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The Scene of Teaching

The replacement of culture by the discourse of excellence is the University's response to 1968. In the face of student critiques of the contradiction between the University's claim to be a guardian of culture and its growing commitment to bureaucracy, the University has progressively abandoned its cultural claim. Forced to describe itself as either a bureaucratic-administrative or an idealist institution, it chose the former. And consequently there is no way back to 1968; a repetition of the radical postures of the late 1960s is not adequate to resist the discourse of excellence. This is because the discourse of excellence can incorporate campus radicalism as proof of the excellence of campus life or of student commitment—something that even *Maclean's* does in its evaluations.

This is not to say, however, that no resistance to the discourse of excellence is possible. Rather, we need to think differently about the shape such resistance must take. What we stand to learn from the events of 1968 is that the emergence of the student who has a problematic relation to modernity offers a resource for resistance. This resource will emerge in the scene of teaching, which will be the focus of this chapter. What is at stake here is what I hinted at earlier: the *value* in teaching. To whom or to what are teachers, students, and institutions accountable? And in what terms? In the University of Excellence, the problem of value is bracketed, and statistical evaluation (of the measure of excellence) is presumed to provide definitive answers that then feed into

funding, resources, and salary decisions. This chapter will explore how we can keep the question of value open in relation to pedagogy, which means neither accepting the accounting logic of the bureaucrats nor simply ignoring it in the name of a transcendental value to education. Pedagogy, I will suggest, has a specific chronotope that is radically alien to the notion of accountable time upon which the excellence of capitalist-bureaucratic management and bookkeeping depend. Such a pedagogy can provide a notion of educational responsibility, of accountability, that is markedly at odds with the logic of accounting that runs the University of Excellence.

To understand how this can indeed be the case, it is important to situate the scene of teaching as part of the larger tableau of how education itself is understood. When people address the question of education, they tend to do so from one of three points of view. First, the administrator is concerned to understand education as a process in which the production and distribution of knowledge will repay the costs in time and capital expended. Second, the professor wants to justify a life spent in the pursuit of objectives that, analyzed in terms of cost and benefit, seem to produce little personal payoff. So she or he will tend to make large claims for her or his power to train a certain kind of student subject: critical, well-rounded, or empowered. Third, the student usually complains about an institution or a practice to which she or he feels forced to submit without first understanding why. From the student's perspective, the hierarchy seems not to acknowledge the student to whom it appeals (as product) in order to justify itself, although in a consumer society these complaints become harder to ignore.

Each of these descriptions of education performs an initial gesture of centering in that each assumes that its perspective stands at the *center* of the educational process. The question of value is thus always posed from a subjective standpoint that is taken to be central: how to evaluate teaching *for* the University administration, *for* the teacher, or *for* the student. It would even be possible to take this argument a step further and say that the administration usually intervenes a second time as a meta-evaluator that produces a synthesized metasubjective standpoint. By weighing the various costs and benefits, the meta-evaluator tries to

offset advantages of one position against disadvantages of the others. The final goal here is to perform a synthesis of the three different interests, even where they seem to be conflicting or competing.

However common it is to approach the evaluation of teaching in these ways, the structure of responsibility, of accountability, is much more complex and intertwined, and I shall argue that no such synthesis is possible. My aim in focusing on teaching—and in relating that focus to the kind of attention this book pays to institutions—is not to put teaching “back at the center of things.” As my analysis has shown, the constitutive moment of the modern University is the placing of an idea at the center of things, making both teaching and research depend upon this idea. However, in the posthistorical University, bureaucratic administration becomes central, because the very emptiness of the idea of excellence makes the integration of activities into a purely administrative function. Teaching actually thus becomes a triple administrative function. First, the simple administration of students by teachers (keeping them off the streets). Second, the training of the administrative or managerial class (the self-reproduction of the administrative system). Third, the administration of knowledge (the functional programming of students). There is even a fourth function, if you like, in that subsequently teaching is administered through the process of evaluation.

The administration of knowledge is, of course, the only point at which anything like a question of content enters: the question of what knowledge is to be managed by teachers and *administered* to students. But the question of content is short-lived, since in order to be administered to students, knowledge has to be made into *manageable* doses. Thus the textbook takes on a new form in the University of Excellence. It tends to become shorter and to require less of the student. In fact, it tends toward virtuality, as we have seen in Chapter 6 in reference to the question of the literary canon. Teaching administers students. It accredits students as administrators, and it trains them in the handling of information. It probably does all these things rather successfully.

It would be wrong, then, to suggest that teaching does not matter in the University of Excellence, for it is as closely tied to the logic of administration as it had previously been to the logic of cultural repro-

duction (the reproduction of subjects of culture). In order to open up the question of pedagogy we do not need, therefore, to *recenter* teaching but to *decenter* it. By the decentering of the pedagogic situation I mean to insist that teaching is not best understood from the point of view of a sovereign subject that takes itself to be the sole guarantor of the meaning of that process, whether that subject is the student, the teacher, or the administrator. Decentering teaching begins with an attention to the *pragmatic scene of teaching*. This is to refuse the possibility of any *privileged point of view so as to make teaching something other than the self-reproduction of an autonomous subject*. Neither the administrator taking the system in hand, nor the professor taking the student in hand, nor the student taking him- or herself in hand will do the trick.

In order to pose the question of the grounds of value in teaching in terms that respect the complexity of the obligation involved, it will also be necessary for me to resist the temptation of believing in my own autonomy. That will involve resisting the lure of speaking from a position in which the intellectual subject takes itself to incarnate the singular voice of the universal. Instead, I would emphasize that pedagogy cannot be understood apart from a reflection on *the institutional context of education*. This reflection refuses both the isolation of education in relation to wider social practices and the subjugation of education to predetermined or externally derived social imperatives.¹ Institutional forms are always at work in teaching: forms of address, rooms, conditions of possibility. But the reminder of the institutional question is a warning against imagining that attention to pedagogic pragmatics can be essentially divorced from an attention to institutional forms.² Paying attention to the pragmatics of the pedagogic scene, without losing sight of institutional forms, is important, because it refuses to make the pedagogical relation into an object of administrative knowledge. Understanding teaching is not a matter of drawing flow charts that track and police the movements of knowledge, power, or desire. Such charts, even when drawn up with the best of intentions, tend always to install a single and authoritative point of view, reducing teaching to an object of knowledge for a sovereign subject who will play the role of policeman.

This reduction of the goals of teaching to the concerns of a sovereign

subject is also nothing new; it has simply taken different forms over the years. The Enlightenment proposes education as the site of emancipation, the freeing of the student from all obligations, including that to the teacher. The modern bureaucratic state proposes to reduce the relation to that of the development and training of technocrats through the transmission of education. These attempts can be summarized under the rubric of the ideology of autonomy. I want to suggest, however, that pedagogy also can be understood otherwise: other than as the inculcation or revelation of an inherent human autonomy, other than as the production of sovereign subjects.

Such a consideration of pedagogy must begin by recognizing that the modernist project of autonomy and universal communicability is not provisionally but fundamentally incomplete. No authority can terminate the pedagogic relation, no knowledge can save us the task of thinking. It is in this sense that the posthistorical University can perhaps relinquish the presumption to unite authority and autonomy in a community unified by an idea: be it the idea of reason, culture, communication, or professional excellence. My aim, then, is an anti-modernist rephrasing of teaching and learning as sites of *obligation*, as loci of *ethical practices*, rather than as means for the transmission of scientific knowledge. Teaching thus becomes answerable to *the question of justice*, rather than to the criteria of truth. We must seek to do justice to teaching rather than to know what it is. A belief that we know what teaching is or should be is actually a major impediment to just teaching. Teaching should cease to be about merely the transmission of information and the emancipation of the autonomous subject, and instead should become a site of obligation that exceeds an individual's consciousness of justice. My turn to the pedagogical scene of address, with all its ethical weight, is thus a way of developing an accountability that is at odds with accounting.

This is a complex move, and I want to slow down and explain it more precisely. First of all, the scene of teaching should be understood as a radical form of dialogue. This is not a Habermasian claim for communicative rationality in which the dialogues of teachers and students are really divided monologues. I would argue that the dialogues between teachers and students are not synthesized in a final agreement

(even an agreement to disagree) that evidences the capacity of the informed and rational subject to occupy both sides of a question. That is to say, the dialogue of teaching is not organized dialectically so as to arrive at a single conclusion that will be either the vindication and reinforcement of one position (Socrates' opponent is forced to agree with Socrates) or a synthesis of the two (Joyce's "jewgreek is greek-jew").³ The dialogue does not thaw and resolve into a monologue, nor is it controlled solely by the sender as a formal instrument in the grasp of the writing subject, like Mallarmé's use of the *mise en page*. In this respect, I am evoking the dialogue form in order to refuse the modernist privileging of the sender over the addressee, to refuse the figure of the lone artist who synthesizes reality through either a rational understanding or a romantic effort of will.

To pay attention in this way to the addressee is not simply to attempt to determine the conditions of reception of a discourse, which would be another way of creating a monologue. The listener is not an empty head, as in the line drawings that illustrate Saussure's account of communication. Saussure would have communication be the passage of a message from a sender to a receiver who is silent, who exists only as receptacle. A message is passed from a sender (full vessel emptied) to a receiver (empty vessel filled). Dialogue would then be merely the exchange of roles between two persons, so that the first sender becomes in turn the empty receiver, and so on. By contrast, Bakhtin seems to me correct when he observes that "it is not a mute, wordless creature that receives such an utterance but a human being full of inner words. All his experiences—his so-called apperceptive background—exist encoded in his inner speech, and only to that extent do they come into contact with speech received from outside. Word comes into contact with word."⁴

I am thus inclined to leave Saussure's model of communication behind in favor of what Bakhtin has called dialogism. This is an often misunderstood and misused term. Bakhtin's dialogism is not simply the capacity for reversed or serial monologue, the exchange of roles that allows interlocutors to take turns at being monologic senders (as it is for Socrates). The addressee's head is full of language so that the story of communicative transmission cannot adequately describe what

happens in linguistic interaction. *Interdiscursive* rather than *intersubjective*, the addressee is not a virtual point of consciousness (the *tabula rasa* of a listening pineal gland, as Descartes might have it). All consciousness is consciousness of language in its heterogeneous multiplicity. Understanding and misunderstanding, as it were, are entwined as the conditions of linguistic interaction. Communication cannot be the transfer of a prefabricated meaning, since the meaning of words does not remain the same from one utterance—or more precisely, one idiolect—to the next. What a sender says takes its place amid a crowd of idiolects in the listener, and their conversation acquires its sense in a discursive act of which neither is the master. Thus, to recognize the addressee is to inscribe within discourse a radical aporia. It is to speak in a way that respects what might be called the abyssal space of reading by the other: the fact that we never know to whom our words may speak. Teaching, then, is not primarily a matter of communication between autonomous subjects functioning alternately as senders and receivers.

The difference between Saussure's monologic model of communication and Bakhtin's dialogism may not seem all that significant in a discussion of pedagogy. But it actually tells us a great deal about misplaced pedagogical commitments to autonomy, helping us to understand—and avoid—three pitfalls that attend the pedagogic relation: First, the hierarchy that makes the professor an absolute authority and the students so many receptacles for the transmission of a preconstituted and unquestionable knowledge. Second, the claim that teaching raises no *difference* between teachers and students, the demagoguery that suggests there is nothing to learn. Third, the reduction of education to the development and training of technocrats without questioning the purposes and functions to which that training is dedicated. All three of these seek to put an end to questioning, most obviously in the first and third cases, but more insidiously in the second, where thought is sacrificed rather than questioned—sacrificed precisely because it might question the presumption of an indifferent egalitarianism.

What these misplaced pedagogic commitments have in common is an orientation toward *autonomy*, an assertion that knowledge involves the abandonment of a network of ethical obligations: to have knowl-

edge is to gain a self-sufficient, monologic voice. The first replicates on a large scale all of the problems with Saussure's model of communication. The authoritative voice of the *magister* rests upon his or her (usually his) privileged relation to the meaning of knowledge. This relation is secured against any irruption of the pole of the addressee—authoritative discourse means that it makes no difference to whom he or she is talking. The pole of the addressee is empty, an empty vessel. And the end of the process will be a replication of that autonomy, as the student becomes another professor, in turn. Thus, student autonomy is the end product of the pedagogical process, which is nothing more than the replication of the autonomy of the master.

Second, in the demagogic mode, the students' autonomy is assumed as an *a priori* given, is asserted from the beginning as the unrecognized condition of possibility of education. Students have the autonomy to decide what it is they know, what it is they should or should not learn; they have no particular relation to the professor. This might look like a claim for the recognition of the student addressee, but it actually returns to Saussure. The addressee is merely redescribed as always already the sender of any message, able to listen to a message only insofar as he or she has, in fact (or *in potentia*), already sent it to him- or herself.

Third, in the technocratic mode of training, autonomy is accorded to the referent, to a technical knowledge that is indifferent to the specificity of its inculcation. In this instance, the pedagogic relation is once again reduced to a mere replication that accords with Saussure. This time the replication is of the bureaucratic state as it fits subjects to tasks. The educational subject is the system, and the autonomy that the student gains through education is the freedom to occupy a preconstituted place in the system, which we usually describe in terms of the illusion of "working for oneself."

The common narrative that underlies these three accounts of the function of education argues that the goal of education is the achievement of a certain mimetic identity by the student: either as replication of the professor or as replication of a place in the system. And with this identity comes autonomy, or to put it more clearly, *independence*—the end of dependence, the end of obligated relations to others. The student has acquired a certain freedom, a position of self-sufficient identity. She

or he has been granted it by the professor, by the consensus of her or his peers, and by the employer. She or he will not have to listen any more—indeed, should not listen any more, since listening would be tantamount to questioning, which indicates, by a twist in logic, dependence.

This is part of the long narrative of education that the Enlightenment, above all in French secondary schools, inculcated: that knowledge would make mankind free, that education is a process of transforming children into adults. Education, that is, transforms children, who are by definition dependent upon adults, into independent beings, the free citizens that the modern state requires. They will judge for themselves. They will vote individually, in private, in little boxes that cut them off from all relation to others. Hence, the French educational system has always privileged primary education rather than the University, since the state's interest in education is above all in the production of citizen-subjects. The subject's "freedom" is the freedom to be subjected to a state. Subjection is held to be no constraint by virtue of the fiction that the existence and nature of that state holds only insofar as it is the object of the free choice of subjects—a fiction of representation whose limits appear the moment one remarks, "but I didn't vote for that."⁵ If we are perhaps ready to recognize that this freedom is bought at the price of subjection to the abstract entity that is the modern state, we have yet to think through its implications for our understanding of pedagogy.

In place of the lure of autonomy, of independence from all obligation, I want to insist that pedagogy is a *relation, a network of obligation*. In this sense, we might want to talk of the teacher as *rhetor* rather than *magister*, one who speaks in a rhetorical context rather than one whose discourse is self-authorizing. The advantage here would be to recognize that the legitimation of the teacher's discourse is not immanent to that discourse but is always dependent, at least in part, on the rhetorical context of its reception. The *rhetor* is a speaker who takes account of the audience, while the *magister* is indifferent to the specificity of his or her addressees.

Yet the invocation of "rhetoric" leaves room for a certain reservation with regard to the embrace of sophistic rhetoric as a *model* for the

pedagogic scene. The appeal to persuasion risks turning the pedagogic relation back into a site of subjective calculation. This is the epistemology of Stanley Fish, in which the act of rhetorical persuasion is an agonistic contest of subjective wills who continue to use language instrumentally, as the instrument of persuasion that will create an effect of conviction and cause the addressee to become, for him- or herself, what he or she is for the speaker. Fish's rhetoric does not display a prudent respect for the pole of the addressee; instead, it seeks to erase the pole of the addressee, to render it identical to the pole of the speaker. That is to say, the listener is made to adopt the same "position" as the speaker. The pole of the addressee is recognized only as the object of a calculation by the speaker.

If the rhetorical pragmatics of the pedagogue are not directed at conviction, how then are we to characterize the ethical obligation that teaching aims to evoke? What is more, how are we to avoid focusing solely on teaching as an intersubjective relation? It is important to underline here that teaching is not exhausted in the achievement of intersubjective communication. The student-teacher relation is not one of magisterial domination, nor is it one of dyadic fusion in which mutual understanding would serve as an end in itself (the mutual unveiling of teachers and students of which Fichte speaks in his writings on the University).⁶ Neither convincing students nor fusing with them, teaching, like psychoanalysis, is an interminable process.

What prevents a fusion between teachers and students and makes teaching interminable (structurally incomplete) is that the network of obligation extends to all four poles of the pragmatic linguistic situation: the sender, the addressee, the referent, and the signification.⁷ The referent of teaching, that to which it points, is the name of Thought. Let me stress that this is not a quasi-religious dedication. I say "name" and I capitalize "Thought" not in order to indicate a mystical transcendence but in order to avoid the confusion of the referent with any one signification. The name of Thought precisely is a name in that it *has no intrinsic meaning*.⁸ In this sense, it is like excellence. However, Thought differs from excellence in that it does not bracket the question of value.

What I would like to suggest is that we recognize that, with the decline of the nation-state, the University has become an open and

flexible system and that we should try to replace the empty idea of excellence with the empty name of Thought. The first difference between the two emptinesses is that Thought, unlike excellence, does not masquerade as an idea. In place of the simulacrum of an idea is the acknowledged emptiness of the name—a self-conscious exposure of the emptiness of Thought that replaces vulgarity with honesty, to rephrase Adorno. And a second difference, proceeding from this, is that Thought does not function as an answer but as a *question*. Excellence works because *no one has to ask what it means*. Thought demands that we ask what it means, because its status as mere name—radically detached from truth—enforces that question. Keeping the question of what Thought names open requires a constant vigilance to prevent the name of Thought from slipping back into an idea, from founding a mystical ideology of truth. We can only seek to do justice to a name, not to find its truth. Since a name has no signification, only a designatory function, it cannot have a truth-content. The meaning-effects of a name are structurally incapable of final determination, are always open to discussion.

As a horizon, the name of Thought cannot be given a content with which consciousness might fuse, or a signification that would allow the closure of debate. Debate may occur as to its signification, but this will always be an agonistic contest of prescriptives about what Thought should be. Nothing in the nature of Thought, as a bare name, will legitimate any one or other of these accounts. To put this another way, any attempt to say what Thought should be must take responsibility for itself as such an attempt. The name of Thought, since it has no content, cannot be invoked as an *alibi* that might excuse us from the necessity of thinking about what we are saying, when and from where we are saying it.⁹ Hence, for instance, I admit that these reflections are written from the point of view of someone who is, professionally, a teacher, though he does not know in any absolute sense what is the signification of the name of teacher. Thought is one of many names that operate in the pedagogic scene, and the attribution of any signification to it is an act that must understand itself as such, as having a certain rhetorical and ethical weight.

In the classroom, Thought intervenes as a third term alongside speaker and addressee that undoes the presumption to autonomy, be it the autonomy of professors, of students, or of a body of knowledge (a tradition or a science). Thought names a differend; it is a name over which arguments take place, arguments that occur in heterogeneous idioms. Most important, this third term does not resolve arguments; it does not provide a metalanguage that can translate all other idioms into its own so that their dispute can be settled, their claims arranged and evaluated on a homogeneous scale. As a name, Thought does not circulate; it waits upon our response. What is drawn out in education is not the hidden meaning of Thought, not the true identity of students, not the true identity of the professor (replicated in the students). Rather, what is drawn out is the aporetic nature of this differend as to what the name of Thought might mean: the necessity and impossibility that it should be discussed, despite the absence of a univocal or common language in which that discussion could occur. Thought is, in this sense, an empty transcendence, not one that can be worshiped and believed in, but one that throws those who participate in pedagogy back into a reflection upon the ungroundedness of their situation: their obligation to each other and to a name that hails them as addressees, before they can think about it.

Thus, to attribute a signification to Thought, the act of saying what it means to think, is inevitably a political question in the minimal sense of an agonistic moment of conflict, where a difference is opened concerning the nature of discourse. To put this another way, “What is called thinking?” is never simply a theoretical question, one that a fully grounded epistemology might answer.¹⁰ Our reflections on teaching as a practice must insist on a pedagogic scene structured by a dissymmetrical pragmatics, and this unequal relation must be addressed in terms of ethical awareness. The scene of teaching belongs to the sphere of justice rather than of truth: the relation of student to teacher and teacher to student is one of asymmetrical obligation, which appears to both sides as problematic and requiring further study.

The condition of pedagogical practice is, in Blanchot’s words, “an infinite attention to the other.”¹¹ Not the attention of individual sub-

jects to individual objects, for we are not returning to the Enlightenment privileging of autonomy. No individual can *be* just, since to do justice is to recognize that the question of justice exceeds individual consciousness, cannot be answered by an individual moral stance. This is because justice involves respect for an absolute Other, a respect that must precede any knowledge about the other.¹² The other speaks, and we owe the other respect. To be hailed as an addressee is to be commanded to listen, and the ethical nature of this relation cannot be justified. We have to listen, without knowing why, before we know what it is that we are to listen to.¹³ To be spoken to is to be placed under an obligation, to be situated within a narrative pragmatics. Even a preliminary discussion of the framework within which discussions are to be undertaken requires this initial respect, a respect that is senseless in that it has no constative content. Nor is this “respect” a matter of deference; it is the simple fact of alertness to otherness, something that the German word *Achtung* conveys, linking as it does respect and warning. “*Achtung! Ein andere*” is perhaps the (post-Kantian) rule of this ethics, a respect for the Other rather than for the Law—which is to say that this is not a subjective attitude of respect for the institutions of state, since the subject does not find itself reflected in the other it respects.

In the classroom, the other should not serve to erase the addressee; the pragmatic instance that the other occupies is not simply the pretext for a communication between the philosopher-master and the tradition of Western Thought (or the unconscious). There is some other in the classroom, and it has many names: culture, thought, desire, energy, tradition, the event, the immemorial, the sublime. The educational institution seeks to process it, to dampen the shock it gives the system. *Qua* institution, education seeks to channel and circulate this otherness so that some form of profit can be made from it. Yet shock arises, since it is *the minimal condition of pedagogy*, and it opens a series of incalculable differences, the exploration of which is the business of pedagogy. Education, as *e ducere*, a drawing out, is not a maieutic revelation of the student to him- or herself, a process of clearly remembering what the student in fact already knew. Rather, education is this drawing out of the otherness of thought that undoes the pretension to self-presence

that always demands further study.¹⁴ And it works over both the students and the teachers, although in a dissymmetrical fashion.

The demand that the pole of the addressee should be respected is not a demagoguery. A refusal to make the students into the locus of a simple reproduction, either of the professor or of the faithful servants the system requires, does not mean that the students occupy a position of autonomy or authenticity, or that in order to be educated they need only to affirm who they already are. *Pace* Paulo Freire, radical pedagogy must avoid subjugating education to a Marxist grand narrative. The students are not a proletariat by analogy; they do not incarnate the repressed meaning of the educational process.¹⁵ To mount an attack on the professors’ authority, on the professor as the transcendent subject of the educational process, must not simply be to seek to replace the professor by the student. This would be the demagogic version of 1968: the inversion of hierarchy so that the students embody the real University.

The question of the University cannot be answered by a program of reform that either produces knowledge more efficiently or produces more efficient knowledge. Rather, the analogy of production itself must be brought into question: the analogy that makes the University into a bureaucratic apparatus for the production, distribution, and consumption of knowledge. For what is at stake here is the extent to which the University *as an institution* participates in the capitalist-bureaucratic system.¹⁶ It seems to me dishonest to pretend that it does not. The University as an institution can deal with all kinds of knowledges, even oppositional ones, so as to make them circulate to the benefit of the system as a whole. This is something we know very well: radicalism sells well in the University marketplace. Hence the futility of the radicalism that calls for a University that will produce more radical kinds of knowledge, more radical students, more of anything. Such appeals, because they do not take into account the institutional status of the University as a capitalist bureaucracy, are doomed to confirm the very system they oppose. The ideological content of the knowledges produced in the University is increasingly indifferent to its functioning as a bureaucratic enterprise; the only proviso is that such radical knowledges fit into the cycle of production, exchange, and consumption.

Produce what knowledge you like, only produce more of it, so that the system can speculate on knowledge differentials, can profit from the accumulation of intellectual capital.

It is perhaps worthwhile to distinguish once again my analysis from Bourdieu's concept of "cultural capital," which animates John Guillory's analysis of the University in *Cultural Capital*.¹⁷ For Guillory, as for Bourdieu, cultural capital retains a primarily ideological function despite the fact that the concept of cultural capital seems relatively indifferent to the ideological content of cultural production. As we have seen, this is because cultural capital is conceived as circulating within a cultural system that is closed off by national boundaries. In order for symbolic status to be quantifiable, to be analyzed as an analogue of financial value, the system within which it is distributed must be closed. Hence Bourdieu and his epigones tend to limit the field of their studies, often appealing to a need for contextual specificity. From such a narrow perspective, the University necessarily appears as an ideological apparatus of the nation-state rather than a potentially transnational bureaucratic-capitalist enterprise.

My argument is that the University is developing toward the status of a transnational corporation. To recognize the transnational framework within which the question of the University is posed is to have to acknowledge that teaching cannot be understood either as structurally independent of a generalized system of exchange or as exhaustively contained within any one closed system of exchange. This, it seems to me, is the situation in which we find ourselves now, one of both limitation and openness. We are more free than we used to be in our teaching, but we can no longer see what it is that our freedom is freedom from. How can we raise the question of accountability without always already giving in to the logic of accounting? In some sense, we cannot. People have to be paid, get scholarships, etc. The question, then, is how we can raise the question of accountability as something that *exceeds* the logic of accounting. The exponential growth in the commodification of information itself, thanks to new technologies, renders the current situation even more acute.

If pedagogy is to pose a challenge to the ever-increasing bureaucratization of the University as a whole, it will need to decenter our vision

of the educational process, not merely adopt an oppositional stance in teaching. Only in this way can we hope to open up pedagogy, to lend it a temporality that resists commodification, by arguing that *listening to Thought* is not the spending of time in the production of an autonomous subject (even an oppositional one) or of an autonomous body of knowledge. Rather, to listen to Thought, to think beside each other and beside ourselves, is to explore an open network of obligations that keeps the question of meaning open as a locus of debate. Doing justice to Thought, listening to our interlocutors, means trying to hear that which cannot be said but that which tries to make itself heard. And this is a process incompatible with the production of (even relatively) stable and exchangeable knowledge. Exploring the question of value means recognizing that there exists no homogeneous standard of value that might unite all poles of the pedagogical scene so as to produce a single scale of evaluation.

Such an exploration may prove surprising. Contrary to conventional wisdom, an audience does not preexist an event. The event makes the audience happen, rather than the event happening in front of an audience. Making an audience for this kind of pedagogy "happen" is the task that faces those of us who find ourselves in the contemporary University—teachers and students alike. That audience is not a general public; it is an agglomeration of people of widely differing ages, classes, genders, sexualities, ethnicities, and so on. It is not simply composed of students; it will have to include funding agencies, both state-controlled and private. Creating and addressing such an audience will not revitalize the University or solve all our problems. It will, however, allow the exploration of differences in ways that are liberating to the extent that they assume nothing in advance.

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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 be-

tween 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

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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 in-

troduced 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.

~ 12

The Community of Dissensus

I have already discussed the way in which the community of scholars in the University is presumed to serve as a model for rational political community at large, both for the German Idealists and for more contemporary thinkers. This model is not without its variations: Fichte's body of students and professors is not Rawls's veiled tribunal, for instance. But there consistently remains a strong tendency in modernity to imagine the University as a model of the rational, the just, or the national community, which incarnates a pure bond of sociality around the disinterested pursuit of the idea. Indeed, the only hope of an existence beyond market imperatives that Alfonso Borrero Cabal in his report for UNESCO can hold out for the University as a contemporary institution is the vague assertion that the University can "serve culture" by virtue of its "principal commitment to being" the "model and pattern" for the society that surrounds it—a direct echo of the German Idealists.¹ Never mind that such an argument has already been undermined by his calls for the University to be "internationalized" as a global institution, which means the rupture of any such link between a given University and the society that surrounds it.

Anyone who has spent any time at all in a University knows that it is not a model community, that few communities are more petty and vicious than University faculties (suburban "model communities" might be an exception). And yet the story persists. The University is supposed to be the potential model for free and rational discussion, a

site where the community is founded in the sharing of a commitment to an abstraction, whether that abstraction is the object of a tradition or of a rational contract. The medieval guild was a practical community among others (glassblowers, painters, victuallers); the medieval University as a society for the study of knowledge was a corporate community, in the medieval sense like a guild. In modernity, the University becomes the model of the social bond that ties individuals in a common relation to the idea of the nation-state. Of course, this change is an uneven and variable process, and some universities are more modern than others. Like the role of trustees, the degree to which religion continues to function in University foundations is a significant variant here, one with which Newman struggles in particular.

However, what is central to the thought of community in the modern model University is the notion of *communication*, of a mutual transparency that permits the executive action of Kant's judge as much as it does the bonding of Fichte's professors and students. Nor is this understanding of community in terms of communication restricted to the University. To understand how the modern University can be a model for society, we have to look at the way modernity approaches community: in terms of the state. The notion of the state is the abstract ground that assumes the community is disinterested and autonomous. Modern community is founded upon the autonomous decision of individuals to communicate with each other as subjects of a state. Community does not come about because of a heteronomous obligation of subjects to a monarch, a tribe, or a land. The modern assumption is that the question of what it means, for instance, to be American is the object of a decision made with the free assent of Americans, rather than an essence inscribed in a race or climate, or a decision made by a monarch to whom a primordial allegiance is owed. Hence, those who are born as subjects of a modern state supposedly possess the power to alter that social contract by such processes as voting.

The effect of domination inherent in this fiction of the state is apparent once we consider how the alleged autonomy of the subject, its freedom to participate in communicational transactions such as this, is conditional upon its subjection to the idea of the state. The subject is "free" only insofar as she or he becomes, for her- or himself, primarily

The Community of Dissensus

I have already discussed the way in which the community of scholars in the University is presumed to serve as a model for rational political community at large, both for the German Idealists and for more contemporary thinkers. This model is not without its variations: Fichte's body of students and professors is not Rawls's veiled tribunal, for instance. But there consistently remains a strong tendency in modernity to imagine the University as a model of the rational, the just, or the national community, which incarnates a pure bond of sociality around the disinterested pursuit of the idea. Indeed, the only hope of an existence beyond market imperatives that Alfonso Borrero Cabal in his report for UNESCO can hold out for the University as a contemporary institution is the vague assertion that the University can "serve culture" by virtue of its "principal commitment to being" the "model and pattern" for the society that surrounds it—a direct echo of the German Idealists.¹ Never mind that such an argument has already been undermined by his calls for the University to be "internationalized" as a global institution, which means the rupture of any such link between a given University and the society that surrounds it.

Anyone who has spent any time at all in a University knows that it is not a model community, that few communities are more petty and vicious than University faculties (suburban "model communities" might be an exception). And yet the story persists. The University is supposed to be the potential model for free and rational discussion, a

site where the community is founded in the sharing of a commitment to an abstraction, whether that abstraction is the object of a tradition or of a rational contract. The medieval guild was a practical community among others (glassblowers, painters, victuallers); the medieval University as a society for the study of knowledge was a corporate community, in the medieval sense like a guild. In modernity, the University becomes the model of the social bond that ties individuals in a common relation to the idea of the nation-state. Of course, this change is an uneven and variable process, and some universities are more modern than others. Like the role of trustees, the degree to which religion continues to function in University foundations is a significant variant here, one with which Newman struggles in particular.

However, what is central to the thought of community in the modern model University is the notion of *communication*, of a mutual transparency that permits the executive action of Kant's judge as much as it does the bonding of Fichte's professors and students. Nor is this understanding of community in terms of communication restricted to the University. To understand how the modern University can be a model for society, we have to look at the way modernity approaches community: in terms of the state. The notion of the state is the abstract ground that assumes the community is disinterested and autonomous. Modern community is founded upon the autonomous decision of individuals to communicate with each other as subjects of a state. Community does not come about because of a heteronomous obligation of subjects to a monarch, a tribe, or a land. The modern assumption is that the question of what it means, for instance, to be American is the object of a decision made with the free assent of Americans, rather than an essence inscribed in a race or climate, or a decision made by a monarch to whom a primordial allegiance is owed. Hence, those who are born as subjects of a modern state supposedly possess the power to alter that social contract by such processes as voting.

The effect of domination inherent in this fiction of the state is apparent once we consider how the alleged autonomy of the subject, its freedom to participate in communicational transactions such as this, is conditional upon its subjection to the idea of the state. The subject is "free" only insofar as she or he becomes, for her- or himself, primarily

subject to the state. The state positions individuals as subjects subject to the idea of the state as an instance of community. Subjects, that is, first have an allegiance to the idea of the state. Thus, since the individual is subject to the state, his or her relation to other people is a relation to them as subjects of the state in their own turn. In short, all interactions are mediated through the abstract idea of the state. The singularity or difference of others is reduced, since community with others becomes possible only insofar as those others are, identically with oneself, civil subjects. In modernity, the abstract idea of the state thus underpins the very possibility of communication and civil society.

In this sense, the modern community is inherently universalizing, since it is based upon the assumption of a shared *human* capacity for communication. Specific nations merely compete to best incarnate their essential humanity. The United Nations is a modern institution in that it seeks to resolve the contradiction between nationalism and the ideal of human community, positioning nations analogously to the subjects of the nation-state, as subjects in a community (of nations). The horizon of consensus that guides the modern thought of community is guaranteed by the assumption that the nature of the social bond can itself become the object of free and rational discussion and agreement between subjects, so that they can each freely consent to it. Paradoxically, an agreement that founds the possibility of free and fair communication is presumed to have been made freely and fairly, despite the absence of the agreement.

Such a metalepsis can only be permitted if it is assumed that the language in which differences are sorted out is not itself prey to the action of those differences. We can only agree to disagree if we can establish agreement concerning what it is that we are disagreeing about, and we can only establish communication if we can ascertain that we are in communication without first communicating that fact. Hence all problems of communication, any differences of idiom, must be presumed to be merely secondary to, or parasitical upon, a fundamental clarity of communication—an ideal speech situation.

Culture, as I have shown, claims to be the natural birth of rational communication, mediating between brute nature and articulated reason. According to the German Idealists, a sense of communitarian be-

longing, which would otherwise be the object of abstract reasoning, occurs spontaneously. Culture both teaches brute nature how to be rational and makes reason accessible to nature. To take an example, the subject says to her- or himself: "I feel a sense of attachment; I know a rational state. By understanding myself as culturally German, I can reconcile the two." Culture here serves to unify the desire to speak and the power to mean. Or to put it another way, culture unifies sentiment and logic. Nothing in the world, however, guarantees the assumption that the force of sentiment and the clarity of logic can be harnessed, that *communicative transparency* is possible. Culture claims that it can provide such a guarantee in that it is both the *object* of communication (what is communicated) and the *process* of communication (something that is produced in communicative interaction). Culture, in short, is both *Wissenschaft* (what we talk about) and *Bildung* (the very act of our talking together).

The University of Culture's ideological function in modernity is, then, to pretend to be the institution that is not an institution but simply the structure you get if transparent communication is possible. The University, that is, is presumed to institutionalize the very principle that renders possible the functioning of institutions as bearers of the social bond. This allows universities to appear as pure instances of communication between subjects rather than examples of brute domination.

The majority of left-wing critics have shared in this logic, merely arguing that the egalitarian assumption at the heart of communicational transparency should be fully realized and that domination is an effect of failed communication. This is one of the reasons for which leftists have proved such excellent functionaries of the University, even in conservative regimes: they believe that they are the guardians of a true culture of which the extant regime is merely a false or ideological version. For them, all that is required to set things right is clearer (true) communication: the truth will set us free. I have already given ample account of my sense that this belief is misplaced. To say this, however, is not to say that there is no such thing as interaction, as is often claimed by those who read deconstruction or postmodernity through the lens of Matthew Arnold as restatements of the late-Victorian crisis of faith.

The work of Jacques Derrida and Jean-François Lyotard has been greeted with considerable hostility for the very reason that they raise some fundamental doubts about the assumption that communication is, in principle, transparent. Derrida's powerful readings of the Western philosophical tradition are marked by his insistence that every attempt at communication is attended by a foundational violence (the reduction of the Other to the status of addressee) and by a structurally implicit failure of representation.² For his part, Lyotard has insisted upon the radical heterogeneity of idioms in a way that renders the organization of phrases under a common horizon of truth impossible. His is a pragmatic consideration of speech in terms of a performative notion of "doing justice" rather than a constative attempt to speak the truth—a consideration upon which I have already drawn in Chapter 10 when discussing the scene of pedagogy.

Questioning the transparency of communication, as Derrida and Lyotard do, does not then lead to a claim as simpleminded as "we cannot speak to one another," which has been the conclusion of some. Rather, while we are constantly speaking to one another (Lyotard insists that even silence is a way of saying something, so that Pontius Pilate was not innocent), to describe what happens in terms of an ideal notion of "communication" (even in terms of degrees of successful communication) is to miss the point. Effects of communication may occur; speech contexts may be temporarily stabilized by apparent assent between interlocutors. But such occurrences are never more than acts of stabilization; they are not revelations of a fundamental stability or transparency to communication. Furthermore, such stabilizations are never total, since the very phrases that seek to establish assent to the grounding rules of communication cannot themselves be subject to the rules they establish. Indeed, the presumption of communication, as the Charge of the Light Brigade testifies, causes the most disastrous effects of misunderstanding.

If the assumption that we speak a common language lights the way to terror,³ in what terms can we speak of community? What is the nature of the social bond, if it cannot simply be the object of free choice and rational assent in communication? And what are the implications for the University, the institution supposed to incarnate this model of

communicational community? Is the only alternative to a community founded in communicational transparency a world of atomistic subjects who clash by night in absolute ignorance of one another? If community is grounded neither upon some fundamentally shared ethnic bond (the pre-modern community of blood and soil) nor upon modernity's assumption of a shared possibility of communication, how is it even possible to form? My suggestion is that in thinking about the University we must take seriously the critique of modernity's claim to communicational transparency; we must work out what it means to become what the Miami Theory Collective felicitously calls a "community at loose ends."⁴ As such, the question of the community that the University harbors needs to be phrased differently than it is in the modernist model. We need to think about a community in which communication is not transparent, a community in which the possibility of communication is not grounded upon and reinforced by a common cultural identity.

The thought of community without identity has been above all the work of Jean-Luc Nancy and Maurice Blanchot, in *The Inoperative Community* and *The Unavowable Community* respectively.⁵ Structured by a constitutive incompleteness (Blanchot) or by the sharing of an absence (Nancy), such a community is not made up of subjects but of *singularities*. The community is not organic in that its members do not share an immanent identity to be revealed; the community is not directed toward the production of a universal subject of history, to the cultural realization of an essential human nature. Rather, singularities ("I's" not *egos*, as Nancy puts it) variously occupy the positions of speaker and listener.

This seems particularly important in the context of thinking about the University because, to recall my observations in Chapter 10, it is noteworthy how often intellectuals tend to forget about the position of the listener in favor of worrying solely about the speaking position or position of enunciation. By contrast, what the "community at loose ends" remembers is that the singularity of the "I" or the "you" is caught up in a network of obligations that the individual cannot master. That is, the network of obligations in which an individual is caught up is not entirely available to the subjective consciousness of that individual,

so that we can never pay all our debts. Indeed, the assumption that we can pay all our debts is fundamentally unethical, since it presumes the possibility of overcoming all responsibilities and obligations, achieving “freedom” from them. Autonomy, as freedom from obligation to others, holds out the impossible imagination of subjective self-identity: I will no longer be torn up, divided from myself by my responsibilities to others.

It is the desire for subjective autonomy that has led North Americans, for example, to want to forget their obligations to the acts of genocide on which their society is founded, to ignore debts to Native American and other peoples that contemporary individuals did not personally contract, but for which I would nonetheless argue they are *responsible* (and not only insofar as they benefit indirectly from the historical legacy of those acts). In short, the social bond is not the property of an autonomous subject, since it exceeds subjective consciousness and even individual histories of action. The nature of my obligations to the history of the place in which I live, and my exact positioning in relation to that history, are not things I can decide upon or things that can be calculated exhaustively. No tax of “x percent” on the incomes of white Americans could ever, for example, make full reparation for the history of racism in the United States (how much is a lynching “worth”?). Nor would it put an end to the guilt of racism by acknowledging it, or even solve the question of what exactly constitutes “whiteness.”

Fuller discussion of these questions would require another book. However, I raise these issues in order to suggest how the nature of the social bond should be rethought. One might say that this is a “thickening” of the social bond, or that the social bond is becoming opaque to the consciousness of the modern rational subject. The sheer fact of obligation to others is something that exceeds subjective consciousness, which is why we never get free of our obligations to others, which is why nobody is a *model* citizen (the citizen who would not have any bond to anyone else in the community because he or she would stand for the community as a whole).

A useful analogy can be drawn here with Agamben’s portrait of the community of singularities as a “whatever” community, where the social bond is characterized in lighter terms than I have used so far: not

as obligation but as *transience*, the solidarity of those who have nothing in common but who are aggregated together by the state of things.⁶ This description can help us see that to speak of obligation is to engage with an ethics in which the human subject is no longer a unique point of reference. The obligation is not to other humans but to the condition of things, *ta pragmata*. This is why, as Aristotle points out, a man can be made unhappy after his death by the social disgrace of his children. The social bond exceeds subjective consciousness.⁷ What we call language is not exhausted as an instrument of communication or representation. As a structure that is incapable of self-closure, language escapes instrumentality to mark the indifference of the state of things to the subject.

A distinction must be drawn between the political horizon of consensus that aims at a self-legitimizing, autonomous society and the heteronomous horizon of dissensus. In the horizon of dissensus, no consensual answer can take away the question mark that the social bond (the fact of other people, of language) raises. No universal community can embody the answer; no rational consensus can decide simply to agree on an answer. To preserve the status of the social bond as a question is to tolerate difference without recourse to an idea of identity, whether that identity is ethnic (“we are all white, we are all French”), or even rational (“we are all human”). It is to understand the obligation of community as one to which we are answerable but to which we cannot supply an answer. Such a community is heteronomous rather than autonomous. It does not pretend to have the power to name and determine itself; it insists that *the position of authority cannot be authoritatively occupied*. No consensus can legitimate the University or the State as the authoritative reflection of the consensus it represents. Thought can only do justice to heterogeneity if it does not aim at consensus. To abandon consensus says nothing about limited or provisional forms of agreement and action, rather it says that the opposition of inclusion to exclusion (even a total inclusion of all humanity over and against the space alien) should not structure our notion of community, of sharing.

To argue for the political as an instance of *community* rather than as an instance of society is to make a distinction between the political

closure of a party line (society) and the uncertain experience of being-together that no authoritative instance can determine (community).⁸ To be more precise here, the political as an instance of community is a sharing that does not establish an autonomous collective subject who is authorized to say “we” and to terrorize those who do not, or cannot, speak in that “we.”⁹ A dissensual community would thus be a development of the social bond as a necessity of sharing, of community. However—and this is a crucial restriction—necessity and community cannot themselves be made the object of a consensus. The social bond is the fact of an obligation to others that we cannot finally understand. We are obligated to them without being able to say exactly why. For if we could say why, if the social bond could be made an object of cognition, then we would not really be dealing with an obligation at all but with a ratio of exchange. If we knew what our obligations were, then we could settle them, compensate them, and be freed from them in return for a payment.

This is the point to which the logic of exchange has penetrated such questions in the United States, where children sue their parents for monetary compensation in relation to their failure to live up to parental obligation. Such action is perfectly logical in the terms of capitalism: if there exists an obligation between parents and children, then it must have a monetary value (or it is not real) and potentially be the object of an agreed settlement. That is to say, the capitalist logic of general substitutability (the cash-nexus) presumes that all obligations are finite and expressible in financial terms, capable of being turned into monetary values. This is the logic of the restricted or closed economy.

Of course, once one begins, as I have done, to speak of a non-finite obligation, people easily think of religion, since this is precisely the discursive sphere in which the awareness of the possibility of an incalculable (and hence unpayable) debt has been preserved as an anachronism in modernity. This is why it is easy to sound mystical when speaking of incalculable obligation or unknowable (and hence unpayable) debt, of non-finite responsibility toward the Other. But I am not trying to sound mystical. I am saying something rather simple: that we do not know in advance the nature of our obligations to others, obligations that have no origin except in the sheer fact of the existence of

Otherness—people, animals, things other to ourselves—that comports an incalculable obligation.

To bring this back once again to my argument about pedagogy in Chapter 10, the sense of incalculable otherness of the student affects the scene of pedagogy. To a certain extent, the students are always more aware of the otherness of the teacher, and this becomes clear when they say or respond in a way that forces the teacher to rethink her or his ideas, although almost never in the exact way suggested by the students. Similarly, while teachers may be (and I hope are) in the process of making their students rethink their own ideas, the end result remains incalculable in the final instance. The pedagogic relationship, that is, compels an obligation to the existence of otherness.

To take a slightly different kind of example, one of the reasons family relationships are so difficult, as Freud noted, is that neither children nor parents come with instruction manuals. Again, we do not know the nature of our obligations in advance, and any attempt to determine strictly the nature of mutual obligation, to regulate the reciprocal debt, merely produces psychotics instead of neurotics. I cite the problem of families in a non-normative way to make the point that we never really “grow up,” never become fully autonomous and capable of cognitive determination. As a result, we can never settle our obligations to other people. There is no emancipation from our bonds to other people, since an exhaustive knowledge of the nature of those bonds is simply not available to us. It is not available because the belief that we could fully know our obligation to the Other, and hence in principle acquit that obligation, would itself be an unjust and unethical refusal to accept our responsibility.

The desire to know fully our responsibility to others is also the desire for an alibi, the desire to be irresponsible, freed of responsibility. Our responsibility to others is thus inhuman in the sense that the presumption of a shared or common humanity is an irresponsible desire to know what it is that we encounter in the other, what it is that binds us. To believe that we know in advance what it means to be human, that humanity can be an object of cognition, is the first step to terror, since it renders it possible to know what is non-human, to know what it is to which we have no responsibility, what we can freely exploit. Put

simply, the obligation to others cannot be made an object of knowledge under the rubric of a common humanity.

We are left, then, with an obligation to explore our obligations without believing that we will come to the end of them. Such a community, the community of dissensus that presupposes nothing in common, would not be dedicated either to the project of a full self-understanding (autonomy) or to a communicational consensus as to the nature of its unity. Rather, it would seek to make its heteronomy, its differences, more complex. To put this another way, such a community would have to be understood on the model of *dependency* rather than emancipation. We are, bluntly speaking, addicted to others, and no amount of twelve-stepping will allow us to overcome that dependency, to make it the object of a fully autonomous subjective consciousness. The social bond is thus a name for the incalculable attention that the heteronomous instance of the Other (the fact of others) demands. There is no freeing ourselves from the sense of the social bond, precisely because we do not come to the end of it; we can never totally know, finally and exhaustively judge, the others to which we are bound.¹⁰ Hence we cannot emancipate ourselves from our dependency on others. We remain in this sense immature, dependent—despite all of Kant's impatience.

This long and rather thorny excursus into the problems of obligation and the social bond has been necessary in order to point out a peculiar paradox. As Gianni Vattimo has argued, modern society is "the society of generalized communication."¹¹ Yet as Vattimo also points out, the dream of self-transparency at the heart of the modernist project has been undermined rather than fulfilled by the mass media's "intensification of social communication" (21). The utopia of self-transparency, of a society immediately present to itself in which all members communicate unrestrictedly with all of the others all of the time and without misunderstanding or delay—the German Idealist fantasy of the Greek *polis*—has not been realized. And this is not because of technical limitations but because of technical success. That is to say, the development of technologies capable of processing and transmitting information (of "informationalizing" the world) has expanded so that the speed and range of information exchange exceeds the capacities of the subject who had been destined to master such information. One effect of globali-

zation is to undermine the possibility of a single subject's mastering the complexities of the social bond, metonymically incarnating it as a personal relation to culture. Globalization paradoxically undoes the possibility of a single world culture (or a single world history), because the single world market it proposes is no longer predicated upon the relation of subject to state as the point at which the system acquires meaning.¹²

Hence, in a global economy, the University can no longer be called upon to provide a model of community, an intellectual Levittown. And the appeal to the University as a model of community no longer serves as the *answer* to the question of the social function of the University. Rather, the University will have to become one place, among others, where the attempt is made to think the social bond without recourse to a unifying idea, whether of culture or of the state. In the University, thought goes on alongside other thoughts, we think beside each other. But do we think together? Is our thinking integrated into a unity? There is no property in thought, no proper identity, no subjective ownership. Neither Kant's *concordia discors*, nor Humboldt's organic idea, nor Habermas's consensual community can integrate or unify thinking. Working out the question of how thoughts stand beside other thoughts is, I believe, an act which can push the impulse of Cultural Studies beyond the work of mourning for a lost idea of culture that needs political renewal.

Such is the force of my suggestions concerning disciplinarity. Instead of a new interdisciplinary space that will once and for all reunify the University, I have attempted to propose a shifting disciplinary structure that holds open the question of whether and how thoughts fit together. This question is not merely worthy of study; it is the massive challenge that faces us. An order of knowledge and an institutional structure are now breaking down, and in their place comes the discourse of excellence that tells teachers and students simply not to worry about how things fit together, since that is not their problem. All they have to do is get on with doing what they always have done, and the general question of integration will be resolved by the administration with the help of grids that chart the achievement of goals and tabulate efficiency. In the University of Excellence, teachers and students can even go on

believing in culture if they like, as long as their beliefs lead to excellent performance and thus help the aim of total quality.

The problem that students and teachers face is thus not so much the problem of what to believe as the problem of what kind of analysis of institutions will allow any belief to count for anything at all. What kind of belief will not simply become fodder for evaluation in terms of excellence? At the same time, the very openness to activity that the process of dereferentialization fosters in the University of Excellence allows considerable room for maneuver, provided that students and teachers are ready to abandon nostalgia and try to move in ways that keep questions open.

The thought of community that abandons either expressive identity or transactional consensus as means to unity seems to me to refer to what the posthistorical University may be. The University is where thought takes place beside thought, where thinking is a shared process without identity or unity. Thought beside itself perhaps. The University's ruins offer us an institution in which the incomplete and interminable nature of the pedagogic relation can remind us that "thinking together" is a dissensual process; it belongs to dialogism rather than dialogue.

Such a thought as I am proposing does not amount to a social mission for the University, since it begins by giving up the link between the University and national identity that has assured power, prestige, and research funds for some University intellectuals for almost three centuries. But it also does not mean the abandonment of social responsibility. Real responsibility, ethical probity, is simply not commensurate with the grand narrative of nationalism that has up to now underpinned accounts of the social action of University research and teaching. The abandonment of that legitimating metanarrative is a frightening prospect, but it seems to me that it is inevitable. Such an abandonment will occur gradually without us, if we ignore it. Hence I suggest we pay attention to the prospect of this dereferentialization that will make the preservation of the activity of thinking considerably more difficult. That a major shift in the role and function of the intellectual is occurring is clear. What it will come to have meant is an issue upon

which those in the University should attempt to have an impact. An attention to this problematic is necessary. How we pay attention to it is not determined. Therein lies both the freedom and the enormous responsibility of Thought at the end of the twentieth century, which is also the end of what has been the epoch of the nation-state.

pointlessness of the student actions (and a fortiori of his bothering to write a history of them). While they were perhaps pointless from the perspective of historical continuity, the events of May work outside and against the modernist conception of History as the grand narrative of the realization of a subject, as Lyotard hints in his unfinished introduction to an unpublished “anti-history” of the movement of March 22: “The only way to excuse having written a history book on the March 22 movement is for it not to be a book of history, for it not to dissolve the delirium, the unjustifiability, and the passion into a simple phenomenon to be understood. Rather, such a book must in its turn be an *event*” (“March 23,” *Political Writings*, p. 60).

10. The Scene of Teaching

1. Jean-François Lyotard’s *The Postmodern Condition*, tr. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), is important in reminding us of this. The relevance of Lyotard’s work to the question of pedagogy has not necessarily been acknowledged: the renown gained by *The Postmodern Condition* has tended to obscure its status as a report written for the Conseil des Universités of the government of Québec. As Lyotard remarks in his introduction, that book is an “occasional” text, a report on the contemporary nature of knowledge in Western societies that is addressed to university administrators, a text that “situates” the analysis of the epistemological legitimation (xxv). One significant gesture is the book’s initial refusal of the role of expert in favor of the uncertainty of the philosopher, who is not sure what it is that he does and does not know (xxv). This is not just a matter of epistemological modesty; it is also a refusal to situate the writer of *The Postmodern Condition* in a position of transcendence, outside the institution he analyzes. Neither outside the institution nor completely at home in it, Lyotard foregrounds the institutional question, unable to take the institution as either merely an object of knowledge or a way of life. One of the ironies of Jameson’s widely accepted critique of *The Postmodern Condition* is the way in which his imputations of insufficient political seriousness ignore this highly “practical” discursive location (Foreword to *The Postmodern Condition*, p. xx). One has to be very careful what one says to governments, after all.

Lyotard’s militant position in the events of 1968 in Paris is now perhaps more widely acknowledged, however much it may surprise those accustomed, like Peter Dews, to associate his writings with the undermining of the possibility of political action. Peter Dews, *Logic of Disintegration: Post-Structuralist Thought and the Claims of Critical Theory* (London: Verso, 1987). I shall not examine the problems of Dews’s argument here. Instead, I would urge readers to consult Richard Beardsworth’s excellent essay “Lyotard’s Agitated Judge-

ment,” in *Judging Lyotard*, ed. Andrew Benjamin (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), which persuasively rebuts Dews’s accusations.

Lyotard’s essays emerging from the events of 1968 insist upon the concrete fact of militant action, as in “Nanterre, Here, Now,” which situates student accounts of battles with the police alongside the text of an analysis of the situation which Lyotard had prepared for a meeting of teachers’ union groups. Lyotard begins by noting the fact that he failed to deliver this address owing to the intervention of security marshals—underlining the point that one of the primary effects of the student revolt was to provide the proof that no institutional space of enunciation or of reflection is completely independent of the violence and disruption of political conflict, the fact that “in this society, knowledge is constantly compromised with power.”

Hence Lyotard’s analysis of 1968 refuses the choice proposed by the Fouchet plan, which offered to bring the French University “up to date.” Fouchet’s choice was between a quasi-feudal institution that produces erudite scholarly knowledge and a modernized, practical institution that will produce the technical know-how required in advanced capitalist society. As he argues in “Preamble to a Charter,” the traditional and modern images of the University are in fact more complicit than they might seem: the humanities stress the separation of the University from society, and thus defuse critical energies in producing scholars, while the social sciences technologize social reality to produce experts. Lyotard’s description of the role of the philosopher in the introduction to *The Postmodern Condition* is precisely a refusal to be either an expert or a scholar. The production of scholars in the humanities and the production of experts in the social sciences combine to prevent social critique, whether by defusing critical energies or by recuperating them so as to refine the functioning of the existing social order.

2. This is a warning that Samuel Weber has theorized in exemplary fashion in his *Institution and Interpretation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).
3. Here I am thinking in particular of the dialogue form in the penultimate section of *Ulysses*, in which a question-and-answer session leads to a synthesis of Bloom and Stephen Dedalus, of the Hebraic and Hellenic traditions.
4. V. N. Volosinov (M. Bakhtin), *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, tr. L. Matejka and I. R. Titunik (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1986), p. 118.
5. As Wlad Godzich puts it, “those who hold state power first co-opt individuals, thereby making them other with respect to the rest of society, and then let the state as an apparatus of power determine the configuration of the social. Thus neither the production of the other nor that of the social is collective.” “Afterword: Religion, the State, and Post(al) Modernism,” in Weber, *Institution and Interpretation*, p. 161.
6. As Johann Gottlieb Fichte phrases it in “Plan déductif d’un établissement

- d'enseignement supérieur à fonder à Berlin," in *Philosophies de l'Université* (Paris: Payot, 1979), pp. 180–181, my translation: "A common spiritual existence . . . where they have learnt early on to know each other deeply, and to respect each other, where all their reflections begin from a base which is known to all identically and which gives no grounds for dispute."
7. Lyotard discusses these four poles at length in *The Differend*, tr. Georges Van Den Abbeele (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988).
 8. See Saul Kripke, *Naming and Necessity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980).
 9. As Lyotard puts it in "A Podium without a Podium," in *Political Writings*, tr. Bill Readings and Kevin Paul Geiman (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), p. 94: "To admit that competence in scientific and technical matters is not illusory and that scientists, engineers and technicians really are learned, although at times there is evidence to the contrary, does not prove that the same thing goes for all questions. One can, for example, provide a rigorous demonstration that the just is not an object of knowledge and there is no science of justice. One can show the same thing for what is beautiful, or what is agreeable. Hence there is no true and certain competence in these domains, domains that, however, have a great significance in everyday life. In these domains there are only opinions. And all these opinions have to be discussed."
 10. My allusion to Heidegger here is not coincidental. I follow Granel in seeing the Rectorial Address as the last serious theoretical attempt to position the University as mediating institution between Volk and technology. However, this is not an excuse to ignore Heidegger on the grounds of his Nazism. The critique of instrumental reason that Heidegger mounts is neither wholly determined by nor wholly determinant of Nazism. Understanding this point would have spared us many column inches in the *New York Times*. Heidegger's *What Is Called Thinking?* tr. F. Wieck and J. Gray (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), situates Thought as a gift (something that is caught up in a network of extended, receiving, welcoming and welcomed hands) and as a call (in the sense of something that links our essential being to thought). In both cases, what is crucial is that Thought appropriates the subject, not vice-versa: the gift Thought gives is nothing less than itself, to be called to think is both to receive a vocation and to think about what to call Thought, to attempt to furnish a name to Thought—to enter thinking without knowing in advance what it is that is to be Thought. Thus, to be concerned with the name of Thought is to preserve Thought in its status as questioning in the most extended sense.
 11. Maurice Blanchot, *The Unavowable Community*, tr. Pierre Joris (Barrytown, N.Y.: Station Hill Press, 1988). The nature of this attention is up for grabs. It can be the attention of the Lacanian analytic scene, which, to paraphrase Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen, can be characterized as "absolute mastery." *Lacan: The*

Absolute Master, tr. Douglas Brick (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991). The difference between a pedagogy attentive to the various poles of address and Lacan's analysis is that the "other" to whom Lacan pays attention is not the analysand but the Unconscious. The pragmatics of Lacanian analytic discourse thus remain modernist in that the pole of the addressee is suppressed, becoming the empty relay that marks the place of castration, of absence, the black hole around which the privileged encounter of the analytic master and the unconscious instance of the signifier occurs. Of course, the action of this signifier is purely indexical. Pointing to its own slippage along the signifying chain, it has no signification other than the absence of the signified. Hence analytic mastery is not a matter of simple interpretation, of decoding; rather, as the case of Dupin reminds us, it is a privileged capacity for following the defiles of the signifier without being entrapped into the illusion of hermeneutic mastery, the lure of the search for a contentual meaning by which the Prefect of Police is transfixed. "Séminaire sur *La Lettre volée*," in Lacan, *Écrits* (Paris: Seuil, 1966). Yet this abnegation of one kind of mastery is compensated by another: the privileged knowledge that there is no such meaning, armed with which the analyst can fix the analysand in the place of blindness or castration, pretext for and inert support of an encounter with the unconscious signifier.

While I applaud the exemplary anti-humanism of Lacan's gesture, I find it somewhat unjust to the analysand, who (as the rich tradition of feminist readings of Lacan has pointed out) may hesitate before the absolute identification of castration with lack and absence. In this respect, Jane Gallop's *The Daughter's Seduction* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982) seems to me an exemplary reassertion of the analysand/addressee within the framework of the Lacanian refusal of depth psychology, which is perhaps what makes it such a successful text for classroom use. However, the limitation of Gallop's Lacanian analysis is that the emergence of the addressee is contained within the dialectic of transference and counter-transference, which tends to produce an account of pedagogic affect that fits too easily into an instrumental rhetoric of manipulative seduction—a rhetoric that can be invoked as easily by the student painting her- or himself as victim as by the "lecherous professor." Desire remains a transaction between subjects, and as such can be too easily complicit with power, its flow channeled within the hierarchical distribution of places.

12. My remarks closely parallel the work of Emmanuel Levinas, which has played a major role in formulating the contemporary account of the ethical in France—a notion of ethics that diverges significantly from that found in Anglo-American philosophy. Lyotard perhaps best summarizes what has made Levinas's work so important: "it shows that the relation with the other, what he calls 'the Other' of 'the absolutely Other' is such that the request that is made of me by the other, by the simple fact that he speaks to me, is a request that can never be justified." Jean-François Lyotard and Jean-Loup Thébaud,

- 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, disbaring 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 alibi: 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 delegitimizing 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, *Nicomachean 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 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).