BILL READINGS

The University in Ruins

Harvard University Press
Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, England 1996

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Readings, Bill, 1960–
The university in ruins / Bill Readings.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references (p.) and index.

ISBN 0-674-92952-7 (alk. paper)
1. Education, Higher—Aims and objectives.
2. Education, Higher—United States—Aims and objectives.
3. Education, Higher—Social aspects.
4. Higher education and state.
5. Nationalism and education.
I. Title.
LB2322.2.R42 1996
378'.001—dc20 95-47290
CIP

Contents

1

Introduction

Jeremiads abound concerning the "betrayal" and "bankruptcy" of the project of liberal education.[1] Teaching, we are told, is undervalued in favor of research, while research is less and less in touch with the demands of the real world, or with the comprehension of the "common reader." Nor is this—as some academics seem to believe—just the lament of the middlebrow media, motivated by media commentators' resentment at their failure to gain access to the hallowed groves of academe. Forever deprived of the chance to sit on the Faculty Promotions Committee, such pundits, it is claimed, take out their frustrations on the University, constrained as they are to content themselves with huge salaries and comfortable working conditions. The causes of the media's sniping at the University are not individual resentments but a more general uncertainty as to the role of the University and the very nature of the standards by which it should be judged as an institution. It is no coincidence that such attacks are intensifying in North America at the same time as the structure of the academic institution is shifting.

It is not merely that the professoriat is being proletarianized as a body and the number of short-term or part-time contracts at major institutions increased (with the concomitant precipitation of a handful of highly paid stars).[2] The production of knowledge within the University is equally uncertain. An internal legitimation struggle concerning the nature of the knowledge produced in the humanities, for ex-

ample, would not take on crisis proportions were it not accompanied by an external legitimation crisis. Disputes within individual disciplines as to methods and theories of research would not hit the headlines, were it not that the very notion of a research project is now a troubled one. Thus, the impulse behind this book is not simply to argue that the University needs to recognize that new theoretical advances in particle physics or literary studies render old paradigms of study and teaching obsolete. Nor is this book simply another attempt to engage with the web of conflicting and often contradictory sentiments that currently surround the University. Rather, I want to perform a structural diagnosis of contemporary shifts in the University's function as an institution, in order to argue that the wider social role of the University as an institution is now up for grabs. It is no longer clear what the place of the University is within society nor what the exact nature of that society is, and the changing institutional form of the University is something that intellectuals cannot afford to ignore.

But first, some preliminary warnings. In this book I will focus on a certain Western notion of the University, which has been widely exported and whose current mutation seems likely to continue to frame the terms of transnational discussion. 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 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. The obverse of this inequitable coin is that the process of expropriation by transnational capital that globalization names is something from which the United States and Canada are currently suffering, a process graphically described by the study of Flint, Michigan, in the film *Roger and Me.* The film's director, Michael Moore, traces the profound impoverishment of the once-rich town of Flint, as a result of the flight of capital to more profitable areas—despite the fact that General Motors was in relatively good economic health at the time of the plant closings. The resulting devastation of Flint (after failed attempts to make it into a tourist destination by opening the "Autoworld" theme park) means

that the majority of new jobs available there today are in minimum-wage service industries. "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. "Americanization," that is, implies the end of national culture.

The current shift in the role of the University is, above all, determined by the decline of the national cultural mission that has up to now provided its *raison d'être,* and I will argue that the prospect of the European Union places the universities of Europe under a similar horizon, both in the states of the European Union and in Eastern Europe, where projects such as those of George Soros sketch a similar separation of the University from the idea of the nation-state.[3] In short, the University is becoming a different kind of institution, one that is no longer linked to the destiny of the nation-state by virtue of its role as producer, protector, and inculcator of an idea of national culture. The process of economic globalization brings with it the relative decline of the nation-state as the prime instance of the reproduction of capital around the world. For its part, the University is becoming a transnational bureaucratic corporation, either tied to transnational instances of government such as the European Union or functioning independently, by analogy with a transnational corporation. The recent publication by UNESCO of Alfonso Borrero Cabal's *The University as an Institution Today* provides a good example of the terms in which this move towards the status of a bureaucratic corporation may occur.[4] Borrero Cabal focuses upon the *administrator* rather than the professor as the central figure of the University, and figures the University's tasks in terms of a generalized logic of "accountability" in which the University must pursue "excellence" in all aspects of its functioning. The current crisis of the University in the West proceeds from a fundamental shift in its social role and internal systems, one which means that the centrality of the traditional humanistic disciplines to the life of the University is no longer assured.

In making such a wide-ranging diagnosis, I am, of course, going to tend to ignore the process of uneven and combined development, the different speeds at which the discourse of "excellence" replaces the

ideology of (national) culture in various institutions and various countries. For instance, in a move that might seem to head in the opposite direction to that suggested by my argument about the nation-state, the British conservative party is currently attempting to install a uniform "national curriculum." The proposed educational "reforms" in Britain are not, however, inconsistent with what I will be arguing. This is a book about the spinning off of *tertiary* education from the nation-state, and such a move will probably accentuate the structural differences between secondary education and universities, especially as concerns their link to the state. Furthermore, the fact that an institution as ancient as New College, Oxford, should have begun to attach an announcement of its dedication to "excellence" to all public announcements such as job advertisements seems to me more indicative of long-term trends in higher education.

Just as this book will focus on a certain "Americanization" that moves the University further away from direct ties to the nation-state, it will also tend to privilege the humanities in its attempt to understand what is going on in the contemporary University. This emphasis likewise needs a few words of preliminary explanation. In choosing to focus on the notion of "culture" as I do, I may give the impression that the humanities are the essence of the University, the place where the University's sociopolitical mission is accomplished. This would be unfortunate for at least two important reasons. First, I do not believe the natural sciences to be positivist projects for the neutral accumulation of knowledge, which are therefore in principle sheltered from sociopolitical troubles. As I shall argue, the *decline* of the nation-state—and I do believe that despite resurgent nationalisms the nation-state is declining—and the end of the Cold War are having a significant effect on the funding and organization of the natural sciences. Secondly, the separation between the humanities and the sciences is not as absolute as the University's own disciplinary walls may lead one to believe. The natural sciences take their often extremely powerful place in the University *by analogy* with the humanities. This is particularly the case when it comes to the sources of the narratives in terms of which pedagogy is understood. For example, when I asked a recipient of the Nobel Prize for physics to describe what he understood to be the goal of

undergraduate education in physics, he replied that it was to introduce students to "the culture of physics."[5] His drawing on C. P. Snow seems to me both very canny and fair, given that the contested status of knowledge in physics—the fact that undergraduates learn things that they will later discard if they pursue their studies—requires a model of knowledge as a *conversation* among a community rather than as a simple accumulation of facts. It is in terms of a model of the institutionalization of knowledge of which the humanities—and especially departments of philosophy and national literature—have been the historical guardians that the institutional fact of the natural sciences in the University has to be understood. In this sense, the general thrust of my argument that the notion of culture as the legitimating idea of the modern University has reached the end of its usefulness may be understood to apply to the natural sciences as well as to the humanities, although it is in the humanities that the delegitimation of culture is most directly perceived as a threat.[6]

As someone who teaches in a humanities department (although one that bears almost no resemblance to the department in which I was "trained"), I have written this book out of a deep ambivalence about an institution: it is an attempt to think my way out of an impasse between militant radicalism and cynical despair. I am still inclined to introduce sentences that begin "In a *real* University . . ." into discussions with my colleagues, even though they know, and I know that they know, that no such institution has ever existed. This would not be a problem were it not that such appeals to the true nature of the institution no longer seem to me to be honest: it is no longer the case, that is, that we can conceive the University within the historical horizon of its self-realization. The University, I will claim, no longer participates in the historical project for humanity that was the legacy of the Enlightenment: the historical project of culture. Such a claim also raises some significant questions of its own: Is this a new age dawning for the University as a project, or does it mark the twilight of the University's critical and social function? And if it is the twilight, then what does that mean?

Some might want to call this moment to which I am referring the "postmodernity" of the University. After all, one of the most discussed

books on postmodernity is Jean-François Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition,* a study of the implications of the questions posed to the legitimation of knowledge by postmodernity. Lyotard's book is explicitly framed as a report on the University for the government of Québec, a report which doubtless was something of a disappointment to its patrons, despite its later success. Lyotard argues that it is written "at this very Postmodern moment that finds the University nearing what may be its end."[7] The question of the postmodern is a question posed *to* the University as much as in the University. Yet since the postmodern has by and large ceased to function as a question and has become another alibi in the name of which intellectuals denounce the world for failing to live up to their expectations, I prefer to drop the term. The danger is apparent: it is so easy to slip into speaking of the "postmodern University" as if it were an imaginable institution, a newer, more critical institution, which is to say, *an even more modern* University than the modern University. I would prefer to call the contemporary University "posthistorical" rather than "postmodern" in order to insist upon the sense that the institution has outlived itself, is now a survivor of the era in which it defined itself in terms of the project of the *historical* development, affirmation, and inculcation of national culture.

What I think becomes apparent here is that to speak of the University and the state is also to tell a story about the emergence of the notion of culture. I shall argue that the University and the state as we know them are essentially *modern* institutions, and that the emergence of the concept of culture should be understood as a particular way of dealing with the tensions between these two institutions of modernity. However, before anyone gets the wrong idea, this is not because I am simply going to bash the University. I work in a University—sometimes I feel I live in it. It is far too easy simply to critique the University, and there is hardly anything new in doing so. After all, the specificity of the modern University that the German Idealists founded was its status as the site of critique. As Fichte put it, the University exists not to teach information but to inculcate the exercise of critical judgment.[8] In this sense, it might seem that all critiques of the modern University are

internal policy documents that do not affect the deep structure of the institutionalization of thought.

It is also worth mentioning right from the beginning that when I speak of the "modern" University I am referring to the German model, widely copied, that Humboldt instituted at the University of Berlin and that still served for the postwar expansion of tertiary education in the West. I would argue that we are now in the twilight of this model, as the University becomes posthistorical. In this context, Allan Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind* seems to me to be more in touch with reality than the liberal nostrums of Jaroslav Pelikan in his *The Idea of the University,* which recalls us to a lost mission of liberal education.[9] Bloom's conservative jeremiad at least recognizes that the autonomy of knowledge as an end in itself is threatened, because there is no longer a *subject* that might incarnate this principle, hence Bloom's repeated ridiculing of much of what goes on in the University as unintelligible and irrelevant to any student (read young-white-male-American student). Pelikan, on the other hand, prefaces his work with a Newmanesque pun that suggests that *The Idea of the University* might well have been retitled *Apologia pro vita sua.* This pun arouses my suspicion because I am inclined to agree with Bloom's conclusion that the story of what he calls "the adventure of a liberal education" no longer has a hero.[10] Neither a student hero to embark upon it, nor a professor hero as its end.

Some sense of how this came about can be grasped from reading a text such as Jacques Barzun's *The American University: How It Runs, Where It Is Going.*[11] This work, which dates from 1968, has recently been reprinted by the University of Chicago Press, a remarkable feat for a text that claims a contemporary relevance in the 1990s and yet which was self-consciously out of date at the time of its first publication. Barzun remarks in a May 1968 postscript to the January 1968 preface (an ironic locus if ever there were one)[12] that he sees "no reason to change or add to the substance" of a text completed six weeks prior to the student "outbreak of April 23 [1968] that disrupted the work of Columbia University" (xxxvi). This insouciance might seem strange in a work centered on the question of how an administrator is to act. Yet

it is less paradoxical once we realize that the narrative upon which Barzun is engaged is that of the production of the enlightened and liberal administrator as the new hero of the story of the University. Thus Barzun explicitly proposes the formation of an autonomous stratum of non-academic administrators within the University, a "second layer": "If caught young, such men [*sic*] can become top civil-servants and be accepted as professionals without being scholars; they can enjoy a prestige of their own and share fully in the amenities that are widely believed to adorn campus life; and they can do more than any other agency, human or electronic, to render efficient the workings of the great machine" (19). The central figure of the University is no longer the professor who is both scholar and teacher but the provost to whom both these apparatchiks and the professors are answerable. The difference between Barzun and Newman is that Barzun has realized what kind of liberal individual it is that must embody the new University. The administrator will have been a student and a professor in his time, of course, but the challenge of the contemporary University is a challenge addressed to him *as administrator.*

Herein lie the origins of the idea of excellence that I discuss in the next chapter. It should be noted, though, that Barzun does not feel the need to have recourse to the notion of excellence and is able to recognize that excellence is a "shadow" (222); whereas Herbert I. London, writing an introduction to the reissue of Barzun's text twenty-five years later, bemoans the fact that "excellence" is no longer as *real* as it was in Barzun's day (222n), since there has been a "virtual abandonment of the much touted goal of excellence" (xxviii). Thus we can make the observation that Barzun appears as the John the Baptist of excellence, preparing the way for the new law ("excellence") in the language of the old ("standards"), while London appears as St. Paul, telling us that the new law will be real only if it is as strictly applied as the Old. Things have speeded up since Christ's day, since the elapsed time required for the re-postponement of messianic promise is now down from thirty-five to twenty-five years.

Yet in comparing Barzun with the contemporaries who invoke him, I want above all to remark upon a question of tone: the tone that differentiates Barzun's work (and Pelikan's) from the denunciations of

Allan Bloom or even of Herbert London in his 1993 reintroduction of Barzun's book. The remarkable difference is the loss of the mellifluent pomposity consequent upon entire self-satisfaction, and its replacement by vitriolic complaint. This is particularly clear with regard to the question of sexism. Throughout his text, Barzun refers to professors by the metonym "men." Let me take Barzun's description of the plight of the young graduate student as an example: "after the orals a dissertation has to be written—how and on what matters less than how quickly. For many topics Europe or other foreign parts are inescapable and disheartening!—Fulbright, children, wife working (or also a candidate), more library work, and in a foreign tongue—it is a nightmare" (228). Where Barzun remarks vaguely that women can indeed fulfill secretarial roles adequately in the University and perhaps even pursue graduate studies as a way of preparing themselves to bear the children of their male counterparts, Bloom and London see their University threatened by raving harpies.[13] Where Barzun sees silliness and calls it "preposterism," London sees "contamination" (xxviii). Despite the fact that books about the University marked by the enormous self-satisfaction of its (male) products are still being written (Pelikan is a case in point), it is clear that a significant shift has taken place. It is not that our times are more troubled; after all, Barzun pronounces himself untroubled by 1968. Rather, the problem that both Bloom and London labor under is that no one of us can seriously imagine him or herself as the hero of the story of the University, as the instantiation of the cultivated individual that the entire great machine works night and day to produce.

My own reluctance to assume the tone of self-satisfaction with which many of my predecessors presumably felt comfortable is not a matter of personal modesty. After all, I have not waited for the twilight of my career to write a book about the University. What counts, and what marks the tone of contemporary diatribes, is that the grand narrative of the University, centered on the production of a liberal, reasoning, subject, is no longer readily available to us. There is thus no point in my waiting. I am not going to become Jacques Barzun; the University system does not need such subjects any more. The liberal *individual* is no longer capable of metonymically embodying the *institution.* None of us can now seriously assume ourselves to be the centered subject of

a narrative of University education. Feminism is exemplary here for its introduction of a radical awareness of gender difference, as are analyses that call attention to the ways in which bodies are differentially marked by race. Both are targeted by the old guard, because they remind them that no individual professor can embody the University, since that body *would still be gendered and racially marked* rather than universal.

Given this condition, I am *not,* however, advising that we give up on the University, offering in its place reasons to indulge in cynical despair. In this book I will discuss how we can reconceive the University once the story of liberal education has lost its organizing center—has lost, that is, the idea of culture as the object, as both origin and goal, of the human sciences. My sense of this is the more acute because the particular University in which I work occupies a peculiar position nowadays. This position may seem outdated to those unaware that Québec, like Northern Ireland, is an area within the territory of the G7 group of industrialized nations where nation-statehood is still a contemporary political issue of consequence rather than a vestigial outgrowth to the increasing integration of the global economy. The Université de Montréal is a flagship of Québec culture that only recently replaced the church as the primary institution with responsibility for francophone culture in North America. Working at a flagship University of a nation-state (especially a nascent one) confers enormous benefits in that our activities of teaching and research have yet to be entirely submitted to the free play of market forces; they do not yet have to justify themselves in terms of optimal performance or return on capital.

My sense of this is the stronger in that I used to work at Syracuse University, which does have the ambition of being entirely market driven, a notion that the administration called "The Pursuit of Excellence." Hence the then-Chancellor, Melvin Eggers, repeatedly characterized Syracuse as an aggressive institution that modeled itself on the corporation rather than clinging to ivy-covered walls. Interestingly, during my time at Syracuse, the University logo was changed. Instead of the academic seal with its Latin motto affixed to University letterhead and other documents, a new, explicitly "corporate" logo was developed, and the seal reserved solely for official academic documents such as degree certificates. This seems to me directly symptomatic of the re-

conception of the University as a corporation, one of whose functions (products?) is the granting of degrees with a cultural cachet, but whose overall nature is corporate rather than cultural.

To analyze the University solely in terms of cultural capital, however, would be to miss the point that this is now merely one field of operation. Syracuse's rhetorical rejection of symbolic capital in favor of "bottom-line" accounting (which carried through into the decision-making process of the administration and the corporate executive ethos favored by deans) unsurprisingly meant that the percentage of alumni who gave gifts to the University was considerably lower than at other comparable institutions, since everything in the lives of students encouraged them to think of themselves as consumers rather than as members of a community. For example, the "official" graduating class T-shirt for 1990 was sold to students with a significant markup and was perceived by many to whom I spoke as an attempt to squeeze further pennies from them as they left. The students at every turn are asked to buy the signs of symbolic belonging (hence University "book" stores devote a great deal of space to logo-encrusted desk items on the Disneyland model). Thus commodified, belonging to the University carries little ideological baggage and requires no reaffirmation through giving (any more than a consumer, having purchased a car, feels the need to make further periodic donations to General Motors in excess of the car loan repayments). That some students do make such gifts is an interesting symptom of an atavistic desire to believe that they did not attend a University of Excellence but instead a University of Culture. Some support for this belief could doubtless be drawn from the persistence in some corners of the machinery of individuals, groups, and practices that hark back to prior forms of organization.

Students' frequent perception of themselves and/or their parents as consumers is not merely wrongheaded, since the contemporary University is busily transforming itself from an ideological arm of the state into a bureaucratically organized and relatively autonomous consumer-oriented corporation. Even in Universities largely funded by the nation-state, the signs of this process are to be found. For instance, Jacqueline Scott, president of University College of Cape Breton in Nova Scotia, recently referred to the University as an "integrated industry."[14] She

offered a remarkable rephrasing of Humboldt's articulation of teaching and research. Where Humboldt positioned the University as a fusion of process and product that both produced knowledge of culture (in research) and inculcated culture as a process of learning (in teaching), Scott's account of this double articulation has been significantly updated. She argues that the University, as a site of "human resource development," both produces jobs (through research) and provides job training (in teaching). With remarkable fluency, she preserves Humboldt's structural articulation of teaching and research while transferring it into a new field: that of the development of "human resources" for the marketplace rather than of "national culture."

This is hardly surprising as a strategy, since it is corporate bureaucratization that underlies the strong homogenization of the University as an institution in North America. University mission statements, like their publicity brochures, share two distinctive features nowadays. On the one hand, they all claim that theirs is a unique educational institution. On the other hand, they all go on to describe this uniqueness in exactly the same way. The preeminent signs under which this transformation is taking place are the appeals to the notion of "excellence" that now drop from the lips of University administrators at every turn. To understand the contemporary University, we must ask what excellence means (or does not mean).

And in that respect, on the surface this book makes a rather simple argument. It claims that since the nation-state is no longer the primary instance of the reproduction of global capitals, "culture"—as the symbolic and political counterpart to the project of integration pursued by the nation-state—has lost its purchase. The nation-state and the modern notion of culture arose together, and they are, I argue, ceasing to be essential to an increasingly transnational global economy. This shift has major implications for the University, which has historically been the primary institution of national culture in the modern nation-state. I try to assess those implications and trace their symptoms, most notably the emergence of a discourse of "excellence" in place of prior appeals to the idea of culture as the language in which the University seeks to explain itself to itself and to the world at large. Another of those symptoms is the current fierce debate on the status of the University, a debate that by and large misses the point, because it fails to think the University in a transnational framework, preferring to busy itself with either nostalgia or denunciation—most often with an admixture of the two.

I will begin trying to think differently about the University by discussing the ways in which University administrators, government officials, and even radical critics now more and more often speak of the University in terms of "excellence" instead of in terms of "culture." Chapter 2 attempts to situate and diagnose why the term "excellence" is becoming so important to policy documents in higher education. My argument is that this new interest in the pursuit of excellence indicates a change in the University's function. The University no longer has to safeguard and propagate national culture, because the nation-state is no longer the major site at which capital reproduces itself. Hence, the idea of national culture no longer functions as an external referent toward which all of the efforts of research and teaching are directed. The idea of national culture no longer provides an overarching ideological meaning for what goes on in the University, and as a result, what exactly gets taught or produced as knowledge matters less and less.

In Chapter 2 I also trace this process and insist that it would be anachronistic to think of it as an "ideology of excellence," since excellence is precisely non-ideological. What gets taught or researched matters less than the fact that it be excellently taught or researched. 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 automatic political or cultural orientation, for it is not determined in relation to any identifiable instance of political power.[15] This is one of the reasons why the success of a left-wing criticism (with which I am personally in sympathy) is turning out to fit so well with institutional protocols, be it in the classroom or in the career profile.[16] It is not that radical critics are "sell-outs," or that their critiques are "insufficiently radical" and

hence recoverable by the institution. Rather, the problem is that the stakes of the University's functioning are no longer essentially ideological, because they are no longer tied to the self-reproduction of the nation-state.

Where Chapter 2 diagnoses the discourse of excellence, Chapter 3 attempts to frame that discourse in terms of the movement of globalization in which it participates. Here I argue that the discourse of excellence gains purchase precisely from the fact that the link between the University and the nation-state no longer holds in an era of globalization. The University thus shifts from being an ideological apparatus of the nation-state to being a relatively independent bureaucratic system. The economics of globalization mean that the University is no longer called upon to train citizen subjects, while the politics of the end of the Cold War mean that the University is no longer called upon to uphold national prestige by producing and legitimating national culture. The University is thus analogous to a number of other institutions—such as national airline carriers—that face massive reductions in foreseeable funding from increasingly weakened states, which are no longer the privileged sites of investment of popular will.

In order to understand the implications of this shift, the middle part of this book engages in a historical investigation of the role that the modern University has sought to assign to itself. The history of previous ways of understanding the function of the University can be roughly summarized by saying that the modern University has had three ideas: the Kantian concept of reason, the Humboldtian idea of culture, and now the techno-bureaucratic notion of excellence. The historical narrative that I propose (reason—culture—excellence) is not simply a sequential one, however. There are earlier references to excellence that precede recent accounts; likewise, there continue to be references to reason and culture. What I want to emphasize throughout this book is that the debate on the University is made up of divergent and non-contemporaneous discourses, even if one discourse dominates over the others at certain moments.

To begin with, then, I argue in Chapter 4 that Kant defines the modernity of the University. The University becomes modern when all its activities are organized in view of a single regulatory idea, which

Kant claims must be the concept of reason. Reason, on the one hand, provides the *ratio* for all the disciplines; it is their organizing principle. On the other hand, reason has its own faculty, which Kant names "philosophy" but which we would now be more likely simply to call the "humanities." In his thinking on the University, Kant also begins to pose the problem of how reason and the state, how knowledge and power, might be unified. Importantly, as I will show, he does this by producing the figure of the subject who is capable of rational thought and republican politics.

Chapter 5 continues to trace the development of the modern University, discussing the German Idealists, from Schiller to Humboldt. Significantly, they assign a more explicitly political role to the structure determined by Kant, and they do this by replacing the notion of reason with that of culture. Like reason, culture serves a particularly *unifying* function for the University. For the German Idealists, culture is the sum of all knowledge that is studied, as well as the cultivation and development of one's character as a result of that study. In this context, Humboldt's project for the foundation of the University of Berlin is decisive for the centering of the University around the idea of culture, which ties the University to the nation-state. That this should happen in Germany is, of course, implicit with the emergence of German nationhood. Under the rubric of culture, the University is assigned the dual task of research and teaching, respectively the production and inculcation of national self-knowledge. As such, it becomes the institution charged with watching over the spiritual life of the people of the rational state, reconciling ethnic tradition and statist rationality. The University, in other words, is identified as the institution that will give reason to the common life of the people, while preserving their traditions and avoiding the bloody, destructive example of the French Revolution. This, I argue, is the decisive role accorded to the modern University until the present.

Chapter 6 looks at the way in which the British and Americans give a particularly *literary* turn to the German Idealists' notion of culture. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the English, notably Newman and Arnold, carried forward the work of Humboldt and Schlegel by placing literature instead of philosophy as the central dis-

cipline of the University and hence also of national culture. Discussing the examples of Arnold, Leavis, and the New Critics, I trace the implicit linkage between the way "literature" gets institutionalized as a University discipline in explicitly national terms and an organic vision of the possibility of a unified national culture. The study of a tradition of national literature comes to be the primary mode of teaching students what it is to be French, or English, or German. In the case of the United States, this process is regulated in terms of the study of a *canon* rather than a tradition, in exemplary republican fashion. The canon matters in the United States because the determination of the canon is taken to be the result of an exercise of republican will. The autonomous *choice* of a canon, rather than submission to the blind weight of tradition, parallels the choice of a government rather than submission to hereditary monarchy. The role of literary study in the formation of national subjects is consequently what explains the massive institutional weight accumulated by literature departments, especially through their traditional control of the University-wide "composition course" requirement in many American universities. The current growth of a separatist movement in composition, concerned to demand its own distinct disciplinary dignity, is symptomatic of the loosening of the link that ties the study of national literature to the formation of national citizen-subjects. The terms of literacy are no longer determined in explicit reference to national culture.

Chapter 7 looks at the parallel disciplinary rise of Cultural Studies and at the American "culture wars" from the historical perspective of the previous chapters, so as to understand what is at stake in the notion of "culture" over which we are currently battling. The German Idealists attributed the guardianship of culture to philosophy, although in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries it has come increasingly to be housed in departments of national literature. We are now seeing a decline in national literary studies and the increasing emergence of "Cultural Studies" as the strongest disciplinary model in the humanities in the Anglo-American University. In this context, the radical claims of Cultural Studies display rather more continuity than might be expected with the redemptive claim that underpinned the literary model of culture, however much they oppose its institutional forms. I argue

that the institutional success of Cultural Studies in the 1990s is owing to the fact that it preserves the structure of the literary argument, while recognizing that literature can no longer work—throwing out the baby and keeping the bathwater, as it were. Cultural Studies does not propose culture as a regulatory ideal for research and teaching, so much as seek to preserve the structure of an argument for redemption through culture, while recognizing the inability of culture to function any longer as such an idea. To put it in the cruelest terms—terms that apply only to the attempt to make Cultural Studies into a hegemonic institutional project and not to any specific work calling itself "Cultural Studies"—Cultural Studies presents a vision of culture that is appropriate for the age of excellence.

And even like "excellence" itself, "culture" no longer has a specific content. Everything, given a chance, can be or become culture. Cultural Studies thus arrives on the scene along with a certain exhaustion. The very fecundity and multiplicity of work in Cultural Studies is enabled by the fact that culture no longer functions as a specific referent to any one thing or set of things—which is why Cultural Studies can be so popular while refusing general theoretical definition. Cultural Studies, in its current incarnation as an institutional project for the 1990s, proceeds from a certain sense that no more *knowledge* can be produced, since there is nothing to be said about culture that is not itself cultural, and vice versa. Everything is culturally determined, as it were, and culture ceases to mean anything *as such.*

I will also refer to this process as "dereferentialization." By this I mean to suggest that what is crucial about terms like "culture" and "excellence" (and even "University" at times) is that they no longer have specific referents; they no longer refer to a specific set of things or ideas. In using the term "dereferentialization," however, I do not want simply to introduce another bulky piece of jargon into our vocabulary; rather my design is to give a name to what I will argue is a crucial shift in thinking that has dramatic consequences for the University. In these terms, we 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. This polemical argument does not denounce the history of work in Cultural Studies so much as criticize attempts—however well-meaning—to make Cultural Studies into the discipline that will save the University by giving it back its lost truth.

The subsequent Chapter 8 seeks to imagine the University "after" culture and introduces the concluding part of the book by sketching the general terms in which the institutional question of the University can be posed in the age of excellence, once the historical project of culture has ground to a halt. I attempt to provide the terms of an institutional pragmatism that can make an argument for the tactical use of the space of the University, while recognizing that space as a historical anachronism. In so doing, I discuss the specific debates in which the University is currently engaged and the general terms in which an appeal can be made to the activity of thought. Significantly, this concerns the question of how the University is to be evaluated, and it argues for the need for a philosophical separation of the notions of *accountability* and *accounting*. I argue that it is imperative that the University respond to the demand for accountability, while at the same time refusing to conduct the debate over the nature of its responsibility solely in terms of the language of accounting (whose currency is excellence). To raise the issue of value precisely as a *question* is to refuse the automatic identification of globalization and capitalism. I want to argue that accountants are not the only people capable of understanding the horizon of contemporary society, nor even the most adept at the task.

Chapter 9 discusses how the questions of value that I am raising—and that are of such concern to the University today—become apparent in the wake of the student revolts of the late 1960s, for which "1968" stands as a synecdoche. Those uprisings open up an incredulity about the University as an institution, a committed unbelief that is helpful in trying to imagine what it would mean to be in the University without being able to believe in the University, in either its actual or its ideal form. What I find most interesting about the documents of the student revolt, as presented by Cohn-Bendit and others, is their remarkable *lack* of idealism, their tendency to deny the terms in which they have subsequently tended to be understood. In a reflection upon 1968, I seek

the terms within which we can think the University in the absence of a public sphere and outside the framework of a society that aggregates individuals as consumers.

How to understand the contemporary situation of the University without recourse either to nostalgia for national culture or to the discourse of consumerism is the burden of my three final chapters, which deal respectively with questions of pedagogy, of institutions, and of community. Chapter 10 focuses on the pragmatic scene of teaching and stresses that pedagogy cannot be understood in isolation from the institutional context of education. Much of the current furor over teaching has to do with a simple contradiction between the time it takes to teach and an administrative logic that privileges the efficient transmission of information. I argue that the aim of pedagogy should not be to produce autonomous subjects who are supposedly made free by the information they learn, which is the Enlightenment narrative. Rather, by relinquishing the claim to join authority and autonomy, the scene of teaching can be better understood as a network of obligations. Arguing that teaching is a question of justice not a search for truth, Chapter 10 tries to evoke what remains persistently troubling in the business of thinking together. As such, the transgressive force of teaching does not lie so much in matters of content as in the way pedagogy can hold open the temporality of questioning so as to resist being characterized as a transaction that can be concluded, either with the giving of grades or the granting of degrees.

Chapters 11 and 12 examine the terms in which the University as a space for such a structurally incomplete practice of thought can conceive itself. I argue first that it is imperative to accept that the University cannot be understood as the natural or historically necessary receptacle for such activities, that we need to recognize the University as a *ruined* institution, one that has lost its *historical raison d'être*. At the same time, the University has, in its modern form, shared modernity's paradoxical attraction to the idea of the ruin, which means that considerable vigilance is required in disentangling this ruined status from a tradition of metaphysics that seeks to re-unify those ruins, either practically or aesthetically.

The institutional pragmatism that I call for in place of either Enlight-

enment faith or Romantic nostalgia leads to an investigation in Chapter 12 of the way in which we can rethink the modernist claim that the University provides a model of the rational community, a microcosm of the pure form of the public sphere. This claim for an ideal community in the University still exerts its power, despite its glaring inaccuracy—evident to anyone who has ever sat on a faculty committee. I argue that we should recognize that the loss of the University's cultural function opens up a space in which it is possible to think the notion of community otherwise, without recourse to notions of unity, consensus, and communication. At this point, the University becomes no longer a model of the ideal society but rather a place where the impossibility of such models can be thought—practically thought, rather than thought under ideal conditions. Here the University loses its privileged status as the model of society and does not regain it by becoming the model of the absence of models. Rather, the University becomes one site among others where *the question of being-together is raised,* raised with an urgency that proceeds from the absence of the institutional forms (such as the nation-state), which have historically served to mask that question for the past three centuries or so.

~ 2

The Idea of Excellence

The significance of making a distinction between the modern University as ideological arm of the nation-state and the contemporary University as bureaucratic corporation is that it allows one to observe an important phenomenon. "Excellence" is rapidly becoming the watchword of the University, and to understand the University as a contemporary institution requires some reflection on what the appeal to excellence may, or may not, mean.

A few months after I first gave a talk on the significance of the concept of excellence, Canada's principal weekly news magazine, *Maclean's,* brought out its third annual special issue on the Canadian universities, parallel to the kind of ranking produced by *U.S. News and World Report.* The November 15, 1993, issue of *Maclean's,* which purported to rank all the universities in Canada according to various criteria, was entitled, to my surprise, *A Measure of Excellence.*[1] Now what this suggests to me is that excellence is not simply the equivalent of "total quality management" (TQM). It is not just something imported *into* the University from business in the attempt to run the University *as if* it were a business. Such importations assume, after all, that the University is not really a business, is only like a business in some respects.

When Ford Motors enters into a "partnership" with The Ohio State University to develop "total quality management in all areas of life on campus," this partnership is based on the assumption that "the mission[s] of the university and the corporation are not that different," as

≈ 11

Dwelling in the Ruins

Up to this point, my description of the current situation may seem to have rather dire consequences for the University in general and for the humanities in particular. However, such is by no means the case. A certain amount of crystal-ball gazing might lead us to want to say things such as: the humanities will in twenty years' time no longer be centered in the study of national literatures. And these predictions might prove more or less correct. However, my argument is less concerned with the precise disciplinary shape that the University of the twenty-first century will assume than with what that shape will *mean*, which is to say, how it will be given meaning as an institutional system. This is why my analysis thus far has tended to ignore the uneven and combined development that is the actual form of the appearance of the tendencies that I have sought to isolate. And it is also the reason for my own habit of privileging self-description (such as prospectuses) over empirical study in the analysis of how universities work. I will cheerfully admit that in all probability far less will have changed in the daily life of professors and students than one might expect. Significant shifts, though, are taking place in the way in which everyday practices are organized and ascribed meaning. These shifts are even taking place at a remarkably intense rhythm (rhythm rather than speed, since these shifts are not linear but interruptive). For purely heuristic purposes, I subsume these shifts under the name "dereferentialization," which marks a decline in the ideological function *of* the University that is

intimately linked to the symptomatic rise of ideology-critique as a methodology inside the University.

This process of dereferentialization, though, is not a historical necessity for Thought. That is to say, I do not invoke dereferentialization as an alibi for retirement from the University. Instead, it seems to me that an engagement with and transvaluation of this shift can allow innovative and creative thinking to occur. But for any such innovation to occur, we must address two issues: the place of the University in society at large, and the internal shape of the University as an institution. Within modernity, the University held a central place in the formation of subjects for the nation-state, along with the production of the ideology that handled the issue of their belonging to that nation-state (culture). Its internal organization as a community was meant to reflect that structure of belonging or community in which a general culture of conversation held together diverse specialties in a unity that was either organic (Fichte), societal (Newman), or transactional (Habermas).

In all of these accounts, the University held the promise of being a microcosm of the nation-state. In my final two chapters, I want to ask what can be done with and in a University that, along with the nation-state, is no longer central to the question of common life. This involves two questions: that of the institution's function as an institution, and that of the community that the institution may harbor. I shall not argue, though, for either a new institution or a new community, but rather for a rethinking of both terms. If my preference is for a thought of *dissensus* over that of consensus—as I shall argue in the next chapter—it is because dissensus cannot be institutionalized. The precondition for such institutionalization would be a second-order consensus that dissensus is a good thing, something, indeed, with which Habermas would be in accord. A version of this tendency is persuasively argued for in Gerald Graff's *Beyond the Culture Wars: How Teaching the Conflicts Can Revitalize American Education.*[1]

For my part, I will propose a certain pragmatism, a pragmatism that does not simply accept the institution's lack of external reference and glory in it (as does Stanley Fish in *There's No Such Thing as Free Speech*), but that tries to make dereferentialization the occasion for *détourne-*

ments and radical lateral shifts.[2] Such moves may be critical, but they will not appeal to a transcendent self-knowing subject capable of standing outside his or her own behavior and critiquing it. To refer back to another term I have already introduced, such an institutional pragmatics will be without *alibis,* without "elsewheres," a truth whose name might be invoked to save us from responsibility for our actions. Here lies another of my differences with Fish and Rorty: this is a pragmatism that does not believe that it adds up to its own alibi, or that its denial of the grand narratives is not itself a project. To put this another way, being a good pragmatist is not in itself a guarantee that one will always be right. It may be pragmatic to abandon pragmatism, so pragmatism cannot function as a project in the modernist sense. Hence institutional practices—even in an institution stripped of Platonic illusions—cannot be their own reward. If I have certain principles (more accurately, certain habits or tics of thought), they are not grounded in anything more foundational than my capacity to make them seem interesting to others, which is not the same thing as convincing other people of their "rightness."

Institutional pragmatism thus means, for me, recognizing the University today for what it is: an institution that is losing its need to make transcendental claims for its function. The University is no longer simply modern, insofar as it no longer needs a grand narrative of culture in order to work. As a bureaucratic institution of excellence, it can incorporate a very high degree of internal variety without requiring its multiplicity of diverse idioms to be unified into an ideological whole. Their unification is no longer a matter of ideology but of their exchange-value within an expanded market. Administering conflict thus does not mean resolving it, as one might take the example of the Cold War to have demonstrated. The non-ideological role of the University deprives disruption of any claim to automatic radicalism, just as it renders radical claims for a new unity susceptible to being swallowed up by the empty unity of excellence.

Those of us who, like me, have found the University a place where the critical function has in the past been possible, have to face up to the fact that our current gains in critical freedom (unimaginable shifts in the institutional face of new programs, etc.) are being achieved in

direct proportion to the reduction in their general social significance. This is not in itself any reason to abandon projects for change or innovation. Far from it. But what is required is that we do not delude ourselves as to their significance, that we do not satisfy ourselves with rebuilding a ghost town. Energies directed exclusively toward University reform risk blinding us to the dimensions of the task that faces us—in the humanities, the social sciences, and the natural sciences—the task of rethinking the categories that have governed intellectual life for over two hundred years.[3]

We have to recognize that the University is a *ruined institution,* while thinking what it means to dwell in those ruins without recourse to romantic nostalgia. The trope of ruins has a long history in intellectual life. The campus of the State University of New York at Buffalo is decorated by some artificial concrete ruins that allude to Greco-Roman temple architecture, something that might seem incongruous in North America were it not that it coincides with a history that I have already sketched. This history is that of modernity's encounter with culture, where culture is positioned as the mediating resynthesis of knowledges, returning us to the primordial unity and immediacy of a lost origin—be it the total sunlight and dazzling whiteness of an artificial Antiquity or the earthy social unity of the Shakespearean Globe.[4] This story has been with us since at least the Renaissance, which actually took place in the nineteenth century as the nostalgia of Burckhardt, Pater, and Michelet for an originary moment of cultural reunification; and I have discussed its incarnations elsewhere.[5]

Du Bellay's sonnet cycle "The Ruins of Rome" claims to be the first illustration of the Renaissance of France as a linguistically unified nation-state, the Renaissance for which he calls in his *Défense et illustration de la langue française.* The claim to new origin and national specificity is somewhat vitiated in that his arguments are largely a pirate translation from an Italian dialogue by Speroni. France, says du Bellay, can arise as a modern nation-state by giving a new life and critical dignity to the national language, a task he undertakes on the ground plan offered by the ruins of Rome. A lost splendor will endow the building of a renewed vernacular, much as the stones of Roman monuments were taken and used for building Renaissance palaces.

Where du Bellay saw in the ruins of Rome the foundations of modernity, the Romantics appreciated ruins as ruins, even constructing artificial ones in the grounds of stately homes, just as the monster in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* constructs his subjectivity in part from overhearing the reading of Volney's *Ruins of Empires.* According to this romantic story, the fragmented subject (the monster, himself pieced together by technology from bits of past bodies that have lost their organic life) aesthetically appropriates the scattered shards of a now broken and lifeless tradition. That which he cannot live he apprehends aesthetically, thus performing a secondary synthesis both of the tradition (as object of aesthetic appreciation) and of his own subjectivity (as subject of that act of appreciation). Art redeems a fractured and merely technical life; a unified life that can no longer be lived is resynthesized as art.

The Romantics, appreciating ruins *as ruins* rather than as traces of a renascent past, recuperate tradition as aesthetic sensation through a subjective attitude of nostalgia. The Buffalo simulacrum of Greco-Roman culture as the foundation of the North American State University seems to propose an uneasy mixture of the two: a grounding of both the arts and the sciences in a particular tradition (and certainly not a Native American one). The simulation of ruins has to do with the Romantic aesthetic appreciation of the past, and their positioning beside the concrete buildings of the new University is indebted to a hermeneutic claim for knowledge as an interactive encounter with tradition. In either case, ruins are the objects of subjective appropriation and mastery, whether epistemological or aesthetic.

Freud's point in comparing the unconscious to the ruins of Rome was that the present did not ever achieve the modernist task of being simply present, of condemning the past either to become present (be reborn) or to enter utter oblivion.[6] Hence, in *Civilization and its Discontents,* he revises the allusion to insist upon its limitations: the figure of the building constructed from ruins is inadequate, he says, because it fails to convey the sense that, in the unconscious, two buildings from heterogeneous historical periods are impossibly co-present.[7] The past is not erased but haunts the present. Thus, the traumatic return of repressed memory is a constant threat. To inhabit the ruins of the

University must be to practice an institutional pragmatism that recognizes this threat, rather than to seek to redeem epistemological uncertainty by recourse to the plenitude of aesthetic sensation (nostalgia) or epistemological mastery (knowledge as progress). The ruins of culture's institution are simply there, where we are, and we have to negotiate among them.

This is a different way to think about our relation to tradition than that proposed by the German Idealists (in which hermeneutic reworking returned the tradition to a new unity and vitality, a renaissance).[8] We should not attempt to bring about a rebirth or renaissance of the University, but think its ruins as the sedimentation of historical differences that remind us that Thought cannot be present to itself. We live in an institution, and we live outside it. We work there, and we work with what we have at hand. The University is not going to save the world by making the world more true, nor is the world going to save the University by making the University more real. The question of the University is not that of how to achieve a stable or perfect relation between inside and outside, between the ivory tower and the streets. So, let us treat the University as we treat institutions. After all, I do not need to believe a story about Man (universal subject of history) creating power by taming nature and bending it to his will in order to switch on the light, nor does my incredulity mean that the light will go off. Nor does continuing to believe this story keep the light on if I cannot afford to pay my electricity bill. Enlightenment has its costs.

Although this may seem to make light of institutions, it actually involves a political recognition that institutions have a weight that exceeds the beliefs of their clientele. What I mean by dwelling in ruins is not despair or cynicism; it is simply the abandonment of the religious attitude toward political action, including the pious postponement or renunciation of action. Remember Leonard Cohen's dictum: "they sentenced me to twenty years of boredom, for trying to change the system from within."[9] Change comes neither from within nor from without, but from the difficult space—neither inside nor outside—where one is. To say that we cannot redeem or rebuild the University is not to argue for powerlessness; it is to insist that academics must work without alibis, which is what the best of them have tended to do.

To return to my analogy of the Italian city, this means neither razing the old to build a rational city on a grid, nor believing that we can make the old city live again by returning to the lost origin. Structurally, each of these options presupposes that the city is not where we live, that we are somehow out in the suburbs, wondering what to do with uninhabited ruins. The city is where we dwell. The ruins are continuously inhabited, although they are also from another time whose functionality has been lost. Even if the University is legible to us only as the remains of the idea of culture, that does not mean that we have left its precincts, that we view it from the outside. The question that is raised by the analogy is how we can do something other than offer ourselves up for tourism: the humanities as cultural manicure, the social sciences as travelogue, the natural sciences as the frisson of real knowledge and large toys. If the process of consumerization seems more advanced in the humanities, this may only be a matter of a funding-induced perspective. How much does our vision of what science education achieves owe to Disney? Our idea of the natural sciences is already deeply structured by the mass media, through organizations such as NASA and the Epcot Center, in a way that makes the production of scientific knowledge deeply entrenched in the reproductive systems of mass culture.[10]

The cancellation of the Superconducting Super Collider suggests that the end of the Cold War does not simply have effects on the readiness of states to fund national competition in the realm of humanistic culture. Indeed, there is an increasing problem with what education in the natural sciences might consist of, what kind of subject it might be directed to. Information technology combines with the drying up of funds to suggest that there may no longer be an open market for graduate students educated in the pure sciences, while vocational engineering schools seem more adapted to the market. Hence, the question of to whom an education in physics or chemistry may be directed has no obvious answer. American physics departments in particular may have as much reason as the humanities to fear trial by "marginal utility" or "market forces" in funding battles, once there is no longer a quasi-inexhaustible defense budget. Incidentally, the highest percentage of post-graduate unemployment in Canada is not in the humanities but among physics majors. All of which suggests that the dualist split between humanities and natural sciences that has been the most apparent structural reality of the University in the twentieth century is no longer the practical certainty it once was. Not that it has ever really been so. English was initially perceived in the United States as a practical and businesslike alternative to the classics.[11] Of course, as Graff points out, the study of English literature was soon professionalized under the German model of *Geisteswissenschaft* as an autonomous field of research in order that its teaching might accede to the dignity of a "science," a field of knowledge.[12]

Earlier in this book, I dropped dark hints about the fate of departments of philosophy, which seem to be heading down the path already followed by classics, once the sumptuary laws that made a University without a strong philosophy department unthinkable have been dropped in favor of market imperatives. This may not be a bad thing, since it does not necessarily mean that a set of questions about the nature and limits of thinking, about the good life, etc., which were once asked under the heading of "philosophy," have ceased or will cease to be asked. It simply means that nothing in contemporary society makes it evident that individuals should be trained to ask such questions. Instead, philosophy departments are spinning off into applied fields in which experts provide *answers* rather than refining questions—medical ethics being the most obvious example, not least because the boom in medical ethics is the product of the interaction between biomedical technology and the economics of the U.S. medical insurance "system."

Instead, responsibility for questioning seems to have devolved onto literature departments insofar as those departments are themselves increasingly abandoning the research project of national literature. "English and Comparative Literature" tends to function in the United States as a catch-all term for a general humanities department and is likely for that reason to be gradually replaced by the less weighted title "Cultural Studies." It is worth thinking about why Cultural Studies should win out over the traditional designations of "History of Ideas" or "Intellectual History." This has to do both with their relationship with the existing research project of the history department and also with the extent to which the term "studies" acknowledges that the professionalization of the academy today is no longer structured by research into

a central idea. To put this another way, as my argument in Chapter 7 has demonstrated, the idea of culture in Cultural Studies is not really an idea in the strong sense proposed by the modern University. Cultural Studies, that is, does not propose culture as a regulatory ideal for research and teaching so much as recognize the inability of culture to function as such an idea any longer.

I am frankly not equipped to trace the parallel processes that may emerge in the natural sciences and social sciences, but the apparent horizon in arts and letters for the North American University can be roughly sketched as the development of an increasingly interdisciplinary general humanities department amid a cluster of vocational schools, which will themselves include devolved areas of expertise traditionally centered in the humanities, such as media and communications. Such vocational schools will tend to increase the social science component in traditionally humanistic fields of inquiry, a process in which the designation of Cultural Studies as a disciplinary endeavor that straddles the humanities (critique of aesthetic objects) and the social sciences (sociology, communications) will doubtless play a part. This is a historical irony, since such a prospect has striking similarities to the original plan of many land-grant universities, before most of them bought into the research University model as the way to acquire increased prestige and concomitant funding. Such a horizon of expectation is already being marketed to us under the slogan of the "Liberal Arts College within the University of Excellence." Needless to say, the liberal arts college is invoked here less in terms of its pedagogical tradition than in terms of its potential attraction to consumers.

Such is the role that the humanities are called upon to play in the University of Excellence, one that wavers between consumer service (the sense of individual attention for paying students) and cultural manicure. And the claims for scientific research in the humanities, for a *Geisteswissenschaft,* that have through the history of the modern University assured a dignity to the humanities, no longer find themselves reflected in and guaranteed by a guiding idea of culture for the University as a whole. Hence it is not the research model, I fear, that will save the humanities (or indeed the natural sciences), since the organization of the humanities as a field structured by a project of research

no longer appears self-evident (with the decline of the nation-state as the instance that served as origin and telos for such organization). In a general economy of excellence, the practice of research is of value only as an exchange-value within the market; it no longer has intrinsic use-value for the nation-state.

The question remains of how Thought, in the sense in which I have described it in Chapter 10, may be addressed within the University. We should be clear about one thing: nothing in the nature of the institution will enshrine Thought or protect it from economic imperatives. Such a protection would actually be highly undesirable and damaging to Thought. But at the same time, thinking, if it is to remain open to the possibility of Thought, to take itself as a question, must not seek to be economic. It belongs rather to an economy of waste than to a restricted economy of calculation.[13] Thought is non-productive labor, and hence does not show up as such on balance sheets except as waste. The question posed to the University is thus not how to turn the institution into a haven for Thought but how to think in an institution whose development tends to make Thought more and more difficult, less and less necessary. If we are not to make the situation of the professor into an analogy for the waning power of the priesthood—faced by unbelief on the one hand and television evangelism on the other—this requires us to be very clear about our relation to the institution, to give up being priests altogether. In other words, the ruins of the University must not be, for students and professors, the ruins of a Greco-Roman temple within which we practice our rites as if oblivious to their role in animating tourist activities and lining the pockets of the unscrupulous administrators of the site.

In attempting to sketch how one might dwell in the ruins of the University without belief but with a commitment to Thought, I want to return to what I said about the problem of evaluation. The challenge that faces those who wish to preserve the task of thinking as a question is a difficult one that does not admit of easy answers. It is not a matter of coming to terms with the market, establishing a ratio of marginal utility that will provide a sanctuary. Such a policy will only produce the persistent shrinking of that sanctuary, as in the case of old-growth timber in the United States. How many philosophers, or redwoods, are

required for purposes of museification? If the grand project of research and the minimal argument of species-preservation are likely to prove unsuccessful, it is necessary that our argument for certain practices of Thought and pedagogy measure up to the situation and accept that the existing disciplinary model of the humanities is on the road to extinction.

Within this context, a certain opportunism seems prescribed. To dwell in the ruins of the University is to try to do what we can, while leaving space for what we cannot envisage to emerge. For example, the argument has to be made to administrators that resources liberated by the opening up of disciplinary space, be it under the rubric of the humanities or of Cultural Studies, should be channeled into supporting short-term collaborative projects of both teaching and research (to speak in familiar terms) which would be disbanded after a certain period, whatever their success. I say "whatever their success" because of my belief that such collaborations have a certain half-life, after which they sink back into becoming quasi-departments with budgets to protect and little empires to build. Or to put it another way, they become modes of unthinking participation in institutional-bureaucratic life.

What I am calling for, then, is not a generalized interdisciplinary space but a certain rhythm of disciplinary attachment and detachment, which is designed so as not to let the question of disciplinarity disappear, sink into routine. Rather, disciplinary structures would be forced to answer to the name of Thought, to imagine what kinds of thinking they make possible, and what kinds of thinking they exclude. It is perhaps a lesson of structuralism that, when faced with a disciplinary project, a crucial way of situating that project is by considering what it is *not,* what it excludes. Thus a concentration in European philosophy, for example, would be obliged—by the nature of the interruptive pattern that I propose—to address both non-European philosophy and European non-philosophy.

The intellectual advantages of such an organizational structure reside in the fact that it can draw on the energy of the North American tendency toward "free electives," while detaching the terms of such choice from consumerism. The system of course-choice that Charles Eliot introduced at Harvard had two problems, both consequent upon making the student the sole locus of elective choice: it presumed a student capable of informed choice as to how to become informed, and it presumed that knowledge had an organic structure through which the student could navigate. Indeed, Eliot's opponents were quick to remark upon the need for a core curriculum or a distribution requirement, in order to limit student choice and to preserve the structure of knowledge from simple market conditions.[14] The result was a compromise, so that the tension between choice and distribution requirements has continued to agitate debates on curriculum in U.S. universities.

My argument is that the market structure of the posthistorical University makes the figure of the student as consumer more and more a reality, and that the disciplinary structure is cracking under the pressure of market imperatives. The means by which the question of the structure of knowledge can be preserved as a *question* in such a situation, the means by which knowledge can be something other than marketed information, are not the reassertion of a fixed disciplinary structure by dictatorial fiat. What makes the William Bennetts of this world so angry is that such a solution is no longer competitive. Hence I suggest that we make the market in courses a matter of Thought and discussion by situating it on the side of the faculty and administration, rather than by leaving it as solely a matter for student desire—which the faculty seeks to satisfy and the bureaucracy seeks to manage.

Thus I propose an abandonment of disciplinary grounding but an abandonment that retains as structurally essential the *question of the disciplinary form that can be given to knowledges.* This is why the University should not exchange the rigid and outmoded disciplines for a simply amorphous interdisciplinary space in the humanities (as if we could still organize knowledge around the figure of "Man"). Rather, the loosening of disciplinary structures has to be made the opportunity for the installation of disciplinarity as a *permanent question.* The short-term projects I suggest are designed to keep open the question of what it means to group knowledges in certain ways, and what it has meant that they have been so grouped in the past. This keeps open the question of disciplinarity at the heart of any proposal for the grouping of

knowledges in a constellation such as "Modern Art History" or "African-American Literature." Only by being constrained periodically to reinvent themselves can such groupings remain attentive to the terms of their production and reproduction. However, before we commit ourselves to loosening the disciplinary structures of the University, it would first be necessary to make some very firm deal about hiring prospects on the basis of an overall ratio of tenured faculty to students rather than, as now, on the rather specious basis of "disciplinary coverage." It is remarkable how few departments of English, for example, actually turned out to "need" so many medievalists.[15]

I have a certain diffidence about such plans as this, though, which always smack of bad utopianism, since there is no general model, no *the* University of the Future, merely a series of specific local circumstances. I supply these suggestions merely in the interest of attempting to find possibilities that work in the service of Thought in the current (and, I think, implacable) bourgeois economic revolution in the University. It is essential to understand that this is not a move of "big politics," not an attempt to divert the process toward another result, a different end. Rather, it seems to me, recognizing the University as ruined means abandoning such teleologies and attempting to make things happen within a system without claiming that such events are the true, real, meaning of the system. The system as a whole will probably remain inimical to Thought, but on the other hand, the process of dereferentialization is one that opens up new spaces and breaks down existing structures of defense against Thought, even as it seeks to submit Thought to the exclusive rule of exchange-value (like all bourgeois revolutions). Exploiting such possibilities is not a messianic task, and since such efforts are not structured by a redemptive metanarrative, they require of us the utmost vigilance, flexibility, and wit.

Given the prospect of such a generalized disciplinary regroupment, it seems to me necessary that we engage in a consideration of how the University might function as a place where a community of thinkers dwell, with the proviso that we rethink critically the notion of community, so as to detach it from both the organicist tradition and the feudal corporation. On this basis, it may become possible to provide

some hints as to the kinds of institutional politics that might be pursued in order to transvalue the process of dereferentialization, to make the destruction of existing cultural forms by the encroachment of the open market into an opportunity for Thought rather than an occasion for denunciation or mourning.

Notes

1. Introduction

1. A typical recent publication is entitled *Bankrupt Education: The Decline of Liberal Education in Canada.* The book's epigraph is from Matthew Arnold, and the authors lambaste the Canadian secondary school system for abandoning the "unique hybrid of Anglo-European influences including Hegelianism and Scottish commonsense philosophy" that had, they contend, until recently characterized Canadian educational theory and practice. Peter C. Emberley and Waller R. Newell, *Bankrupt Education: The Decline of Liberal Education in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), p. 11.
2. Recent events at Bennington College are one example of this: where "academic restructuring" has led to the immediate sacking of some 20 faculty members out of 78. Their replacements will tend to be local part-timers, working under a stripped-down "core faculty" of full-time professors. Thus, for instance, "area musicians" will teach courses in instrumental music. Likewise, new employees will no longer be eligible for presumptive tenure: "instead, professors will work under individual contracts of different lengths." Denis K. Magner, "Bennington Dismisses 20 Professors . . ." *Chronicle of Higher Education,* June 29, 1994, p. A16. Whether we call this piecework or freelancing, the general implication is clear: full-time staff will be increasingly called upon to manage part-time teachers. At larger research universities in the United States, the number of such part-timers can be expected to rise as the collapse of the job market causes the graduate student teaching assistants of the old apprenticeship model to be increasingly replaced by part-timers (many of them with recent doctorates).
3. A good general introduction to the Soros project can be found in Masha

Gessen, "Reaching to the Critical Masses," *Lingua Franca,* 4, no. 4 (May/June 1994), pp. 38–49.

4. Alfonso Borrero Cabal, *The University as an Institution Today* (Paris and Ottawa: UNESCO and IDRC, 1993).
5. This is, of course, primarily a reference to C. P. Snow's argument against what he saw as "the intellectual life of the whole of Western society . . . increasingly being split into two polar groups," the "literary intellectuals" and the "scientists." *The Two Cultures and a Second Look* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957), pp. 3–4. In response to this division, Snow argued forcefully that "the scientific culture is really a culture, not only in an intellectual but also in an anthropological sense" (9), and called for a dialogue between the two cultures based on mutual respect.
6. Of course, there are other disciplinary divisions within the University besides that of the humanities and the natural sciences. In what follows, I hope to show the ways in which the humanities have proved in the past to offer such powerful paradigms for the function of the University.
7. Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition,* trs. Geoffrey Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p. xxv.
8. Johann Gottlieb Fichte, "Deductive Plan of an Institution of Higher Learning to be Founded in Berlin" (1807, pub. 1817) in *Philosophies de l'Université: l'idéalisme allemand et la question de l'Université,* ed. Luc Ferry, J.-P. Pesron, and Alain Renaut (Paris: Payot, 1979), p. 172, my translation. The original German version, *Deduzierter Plan einer zu Berlin su errichtenden höhern Lehranstalt, die in gehöriger Verbindung mit einer Akademie de Wissenschaften stehe,* can be easily found in Engel et al., *Gelegentliche Gedanken über Universitäten,* ed. Ernst Müller (Leipzig: Reclam Verlag, 1990), pp. 59–159.
9. Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Idea of the University: A Reexamination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992). This book suggests that Newman was largely correct, and that all that universities require is some updating of his suggestions to meet present circumstances. In general, Pelikan believes that: "The affirmation of the unity of the human race is, for the university and its scholars, both an ideal and a fact: a fact without which, as that kind of ultimate context, research into this or that particular and local phenomenon is fatally skewed; and an ideal that cannot be realized without just such research into this or that particular and local phenomenon" (53). Religious faith in this unity will, presumably, allow the hermeneutic circle sketched here to be overcome. One cannot but add, however, that it has done little to protect the victims of ethnocentrism.
10. Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), p. 336.
11. Jacques Barzun, *The American University: How It Runs, Where It Is Going,* 2nd

ed. with an Introduction by Herbert I. London (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1993), first published 1968. Further references noted by page number in the text; a similar policy will be followed for other works discussed.

12. On this particular structure, see Diane Elam, *Romancing the Postmodern* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992). She argues persuasively for the problematic status of both postscript and preface, and their tendency to become confused, as symptomatic of a general problem of textuality.
13. "Within the department, continuity is best assured by the administrative assistant, usually a woman" (103). Remember that the administrative deans are consistently referred to as "men," and one cannot but be reminded that the generic form "man" is not as inclusive as anti-feminists usually claim.
14. Jacqueline Scott, panel discussion among Canadian Woman University Presidents on "Morningside," CBC radio, March 10, 1994. I am grateful to the University of Trent for supplying the radio on which I heard this broadcast.
15. Here, as elsewhere in this book, I use the term "ideology" very precisely. Some of those to whom I have presented previous versions of this argument have wanted me to use the term "ideology" when referring to the discourse of excellence since, as they tend to claim, "everything is ideological." If everything were ideological, then it would quite simply be impossible to know ideology as such. For the term "ideology" to have a critical usefulness, we have to presume an outside to ideology, be it a Lukácsian notion of "objective truth" or an Althusserian account of "critical self-consciousness." The assumption is that, once the standpoint of objective truth or self-consciousness is reached, the discourse to which we are opposed appears as contradictory and hence powerless—which does not explain why workers continue to vote against what intellectuals perceive to be their best interest.

    The great contribution of Louis Althusser's work on ideology was to insist upon its tie to the state apparatus, even while laying aside simplistic notions of "falsification." In order to preserve the term's critical utility, Althusser clearly distinguished between ideology and critical science. Even though there is no end to ideology, no pure and simple positivism, there has to be an outside to ideology, which comes for Althusser at the point when critical science, by means of an "epistemological break," achieves self-knowledge, becomes the ideology that knows itself to be an ideology. Such self-knowledge, he argues, is only possible for Marxism, which can know itself to be the ideology of the proletariat, which is to say, of the historical process itself. Positive knowledge is not possible except within the horizon of an achieved revolution, whose terms the pre-revolutionary thinker can only hope to imagine. Nonetheless, the pre-revolutionary thinkers can lift themselves above the pre-revolutionary framework within which they find themselves through the exercise of critical thought, by finding the contradictions inherent in their own system of think-

ing—such was Marx's achievement, for all that Marx was a late-nineteenth-century thinker. Thus, even if the "lonely hour of the last instance never comes," it is potentially available as the deduction of its inevitability through critical science. Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, tr. Ben Brewster (London: New Left Books, 1971).

16. For instance, John Beverley remarks in *Against Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993) on "the conversion of cultural studies from a form of radical opposition to the avant-garde of bourgeois hegemony" (20): "I believe it is still worth making the struggle for (and in) cultural studies, but just at the moment when its presence in the contemporary university seems assured, cultural studies has begun to lose the radicalizing force that accompanied its emergence as a field" (21). While I agree with Beverley's account of the institutional domestication of Cultural Studies, I am less than convinced that this is a fate that has befallen Cultural Studies as a result of individual weakness or external pressure.

2. The Idea of Excellence

1. *Maclean's*, 106, no. 46 (November 15, 1993).
2. Quoted in Aruna Jagtiani, "Ford Lends Support to Ohio State," *Ohio State Lantern*, July 14, 1994, p. 1.
3. Ibid.
4. See C. P. Snow, *Two Cultures and A Second Look* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969).
5. Phat X. Chem, "Dean of Engineering Forced Out," *New University* (University of California at Irvine), April 4, 1994, my italics.
6. Some sense of the distance we have traveled is apparent in the historical irony of the fact that this is a letter written to criticize the University on March 22, the very date recalled in the naming of the revolutionary movement in French universities in 1968 as "The Movement of March 22." *Sic transit.*
7. "Summer Faculty Fellowships: Information and Guidelines," Indiana University, Bloomington Campus, May 1994.
8. As a purely internal unit of value, excellence shares with Machiavelli's *virtù* the advantage of permitting calculation to be engaged in on a homogeneous scale. On *virtù*, see Machiavelli, *The Prince*, ed. and tr. Robert M. Adams (New York: Norton, 1977).
9. "News You Can Use," *U.S. News and World Report*, 117, no. 13 (October 3, 1994), pp. 70–91. *U.S. News and World Report* has not limited its focus simply to undergraduate education, as this particular issue might seem to suggest. Earlier in the same year, it published a special "info-magazine" issue devoted

entirely to "America's Best Graduate Schools." That the issue was sponsored by a car company—specifically, a car: the "Neon" from Plymouth and Dodge—is an irony that should not be lost here.

10. That the link between consumerism and the rhetoric of excellence appeals to a wide audience is certainly a fact that these magazines count on, not only to sell copies of individual issues but also to keep readers coming back for more information and more magazines in the future. Interestingly enough, the measures of excellence and value-for-money in universities seem to change on a yearly basis, not unlike those in the car industry. To keep up with these trends, each year the wise consumer should allegedly pick up *Maclean's* and/or *U.S. News and World Report* to have the most up to date information possible. For instance, while McGill held first place in *Maclean's* "Medical/Doctoral" category in 1993, by 1994 it had dropped to a less impressive third overall: *Maclean's*, 107, no. 46, (November 14, 1994). Likewise, the reader who would like to be fully informed about the criteria *U.S. News and World Report* used to calculate the "Most Efficient" and "Best Value" universities must also buy the previous issue of the magazine, because, as we are told in the article that accompanies the tables, "Only schools that finished in the top half of our rankings of national universities and national liberal arts colleges, *published last week*, were considered as potential best values" (October 3, 1994, p. 75, my italics). Being fully informed is presumably a two-issue affair for *U.S. News and World Report.*
11. Obviously, not all universities welcome the implication that they resemble car sales. As Edwin Below, director of financial aid at Wesleyan University, puts it: "I am much more likely to see if we overlooked something [in the financial aid offer] when families are honest about their financial concerns than if they treat the process like they were buying a used car" (quoted in *U.S. News and World Report*, October 3, 1994, p. 72). However, not all University officials seem to mind the similarities, even if they are not willing to draw the exact parallel themselves. According to the same issue of *U.S. News and World Report*, "a growing number of schools, such as Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh, are letting families know that they welcome [financial aid] appeals. In letters sent this spring to all prospective students offered aid, the university's message was clear: 'Send us a copy of your other offers—we want to be competitive' " (72).
12. Publicity brochure, October 1, 1992, published by the Direction des Communications, Université de Montréal, my translation. The original reads as follows: "Créée en 1972, la Faculté des études supérieures a pour mission de maintenir et de promouvoir des standards d'excellence au niveau des études de maîtrise et de doctorat; de coordonner l'enseignement et la normalisation des programmes d'études supérieures; de stimuler le développement et la coordination de la recherche en liaison avec les unités de recherche de l'Uni-

Just Gaming, tr. Wlad Godzich (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), p. 22.

13. This should be clearly distinguished from Althusser's account of ideological interpellation, in that the other here is the sheer blank fact of otherness, not the institutional apparatus of the state (which the enlightened critic can identify). This hailing does not position the subject in an illusory autonomy (like the driver's licence), does not "suture" the subject but wounds the subject, disbarring the illusion of autonomy.
14. Clearly, I take a considerable distance here from those like Bruce Wilshire who want to think of education as a cure for alienation and as the means of return to pure self-presence. Bruce Wilshire, *The Moral Collapse of the University: Professionalism, Purity, and Alienation* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1990). Wilshire's grounding metaphysical assumption of originary self-presence (the assumption that there was a time when we were not alienated, a time to which education can return us) is not one that I can share, as my remarks in the previous chapter—where I argue that the student is born too soon and too late—may suggest. Hence Wilshire ends up with a call for an organic human community as the center of the University: "there is no substitute for human relationship and presence, for listening, for sharing silence and wonderment, and for caring" (282). In his case, the human community is going to be a little more touchy-feely and embodied than Humboldt's, with the promise of redemptive religiosity proportionally intensified.
15. This seems to me to be the risk in the "critical pedagogy" of Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Seabury Press, 1973), the risk of a certain kind of Maoist third-worldism, in which the oppressed become the bearers of a bourgeois idealist hope for historical meaning in place of the exhausted industrial proletariat.
16. "The university belongs to the system insofar as the system is capitalist and bureaucratic," Lyotard, "Nanterre, Here, Now," p. 56.
17. See Pierre Bourdieu, *Homo Academicus*, tr. Peter Collier (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988); John Guillory, *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

11. Dwelling in the Ruins

1. Gerald Graff, *Beyond the Culture Wars: How Teaching the Conflicts Can Revitalize American Education* (New York and London: Norton, 1992).
2. Stanley Fish, *There's No Such Thing as Free Speech: And It's a Good Thing Too* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994). I think in particular of Fish's essay on the Milton Society of America, in which he argues that "institutional life is more durable than the vocabulary of either dissolution or revolution suggests" (271). Thus, all novelty and difference are accommodated by the self-

adjusting tradition, which rests on nothing other than its own history of self-adjustments.

3. One simple example: for a consideration of the way in which the internet threatens to delegitimize the structure of scholarly publishing, see my "Caught in the Net: Notes from the Electronic Underground," *Surfaces*, 4, no. 104 (1994), available via gopher from the Université de Montréal gopher site.
4. The University of California also has some piled ruins, which are known locally as "Stonehenge," an equally incongruous cultural reference.
5. See my "When Did the Renaissance Begin?" in *Rethinking the Henrician Era*, ed. Peter Herman (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993) for a more developed account of the invention of the Renaissance and the question of the visibility of history.
6. Freud tells us in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, ed. and tr. James Strachey (New York: Avon Books, 1965), p. 530: "If we examine the . . . structure [of dreams and daytime phantasies], we shall perceive the way in which the wishful purpose that is at work in their production has mixed up the material of which they are built, has re-arranged it and has formed it into a new whole. They stand in much the same relation to the childhood memories from which they are derived as do some of the Baroque palaces of Rome to the ancient ruins whose pavements and columns have provided the material for the more recent structures."
7. Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, tr. James Strachey (New York and London: Norton, 1961), pp. 16–17.
8. It implies an institutional pragmatism, what Samuel Weber calls "deconstructive pragmatics." See *Institution and Interpretation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), esp. ch. 2, "The Limits of Professionalism." Where Stanley Fish and Richard Rorty tend to celebrate the historical fact of institutional existence in their insistence on the status of actual practices, Weber sketches the contours of an argument against disciplinary autonomy and the concomitant ideology of professional mastery. He does so by recourse to Peirce's notion of "conditional possibility" in order to refuse the fixity of disciplinary boundaries. Such a transgression of disciplinary limits exposes the phobic exclusions upon which professional authority and competence are based. As Weber points out, "the modern university was the institutional means by which the professional claim to a monopoly of competence could be established and maintained" (32). Against this he proposes not a holistic refusal of abstraction and limit but a "deconstructive pragmatics" that "would work from the 'inside' of the various disciplines, in order to demonstrate concretely, in each case, how the exclusion of limits from the field organizes the practice it makes possible" (32). This seems to me an exemplary instance of the critique of institutions without recourse to alibis: neither the alibi of the perfect institution nor the alibi of the potential absence of all institutions.

9. Leonard Cohen, "First We Take Manhattan," from *I'm Your Man* (CBS Records, 1988).
10. This is the sort of point that Andrew Ross makes in *Strange Weather* (London: Verso, 1991), although he rather exaggerates its delegitimating effect on scientific practices and norms.
11. See Gerald Graff, *Professing Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), pp. 19–36.
12. As Graff reminds us, "in literary studies, as everyone knows, the advance guard of professionalization was a German-trained cadre of scholarly 'investigators,' who promoted the idea of scientific research and the philological study of modern languages" (*Professing Literature,* p. 55).
13. See Georges Bataille, "La notion de dépense" in *La part maudite* (Paris: Minuit, 1949), for the origins of this distinction.
14. See W. B. Carnochan, *The Battleground of the Curriculum: Liberal Education and American Experience* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), for a brief and illuminating account of this debate.
15. My remarks about coverage are no slur to medievalists in particular. I think that the twilight of modernity makes the pre-modern a crucial site for understanding what a non-Enlightenment structure of thought might look like. My point is rather that the relative weakness of arguments for disciplinary coverage proceeds from the fact that such arguments presume the University to be primarily an ideological institution, when actually this is not the case. I will go further and say that my suggestion is a crucial means for preserving classical and medieval texts from the extinction that currently threatens them. I also do not have space here to get into an argument about tenure, so I merely presume its continuation in the short term. However, I think that the increasing proletarianization of the professoriat suggests that tenure may not *necessarily*—I italicize, to remind readers that I only wish to consider a possibility—be the most effective defense of faculty interests in the future. Finally, note that the notion of faculty-student ratio is an economic rationale that I believe can be sold to administrators with potentially interesting results.

12. The Community of Dissensus

1. Alfonso Borrero Cabal, *The University as an Institution Today* (Paris and Ottawa: UNESCO and IDRC, 1993), p. 130.
2. This is because the possibility of reference can only be thought as the failure of linguistic transparency, as the internal opacity or thickening of language, which permits the flawed subsumption of worldly reference under linguistic meaning.
3. Jean-François Lyotard's *The Differend,* tr. Georges Van Den Abbeele (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), amply demonstrates this point.

4. This community might also be called headless, to echo Bataille, in that this community marks the necessary wound of subjectivity, while not offering to heal that wound in producing a greater subject.
5. Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community,* ed. Peter Connor, tr. Peter Connor, Lisa Garbus, Michael Holland, and Simona Sawhney (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990); Maurice Blanchot, *The Unavowable Community,* tr. Pierre Joris (Barrytown, N.Y.: Station Hill Press, 1988). Blanchot and Nancy draw on Bataille and the surrealists in an attempt to think a community without identity, without a commonly shared core that would ground the social bond.
6. Giorgio Agamben, *The Coming Community,* tr. Michael Hardt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).
7. Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics,* tr. Terence Irwin (Cambridge: Hackett, 1985), 1100a30.
8. Nancy draws a distinction between two versions of the political: on the one hand, the sociotechnical organization of society; on the other, the community that orders "itself to the unworking of its communication" (*The Inoperative Community,* pp. 40–41). As such, Nancy's inorganic community is distinct from the collective identity of republican democracies in which, as Lyotard remarks, "the pronoun of the first person plural is in effect the linchpin of/for the discourse of authorization" (*The Differend,* p. 98).
9. For further discussion of Lyotard's account of the totalitarian force of the apparently democratic "we," see my "Pagans, Perverts, or Primitives," in *Judging Lyotard,* ed. Andrew Benjamin (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 174–176.
10. For a more detailed discussion of the impossibility of subsuming the relation to the Other under a cognitive synthesis, see Emmanuel Levinas, *Totalité et infini* (Paris: Livre de Poche, 1992), p. 71.
11. Gianni Vattimo, *The Transparent Society* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), p. 14.
12. This is the process to which Lyotard has pointed in describing a loss of belief in grand narratives and the turn to a non-finite series of little narratives, in *The Postmodern Condition,* tr. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).