature, gain independence, and attain credentials that will help them be successful as adults”; students who are at least (if not more) interested in college social life than academic pursuits, and who want to be awarded high marks for little effort; professors who focus on scholarship and professional interests to the neglect of teaching; administrators concerned with rankings and the bottom line; and government funding agencies primarily interested in scientific research and development (124-25). As we can see, all the usual suspects have been rounded up here.

the institutional actors implicated in the system are receiving the organizational outcomes that they seek, and therefore neither the institutions themselves nor the system as a whole is in any way challenged or threatened” (125). So, what early on in the report seems like a prudent caveat – namely that, despite some worrying trends higher education is not in crisis – later turns out to be the set up for a snarky rebuke: there is no crisis because all the actors involved are too complacent to notice or care.

This scapegoating is even more evident when we consider Arum and Roksa’s list of reforms for higher education. In the final chapter of the report, “A Mandate for Reform,” they make the following suggestions: improving academic preparation and moral education in elementary and secondary schools; a renewed commitment to strong leadership by effective administrators who recognize “that providing support for student academic and social development [is] a moral imperative worth sacrificing for personally, professionally, and institutionally” (127); encouraging (and/or enforcing) faculty to develop high expectations and rigorous standards for their students, and to take their teaching responsibilities as seriously or more so than their research; “facilitating learning, not just persistence”; and greater “institutional transparency and accountability.”⁴¹ The problem here is that while Arum and Roksa are indeed calling for institution and system wide reforms, they rely both implicitly and explicitly upon the concept of leadership for setting things aright. Administrators, faculty, and government officials are exhorted to exhibit qualities of leadership, to take the lead in turning the ship of higher education around, to set it back upon its true course. If I seem to have sunk to the level of bland

⁴¹ Put rather glibly, Arum and Roksa’s plan for transforming American higher education to be more conducive to meeting and promoting the goals of a system of globalized economic competition is to begin by imagining that we neither live in – nor have the corresponding educational institutions proper to – just such a system.

cliché, it is because these are precisely the types of metaphors upon which Arum and Roksa's report relies, the most important of which is the thought-image of "being adrift," which I will turn to in more detail presently.

To sum up, I find that Arum and Roksa fail to avoid the pitfall of scapegoating for two reasons. One, because scapegoating is less a phenomenon of blaming individual human actors than it is of isolating a single cause to the exclusion of others, or (what amounts to the same thing) of arbitrarily stopping the investigation at that cause without inquiring further into the reasons for its behavior. Arum and Roksa's blaming of institutions and their logics for the state of higher education without consideration of the greater material and ideological milieus in which they function amounts to a kind of passing the buck, a scapegoating once removed from, but ultimately yet reducible to the individuals it claims are not the target of its inquiry. Two, because their suggestions for reform ultimately amount to a reliance upon the leadership potential of individual actors, it can only be assumed that the current state of affairs is the result of those very same individuals not doing their jobs or not doing them properly. This is perfectly consistent with scapegoating logic. According to French historian, literary critic, and social science philosopher René Girard, the figure of the scapegoat is one that is ultimately conceived of as both the source and solution to the problem.⁴² Thus, the lack of leadership on the part

⁴² In Girard's schema, scapegoating takes place in response to a threat that collapses cultural distinctions. A plague, for example, disrupts categories of rich and poor, low and high, etc. because all become susceptible to the contagion. The massacre of Jews during the Black Death and the condemnation of homosexuals during the first outbreak of AIDS are prime examples. Groups attempt to ward off the threat by isolating a victim/type as logically at fault or the perpetrator, and then dissociating themselves from that group. Kenneth Burke, in *A Grammar of Motives*, offers a similar schema. He describes three stages involved in scapegoating: an *initial state of merger* in which the

of administrators, faculty, and government officials is, in the main, the source of higher education's current predicament; at the same time, only the leadership and renewed commitment of these individuals can get us back on course.

I have to admit that a part of me is strongly sympathetic to the foregoing analysis. Though they do not name it as such, Arum and Roksa's report raises important questions about interpellation. Briefly put, interpellation refers to subject formation. It is comprised of both a static and a fluid element. The former is the subject herself, the totality of experiences that map the matrix of “who” she “is”. The latter refers to the material contexts in which she finds herself, the “environment” writ large, from her immediate living situation to the social, economic, political, and institutional contexts of which she is a part and in which she acts, which thus inform and delimit both “who” and “what” she “can be”.⁴³ Individual destiny is always a confluence between these two forces. That A&R are more interested in interpellation than individual actors is attested to by the level of attention in their report to both student background and institutional culture. And yet

particular iniquities are shared by all; a *principle of division*, in which the iniquities are transferred to a *chosen vessel*; and finally, a *new principle of merger*, in which those purified of iniquities are galvanized against the chosen sacrificial vessel. I claim that the increasing precarity of academic work (especially the declining value of “pure” as opposed to “applied” research in the humanities), along with the rise in number, status, and remuneration of academic administrators are driving today’s crisis narratives of higher education. The threat to financial security and status that such a state poses to academics as a class is a much more likely source of the current animus toward “the market” or “for profit education” than the supposedly inherent antithesis between economic and scholarly values. As Catherin Chaput notes in *Inside the Teaching Machine*: “Little productive change comes from scapegoating corporations as wholly responsible for a complexly structured university with government funds and wide public support – even if that corporate role appears most significant, as it does in the global stage” (98). I will take this up again in Chapter Four.

⁴³ If this sounds different from the classic Althusserian formulation, it is only because I focus on the material, contextual circumstances that allow for interpellation rather than on the particular utterance that, in mobilizing those forces, calls the subject forth.

their critique misses the mark because it is carried out only half-way. It does not probe further to ask how the institution itself is interpellated by the greater historical, geopolitical situation in which it finds itself. I am sympathetic to Arum and Roksa's report,⁴⁴ then, in part because it resonates with my own experiences in trying to articulate and pursue this present inquiry, a few words about which I feel fit to say at this point.

In my early years as a graduate student in English studies, when this inquiry was still inchoate and taking form mostly as a series of gripes I had with the academy, I made a similar error to the one I accuse Arum and Roksa of here. One of my frustrations was what seemed to me to be a lack of caring for students and for teaching exhibited by a number of my graduate colleagues as well as professors. Indeed, it was not just a matter of seeming, but was actually the case, and for precisely the reasons that Arum and Roksa cite in their report: the professional culture of academia *does* privilege research over teaching, and graduate students mostly are both undertrained and overworked (not to mention, ill-paid) when it comes to teaching. Thus the focus, first of my animus, then of my inquiry, shifted from the individuals to the interpellative forces at work in enabling them to be just such subjects who felt just so about students and teaching. For example, I asked in a paper, *What kind of composition teacher is called forth, both ideologically and materially, by the following circumstances: teaching five classes of 26 students every semester, each class requiring 5 writing projects from each student, which means responding to at least 130 papers every three weeks, yet with the requirement of revision*

⁴⁴ To be clear, while my assessment of their report is largely critical, there is much in it with which I agree, and I share with them a desire for education at all levels to be a place and possibility for students to develop their critical abilities. Of course, the devil is always in the details – most notably here, what we mean by “critical thinking,” and exactly how it is that it develops.

and multiple drafts, actually means responding to 130 student texts at least every 1.5 weeks? My initial response to this rhetorical (yet drawn from real circumstances) question was that the type of composition teacher called forth by such circumstances was not a very good one. Clearly my aim was to look beyond individuals to the institutional factors that inform and shape their attitudes and actions. And yet, my explanation, while it had the benefit of being a more subtle and critical apprehension of the problem than simply blaming graduate students and professors for not caring about students and teaching, yet failed to explain how the institutions entrusted with the care of undergraduate education were themselves the breeding ground of (or at the very least, highly collusive in fostering) those very attitudes.⁴⁵ This insight led me to my next formulation: While it was tempting for me to write off the type of teacher interpellated by the circumstances just described as not very good, to do so would be to fall prey to the historicist fallacy as described by Foucault at the beginning of this chapter. It would start by assuming some stable definition of what good teaching is in itself, and then proceed to deduce how current circumstances are incapable of achieving it. As I see it now, the type of teacher called forth in such circumstances is precisely a good one. Not because they succeed in giving thorough, insightful feedback and support to each of their students, but because, in such a system, the nature of “good teaching” itself has already shifted.

It is clear, however, that even this formulation is unsatisfactory. Partially because it partakes in the very same spatial imagery as Arum and Roksa. To claim that something

⁴⁵ In a similar fashion, analyses which inquire into disparities of reading ability among students, and find a high correlation between reading ability and households rich in books and reading behavior on the part of parents, which yet stop there and do not further inquire into the socioeconomic factors which play into a household’s being rich in books and reading behaviors in the first place, simply replace one scapegoat for another.

has shifted is to compare its present position or composition to a location or state not only prior, but also more originary, more essential, and thus its current status and/or trajectory marks a loss or deformation. This is more or less what is at stake in being adrift: islands are not adrift, stationary as they are; and sea creatures are not adrift, as they move according to their own volition. To be adrift is to be carried by a force or motion not one's own, over which one has no control. Moreover, it assumes a prior state or status from which it has been unmoored and carried away.⁴⁶ As I began to reconceptualize my project, two things became clear to me: 1) That I had no understanding of the historical context out of which present notions like “good teaching,” “higher education,” and “critical thinking,” emerged, and thus I had no real evidence to support my claim that anything had “shifted”; 2) That I conceived of them in essentialized notions of what I felt they ought to be rather than understanding how they functioned rhetorically, and thus constitutively. Having discussed the historical emergence of the public research university and its values in Chapter 1, I now turn to an examination of the rhetorical function of critical thinking as it appears in current discourses.

Metaphors We Sink or Swim by

⁴⁶ And here I am reminded of Althusser's caveat regarding the use of “origins”: “The function of the concept of origin, as in original sin, is to summarize in one word what has not to be thought in order to be able to think what one wants to think. The concept of genesis is charged with taking charge of, and masking, a production or mutation whose recognition would threaten the vital continuity of the empiricist schema of history. ...Applied to our question, these concepts ensure us a cheap solution on every occasion: they make a chain between an original knowledge effect and current knowledge effects – giving us the mere posing, or rather non-posing of the problem as its solution” (63).

Arum and Roksa's central metaphor – being adrift – asks us to imagine the state of critical thinking/critical thinkers in the U.S. as similar to being a vessel afloat in a body of water without the power to propel itself or to navigate a course. “[W]hile others have applied the metaphor of a river to the journey through college of today's students, our findings call attention to the fact that many undergraduate students are academically adrift on contemporary campuses. ...Only with the individual mastery of such competencies [as “think(ing) critically, reason(ing) deeply, and communicat(ing) effectively”] can today’s complex and complicated world be successfully understood and navigated by the next generation of college students” (31).

One of the first things to strike me here is the rather astonishing claim that at least some students, or indeed anyone, has the capacity to “understand the world.” Leaving aside the rather unnavigable question of what it actually means “to understand the world,” let alone navigate it, it seems at the very least that what is meant here is something different than the model of critical thinking upon which Arum and Roksa rely throughout their report. In the examples they provide of the Collegiate Learning Assessment, it is clear that what is being measured is a kind of reading proficiency, the ability to sift documents for information relevant to a very specific goal of limited dimensions, and to write up a plan of action based upon the evidence at hand. The usefulness of such a skill notwithstanding, it is apparent that such a task is wildly different from whatever might be meant by the capacious phrase “understanding the world.” Indeed, if the failure of Western Civilization’s greatest thinkers and systems of thought to provide a satisfactory answer to the question of understanding the world is any measure to go by, it is more than passing strange that we should expect such a

performance of anyone based on nothing more than their ability to read well. I would like to suggest that here we are again faced with another startling dissonance, and one which bears structural affinities to the first. Earlier, we were struck by the disproportion between the enormity of the sociological analysis performed in diagnosing the purportedly desperate state of critical thinking cultivation on one hand, and on the other, the paucity of the proffered remedy, which amounted to little more than, *Get with the program!* Now what catches us off guard is the asymmetry between the grandiose claim that being a critical thinker allows one to understand and to navigate the world, with the reduction of this skill to the mundane act of reading, the paradigmatic example of which (at least, the one provided by the report) is responding to a memo from the boss.

As an index of the dissonance here, I have identified at least eight distinct referents for how Arum and Roksa use the metaphor of *being adrift*:

1. Students' lack of discursive capital (reading, writing, speaking skills)
2. Students' lack of social capital (attitudes deemed necessary for success, like ambition)
3. Students' lack of educational capital (study skills, knowing how to learn)
4. Students' lack of a sense of purpose
5. Students' misplaced priorities (e.g. leisure over work)
6. Professors' underprioritizing undergraduate education for professional goals
7. Administrators' underprioritizing undergraduate education for institutional goals
8. Government officials' underprioritizing undergraduate education for research and development.

The technical-discursive skill of reading (which is the bedrock of Arum and Roksa's report, and their explicit concern) is the referent of usage number 1 only; although I think that with a slightly expanded understanding of what is involved in reading, usages 2 and 3 are germane to that concern as well. However, with usages 5-8 we have clearly left the domain of skill and entered the domain of, let us say, moral conscience/political will. Indeed, as Arum and Roksa conceptualize it, the issues named in referents 1-3 arise largely as the result of the conditions referred to in 5-8. And thus, again, my claim that while Arum and Roska are explicitly concerned with critical thinking as a technical-discursive skill, their greater concern is with a moral/political compass which could adequately understand and navigate the world. This much more capacious concern and claim is what is at issue in their discussion of *purpose*.

That purpose is what is really at issue is made abundantly clear throughout the text:

If faculty at U.S. Colleges can be described as being distracted by professional interests other than undergraduate instruction, it is likely even more the case that contemporary higher education administrators experience institutional interests and incentives that focus their attention elsewhere. ...Arguably, shifts in the character of administrative leadership are associated with the phenomenon of colleges and universities today becoming much more interested in the fulfillment of nonacademic services and functions, while focusing less on traditional academic instruction. (11)

It is this unique point in time – when access to college is widespread, concerns about inadequate academic preparation are prevalent, and drifting through college

without a clear sense of purpose is readily apparent – that serves as the historic context for our observations of the lives of students... (34)

Many students emerging from [elementary and secondary schools] have also not developed norms, values, and behaviors conducive to assuming productive lives as responsible adults, let alone the ability and interest to focus on academic learning at college. ...Youth today have been unable to develop a sense of purpose in their lives not only because of general changes in parenting and the larger culture...but because schools have turned away from accepting responsibility for youth socialization and moral education. (126)

Leaders at successful institutions have a strong sense of purpose; they engage other members of the community in achieving the vision, and they make decisions about hiring and programs that support the achievement of these goals. ...Many higher education administrators and faculty today have largely turned away from earlier conceptions of their roles that recognized that providing support for academic and social development was a moral imperative worth sacrificing for personally, professionally, and institutionally. (127)

And while those who are committed to promoting a democratic citizenry might bemoan the consequences of limited learning on the public's ability to reflect critically on contemporary political issues, critical thinking and complex reasoning capacities are of little use if future citizens are largely disengaged and tuned out from societal events altogether. (143)

Here we find evidence of the other “pitfall” that Arum and Roksa had set out to avoid, that of “propagating historically inaccurate sentimental accounts of a romantic

collegiate past followed by a tragic ‘fall from grace’” (2). While their report does not go to that extreme, the language of nostalgia in these passages (and throughout) is unmistakable. Here schools and their actors have *turned away* from their responsibilities and *turned away* from *earlier conceptions of their roles*. Here faculty have been *distracted* (drawn asunder, turned aside), and the character of leaders has *shifted*. Indeed, the structural metaphor of the report itself – being adrift – registers a nostalgia for a time when we were fixed in our roles and steady in our purpose. The problem with nostalgia here is not that a time never existed wherein the circumstances of higher education were different and presumably (at least, from the perspective of the analyses taken in the report) better or more ideal than now. For Arum and Roksa (and others) the acme of American higher education was that period in the early 1960s wherein full-time college students “spent roughly forty hours per week on academic pursuits (i.e., combined studying and class time); at which point a steady decline ensued throughout the following decades” (3).⁴⁷ Nor is the problem of nostalgia to be found in imagining that at its acme American higher education possessed a firmer sense of purpose or that such a sense was more unambiguously devoted to undergraduate education than it is now. All of this may be borne out. The problem resides in imagining that such purpose itself was a thing in itself and not the crystallization of a myriad of other socioeconomic and political conditions. The questions, it seems to me, are how and why does educational purpose get articulated differently under different historical, material, and ideological conditions. And

⁴⁷ It is not insignificant that the period immediately following this acme – the mid to late sixties – was characterized by unprecedented levels of college student activism, a large and looming target of which was the institution of higher learning itself. Many would argue that such political activity is a better measure of critical engagement than time spent on institutionally assigned tasks.

why, after all their painstaking research, and with all their sociological training, does Arum and Roksa's answer to the complex question of what is driving material, ideological, and structural changes in higher education today boil down to a question of moral purpose? I would suggest, glibly, because only by posing the question in these terms can the answer decided in advance achieve coherence.

Arum and Roksa are diligent throughout the report that any discussion of individuals is always framed within a greater context. As I said earlier, their fault is not straightforward scapegoating per se, and both the tone and the argument are a far cry from the witch hunting rhetoric in which public discourse about education – higher or otherwise – is wont to engage. Thus, in Arum and Roksa's schema, the student is prey to her peer group; parents are buffeted by cultural shifts in parenting trends; professors are caught up in their professional obligations and the publish or perish dilemma; administrators are forced to go to great lengths to meet the bottom line; and government officials are ever pressured to seek out new research and technology to further national agendas. Such insights are both warranted and welcome. And yet, the register in which they are presented is a moral one. That is to say, that the moral tone and rhetoric at work throughout the report function in such a way as to transform deep-seated material, ideological, and structural contradictions into matters of trials and temptations. Students lack academic focus but have learned how to “game the system,” achieving high marks for little effort. Parents have become “advocates” for their children's education, and parents and students both become “customers” and “clients” of education service providers. Professors are “distracted by institutional demands and individual incentives to devote increased attention to research productivity” (6). They, too, have learned to game

the system “by replacing rigorous and demanding classroom instruction with entertaining classroom activities, lower academic standards, and a generous distribution of high course marks,” thus ensuring better course evaluations and allowing them to prioritize their research.⁴⁸ College educators, administrators, and staff “have ‘largely withdrawn from oversight of manners and morals,’” (14). Once again, my critique here is not concerned with the validity of any of these claims. My critique is rather how these observations, and many more which are equally pertinent to the discussion, come to be arranged, as it were, on the periphery of the discussion, surrounding the core issue which turns out to be nothing more than a lack of moral courage and political will. While Arum and Roksa’s report is explicitly concerned with undergraduate students developing critical thinking skills, the real complaint is an indictment at all levels – individual, family, teachers, administrators, government, and culture – of a lack of purpose, of a failure to act, of a dereliction of duty to reason. Thus, while the text makes an explicit critique at the level of the critical as intellectual skill or ability, implicitly, it is a critique of the critical at the level of political will: if all these figures in authority would just have the courage and alacrity to stand up to the tide of professional and institutional forces, we could right the ship of higher education.

And here I come to the crux of my critique of Arum and Roksa’s text. It has two parts. First, its two key terms – critical thinking and purpose – show evidence of a schism. Critical thinking appears in the text either as a technical-discursive skill (one which would require the type of sociological breadth and rigor devoted to critiquing

⁴⁸ While this point really requires a more extensive discussion, I would just like to point out here another dissonance. Professors are called upon to be less dedicated to, thus less rigorous in their own academic research in the name of modeling and teaching academic rigor.

higher education here in order to properly grasp) or as the romantic faculty of the Enlightenment man, one that allows us to understand and navigate the world. Purpose in this discourse is similarly bifurcated, appearing either as a set of interpellative effects the amalgam of which might be called “the productive citizen,” or as a sense of conviction in the rightness of one’s goals, coupled with an independent spirit and a vision for achieving them (as is illustrated in the figure of the leader). This schism can be explained, I believe, if we remember that the ultimate goal of education is the production of a certain type of subject. American higher education begins with elite institutions aimed at cultivating gentlemen and future leaders. By the middle of the nineteenth century, another type of subject was needed, one that could grasp and be trained in the new agricultural and industrial technologies. Thus the Morrill Act was created in response to economic and technological pressures. Despite its much touted democratizing of higher education, as Danika Brown makes clear in “Hegemony and the Discourse of the Land Grant Movement: Historicizing as a Point of Departure”:

The land grant idea was shaped by members of the dominant professional class within a discourse of economic utility. It was the articulation of the desire to serve capitalism in terms of heightened productivity by putting public land into use as capital and facilitating the creation of more productive laborers. However, ...the formation of public higher education can also be understood as providing the dominant class a way to respond to resistance to the conditions it was creating by constructing working class interests and appearing to serve those interests through a public institution. (334)

Thus the schism we can identify in Arum and Roksa's differing uses and configurations of the critical and purpose attest to two different subjects being interpellated by their discourse, which I will provisionally label "aristocrats" and "citizens." Aristocrats need autonomy, independence of spirit, and strong moral convictions if they are going to lead. Citizens also need strong morals, but they must ultimately see themselves as serving rather than leading. They do not require autonomy or independence so much as boundaries and standards. Above all, they should aspire to be productive. An earlier citation is worth a second gloss here:

Many students emerging from [elementary and secondary schools] have also not developed norms, values, and behaviors conducive to assuming productive lives as responsible adults, let alone the ability and interest to focus on academic learning at college. ...Youth today have been unable to develop a sense of purpose in their lives not only because of general changes in parenting and the larger culture, [] but because schools have turned away from accepting responsibility for youth socialization and moral education. (126)

While Arum and Roksa's use of purpose is not exhausted by this quote, I find it revealing that lacking purpose is equated here with lacking "norms, values, and behaviors conducive to assuming productive lives as responsible adults." One can't help asking, "Productive of what and to whom?" In terms of the values at play in Arum and Roksa's notions of the critical and purpose, the following citations are revealing:

Education reform requires improved measurement and understanding of the processes and factors associated with student learning. In an increasingly globalized competitive economy, the consequences of policy inattention are

profound. Regardless of economic competitiveness, the future of a democratic society depends upon educating a generation of young adults who can think critically, reason deeply, and communicate effectively. (31)

[S]tudents, parents, faculty, and administrators are not overly concerned with the lack of academic learning currently occurring in colleges and universities, as long as other organizational outcomes more important to them are being achieved. The dissatisfaction of corporate leaders in the private sector with the quality of U.S. undergraduate education has, however, become palpable as they claim that “the current state of affairs is unacceptable” and that “many of the skills and abilities they seek can – and should – be taught on campus.” (143)

My point here is not to discredit Arum and Roksa’s analyses by revealing the socioeconomic and political values that underlie them. Rather, it is the way in which they conceptualize critical thinking and purpose as, on one hand, politically neutral intrinsic values, yet on the other hand, each concrete usage of the terms betrays their imbrication with a technico-productive-democratic rationality. All of which begs the questions: Is the critical productive as such? Is the critical democratic? Is purpose productive and democratic? And even if we could positively answer yes to these questions (for which no evidence is provided in the report), further questions would still need answering, such as, What do critical thinking and purpose produce? Are all such productions uncritically good? I am tempted to make a broad claim here that I will qualify as simply that, a broad claim. Whether it will be born out by further analysis remains to be seen. At any rate, I want to say that what we see in Arum and Roksa’s text is less an analysis of critical thinking and the status of its teaching and more an attempt to colonize and co-opt the

critical to interpellate strong leaders – independent thinkers who make moral, principled decisions – on one hand, and productive citizens who know their place, on the other. And to be clear, my critique is not that Arum and Roksa are imputing values whenever they use the terms or ascribe intrinsic values to critical thinking and to purpose; my critique is rather of the very uncritical way in which they do so. It is the unreflexive nature of their analyses, their failure to problematize, or at least to situate the values informing their conceptualization and valorization of the critical and of purpose, and their tendency to essentialize these as value-neutral values that I find problematic.

My second major criticism concerns Arum and Roksa's understanding of the relationship between interpellative forces and subjects. As I tried to articulate earlier when discussing the disconnect between the rigor of the sociological analysis of the report and the simplicity of the remedy, between historical materialist critique and moral chastising, interpellation is not reducible to temptation. The forces which constrain particular types of being to come forth (while keeping other kinds at bay) are not shackles that are holding another, more essential, authentic being from showing itself, forced to hide behind a mask as it were, or "distracted" from its true nature. The being called forth is just that being that shows itself. While this appearance is not exhaustive, it is not mere showing as opposed to a more real essence. The professor who puts research over teaching is not actually a teacher distracted from her true purpose. Her sense of purpose is bound up with a dedication to research that is the result of a whole host of interpellative forces and personal choices. That this "type" of professor is prevalent today, indeed, that it is a recognizable type, and further, that it is distinguishable from other types that have presented themselves at different times and situations is all the more reason to try to

understand the conditions that call it forth, rather than to eulogize a privileged, ordinary type and exhort a return to it.

The fact is that one of the problems facing us whenever we begin to try to talk about something like critical thinking is that it is impossible to do so without raising questions of value and purpose, and thus of morals and politics. While it may be useful and possible to separate the critical from purpose in theory, as soon as we are speaking about human beings we can never find the critical as a pure instrumentality not already informed by and bound up with intentionality; nor can we find pure purpose separate from a critical apparatus through which it is rendered and articulated. Thus, despite our best, most conscientious efforts (and many efforts are less than conscientious), even our most rigorous and objective definitions of *what* critical thinking *is* can never be wholly extricated from our investments in *what* critical thinking *ought to be*, including even the seemingly innocuous assumption that *it is* indeed a *what* which *is*, with all of the ontological baggage that comes with conflating an aspect with an essence. In remarking thus, I am not definitively claiming that critical thinking is an aspect as opposed to an essence so much as I am trying to imagine what difference/s it might make to do so. That is to say, that rather than imagine critical thinking as a thing and then trying to describe what type of a thing it is, what happens when we imagine that the critical is an appellation we give to certain things and not to others, that rather than being constative, it is descriptive, and, as such, evaluative. Such evaluations themselves have constitutive effects. What passes for critical thinking today is the reification of a series of historical, rhetorical, evaluative distinctions as to what is and what is not critical thinking, in an effort to make the critical productive as such. That is, critical thinking is a term mobilized

in the service of a worldview that one either feels is threatened or that one wishes to actualize. What is at stake in discussions of critical thinking are the kinds of worlds we wish or do not wish to inhabit. My thinking here has been deeply influenced by Foucault's reflections on Kant's seminal essay, *What is Enlightenment?*, and it is to these two thinkers that I now turn in further inquiring into the nature of the critical.

What Is Enlightenment?

Kant's essay, "What is Enlightenment?", is a reflection upon the possibilities for, and responsibilities of, thought, in an age when some of the formal barriers to its freedom were seen to be coming to an end or had already dissipated, namely, religion and the sovereign. As the story goes, with thinking no longer formally bounded by these strictures (although, of course, citizens must still obey the law and the responsibilities attendant upon their positions), humanity was in a position to emerge from its immaturity and take up the responsibilities attendant upon freely thinking beings. This new potential was both individual and social – social to the extent that that this freeing up was taking place in western Europe generally; individual in that it called upon citizens to exercise their reason publicly. This newfound freedom of thought was not without its limitations. One limit placed upon it was Kant's distinction between the private and public uses of reason. For Kant, private is that use of reason one makes while in a role or position that requires some form of obedience that overrules freedom of thought. The soldier must follow orders no matter how unsound, immoral, or dangerous. The citizen, as citizen, must pay taxes, however much she may disagree with the policies they enable. The clergyman must preach dogma, though his conscience may be conflicted over certain

points. However, the public use of reason is free and unrestricted. This is the use one puts reason to as a freely thinking being. Thus, while the soldier must obey orders, in his role as public thinker, he is free to write a critique of the present war or its strategies and publish it in a paper or as a book. The citizen, while paying taxes, is free to publish opinion or politically organize to repeal said taxes. And the clergyman, while keeping to the catechism while in the pulpit, is free to entertain, discuss, debate, and again, publish views in opposition to the established dogma. Kant describes an almost symbiotic relationship between the enlightened despot (Frederick II of Prussia) and free thought. The former through firm rule and law provides the conditions of possibility for the latter; while thought liberated from false limitations further enlightens, strengthens, glorifies and legitimizes the rule of the former.

There is another, more subtle and thornier limit to thinking that Kant addresses at the very beginning of his essay, one that is at the heart of the issues I have been addressing in Arum and Roksa's text – political will. In the opening sentence of the essay Kant makes clear that human beings' state of immaturity is "self-incurred," and that only through "daring to know" – *Sapere aude!* – can we achieve full maturity, that is, autonomy, thinking for oneself. That is to say, that the limits to thinking freely, thinking critically, are not merely formal or external – political, religious, etc. They are also personal: one may have the technical-discursive ability to think critically, but it is another thing to have the courage, the audacity to use it. (You can lead a student through Harvard, but you can't make them think.) Indeed, in the examples of critical thinking that Kant provides in his essay (the soldier, citizen, and clergyman referred to above), there is no indication that they lack anything in terms of the formal ability to think critically in the

service of their positions – Kant is not calling them to account for their lacking skills or a substandard job performance. What is in question, what is the enlightenment question, is do they have the proper attitude, the courage, the political will to think about their private roles, and in their public roles speak truthfully and critically about what they find there. It is not insignificant that the examples of critical being here are all acts of resistance to power, law, established authority. What is more, if we imagine that each of these authorities and their actions were themselves arrived at through the use of reason (of course not all of them may have been), then we understand that even reason itself and its uses are not to be exempt from our power and responsibility to think critically. Thus, here we have a third limit to thought – the limits which thought imposes upon the dominion, scope, and validity of its own reason.

It is with these notions of the critical as disposition, political will, resistance, and as limitation that I take up Foucault's reflections upon Kant's Enlightenment essay. I find in the extended meditations on Kant and the Enlightenment as found in Foucault's essays "What is Enlightenment?", "What is Critique?", and "What is Revolution?"⁴⁹ a powerful counter-orientation toward critical thinking and purpose than those that appear not only in Arum and Roksa's text, but many contemporary discourses of critical thinking and higher education today.

What Enlightenment Is Not

In his essay, "What is Enlightenment?", Foucault warns us to be wary of "the blackmail of the Enlightenment." This blackmail consists of being forced to accept the

⁴⁹ These essays, as well as Kant's, are all to be found in *The Politics of Truth*. Ed. Sylvère Lotringer. Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e), 2007.

traditional narratives of the Enlightenment that place it within a teleological framework and choosing sides “for” or “against” it. For Foucault, this reduces to petty squabbling about the relative “goodness” or “badness” of reason, or, just as bootless, attempts to erect or discover a better, truer, more originary principle of rationality. Nor will philosophical subtlety and conniving release us from this constraining orbit: “And we do not break free of this blackmail by introducing ‘dialectical’ nuances while seeking to determine what good and bad elements there may have been in the Enlightenment” (*Politics* 110). In all of these choices, or rather, false choices, there is an element of reification, of fetishization (my terms, not Foucault's), which makes of reason or rationality a thing in itself, a kind of transhistorical entity whose progress we can measure and monitor, or whose perversion from “real reason's” trajectory we can criticize and track. Foucault's advice here: “Let us leave to their pious meditations those who want to keep the heritage of the *Aufklärung* alive and intact. This piety, of course, is the most touching of all treasons. Preserving the remains of the *Aufklärung* is not the issue, but rather it is the very question of this event and its meaning (the question of the historicity of the reflection on the universal) that must be maintained and kept in mind as that which must be contemplated” (*Politics* 93-4).

What does Foucault mean here by “the question of the historicity of the reflection on the universal”? I believe what he means is that this reflection itself, reason itself, the nature of the critical as such, is itself historical, and that the implications of this insight require that philosophy shift its orientation and line of questioning from an epistemological to an ontological model. “It seems to me that the philosophical choice with which we are confronted at the present is this: we can opt for a critical philosophy

which will present itself as an analytic philosophy of truth in general, or we can opt for a form of critical thought which will be an ontology of ourselves, an ontology of the actuality. It is this form of philosophy that, from Hegel to the Frankfurt School, through Nietzsche and Max Weber, has founded the form of reflection within which I have attempted to work” (*Politics* 95). We have an opposition here between “a critical philosophy” and “a form of critical thought.” While “a philosophy” connotes the tendency to give way to a rigid system of thinking, “a form of thought” retains a kind of suppleness and mobility. While I don’t want to make too much of this contrast, Foucault goes to great pains to lay out and describe his methodology in terms of both *archaeology* and *genealogy*, as well as to refer to it as a *strategy*, and so the distinction between philosophy/form of thought is not insignificant. I am more interested, however, in the way in which Foucault, here and elsewhere, locates the difficulty, the tension, the problematic of the critical not between the critical and what constrains it, but within the constitution of the critical as such. Of course, this, too, is a way of asking what is it that constrains the critical; but rather than assuming the critical to be something in and of itself, and then to ask what conditions best foster or most squelch it, Foucault’s way is to inquire into what is being asked of the critical in this moment and to put through a rigorous historical material critique the conditions that allow for and create such demands. To refer back to the example about teaching I gave in discussing my early thinking on, and the impetus for, this project, the issue is not to figure out why teaching is less valued and less valuable today; rather it is to understand precisely the value that it has and the values and conditions that call forth this particular iteration of it. And so, while at one point in time the critical may have opposed itself to sovereignty and religion,

at another historical moment religion, or spiritual, mystical thinking was itself the essence of the critical; just as today articulations of sovereignty are lodged as critical interventions into the process of global financialization. These insights, however, do not allow us the luxury of a cheap relativism. While on one hand, like Dostoevsky's *Underground Man*, we are not allowed the comfort of having first principles to lean on; on the other hand, however, “the question of the historicity of the reflection on the universal” neither affords us the pleasure of being able to lie back and enjoy the play of a world without principles, or to avoid the responsibility for making principled decisions. What emerges most clearly in Foucault’s thinking on the Enlightenment is a sense of the critical as a commitment towards an attitude that refuses certain impositions. And here we have one of Foucault’s most provocative (perhaps because most modest and unadorned) definitions of the critical (he coins many): “the art of not being governed quite so much” (*Politics* 45). This art is called forth most vocally in response to impositions of governmentalization:

[A]bove all, one sees that the core of critique is basically made up of the bundle of relationships that are tied to one another, or one to the two others, power, truth and the subject. And if governmentalization is indeed this movement through which individuals are subjugated in the reality of a social practice through mechanisms of power that adhere to truth, well, then! I will say that critique is the movement by which the subject gives himself the right to question truth on its effects of power and question power on its discourses of truth. Well, then!: critique will be the art of voluntary insubordination, that of reflected intractability.

Critique would basically insure the desubjugation of the subject in the context of what we could call, in a word, the politics of truth. (*Politics* 47)

Notice here (and Foucault himself is quick to point it out) that we are still well within the Kantian framework of Enlightenment. Kant's challenge to modernity is not, "Acquire knowledge!", it is *Sapere aude!* ("Dare to know!"). He charges his era not with stupidity or ignorance, but with intellectual lassitude and moral cowardice. And here I'd like to bring Arum and Roksa back into the discussion, who, after all, have never been far from my mind.

I think it is clear from our discussion that Arum and Roksa are butting their heads against just this facet of the Enlightenment – that of interpellation, of moral conviction and political will. They specify that their concern is not students' ability to accumulate knowledge: "While they may be acquiring subject-specific knowledge or greater self-awareness on their journeys through college, many students are not improving their skills in critical thinking, complex reasoning, and writing" (36). Yet their description of critical thinking as illustrated by the Collegiate Learning Assessment tool that they use to measure it contains none of the affective qualities so crucial to Kant's and Foucault's texts. Where A&R do invoke the language of morals is in their challenge to educational leaders and those in positions of authority to resist organizational inertia and professional ethos and make the teaching of critical thinking skills job one on university campuses. I think my analysis also shows that though the real animus of their report seems like it ought to be directed at all the social, economic, cultural, and institutional conditions that collude in preventing making critical thinking a priority in undergraduate education, instead it is redirected at the parents, professors, administrators, and government officials

who do not rise to the occasion of making it so. In Arum and Roksa's Enlightenment challenge, it is all these figures of and in authority who have failed the test of leadership, become distracted, drifted away from the "moral imperative...[of] providing future college students with rigorous and high-quality educational experiences," whom they indict with intellectual and moral torpor.

For all their points of contact, the differences between Kant's and Arum and Roksa's articulations of the challenge of the Enlightenment couldn't be more striking. Whereas Kant calls upon every person to have the courage to think for themselves in opposition to authority (though they must obey the law), Arum and Roksa call upon authorities to tow the line in cultivating in students an adherence to critical thinking. What is more, Arum and Roksa's conceptualization of critical thinking has already been evacuated of the affective qualities, of the attitude that would make it critical: critical thinking has now become nothing more than a technical-discursive skill.⁵⁰ It is important to note, as well, the configurations of the critical thinker in each text. For Kant, critical subjects are those who, having acquitted themselves of their duties for the day, in their free time engage in public discourse in opposition to established laws, policies, practices, beliefs, etc. In Arum and Roksa's text, whether exhorting the aristocrat or the citizen, the critical thinker is articulated in the private sense: either as the strong leader of an institution or as an employee of such, carrying out her directives. This distinction is crucial. For Kant, the soul of critical thinking lies in its public, rather than its private use. That is, in the use we make of it as free thinkers, public citizens in a community of

⁵⁰ This may be one reason why throughout the text A&R cannot use this term in isolation, but constantly invoke a kind of critical trinity: "critical thinking, complex reasoning, effective communication."

thinkers, and not the use we make of it while in the service of any private concern, such as a job. Arum and Roksa describe the stakeholders of critical thinking thus:

Legislators – and privately, middle-class parents as well – increasingly have expressed worry over the value and returns to their investments in higher education. Business leaders have begun to ask whether graduates have acquired the necessary skills to ensure economic competitiveness. And increasingly, educators within the system itself have begun to raise their voices questioning whether organizational changes to colleges and universities in recent decades have undermined the core educational functions of these institutions. (1)

For whatever our political biases as to the relevance, merit, or danger of a particular stakeholder named above (e.g. business leaders or educators) to our particular conceptualization of what education is or ought to be, it is important to note that for Kant, each one of these groups and their spheres of influence would constitute a private use of reason as opposed to a public one. Foucault draws our attention to Kant's use of the German word *räsonieren* in differentiating between "the realm of obedience [private] and the realm of the use of reason [public]" (*Politics* 101). *Räsonieren*, Foucault explains, "is also used in the *Critiques* [and] does not refer to just any use of reason, but to a use of reason in which reason has no other end but itself: *räsonieren* is to reason for reasoning's sake." Having said this, I now feel the need to complicate it.

While I claimed that these stakeholders are examples of the private use of reason, at first glance, the legislators, parents, businessmen, and educators mentioned above may all seem, in their own way, to be meeting the criteria of the public use of reason: parents questioning the quality of their children's education; businessmen challenging the

efficiency and efficacy of it; educators raising their voices against organizational challenges. And yet, to the extent that each of these groups enters into the question, “What is education?”, with a particular end in view – return on investment, economic competitiveness, protecting the core missions of the institution – each use of reason here is but a private one, constrained by its particular concerns. And yet again, as we saw earlier, if we cannot separate the use of reason from a reasoning subject imbricated within a matrix of values and experiences, what becomes of Kant's private/public distinction? Clearly Kant was speaking about more than the formal possibility for the Enlightenment, more than free speech laws, academic freedom, and such. From the point of view of autonomy and reason, while adhering to church dogma because one fears incurring ecclesiastical wrath is a condition we ought want to be free of, more insidious is the condition in which we adhere to it simply out of inertia or laziness, or because we don't know any better. And yet, what if I adhere to it because I truly believe in it? What if I believe in it because my reason tells me so? What if my reason separates matters of reason from matters of faith, and thus I never find fit to question one on the basis of the other? These questions are significant because an essential condition for enlightenment requires assurance of a political subject determined to use reason in just such a way as is implied by *räsonieren*. As Foucault suggests, then, there is a negative and a positive condition for the possibility of critical thinking: the negative is the absence of any formal barriers to the exercise of *räsonieren*; the positive is the interpellation of critical subjects so disposed to act critically.

We can readily see how the universal use of reason (apart from any private end) is the business of the subject himself as an individual; we can readily see, too, how

the freedom of this use may be assured in a purely negative manner through the absence of any challenge to it; but how is a public use of that reason to be assured? Enlightenment, as we see, must not be conceived simply as a general process affecting all humanity; it must not be conceived only as an obligation prescribed to individuals: it now appears as a political problem. The question, in any event, is that of knowing how the use of reason can take the public form that it requires, how the audacity to know can be exercised in broad daylight, while individuals are obeying as scrupulously as possible. (*Politics* 103)

That is to say, while education may be able to provide the subject with the formal possibility for critical thinking, and while nothing in the academy or society at large may directly impede or prevent the subject from exercising her free use of reason, how does society ensure that she in fact will exercise it, and in just such a way as is mete for its particular power: “a use of reason in which reason has no other end but itself...to reason for reasoning’s sake.”⁵¹

As Foucault illustrates, such a conceptualization of reason establishes its own internal limits and form of policing. Reason becomes limited by interest on behalf of preserving its intrinsic disinterest. Foucault shows as well how this intrinsic disinterest of reason itself becomes a means of tyranny, which in turn requires a critique. But this

⁵¹ While it is not the explicit concern of this inquiry, a whole host of issues and questions arise here concerning what constitutes and whether or not there is such a thing as a “public sphere” as it is being imagined here. If there is no space outside of the private (and I grant that this is an “if”), where, exactly, is the public use of reason to be enacted; is it even possible without the space that gives rise to it? Mea culpa – I have no answers here. I’ll only say that I think part of what I’m up to is trying to imagine how the university might become such a space, or something like it; something, what is more, which I don’t believe it ever has been, despite my own and others’ nostalgia for it. Can one be nostalgic for something that has never existed? More to the point, isn’t nostalgia always for that which has never been, is no place, and is thus utopic?

critique must not seek its line of attack in establishing a truer, more legitimate reason. Nor must it rest at (which would amount to the same thing, in the negative) of revealing the limits of the reasoning at which it takes aim. Foucault's strategic "third way" is to contextualize the circumstances that allow for and facilitate the present paradigm of reasoning and to ask what is possible outside of it. Thus, the requisite "foritselfness" of reason is a requirement or limit imposed upon it by the necessary conditions of its genesis only. That is to say, that the conceptualization of reason as a power and value, the efficacy and merits of which depend upon its free, disinterested usage, is a conceptualization which is entirely contingent upon the geo-historical specificity of 17th-18th century Western Europe. Whether such a conceptualization of reason is still efficacious, valuable, or even critical today is the question before us. In short, for Foucault, to ask "What is Enlightenment?" is unthinkable without asking another question which Kant also turned to addressing about 14 years after his enlightenment essay, namely, and as the title of another essay by Foucault, "What is Revolution?"

I want to pause for a moment and recapitulate the significant moves Foucault makes in thinking about Kant's enlightenment essay before moving on to discuss his insights in "What is Revolution?" First, reason (and we might even add, philosophy) is not the same thing as critique. Second, the critical is more properly understood as an attitude or orientation than as a method or skill. Third, that this attitude neither grounds itself in a system of thought nor justifies itself with claims to intrinsic value. This attitude is wholly ethical and political. "The critical ontology of ourselves has to be considered not, certainly, as a theory, a doctrine, nor even a permanent body of knowledge that is accumulating; it has to be conceived as an attitude, an ethos, a philosophical life in which

the critique of what we are is at one and the same time an historical analysis of the limits that are imposed on us and an experiment of the possibility of going beyond them”

(*Politics* 118). Further,

...critique only exists in relation to something other than itself: it is an instrument, a means for a future or a truth that it will not know nor happen to be, it oversees a domain that it would want to police and is unable to regulate. All this means that it is a function that is subordinated in relation to what philosophy, science, politics, ethics, law, literature, etc., positively constitute. And at the same time, whatever the pleasures or compensations accompanying this curious activity of critique, it seems that it rather regularly, almost always, brings not only some stiff bit of utility it claims to have, but also that it is supported by some kind of more general imperative – more general still than that of eradicating errors. There is something in critique which is akin to virtue. And in a certain way, what I wanted to speak to you about is the critical attitude as virtue in general. (*Politics* 42-43)

What is this “virtue in general,” then? According to Foucault, and through his reading of Kant, it is “humanity’s moral predisposition,” which never reveals itself so clearly or so consistently as it does in “a sympathy of aspiration that borders on enthusiasm...for the Revolution” (*Politics* 91).

What Is Revolution?

In this essay, Foucault begins by calling attention to the unique way in which Kant’s essay raises the question of history. Put briefly, the question of the Enlightenment

is to be understood neither as a question of origins nor of teleology nor of principles for acting; rather, it is a question of our actuality and our possibility.

In short, in this text, it seems to me that one witnesses the appearance of the present as a philosophical event to which the philosopher who speaks about it belongs. If one agrees to envision philosophy as a form of discursive practice which has its own history, it seems to me that with this text on the *Aufklärung*... one sees philosophy problematize its own discursive actuality: an actuality that it questions as an event, as an event whose meaning, value, and philosophical singularity it has to express and in which it has to find both its own reason for being and the foundation for what it says. (*Politics* 85)

In short, philosophy has to justify its existence and authority on the bases of its own, particular, historical conditions for possibility. And it will not do here for the philosopher to rely upon doctrine or tradition, nor upon “his belonging to a larger human community in general,” to answer this charge, “but rather it will be a question of his belonging to a certain *us*, to an *us* that relates to a characteristic cultural ensemble of his own actuality. ...What is my actuality? What is the meaning of this actuality? And what am I doing when I speak about this actuality? I believe that this is what this new examination of modernity is all about” (85-6). In questioning his actuality, its meaning, and his role within it, the philosopher is also asking about his and the present’s possibilities, which is to raise the question of the possibility for change or progress. For Kant and other thinkers of his time such questions tended to galvanize around the event of the French Revolution. With the question of the Enlightenment still very much in his mind (his essay came out in

1784), in 1798 Kant turns to answering another question which, as we will see, is an inflection of the first, “What is Revolution?”

Foucault’s discussion of Kant’s thinking here is drawn from a collection of papers – *The Conflict of the Faculties* – in which Kant takes up the task of establishing the relations among the different faculties that make up the University. The second paper concerns the conflicts between the School of Philosophy and the Law School. Here, as Foucault describes it, “the whole field of relationships between philosophy and law is engrossed with the question, ‘Is there constant progress for humankind?’” Without explicitly stating it, it is clear that to Foucault’s thinking, the answer to this question is precisely what is at stake in philosophy’s finding “both its own reason for being and the foundation for what it says.” And yet we must tread carefully here. Having already qualified that neither through recourse to origins, ends, nor principles will this critical activity ground itself, it is difficult to imagine how it may be conceptualized as partaking in a kind of progress, indeed, and such a progress that is a form of virtue. Kant’s initial response to the question, “Is there constant progress for humankind?”, is to ask another, logically prior one, “Does there exist a possible cause for this progress?” (*Politics* 88). In answering this question, however, we must be careful to avoid determining a purely formal teleology. That is to say, that “once this possibility is established, one must show that this cause effectively translates into action and for that reason elicits a certain event that shows that the cause acts in reality. ...Therefore, it is not enough to follow the teleological framework which makes progress possible. One must isolate an event in history that will take on the value of a sign.” For both Kant and Foucault, such a sign was revolution. And it is here, in Kant’s insights regarding revolution, what it is and what it

signifies, that I think we find a radical alternative to our current predominating conceptualizations of the critical.

Neither the grand gestures, nor the infamous acts, neither the heroes nor the martyrs, not the bringing low of what was high, not the raising up of the downtrodden – in a word, none of that which simply spells reversal is what constitutes the significance of revolution for Kant. So, too, the relative (or absolute) success or failure of the revolution is also extrinsic to its value. Kant warns us of the dangers of looking for the significance of great events. Foucault writes: “We cannot analyze our own present in terms of these significant events without recodifying them in such a way that they will allow us to express the important meaning and value we are seeking for what, apparently, is without meaning or value” (*Politics* 89). If the significance of revolution is not to be found in its outcome (an outcome which, again, is never anything more than simple reversal, and which, moreover, knowing the cost in advance, the sensible person would forgo taking up the cause to begin with), where is it to be found? “What is important in the Revolution is not the Revolution itself, it is what happens in the heads of those who do not participate in it or, in any case, are not its principal actors. It is in the relationship they themselves have to this Revolution of which they are not the active agents. The enthusiasm for Revolution is the sign, according to Kant, of humanity’s moral predisposition” (*Politics* 91). According to Kant, this moral predisposition of humanity manifests itself in two ways: in seeking out that political constitution which best suits it; and by the very principles of this constitution avoiding any offensive war. Revolution, then, is the historical event that signals the possibility of constant progress for humankind. Not the act, but the moral disposition to act. “The Revolution, in any case, will always risk falling

back into the old rut, but as an event whose very content is unimportant, its existence attests to a permanent virtuality and cannot be forgotten. For future history, it is the guarantee of this continuity of an approach to progress” (*Politics* 93). If Revolution is the sign of humankind’s moral predisposition to seek out that political constitution which best suits it and which by its very principles avoids offensive war; and if this predisposition be the sign of the possibility of progress which validates the activity of critique; and if it is to located not so much in activists or leaders, but chiefly “in the heads of those who...are not its principal actors,” I say then, that the critical is that which seeks to provide the conditions for progress, for revolution, rather than that which is or seeks to be the driver of it. As such, the nature of the critical is not productive. It is, however, generative.

At the beginning of this chapter I claimed that the critical is less a faculty of mind than a political subject, as discourses of the critical always entail value claims. This means that we cannot say of the critical or of a critical work or a critical thinker that it/she has value in it/herself. However, the fact that we cannot secure the value of the critical without qualification does not mean that we likewise cannot value the conditions that give rise to the critical as such. Just as we cannot say in advance that any particular exercise of the right to free speech will be valuable in itself, we can yet agree that the conditions that make free speech possible are generally agreed to be positive. Likewise, regarding the critical, we error to the extent that we attempt to produce a particular iteration of it, not because any such iteration would be subjective or political, but because in doing so we misunderstand the nature of the critical as such. Just as a society cannot produce free speech, but can provide the conditions that allow for it, the critical also

resists attempts at production, though we can secure for subjects the conditions generative of it, conditions such as economic security, time, and space. In terms of the University, its role would not be to prepare students for the job market or make to them more competitive (nor is its role specifically to steel them against or prevent this). Rather, its role is to foster the conditions of possibility for Revolution. And it is here that I am again reminded of the urgings of Bill Readings.

I believe that Kant's and Foucault's reflections upon Enlightenment and Revolution reveal a process whereby the movement to desubjugate individuals from power effects of truth and truth effects of power, becomes itself a truth discourse generating its own power effects located in centers of power (such as the university) which in turn generate truth effects. In this way, a historically particular effect or iteration of the critical – always, at its core, a kind of attitude, a predisposition to act morally – becomes reified, a productive force, and as such, susceptible to exploitation. In revealing the historicity of the Enlightenment, Foucault shows how the importance of the reconfiguration of the subject vis-à-vis truth and power does not lie in any particular truth or power to which the subject is entailed or from which she attempts to extricate herself. It lies in the attitude, the potential for movement itself. The autonomous figure of 19th and 20th century Enlightenment projects is already an anachronism, autonomy itself a historical gesture or position in relation to historically specific truth and power configurations, which gesture is not importable or satisfactory to meet the demands of resistance to contemporary forms of hegemony. As Readings reminds us of the student discontent in France in 1968,

Understanding 1968 requires recognizing how the ‘events’ broke with a certain narrative of the University education as the individual experience of emancipation in the passage of a virtual student from ignorance to knowledge, from dependence to autonomy and competence. 1968 broke with that narrative precisely insofar as the students were revolting as students, not as would-be professors. ...The realization of 1968 is that the functioning of the University, the question of its role, is not a self-evident one. The University cannot be assumed in advance as either the positive or negative framework for critical activity, nor should it be assumed that such activities are ever free of the implication that the University is an institution. As an institution it has a history – and a history that is structured by the contradictions attendant upon the performative act of the foundation of any institution. (144-45)

As we have seen already in Chapter 1, the hegemony of efficiency discourses, the mutually constitutive nature of the rise of the corporation and the emergence of the American university, and the professionalization of academia are three significant structuring contradictions in the development of what we know as higher education in the US today. Some would argue, however, that the project of critical thinking, of developing human subjects who could understand and navigate the world, while it may have failed at public institutions or research universities, has been kept alive in humanities studies. Liberal arts schools, departments, teachers and advocates have long maintained that only the disinterested pursuit of truth can properly cultivate those qualities of intellect and spirit that we typically associate with critical thinking. For them, the crisis of the university is the decline (or perception of it) of resources invested in liberal arts

departments, programs, and scholarship. Thus I now turn to those discourses to get a better understanding of how the critical is being configured there.

Chapter 3. The Liberal Arts: A Value in Crisis or A Crisis in Values?

...A lot of parents, unfortunately, ...told their kids you don't want to go into the trades, you don't want to go into manufacturing because you'll lose your job. ...[T]he problem is that...a lot of young people no longer see the trades and skilled manufacturing as a viable career. But I promise you, folks can make a lot more, potentially, with skilled manufacturing or the trades than they might with an art history degree. Now, nothing wrong with an art history degree -- I love art history. ...I'm just saying you can make a really good living and have a great career without getting a four-year college education as long as you get the skills and the training that you need.

This comment, made recently by Barack Obama in a speech to the employees of General Electric's gas engines plant in Waukesha, WI (January 30, 2014), raised a small storm among liberal arts workers and advocates.⁵² The story was picked up by journals and blogs both professional – *Insider Higher Ed* and *The Chronicle of Higher Education* – and popular – *The Washington Post* and *Huffington Post*, to name a few – and elicited the following statement from the executive director of the College Art Association, Linda Downs: “When these measures are made by cutting back on, denigrating or eliminating humanities disciplines such as art history, then America’s future generations will be discouraged from taking advantage of the values, critical and decisive thinking and creative problem solving offered by the humanities. It is worth remembering that many of the nation’s most important innovators, in fields including high technology, business, and

⁵² In fact, it even elicited a handwritten letter of apology by Obama himself in response to an email sent by a University of Texas art history professor, Ann Johns.

even military service, have degrees in the humanities.”⁵³

Downs’ comments here are representative of the dominant strain of liberal arts discourse today. Central to this discourse are two explicit claims: 1) that liberal arts disciplines teach, inculcate, and/or hone critical thinking skills; 2) that these skills are marketable and economically productive. There is also a third, implicit claim, in Downs’ statement, which is also typical of this discourse: that it is the nature of critical thinking to be “decisive” and “problem solving.”⁵⁴ While each of these claims is arguable, one of the strongest challenges to this strain of liberal arts discourse comes from within the discourse itself. There is a long tradition of liberal arts advocacy that decries their instrumentalization even for seemingly progressive or altruistic purposes. An almost iconic champion of this strain of liberal arts advocacy is Stanley Fish. In his writing – both scholarly and (increasingly, today) public – he is a vocal and provocative defender of the intrinsic value of liberal arts study. Responding to a recent report issued by the American Academy of Arts and Sciences titled “The Heart of the Matter” (2013), he writes in his *New York Times* “Opinionator” blog that “the academy, and especially the humanist academy, has traditionally been conceived...as a cloistered and separate area in which inquiry is engaged in for its own sake and not because it yields useful results. It is the rejection of this contemplative ideal in favor of various forms of instrumentalism that underlies the turn away from the humanist curriculum. The rhetoric of the report puts its

⁵³ As printed in Scott Jaschik’s article, “Obama vs. Art History.” *Inside Higher Ed.* 31 January 2014. Web. 17 March 2014.

⁵⁴ I intend to take this up at a later point. However, to anticipate: one of the issues to be explored and worked through is how critical thinking becomes so often and so naturally coupled with the power of decision and problem-solving, when a still vibrant strand of its sense means to slow down, defer decision, and to complicate not only a problem, but solutions to it.

authors on the side of that ideal, but when push comes to shove, they are all too ready to dilute it in the name of some large abstraction — democracy, culture, social progress, whatever. They are, in short, all too ready to depart from the heart of the matter” (“Case”).

It would seem, then, that at the root of liberal arts discourse there lies a fundamental contradiction in values, which we might characterize as *instrumental* vs. *intrinsic*. Is the study of the liberal arts something one engages in for the good/s that will eventually accrue from it, or is it rather something that one pursues for its own sake? While this need not be an either/or issue – i.e., advocates could (and often do) embrace both kinds of value – yet quite different types of arguments get made depending upon which sense is stressed. As I intend to show in the following analysis, such arguments depend largely upon unexamined notions of freedom to give them purchase. Arguments of the instrumentalist stripe imagine such studies as having a liberalizing effect; while those in the intrinsic camp conjure a free subject whose assumed disinterestedness valorizes their choice of study. There are problematic assumptions in both iterations that I intend to work out in what follows.

For my analysis I have chosen three texts: Martha Nussbaum's *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities* (2012), as representative of the instrumentalist argument; and Stanley Fish's book, *Save the World on Your Own Time* (2008) and lecture, “An Early Alzheimer's Poem: What It's Worth,” (2011) to articulate the intrinsic defense. In order to put these two lines of argument into perspective as well as to help hone my analyses, I will rely heavily upon the histories and institutional critiques offered by five works: *The Emergence of the American University*, Laurence R. Veysey, 1965;

Universities and the Capitalist State: Corporate Liberalism and the Reconstruction of American Higher Education 1894-1928, Clyde W. Barrow, 1990; *Orators and Philosophers: A History of the Idea of Liberal Education*, Bruce A. Kimball, 1995; *As If Learning Mattered: Reforming Higher Education*, Richard Miller, 1998; and *The Genesis of Plato's Thought*, Alban Dewes Winspear, 2011. While it exceeds the scope of this project to give a full account of the historical development of liberal arts discourse, I highlight moments where we can see the ways in which it was shaped by historical and rhetorical exigencies. In my investigation, while I have found no transhistorical concept or essence of the critical or critical thinking which can be seen developing over time, what we do see is the ways in which notions of liberal arts and critical thinking have been used at different times and places to make arguments about the world, its beings, and how material and power should be apportioned among them.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ We might think here of the distinction Foucault makes between medical theory and practice in *The Birth of the Clinic*:

The theoretical, it was thought, was the element of perpetual change, the starting point of all historical variations in medical knowledge, the locus of conflicts and disappearances; it was in this theoretical element that medical knowledge marked its fragile relativity. The clinic, on the other hand, was thought to be the element of its positive accumulation: it was this constant gaze upon the patient, this age-old, yet ever renewed attention that enabled medicine not to disappear entirely with each new speculation, but to preserve itself, to assume little by little the figure of a truth that is definitive, if not completed, in short, to develop, below the level of the noisy episodes of its history, in a continuous historicity. In the non-variable of the clinic, medicine, it was thought, had bound time and truth together. (54-55)

Foucault's distinction is significant here for the way in which he figures practice within an institutional space which is itself both materially and discursively constructed. We might invoke this same distinction in trying to think the difference between the critical as such and those spaces which allow it to come forth and be practiced.

Liberal Arts: The Instrumental Case

As the title of her book – *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities* – suggests, Martha Nussbaum’s overarching claim is that if we care about democracy (which she assumes we do), then we cannot afford to lose or even slacken investment in the humanities, because only the program of study which they offer is capable of producing the type of subjects necessary to (worthy of) a robust democratic society. And though her title targets “for profit education” as one of the most significant threats to this democratic ideal, she is quick to qualify that democracy – and thus, the humanities – and economic growth are not incompatible. “The national interest of any modern democracy requires a strong economy and a flourishing business culture” (10). Indeed, “economic interest, too, requires us to draw on the humanities and arts, in order to provide a climate of responsible and watchful stewardship and a culture of creative innovation.” Rather than an either/or, the issue is a matter of emphasis for Nussbaum: arguments for education in the service of economic growth “ought to be subservient to the argument concerning the stability of democratic institutions, since a strong economy is a means to human ends, not an end in itself” (10).

Nussbaum’s text vacillates among three objectives: presenting evidence of a world-wide decline in the funding, role, influence and esteem of humanities disciplines both institutionally and publicly; making a case for the type of citizen-subjects and the qualities that define them, which she believes a humanities paradigm of education produces/would produce; providing a critique of the short-comings and potential dangers of economic growth based models of education and the type of citizen-subjects they produce/are imagined to produce. She makes no bones about the fact that hers is an

interpellative project – the quality of citizen-subjects produced by our systems of education directly impacts the quality of our democracy. And the contrast between the two paradigms of education, which she dubs “human development” and “economic growth,” couldn’t be more stark. According to Nussbaum, a human development model of education cultivates citizen-subjects who: think well and independently about local, national, and international politics; view and treat others as they would have others view and treat themselves; temper their political hopes with judicious assessment of the objective possibilities; are empathetic and think and act politically in the service of others (25-26). Economic growth models, however, have different requirements:

After basic skills for many, and more advanced skills for some, education for economic growth needs a very rudimentary familiarity with history and with economic fact – on the part of the people who are going to get past elementary education in the first place, and who may turn out to be a relatively small elite. But care must be taken lest the historical and economic narrative lead to any serious critical thinking about class, about race and gender, about whether foreign investment is really good for the rural poor, about whether democracy can survive when huge inequalities in basic life-chances obtain. So critical thinking would not be a very important part of education for economic growth, and it has not been in states that have pursued this goal relentlessly, such as the Western Indian state of Gujarat, well known for its combination of technological sophistication with docility and group-think. The student’s freedom of mind is dangerous if what is wanted is a group of technically trained obedient workers to carry out the plans of the elites who are aiming at foreign investment and technological development.

(20-21)

The hyperbole of passages like this one is cloying at times, yet Nussbaum has made clear that her text is a “manifesto.” And while there is more than a bit of melodrama to her account, she voices a fear common to many concerned with the fate of higher education today: that it is being shaped by forces and interests which are (or which seem) antithetical to its historical mission. Across the political spectrum and in both professional and public spheres there is still a sense that the humanities represent something unique, irreplaceable, and invaluable (whether it be “the best that has been thought or said” in canonical texts; a disciplined tradition of philosophical reflection; or a set of practices which cultivate the moral and civic qualities required of a healthy democracy) which is being threatened by economic forces in two ways: by material crises and inequities on one hand; on the other, by the development and ascendance of an economic truth regime that reduces all values (even intrinsic ones) to instrumentalities concerned mainly with financial gain.

That the humanities have been in decline by almost any measure for some time hardly requires an argument. Besides Nussbaum’s evidence, data is legion in support of this claim.⁵⁶ Moreover, that the qualities described by Nussbaum as proper to the

⁵⁶ I have recently come across accounts that would contradict the claim that material support for the humanities is shrinking. If this is so, the question would become, why do humanists feel themselves imperiled today? There is evidence that they have always felt so. Clyde Barrow suggests that this has to do with the tenuous nature of their position, which he aligns with “progressive” platforms more generally. His critique of how liberal arts professors were threatened by the new trend in appointing bankers, lawyers, and businessmen to college boards of trustees at the turn of the twentieth century is still salient today. According to Barrow, humanists are “caught between the power of corporate capital and the demands of a rising working class. Progressivism provided a uniquely ‘conservative’ program of reform that on one hand improved labor’s material condition and regulated business practices, and yet preserved the basic economic

freethinking democratic citizen are worth cultivating is also relatively uncontroversial: Who wouldn't want to possess them and to inculcate them in their children? Similarly, who is not repulsed by the Orwellian dystopia Nussbaum alludes to in describing the consequences of economic growth models of education? What remains unclear (and unaddressed by her text) is how a certain course or paradigm of study is, all on its own, supposed to develop all of the personal qualities that she describes, and how these qualities are to lead to the ideal democratic society that she envisions. Besides this basic question, other thorny questions arise: *What are these values Nussbaum lauds? (For example, what does it mean to “think well” as opposed to think? How does one learn to “temper their political hopes with judicious assessment of the objective possibilities,” and how do we judge her own self-styled manifesto in light of that dictum?) Why do liberal arts disciplines do any better of a job of inculcating these values than others? How does she account for her distinction between the logic and values informing the economic truth regimes that she decries (though not in those terms) and those that animate the liberal democratic ideal for which she advocates? Put another way, how does she imagine that our current situation is not the fruit of the Enlightenment values she so cherishes rather than their perversion?*

As I pointed out in my analysis of Arum and Roksa's text, lacunae such as these are neither incidental nor accidental but structural, even while not intentional. Nussbaum's discourse can only be articulated – indeed, is only legible – to the extent that these questions remain unvoiced. Yet, in good rhetorical fashion, it is necessary here to listen

framework of private property, free markets, and the emphasis on individual achievement. Meanwhile, it introduced a conception of democracy in which professional middle-class experts assumed leading roles as social engineers, reformers, legislators, and technical advisors to business, government, and labor” (49).

to precisely what the text does not say, and to define and articulate its particular unsaid in order to grasp what is really at issue in it. I claim that what is at issue in Nussbaum's text is the specter of materiality haunting her discourse of interpellation. By interpellation, I mean the development of certain types of subjects. By materiality,⁵⁷ I mean all those factors (including those not typically thought of as material, e.g. time, affect, or discursive habits) that are necessary in providing any realistic account of subject formation. I say specter because it is precisely this materiality's absence that animates her discourse. I will have more to say about interpellation and its material core in my examination of the intrinsic argument for liberal arts education and humanities scholarship as put forth by Stanley Fish.

Liberal Arts: The Intrinsic Case

In the last analysis, if the study of the arts and humanities in our colleges is to be justified, it will be because it keeps alive and refurbishes glorious human artifacts that might well be lost or rendered less available to future generations if they were no longer taught. ...If it's no longer taught, it will no longer be read. The loss will not be economic or reputational or civic. It could not be described by any of the measures the commission would invoke. In fact, it cannot be described, and it cannot be explained. ...To explain something would be immediately to subordinate it to the system of values that was implicit in the vocabulary of

⁵⁷ I use "materiality" rather than "class" for two reasons. First, "class" has so much baggage that I fear I would constantly have to be qualifying my use of it. Second, and more simply, inequities between people result not from their belonging to different classes, but from those classes habitually comprising and circumscribing different and inequitable distributions of material resources and socioeconomically and culturally valued experiences.

explanation. ...All I can do in response is to remind you of what it's like to encounter the real thing.

The citation above comes from a lecture given at the Chautauqua Institution in 2011 titled, “An Early Alzheimer's Poem: What It’s Worth.” In this lecture, Stanley Fish makes what he believes is the best case for preserving and protecting not only the humanities, but the scholarly study of them. In making his case, he develops three points: 1) the value of the humanities and of liberal arts scholarship must be measured on their own terms and not others; 2) those not trained in and devoted to humanities disciplines are unqualified to judge or critique their value and unable to best understand, represent, and protect their interests; and 3) arguments for the instrumental value of the humanities and their study are a slippery slope leading toward the eventual perversion of their intrinsic value toward other values not their own and the consequent disenfranchisement of those most qualified to judge, inculcate, and represent them (humanities scholars).

Fish mostly reiterates here the argument of his book, *Save the World on Your Own Time* (2008), albeit with a slightly different emphasis. There, he is mostly concerned with defining and delimiting the roles and responsibilities of academics as regards their teaching, research, and publication. The title itself is an injunction to higher education faculty and those aspiring to it about the mandate of their position and its limits.⁵⁸ For Fish, that mandate is neither more nor less than the inquiry into and communication of

⁵⁸ Although it seems likely, as this was written for a public audience, that Fish also seeks to curry favor with those who traditionally knock the ivory tower for its “liberal elitism.” Fish's dressing down and caricaturing of faculty activism in a mavericky, straightshooter tone suggests a strategy of mobilizing anti-intellectual sentiment in support of his claim for the necessary disinterestedness of liberal arts scholarship, which for Fish, if it is elite, is certainly not political.

disciplinary knowledge: “But if liberal arts education is doing *its* job and not the job assigned to some other institution, it will not have as its aim the bringing about of particular effects in the world. Particular effects may follow, but if they do, it will be as the unintended consequences of an enterprise which, if it is to remain true to itself, must be entirely self-referential, must be stuck on itself, must have no answer whatsoever to the question, ‘what good is it?’” (*Save* 55).⁵⁹ Fish charges that in attempting to answer that question, academics dangerously compromise their position. As he points out, in trying to explain the value of liberal arts scholarship to those who have not the required training to appreciate it, we undertake a fool’s errand. What is worse and more damaging, in trying to justify liberal arts scholarship by articulating its value in other terms not its own – economic, political, moral, what have you – we implicitly accept the criteria of those to whom we justify our work, thereby undermining our own position and authority.

Fish’s defense of the humanities,⁶⁰ and of liberal arts scholarship in particular, is at once more modest and more bold than Nussbaum’s. More modest in that he puts forth what he calls a *deflationary* view of liberal arts education: “[I]t takes the air out of some

⁵⁹ We might note here that Fish’s concern with people doing their jobs (*and not others*) is an iteration of Plato’s concept of justice in the *Republic*. This concern is so central to Fish’s argument that four of the seven chapters of this book employ titles that refer to jobs: Chapter 1: “The *Task* of Higher Education” (italics mine); Chapter 2: “Do Your Job”; Chapter 4: “Don’t Try to Do Someone Else’s Job”; and Chapter 5: “Don’t Let Anyone Else Do Your Job.”

⁶⁰ While Fish repeatedly asserts in the Chautauqua lecture and elsewhere that attempting to justify humanities scholarship is a dead end strategy, because, as he rightly points out, “The demand for justification is always a demand that something be justified in terms not its own,” he has nonetheless emerged as one of its most articulate, prolific, and formidable champions. This disjunction between what he says – “I will not justify or explain the value of humanities scholarship” – and what he does – loudly and regularly through speaking and writing defends and advocates for humanities scholarship – is an interesting facet of Fish’s rhetorical performance in general, and one which I will return to later.

inflated balloons...denies to teaching the moral and philosophical pretensions that lead practitioners to envision themselves as agents of change or as the designers of a ‘transformative experience,’ a phrase I intensely dislike” (*Save* 53). “A good liberal arts course is good because it introduces you to questions you did not know how to ask and provides you with the skills necessary to answer them, at least provisionally. And what do you do with the answers you arrive at? What do you do with the habits of thought that have become yours after four or more years [of liberal arts study]? Beats me! As far as I can tell those habits of thought and the liberal arts education that provides them don’t enable you to do anything, and, even worse, neither do they prevent you from doing anything” (52-3). I say Fish’s argument is more bold than Nussbaum’s because in refusing to justify or to explain the value of liberal arts scholarship in terms other than its own, Fish denies his opponents the necessary qualifications to question them. After all, if it is true, as Fish claims, that “the demand for justification is always a demand that something be justified in terms not its own,” then it is equally true that the demand that others accept one’s own terms as the only ones relevant is always a demand that others accept one’s authority over a subject on the grounds of their own insufficiency to properly understand it. And here we see a wonderful rhetorical reversal. To insist that liberal arts scholarship be understood or valued or analyzed according to its own terms is to insist that the questioner/interrogator be one interpellated by the very discourses that give it value. This trick reflects the emphasis back upon the attacker – it is *What makes the humanities so valuable? Defend them!* vs. *What makes you capable of critiquing them? Defend yourself!* Rather than addressing the charge, Fish has instead responded by issuing his own, equally unanswerable challenge. The one who would disparage the

value of the liberal arts turns out to be the one who has not learned to appreciate them, and thus, by definition, is incapable of judging. I suggest that what we have here is a case of dueling interpellations: two sets of values are jousting, each proclaiming its own version of the rules for how the contest be fought and scored as more legitimate than the other. However, to recognize the other's rules as valid would, of course, spell defeat for the one who accepted the other's terms. So how to proceed? Put another way, if Fish declares his antagonists incapable of understanding the values he advocates; and if it is also true that to defend them on other grounds not their own is the same – in the end – as to capitulate, then by what power does he hope to persuade his opponents to concede his point and act in his favor? Surprisingly enough, and in a fashion wholly similar to the moral chastisement of Arum and Roksa's text, Fish advocates the rhetorical strategy of shaming.

The foregoing analysis of Fish's rhetorical maneuvering is not my own; Fish says as much himself: "If telling our story in the hope that its terms will be adopted by those who have never lived it won't work, neither will the attempt to translate it into their terms by retelling it in the vocabulary of business or venture capitalism" (164). Or again, "If explaining to our critics what we do won't work, and if redescribing the enterprise in the vocabulary of their vocations won't work either, what will work?" (165) While Fish shares Nussbaum's fear of the university's capture by mercantile values,⁶¹ he lacks Nussbaum's faith in the efficacy of education. We could imagine Fish saying to

⁶¹ Fish takes up this concern in a relatively short chapter titled "Higher Education Under Attack." While it is fair to say that Nussbaum shares Fish's sense of the irrevocable loss that the decline and perhaps extinction of humanities scholarship would entail, Fish does not qualify this loss in moral or political or economic terms, as does Nussbaum.

Nussbaum, “Even if I conceded that a liberal arts education accomplishes all that you say it does – which I don’t – still, it is those with whom you are taking issue and to whom you appeal who need the very type of education you are talking about in order to understand why it’s valuable and ought to be preserved and better funded.” That is to say, Fish not only denies the inflated claims of liberal arts education’s efficacy in producing the basketful of goods that Nussbaum and others in the instrumentalist camp claim for it; he also disparages the possibility of educating one’s adversaries to value the humanities and liberal arts scholarship in any terms but their own. So what is to be done? Fish suggests we “try to stand up for ourselves unapologetically, and to comport ourselves as if we were formidable adversaries rather than easy marks. This would mean allowing no false statement by a public official to pass uncorrected or unrebuked. (Not only must the record be set straight; those who have gotten it wrong must be made to feel bad if only so that they will think twice before doing it again)” (165). In other words, ““Get their [administrators’, politicians’, and the public’s] attention...make them uncomfortable...cause them pain”” (163). As we can see, Fish’s explicit advocacy of a rhetorical strategy of shaming is of a piece with the implicit moral chastisement taking place in Arum and Roksa’s text.⁶²

Remember that in Chapter Two we noted a disjunction in Arum and Roksa’s report between the discourse of sociological analysis used in diagnosing the problem of limited critical thinking gains in colleges and universities and the discourse of moral chastisement invoked to rouse faculty, administrators, politicians, and the public to make good on higher education’s commitment to the academic and social development of our

⁶² In describing his own teaching style during the Chautauqua lecture, Fish claims “I always like shame and humiliation as good pedagogical techniques at the beginning.”

youth, which Arum and Roksa see as a “moral imperative worth sacrificing for personally, professionally, and institutionally” (127). Remember, too, that one of the things that struck us about this disjunction is that the strategy of moral chastisement seemed jarring, ill-chosen, even futile in the face of the interpellative logic of the arguments amassed. That is to say, if we accept Arum and Roksa’s analyses that show how the stakeholders in higher education act according to deep-seated convictions about the value of higher education, convictions which have been shaped by their life and work experiences and which make them deaf, if not antagonistic to, the values that Arum and Roksa would bid them embrace, then we are forced to ask upon what ground do Arum and Roksa chastise them to take up or recommit themselves to values which they do not hold and most likely have never held? Similarly, if Stanley Fish sees as only futile trying to educate those not already in the know as to the value of liberal arts scholarship, then upon what grounds does he imagine to shame them into acting better if they neither know nor care to understand that about which he thinks they ought to feel bad in denigrating? At this point I think it might be helpful to pause and to look a little more closely at “interpellation,” a term I have been using throughout my analyses.

Interpellation

According to Louis Althusser, interpellation refers to the processes by which the individual becomes a subject, a subject that, in coming to recognize itself as such, is co-constitutive of its subjectedness. The word “subject” works here in a double sense in that the individual only becomes a *subject* through being *subjected* to the forces that call her forth. These forces are largely *though not exclusively* discursive, and as such ideological.

Ideology must be understood in both its particular and its broad senses. In the more general sense, we might replace it with the term “ideational,” to denote the ways in which the subject is called forth by myriad discursive messages and discourses the amalgam of which is the rich matrix of the discursive subject. At the same time, those discourses always exist within a differential system which weights certain discourses and articulations more heavily than others and which exist in complex patterns each with a history and trajectory, thus the more specific sense of ideology as a constellation, system, or network of ideas and values – religious, political, economic, etc. It goes without saying that in this schema ideology need not be consciously embraced nor touted to be at work; rather it is the foundation and structure that makes possible the subject as such.

When I say that interpellation is not exclusively discursive, I also follow Althusser, who, in describing how one might be interpellated by religious ideology, includes not only the prayers, sermons, and songs, but the many rituals and holidays and traditions – even the space of the church itself – as forces that call forth and allow for a particular kind of subject. I logically extend this notion to material resources as well, and one in particular that I will have more to say about a little later – that of time. But to give a foretaste of what I am thinking about here, we might say that time was the foundational and historical interpellative force in marking two very different kinds of educations and educational subjects. In its initial formulation, the liberal arts or *ars liberalis* referred not to any set curriculum or prescribed paradigm of education. *Liberalis* did not refer to subjects of study or practices of thinking or scholarship that would set one free or free one’s mind from dogma. (In fact, to the extent that there even was some sort of coherent set of subject matter, it was intended to bring about *adherence* to dogma, rather than

freedom from it.) On the contrary, *liberalis* referred to free men and the education befitting them in light of their possession of the requisite leisure time to pursue such studies, in contradistinction to the kind of education befitting a slave, who had no such leisure.

As a more contemporary example of how the material resource of time interpellates different kinds of academic subjects, take two graduate students: one who scores particularly high on the GRE and who manages to publish an essay while still an undergrad; and another who, while equally bright and industrious, has for one reason or another scored a couple points less and has no publications to speak of. While both get accepted to the same program at the same school, the former receives a university fellowship which releases him from teaching duties for most of his stay in the program; while the other must teach a 2/2 load in order to earn her stipend. Over the next 6 years the former goes on to present his work at numerous conferences and to publish a slew of articles; while the other, no less diligent, teaches her classes, keeps up with her courses and dissertation work, manages to present at a conference here and there and even gets an article published. The first goes on to take a position at a research one university; the second, after numerous applications, accepts an adjunct position at a community college. Let's also assume that they began with similar aspirations to become scholars. While the first has progressed along a path of development that led with each step to the fulfillment of those ambitions; the second, year by year, has found that, funny, her heart really isn't so much in research and writing – as she had thought – but in the teaching. Moreover, she's glad not to have the headache of constantly being in a publish or perish situation. Depending upon your ideology, some of us might take heart that the market has

succeeded here in sorting people according to their dispositions and talents. Others cannot help but hear in the second graduate student's self-narrative echoes of what Pierre Bourdieu calls "the choice of the necessary," whereby those things that are available to us as circumscribed by socioeconomic class, fortuitously appear to us as just the things we want and not others. Regardless of your standpoint, I think we can see that the material resource of time in this example has helped to shape, to call forth, to interpellate two very different kinds of scholarly being.

I use interpellation then to refer to all those forces – discursive and material – that inform and constrain subjects in their very subjectivity. To be clear, however, my use of the term is constitutive, not definitive; it is not about determinism, but about contingency. Maurice Charland provides a clear explanation here in his description of constitutive rhetoric:

[I]nterpellation occurs rhetorically, through the effect of direct discourse. Note, however, that interpellation does not occur through persuasion in the usual sense, for the very act of *addressing* is rhetorical. It is logically prior to the rhetorical *narratio*. In addition, this rhetoric of identification is ongoing, not restricted to one hailing, but usually part of a rhetoric of socialization. Thus, one must already be an interpellated subject and exist as a discursive position in order to be part of the audience of a rhetorical situation in which persuasion could occur (6).

Does this not sum up Fish's argument quite nicely? That in order to convince someone of the value of liberal arts scholarship, that they would already have to have been interpellated by that discourse in order to be convinced? Might this also help explain what we might call now the *pathetic strategy* in the texts of Arum and Roksa, Martha

Nussbaum, and Stanley Fish? That is to say, that if the logic of interpellation upon which the analyses of all three of these texts relies is valid, making futile all logical appeals for the support of humanities scholarship to those not interpellated by humanities values; and if the text and writers are – to varying degrees – conscious of this paradox or impasse, then might it be not only sensible, but the only alternative, to attempt to appeal to common feelings if not common values? Arum and Roksa appeal to our sense of moral obligation; Nussbaum appeals to our pride in and hope for democracy and fear of totalitarianism; and Fish relies upon the teacherly weapon of shame – make people feel stupid for talking out of turn.

I might need to back up a moment here and provide evidence for the claim that all three of these texts invoke a logic of interpellation. I most fully developed this claim in addressing Arum and Roksa's text, but to recapitulate: In their fairly exhaustive analyses of the stakeholders in American higher education, Arum and Roksa illuminate the socioeconomic, political, cultural, and institutional forces at work in shaping the values and goals of their subjects, such that their critique is lodged not at the level of the individual, but at the level of the institution. Thus, while the explicit referent of their title – *Academically Adrift* – connotes the college student who arrives at campus unprepared for scholarly work and without a sense of purpose, to the extent that Arum and Roksa show these students to be products of their culture and material circumstances, and further, that nothing in their college experience will seriously address these gaps, then what is truly adrift in Arum and Roksa's schema is the culture which allows for these sad circumstances. It is the interpellative effects of such a culture with which Arum's and Roksa's text is at odds.

Similarly, in Martha Nussbaum's text, we are given a picture of the ideal capitalist-democratic society and told that if we want to retain/achieve this status, then we must be sure to put in place a system of education capable of producing the type of subjects that it requires. In her description of such an education, Nussbaum goes beyond college and begins with pre-school. Indeed, one could cite Socrates's famous description of the training required for the philosopher-king in the *Republic* (a text book model of interpellation *par excellence*) as the model from which she draws. She even invokes the same dicey allegory of state to individual used in Plato's text.⁶³ "How...might we think of the sort of nation and the sort of citizen we are trying to build?" (24) "We need to understand how to produce more citizens...prepared to live with others on terms of mutual respect and reciprocity...and fewer of those...who seek the comfort of domination" (29). "Schools are but one influence on the growing mind and heart of the child. Much of the work of overcoming narcissism and developing concern has to be done in families; and relationships in the peer culture also play a powerful role. School, however, can either reinforce or undermine the achievements of the family, good and bad. They can also shape the peer culture. What they provide, through their curricular content and their pedagogy, can greatly affect the developing child's mind" (44-45).

In Plato's *Republic*, Socrates makes it clear that you cannot simply teach dialectical reasoning or philosophy to anyone. Rather, the subject must be prepared by a whole series of prior experiences and training in order to be capable of receiving truth and the light of reason. That is to say, that the constitution of the rational subject is discursively and materially prior to the ability to partake in, practice, and benefit from the use of

⁶³ I say this conceit is problematic because it ignores differences of scale, a subject that I will take up later.

reason as such. All of these practices meant to prepare the individual for becoming just such a rational subject are what Michel Foucault describes as “technologies of the self.” In a series of lectures delivered at the Collège de France between 1981 and 1982 (now collectively titled *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, 2005), Foucault addressed the relationship between the subject and truth, and asked what was necessary in order to prepare the subject to receive truth as such. “I think we can say that in and of itself an act of knowledge could never give access to the truth unless it was prepared, accompanied, doubled, and completed by a certain transformation of the subject; not of the individual, but of the subject himself in his being as subject” (16). Foucault makes a distinction here between *philosophy* and *spirituality*. Philosophy, according to Foucault, is a form of thought that seeks to answer questions of how truth is possible, how we can attain and measure it, and what are its limits. Spirituality, on the other hand, asks what kind of subjects must we be and by which practices and experiences may we become them in order to be able to receive the truth. While such experiences are typically thought of as particular to religions, Foucault makes clear that the question of a subject’s openness or receptivity to or preparedness for the truth is a secular phenomenon as well. He cites Marxism and psychoanalysis as two schools of thought that require both a certain preparedness of the subject to receive their truths and entail a transformation of the subject as the price of receiving them. Foucault lists other interpellative experiences as well, some which we have already mentioned: “The idea of the effect of a class position or of the party, of allegiance to a group or membership of a school, of initiation or of the analyst’s training, etc., all refer back to these questions of the conditions of the subject’s preparation for access to the truth, but conceived of in social terms, in terms of

organization” (29).

We witness in Foucault’s account here the same interpellative logic that I have been attempting to illuminate in the other texts under discussion. And it is precisely at this point that Foucault raises a problem that I believe gets at the heart of what I have been trying to say about all of them. The importance for Foucault in (re)establishing historical traditions of *spirituality* that sought to prepare the individual to become a subject capable of receiving truth lies in reconstituting the proper relationship between truth and the subject as such in order to understand the contemporary epistemic malaise.⁶⁴ That is to say, that in losing sight of the interpellative function of spiritual practices, we lost insight into the essential conditions of what knowledge, in effect, actually is. Today, these conditions are largely “not...thought of in terms of the historical thrust of the existence of spirituality and its requirements. Moreover, at the same time the price paid for transposing or reducing these questions of ‘truth and the subject’ to problems of membership (of a group, a school, a party, a class, etc.) has been, of course, that the question of the relations between truth and the subject has been forgotten” (29-30). What does Foucault mean by this and what is at stake? I believe what he means is that while we have retained the notion that different subject positions entail different kinds and different levels of privilege and capital, we have largely forgotten that such positions are interpellative, constitutive. We might take as a contemporary example of what is at stake the many discourses of “access” to education. Such discourses, while understanding that individuals inhabit different positions of class, ethnicity, gender, religion, and so on, yet assume such positions as merely locational rather than dispositional. They locate

⁶⁴ I say contemporary, but as Foucault make clear, this issue existed even in antiquity and really begins to pick up steam with the Enlightenment.

disparity in differences between relative levels of access to educational capital. The eradication of the barriers to this capital, the logic runs, will rectify the situation. They do not entertain the notion that the very ability to make use of such access is the dispositional effect of class *par excellence*. Imagining then that education is a thing, and a thing that relies simply upon having access to it in order to attain it, constitutes the contemporary *fetish* of education. In believing so, we negate or must not believe or not see all of the relationships involved in constituting the subject to be just such a subject as can make use of just such educational capital and not others, and only so much, and not more.

It is here that I find it helpful to bring Stanley Fish back into the discussion. While there is nothing in his writing to intimate that he is at all interested in issues of class or social justice (or, if he is, then it is from a political and not an academic standpoint, always wanting, as he does, to keep these two realms separate), out of the three texts examined so far, Fish's is by far the most interpellatively savvy. To be clear, I do not claim that his texts are any more reliant upon interpellative logic than the others; merely that his deflationary view of education – both in terms of its efficacy in transforming students and in terms of convincing others who don't share your values why they should – seems more consistent with interpellative logic than do the claims made and hopes shared by Arum and Roksa's and Nussbaum's texts. And yet, for all that, Fish's account is also problematic.

That Fish relies upon a logic of interpellation in his analyses is clear enough from what has been said already, but just to provide a few further examples:

[T]he arts and humanities...operate according to their own terms. ...[T]hese terms

[are] the basis both of the value they have and the pleasure we take in them. That pleasure is a learned pleasure. It does not come to us as the pleasure of watching the sun rise or seeing a flower bloom comes to us. One must study conventions and genres and traditions of philosophy and theology before one can have access to a poem like *The Forerunners*. ...The loss [of arts and humanities scholarship] will not be economic or reputational or civic. It could not be described by any of the measures the commission would invoke. In fact, it cannot be described, and it cannot be explained. ...To explain something would be immediately to subordinate it to the system of values that was implicit in the vocabulary of explanation. ...All I can do in response is to remind you of what it's like to encounter the real thing ("Chautauqua Lecture" mins 48-52).

Or again, "If telling *our story* in the hope that its terms will be adopted by *those who have never lived it* won't work, neither will the attempt to translate it into their terms by retelling it in the vocabulary of business or venture capitalism" (italics mine).

It is clear that for Fish, advocating for the value of liberal arts scholarship is not a matter of understanding or of logical argument. The values he speaks for come from *lived* experiences and both require and produce a *story* or narrative to be properly understood. This story is not legible to just anyone, but requires at least the four years of an undergraduate liberal arts degree, and quite possibly a more lengthy inculcation through elementary and secondary school (as proposed by Nussbaum) in order to read it and be properly addressed by it. While he "intensely dislikes" the term "transformative experience," it is clear that this is precisely how he conceives of the work performed by a good liberal arts education. Channeling a former colleague, the theologian Stanley

Hauerwas, Fish recounts the anecdote of a student coming up to Hauerwas at the end of class and complaining that though he had had his hand up, Hauerwas never called on him. “Don’t you want to know what’s on my mind?!” the student asked. “You don’t have a mind yet! I’m here to give you one,” Hauerwas rejoined. Fish: “That sounds right to me” (mins 54:45-55:15). Clearly then, despite his deflationary account of the efficacy of higher education, Fish’s account of the work done by a liberal arts education is precisely interpellative, as it is engaged in the formation of academic subjects. The contradiction here is only an apparent one. According to the logic of interpellation, a good liberal arts education will address and transform precisely those students who arrive already interpellated by the types of experiences that have made them already the proper subjects of liberal arts discourse. Those students who arrive at college who have not undergone the technologies of self required to accept the liberal arts address will not be transformed in the same ways, if at all. Thus higher education does transform students but does so differentially according to the already constituted types of subjects they arrive as. To the extent that Nussbaum’s ideal educational paradigm would begin with preschool and work to shape and direct students all the way through college, it is in this sense superior to Fish’s, realizing as it does all of the potential ways in which one student’s background can differ from another’s and the effects this has upon their interpellability.

So where does this leave us and how do we understand what is going on in these texts? I think it is safe to say that while the logic of interpellation is fundamental to the analyses and claims being made in all three of the texts we have been discussing, the use of this logic is spotty and instrumental: invoked to make certain arguments, forgotten while fashioning others. Clearly for Arum and Roksa as for Nussbaum, reason and

critical thinking still stand as powerful values and tropes, ones which they advocate the extension and cultivation of, and which they rely upon (although, as I have shown, by no means exclusively) in making their arguments. And yet, through their analyses and descriptions of the ways in which subjects are formed through larger interpellative forces that construct them as subjects open to reasoning or certain types of critical thinking as such (or not), i.e. that “interpellation” is not “manipulation,” is constitutive more than persuasive, it is hard to understand the faith they put in the efficacy of rational discourse in addressing the problems they raise.

To put it another way, the tension we see here is between the logic of interpellation and the fetish of reason. In making clear the many ways in which subjects must be prepared, cultivated, educated to receive truth or a truth paradigm, these authors are at a loss to explain how their own discourse – reasoned argument – is to persuade their adversaries who have not been so prepared to receive their truths. They describe the formation of critical thinking as constituted by a system of interconnected spheres of influence. Yet in making their arguments they fashion reason as a sword that would cut through this Gordian knot. In effectively detailing the ways in which subjects are shaped by greater social and institutional milieus, these texts are not arguing (and could not support such a claim if they were) that all the parties concerned are making decisions against their better judgments, hoodwinked or manipulated by flashy rhetoric or crass self-interest. Interpellation refers to the entire being and system of that being. These actors are neither mistaken in their attitudes and actions, nor do they act in bad faith; rather, they act in accord with the values they hold. It is not that they do not “listen to reason;” rather, in listening, they arrive at other – and perfectly reasonable, given their

informing values – answers than those valued by the authors. Put another way, one of the reasons that Arums and Roksa’s as well as Nussbaum’s accounts are dissonant and jarring is because they sound a call to reason in the context of an analysis that denies reason as a universal discourse, recognizing instead an array of rationales. Lacking an ontological account of what reasoning or critical thinking might be, these discourses invoke it as a kind of magical palliative. *If only it could be prescribed to everyone!*

Stanley Fish’s account is unique in this regard, in that he does not ascribe the same efficacy to reason and critical thinking that the others do. In fact, he says of critical thinking that it is “a phrase without content” (Save 54). What he claims instead is that liberal arts courses teach *critical analysis*, by which he means both a disciplinary specific vocabulary and a paradigm of questions to be asked, all of them particular to the set of objects with which that discipline concerns itself and not others. That is to say, that for Fish, “critical thinking” smacks of a bogus ontology, e.g. the Enlightenment narrative to which Arum and Roksa and Nussbaum are so beholden. Critical analysis, for Fish, names a technical-discursive skill. It is not that Fish denies the efficacy of critical thinking as such. However, in insisting that critical analysis is what we really mean by the term, and in showing how analysis is not a natural or general ability, but one that is both learned and specific to the discipline in which it is taught and the discursive practices of that discipline, he reconstitutes the missing materiality of Arums and Roksa’s and Nussbaum’s texts. The difference between critical thinking and critical analysis here is the difference between a general and generalizable cognitive faculty and a discursively specific and limited skill. In this framework, it only makes sense that developing a student’s vocabulary for discussing and asking questions about literature, for example,

would have little to no effect in making them critically analytical concerning other areas, for example, politics or economics; nor would there be any reason to believe that such studies would make them any more politically liberal or civically minded. Fish's model also helps to explain why it would be unreasonable to believe that one could convince others to embrace one's values based solely upon the fact that they have obtained an education or use reason to make decisions. The critical analysis that liberal arts courses teach requires and inculcates no other values than those requisite to successfully performing a specific disciplinary activity.

Furthermore, if interpellation is constitutive rather than persuasive, then it follows that logical appeals are not the only ones thrown into question here. That is to say, that if we accept Fish's argument that it is impossible to reason with someone who does not share your informing values, we ought to consider whether ethos or pathos based appeals can fare any better. If what is at issue is the underlying matrix of values and discourses that constitute the subject as such, and not some common substance or faculty like reason or emotion, then it is hard to see why people who do not already see the value in liberal arts scholarship should feel ashamed about this fact or be concerned that a humanities professor think they ought to feel so ashamed. If this is how interpellation works (and if not, then there is very little theoretical value to the notion), then the pathos filled pleas in all of these texts that people suddenly act and choose differently can only come as a non sequitur. In a sense, it expresses the irrational (but wholly understandable) desire that these beings with whom they engage were other than the beings they actually are. The problem here, then, is not critical thinking or its lack; rather it is the disposition of the subjects who exercise it. This problem is taken up extensively in Arums and Roksa's text

in their discussion of “purpose.”

Purpose

Arum and Roksa’s report on the phenomenon of limited learning on college campuses is a multi-layered critique of the lack of moral and political will to devote undergraduate education to the development both of critical thinking skills and the will to use them in a competitive-productive manner. Their critique of this moral and political failing takes place in their discussion of purpose and its lack. In fact, it is safe to say that for Arum and Roksa, critical thinking as the technical-discursive skill they describe it to be is a lesser concern to them than the sense of purpose – always primary – that ought to inform it. For Arum and Roksa purpose appears as that without which we are less than human, less than critical, less than morally responsible. Formally, purpose for A&R is a kind of fixity, consistency, integrity, coherence. One with purpose is steadfast, standing fastened to the wheel amidst the storm, ever guiding the ship/the self between the many-handed Scylla of distraction and the great anomic suck of Charybdis. We best glimpse purpose in action, in the figure of the leader:

Leaders at successful institutions have a strong sense of purpose; they engage other members of the community in achieving the vision, and they make decisions about hiring and programs that support the achievement of these goals. Effective administrators provide the vision; motivate broad engagement and openness to change, continuous evaluation and growth; and “get and keep the right people” – those committed to undergraduate learning. ...Many higher education administrators and faculty today have largely turned away from earlier

conceptions of their roles that recognized that providing support for academic and social development was a moral imperative worth sacrificing for personally, professionally, and institutionally. (127)

Leaders have a vision. (Vision here seems slightly more capacious than purpose. It would entail not only purpose but a plan or strategy for achieving or fulfilling it.) Leaders engage and motivate people, particularly those who work under them. Leaders set priorities and “provide[] guidance and focus for future action; stay[] the course over the long haul” (127). Leaders evaluate, cultivate, hire and fire, provide a role model for their followers and are willing to sacrifice themselves personally for the cause.

While the foregoing example describes purpose as it manifests itself in the figure of the leader, on a more mundane level purpose for Arum and Roksa is a “moral grounding that anchors [one’s] ambitions in the tasks, behaviors, and practices required to achieve the ends [one] views as meaningful” (126). And thus their critique that “Many students come to college not only poorly prepared by former schooling for highly demanding academic tasks that ideally lay in front of them, but – more troubling still – they come with attitudes, norms, values, and behaviors that are often at odds with academic commitment. In recent cohorts of students...[there is a] prevalence of ‘drifting dreamers’ with ‘high ambitions, but no clear life plans for reaching them.’ These students ‘have limited knowledge about their chosen occupations, about educational requirements, or about future demand for these occupations’” (3). Purpose here then seems to be both a morally grounded ambition and a practical sense of the means of achieving it. The problem of purpose as it arises here, in either the administrator or the student, is the lack of it. However, as their discussion of faculty illustrates, there is another kind of purpose

problem that concerns not its lack, but its possession:

[W]e believe that given the transformation of higher education, one of the few remaining moral bases for academic life is a quasi-religious commitment to embracing research as a “vocational calling.” As Anthony Kronman recently observed, “the equation of scholarly specialization with duty and honor...makes the development of one’s place within the intellectual division of labor a spiritually meaningful goal and not just an economic or organizational necessity.” For many faculty, commitment to their own individual research programs is thus understood not as an act of self-aggrandizement or personal selfishness, but rather as a moral imperative that one must pursue and struggle to achieve regardless of institutional obstacles. (10)

Here Arum and Roksa assert that many faculty do have a sense of purpose, and a strong one at that: they experience their commitment to scholarship as a vocation, a duty, a moral imperative. And yet, it is precisely this academic purpose that is itself problematic for them: “While faculty *distracted* by professional interests other than undergraduate instruction share responsibility for the current state of undergraduate learning occurring on U.S. campuses...” And just a few lines later, “If faculty at U.S. colleges can be described as being *distracted* by professional interests other than undergraduate instruction...” (10-11, italics mine). In Arum and Roksa’s schematic, faculty and administrators are adrift because they have been distracted by interests other than undergraduate instruction. And yet, their own analyses clearly show that far from not having a sense of purpose, it is precisely because academics share such a strong sense of scholarly and professional purpose that they are immune to the distractions of others

telling them what their obligations ought to be, including undergraduate instruction. The difference between being without purpose and being invested with a purpose different from the one desired by the analyst is critical. And while it is clear that for Arum and Roksa the desired purpose of the educational leader is a commitment to the moral, social, and critical formation of our nation's youth, what is the purpose desired for those youths themselves?

One way of answering this is to ask what sense of purpose might inform those tasks that Arum and Roksa designate as critical. If meaning and purpose are crucial elements in critical thinking/critical being, what meaning or purpose are we to derive, then, from the performance tasks of the Collegiate Learning Assessment tool which they rely upon in measuring students' critical thinking abilities? If this test purports to measure critical thinking, then its tasks or exercises must be such that recreate contexts for thinking critically, key aspects of which are meaning and purpose. What meaning or purpose are we to imply or assume in the task of "prepar[ing] a memo that addresses several questions, including what data support or refute the claim that the type of wing on the SwiftAir 235 leads to more in-flight breakups, what other factors might have contributed to the accident and should be taken into account, and your overall recommendation about whether or not DynaTech should purchase the plane"? We are to assume the role of "the assistant to Pat Williams, the president of DynaTech, a company that makes precision electronic instruments and navigational equipment." What meaning or purpose might we, as such assistants, find in this task? A glib reply is that our boss told us to do it, period. However, we might also find meaning and purpose in that our work will aid in the company's making an informed and critical decision that will affect the safety of

employees. But why stop there? Purpose, as an ontological category, is more capacious than simply the fulfilling of a task. *So what is our purpose in working for DynaTech? We are an assistant. That sounds rather vague, but let it pass – we are happy to assist. But assist in what?* In the making of precision electronic instruments and navigational equipment. *So we are engineers?* No. *But we do assist?* Surely. *Okay, but what is the purpose in making this equipment? Is the president whom we assist a precision electronics and navigational equipment expert?* No; formerly ran a paper mill, where he was also not an expert on paper. This company, in fact was recently making DVD players, but our current product costs less to produce and moves more quickly. *Oh, okay. So what is the purpose again?*

As with the logic of interpellation, the question and questioning of purpose in this text is only carried out halfway. If we pursue this line of questioning as to the purpose of being an assistant for Pat Williams, the president of a company that makes precision electronic instruments and navigational equipment we arrive at the absurdity of the assumption that such a job carries with it answers to metaphysical questions. After all, how is one to find individual purpose or meaning in working in the service of something or someone the purpose of which is simply to make money? Granted, this last assertion is rather glib. There are many ways that one can find meaning or purpose in a job – if nothing else, the reward of doing it well, whatever it is – where making money is an additional reward, not the sole purpose. So, too, the goal of making money can be undertaken less for material gain than in the spirit of competition. More problematic about Arum and Roksa's discussion of purpose is its twofold nature. On one level, purpose in their text is configured as a measure of personal satisfaction and integrity. On

another level, however, purpose is something to be evaluated according to an external standard. Arum and Roksa's figure of the strong leader seems to embody both senses, being both sure of herself and regarded by others as trustworthy and effective. But what about a leader who is sure of himself but not respected by others? Or, more likely, a leader who is sure himself and believed in by many, while yet others decry him? Arum and Roksa paint average college administrators today as having lost their purpose. But how many of them would agree with this assessment?

And it is here that I wish to point out something else that seems so troubling not only in Arum and Roksa's text, but in Nussbaum's and Fish's as well. While these texts seem to be talking about critical thinking or the humanities or liberal arts scholarship as such, there seems to be two separate and unequal registers of interpellation taking place. One set of interpellative strategies and concerns is directed toward an aristocratic subject; the other toward a citizen subject.

Up till now I have divided liberal arts discourses and discourses of critical thinking along an instrumental/intrinsic axis. That is to say, I have distinguished them according to whether they justify the value of the endeavor in terms of what it produces, or on its own terms as an activity of value in itself. However, it might be fruitful to distinguish them according to the type of subject that they imply. I claim that these subjects divide along an aristocrat/citizen axis. By this I mean that some discourses of the critical imply/prescribe the behavior/an ethics appropriate to a subject position of leadership, others one of obedient compliance. These rhetorics are enmeshed and have a historical

background. They arise from two very different ideals of liberal arts discourses.⁶⁵ The first arose in antiquity and was characterized by a course of scholarly study and moral training (that cultivated respect for prescribed values and the texts which exemplified them), which sought to isolate and cultivate the best subjects fit for leadership. Beginning during the Renaissance and gaining purchase by the time of the Enlightenment, a second ideal arose. This one emphasized freedom from a priori strictures, traditions, authorities. It placed reason over character, and along with reason the freedom to pursue it, skepticism, tolerance and egalitarianism. I contend that so long as the implied (human) subject of these discourses was aristocratic, or of the “ruling” class, the tensions between these two very different liberal arts ideals could be contained. However, with the expansion of liberal capitalist democracies, which necessitate ever more subjects be educated to be productive while yet being interpellated as citizens, the tensions between these two ideals became too sharp to be ignored. Specifically, the extension of a model of education that emphasizes possession of and dedication to prescribed values and the texts that exemplify them to a class lacking the socioeconomic and cultural-discursive capital necessary for their acquisition, means providing a good to those without the means to make use of it. Such is the logic of “access” as it plays out in social reproduction. On the other hand, cultivating a robust sense of independence from authority, skepticism towards traditions, and faith in one’s own powers of reason in a class whose socioeconomic interests might very well be opposed to those in power has never been a popular educational platform. As industrial and post-industrial societies have required more and more educated subjects from classes historically not the intended subject of liberal arts

⁶⁵ The history I provide here is culled from Bruce Kimball's *Orators and Philosophers: A History of the Ideal of Liberal Arts Education*.

discourses, these discourses themselves evolved in order to attempt to contain their own internal contradictions. Such contradictions may be merely academic when it is a matter of differing educational paradigms for subjects with similar class interests. However, exported to subjects of different or opposing class interests, these tensions can become volatile.

It seems to me that a better schema is in order than the one I have been proposing. Rather than imagining aristocrat/citizen as a fundamental distinction between different models of liberal arts/critical thinking discourses, perhaps it's more accurate to say that the ideal subject imagined in discourses of critical thinking/liberal arts reflects the interests of the dominant group or logic at the time. The ideal subject of antiquity is an aristocratic one. Of the Renaissance, Enlightenment, and French Revolution, a bourgeois one. And what of today? I would argue that today we see in ascendance, or even already arrived the ideal of the productive or entrepreneurial citizen. This ideal is in tension with what might be called the ideal of a democratic citizen that came to dominance for a very short time when progressivism seemed able to contain the contradictions inherent in liberal capitalist democracies, wherein scholars and intellectuals straddled a difficult balance between the interests of the bourgeoisie to which they belonged and those of the laboring and agricultural classes for which they felt responsible. Understanding the history of their failure to reconcile the democratic values that they espoused with the class interests that they embodied and enacted, while keeping in view the still lingering rhetorical power of former liberal arts ideals and the subjects they imagine, provides a rich matrix for thinking about and trying to apprehend the schizoid composite of the subject of higher education discourses today.

The Nature of Value

Before ending this chapter I would offer a reflection that I feel gets at the heart of the instrumental/intrinsic binary I have been working to complicate throughout this chapter.

If it seems reductive to account for all of these beliefs about the value of the liberal arts in terms of either instrumental or intrinsic paradigms, it is in order to illuminate the architectonic logics that inform and structure them. Fish is enlightening here. While many construct instrumentalism as the particular evil of “for profit” or vocational education, as Fish shows, instrumentalism is defined not by content but by purpose. At the level of the logic of *how* education is valued rather than any particular value it may produce, then education for profit is no different than education for democracy, to the extent that education is valued not in itself, but for what it produces. Once something exists as a value, it partakes in a system of equivalences or exchanges – a market – *as do all values*. The concept of value itself entails the concept and logic of equivalence, without which value, as a term, loses coherence. In this regard, even Fish’s intrinsic values – in order to properly be considered such – must possess the property of equivalency, or at least, exchangeability. Another way of saying this is that values are only human terms and not affixed to things. To say that poetry – “the liberal arts activity par excellence,” according to Fish – has intrinsic value rather than instrumental value is to say that *I* value poetry not for anything that it leads to or something else that it provides, but for the pleasure that the poem itself affords *me*. Once we have reestablished the proper locus of value as the human subject we can see that while we may distinguish between mediated and unmediated (or immediate values), the distinction between instrumental and intrinsic falls

apart. That is to say, that intrinsic values are ones that we may capitalize on right away, where the capitalizing is the value itself; and instrumental values are ones in which the realization of value is deferred to some other effect not to be found in the realizing activity itself. Both kinds of value are only such, however, to the extent that they yield a kind of good or goods obtainable immediately or mediately. What is really at issue for all of these folks – Arum and Roksa, Martha Nussbaum, Stanley Fish, and their respective constituents – is not a conflict of values, but the equivalency or exchangeability of values. The problem they face is in trying to fix the value of certain kinds of value (e.g. “critical”) relative to others (namely, “economic”); of trying to hierarchize and standardize a system of exchange; of trying to stabilize the values of things that depend upon a system of volatility and commensurability to produce value in the first place. Remembering Marx’s injunction that in capitalism *all that is solid melts into air*, in attempting to work out a system in which certain values remain fixed, or in exhorting others to recognize their fixedness, the upshot is that each of these thinkers is, in one way or another, trying to correct for capitalism.

Chapter 4. The Market and the University: Shifting Frameworks and the Loss of Sovereignty

At the end of the last chapter I claimed that Arum and Roksa, Martha Nussbaum, and Stanley Fish, in their attempts to defend or assert the value of critical thinking or the liberal arts⁶⁶, are trying to correct for capitalism. This claim needs some elaboration, as it is one of the central claims of my inquiry, and it is the implications of this claim with which I am most concerned.

I am using capitalism in a very broad sense to refer not only to a system of commodity production and wealth distribution, but to a system of logic and set of values arranged around the mechanism of competition and the truth effects it produces. What needs to be highlighted, however, and what I will take up more in depth via Foucault later on in this chapter, is the way in which today, the logic and values of competition are no longer one system among, and vying with, others. They form the very ambient and matrix of intelligibility in and through which all other values and logics are expressed and enacted. Thus my fundamental critique of the works we have looked at so far is that they falsely conceptualize the state of affairs today when they imagine that the values they champion – critical thinking, the liberal arts, even democracy – are in competition with the market. When competition itself is the name of the game, the production of values as such – critical, liberal, democratic – ultimately springs from, is beholden to, and profits the market and its increasing purchase on all spheres of value production.

One cannot avoid the sense of loss – already past, ongoing, and anticipated –

⁶⁶While the two terms are not synonymous, they share rhetorical strategies and for our purposes here can be used together.

which pervades each of these texts. There is an almost tragic quality to the way in which their staunch defenses of and advocacy for the value of critical thinking, democracy, the liberal arts, etc., are in fact begging the question as to the value of the very things they champion. In an overly schematic yet, I believe, still useful way, we might read the subtext of each of their works as asking, *Why aren't critical thinking/the humanities as valued as we think they should be?* But because they do not directly ask this question, neither can they effectively answer it. Arum and Roksa's text comes closest to providing the type of analysis required to ask such a question, but falls short for various reasons already discussed.

What I want to take up in this chapter is the question of capitalism and its relation to the critical. While none of the texts examined so far perform anything even resembling a Marxist critique or critique of capitalism per se, each does to varying degrees indict "the market," "the corporate university," "education for profit," as a major obstacle to the kinds of values they are trying to argue for. As I have pointed out in regards to Arum and Roksa's and Nussbaum's texts, while critical of certain instances when market values interfere with other kinds of value (e.g. critical thinking or democratic), none of them pose the possibility of capitalism being antithetical to the critical or the humanities as such; indeed, these two texts in particular spend a good deal of time arguing to what extent global competitiveness could only be enriched by better supporting and embracing critical thinking/liberal arts education. While Stanley Fish, as we have seen, will not engage in such justifications of the humanities, he does share with these other texts a way of conceptualizing the state of things as two separate spheres of value in conflict with one another. I would even go so far as to say that Fish imagines these as two different

markets. After all, what is a market? It is a system, or place, or set of relations that allows for parties to engage in exchange. In so doing, the value or price of exchangeable goods is established. This value or price is the good's "truth." Fish, like all academics, sees intellectual/scholarly work involved in the exchange of ideas.⁶⁷ While it is true that more than one model of exchange exists – dialog, for instance – argument is the lingua franca, i.e. competition, of academic exchange. As we saw in Chapter 1, "the rule of the expert," which is the backbone of academic discipline, is itself an efficiency value, relying on the idea that the one most qualified for a task ought be the one to rule/manage/undertake it, as not doing so would be a waste of time and resources. Finally, Fish himself has no problem in claiming that the university is in "the pursuit of truth business" (*Save* 56). While I don't want to make too much of a glib phrase, this formulation is in stark contrast to higher education's mission as articulated by John Henry Newman, an arch liberal arts proponent, and one to whom Fish is indebted for a good deal of his rhetoric. According to Newman, the University's task was "the diffusion and extension of knowledge rather than the advancement. If its object were scientific and philosophical discovery, I do not see why a University should have students" (Newman xxxvii).

However, while I read Fish as invoking an alternate market of the critical or critical expertise that operates according to its own terms, it is clear that he does not want this "shadow market" to compete with the financial one, which is the very problem he is up against. Rather, he wants the humanities market to be protected from outside competition. And here is where I would like to make an intervention: I believe that to

⁶⁷ While Fish does not use the term, "the marketplace of ideas" is a common idiom today, coined by John Stuart Mill in 1859, and is another example of how the liberal imaginary is beholden to economic topoi.

assume the humanities or critical thinking operate according to terms and values outside of the market misrecognizes the ways in which the critical is always subsumed by the economic, and not only that, operates itself, internally, according to a similar logic of competition. The humanities or critical thinking are not separate spheres of activity that compete (or could be protected from competing) with economic activity. They themselves operate within the context and framework of global competition as such. In what follows I want to tread carefully in trying to explain what I think this means and what it doesn't. To do so, I will turn once again to Foucault.

This chapter is composed of three episodes. The first we might consider a longish anecdote about the ways in which competition affects the behavior and identity of scholars and teachers. Here I will rely mainly upon a paper given by Patricia Harkin at the 4Cs, "Excellence is the Name of the (Ideological) Game." Her analyses offer a poignant illustration of the Foucauldian concepts I want to take up and work through in episode two. There I will be concerned mainly with Foucault's interventions into popular misconceptions (then, at the time of his writing, and still today) of neoliberalism, misconceptions that are at the heart of my critique of Arum and Roksa, Nussbaum, and Fish. In episode three, I will return to *Academically Adrift* to illustrate how Arum and Roksa's analyses evidence less a conflict between the values of critical thinking and the values of the market, but rather how the critical must perform as interpellated by an economic truth regime.

Competition is the Name of the Game

Two hundred years ago, teachers and researchers sought to produce subjects of universal reason. Today, they produce competitors—for grant monies, for

rankings by national publications, for test scores, for larger and greater endowments, for internationally known faculty members, for graduate students. The multinational corporation has replaced the nation state; disciplinary piety has replaced transhistorical truth. But competition remains, and “excellence” emerges as the mark of the winner. Just as it fostered “truth” two centuries ago, the university now generates “excellence.” (Harkin 9)

This is a dense paragraph, and it comes about half way through Harkin's paper, “Excellence is the Name of the (Ideological) Game.” I want to take some time to unpack it, as it contains in miniature most of the larger claims that I am making throughout this inquiry.

To begin with, it assumes that what the university does (more or less, the work of “the critical”) is not essential, but historical in nature. That is to say, that despite a genealogical resemblance which might tie together the work of the university as it appeared in 17th and 18th century Germany with the work of British universities circa the 18th and 19th centuries, and then with the work done in the constellation of American higher education developing in the 20th century and still with us today, there are yet significant differences in what that work is; who does it; how those workers understand themselves and their work; how that work functions; who or what or to what extent and in what ways it is supported, as well as whom and what it benefits and how its products or values are disseminated.⁶⁸ Basically, to look at something historically means to pay

⁶⁸ Harkin cites Bill Readings's *The University in Ruins* as the source of her historical overview of the shifting nature of the idea and missions of the university. Readings begins his conceptualization of the university's historical trajectory with Enlightenment Germany, which understood its mission as the practice and cultivation of

less attention (if any) to what an object is in itself, and to look at its conditions of possibility – all of the frameworks and contexts within and according to which it acts.⁶⁹

The context of Harkin's analysis is American higher education as it operates in post-Fordist, globalized capitalism. More immediately, it is in the wake of 30 years of slackening state and federal funding of higher education and research, as well as the transformation of the funding mechanism itself from institutions or departments to individualized competitors for grants. As a result, according to Harkin, what is at issue is not simply less resources for higher education or that resources are now allotted according to mechanisms of competition, but more profoundly that such conditions, being integral to academic work, thus change both the nature of scholarship and the identities of those who perform it.

Harkin invokes the work of Louis Althusser and his theory of interpellation in making her analyses. Similar to the ways in which I have been using the term throughout this inquiry, interpellation here is not a matter of direct mandate; rather it works

universal reason and the rational man. Later, in the nineteenth century, the scene switches to England and along with it, shortly afterwards, the United States, where culture and the cultured man become University projects and productions. As Readings argues, the production of culture both materially and ideologically played a key role in imperial and colonial expansion. By mid to late twentieth century, however, capital had gone global at a scale and with a speed never before seen. The nation-state was no longer *the* privileged center of capital production. This meant that culture, at least ideologically, was no longer as central a mechanism for galvanizing public energy and action, leaving the University to reimagine itself once again. According to Readings, the reigning *raison d'etre* of the posthistorical University today is that of *excellence*, about which I will say more later in this section.

⁶⁹ Keeping this in mind, we should take note then, that even Readings' historical starting point – the German University of the 17th and 18th centuries – is not to be understood as *the* paradigm of disinterested inquiry or knowledge, but one possible model that emerged according to the historical, socio-economic, political, and cultural contexts in which it found itself.

constitutively through the conditions of possibility that call a subject forth. One of the most salient conditions Harkin addresses here is that of funding, which went from a largess devoted to supporting scholarship, to an austerity measure enjoining scholars to compete for the very materials to do their jobs. This shift in the framework of funding research transforms not only scholarship but scholars along with it. As Harkin puts it, “[T]he problem is not grants *themselves*, but rather ‘grantsmanship’—the name I’ll give to the (ideological) belief that a compositionist should aspire to be a ‘funded researcher’ rather than as a person who seeks to theorize writing so that she can teach it. The difference is not in the activity itself but in the understanding—one’s naming of the work that one does” (16). That is to say, compositionists qua “funded researchers” lose a sense of themselves “as researchers into questions that [they themselves] raise as a consequence of actual problems [they] encounter in the classroom, library or culture” (6); they “identify...primarily as competitors for corporate funding rather than as teachers, historians, scholars, or (even) as activists for social change” (3). This loss of identity is co-constitutive with the loss of being able to value one’s work based solely on one’s “*informed and contingently ethical desire* to do it rather than its ‘fundability’” (16, italics as in original).

One of the things that I would like to draw attention to here is the direct relation Harkin sets up between funding and value. That is to say, that the availability of funding determines to a large extent not only which research projects are valued and which are not, but the ways in which we entertain the value of research itself, namely, as we looked at in Chapter 3, instrumentally or intrinsically. The paradigm of competition-based funding and publication helps throw into relief the model of “disinterested inquiry” that it

threatens and seems to replace. That is to say, that whatever else we might say about the “disinterested inquiry” model – either about the purity of its motives, the truth of its discoveries, or the accessibility of its methods – we must understand that this particular paradigm is as much the material reality of ample resources as it is the scholarly ideal of fidelity to truth or knowledge.⁷⁰ In this sense, disinterested activity always names less a moral value (Arum and Roksa), political commitment (Nussbaum), or intrinsic ideal (Fish) and more the possession of a surplus that allows for investment in such activities, as well as others. At whatever level we examine it – as here, the university, the scholar, the student – the disinterested in each of its iterations – critical thinking, democratic citizenship, aesthetic appreciation and analysis – depends upon a surplus of resources to make it go. And making it go depends upon there being those with the resources and inclination to make a go of it. We might call this the constant feedback loop of interpellation – material realities call forth subjects who embody and enact values that support, reinforce, and produce material realities. The material reality of a discursive activity like critical thinking is housed both in the subjects who practice it as in the institutions that call forth, shape, and limit its practice, each – individuals and institutions – historically contingent.

In Bill Readings's institutional history and critique (*The University in Ruins*) with which Harkin is in dialog, Readings identifies three major historical moments and locations of the University: Enlightenment Germany and France; 18th and 19th century

⁷⁰ It is worth noting that it is in precisely this sense that the original conception of *artes liberales* was understood. That is to say, that the historical ideal of the liberal arts rests upon a belief that such a course of study was neither intrinsically valuable nor emancipatory, but simply reflected the education appropriate to the free man, that is, to the man with such a surplus of leisure to pursue it.

British Imperialism; and post-Fordist United States. In each, he describes how the university and its practitioners understood themselves within the greater socioeconomic and sociopolitical contexts that gave them impetus and housed them. Thus, even while both responding to the cultural and intellectual forces of the Enlightenment, France and Germany inhabited different political realities that influenced the particular ways in which “the critical” as such developed within the university. As Readings explains, “[B]ecause post-revolutionary France legitimates the state through an appeal to the idea of the people...French thought becomes concerned with the idea of humanity; ... while for Germany prior to and after Bismark the problem is of legitimating the German state as an ethnic unity,” and thus German thought “focuses on the notion of ethnicity” (60). And thus, because the French “claim[] to legitimate the state in terms of universal reason...their University system, placed at the service of national culture, [will] continu[e] to think its identity in terms of a battle between superstition and enlightenment.” However, as Germany legitimates itself through an appeal to national identity, “The University is pressed into the service of the state once the notion of universal reason is replaced by the idea of national culture as the animating principle of the University. Thus, through an appeal to culture, the state, in effect, orients the university's institutional structure and directs its social articulation, effectively controlling both research and teaching.”

During this time England did not have a state university system. “[T]he need to imagine such a system will only arise later, for Newman and Arnold, when the pressures of empire force an articulation of nation, state, and modernity” (60). According to Readings, it is because of its need to shore up and streamline its empire that culture

becomes the orientating principle of the English university, rather than reason, and thus literature replaces philosophy as “the discipline entrusted with the elaboration of national identity, and this perhaps because the alliance of church and state (and the exclusive rule of the Anglican church over the universities of Oxford and Cambridge until the partial reforms of 1854) undermines the simple opposition guiding the Enlightenment story of emancipation as the triumph of the rational state over the superstition of the church” (60-61).

Finally, with the advent of globalization and post-Fordist capitalism, the nation-state is no longer the most significant or powerful site of wealth/commodity production. In a globalized economy merging more and more into multinational corporations, not only the nation-state, but its ideological buttress, nationalism, becomes less important, if not counterproductive.⁷¹ Thus culture, particularly in the form of national literature, loses its dominance as the orienting principle of the university. According to Readings, what replaces culture as the *raison d'être* of the university is the technical-administrative principle of “excellence.” It is here where the scene switches once again, this time to the collision of 20th century U.S. political economy with higher education. Despite the historical overview, most of Readings’ book is concerned with changes taking place in the American university. As he explains,

If I also pay particular attention to the changes currently occurring in the North American University, this is because the process of “Americanization” cannot be

⁷¹ I must emphasize that Readings is speaking in general terms here, and is by no means suggesting that nation-states and nationalism no longer exist, or even that we will be rid of them anytime soon. The thrust of his analysis is that they no longer reign as the dominant orienting logics, though they can be and often are mobilized in support of political, economic, social and cultural agendas.

understood as simply the expansion of U.S. cultural hegemony. In fact, I shall argue, “Americanization” in its current form is a synonym for globalization, a synonym that recognizes that globalization is not a neutral process in which Washington and Dakar participate equally. ... “Americanization” today names less a process of national imperialism than the generalized imposition of the rule of the cash-nexus in place of the notion of national identity as determinant of all aspects of investment in social life. ...[Today,] the university’s tasks [are figured] in terms of a generalized logic of “accountability” in which the university must pursue “excellence” in all aspects of its functioning. (2-3)

As a corollary and measure of these larger structural changes, Readings has us consider the shifting role of the university president.

In the Kantian University [the president’s] function [was] the purely disciplinary one of making decisive judgements in inter-faculty conflicts on the grounds of reason alone. In the University founded on culture, the president incarnate[d] a pandisciplinary ideal of general cultural orientation, becoming the figure of the University itself[,],...a single individual who can stand metaphorically for the University in the eyes of the world while remaining metonymically connected to the rest of the faculty. ...[S]uch a president figures the double function of culture as the animating principle of the University: both gradual *Bildung* and revealed unity of social meaning, both metonymy and metaphor. In the University of Excellence, however, a president is a bureaucratic administrator who moves effortlessly from the lecture hall, to the sports stadium, to the executive lounge. From judge, to synthesizer, to executive and fund raiser, without publicly

expressing any opinions or passing any judgments whatsoever. (55)

As we can see, Harkin's paper takes up Readings and Althusser to ask, what is a compositionist today, and what is she/he becoming in the context of competition and grantsmanship orienting academic funding, scholarship, and professional identity. While in the main Harkin sees Readings's analyses as apt and insightful, she is rightfully critical of his tone regarding the discourse of excellence. While he urges us to see through the false veneer of excellence as a value to the emptiness of the term, he seems rather dismissive of it, treating it almost comically. Because of its seeming lack of external referent (within the university context, for example, where it might be invoked to measure the relative merit of such incommensurable projects as a new computer program, a vaccine, and a Marxist reading of financial flows in Dickens), Readings claims it is non-ideological. Harkin astutely counters that, "Notwithstanding my admiration for Bill Readings's analysis, I disagree strenuously with his assertion that 'excellence,' lacking internal content and external reference, is not ideological. My argument is that, in the context of the contemporary academy, the content of the word 'excellence' is competition, and its referent is winning. 'Excellence,' in my view, waddles like an ideology and quacks like an ideology, and it is quite useful to critique it as one. To do so is to see that the emphasis on excellence is not (as Readings would have it) silly, but really rather dangerous" (4). What Harkin sees as dangerous are the ways in which compositionists, and by extension, academics, come to see the good of their work no longer in terms intrinsic to it or in terms of one's informed and contingently ethical desire to do it, but according to extrinsic standards decided upon by the market. Citing Althusser's formulation that ideology is *the imaginary relation of individuals to their real*

conditions of existence, Harkin contends that while scholars and teachers today may imagine they are working in the service of their disciplines and/or students, they may nonetheless be functioning according to a competitive logic and purpose ultimately destructive to both the field's and students' well-being.⁷²

What I hope to have shown in this section via Harkin and Readings is both a small (Harkin) and large (Readings) scale picture of the ways in which the conditions of possibility of a thing – activity, institution, profession, etc. – inform and delimit not only its actions and performance, but what the thing actually is and can be, its identity. For Harkin it is the materially constitutive realities of resources, funding mechanisms, and the values according to which they operate as they impinge upon the compositionist and scholars/teachers more generally. For Readings it is the larger geopolitical situations in which different iterations of the University came to prominence. Both understand their objects of analysis through the contexts and frameworks in which those objects operate and which shape (if not fully determine) the logics of their operation. I take pains to point this out because *framework policy* is a concept I adopt from Foucault in the next section, in his discussion of neoliberalism. What Foucault illustrates is that the apprehension of a thing not in terms of an essence, but according to the frameworks in which it manifests itself, is not only a powerful epistemological paradigm, but a potent strategy of governmentality.

⁷² I believe I say much the same thing in Chapter Two where I describe the way in which regularly overworking teachers and overcrowding classrooms gives way not so much to bad teaching as to a lower standard of teaching now being touted as good. This standard comes not from the teacher, but from those who mandate the quotas of grades to be produced every term.

Ideology and the Incorporation of Critical Subjects

If I have not already made it sufficiently clear, when I invoke via Harkin, Readings, or Althusser the term ideology to refer to the ways in which current academics understand their work and their roles within the university, I certainly do not mean to insinuate that previous articulations of the university and its practitioners were ideologically more pure. Each iteration of the university and of its workers existed within a particular historical materialist context that tied together critical work with larger political, economic, social, and cultural frameworks in complex and mutually constitutive ways. Kant did the bidding of the sovereign, and Newman and Arnold that of the nation-state, just as much as Arum and Roksa, Stanley Fish, Martha Nussbaum, Patricia Harkin, Bill Readings, and you and I contribute to the competition mechanisms of the market (via publications and/or grades).

My interest here is less in ideology itself than in the material and ideological frameworks that constitute the doxic field of seemingly disparate ideals and values such as capitalism, liberalism, and Marxism, particularly as they circulate and function in discourses of higher education and critical work. I am trying to articulate the relationship between these discourses and power, but in saying so I become acutely aware that I don't know what exactly "power" is. I use it to refer to something more capacious yet less formal than government. Using Readings' schema we might say that power once rested with the sovereign, then with the nation-state, and now resides in multinational corporations. But what does this mean? It means that power once resided and manifested itself mainly through the actions and impositions of individual figures – the sovereign and all his ministers, soldiers, officials, etc. Later, law became the apparatus for the

administration of power. Today, the matrix of power has become frameworks of contingent fields (e.g. law, prices and wages, education, medicine) that structure the logic according to which institutions and their members must act.

If the Enlightenment project was to produce the autonomous man of reason, the neoliberal innovation has been to structure the fields of human activity such that autonomous reason was guaranteed to produce and reproduce a single truth effect above all – endless progress and competition. In such a framework, the problem is not that the university has been co-opted by the corporation. Rather, the university itself has become the primary space for the legitimation and reproduction of the logic of competition. It is the disinterested scholar who is the interloper. The question is, who possesses the expertise that is to be the orienting principle of the university? In the University of Reason it was the philosopher; in the University of Culture it was the man of letters. In these two configurations, the university and the scholar were ultimately beholden to government, yet within the sphere of their domain, their expertise and authority held sway. Remember Kant's famous injunction of the enlightened despot, "Argue as much as you will, about what you will, only obey!" Obeying the sovereign is not in conflict with the dictates of reason because this obedience is the very condition of the freedom of thought and speech that the enlightened sovereign grants to his subjects. The sovereign is the limit that is the ground of possibility for freedom. Later, in the burgeoning nation-state of England, we might rearticulate the injunction thus: "Argue as much as you will, about what you will, only enrich the culture!" In this scenario the autonomy of the university and the scholar have diminished slightly, the mandate of their academic freedom being no longer simply to obey the law, but also to add to and augment the

national culture. Still, since the experts of culture are just such men of letters and scholars who hail from and inhabit the university, the effective control of scholarship and thinking remains rooted in the hands of the experts. But how might we articulate the injunction today in the age of information and globalization? “Argue as much as you will, about what you will, only produce (excellence)!” If we agree with Harkin that the content of “excellence” is “competition” and that its referent is “winning,” and that the context and stakes of this competition are resources and funding, then we might say that what is unique to this historical configuration of the university is the extent to which the figure and exemplar of its grounding principles has been outsourced, residing outside of the university itself and as a foreigner to its culture. This figure, of course, is the businessman.

At this point I find it fit to make a caveat about the claims I am making here and throughout the text. I treat here a particularly trenchant and popular articulation of the crisis of higher education, variously named “the corporatization of the university,” “the commodification of knowledge,” the rise of “for-profit” or “instrumental” education, etc. I am wholly sympathetic with these critiques, and this inquiry is born out of the same frustrations to which they respond and questions that they pursue. However, I am also deeply dissatisfied with the historical depth and rhetorical complexity of many of these critiques. To wit, while I agree with the charges, they are to a degree anachronistic. As early as 1918, Thorstein Veblen published *The Higher Learning In America: A Memorandum On the Conduct of Universities By Business Men*, in which, among other things, he pointed out the alarming rate by which learned professionals on university boards of trustees were being replaced by businessmen. Here we have a very literal

example of the corporatization of the university: the body of its leadership having been invaded by corporate bodies. And one hundred years before that, in *Trustees of Dartmouth College vs. Woodward*, the United State Supreme Court delivered its ruling that the college was a private, not a public institution, subject neither to government administration nor its faculty, but owned and under the authority of its trustees alone. This landmark decision would not only affect the destiny of the American university, it was also crucial in the development of the American corporation and free trade.

In *Universities and the Capitalist State* (University of Wisconsin Press, 1990), Clyde W. Barrow contends that while

[s]elf-management of the labor process is the professional ideal of a university...laws regulating the property relations of American capitalism have never regarded universities as corporations of learning identified with the tenured faculty. Instead, legal custodianship of university property has typically been vested by the state in an external board of directors whose members are variously designated as trustees, regents, overseers, visitors, or governors. Governing boards are what legally constitute universities as corporations, corporations which, since the Dartmouth College Case, are fundamentally the same as any other business enterprise. Governors are invested with the proprietary right to regulate the disposition of university property, subject only to the legal constraints of corporate charters, the obligation of contract, and other statutory or judicial provisions which define the meaning and rights of property in American law. One must therefore draw an empirical distinction between physical “possession” of the means of mental production by the faculties and the legal “ownership” of these

tools by public and private governing boards. (13)

While this history is more or less well known, what is less apparent, and where I think Barrow's critique really shines, is his account of the ways in which progressive sentiments in the early 20th century were captured and co-opted by corporate rhetorics of accountability and efficiency, and thus made collusive in bringing the more populist and activist elements of the university to heel. While Barrow's work is too complex to adequately sum up here, the gist is that corporate interests groups – especially philanthropic organizations that took up education as their project, such as the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching or John D. Rockefeller's General Education Board – worked assiduously to raise and frame a public debate about the money value of education. Barrow cites a U.S. Bureau of Education biennial survey that “found that by 1922 ‘people who had previously concerned themselves little about higher education’ now ‘felt free to criticize and make suggestions.’ The report notes that businessmen, in particular, became ‘free in their statements’” (97). Barrow concludes:

The rise of the corporate ideal as a public image of the university was a significant ideological victory for business. It not only displaced traditional metaphors and myths with a new one, but structured debate under the leadership of business expertise. The progressive emphasis on the role of the expert meant that once education questions were reformulated as problems of business organization and the investment of public capital, then presumably experienced businessmen – and not educators, farmers, workers, students, or the general public – could rightly claim to be experts. This defined a scenario...in which not only did appointing businessmen to boards of trustees

or educational reform commissions seem legitimate, but in which doing the contrary would seem like mere “politics” instead of good public administration. (97)

One of the issues Barrow raises here (which I do not have time to address) is the public perception of the academic, scholar, intellectual. Such perceptions are crucial to garnering public support for or whipping up public sentiment and sanctions against academic and scholarly work. Indeed, such perceptions and sentiments constitute one of the conditions of possibility for critical work as such.⁷³

The second point I would like to briefly address here is also one that goes back to Kant. It also concerns the relationship between the critical and power, as well as the telos of the critical itself. If in the sovereign’s injunction, “Argue as much as you will, about what you will, only obey!” it is clear that the addressor is the monarch and the addressee is the scholar; in the other famous injunction from that essay, *Sapere aude!* (“Dare to know!” or “Have the courage to use your own reason!”), it is a little less clear who is speaking to whom, and what this proscription actually requires of one. The first describes a formal relationship between critical subjects (mostly, but not limited to scholars) and government, the framework within which intellectual/scholarly activity can and will take place. We might call this a macro level analysis of the relationship between critical

⁷³ If popular shows like *Frasier* (1993-2004) and *Big Bang Theory* (2007-) tell us anything at all about the public’s perception of what an intellectual or scholar is, we might well wonder how universities, and humanities in particular, continue to retain even such limited funding as they already do. It might also be the case that in shows like *House* (2004-2012), *Dexter* (2006-1013), and *Sherlock* (2010-) we see a new configuration of the intellectual as a kind of pathological savant who is made productive by granting certain freedoms in exchange for service. A kind of monstrous mind on a leash.

activity and power. However, the second injunction⁷⁴ is described by Kant as “the motto of the Enlightenment,” what we might call “the spirit of the age.” What exactly is the spirit (by way of Kant) calling upon the general public to do? It is this: wherever subjects are free to exercise their own reason and judgment they are obliged not to leave to others, even other authorities, the thinking and deliberation due to matters of conscience and politics; rather they ought always to rely upon their own reason and powers of judgment in adjudicating such matters. But how does one institute or legislate or cultivate this? Once again we are faced with what I termed (borrowing from Foucault) the difficulty of positively constituting the critical subject. To cite from my earlier discussion of this problem in Chapter 2: “Foucault suggests...there is a negative and a positive condition for the possibility of critical thinking: the negative is the absence of any formal barriers to the exercise of *räsonieren*; the positive is the interpellation of critical subjects so disposed to act critically.

We can readily see how the universal use of reason (apart from any private end) is the business of the subject himself as an individual; we can readily see, too, how the freedom of this use may be assured in a purely negative manner through the absence of any challenge to it; but how is a public use of that reason to be assured? Enlightenment, as we see, must not be conceived simply as a general process affecting all humanity; it must not be conceived only as an obligation prescribed to individuals: it now appears as a political problem. The question, in any event, is that of knowing how the use of reason can take the public form that it requires, how the audacity to know can be exercised in broad daylight, while

⁷⁴ In terms of the essay itself, it is actually prior.

individuals are obeying as scrupulously as possible. (WE 103)

That is to say, while education may be able to provide the subject with the formal possibility for critical thinking, and while nothing in the academy or society at large may directly impede or prevent the subject from exercising her free use of reason, how does society ensure that she in fact will exercise it, and in just such a way as [Kant intended]: ‘a use of reason in which reason has no other end but itself...to reason for reasoning’s sake.’”

If the political problem posed by the Enlightenment is how to constitute individual subjects in such a way that they incessantly of their own volition resort to reason in the production of truth, and that the truths so produced must always be such as to secure and reproduce obedience to the sovereign or law, then the task of government is to create conditions in which the free use of reason cannot but produce and reproduce the very truths which ground and grant its authority. However, with the passing of sovereignty and rise of political economy in the 17th and 18th centuries, and with the further refining of economic concepts and truth as developed by neoliberal thinkers and theorists first in Europe and then in the United States, the market becomes the privileged space of truth production; that is, economics becomes the science of government, and the market, operating without interference, produces the truth of economics. Thus the goal becomes to impose austerity and competition measures such that an environment is created in which subjects’ free use of reason cannot but reproduce the logic of the market, as competition becomes the only game in town.

I realize that in my summing up here I move much too quickly. I will work to elaborate these ideas in the next section where I again turn to Foucault.

What's So New about Neoliberalism?

In *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, David Harvey describes neoliberalism as “a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets and free trade,” with “[t]he role of the state [being] to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices” (2). I choose these couple lines not as representative of Harvey's work so much, but of what I feel to be the general understanding of neoliberalism as it is used today across disciplines and in different discourses. Thus in the following analyses my criticisms are aimed not at Harvey, but at this very general sense of neoliberalism and the ways in which it is often indistinguishable from conceptions of *laissez-faire* or free-market economics. I believe that the ready-made association between neoliberalism and free markets or free trade tends to recreate a conceptual framework which yet imagines market activity as separate from – albeit in competition with – other fields of activity, and which yet conceives of neoliberalism as a purely political economic set of policies rather than the reigning logic and social policy as such. I claim, however, that it is not so the case that market values compete with academics ones, but that the academy itself has become (and in a sense always was) a site wherein the logic of the market – productive competition – (re)produces itself. My reading here is entirely indebted to (and taken almost untouched from) Foucault, and it is to his discussion of neoliberalism in *The Birth of Biopolitics* that I now turn.

In discussing what he found to be unique about and new in neoliberalism as it was being theorized and fashioned in mid-twentieth century Europe, and especially in the United States with the group of economists which came to be known as the Chicago School (Gary Becker, Ronald Coase, Eugene Fama, Robert Fogel, Milton Friedman, Lars Peter Hansen, Frank Knight, Robert E. Lucas, Richard Posner, and George Stigler), Foucault critiques the popular assumptions about and articulations of neoliberalism at that time (and which are still prevalent today). He is adamant about two points in particular: 1) the association of neoliberalism with *laissez-faire* political economy, the idea that government should simply not intervene in the workings of the market; and 2) the reduction of all values to economic ones, more or less the *Frankfurt School* critique.

As to the first point, Foucault makes clear that nothing could be further from the truth. As he describes it, for the theorists and advocates of neoliberalism at that time, the problem was not to carve out a space for the market that would be an autonomous zone from and act as limit to government. Rather, the goal was how to arrange things such that government itself performed like a market, that the logic of the market, that is, competition, would become the logic of government as well. As we can imagine, this would require anything but a hands off approach by government. Rather, government was to be used as the instrument for forcing all areas of human activity (including government) to act according to the logic and values of competition. As Foucault puts it, for these neoliberal thinkers,

Far from being [a natural given], competition was a structure with formal properties [and] it was these formal properties of the competitive structure that assured, and could assure, economic regulation through the price mechanism.

Consequently, if competition really was this formal structure, both rigorous in its internal structure but fragile in its real, historical, existence, then the problem of liberal policy was precisely to develop in fact the concrete and real spaces in which the formal structure of competition could function. So, it is a matter of a market economy without *laissez-faire*, that is to say an active policy without state control. Neoliberalism should not therefore be identified with *laissez-faire*, but rather with permanent vigilance, activity, and intervention. (132)

One of the main strategies used in achieving this effect, this marketization, is what Foucault calls *framework policy*. Framework policy works to change the nature of an activity or enterprise not by acting upon it directly, but by manipulating the various fields, forces, and activities that impinge upon it, which make up its framework of operation. He gives as an example the transitions that took place within European agriculture circa the 1950s. Through manipulating resources and policies regarding population; technology; “the legal framework of farms, and in particular the laws governing inheritance, governing tenant farms and the location of estates;” “the allocation of the soil and the extent, nature, and exploitation of the soil available,” such policies led to what would become the Common Agricultural Market in the following decade. As Foucault points out:

You can see that none of these elements – population, technology, training and education, the legal system, the availability of land, the climate – are directly economic and they do not affect market mechanisms directly...but they are conditions for agriculture to be able to function as a market, for agriculture to be able to function within a market. The idea was not, given the state of things, how

can we find the economic system that will be able to take into account the basic facts peculiar to European agriculture? It was, given that economic-political regulation can only take place through the market, how can we modify these material, cultural, technical, and legal bases that are given in Europe? How can we modify these facts, this framework so that the market economy can come into play? You can see here...that to the same extent that governmental intervention must be light at the level of economic processes themselves, so must it be heavy when it is a matter of this set of technical, scientific, legal, geographic, let's say, broadly, social factors which now increasingly become the object of governmental intervention. (141)⁷⁵

It is my contention that, rather than being an institution with a set of values in competition with or acting as limit to the values of the market, the university is always already just such a “concrete and real space[] in which the formal structure of competition” has been made to function. To put it another way: however the university or its workers may imagine themselves, their work, and the values they stand for, they cannot be in competition with competition itself, for whatever they do is always already an act and in the service of that very competition with which they would (not all, of course) take issue. To cite Foucault again on what is new about this neoliberalism from the old *laissez-faire* liberalism:

[T]he relation between an economy of competition and a state can no longer be one of the reciprocal delimitation of different domains. There will not be the

⁷⁵ It is interesting to note here the symmetry between the logic of neoliberal strategy that Foucault unearths and Foucault's own historical materialist methods of analysis. Neither relies upon an essential object but look to the frameworks, fields, and contexts within which the object is imbricated and seek to act upon or explain them.

market game, which must be left free, and then the domaine in which the state begins to intervene, since the market, or rather pure competition, which is the essence of the market, can only appear if it is produced, and if it is produced by an active governmentality. This will thus be a sort of complete superimposition of market mechanisms, indexed to competition, and government policy. Government must accompany the market economy from start to finish. The market economy does not take something away from government. Rather it indicates, it constitutes the general index in which one must place the rule for defining all government action. One must govern for the market rather than because of the market. (121)

Foucault's critique of conceptualizations of neoliberalism that do not rigorously distinguish it from liberalism or *laissez-faire* is that they misconstrue the relationship between government/power and the market/economics. It is no longer the case that the two are separate spheres of activity and jurisdiction. Nor is it the case, however, that the market is to be dominant over government, which would yet imply two distinct spheres of rationality, but in a hierarchical relation to one another. What Foucault posits instead is the actual transformation of what government essentially is, from a sovereign power, to an economic one, that is, a power the legitimacy of which rests in its constantly making all activities and institutions conformable to the mechanisms of competition. The dynamic that Foucault describes here is not limited to government/market, but names the relationship, nature, and logic of power as such. All institutions and activities that possess power do so through, and in the name of, competition. My central critique, then, of Arum and Roksa, Nussbaum, and Fish is that in their conceptualizations of the relationship between the critical, democracy, or the humanities and the market, they rely upon

outmoded models more representative of liberalism and *laissez-faire* than the hyper-vigilant drive toward pure competition and total production that characterizes the neoliberal truth regime we find ourselves in today. I believe this will become a little more clear in discussing Foucault's second critique of popular notions of neoliberalism.

As to Foucault's second intervention, that is, his criticism of the Frankfurt school critique of everything being reduced to market terms and economic values, the matter is not so much a disagreement as a question of emphasis. He takes this up in his discussion of *homo œconomicus*, the human subject considered strictly and essentially as a rational profit maximizer.

[That t]he subject is considered only as *homo œconomicus*...does not mean that the whole subject is considered as *homo œconomicus*. In other words, considering the subject as *homo œconomicus* does not imply an anthropological identification of any behavior whatsoever with economic behavior. It simply means that economic behavior is the grid of intelligibility one will adopt on the behavior of a new individual. It also means that the individual becomes governmentalizable, that power gets a hold on him to the extent, and only to the extent that he is a *homo œconomicus*. That is to say, the surface of contact between the individual and the power exercised on him, and so the principle of the regulation of power over the individual, will be only this kind of grid of *homo œconomicus*. *Homo œconomicus* is the interface of government and the individual, but this does not mean that every individual, every subject is an economic man. (252-253)

That is to say, that it is not the case that no other values exist besides economic ones, or that human beings have been reduced to purely economic beings and can act only

according to economic motives. However, the way in which power will interact with subjects is according to an economic (as opposed to, say, an ethical, or even purely juridical) logic. Further, while subjects may hold values other than economic ones and so act on them, these actions themselves will be made to conform to economic logic, the logic of competition. Thus, you may still pursue a liberal arts degree motivated by a disinterested pleasure in inquiry. However, every step of this pursuit will be mediated by the ambient in which it takes place, that of market competition. From the school you choose and the funding available (and the choices this forces you to make, or not); to your selection of disciplines and their selection of curriculum and the standards for graduation; to the reading lists and kinds of assignments and kinds of evaluation measures employed;⁷⁶ to your topic of research and your pedagogy and your chances of employment and the kinds of employment available to you upon completion of your degree. Not to mention all of the material forces that have already rendered you competitive (or not, or only to a certain degree) for higher education itself. In all of this, your disinterested interest in inquiry will be but one factor (and a relatively minor one) in your career trajectory and performance. Pursuing higher education for its intrinsic value will neither protect you from the market (although, having the leisure to do so is usually evidence of a certain amount of security from risk), nor will it prevent you from taking part in the productive competition it enforces. As a scholar you will produce competitive research; as a teacher you will produce grades, which are a competition mechanism par

⁷⁶ We must keep in mind here that the publication of research as a measure of the value of literary scholarship is a relatively new trend brought about in response to market forces circa the time of the Morrill Act of 1862. (See Graff, Miller, and Veysey.)

excellence.⁷⁷ Again, the issue here is not that grades serve only a sorting function. They can still serve as feedback and motivation for students. However, in terms of their use and intelligibility vis-à-vis power, their function *is* strictly to sort. If transcripts are required for a job or graduate school application, no one will read about how earnest your desire was to understand Romantic poetry or how authentic and passionate your engagement with the class and its discussions; nor will one hear or care to know your thoughts on British imperialism. What they will have are letters and numbers that tell them how well you measure up vis-à-vis other applicants.⁷⁸

What I am trying to get at here, and what I intend to better illustrate in what follows, is that Arum and Roksa's, Nussbaum's, and Fish's interventions are doomed from the start, because in imagining that the values they champion can compete with those of the market, they fail to recognize the way in which all values are being made to compete (and thus be productive) as such, and that the name of the game is no longer commodity exchange or consumption, but competition itself. As Foucault puts it:

The society regulated by reference to the market that the neo-liberals are thinking about is a society in which the regulatory principle should not be so much the exchange of commodities as the mechanism of competition. It is these mechanisms that should have the greatest possible surface and depth and should also occupy the greatest possible volume in society. This means that what is sought is not a society subject to the commodity-effect, but a society subject to

⁷⁷ A good deal of the scenario I describe here is indebted to Evan Watkins' *Work Time: English Departments and the Circulation of Cultural Value*.

⁷⁸ Of course applications to graduate school will take into consideration writing samples. Here, too, however, it is not the criteria for evaluation that is the issue so much as the mechanism of competition.

the dynamic of competition. Not a supermarket society, but an enterprise society.

The *homo æconomicus* sought after is not the man of exchange or man the consumer; he is the man of enterprise and production. (147)

That is to say, in their interventions Arum and Roksa, Nussbaum, and Fish imagine themselves to be taking part in a battle all the while not noticing that the war has been fought and lost some time ago. What is at issue is no longer a conflict of values; it is the relentless production of values through conflict, through mechanisms of competition.

The crisis of higher education – whether that refers to a dearth of critical thinking abilities in college students; an evisceration of liberal arts funding and programs; or the casualization of academic labor and the commodification of knowledge (which I do not take up here) – is less a crisis of values than the crisis of value itself, the crisis which value always represents and must instigate and perpetually reproduce in capitalist economies. In what follows I attempt to illustrate what this looks like in various places. I will begin by revisiting *Academically Adrift*, the most exhaustive of the three accounts looked at, and the one that I believe gives us the best picture of what we might call an economic truth regime.

The Stakeholders of Education

Let me begin by fleshing out what I believe Foucault means by a truth regime. What he does not mean is a group, government, organization, institution, etc. concerned with pursuing and enforcing (through indoctrination, criminalization, incentivizing, or other means) either a particular truth or worldview, or the pursuit of truth as such, as might be the case say in a technocracy or in some articulations of the university. What he

means, rather, is something more akin to framework policy as I discussed earlier. That is, it refers to the architecture of various interrelated fields wherein the logic and enactment of truth takes place as such: the market, the legal system, education, etc. “Each society has its regime of truth, its ‘general politics’ of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true” (“Truth” 131). As Jonathan Gaventa explains:

These “general politics” and “regimes of truth” are the result of scientific discourse and institutions, and are reinforced (and redefined) constantly through the education system, the media, and the flux of political and economic ideologies. In this sense, the “battle for truth” is not for some absolute truth that can be discovered and accepted, but is a battle about “the rules according to which the true and false are separated and specific effects of power are attached to the true”... a battle about “the status of truth” and the economic and political role it plays.

When I say that we are in the midst of, or that higher education operates according to, an economic truth regime, I am not claiming that education is simply left to the vicissitudes of the free market, or that its values are forced to compete with market values. Nor am I claiming that its shareholders have lost all other sense of value but an economic one. What I will attempt to show here is how the very frameworks within which higher education takes place have undergone serious transformations such that,

while other values and motivations may exist – e.g. the disinterested pursuit of truth or moral training – there are very few milieus in which the pursuit of such values might thrive. To say that we are in an economic truth regime is nothing more than to say that we are in a socioeconomic environment in which very few possess the luxury of operating according to a logic outside of the market, and even for those possessed of such a luxury, even fewer venues where they could “operate according to their own terms.”

In *Academically Adrift*, Arum and Roksa identify the various groups concerned about higher education: students, parents, faculty, administrators, government, corporate leaders, and democracy. In what follows, I treat each of these groups as a framework acted upon in the Foucaultian sense elaborated above,⁷⁹ and try to show how, at every level, Arum and Roksa’s analyses reveal that what is at issue, what is responsible for our current state of drift, is a subject acting according to other interests or motivations beside the critical. Not surprisingly, each of these other interests is ultimately economic in nature.

Stakeholders in the higher education system have increasingly come to raise questions about the state of collegiate learning for a diverse set of reasons. Legislators – and privately, middle-class parents as well – increasingly have expressed worry over the value and returns to their investments in higher education. Business leaders have begun to ask whether graduates have acquired the necessary skills to ensure economic competitiveness. And increasingly,

⁷⁹ With the caveat that it is not quite accurate that the groups themselves are directly acted upon, but the different milieus and mechanisms in which they find themselves and according to which they act: education, job market, taxes, rent or home ownership, credit, etc. While it is not the specific focus of this inquiry, I am referring to the general climate of economic crisis and neoliberal intervention taking place over the past 40 years, about which I will say more in a moment.

educators within the system itself have begun to raise their voices questioning whether organizational changes to colleges and universities in recent decades have undermined the core educational functions of these institutions. (1)

While claiming that the stakeholders⁸⁰ here are concerned about higher education for a “diverse set of reasons,” of all the groups named in the opening paragraph of their text above, only the educators are identified with a non-economic interest. And though educators may have a legitimate interest in the core educational mission of the university, their actions are more and more illustrative of a different set of interests.

Full-time faculty in resource-poor institutions feel increasingly overwhelmed and demoralized by the growing institutional demands placed on them and their inability to identify sufficient resources to maintain traditional levels of support for undergraduate education. In other settings where the costs of higher education have increased at roughly twice the rate of inflation for several decades and resources are therefore less constrained, faculty are nevertheless often distracted by institutional demands and individual incentives to devote increased attention to research productivity. (6)

As Arum and Roksa explain, “In many lower-tier colleges and universities that in recent years have faced growing resource constraints, traditional forms of faculty direct instruction have themselves been undermined by the replacement of full-time tenure track faculty with adjunct, graduate student, and other alternative forms of instruction.” Non-tenure track instructors have higher workloads, are paid less, and carry less status than

⁸⁰ While it is a minor point, we might note here that the term “stakeholders” is itself a testament to the ways in which today we conceive of peoples’ social concerns in an economic register.

tenure track faculty. Often too, as in the case of graduate students, they have less experience in both their field and in teaching. In such a situation, we could say that if higher education is failing in its mission of developing critical thinking skills in its undergraduates, then it is because of a lack of resources devoted to supporting the conditions – namely, teachers – that promote it. In more financially secure institutions, however, economic rationales also underly faculty behavior. To the extent that prestige, promotion, and professional identity in such institutions are pegged to the publishing of original research, teaching is less privileged (if privileged at all) than scholarship. Indeed, despite the oft-voiced truisms that teaching informs scholarship and vice versa, for many faculty teaching is the inconvenient price to be paid for being allowed to pursue one's research. That is to say, that on one hand there is a negative incentive for devoting too much time to one's students and teaching – the lack of advancement and possibly prestige; on the other hand, there is strong positive incentive for privileging research over teaching, not only via promotions, but increasingly in the form of securing outside funding. "In recent decades the allure of external funding for research has been greatly enhanced by the growth of commercial opportunities associated with research activities in higher education. Federal government legislation, such as the Bayh-Dole Act of 1980, allowed colleges and universities to patent discoveries that had been developed with federal research support and facilitated the growth of collaborations 'with the private sector in the development of the commercialization of new technologies'" (9).

Another important factor Arum and Roksa cite as influencing academic values and behavior seems, at least at first glance, not motivated by economic interests. We might call this factor the professional ethos of the scholar. "For many faculty,

commitment to their own research programs is thus understood not as an act of self-aggrandizement or professional selfishness, but rather as a moral imperative that one must pursue and struggle to achieve regardless of institutional obstacles” (10). While this is true, historical accounts of the American university and the professoriate show how this ethos is itself historical and has developed in response to the greater socio-economic, political, and cultural milieus in which it has operated.⁸¹ So, for example, in the discipline of English literature or English studies, the professional ethos of publishing original research is relatively new, developing around the time of the Morrill Act of 1862, which, in creating land grant colleges to educate the nation’s farmers and growing industrial work force, incentivized practical skills, which gave impetus in English departments to the development of practical criticism.⁸²

⁸¹ See Laurence Veysey, *The Emergence of the American University* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970); Clyde Barrow, *Universities and the Capitalist State: Corporate Liberalism and the Reconstruction of American Higher Education, 1894-1928* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990); Gerald Graff, *Professing Literature: An Institutional History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989); and Thomas Miller, *The Evolution of College English: Literacy Studies from the Puritans to the Postmoderns* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2011).

⁸² I want to note in passing here a contradiction in Arum and Roksa’s text which I find both disturbing and illustrative. Their explicit critique of academic faculty is that they find themselves in an environment where teaching is disincentivized and research rewarded. And yet their implicit critique of this particular historical moment in which students, parents, faculty, administrators, and legislators are adrift from some set of moral values bound up with or expressed by critical thinking, is that “the critical” no longer acts as a point of embarkation or orientation, is no longer a fixed point of reference or value which could act as limit or corrective to other kinds of values, for example, economic ones. And yet, is not the scholar’s preference for their research over teaching precisely an instance of the critical acting as point of orientation for action, and the chastisement that faculty ought care less about their scholarship than students itself being animated by political-economic concerns rather than those properly understood as critical? Another way to put this might be to ask at what point historically, and for what reasons, did the university professor become the warden of undergraduate critical thinking, especially considering that in Arum and Roska’s extremely attenuated and atrophied descriptions of critical thinking, what we are really talking about is reading and writing skills? What

So much for faculty, but what about administrators? Arum and Roksa point out how institutional culture is largely shaped by its leadership. Here, too, there are issues.

If faculty at U.S. colleges can be described as being distracted by professional interests other than undergraduate instruction, it is likely even more the case that contemporary higher education administrators experience institutional interests and incentives that focus their attention elsewhere. ...Arguably, shifts in the character of administrative leadership are associated with the phenomenon of colleges and universities today becoming much more interested in the fulfillment of nonacademic services and functions, while focusing less on traditional academic instruction. (11)

But why are college administrators today so “much more interested in the fulfillment of nonacademic services and functions, while focusing less on traditional academic instruction?” Because: “Administrators have been asked to focus largely on external institutional rankings and the financial bottom line” (125). And at the level of educational policy, things are no different: “Government funding agencies are primarily interested in the development of new scientific knowledge” (125).

While their report largely fails to name it so,⁸³ we might characterize the “master framework” within which all these changes are taking place as that of globalization.

While institutions of higher learning have always had to operate within the socio-economic and cultural constraints particular to their locations, the current milieu of – and call to – global competition, has thinkers, policy makers, and stakeholders at all levels

sorts of conditions have allowed for the university scholar to be reducible to and accountable as a high school English teacher?

⁸³ Although they do warn that, “In an increasingly globalized competitive economy, the consequences of [educational] policy inattention are profound” (31).

(including students), and from an array of political perspectives, concerned about the future of higher education. The most immediate context is the economic collapse that began in 2009, the repercussions of which are still being felt. While the current economic crisis is definitely a contributing factor, Richard Ohmann points out that, vis-à-vis higher education:

the market for academic labor collapsed over thirty years ago and in many fields, including language and literature, has remained dismal ever since. This is a story, not of crisis, but of long decline and maybe permanent restructuring. ...[I]t is no coincidence that [this decline] set in at just about the same time when other crises – a rapid increase in debt of all kinds, the peaking of real wages in the United States, declining corporate profits, a negative turn in trade balance, daunting competition from Japan and Europe, and a cresting of the dollar's value – signaled a crisis for American capital and led it to adopt new strategies. (*Politics of Knowledge* 95)

As regards both public and private universities, “[w]e can best grasp this entire process as a decline in the portion of the whole social surplus going into higher education via state appropriation and private philanthropy” (Ibid. 96). More starkly, as Michael Hogan, former president of the University of Illinois, recently put it at a conference, “The state can no longer afford the university” (“Reforming Higher Education to Compete in the Global Economy”).

While it is not the focus of this chapter or this inquiry to examine the many ways in which higher education has been affected by both the immediate financial crisis as well as the more long term development of neoliberal socio-economic policy and

transformations in the ways in which higher education is funded, the analyses I am making cannot be understood outside of that context. While there are many works out there that do just that, my interest is rather in taking this context as a given and exploring some of its implications for the university in general and its commitment to teaching and critical thinking in particular. To be clear, as I have maintained throughout, I am trying not to reduce critical thinking to any particular or essential notion; rather I am trying to look at various ways in which it gets deployed in discussions of higher education and to explore the implications of such discourses of critical thinking in relation to the material conditions in which their development is thought to take place, namely colleges and universities.

I think that I have sufficiently shown that in Arum and Roksa's schema of the various stakeholders in higher education, through their actions and motivations, we can clearly see the prevalence of an economic truth regime. Once again, this is evidenced not by a kind of laissez-faire system wherein academic values are made to compete with economic ones; nor in the disappearance of other kinds of value beside economic gain; rather, it is evidenced by a total environment in which mechanisms of scarcity create conditions conducive to adopting a market logic in lieu of other possible rationales for action, and in which such other rationales will themselves be forced to act in the service of the market and competition in order to be enacted at all.

Before I leave off discussing Arum and Roksa's text, I want to take up just one more aspect of it that I feel is further illustrative of the economic truth regime I am trying to throw into relief. While illustrating the economically motivated behavior of the various actors involved in American higher education attests perhaps to a kind of adaptive logic

taken up in response to material concerns and fears of financial insecurity, Arum and Roksa's analyses go further at times to suggest a larger social and cultural phenomenon taking place. I believe that beyond discreet choices and immediate motivations of individual actors or groups, their work reveals a larger and more embedded logic being shaped. Here I want to again bring up the notion of framework policy as described by Foucault. By this term Foucault refers to a socio-economic and political strategy for shifting the logic according to which an activity or institution functions, not by acting directly upon the institution, but by manipulating the frameworks within which it operates. In terms of higher education, federal and state aid are immensely important frameworks supporting both students and academic workers. Funding, however, is not simply a neutral means of financial support. As Harkin's analysis of the field of composition shows, funding plays a constitutive role in shaping both work and identity. Arum and Roksa's analyses likewise illustrate the ways in which shifts in the federal and state funding of higher education did more than force various actors to tighten their belts; they effected significant social and cultural changes as well:

The effects of the broad-based cultural changes on higher education were enhanced by federal and state policies that shifted financial support from institutions to individuals. ...[I]n the early 1970s the federal government began formulating internal policy papers calling for 'a freer play of market forces' that would 'give individuals the general power of choice in the education marketplace' as well as specifying 'levels and types of student support that will make most institutional aid programs unnecessary.' At the federal and state level, institutional aid programs were increasingly replaced by 'high tuition – high aid policy

through which government gave aid to students rather than institutions, thus making students consumers in the tertiary marketplace.’ ...In recent years, this market-based logic has only been further extended by federal policies that have facilitated the growth of college finance models that rely on tax credits and student loans. (15)

By acting upon the framework of financial aid, government policy also effected a cultural change in how students were interpellated by the higher education they were empowered/enforced to consume. Indeed, in addition to financial aid shifting the burden from institutions to individuals, Arum and Roksa cite changes in laws concerning the status of students and the relationship between schools, students, and parents as being responsible for changing the fundamental relationship of authority between schools and students and their parents. For Arum and Roksa, the 1960s in the U.S. were:

...an historic period where elementary and secondary students had begun to enjoy a wide range of new legal rights and entitlements that undermined students’ sense of traditional forms of authority relationships in education. Concurrently, legally mandated supplementary student services in special education programs increased dramatically, redefining earlier assumptions of individual and institutional responsibility for managing students’ academic and social difficulties. Middle-class parents increasingly saw themselves less as collaborative partners with school authorities who were believed to possess legitimate authority in loco parentis and more as ‘advocates’ for their children’s educational needs. Educators became progressively more reluctant to require students to master certain forms of knowledge over other less culturally privileged ones. Students in K-12, and

particularly in higher education, increasingly became defined as ‘consumers’ and ‘clients.’ In this context, schools are expected not to provide quasi-parental guidance and social regulation, but instead to meet client needs through delivery of elaborate and ever-expanding services. (14-15)

The shift in terms of the student-teacher relationship from what we might call disciple and master or mentor, to client or consumer and service provider is not just empty rhetoric. Arum and Roksa are anything but Frankfurt School critics bemoaning the state of a consumer culture and society; they are, however, very convincingly outlining a series of effects that have seriously transformed the interpellative frameworks within and through which stakeholders in higher education understand themselves and their relationship to academic work and the mission of the university. According to Arum and Roksa, the university used to serve *in loco parentis* to students, whereas today, it no longer does. Citing George Marsden's *The Soul of the American University: From Protestant Establishment to Established Nonbelief*, they claim:

Since the student rebellions of the 1960s, the extent to which collegiate life has embraced nonacademic pursuits has likely been aided and abetted⁸⁴ by college administrators and staff who have “largely withdrawn from oversight of manners and morals.” While colleges once assumed a quasi-parental role and struggled with mixed success to ensure “the enforcement of academic and social rules,” educators and administrators have grown “less certain than they once were as to what students *ought* to be or become, and are reluctant to go to the mat with the young for principles in which they themselves only half believe.” (14)

⁸⁴ Note the discourse of criminal behavior here.

I am not interested here in the veracity of the claims either that universities did once (or did so effectively) act *in loco parentis* to students or that they fail to do so now. I am sure a case could be made.⁸⁵ More important to me is the figure of the parent here as a kind of sovereign authority over the conduct of students, and by extension, the principle of sovereignty as the mandate for critical work as such. What we see again and again in Arum and Roksa's narrative is the breakdown of traditional hierarchical relationships. Leaders don't lead; teachers don't teach; parents don't parent; government officials are more governed by socio-political and socioeconomic concerns than actively govern; and students rebel. In their schema, the university ought to be (and once was) an autonomous institution entrusted with the functions of pursuing truth and cultivating critical subjects to take active roles in society. Within the university, the ideals of culture and critical thinking are embodied in and safeguarded by the strong and noble leader, the university president, faithfully served by her/his administrators, as well as faculty, who themselves act as such leaders to their students. And the university itself acts as a kind of intellectual and moral leader to society at large.

If Arum and Roksa's conceptualization of the university and its role (or ego ideal) sounds familiar, it is because this understanding is more or less shared by many within (and to a lesser extent, outside of) academia, even those old enough and young enough to know better. It is the legacy of the Enlightenment contract as drawn up by Kant. As

⁸⁵ One might also make the case that in so far as a consumer has greater autonomy and say in their education than a disciple, that such shifts in the student-teacher relationship as Arum and Roksa describe constitute students as more critical, and the classroom as more democratic, than in previous articulations. While I ultimately am critical of this position, I believe it helps to reveal underlying antagonisms in the kinds of essentialist notions of critical thinking that Arum and Roksa and Nussbaum tend to traffic in.

Foucault points out, in Kant's famous Enlightenment essay we cannot fail to notice the outline of a kind of contract proposed to Frederick II of Austria as to the relationship between the philosopher/university and the sovereign. Or, as Foucault dubs it, "the contract of rational despotism with free reason: the public and free use of autonomous reason will be the best guarantee of obedience, on condition, however, that the political principle that must be obeyed itself be in conformity with universal reason" ("What is Enlightenment" 103). It is a contract written both in the spirit of, and within the political-economic framework of *laissez-faire*. Kant is explicit in this regard, taking it up in the collection of essays that came to be known as *The Conflict of the Faculties*, where he outlines the various relationships between "the higher faculty" (theology, law, and medicine); "the lower faculties" (philosophy, which for Kant included what we call the humanities or liberal arts); government; and political subjects. In all, he insists on the necessary autonomy and authority of the lower faculty, which authority is guaranteed and safeguarded by the sovereign himself, looking after the state's best interests.

It is absolutely essential that the learned community at the university also contain a faculty that is independent of the government's command with regard to its teachings; one that, having no commands to give, it is free to evaluate everything, and concerns itself with the interests of the sciences, that is, with truth: one in which reason is authorized to speak out publicly. For without a faculty of this kind, the truth would not come to light (and this would be to the government's own detriment); but reason is by its very nature free and admits of no command to hold something as true (no imperative "Believe!" but only a free "I believe"). (27 and 29)

It is worth noting that in the original text cited above, at the end of the first clause, Kant underscores the point he's making by relating the following anecdote in a footnote:

A minister of the French government summoned a few of the most eminent merchants and asked them for suggestions on how to stimulate trade – as if he would know how to choose the best of these. After one had suggested this and another that, an old merchant who had kept quiet so far said: “Build good roads, mint sound money, give us laws for exchanging money readily, etc.; but as for the rest, leave us alone!” If the government were to consult the Philosophy Faculty about teachings to prescribe for scholars in general, it would get a similar reply: just don't interfere with the progress of understanding and science. (27 and 29)

With this anecdote, regarded by historians as the origin of the maxim “laissez faire,” Kant makes a quite explicit analogy between the relationship of the government to the market and of that between the government and the university. As Kant conceptualizes it here, the market, the university, and government are three spheres of power, each of which requires a kind of guaranteed autonomy (for the first two, within the boundaries of obedience to the sovereign power; and for the principle of sovereignty, within the boundaries of reason) in order to achieve their functions. If the rule of reason (at least in so far as academic/university affairs were concerned) was predicated on obedience to the sovereign, that is, if it was the sovereign who granted to the university and scholar their sphere of relative autonomy, what happens to this sphere when the sovereign no longer rules, and when obedience is no longer required? What happens when the absolute rule of the sovereign is replaced by general rules and principles of economics? It would stand to reason that in a system in which no sovereign power

guarantees the autonomy of the university – indeed, when the notion of sovereignty itself is dissolving and its conditions disintegrating⁸⁶ – the critical as such, as not simply an activity but as the material instantiation and guarantee of a set of hierarchical power relations, will be fundamentally altered.

As I have been trying to show throughout, using Foucault as a guide, whatever critical thinking is, it is always historical, contingent upon the frameworks that allow for it and call it forth. And thus we err if, in imagining critical thinking to be a skill, we imagine skills to be personal possessions, discreetly owned and exercised, rather than as social and collaborative configurations, an amalgam of forces of which individual subjects are merely the focal points. To understand the critical is not to proceed, as many have done, to look at subjects supposed to be critical, to define some set of qualities that they or their work possess, and then try to recreate the teleology that gave rise to them. This imaginative way of conceptualizing the relationship between things – this desire or nostalgia for the origin, for teleology – is the root of all ideology, bearing fruit in the protean figure of the fetish. To properly understand the critical requires that we examine all of the frameworks which give rise to, structure, and sanction it. In the works I have examined so far in this inquiry, I find that the authors' accounts of critical thinking and/or the humanities are anachronistic fetishes. Each of them imagines an essential autonomy of both critical work and of the workings of the university that, if it ever did exist, inhered in the historically specific conditions particular to Enlightenment Germany, and in particular the condition of a sovereign which could grant such autonomy. In the post-sovereign landscape in which we increasingly dwell, the absence of such an absolute

⁸⁶ At least this is the case as far as many critics of free trade and globalization are concerned.

authority that could render autonomy to institutions means the critical as such needs to be reconceptualized in post-autonomous terms.

Authority and Autonomy

What I have been trying to articulate in this chapter is the way in which the binary of market vs. critical is insufficient for thinking what is at issue today in the university's role as producer of knowledge and cultivator of critical subjects. While there is no doubt that major transformations taking place in higher education today are being driven by socioeconomic and political forces, I believe that the issue is less any fundamental incompatibility between economic and academic values or between mechanisms of competition and mechanisms of scholarly debate. Rather, what is at stake is the relationship between sovereignty and autonomy. Autonomy requires the conditions that would allow for it, just as sovereignty relies upon freely given obedience. The market does not essentially conflict with intellectual values so much as it does away with the sovereign relationship required to grant the university the autonomy it requires (or imagines it requires) to function in the ways it has historically conceived for itself. That is to say, that if the university once functioned with a certain degree of autonomy, it did so not according to any internal power it or its subjects possessed, but only to the extent that this autonomy (and only so much and no more) was both allowed for by the socioeconomic conditions in which it functioned and granted it by a sovereign authority. Those historical material conditions have changed, and there is no longer a sovereign who could through magisterial fiat make universities exempt from the vicissitudes of the market. (Before leaving this section, I want to briefly think through this relationship

between sovereignty and autonomy in more concrete terms, in the relationship between authority (textual or pedagogical) and the student.

In thinking about the relationship between sovereignty and autonomy, I cannot help but remember the famous quip, *Caesar non supra grammaticos*. “Caesar is not above grammarians.” Here we can see that while Caesar’s actions are in no way limited by grammar, Caesar likewise has no authority to speak other than in conformity to grammatical rules not subject to change by his will, however so much he might break and abuse them. Indeed, his own autonomy and power are grounded in his act of submission to those very rules. We might say, then, that one cannot learn a language by being critical of it. It will not yield to our reasoning. We learn our first language through enculturation, immersion, living and breathing it. It would be a great detriment to us as a species were we to be born with the critical faculties we possess as adults – I cannot imagine anyone would be fluent in the spoken tongue, let alone literate. The critical requires an act of submission, a position of submission as the cost of the authority or autonomy it grants. Take the experience familiar to all of us either as students ourselves or as we witness in some of our students, when they encounter a text and heartily fasten to it. If it is Nietzsche, then everything to them for a time is Nietzschean; if it is Freud, then everything they read or encounter for a time is redolent of defense mechanisms and sublimation. Such a student, far from being an uncritical dupe, gives herself to the master of the text in the way that as children we give ourselves to language. And it is in that giving that we come to master the power of (though not the thing itself) the discourse we have so given ourselves to. Such apprenticeship takes time, and cannot be done except in a condition of autonomy. We know too well that you cannot force anyone to take up

Marx (or Milton Friedman or Plato or anyone else, for that matter). What you can do is to create the conditions in which the taking up of a certain discourse becomes possible, desirable, socially supported and rewarded. You can shape the frameworks that would allow a certain articulation of the critical to emerge. Clearly, what is required here is something more rigorous, thoughtful, materially substantial and ingenuous than simply “access.” I will have more to say on the rhetoric of “access” in the next chapter, where I will take the discipline of composition as a kind of case study to elaborate the ideas I have been discussing here.

Chapter 5. Autonomous from Whom? Accountable for What?

I take the title of this chapter from a passage in Clyde W. Barrow's *Universities and the Capitalist State: Corporate Liberalism and the Reconstruction of American Higher Education, 1894-1928*. Barrow gives a detailed and compelling account of the emergence of the American university from a loose confederation of parochial-scholarly schools to the public and global institution it would become in less than fifty years. He is particularly concerned to illustrate the tensions that arose between different stakeholders in the university during this unprecedented time of democratic expansion in higher education. He articulates one of the central contradictions as the following:

[University] personnel were expected to maintain a commitment to the professional ideals of autonomous scientific neutrality and specialized expertise, but were also expected to perform a public service. This dual goal was a political contradiction that in the case of the intellectuals was clarified by two questions: autonomous from whom and accountable to whom? The answers to these questions yielded radically different conceptions of what objectivity and public service meant in a society structured by class conflict. (7-8)

We can easily see how these questions and their answers are interpellative in nature, as a subject's context of autonomy and orientation to accountability largely constitute her identity.

In the preceding chapters I have labored to make the argument that critical thinking is more descriptive, interpellative, constitutive than it is substantive. I have claimed that it does not name a thing so much as it calls forth a being. In the different accounts that I have looked at there seems to be consensus that freedom or autonomy is a

necessary condition of the critical, especially vis-à-vis “the market,” or economic interest and constraint. In this chapter I explore the institutional and professional autonomy of the university and its workers in three contexts. The first is the historical development of the university in general, with attention paid to the ways in which it has identified itself and articulated its values. The second context I look at is the restructuring of higher education in the UK during the second half of the twentieth century. Finally, I discuss the origin and development of academic freedom as the concept appeared in the US at the turn of the twentieth century. Throughout I will be working to make three claims: 1) that the interpellative missions of universities cannot be separated from beliefs about who or what body shall authorize subject formation and which kinds of subjects ought to be produced; 2) that there is considerable evidence to support the claim that the market is just such an author of interpellation even in the space of the academy; and 3) that the academy itself grounds its authority in the same source or mechanism as the market: the spontaneous generation of truth provided by conditions of freedom or autonomy. As such, discourses of academic freedom, far from challenging the “corporatization of the university,” are powerful proponents of neoliberal values.

The Shifting Subject of the University

Proponents of critical thinking tend to share an origin myth. They locate the roots of their project in ancient Greece, with Socrates and the philosophical schools of Plato and Aristotle. Then, through a rather vague and murky chain of events, we arrive at the Enlightenment, and from there on a dialectic of progress unfolds. No doubt we can identify a vast range of philosophical (not to mention intellectual and artistic) works

spanning the time frame from ancient Greece to today, as well as trace the ways in which many of these works influenced and progressively built upon each other. However, the idea of a conscious, articulated, unified, and unbroken series of developments conspiring to a tradition or historical project of critical thinking is not supported by the historical evidence. On the contrary, according to Bruce Kimball in *Orators and Philosophers: A History of the Idea of Liberal Education*, the liberal arts tradition has from its inception been a much more fractious and ambivalent undertaking than its proponents tend to acknowledge. Throughout its history disagreements over the disciplines that comprise it; its epistemological foundations; its aims, values, and methods; and the kinds of subjects fit for it, have made it less a tradition than a historical source of contention. While a history of the idea of critical thinking cannot be undertaken without recourse to the history of liberal arts education, within that tradition itself, critical thinking has not always been a value. Indeed, critical thinking as free, disinterested, skeptical thought has often been seen as antithetical and dangerous to the values aimed at being inculcated through the liberal arts. Similarly, the value of democracy has always been looked at askance by many in the liberal arts who believe that the authority of the expert ought always and everywhere to win out over the opinions of the untrained masses. Rather than a history of the liberal arts, Kimball's research traces the development of fundamental tensions between adherence to established values and the critique of them, between expert authority and "democratic" expansion.⁸⁷ In this context, rather than understanding critical thinking as a thing with a history, what emerges is a sense of the critical as a rhetorical strategy for containing the crises that such tensions produce. This strategy is

⁸⁷ I loosely use the term "democratic" here to mean the drive toward greater inclusivity in the means and mechanisms of power.

interpellative: it names the ideal subject to be cultivated; it establishes the institutions and procedures of cultivation; and it weeds out those deemed unfit to cultivate. Rather than imagining critical thinking as a skill, value, or tradition that has developed over time, I argue that we can best understand critical thinking as only one of the more current articulations of the drive to interpellate the ideal subject, to standardize and to export it. Such is the universalizing mission of the University. For a more detailed analysis of the rhetorical development of this mission, I turn to Bill Readings's account in *The University in Ruins*.

Readings traces the historically and culturally contingent “self-image” and mission of the University from its inception as an institution in Enlightenment Germany to the present day. From the beginning, the University understood itself as undertaking an interpellative project. This was accomplished through the cultivation of certain kinds of subjects – rational, critical, reflective, informed, ethical – who would then be sent out with a mandate of stewardship to conduct the world's business and/or take up positions of leadership. (This “sending out” of cultivated subjects is what comprises the literal sense of the University's mission.) In Enlightenment Germany, universal reason and the rational man were the measure of the mandate. Later, in the nineteenth century, the scene switched to England and along with it, shortly afterwards, the United States, where culture and the cultured man became University projects and productions.⁸⁸ By the late twentieth century, however, in the midst of advanced globalization, the discourse of national culture no longer held sway. Both the culture wars and the canon wars undermined the ideology of culture as “the best that has been thought or said,” while

⁸⁸ I use rational man and man of culture purposefully. These were largely, if not totally, male dominated institutions and masculine roles or identity ideals.

materially, funding for humanities disciplines began to decrease during this time.⁸⁹ At this point, according to Readings, “excellence” succeeds culture as the *raison d’être* of the University. For Readings, what is different about this discourse as opposed to the University’s former articulations is that it lacks a subject – there is no longer a privileged individual that could (or could even be imagined) to embody the mission of the University or the *telos* of culture.⁹⁰ Thus Readings claims that the discourse of excellence is not ideological. As he clarifies,

In saying that some things, such as the discourse of excellence, are non-ideological, I do not mean that they have no political relatedness, only that the nature of that relation is not ideologically determined. “Excellence” is like the cash-nexus in that it has no content; it is hence neither true nor false, neither ignorant nor self-conscious. It may be unjust, but we cannot seek its injustice in terms of a regime of truth or of self-knowledge. Its rule does not carry with it an

⁸⁹ In “A Borderless World? From Colonialism to Transnationalism and the Decline of the Nation-State,” Masao Miyoshi asserts that discourses of national culture become less rhetorically persuasive and necessary once capital goes global and the nation-state is no longer the privileged site of capital production. Thus his critique of cultural studies: “Criticisms as well as accolades nostalgic for the democratic project of public higher education have consistently refocused public discussion of the university around calls for cultural inclusion and accessibility at precisely those moments when the university was adapting to the exigencies of a new stage of corporate capitalism. Not only are these pleas not new, they demonstrate the power of cultural identification – myth, ideology, and narrative – to trump political and economic realities” (74). That is to say, that criticisms leveled at orthodox culture fail to question the doxic assumption that culture is the dominant force of oppression or power at work here, rather than economics.

⁹⁰ Readings elaborates: “[W]e can say that the rise of Cultural Studies becomes possible only when culture is dereferentialized and ceases to be the principle of study in the University. In the age of Cultural Studies, culture becomes merely one object among others for the system to deal with” (18). Readings makes clear that his critique is less of cultural studies as a field than “its attempts – however well-meaning – to make Cultural Studies into the discipline that will save the University by giving back to it its lost truth.”

automatic political or cultural orientation, for it is not determined in relation to any identifiable instance of political power. (13)

Readings' description of how the discourse of excellence functions here is suggestive of Ernesto Laclau's concept of the "floating signifier" and its use value in shoring up hegemony. As Lynn Worsham and Gary Olson explain in "Hegemony and the Future of Democracy: Ernesto Laclau's Political Philosophy":

Laclau sees hegemony not as the imposition of a pregiven set of ideas but as "something that emerges from the political interaction of groups"; it is not simply the domination by an elite, but instead is a process of ongoing struggle that constitutes the social. Hegemonic struggle requires the identification of what Laclau calls "floating signifiers," those signifiers that are open to continual contestation and articulation to radically different political projects. "Democracy," in his view, is a key example of a floating signifier – its meaning essentially ambiguous as a consequence of its history and widespread circulation. To hegemonize a content for "democracy" would require a fixing (always provisional) of its meaning. Indeed, the open nature of the social and the very possibility of hegemonic struggle stem from the impossibility of total fixity. As Laclau reminds us, it is "urgent" that progressive intellectuals understand the logic of hegemony and the nature of hegemonic struggle (which the neoconservative right has mastered so well in recent years), and that they develop their own hegemonic strategies. ...Central to developing these strategies is the "expansion of rhetoric and rhetorical argumentation." (1-2)

Thus, the indeterminacy that marks “excellence” as nonideological for Readings is precisely, in Laclau’s view, what makes it a vehicle for hegemony. Hegemony consists not in fixed positions, but in constantly fixing dispositions. The power of hegemony is not the power of reason, but the power to measure and define what counts as reasonable. This requires, then, not philosophical subtlety or logical acumen, but technical and material resources for constantly producing and reproducing those discourses whose very ubiquity is suasive while never needing to be persuasive as such.

It is important to note, though, that in speaking of rhetoric, rhetorical argumentation, and persuasion, Laclau means much more than “rational demonstration.” He believes that we must deconstruct the simple opposition persuasion/force and remember that the logic of persuasion always carries within it an element of force – not necessarily physical force, but force in the sense that persuasion is “less than purely rational demonstration.” Persuasion, in other words, is not a process of moving someone logically and step-by-step from one belief to another. (2)

Worsham and Olson’s reading of Laclau makes two critical assertions about ideology and discourse. The first is that ideology is less a matter of content than of production. As those in advertising well know, the ability to inundate a market with one’s brand or message is more strategically advantageous and rhetorically effective than however creative the logo or convincing the message may be. Sheer physical presence has more force in its immediate reality than the abstractions of logical appeals. Which leads to the second assertion, that discourse is forceful in excess of its truth or reason content. What is more, discourse is constitutive of what counts as truth or reason or value.

As we saw in Chapter 4, Patricia Harkin is well aware of the constitutive force of rhetoric. This is why she is so adamant to point out the danger in dismissing the discourse of excellence as empty or silly. To do so avoids acknowledging the very real interpellative effects such rhetoric has, despite being “devoid of content.” Doing so also misunderstands (or refuses to admit) how ideology works. Dismissing the discourse of excellence as empty hyperbole implicitly imagines that an ideology’s efficacy is tied to its truth claims. Harkin (via Althusser) is very clear on this point: discourses are empowered by institutions with the material reach and resources to sanction and disseminate them. In her reading of Readings’ historical development of the subject of the University, what distinguishes the neoliberal⁹¹ University from its previous iterations is not, as Readings would have it, the loss of a unified, autonomous subject; for Harkin, such a subject is and has always been a chimera.⁹² What changes, rather, is the “author of interpellation.” If during the Enlightenment, and later during the age of British imperialism, universities were let to be rather autonomous institutions, enjoying more or less self-rule, then the need for the “democratic” expansion of higher education generated

⁹¹ My term; not Readings’. Readings dubs the contemporary university “postmodern” and “posthistorical.” However, as Harkin explains, “In *The University in Ruins*, Bill Readings asserts that the posthistorical university is in fact best understood as a techno-bureaucratic institutionalization of ‘excellence’ – an empty signifier that emerged as an answer to the peculiarly postmodern question: How can incommensurable entities be competitively measured?” This description more properly captures the spirit of neoliberalism as I have been using the term, by way of my reading of Foucault in Chapter 4, to describe the incumbent truth regime, rather than one set of socioeconomic beliefs and strategies among others. The contemporary university is an instantiation of, not an exception to, the rule of competitive capital accumulation.

⁹² One might be tempted to accuse Readings here of falling prey to the same strain of nostalgia as afflicted Arum and Roksa’s account. However, Readings is quick to point out on numerous occasions throughout his text that the University’s “ruins” are not to be lamented, and more particularly that the “ideology of autonomy” itself, as a historical project animating the University since the Enlightenment, must be subverted (154-155).

by technological, economic, political and social developments meant that governments and industries took a much more critical and hands on interest in what these institutions were doing/producing. Harkin is worth quoting at length here:

If the nation state can no longer serve as the author of interpellation, it would nonetheless be unwise to throw the Althusserian baby out with the nation-state bathwater. Even though the nation-state may no longer be essential to interpellation, some governing power that can authorize an institution like the university system probably is. Multinational corporations, I think, are such a power. “Granting agencies” that serve as the philanthropic branch of such multinational corporations, can, then, have the kinds and extent of control over the day-to-day behavior of ordinary people that were exercised by the nation state in older forms of capitalism. Like the nation state, they assign subject positions (like “funded researcher”) on the basis of an idealized order, a structure of interrelations (like the hierarchy of research, teaching, service) that reflect the design of the institution and name its social function. Universities, for example, are designed as conglomerates of departments that embody disciplines. Two hundred years ago, teachers and researchers sought to produce subjects of universal reason. Today, they produce competitors—for grant monies, for rankings by national publications, for test scores, for larger and greater endowments, for internationally known faculty members, for graduate students. The multinational corporation has replaced the nation state; disciplinary piety has replaced transhistorical truth. But competition remains, and “excellence”

emerges as the mark of the winner. Just as it fostered “truth” two centuries ago, the university now generates “excellence. (4-5)

While many who work in the academy may balk at the description of their work as contributing to the ideological function of productive competition, Harkin is very canny in describing how even those who “see through” the rhetoric can yet be collusive in furthering the project of corporate capital. She is particularly insightful in her analyses of the defense mechanism of treating the discourse of excellence as merely a “game,” and is again worth quoting at length. “[W]e construct a narrative that allows us to live with the double bind[.] Instead of recognizing the system as absurd—and I use that term in its full existential sense—we hide its absurdity, and our own powerlessness in its face, by calling it a *game that we have chosen to play*” (7, italics as in the original). The psychology of the game works as follows:

It is true that our lives are governed by competitions in which a floating signifier is used as a standard of measurement, but never mind, it’s just a game. Old folks tell young folks, tenured professors tell probationary ones, to learn to play the game. You get higher scores on computerized teaching evaluations by adjusting the questions rather than changing your classroom behavior. But those bubble sheets don’t really measure anything, and besides, it’s just a game. A department chair urges a candidate for tenure to rewrite her account of a Marxist thinker, not as an explication of his thought, but rather as a critique of “post-Marxism” because that’s where the game is. A speaker urges a group of graduate students to teach argument—it’s the only game in town. A member of the audience objects that there’s more to the game than argument. The speaker, looking pained,

responds that that objection is part of the game.⁹³ You say my position is absolutist; I say yours is amorphous. That's the game. Your chairperson tells you that the only grants that count in the ranking of English departments are Guggenheim's, NEH's, and ACLS's. If you happen to be a department member who doesn't do the kinds of inquiries those grants support, you're cut from the roster before the season begins. It's just a game. Soon the "just" drops out. The game's the thing and winning is all-important. (7-8)

Readings' and Harkin's accounts suggest that the subject of the neoliberal University today is no longer a philosophical or a cultured one, but a competitively productive one. In the next two sections I will provide a more detailed account of the extent to which Harkin's claim that corporations constitute the authors of interpellation behind the postmodern university may be justified.

The Authors of Interpellation

As we saw in previous chapters, Harkin is not alone in fearing that the authors of academic interpellation are increasingly less the authors of scholarly works and more the officers of corporate boards. As Martha Nussbaum describes it, "the pressure for economic growth has led many political leaders in Europe to recast the entirety of university education – both teaching and research – along growth-oriented lines, asking about the contribution of each discipline and each researcher to the economy. ... Ever since the Thatcher era, it has been customary for humanities departments in Britain to justify themselves to the government, which funds all academic institutions, by showing

⁹³ This example is a reference to the work of Gerald Graff, whom I will discuss later in this chapter.

how their research and teaching contribute to economic profitability” (127). One of the central claims that Nussbaum and many others whom we’ve looked at are making is that the University has suffered (and continues to do so) a lessening of its autonomy. While academic institutions have always been dependent upon outside sources for their funding and status, those funding sources – both public and private – have taken an increasing interest in the returns on their investments, effecting a management and disciplining of erstwhile autonomous disciplines. In the next two sections I trace some of the historical developments that have taken place in higher education in the relationship between the University and its patrons. I look briefly to Great Britain and then more closely at the U.S. to make my case.

In his essay – “From Robbins to McKinsey” – Stefan Collini traces major developments in the structuring and funding of higher education in the UK in the latter half of the twentieth century. While he is clear to point out a number of factors influencing these changes, he is particularly sensitive to the rhetorical forces constitutive in enabling and motivating them, and his article devotes a good deal of time to illustrating the ways in which “certain ideals and arguments acquire an almost self-evident power at particular times, just as others come to seem irrelevant or antiquated and largely disappear from public debate.” In this regard, he claims that “official publications...have a special evidential value. They tend not to bear the marks of an individual sensibility, but rather to deploy the idioms and arguments thought to command the widest acceptance, even when – perhaps especially when – the proposals they contain are novel and controversial.” More pointedly, he argues that,

Since perhaps the 1970s, certainly the 1980s, official discourse has become increasingly colonised by an economistic idiom, which is derived not strictly from economic theory proper, but rather from the language of management schools, business consultants and financial journalism. British society has been subject to a deliberate campaign, initiated in free-market think tanks in the 1960s and 1970s and pushed strongly by business leaders and right-wing commentators ever since, to elevate the status of business and commerce and to make ‘contributing to economic growth’ the overriding goal of a whole swathe of social, cultural and intellectual activities which had previously been understood and valued in other terms.

Collini looks to higher education policy in the UK as “a barometer of the growing dominance of the worldview expressed in these [economic idioms].” The title of his article – “From Robbins to McKinsey” – is a reference to the changing rhetorical ambient in public discourse from the Robbins Report of 1963 to the June 2011 White Paper “Higher Education: Students at the Heart of the System.” The British government commissioned the Committee on Higher Education, chaired by Lord Lionel Robbins, to review higher education in the UK. One of the chief recommendations of this report was the immediate expansion of higher education to able students from populations hitherto thought unfit for academic work. As a consequence, the UK saw an increase from five percent of college age students attending university in 1963 to 50 percent in 2013.⁹⁴

⁹⁴ Gibney, Elizabeth. “Robbins: 50 Years Later.” *Times Higher Education* 24 October 2013: Web. 16 January 2015.

While Robbins is largely lauded for this democratization of higher education,⁹⁵ others of his recommendations went unheeded. Collini points out that

one of the most interesting and, in its way, radical proposals of the Robbins Report was that a new ministry should be created to give universities more direct representation within government. Arguing against the then fashionable idea that universities and schools should be brought together in a new Ministry of Education (which is what happened the following year), Robbins maintained that the connections between universities and schools were less close than between universities and the ‘other forms of organised research’ that operated on a version of the arm’s length principle: the research councils, the Arts Council, the Commission on Museums and Galleries and so on. His committee proposed setting up a Ministry of Arts and Sciences with overall responsibility for these institutions, the point being to ‘recognise the importance to the spiritual health of the community of a proper organisation of state support for learning and the arts’.

While this proposal ultimately failed, Collini’s greater point is that the conditions of possibility that rendered this discourse legible enough to be included in a public policy recommendation stand in stark contrast to the discursive possibilities of today. “Compare [Robbins’ suggestion] with the present arrangement, in which higher education is classed

⁹⁵ While Collini is not critical of the expansion of higher education itself, he is quick to note a fundamental contradiction in values between democratic participation and expert authority. “Very broadly speaking, the extension of democratic and egalitarian social attitudes has been accompanied by the growth of a kind of consumerist relativism. The claim that one activity is inherently of greater value or importance than another comes to be pilloried as ‘elitism’. Arguments are downgraded to ‘opinions’: all opinions are equally valuable (or valueless), so the only agreed criterion is what people say they think they want, and the only value with any indefeasible standing is ‘value for money’.”

as just one part of the remit of a Department of Business, and universities are treated primarily as contributors to economic growth.”

Collini’s words here are not just hyperbole. One of the more fascinating moments in his article is his tracing of the successive government bodies responsible for overseeing higher education, as well as their shifting nomenclature.

For many years following its establishment in 1919, the University Grants Committee, composed largely of senior academic figures, made a case to the Treasury for the size of grant needed by the universities, then distributed that sum among them. Until 1964 the UGC dealt directly with the Treasury, but then the new Labour government set up the Department of Education and Science (DES), which oversaw the UGC until the latter was abolished in 1989. It was replaced by the Universities Funding Council, which included members drawn from the world of business, in a deliberate attempt to make the funding of universities more directly responsive to government priorities. With the abolition of the distinction between universities and polytechnics in 1992 a new body, the Higher Education Funding Council for England (with cognate bodies in the other parts of the UK), was set up to oversee higher education funding as a whole. In 1995 its parent ministry, the DES, was dissolved and replaced by a new ministry, the Department for Education and Employment. In 2001 this was superseded by the Department for Education and Skills, which was itself broken up in 2007 and replaced by the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills. Most recently, in 2009, responsibility for higher education passed to the new Department for Business, Innovation and Skills.

We cannot help but notice the loss of the terms “universities,” “grants”, and “education” from the titles of those departments of government responsible for “recognis[ing] the importance to the spiritual health of the [academic] community of a proper organisation of state support for learning and the arts.”⁹⁶ These transformations are more than just semantics, and Collini effectively illustrates the material policy effects enabled by this discursive ambient of “econobabble.” The major “recommendation” of the 2011 White Paper, “Higher Education: Students at the Heart of the System,” that is the occasion of his essay, was the removal of public funding from teaching and a threefold increase of student fees.⁹⁷ This radical and widely unpopular decision was buttressed by such rhetorical pillars as “market discipline,” “global competition,” and “student choice.” While Collini’s analyses are detailed and convincing, I will limit my discussion here to his critique of the rhetoric of “student choice.”

According to Collini, “student choice” is one of a number of mantras repeated in various forms throughout the White Paper, as in the claim, “Putting financial power into the hands of learners makes student choice meaningful.” As Collini points out,

Part of the brilliance of the semantic reversals at the heart of such Newspeak lies in the simple transposition of negative to positive. After all, ‘putting financial

⁹⁶ Collini traces a similar evolution of bodies such as the Medical Research Council and the Office of Science and Technology, initially under the auspices of the Department of Education and Science, then to Department of Trade and Industry, later renamed the Office of Science and Innovation, and subsequently (2007) absorbed by the Office of Innovation, Universities, and Skills.

⁹⁷ I use scare quotes here because, as Collini points out, unlike the customary procedure whereby White Papers are first introduced to explain a policy proposal and test the waters of public opinion and support before deciding whether to enact it, this White Paper was not released until 6 months after the policy had already been put into effect. To the extent that White Papers are regarded as a major instrument of participatory democracy in the UK, I suggest that this little maneuver is illustrative of discourses of “student choice.”

power into the hands of learners’ means ‘making them pay for something they used to get as of right’. So forcing you to pay for something enhances your power. And then the empty, relationship-counselling cadence of the assertion that this ‘makes student choice meaningful’. Translation: ‘If you choose something because you care about it and hope it will extend your human capacities it will have no significance for you, but if you are paying for it then you will scratch people’s eyes out to get what you’re entitled to.’ No paying, no meaning. After all, why else would anyone do anything?

Besides hypocrisy and a severely attenuated understanding of what makes academic study meaningful, the discourse of student choice here reverses the nature of the relationship between teacher and student.

[T]he model of the student as consumer is inimical to the purposes of education. The paradox of real learning is that you don’t get what you ‘want’ – and you certainly can’t buy it. The really vital aspects of the experience of studying something (a condition very different from ‘the student experience’) are bafflement and effort. Hacking your way through the jungle of unintelligibility to a few small clearings of partial intelligibility is a demanding and not always enjoyable process. It isn’t much like wallowing in fluffy towels. And it helps if you trust your guides rather than assuming they will skimp on the job unless they’re kept up to the mark by constant monitoring of their performance indicators.

To put this in terms of authorship and interpellation, if in the past the University was considered to have interpellated subjects via an institutional authority grounded first

in reason, then in culture, today it would seem that the student comes to the University fully formed, and rather than submit to the disciplines necessary for attaining a privileged subject status, she herself disciplines academic subjects and departments to give her what she wants, in order to become who she has already chosen to be. But not quite. Because “who” she wants to be will in most cases already be largely determined by materially interpellative forces like time and funding mechanisms that see to it that such choices enact a self-disciplining metonymic to the market discipline permeating the institution of higher education as a whole. “Student choice,” then, has a valence similar to “academic freedom” or “the worker owns his labor,” and for the same reasons. In each case the operative term is reduced to a thing – choice, freedom, ownership – ceded to the individual, while the larger social, political, and economic frameworks constitutive of the thing as such remain hopelessly out of reach. While the student actually does, of course, choose his classes, working (as he most likely will) within the material and rhetorical ambient of austerity and competition, the types of courses he is likely to choose, his reasons for doing so, and the spirit in which he takes them up will largely attest to the ways in which these classes have already chosen him. In this way, then, putting “students at the heart of the system,” as the title of the White Paper suggests, is an arch strategy in bringing the University in line with market discipline. The “democratic” expansion of higher education to greater populations of students typically lacking in the resources necessary to pursue it amounts to a kind of enfranchisement through debt. Furthermore, in putting debtors and their “choices” at the heart of the system, it de facto puts their creditors at its head. It is not so much, as Allan Bloom would have it, the closing of the American mind, so much as the enclosure of it: mind, to the extent that it requires

cultivation to be arable, is a public, rather than a private good; while some have the resources to purchase this good outright, most gain access to it via loans. Loans (increasingly more and more), as well as the matrix of material and discursive forces constitutive of the type of subject who requires them, interpellate a market-disciplined subject, whose status at the heart of the system interpellates a market-disciplined university.

The phrase “putting students at the heart of the system” contains two rhetorical *trompe l’oeil*. First, as Collini points out, it paints student indebtedness as student empowerment. Second, it wants to announce an inaugural act, a historical shift in which the university, for a long time imagined to be concerned only with the disinterested pursuit of truth, is now first and foremost a public institution serving the goal of private (student) enrichment. While students ought be wary of both claims, it is the latter that is particularly worrisome for academia. After all, a university’s mission shapes and limits an academic’s work. That being said, if it is clear that behind the rhetoric of “putting students at the heart of the system” lie the economic exigencies (“real” or manufactured) of austerity and market discipline, it ought to be just as plain that crises of critical thinking name similar fears over the autonomy of academics. That is to say, that the student’s mind or the student body becomes a proxy over which institutional and political battles for power, status, and authority are waged. To develop this point further, I look to the history of the notion of academic freedom as it developed in the US from the late 19th century to today. In doing so, I will rely heavily upon Clyde W. Barrow’s *Universities and the Capitalist State: Corporate Liberalism and the Reconstruction of American*

Higher Education, 1894-1928 and Laurence Veysey's *The Emergence of the American University*.

The Indispensable Quality of Freedom

On the “Our Issues” page of the American Association of University Professors’ website, academic freedom is defined as: “the indispensable quality of institutions of higher education. As the AAUP's core policy statement argues, ‘institutions of higher education are conducted for the common good and not to further the interest of either the individual teacher or the institution as a whole. The common good depends upon the free search for truth and its free exposition.’”⁹⁸ As a definition, this statement is rather vague; none of the three claims addresses the issue of academic freedom directly. The first claim assumes its indispensability before saying what “it” is. The second claim is about the mission of higher education generally. The third claim mentions “the free search for truth and its free expression,” but again, rather than explaining what these freedoms are, this claim simply expands upon the presumed indispensability of academic freedom to include not only institutions of higher learning but the common good as well.

To be fair, the policy statement to which this definition refers is a little more specific. There, we learn that academic freedom guarantees (or ought to guarantee) that: “teachers are entitled to full freedom in research and in the publication of the results;” “teachers are entitled to freedom in the classroom in discussing their subject;” and that “college and university teachers are citizens, members of a learned profession, and officers of an educational institution, [and w]hen they speak or write as citizens, they

⁹⁸ “Our Issues.” *AAUP Foundation*. American Association of University Professors, n.d. Web. 21 January 2015.

should be free from institutional censorship or discipline.”⁹⁹ While these qualifications give us a clearer idea of the three domains to which this freedom is meant to apply – scholarly research/publication, classroom teaching, and civic engagement – it is still not apparent yet of what exactly this freedom is to consist. However, the full title of the document quickly dispels any confusion: “1940 Statement on Principles of Academic Freedom *and Tenure*” (italics mine). Specifically, as this statement asserts: “Tenure is a means to certain ends; specifically: (1) freedom of teaching and research and of extramural activities, and (2) a sufficient degree of economic security to make the profession attractive to men and women of ability. Freedom and economic security, hence, tenure, are indispensable to the success of an institution in fulfilling its obligations to its students and to society.” Tenure, then, as a means of economic security, is the material principle generative of the possibility of academic freedom. Tenure (ideally) is less a right or liberty of action than a protection from economic competition, in that the security of one’s job is no longer tied to performance. One “holds” (Latin *tenere*) a position, a station, an estate, rather than works for an employer. By its means the tenured professor may research, teach, publish whatever she pleases regardless of whether it is economically remunerative, socially useful, or politically popular, and still enjoy a sufficiently attractive economic security. Tenure, then, is a materially interpellative mechanism that constitutes a subject free to pursue truth disinterestedly on the condition that her economic interests are sufficiently secured.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ 1940 *Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure*. “Reports and Publications.” *AAUP Foundation*. American Association of University Professors, n.d. Web. 21 January 2015.

¹⁰⁰ As Clyde W. Barrow astutely puts it, “One must therefore draw an empirical distinction between physical ‘possession’ of the means of mental production by faculties

This definition of academic freedom as an interpellative effect predicated upon the material condition of tenure is analogous to my argument in Chapter 3 about the relationship between the liberal arts and critical thinking. There I claimed that the adjective “liberal” is not to be understood as referring to a group of disciplines or a curriculum by means of which a human being may liberate themselves or be emancipated; rather, it refers to the subject position of having the requisite material resources (for example, leisure) to pursue study disinterestedly. That is to say, that the critical subject is a disinterested subject, and the condition of disinterestedness is economic security.¹⁰¹ If, as Collini claims, the pursuit of truth is “a demanding and not always enjoyable process” in the pursuit of which “it helps if you trust your guides rather than assuming they will skimp on the job unless they’re kept up to the mark by constant monitoring of their performance indicators,” it should be clear that it helps even more if one trusts that the time and effort invested in this process will pay off in a “sufficiently attractive economic security,” or at the very least not hinder one from attaining it. Best of all, however, would be to already possess that security in order to enjoy the process as such.

If, then, there is a crisis in critical thinking today (and it is not yet clear that there is), the nature of the crisis is neither intellectual, nor moral, nor even political, but

and the legal ‘ownership’ of these tools by public and private governing boards” (13). I will have more to say about Barrow’s analyses shortly.

¹⁰¹ For the moment, I am using the term “disinterested” with a straight face, that is, with its conventional connotation of “motivated by intellectual curiosity alone.” It is clear, however, that as my argument seeks to provide a material basis for the possibility of disinterested, critical activity as such, this conventional usage will not hold. Indeed, there are a number of related terms – disinterested, autonomous, free, etc. – that need to be qualified with more precision if we are to grasp what is materially and ideologically at stake in them. I will turn my attention to these terms later in this section.

economic. Administrators cannot but be concerned with the bottom line, such that fundraising and cost cutting have become as central to institutional mission as critical thinking or diversity. Tenured professors are hard pressed to keep their own positions secure, not to mention creating opportunities for the next generation of scholars in their field. For this group, money is less the issue than time; as we have seen, however, time is a key economic value. More and more academics are impressed into administrative and service projects, as well as to account for their productivity via yearly “self-reporting” (self-policing) of their “accomplishments” (labor). Graduate students who take out massive loans to finance their education (despite stipends, which are very often not enough to live on) are forced to adopt a professional workload and ethos before they have even finished being students. It’s a buyers market for academic jobs, and not just the good ones. Even non-tenure track lectureships with 5/5 course loads could have a few hundred applicants for a single position. In such a climate, departments can demand publications and a long teaching and service record as qualifications for the position, in effect asking that newly minted PhDs amass a professional track record before they have even been accepted into the profession (not to mention that most will never be accepted as professionals, but relegated to the pool of adjunct labor). In return, graduate students spend an inordinate amount of time trying to make themselves competitive: publishing articles, applying for grants and scholarships, editing journals, mentoring students,¹⁰² etc. It almost seems as if today, being a graduate student in good standing (becoming

¹⁰² Graduate students taking on the mentoring of undergrads as a way to distinguish themselves in a saturated/non-existent job market, while they themselves are often poorly mentored by their own committee members, seeing as these professors are under the same strain and competitive conditions as their graduate students is just one of many sad ironies of higher education today.

competent in your field, making steady progress toward your degree, performing your teaching and/or research duties), is beside the point. The only thing that will get you noticed are how many rings of competition you've thrown yourself into and won.

Undergraduate students are under no less strain, and often have their condition compounded by having to take classes taught by overworked, undertrained and underpaid graduate students and adjuncts.¹⁰³ Most undergraduates do not come to college to seek their passion but to amass credentials to help them in finding a job. In order to shorten their training time and begin earning as soon as possible, many will take five or six courses a term. And they, too, will be advised by a cadre of counselors and student success gurus to apply and compete for all the funding and opportunities that they can. While outside of academe, society is asking, what return on investment is a college education. And governments continue to turn to higher education as vehicle for enhancing the nation's global competitiveness.

And yet, at least in so far as the accounts of critical thinking we have examined are concerned, economic exigencies are understood to be inimical to the disinterested pursuit of truth business. If this is true of the scholar, it is no less true of the student. That is to say, if freedom is a prerequisite of critical activity, and if this freedom is grounded in a material security, then the academic freedom of the professoriate is inextricably bound up with the economic security of the student body. If students are indeed at the heart of the university system, the physical (that is, material, economic) health of that heart will largely determine the nature of the exercises (for example, curricula) prescribed to it, and thus the kind of experts/trainers necessary for the overseeing of such exercises.

¹⁰³ Clearly these descriptions do not apply to all graduate student or adjunct instructors; however, these conditions are prevalent enough to allow for generalization.

The notion that professional autonomy for scholars/teachers cannot be separated from the question of student autonomy can be seen in the very development of the idea of academic freedom in America. Academic freedom in the United States derived from the twin German concepts of *Lernfreiheit* and *Lerhfreiheit*: the former named the student's freedom to choose his course of study via an elective system, while the latter named the freedom of the professor to investigate and teach what he will without government interference. Until the end of the nineteenth century, academic freedom did not exist as a principle so much as a tacit understanding. Indeed, "understanding" might be overstating the matter, as it seems there was no explicit articulation of protections or responsibilities, duties or limits, let alone legal contracts pertaining to such. Aside from now and then offending religious scruples, the world of the American university was relatively autonomous from the greater public that it served. This service was performed obliquely, rather than directly, its teaching and scholarship understood more as generative of public good, than instrumentally accountable to it (Veysey).¹⁰⁴

However, as Laurence Veysey notes in *The Emergence of the American University*, "A self-conscious emphasis upon academic freedom in [the] full sense arrived only in the 1890's along with the mature structure of the university against which its assumptions worked" (384). Four conditions gave birth to academic freedom as we know it. The first was the rise of new social and economic theories (populism and socialism) that challenged the existing socioeconomic and political order. As Clyde W. Barrow points out:

¹⁰⁴ Changes in the relationship between the American university and the public were, however, already underway. To take just one example, the Morrill Act of 1862 set aside federal land for states to make use of in founding colleges dedicated to the agricultural and industrial arts.

[While it] would be an exaggeration to say that Populists constructed “Socialist schools” in their wake, an accusation made by David Starr Jordan and Nicholas Murray Butler of CFAT,¹⁰⁵ [t]here is no doubt, however, that [universities’] social science faculties contained a disproportionate number of prominent advocates of bimetallism, public ownership of utilities, producers’ and consumers’ cooperatives, currency regulation, labor unions, nationalization of railroads and mines, and quite often even socialism. Agricultural scientists in these institutions were also turning their talents against mining companies, whose smelting fumes were damaging agricultural crops, and towards consumer issues of food additives, adulteration, and illegal weights and measures. (92)

The second condition heralding the arrival of academic freedom in the US was a growing number of academics who felt that the university’s social utility existed less in “offering training for success within the existing order...than by agitating for a new arrangement” (Veysey 73). Indeed, as Veysey explains:

In the minds of the Americans who borrowed the term, academic freedom was extended to include a shield for partisan activities conducted outside the classroom among the public at large... Neither the militant American professor nor the service-oriented American administrator usually thought in terms of a rigid line dividing the classroom from the world outside, and the assumption that study had an intimate connection with “real life” worked to produce a broader and

¹⁰⁵ Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, a philanthropy founded by Andrew Carnegie, steel magnate, in 1905. Three years prior, oil tycoon John D. Rockefeller founded the General Education Board (GEB). As Barrow compellingly illustrates (and I will take this up later) these organizations had a vested interest in and exerted a formative impact on the shape, direction, and organization of higher education in America.

quite distinctive meaning for academic freedom on the western side of the Atlantic. (384)

It is worth noting here that at this particular historical moment, the now commonplace adversarial relationship between academics and administrators – especially vis-à-vis matters of academic freedom – was not so entrenched. Indeed, Thomas E. Will spoke for many when, in assuming the presidency of Kansas State University in 1897, he characterized the land-grant philosophy “as that of teaching farmers ‘not only how to farm but also how to get their fair share of what they raised’” (92). In furtherance of this he “instituted a required course on political economy for all students that was taught by a socialist and increased social-science requirements from fifteen to forty-two hours” (277).

The third condition precipitating the development of academic freedom in America was a series of socioeconomic and political crises coupled with social unrest.

The problem begins in 1894, and...the date was not coincidental. The first confrontations [over academic freedom] were played out on a stage which had seen the rise of a new American Federation of Labor, the financial panic of 1893; the formation and first victories of the Populist party, the Pullman strike, and the organization of Eugene Deb’s American Railway Union. The Pullman strike and the Populist campaigns of 1894 sharpened class conflict and, for the first time, led American capitalists to seriously fear the possibility of an apocalyptic challenge to the existing social and economic order. Many leading intellectuals from major colleges and universities attempted to forge an alliance between social theory and

political action by legitimating the new demands of farmers and laborers as sound social science. (Barrow 186-87)

The final condition collusive in giving rise to academic freedom and at the same time (ironically or not so ironically) sounding the death knell of a nascent academic radicalism in the US was the expansion of democracy. The unprecedented growth of institutions of higher learning and the democratic expansion of higher education at the turn of the twentieth century marked at the same time “a heightened susceptibility of the new university to fluctuating tides of public criticism” (Veysey 411).¹⁰⁶ The university administrator had to proceed with caution in order to maintain the patronage (public or private, often both) vital to institutional survival. Thus:

[Administrative] resistance to academic freedom was not so much a matter of principle as it was an aspect of public relations. The passions of the non-academic population, and particularly of its influential members and prospective donors, were permitted to govern the university’s attitude from season to season. In times of marked social unrest, professors were expected to keep silent on issues about which they might otherwise speak. ... The history of academic freedom in America thus became a rather accurate reflection of the degree of social alarm felt at any given hour by the more substantial elements in the American population. ... The correlation between seasons of fear and outbreaks of controversy over the behavior of professors – which was again to be demonstrated during and after the First World War and in the early 1950’s¹⁰⁷ – first became noticeable on a national

¹⁰⁶ In 1800, only 23 institutions of higher learning existed in the US. By 1897, that number increased almost 36 fold to 821.

¹⁰⁷ We can ourselves, no doubt, point to more recent examples.

scale in 1894, the year of the Pullman Strike and the Cleveland-Altgeld controversy. (410)

Thomas Will's presidency at Kansas State University was terminated in 1899 on account of Will's political activism. He was not alone. The end of the nineteenth century would see scores of academics relieved of their posts for similar reasons. To name just a few of the more (in)famous examples: Richard T. Ely, University of Wisconsin (1894); Edward W. Beemis, University of Chicago (1895); E. Benjamin Andrews, Brown University (1896); Edward A. Ross, Stanford University (1900); and John R. Commons, Indiana University (1894) and Syracuse University (1899). All except for Ely were either formally dismissed or otherwise less publicly gotten rid of for their political advocacy and/or activism. And while many at the time regarded Ely's acquittal as a victory for the principle of academic freedom, Barrow argues "that most scholars misunderstood the real political outcome of the Ely case" (188).

Ely was "a nationally prominent political economist, chairman of the Wisconsin political economy department, and secretary-founder of the American Economic Association" whose works advocated "a mild form of democratic socialism" and who "avidly defended the demands of the Populist party as scientifically legitimate economics" (187). In the social and political climate of the time, especially at the University of Wisconsin, these views were nothing extraordinary in themselves. However, when a group of Madison businessmen suspected Ely of having aided a local printer's strike, Ely was charged in a public statement with being a "college anarchist." The charge of anarchism motivated an investigation by the university's regents. Ely cleared himself of the charge, and the Wisconsin regents released a policy statement

claiming that “in all lines of academic investigation it is of the utmost importance that the investigator should be absolutely free to follow the indications of truth wherever they may lead” (as cited in Barrow 188). As Barrow points out, however, the celebration of academic freedom’s victory here was unwarranted because Ely did not successfully defend himself by relying upon the principle of academic freedom (and thus the principle itself was never truly tested); rather, he succeeded in proving only that he was not an anarchist. What is more, Ely’s public embrace of socialism seems to wane after this incident, and he was known to have advised his graduate students to adopt similar tactics. This conscious strategy of toning down one’s political views in the name of professional advancement is even now called the “Ely model” (188-89).

While the cases of Ely, Beemis, Andrews, and Ross were all highly publicized affairs, Barrows argues that the “Commons model,” as he terms it, became the more common model for disciplining academic freedom. A young political economist at Indiana University who had helped found the national Christian Socialist movement, John R. Commons’ economic and political views “soon created silent tension among Indiana’s board of trustees” (192), who promptly pressured then president, Joseph Swain, to do something about it. Not wanting the publicity and scandal of earlier cases, Swain seized his moment in 1895 when Commons was offered a position at Syracuse. Commons had no intention of leaving Indiana but wanted to use the Syracuse offer to leverage a raise. Swain pretended to be his advocate in this, and counseled that Commons should nominally accept the Syracuse offer “so as to make the threat more real to Indiana’s trustees” (193). Of course, once Commons had accepted the Syracuse offer, Swain refused to renew his contract. While this was clearly a politically motivated (albeit

creative) dismissal, to the public view Commons' departure from Indiana was seen as a step up. Commons was to have the misfortune to reenact this scene four years later at Syracuse when, "shortly after he made public speeches that praised Henry George and Karl Marx, the chancellor of Syracuse advised him that his sociology chair was being abolished for financial reasons" (193). The financial reasons, as it turns out, were the withholding of contributions by prominent donors so long as Commons remained on faculty. In addition, according to Commons' account of the conversation, the chancellor "warned him of an agreement reached at a recent meeting of university presidents not to hire any 'radicals.' A blacklist was being circulated. Commons' name would be kept off the list if he voluntarily resigned and kept silent" (193). This he did, and ended up being hired by Ely at the University of Wisconsin, where, as Barrow claims he "became an Ely protégé and adopted a more and more conservative, scholastic, and careerist strategy of survival."

I want to make three claims about academic freedom here. First, academic freedom arose less as a concept than as the elision of a de facto context of relative professional autonomy with a principle of and right to such by those in higher education. Second, the presumption of academic freedom that enabled so much radicalism among both professors and administrators at the end of the nineteenth century led to a disciplining of those activists and activities such that the moment of academic freedom's emergence is simultaneously a monument to its passing. Third, discourses of academic freedom name less a right or principle of the disinterested pursuit of truth than crises of authority, identity, and economic security in maintaining and managing the material conditions constitutive of such pursuits.

In a sense, then, I want to argue that academic freedom is and always has been something of a chimera. To the extent that the material realization and securing of any freedom is founded in some power or authority, and that in the university such authority is invested in its trustees, regents, and/or chief officers, academic freedom is a conceit of those who imagine it possible to be autonomous from the very institution from which they beg their autonomy. Barrow reads this misrecognition in terms of identification; specifically, he locates it in the different interpellative contexts constitutive of academics and administrators.¹⁰⁸

Faculties identified the university exclusively with themselves as a collective body. Consequently, their concept of academic responsibility and institutional

¹⁰⁸ It is important to remember here that the constitutive nature of interpellation, like any constitution, is both stabilizing as well as subject to amendment or even dissolution. Changes in the material and discursive contexts of the subject can alter that subject, just as the subject can make changes in and to their material and discursive contexts. There is no surprise, then, when a professor who had so adamantly identified with the interests and values of the academic class, upon being made the dean of liberal arts and sciences, for example, in time finds herself identifying not only with the interests and values of the administrative class to which she had so long been antipathetic, but that she should also find a qualitative change in her identification with the university as an institution as well. And what is good for the professorial goose is also good for the student gander. While in earlier chapters I worked to make the case that many students come to the university from material and discursive backgrounds that preclude them from making the most of that access to the liberal arts which has been granted them, it is just as true that changes in their material and discursive contexts can impact their abilities to utilize those resources. Malcolm X provides an interesting example in this regard. A junior high drop out, by nineteen Malcolm X was more or less illiterate when he was served an eight to ten year sentence for larceny and breaking and entering. It was in prison that Malcolm X not only taught himself how to read and write, but acquainted himself with world and American history as well as political theory and philosophy. He credits serving time in prison as constitutive of the possibility of his “liberal arts” education: “Prison enabled me to study far more intensively than I would have if my life had gone differently and I had attended some college. I imagine that one of the biggest troubles with colleges is that there are too many distractions, too much panty-raiding, fraternities, and boola-boola and all of that. Where else but in prison could I have attacked my ignorance by being able to study intensely sometimes as much as fifteen hours a day” (Malcolm X).

loyalty precluded a priori any notion that a faculty member could ever act against the interests of the university. They *were* the university, as well as the historical agents of the academic ideal to pursue truth for its own sake. The idea that academic responsibility or professional loyalty could impose external restraints on research or teaching was inconceivable. (Barrow 197)

While at the beginning of the nineteenth century there was little to distinguish academics from administrators, the former typically serving in the offices of the latter, by the turn of the century these designations would come to be seen as and to represent two distinct classes. The unprecedented growth of institutions of higher learning, student bodies, and those responsible for training them necessitated an increasingly complex organizational structure as well as a specialized personnel for managing it. “By 1900 it could be said that administration had developed something like its full measure of force in American higher education. In that year a book appeared fully devoted to the topic of academic management... In 1902 college presidents were urged to undertake special training as preparation for their positions” (Veysey 306). While at the beginning of the nineteenth century it may have been possible for a single class to say of itself, “We are the university,” it took barely one hundred years before others groups could similarly claim, “*We* are the university.” Ironical as it may seem, it is only at the point of such a division that the rhetorical principle of identification becomes operative.

Identification is the key term in Kenneth Burke’s *A Rhetoric of Motives* and is at the heart of his system of rhetoric. While the discipline of rhetoric up to Burke’s time concerned itself largely (though not exclusively) with the persuasive strategies and effects of rhetoric, Burke turned his attention to the material and discursive conditions

that allow for the possibility of suasion as such. Similar, yet prior to, Althusser's notion of interpellation, identification names the material and discursive conditions and strategies that constitute and mediate a subject's relationship to her/his self, others, and to things and ideas.¹⁰⁹ It also works to establish relationships between other people and things. Thus, while the academic may identify himself with the values and interests of scholarship, he may also identify administrators with the values and interests of the market. In fact, for Burke, identification is never purely such, but always entails division. "Identification is affirmed with earnestness precisely because there is division. Identification is compensatory to division. If men were not apart from one another, there would be no need for the rhetorician to proclaim their unity. If men were wholly and truly of one substance, absolute communication would be of man's very essence" (22).

Burke's notion of identification gives us a deeper insight into the mechanics of the false binary of scholarly versus market values that was discussed in Chapter 4. If it is true that these two sets of values are irreconcilable, it is no less true that they are inseparable. It is this co-constitutive condition that provides both positions with the grounds for struggle. Burke is worth quoting at length here:

In pure identification there would be no strife. Likewise, there would be no strife in absolute separateness, since opponents can only join battle through a mediatory ground that makes their communication possible, thus providing the first condition necessary for their interchange of blows. But put identification and

¹⁰⁹ As with my usage of interpellation, if my gloss on identification seems different from its typical formulation, it is because I focus less on its effects and more on its conditions of possibility. I am certainly not the first to do so. Maurice Charland draws explicitly upon Burkean identification and Althusserian interpellation in formulating his conception of constitutive rhetoric.

division ambiguously together, so that you cannot know for certain just where one ends and the other begins, and you have the characteristic invitation to rhetoric.

...When two men collaborate in an enterprise to which they contribute different kinds of services and from which they derive different amounts and kinds of profit, who is to say, once and for all, just where “cooperation” ends and one partner’s “exploitation” of the other begins? The wavering line between the two cannot be “scientifically” identified; rival rhetoricians can draw it at different places and their persuasiveness varies with the resources each has at his command. (Where public issues are concerned, such resources are not confined to the intrinsic powers of the speaker and the speech, but depend also for their effectiveness upon the purely technical means of communication, which can either aid the utterance or hamper it. For a “good” rhetoric neglected by the press obviously cannot be so “communicative” as a poor rhetoric backed nationwide by headlines. And often we must think of rhetoric not in terms of some one particular address, but as a general *body of identifications* that owe their convincingness much more to trivial repetition and dull daily reinforcement than to exceptional rhetorical skill.) (25-26)

Burke’s discussion of identification here touches on a number of points I have been making throughout this text about the interpellative nature of rhetoric in constituting subjects, with the understanding that rhetoric’s force is not limited to the discursive but entails material conditions as well. In terms of our current discussion, identification helps us to better understand how the genesis of academic freedom reveals less the emergence of a pure principle of scholarly value than a growing crisis of identification between

stakeholders in the university (not only academics and administrators, but trustees and regents – including government and the public, and eventually students and parents) who “collaborate[d] in an enterprise to which they contribute[d] different kinds of services and from which they derive[d] different amounts and kinds of profit.” This proliferation of stakeholders with their attendant, often disparate stakes in higher education was caused by the sweeping changes in the university’s funding, governance, and organizational structure concomitant with the larger socioeconomic, political, cultural, and technological changes taking place in the US at the time. It is not insignificant that Burke locates the moment of identification at the site of death. “[T]he *killing* of something is the *changing* of it, and the statement of the thing’s nature before and after the change is an *identifying* of it” (20). In many ways, the university was no longer what it used to be, and many who worked there felt they had much to lose in its passing. As a constitutive rhetoric, academic freedom galvanized the professoriate to resist encroachments – both real and imagined – upon a presumed autonomy, as well as to rigorously advocate for greater security, recognition, income, and power (Veysey 393). Academic freedom then, is an identificatory strategy that seeks to (re)constitute the (real or imagined or somewhere in between) autonomy and authority of academics as a class, which autonomy was itself only a contingency of the historical material conditions in which the university operated, and not a recognized principle in itself. And yet, to the extent that identification is rooted in division, the thrust of constitutive rhetorics will always be outward rather than inward, their efficacy more in defining what one is against than in naming what one is. The discourse of academic freedom is illustrative here.

As Laurence Veysey points out, “Despite the militancy with which it was put forward, the ideal of academic freedom was often notable for its vagueness” (385). As we have already seen, while there was a vibrant strain of those who believed that academic freedom was not just a license, but a mandate to educate both students and the public toward social change, as well as to actively militate for such changes, for most academics at the time, academic freedom was largely a matter of professional autonomy. “Although often associated with a utilitarian ideal for higher education, it was by no means inherently a democratic goal. Thus a researcher such as Edmund C. Sanford of Clark University could speak of ‘the absurdity of setting laymen to investigate a man of science’ as a strong argument on behalf of *Lehrfreiheit*. One suspects, especially at the state universities, that academic freedom was often tacitly conceived as a buffer *against* an intolerant democracy” (386, italics as in original). Interestingly enough, while the public’s presumption to pass judgment on academic affairs was constructed as narrow-minded intolerance, tolerance itself was not at the time an academic value. “Nor was academic freedom particularly to be associated with the arrival of a generous relativism of outlook. ...Most of the supporters of *Lehrfreiheit* in American universities before 1910 believed in a freedom to expound *the truth*. Glory in a diversity of opinions for its own sake was to come only later” (386, italics as in original). If academic freedom appears here to be a rather strained and contradictory concept, Veysey provides an analysis that is startlingly similar to Burke’s description of identification.

These incongruities may seem less important if one locates the center of the dispute over academic freedom not in the realm of abstract reason but rather in that of institutional authority and hierarchy. The peculiar thrust of the problem

lay, after all, in the fact that it represented *an internal struggle between men who lived together on the same campus*. Academic freedom thrived on the passionate sense of one's having been "wronged"; it was an outcry against seemingly unjust treatment. At its heart it was not unlike any other labor dispute. ...[B]y the turn of the century academic freedom in the United States primarily involved institutional relationships, not educational theory. *Liberty, even in the academic context, became inextricably linked with matters of security, status, salary, and power.* (386-387, italics mine)

If we accept the analyses put forth here, then I believe we can say that academic freedom, like "excellence," functions as a floating signifier. It is a constitutive rhetoric that galvanizes subjects and yet remains "open to continual contestation and articulation to radically different political projects." This is not at all to say that academic freedom and excellence are the same things; clearly they are not. And yet the value of an interpellative analysis is precisely in its ability to dislodge us from a rhetorically limited essentializing of things as things. And here we would do well to remember Patricia Harkin's astute analysis of excellence, wherein she does not define it as a concept so much as she describes how it works. Harkin: "[T]he content of the word 'excellence' is competition, and its referent is winning." If academic freedom is "inextricably linked with matters of security, status, salary, and power," and if academic excellence is a matter of competition and winning, then we can see how "freedom" and "excellence" define and delimit the "mediatory ground" upon which professors and administrators compete for the academy. We must keep in mind that academic freedom's inextricable ties to material security in no way reduces the legitimacy of its advocates' claims to mere self-interest; if

we accept that the disinterested pursuit of truth produces a certain good, either intrinsically or instrumentally, and if we are committed to that good, then we must likewise be committed to securing the material conditions that allow for it. By the same token, if we accept that the discourse of excellence refers to competition and winning (and I do), we must keep in mind that the role of competition in free market economics is likewise to produce a certain good, and that competition names less a specific action than a free state necessary for such goods to be produced.

I want to end this chapter by stating more forcefully an idea I have been hovering over for some time. In the preceding chapter I argued we construct a false binary when we pit the disinterested pursuit of truth against market interests. My main point was that in doing so we falsely assume truth production and market forces to be independent spheres and activities that can meaningfully compete with one another, whereas truth production is already imbricated in, and perhaps even subsumed by, economic realities and forces.¹¹⁰ Here I want to go a step further and suggest that even if we could practically separate academic and market activities, the problem is that their value structures, far from being antithetical to one another, are identical in nature. The value claim of each sphere of activity – academic and market – rests upon a belief in the spontaneous generativity of freedom. In describing the logic of academic freedom, Barrow claims:

¹¹⁰ While I did not make the point at the time, we might say here, in accordance with Burke's theory of identification, that the good or goods produced by either academic freedom or free markets are defined less clearly in terms of what they are in themselves, as opposed to what they are not. Academic goods are assumed to be intrinsic – not instrumental (although, of course, patents and inventions clearly are instrumental); market goods are assumed to be real – not abstract (although, of course, "the market" is an abstraction *par excellence*).

The problem of academic freedom is a peculiarly modern one in terms of our contemporary definition of the concept. It not only presupposes an open conflict of ideologies, but an institutional commitment to the principle that any restraint on the free trade in ideas is an inherently illegitimate combination that distorts the intellectual marketplace. The problem of academic freedom has emerged mainly as a result of efforts to regulate this market within the functional requirements of a corporate ideal of social efficiency. Consequently, as a historical phenomenon, the problem of academic freedom has appeared almost exclusively as an element of the fundamental class conflicts associated with the development of advanced industrial society. (186)

The language of “free trade in ideas” and “intellectual marketplace,” while perhaps common today, partakes in a long history of configuring the optimum working conditions of intellectual production as analogous to those of production in general. In the passage above, the second sentence is a distillation of the ideas in John Stuart Mill’s “On Liberty” essay (1869), which Barrow cites. More recently, classical liberal economist Friedrich Hayek is often credited with having developed the concept of “spontaneous order,” whereby a natural state of chaos gives rise to an order more efficient than could be engineered by human design, and he has argued that the free market is just such an order. Others have claimed, however, that Hayek borrowed this concept from Michael Polanyi (scientist, economist, philosopher), who, in a series of articles, republished in *The Contempt of Freedom* (1940) and *The Logic of Liberty* (1951), compared the truth producing process of scientific discourse with value producing process of the free market.

What I have said here about the highest possible co-ordination of individual scientific efforts by a process of self-co-ordination may recall the self-co-ordination achieved by producers and consumers operating in a market. It was, indeed, with this in mind that I spoke of ‘the invisible hand’ guiding the co-ordination of independent initiatives to a maximum advancement of science, just as Adam Smith invoked ‘the invisible hand’ to describe the achievement of greatest joint material satisfaction when independent producers and consumers are guided by the prices of goods in a market. I am suggesting, in fact, that the co-ordinating functions of the market are but a special case of co-ordination by mutual adjustment. In the case of science, adjustment takes place by taking note of the published results of other scientists; while in the case of the market, mutual adjustment is mediated by a system of prices broadcasting current exchange relations, which make supply meet demand.¹¹¹

What is more, Polanyi developed his ideas regarding academic freedom in the context of the encroachment upon science by both socialist and capitalist societies: in the USSR at the time, all scientific research was directed by the needs of the state; in Britain, similar demands were being made for centrally planned scientific research. In 1940, Polanyi helped to found the Society for Freedom in Science, a “group of intellectuals,

¹¹¹ See “The Republic of Science: Its Political and Economic Theory” reprinted in *Knowing and Being*, ed. Marjorie Grene, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969. We should note that Polanyi was quick to qualify an important difference between these two processes: “But the system of prices ruling the market not only transmits information in the light of which economic agents can mutually adjust their actions, it also provides them with an incentive to exercise economy in terms of money. We shall see that, by contrast, the scientist responding directly to the intellectual situation created by the published results of other scientists is motivated by current professional standards” (2). It is no less significant that Polanyi was largely an anti-capitalist figure.

mainly university employed natural scientists, who came together...to combat the spread of Marxist ideas among their fellow academics in Britain” (Reinisch 3). The Society championed a liberal view of science as free inquiry as opposed instrumentalist notions of science that tethered it to the needs of the state.

Polanyi and [John] Baker in particular warned against the confusion of *science* (as a body of theories and observations with its own rules, directed towards ‘the truth,’ that is as “an ever-expanding world of autonomous ideas that exists to be supplemented and modified, but that still exists regardless of the economic vagaries of society”) with *technology* (as the practical manipulation of nature for specific ends, generally closely connected with fluctuating economic conditions). Convinced of the primary value of science, and convinced that knowledge of the laws of nature ‘is a good in itself,’ they attempted to demonstrate that “pure scientific knowledge...cannot be fruitfully sought as a means to the solution to practical problems. To follow such a programme would deter us from acquiring a deeper insight into the laws of nature and even the ultimate contribution of pure science to the realisation of practical ends.” (Reinisch 16)

While Polanyi was largely critical of capitalism, and the free market in particular, he was a staunch advocate for the freedom of scientific inquiry. And yet his description of how truth is produced via scientific exchange is practically identical to how Foucault describes the neoliberal conceptualization of the market as a site of veridiction.

[T]here was something in the regime of government, in the governmental practice of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and already of the Middle Ages also,

that was one of the privileged objects of governmental intervention and regulation, that was the privileged object of government vigilance and intervention. And it is not economic theory but this place itself that from the eighteenth century became a site and a mechanism for the formation of truth. And [instead of] continuing to saturate this site of the formation of truth with an unlimited regulatory governmentality, it is recognized – and this is where the shift takes place – that it must be left to function with the least possible interventions precisely so that it can both formulate its truth and propose it to government practice as rule and norm. This site of truth is not in the heads of economists, of course, but is the market. (*BP* 29-30)

It is interesting to note that within only 30-40 years of its emergence as a concept, academic freedom evolves from a presumed right to educate and agitate for socialist and populist socioeconomic agendas to a presumed right of freedom from encroachment by those very theories and agendas. We must keep in mind, however, that even at the turn of the twentieth century there were many in the academy who did not share an activist vision of the academic mission and saw *democracy* itself as a powerful threat to professional freedom. We might say, then, that academic freedom in itself recognizes no particular political agenda but that of protecting and engendering the conditions necessary for the spontaneous order of truth production that arises from the free trade and competition of ideas. In saying so we must recognize that academic freedom is one of the most powerful argument machines in the production of neoliberal economic discourse and values. This is not because academic values are secretly or implicitly economic values; it is because market and academic systems both aim to produce – and justify

themselves on their production of – a truth the legitimacy of which is grounded in its presumed natural, spontaneous, free emergence.

We can add to market and academic systems a third competitor – democratic systems. While it exceeds the focus of my analysis, we can briefly say here that democracy, especially the American pragmatist, progressive strain of it in the early twentieth century, is another system of values predicated on the production of truth through the free exchange of ideas concretized in the god term “the will of the people.” While it is clear that the theoretical foundations of truth production are the same in these three systems (even if they differ in the practical mechanisms for achieving it), the question remains, who is to be the ideal, privileged, and (most) economically protected producer of truth: the merchants, the experts, or the citizenry? ¹¹² A much more complex set of questions with which my inquiry is implicated (which, however, exceed the boundaries of my analysis) are when and how does truth come to be imagined as something that must be produced, and when and how does freedom become the privileged vehicle of its production?

In wrapping up I want to review the claims about critical thinking discourses and crisis narratives of critical thinking that I have made throughout this text. First, the crisis is multiple. That is to say, the crisis appears as something different depending upon the ethical and political commitments of the one who articulates it. Second, such discourses are interpellative. They act to constitute the very subjects whose existence they claim is threatened. Third, the ideal subjects that these discourses suppose are produced through

¹¹² Given that the truth produced by markets is the “real” price as determined by supply and demand, it might be more accurate to classify the first group of truth producers as consumers rather than merchants. However, none of these categories is unproblematic, and my use of them is heuristic more than anything else.

the inculcation of critical thinking are imagined to be the conditions for building the ideal state, society, culture of which they are a part. However, in their descriptions of what is necessary for the interpellation of critical subjects, the causality is reversed: we need already the ideal state, society, culture in order to produce the critical subject.¹¹³ Fourth, in keeping with what was just said about the reversal of cause and effect relationships in these discourses, the term critical thinking almost always acts as a fetish. It essentializes rather than historicizes. Fifth, fetishes are never neutral but always value laden. The fetish of critical thinking today operates within an economic register. Wherever it is to be found, and however we imagine it to be inculcated, it is always and everywhere taxed with having to produce – an account, a text, a truth – and these products, whether they

¹¹³ All of these accounts either explicitly or implicitly assume the citizen/state metaphor of Plato's *Republic*. (Even Stanley Fish, for whom politicizing liberal arts education is anathema to its purpose and spirit, imagines the ideal state as one in which the expert is granted the autonomy and authority to make decisions, and in which everyone does their job and not others.) What is interesting is that they reverse the causal relationships between the two as Plato understood them. Plato's text is so concerned about the conditions of the Guardians' education (as well as with putting and keeping in place those found unfit for it) as to make it indistinguishable from 20th century dystopias, *Brave New World* chief among them. While Plato understands that properly trained/educated citizens are necessary to achieving and maintaining the ideal state, it is clear that the formative and responsible power is the state. He even goes so far as to justify manipulation in the service of this ideal. The "noble lie" is a necessary political stratagem for persuading people to accept the social order the philosopher king wishes to impose (with, of course, his subjects' best interests at heart). The lie consists in imagining people to have essential natures, and that these natures are fundamentally unequal in ability and temperament. In accepting this account citizens are prepared to adopt the differentiated roles and stations assigned to them as required by the needs of the state. We might say that the need for such a master narrative is the possibility that ideas of freedom and equality might make some (or many) question the established order, giving way either to chaos or democracy (which for Plato were essentially the same thing). Contemporary discourses of critical thinking and its crises, on the other hand, start at the opposite pole. While they clearly imagine certain conditions as necessary to the cultivation of critical beings, their emphasis is on the actions of individuals to bring about the ideal society. Rather than see freedom as antagonistic to justice, truth, and the critical, it is freedom alone that is imagined to produce and be produced by them.

compete or not (and they will always, finally, have to compete) must create value.¹¹⁴

Sixth, in this way then the academy cannot operate as a site for contesting economic truth regimes. Indeed, if we accept Foucault's analyses in *The Birth of Biopolitics* that from the eighteenth century onward the market becomes a (if not *the*) privileged site of veridiction, of truth telling or truth production, and that this is the result not of economic theory but of the conditions in which the optimal market operates (freedom and competition), then rather than imagining that critical thinking today has been co-opted by economic imperatives, it would be more apt to say that economic values and models are driven by truth producing mechanisms. That is to say, it is the ceaseless and unquestioned drive to produce truth at all costs that animates the spirit of economics as such. That is to say, that the value we place in the market is not primarily in its economic productivity, and as an effect of this, its ability to generate truth claims. As a site of veridiction, it is rather the market's ability (in certain conditions) to allow for the spontaneous eruption of truth as such that makes it a driver of economic value. In this schema, truth is not a species of economics; rather, economics is a kind of truth discourse. To bemoan the encroachment of economic values into "the pursuit of truth business" (a handy phrase I borrow from Fish) is not only to misunderstand the way in which the truth drive *is* the driver of economics but also to fetishize the truth in such a way as to strengthen the economic argument rather than to weaken it.

If we accept the foregoing analyses, then I believe we need to understand that if there is a crisis, it is not about the relative amount of discursive skills preparation taking

¹¹⁴ By way of contrast we might think of something like *care*, which, even if universally recognized as valuable, is not thought in itself to be either productive or value producing, but as an obligation or relationship first. Though it might entail productive consequences, these are irrelevant to its value.

place in education, higher or otherwise. Rather, this crisis is more properly characterized by and understood as a crisis of authority and autonomy. Proponents of critical thinking seek to assume or maintain (or regain, in the case of those who feel they have lost it) the authority and autonomy (either for themselves or some body or institution) to put in place such conditions as they imagine foster critical beings or behavior. Critical subjects are those imagined as having both the authority to make judgments or truth claims, as well as the disposition and autonomy to do so. As an administrative or pedagogical goal, the production of critical beings, like efficiency, depends upon a ratio of fixed to free conditions: what must be fixed or put in place and what must be freed up in order that the critical subject produce such and such or act in such a way. The possibility for critical action, then, would be a matrix of those forces and constraints that the subject is free *from* and those possibilities and spaces which she is free *to* engage or inhabit. I'll stop here, as the question of freedom is one that I do not have the time or resources to develop. At the very least, however, I think it is clear that freedom cannot be understood as a pure quality or essence in itself, but must always be qualified by questions: Who is to receive freedom? How much and which kinds of freedom (e.g. license to action or liberty from restraint or deprivation) is one to receive? For what is this freedom to be used, or wherein or in what is it to manifest itself? Put in this way, questions of freedom or critical thinking are not philosophical but technical in nature, and they require not academic, but material answers.

Conclusion. What Can Be Learned from a Fetish?

According to Raymond Williams, the word *criticism* encapsulates a class antagonism. Of its two primary meanings, one refers to faultfinding, the other to a more general sense of judgment, particularly in response to cultural objects. The former sense developed toward censure, the latter toward taste, cultivation, and culture. It is in these latter formations, Williams argues, that criticism becomes ideological (*Keywords* 75).

Criticism became the name for a type of learned response to certain objects. The learning in question here is not so much that of formal education as that of the informal processes by which people are acculturated to the objects, environments, values, and discursive habits typical of their class. A value neutral term for describing how both an aristocrat and a working class person react to cultural artifacts would be *response*. “Criticism” not only dresses up the responses of the former as inherently superior to those of the latter, it also imagines this dressing as indicative of a faculty of mind that the latter is supposed to lack. If we extrapolate the way in which the activity of criticism is functioning ideologically here to the activity of critical thinking in general, this process names the fetishization of the intellect. The metamorphosis of a particular kind of response into a general faculty of judgment (which, though general, is only ever supposed to be in the possession of a few)¹¹⁵ is ideological for two reasons: 1) because in distinguishing between learned and unlearned (or differently learned) responses it not only imposes a value structure that privileges the former over the latter, but in doing so it imagines the former a kind of thing in itself (and a superior thing at that) – judgment –

¹¹⁵ This apparent paradox is a constitutive fiction of all meritocracies – we could not believe in the merit of some if we did not also believe that others had equal opportunity to so distinguish themselves.

rather than one kind of response among others; 2) it obfuscates the class resources and professional experiences requisite to conditioning such responses. Thus the democratic appearance of a concept which refers to a general faculty of human cognition, available to all, is belied by the very class specific circumstances which condition only certain responses and ways of responding as being legible as judgment or critical. According to Williams, the first sense of criticism noted above, that of fault-finding, developed and continues on as a critique of the notion of criticism as judgment, deflating the pretensions of those who hold such a position by reducing them to nothing more than the wittering of pretentious nay-sayers. While Williams finds such a rhetorical strategy useful, he makes an even more radical suggestion: instead of quibbling over terms, what if we were to get rid of criticism altogether?

The point would then be, not to find some other term to replace it, while continuing the same kind of activity, but to get rid of the habit, which depends, fundamentally, on the abstraction of response from its real situation and circumstances: the elevation to judgment, and to an apparently general process, when what always needs to be understood is the specificity of the response, which is not a judgment but a practice, in active and complex relations with the situation and conditions of the practice, and, necessarily, with all other practices. (76)

What would it mean to take Williams at his (key)words here and propose getting rid of the habit of critical thinking? After all, if one of the most outspoken and respected (albeit contentious) of liberal arts advocates, Stanley Fish, can claim that critical thinking is “a phrase without content,” then the suggestion ought at least give us pause for considering what might be gained and what might be lost in relinquishing our belief in it.

To be clear, laying aside the belief in a concept is not the same as ceasing to value the things that it was imagined to stand for or engender. We may no longer believe in the medicine man's fetish, but the knowledge and practice of health and medicine are alive and flourishing. We have learned to decouple the salutary effects from the charm and link them to more material means, dispelling magic while conjuring science. Similarly, we need not – and *should not* – forgo imagining that all human beings are capable of reflection, discernment, creativity, and purposeful action; nor should we relinquish our belief that we can create conditions generative and supportive of such skills and dispositions. Indeed, this is the danger of Fish's quip: that in reducing critical thinking to a nonsense term, he erases the very real conditions that enable some to profit by this nonsense while disabling others from doing so. Claiming that "critical thinking" has no content is a categorical error on par with Bill Readings' claim that "excellence" is nonideological. In fact, claiming that "critical thinking" has no content enacts the very form of fetishization that it seeks to critique. If critical thinking is a fetish, it is only because it essentializes and reifies a response or practice into a thing. In the same manner, dismissing the rhetoric of critical thinking for being devoid of content reduces the discursive power and function of the term to a kind of thingness (albeit a supposedly empty one), while ignoring the performative power of its practice as a discourse. One cannot defeat a fetish by denying it; denial only gives substance for further struggle. If the fetishized thing is not actually a thing, then neither is the fetish. Resolution, transformation, or dissolution of the conflict comes from identifying the actual material and discursive forces at work in producing particular subject effects.

To return to the aristocrat and the worker mentioned above, I am not claiming that the former's response to the cultural artifact is not qualitatively different from the latter's, but that its quality derives from a series of quantitative, material effects rather than the possession of some faculty that the latter lacks. Alternately, we might say that the aristocrat does have such a faculty and the worker does not, but then we must understand faculty as something more like a muscle. While we would all readily admit that the professional body builder possesses muscles that the average person does not, no one imagines these muscles to be out of reach to anyone who would undertake the training to develop them. Nor do we imagine that the average person lacks the requisite muscles for engaging in the activities with which her life is concerned. And if science were to discover that an optimal ratio of muscle mass or a particular combination of muscle development were essential to both longevity and quality of life, it would be unthinkable that a sociopolitical system could/would prevent people from developing this faculty that they all share in common.

So what's the deal with critical thinking? Is it truly a faculty that is requisite for being ethical, engaged, democratic, and free? If so, and if we understand the conditions necessary for developing it (conditions which we have seen throughout entail much more than simply being allowed to study at a particular institution) then why aren't there more calls for the democratic expansion of material conditions than for access to the spaces such conditions train one to make use of? Why aren't there more calls for material equity than for educational equality?

On the other hand, what if critical thinking is *not* the *sine qua non* of being human, productive, successful, or free? What if it is simply a muscle that develops

according to habit and training, one that serves everyone more or less equally well for their particular day to day needs and cannot be shown to have benefitted any one more than another relative to those needs? What if we were to decouple critical thinking from the mission of higher education?

The two sets of questions above encapsulate the general thrust of the intervention into discourses of critical thinking that I have been trying to make throughout this inquiry. I have been trying to materialize, i.e., historically and rhetorically contextualize critical thinking. It is my hope that by doing so we might eventually do away with a certain kind of democratic hope with which we've invested the term, the belief in which stands in the way of working towards those things we imagine it to give rise to. To put this another way, advocates of critical thinking often put the cart before the horse: in imagining critical thinking to be a faculty or cause rather than a response or effect, they imagine that the problem lies in extending access to institutions which can teach critical thinking skills. If, however, we understand critical thinking as a response shaped and refined by a matrix of class and profession-specific conditions, then we are committed to working towards the extension of those conditions – protections of time, in the form of leisure; protections from want, in the form of income and social services; protections from stultifying conditions, in the form of quality living environments, neighborhoods, communities, and social institutions – which are the real generators of socially valued critical activity. We might say that the poles of this discussion extend from conceiving critical thinking as a faculty to imagining it as a habit. In good Bourdieuan fashion, I grant the faculty but only as a reification of the habit. And we cannot talk about habits without consideration of *habitus*.

It seems to me that there are at least two immediate implications – and one would hope consequences – of decoupling critical thinking from education. First, in realizing that what is at issue is not an abstract quality of mind but a specific material practice, then discussion can focus on the root of the matter – extending the material conditions conducive of such a practice to all, not just a few. If the practice is reading, for example, then we can openly discuss the conditions, strategies, and material requirements for producing a nation of readers.¹¹⁶ There is ample evidence to suggest that, in the case of reading, there is no underlying problem: if you throw enough resources at it – money, teachers, books, etc. – the “literacy problem” dissolves. There is no reason to imagine that other skills are any different. Writing, math, chemical engineering – if we decide these are essential skills, we have the means of producing a public proficient in them.

The second implication follows from the first. If critical thinking is nothing more than a matrix of specific material practices, then it is clearly not a good in itself, much less a panacea for socioeconomic or political ills. While the critically thinking mechanic might not make heads or tails of *Ulysses*, neither would anyone trust Joyce or Frederick Jameson with the maintenance of their *Subaru*.¹¹⁷ Neither the liberal arts, nor any particular discipline therein, nor business, nor law, nor trade schools teach critical

¹¹⁶ While it lies outside the scope of my analysis, the current “crisis” in critical thinking is just the latest in a long line of moral panics over the state of the nation’s literacy. From Rudolph Flesch’s 1955 classic, *Why Johnny Can’t Read*, to *Newsweek*’s 1975 exposé, “Why Johnny Can’t Write,” to turn of the twenty-first century fears over computer literacy, to today’s fears over critical thinking, such panics are proxies for larger socioeconomic changes disrupting people’s lives.

¹¹⁷ This, of course, is a gross generalization. I have taught literature to plenty of non-English major undergrads who’ve made wonderfully insightful observations about dense texts, while I have met and read many scholars whose insights, even if published, seem rather pedestrian. I have had less luck finding in English departments anyone who could diagnose my engine trouble.

thinking or train critical thinkers as such. What they do is provide a body of knowledge and a set of practices conducive (if other conditions are met) to refining one's understanding of and ability to make distinctions about the particular objects with which they concern themselves. Relative to the topic at hand – this motor, that postmodern text – competing analyses can be more or less critical. (It is also possible that differing analyses can be equally critical while yet disagreeing.) But the ability to critically respond to a given object proves nothing in the way of a more widely applicable expertise. Nor can a context specific critical ability vouch for the critical, ethical, or social value of its activity as such. One may be America's preeminent economist, but that in itself cannot answer the question, "So what?" Here again, Kenneth Burke's theory of identification is illustrative.

As was discussed in the last chapter, identification names a process not only whereby subjects recognize themselves in other projects, groups, values; or whereby a rhetor may make common ground with an audience; it is also an analytic whereby relationships are established between other things, groups, people, ideas, etc. As such, identification is antithetical to autonomy and often anathema to individuals, groups, and ideologies that hold autonomy as a cardinal value. In this the libertarian and the liberal arts scholar are in agreement: do not adulterate their respective privileged spheres of activity – the market, the mind – by identifying them with any other instrumental causes, socioeconomic, political, cultural, ethical or otherwise. Burke sums up the gist of this conflict thus:

The fact that an activity is capable of reduction to intrinsic, autonomous principles does not argue that it is free from identification with other orders of motivation

extrinsic to it. Such other orders are extrinsic to it, as considered from the standpoint of the specialized activity alone. But they are not extrinsic to the field of moral action as such, considered from the standpoint of human activity in general. The human agent, *qua* human agent, is not motivated solely by the principles of a specialized activity, however strongly this specialized power, in its suggestive role as imagery, may affect his character. Any specialized activity participates in a larger unit of action. “Identification” is a word for the autonomous activity’s place in this wider context, a place with which the agent may be unconcerned. The shepherd, *qua* shepherd, acts for the good of the sheep, to protect them from discomfiture and harm. But he may be “identified” with a project that is raising the sheep for market. (*Rhetoric* 27)

Burke is quick to qualify his critique here by conceding that principles of autonomy do have analytical and methodological validity within their spheres of activity, and as such are capable not only of increasing our goods, but of furthering our overall good, as well. Still, he warns us to be wary of intrinsic values:

But along with these sound reasons for a primary concern with the intrinsic, there are furtive temptations that can figure here too. For so much progressive and radical criticism in recent years has been concerned with the social implications of art, that affirmation’s of art’s autonomy can often become, by antithesis, a roundabout way of identifying oneself with the interests of political conservatism. In accordance with the rhetorical principle of identification, wherever you find a doctrine of “nonpolitical” esthetics affirmed with fervor, look for its politics. (*Rhetoric* 28)

I claimed above that the second implication of my inquiry is that critical thinking is not a good in itself. I would amend that here. Rather than claim critical thinking is not intrinsically valuable, I argue that if it is, then it is autonomous from the field of values as such, and thus cannot claim to be valuable vis-à-vis other values. To the extent that the very concept of value is structured by the possibility of exchange, to be intrinsically valuable is to be invaluable, which is to say, to have zero value. While one might legitimately have a philosophical wrangle with my equating having a value equal to zero with being removed from the sphere of valuation as such, this is precisely not the case with the way in which intrinsic values operate rhetorically. The claim is never “these values are beyond debate; do what you will,” but always, “these values, by virtue of being beyond value, are in fact the most valuable, and we should expend whatever resources necessary in protecting them from being subject to evaluation.” It would help here to illustrate this point with a practical example. I will return to the recent hullabaloo Obama stirred up by disparaging the value of art history degrees.

When liberal arts folk rebuke the president for suggesting that well-paid skilled labor jobs might be a more sound personal and social investment than art history degrees, they are making the same rhetorical maneuver that conservatives make in disparaging the humanities in general. The strategy consists of reducing the function of the liberal arts to the inculcation of a recognizable value term – productivity, innovation, critical thinking – and then making claims as to how efficient (or not) the liberal arts are in realizing it. For conservatives (generally) the claim is made that the humanities provide little of economic value, and should at best be considered a frill, but by no means the core of education. For liberal arts folk (again, generally speaking) the humanities are synonymous with critical

thinking, culture, and democratic citizenship, and argue that in losing them our society would thereby lessen our stock of those values that they yield.¹¹⁸ But art history courses no more inculcate critical thinking than business courses teach innovation. Both are spaces wherein critical thinking and innovation might emerge if other conditions are met. The other conditions are, in the main, attributes of class: time, prior education, discursive capital, affect, etc. In the recent gaff by Obama about the value of an art history degree, if we accept the president at his word that he intends to put money into strengthening vocational education and the status, remuneration, and security of trades jobs, even at the expense of less federal dollars for humanities scholarship, then it would only be consistent of art historians to support this plan. If courses like those in art history are supposed to inculcate critical thinking, and if critical thinking (from a progressive standpoint) means realizing the greater good and working towards it, then it is clear that vocational education and strong trades jobs are a vastly greater social good than art history majors. Besides the immediate greater social mobility and security Obama's plan would produce, a byproduct would be that the children from economically stable families

¹¹⁸ I am using "conservatives" and "liberal arts folk" as general descriptors. Clearly, things are more complex. As we have already seen, there are those liberal arts advocates like Stanley Fish who are anathema to implicating the humanities with other sorts of values or projects. It is also true that many conservatives value the humanities for more than economic reasons. In fact, conservatives have historically played the role preserving "the best that has been thought or said" as some of our most invaluable traditions. In his blog essay, "Remember the Canon Wars," Matt Reed claims that the conservative position regarding the humanities has radically shifted in the past thirty years. "In the canon wars, the 'conservative' position involved upholding the idea of humanistic education. In fact, it held that humanistic education was so important that the prospect of universities doing it wrong was an existential threat to Western society. ...Conservatives saw themselves as conserving a tradition, which is their role. It's what they do, and it serves an important purpose. ...At this point, conservatives have given up on the idea of maintaining an intellectual tradition, and have settled on cost reduction as a good in itself. They've decided that rather than defending Edmund Burke, it's easier just to run Intro to Business online and call it a day."

in the trades would have greater resources to choose liberal arts education if they wanted to.

The trap that liberal arts advocates fall into here is this: if they take the instrumental line of defense, it soon becomes clear that there are many more direct routes to advancing progressive causes than humanities scholarship. If such scholarship is only to be a means to more egalitarian ends, then why not simply cut to the chase and work towards those ends than by teaching Shakespeare and hoping students will get the message? On the other hand, if they take up the intrinsic defense, they cannot give an account of intrinsic value that does not rely upon subjects who can realize this value, and thus they must commit themselves to working towards securing the material means for the engendering and support of those subjects, or find themselves in a state of bad faith. The claim made upon us by the intrinsic (*if* we accept its logic) is not that we universally recognize the primacy of its value; it is rather that we universalize the conditions requisite to recognizing its value as such. It is not a demand made upon *them*; it is an obligation laid upon *us*.

Furthermore, the present conflation of intrinsic values with autonomous activity, in particular the autonomy of scholarship from ethical and political considerations and projects, is entirely historical, and not intrinsic to the nature of the intrinsic as such. We can find an interesting corollary here in the discourse of disinterest. Terry Eagleton, in *After Theory*, discusses the notion of disinterestedness as it arose in the 18th century, particularly as articulated by the Irish philosopher, Francis Hutcheson. This notion of disinterestedness, as Eagleton writes, was “the opposite not of interests, but of self-interest” (133). It was a discourse in resistance to the possessive individualism of

Hobbes, and was synonymous with compassion and fellow feeling. As it circulates now, however, in Fish and others' discourses, compassion and fellow feeling are categorically denied “disinterested” scholarship as instances of the ethical and political. It would be interesting to trace the development of this antimony between disinterestedness as an outward directed action on a level with compassion and as an inner state of freedom (including the freedom from ethical considerations) to pursue one's own interests (the cardinal value of academic professionalism). Such a question is, however, outside the bounds of the present inquiry. Rather, the point I am trying to make here about the intrinsic value of critical thinking is twofold. First, even if we accept that critical thinking is an intrinsic rather than an instrumental value, far from removing us from the spheres of ethical action and political activism, we are by definition implicated in the project of creating and securing the material conditions requisite to interpellating subjects capable of realizing the intrinsic value of critical thinking as such. Second, to the extent that intrinsic values are not more valuable than other values, but that in being invaluable they are removed from the circulation and exchange of values as such, our commitment to them, even if realized, cannot abridge our ethical and political obligations to those things that we imagined those values to have yielded. That is to say, if critical thinking is an intrinsic value, then even if we were somehow to succeed in producing a nation of critical thinkers (and I see no reason to suppose that such is not already the case), such a state is neither proof of, nor proof against social ills like poverty and inequality. Our commitment to education – higher or otherwise – is not to be conflated with, nor can it accomplish, larger socioeconomic and political goals that neither begin nor end with discursive habits.

My thinking on this last point has been largely influenced by two works: Jean Anyon's *Radical Possibilities: Public Policy, Urban Education, and a New Social Movement* (Routledge, 2005) and John Marsh's *Class Dismissed: Why We Cannot Teach or Learn Our Way out of Inequality* (Monthly Review Press, 2011). Anyon and Marsh present compelling sociological and economic accounts for why education cannot in itself be the vehicle for larger socioeconomic or political change. I feel that my own work complements their analyses by trying to show how rhetorically and philosophically the concept of critical thinking is imbricated in the complex web of material and discursive forces these two writers address, but which are regularly excluded from discourses of critical thinking. In fact, throughout this inquiry I have been trying to show how a close reading of the rhetoric of critical thinking and humanities advocates reveals a similar indebtedness – either explicitly, in the case of Arum and Roksa, or implicitly, as with Fish and Nussbaum – to material concerns, specifically via processes of interpellation.

To conclude, if I have successfully shown critical thinking to be a kind of fetish, I hope that I have equally made clear that the power of the fetish is real, emanating as it does from material and discursive contexts, and exerting material and discursive force. I hope I have also shown that the fetish, *qua* fetish, is neither good nor bad, true nor false, oppressive nor progressive. It serves a function: to identify a certain thing with a certain power, and in so doing, to rhetorically constitute a set of subjects, who, by identifying themselves with the thing, constitute the material embodiment of its power. Critical thinking, as a fetish, interpellates subjects who, in identifying with it, seek to develop the strategies and dispositions of the critical thinker. As we know from Charland, however, constitutive rhetoric never works in a vacuum. The subject who identifies with a

discourse is one already materially and discursively predisposed to do so. The medicine man's totem *does* heal, but not just anyone. So long as the power of healing is identified with the totem, those who do not benefit from its charm are either deemed unfit or not sufficiently faithful to be healed, or too far beyond the pale of its effects. Similarly with critical thinking, to the extent that we imagine it to be a cause rather than an effect, there will always be those deemed incapable of possessing or benefitting from it, either because "they just don't have the chops" or because "education has failed them." (In the latter case, we simply see the transference of the fetish of critical thinking to the fetish of education.) The point with fetishes, however, is not to deny their virtues, but to understand the real conditions that constitute them. While this is an onerous task in itself, it is made even more difficult by the fact that fetishes are not only believed to possess virtuous properties, but are themselves the possessions of those in power. To understand the real conditions that constitute the power of the fetish is not only to empower oneself to struggle for the conditions rather than their effects, but to disempower those who have historically been held to be the true possessors and dispensers of those effects. I am not suggesting that academia cynically seeks to hold a monopoly on critical thinking. I do claim, however, that such a hold has been its historical patrimony, as well as the bulwark of its professional autonomy. Dismantling this hold possesses very real existential questions as well as threats to a class that has traditionally identified itself as the source and protector of reason, culture, and now critical thinking.

To answer my own question (adapted from Williams') about what might be lost and gained by doing away with the concept of critical thinking, I believe that one of the immediate and principal losses would be the sense of purpose shared by many in

academia regarding the meaning and value of their work.¹¹⁹ In fact, I think it is safe to say that many of us have been struggling with a sense of disillusionment for some time. But as a student of mine once said, “I think disillusionment is a good thing. It means we have dropped the illusion and can now concentrate on what’s real.” So my hope is that in dropping the illusions we have attached to critical thinking and our roles in producing and inculcating it, we come more into contact with the real people and their living conditions that are both the source and ethical end of critical thinking’s virtue.

¹¹⁹ Clearly, purpose is an amorphous and ambiguous concept, and in no way do I mean to imply that all those in academia share a similar sense of purpose. I do claim, however, that the vast majority of them identify with the values of critical thinking, despite the elasticity of this concept.

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SCHOLARSHIPS AND AWARDS

English Institute Award, A competitive travel subsidy to attend the annual English Institute conference at Harvard, 2011

Fulbright-Hays Fellowship, For participation in the Summer Russian Language Teachers Program through American Councils of Teachers of Russian (ACTR), Moscow, 2008

University Fellowship, A two-year stipend supporting the first year of coursework and the first year of dissertation writing, University of Illinois at Chicago, 2001

CONFERENCE PAPERS

"The Liberal Arts: A Value in Crisis or a Crisis in Values?" Rhetoric Society of America Summer Institute, University of Wisconsin at Madison, June 2015

"Critical Thinking and Critical Subjects," Rhetoric Society of America Summer Institute, University of Kansas, June 2013

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TEACHING

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Courses Taught:

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