# Quango-ing the University (Cont.)

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## PART THREE

### Critique-al Humanities, the Corporate University and the Pursuit of Profit

1

Although the texts by the Vice President are occasioned by what she represents as a (local) "crisis" in the English Department at SUNY-Albany, they are part of a larger anti-(non-profit)-research and pro-business move in the University. In other words, the views articulated in her texts are effects of historical tendencies to adjust the rate of profit in the knowledge industry as part of changes in the globalization of capital. They are, in short, symptomatic of larger shifts in public spending caused by the emerging economic and political practices aimed at further transferring wealth from the public to the private sector. Public expenditure on higher education has declined since the beginning of the current decade: the "proportion of state funds devoted to [higher education] fell from 14 to 12.5 per cent" (Breneman B-4). The decrease is usually justified by a legislative hysteria about "budget crisis." However, the reduction of public support for higher education is taking place at a time when "more than 15 states have budget surpluses" (Breneman B-4). Take the example of New York State: in his budget for 1997, George E. Pataki, the Republican Governor of the State, has proposed sharp cuts in spending on public education, health care and other social programs at the very time that the State has a budget surplus of over $1.36 billion. The City of New York has ended up with over an $800 million surplus in the same budget cycle (*The New York Times*, May 2, 1997, B-1, B-4 ). The budget crisis is simply a ruse for transferring wealth to the upper classes by means of tax cuts, capital gains cuts and the like, especially cuts in social spending such as education. These funding shifts and privatizing practices should be critiqued and changed: they impose new and more drastic limits on public education; restrict access to knowledge; restrain free intellectual inquiry and replace critique-al citizenship with techno-subjects.

Those who have discussed "privatization" have, by and large, looked at it as a positive development--a "model for the future," to use David W. Breneman's word. "Privatization" of the public research university, however, is not simply a matter of the reduction of public funds; rather it is a "new type of organization whose culture focuses on providing quality goods or services." It is, in the words of Ted Marchese, a "mind set" (SUIQ 3). "Privatization," in other words, is a re-articulation of the university, turning it from a space of critique-al knowledges into a corporation run by managers and by means of such methods as "TQM" (Total Quality Management) which are widely deployed in for-profit corporations. In most research universities--whether formally private (Carnegie-Mellon, Syracuse) or public (Michigan, Georgia Tech) business management strategies, such as the TQM method, are now the order of the day. At Syracuse University, for instance, the TQM model has been adopted as "SUIQ" (Syracuse University Improving Quality). The purpose of SUIQ is to do at Syracuse University what TQM has done in such corporations as Motorola, IBM, Federal Express and Westinghouse. In order to reshape the University as a corporation, TQM takes the "customer" as its central figure and them establishes a relation of identity between the'"customer,' 'student' or 'colleague'" (SUIQ 3). All relations, to be more precise, are relations of "consumption." To implement this new model of management, "[Syracuse] University looked to Corning, Inc." (SUIQ 4). One consequence of transforming the university into a consumption unit is to replace "critique-al" knowledge with business "excellence" (as in CETL--"Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning" at SUNY-Albany, which I will discuss at length later in this section).

SUNY-Albany, it seems, is convinced that the "wave of the future" is to undermine various forms of "basic research" in the humanities by weakening their supporting academic structures--primarily through the adoption of several different management models from the business world. Common to all these different management models being brought into SUNY-Albany and other universities is a shared antagonism to all practices that do not yield "profit," whether directly--by "bringing in money" to the University from outside--or indirectly--by producing skills and consciousness habits in the students/workforce that, as second order practices, will lead to profit-making activities. A research-oriented humanities program--including departments of English, Classics, French, German, Philosophy, History...--aimed at making critique-al knowledges available to citizens of a democratic society is in the way of such a de-formation of the university and thus must be either eliminated or marginalized. It is especially telling that SUNY-Albany has, in fact, eliminated its German Department.

An exemplary instance of this tendency to de-form research practices into more profit-making skills and information is the marginalization of the "history" departments at CUNY. Contrary to the pro-business propaganda, the dismantling of "history" departments at CUNY has nothing to do with a decline in the quality of the scholarship of the history faculty (the faculty of CUNY's history departments includes Arthur Schlesinger, Alfred Kazin, Blanche Wiesen Cook, David Rosner) or the lack of interest in history on the part of students. In fact at CUNY, between 1991 and 1994, "the number of juniors and seniors who declared a history major rose by more than 25 percent" (*The New York Times*, May 29, 1996, B-9). History departments at CUNY are marginalized, in

other words, not because they are not producing first-rate scholarship or there is no interest in history on the part of students but simply because history is not a discipline which yields "profit" to Big Business. Instead, history has often offered some of the most critical assessments of corporate business practices in the U.S. and abroad. History has, in short, served critique-al citizenship by producing "basic research" that has insisted on maintaining a critique-al space in culture. The history programs at CUNY and SUNY-Albany's German Department are, of course, not the only instances of "downsizing" critique-al studies. At the University of Cincinnati, Bowling Green State University and Kent State University, graduate literature programs have either been downsized or completely eliminated (*The Chronicle of Higher Education* March 29, 1996, A-48). Comparative literature studies at the University of Illinois (Urbana-Champaign) and University of Rochester have been closed down at the very same time that cultural theory itself has shifted from inquiry into national to post-national cultures. One can, of course, add other examples to this list. However, what is significant is that the elimination of non-profit "literature" programs is not simply a matter of lack of financial resources but of changing priorities. For example, the Ohio Board of Regents "wants to replace the literature program" at Kent State University, "with a new Ph.D. in composition and rhetoric" (*The Chronicle of Higher Education* October 18, 1996, A-10). Syracuse University has just added a new Ph.D. in exactly the same subject, composition and rhetoric, because these programs have acquired high "market value"--they provide the communication "skills" needed by transnational capital. The same market forces that marginalize, downsize and eliminate such critique-al transnational cultural studies as "comparative literature" (at the University of Illinois and the University of Rochester) or "Italian and Portuguese" (at the University of North Carolina-- Chapel Hill), proliferate programs in "composition," "writing" and "rhetoric." The "global English" that is discussed in these programs is the "global English" of Business, and the un-said of many "Creative Writing" programs has become the training of "best seller" producers whose books--like Hollywood big budget films--are crafted to have a transnational market. The narratives that "composition" and "writing" are undervalued and have been victim disciplines in the universities is simply a myth aimed at justifying the disproportionate funding of these programs and the inordinate power and influence that they have in the organization of priorities by the university central administration.

The Vice President's texts and her administrative practices, such as putting the English Department in "receivership," are moves to marginalize non-profit research in the humanities by, among other things, weakening the autonomy of its faculty. The moves to marginalize the English Department; eliminate the German Department, and to collapse the remaining modern languages into one department at SUNY-Albany; the elimination of language and literature programs across the country, as well as the fate of "history" at CUNY and elsewhere, are not isolated acts. These are all part of larger administrative moves to de-form universities, especially in the next decade or so, reducing their humanities to peripheral units engaged largely in "service" work for more profit-making practices. This process will eventually replace autonomous departments devoted to (non-profit) "basic research" with a number of quasi-academic, quasi-autonomous units that, adopting a common (British) term for an organizational unit that operates largely autonomously, I call *quangos* (*Q*uasi *A*utonomous *N*ational *G*overnment *O*rganization).

University quangos, unlike departments, by-pass the academic processes of decision-making--setting priorities by the majority of faculty--which both involve the democratic participation of members through open debate and discussion and regard intellectual dissent to be an integral part of self-governance and teaching in the university. Instead, quangos "report" directly to one of the senior administrators, usually a vice president. Quangos, however, do not only weaken the autonomy of research units through their administrative structure, for example, by undermining faculty decision-making processes. They also undermine the central role of the critique-al humanities in a democratic society through the way they (re)define the very work of the humanities itself.

In a democracy, the role of the humanities--in its basic research and pedagogy--has been understood, at least since the 18th century which is the beginning of the new humanities in the West, as continuing, with various modifications, the legacies of the Enlightenment. My understanding of the "Enlightenment," I must point out, is radically different from the one popularized by bourgeois theorists in recent years--beginning with "readings" by the Frankfurt School writers. Most poststructuralists, ludic feminists, and NeoMarxists--as, for example, in *Modernity: An Introduction to Modern Societies* written by Stuart Hall and others--have routinely "read" the Enlightenment as essentializing "reason" and thus as a form of totalitarian rationalism. Among other things, this has provided bourgeois theory with an alibi to abandon "reason" and "rationality" and to put in its place both an essentializing "relativism" and an opportunistic pragmatism. The critique of reason in these discourses is itself part of a class politics that attempts to bracket reason and thus dismantle any critique-al understanding of material practices in culture. In his *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*, Engels offers a historical critique of "reason" in the "Enlightenment," but his critique is aimed at historicizing reason and not abandoning it. He writes,

> Every previous form of society and state, every old traditional notion was flung into the lumber-room as irrational; the world had hitherto allowed itself to be led solely by prejudice; everything in the past deserved only pity and contempt. The light of day, the realm of reason, now appeared for the first time; henceforth superstition, injustice, privilege and oppression were to be superseded by eternal truth, eternal justice, equality based on nature, and the inalienable rights of man.
>
> We know today that this realm of reason was nothing more than the idealized realm of the bourgeoisie; that eternal justice found its realization in bourgeois justice; that equality reduced itself to bourgeois equality before the law; that bourgeois property was proclaimed as one of the most essential rights of man; and that the government of reason, Rousseau's social contract, came into being, and could only come into being, as a bourgeois democratic republic. The great thinkers of the eighteenth centry were no more able than their predecessors to go beyond the limits imposed on them by their own epoch. (46-47)

The "Enlightenment," in short, is an effect of class struggle and not a totalitarian rationalism as bourgeois critics have popularized it.

At the core of the humanities and the Enlightenment project has always been the education of critique-al citizens to see through the layers of superstition represented as truth: the ideologies--what Roland Barthes called social "myths"--that have blocked clear, rational thinking and thus have undermined the cause of the progress of humanity towards a society of truth and equality. The humanities, in other words, have sought to educate nunaced and engaged critique-al thinkers, develop an imaginative expansiveness, and foster a historical understanding of truth and justice. (Part of the post-al reading of the Enlightenment as totalitarian rationalism, however, has been to separate "truth" from "justice," as Lyotard does in his notion of "ethics"--as an ungrounded judgment--and to treat "justice" as simply a [case-by-case] pragmatic "differend" and truth as an impossible metaphysics.) Historically, then, the humanities have articulated discourses to develop a critique-al space--a zone of free, not-for-profit thinking--in a culture that has, since the 18th century, increasingly grown commercial and profit-oriented. It is, in fact, the emergence of this culture of commerce ("capitalism") that made the Enlightenment thinkers--Vico, Kant, Rousseau, Helveticus, Diderot, d'Alembert--and such post-Enlightenment thinkers as Hegel more committed to the humanities as a way of maintaining critique-al space as a necessary condition for a "good society." Mozart's "The Magic Flute," it should be remembered, is a above all a hymn to "critique":

> The rays of the sun
> Drive away the night
> Destroyed is the hypocrite's
> Surreptitious power

"Surreptitious power" (the undemocratic and coercive force that appropriates resources to serve the interests of a few at the expense of the many) is what the critique-al citizen is educated to fight against. Without freeing humanity from the "surreptitious power" of myths and ideologies represented as truth, the Enlightenment humanities argued, there will be no "good society." The displacement of the humanities today is, in short, an attempt to marginalize the struggle for a "good society"--which affirms the well-being of the collectivity (not "networking")--and to put in its place a "pleasure society" that celebrates the singularities of individuals by valorizing the "desire" to obtain and "consume" objects of pleasure. The marginalization of critique-al practices, to put it in words that foreground the point I have been making about "profit," replaces the "good society" with a "consumer society." The ability of the citizen to accumulate the power of (personal) consumption and not her ability to critique-ally put human "need" before "desire"--and work to meet these needs--becomes the object of profit-making education.

Since its modern re-articulation in the writings of Adorno, Horkheimer, Benjamin, Marcuse and other Frankfurt School theorists, "critique" has been the subject of attacks by those in power in the culture of commerce. One line of these attacks--from the early opponents of the Frankfurt School to, for example, Marjorie Perloff's "A Passion for Content"[18]--has been to equate "critique" with what Perloff calls "Gotcha." Others have

attacked "critique" by calling it "trashing" (for example, Jane Gallop, Marianne Hirsch and Nancy Miller in "Criticizing Feminist Criticism"), "harassment," "un-civil".... By calling "critique" "Gotcha," "harassment," "trashing," "un-civility," the dominant power have tried to protect its practices from being scrutinized and examined in the public domain and from a rigorous inquiry into its un-said assumptions (un-said because they are treated as self-evident through the exercise of power).

Critique, of course, is a quite distinct practice from "Gotcha," "harassment" and "trashing." Critique is a public act aimed at examining what is taken for granted and put beyond argument--what is treated as a first principle. It is aimed at "practices" not persons; it works to open up space for all who are affected by these practices--to develop new spaces for knowledge and democratic practices of equality. In contrast, "Gotcha," "harassment" and "trashing" move in the opposite direction: they turn away from practices to focus on persons. "Harrassment," for example, is deployed by those who hold institutional power (or are the agents of those who hold such power) to limit not only access to resources but also the life-chances and free choices of other persons who do not hold institutional power. "Harassment" is the use of force and/or intimidation to maintain existing practices by naturalizing inequality and privilege and by silencing the questioning of these practices. Those in power have long called critiques of their practices "harassment"/"trashing"/"un-civility."[19] In doing so they have tried to block any questioning of the legitimacy of their power. To equate critique with "harassment, "trashing," "un-civility"...is to obscure power relations and protect the dominant power.

Removing critique from the scene of the social produces a new cultural space--one in which social relations are mystified and the conditions are made ready for situations like those Ali S. Zaidi describes at the University of Rochester:

> That the savagery of the market should prevail so completely over voices of wisdom and understanding, that corporate theft should pass for fiscal necessity, that the bottom line should pass for "vision," and that the orders and instructions that have turned UR [University of Rochester] into a corporate plantation should pass for the dialogue of an "intellectual community" is indeed the very measure of our disenfranchisement ("The Rochester Renaissance" 56)

It is a mark of this "disenfranchisement" that "literature," "philosophy," "history"...are displaced, in a consumer society of desire, by such profitable and "pragmatic" practices as "writing studies" which have a ready market. Critique-al work in the humanities has not been aimed at developing a specific skill but at cultivating a mode of thinking that insists on the priority of the human search for truth whether this has turned out to be "profit" making or (as is more often the case) has gone against the very grain of a society that has valorized consumption and given priority to "profit." It is this critique-al thinking (not to be confused with "critical thinking" which has become a commodity now taught as a skill as part of writing studies) that the quango-ing of the university displaces so that business practices aimed at making "profit" will assume the status of "natural" acts in human daily life.

2

The secret proposal to establish a "Department of Writing Studies" by partitioning the English Department at SUNY-Albany and removing its research Ph.D. has been supported by corporatist elements in the University as a means for carrying out this shift in the university from a place of critique-al knowledges to one of useful practices that are pro-business. The retrograde project of turning the university into a quasi-business corporation is carried out by the agency of a reactionary group who sees its interests protected in protecting the interests of business ("the wave of the future") by undermining critique-al knowledges and diminishing critique-al space in the university. A "Department of Writing Studies," in other words, is the space in which the historically produced interests of the Group as a structure of power constrains critique-al knowledges by valorizing entrepreneurial individualism in the name of the humanities as a mode of self-writing and a site for the circulation of "experiential" narratives. The Group's interests coincide with those of the pro-business entrepreneurial forces--and both act to marginalize the sites of critique-al thinking in the humanities. This is a repetition on a smaller scale, of course, of the ways in which such conservative ideologues as Lynn Cheney, Hilton Kramer, and Roger Kimball support the pro-business moves to marginalize critique-al humanities by discrediting progressive pedagogues as "tenured radicals" and progressive knowledges as modes of "fundamentalism."

It is not only the Cheney-Kimball axis that uses the charge of "fundamentalism" to erase any resistance to the free market and consumer society. In fact, for the oligarchy in power in the English Department at SUNY-Albany, the term "fundamentalism" (like "idealism") has become a "rescue" word. Anytime they encounter a radical resistance--to the old knowledges that they profess, to the unequal labor relations that dominate the Department, to the rewards and awards that have little basis in work and instead are the effect of their "networking"--they reject that resistance as "fundamentalism." There is of course an "un-said" in this "coding" of resistance to the ruling elite as "fundamentalism." "Fundamentalism" casts the material inequalities among citizens in vaguely religious terms and suggests that any opposition to the status quo is a form of religious "fanaticism." Since the "fanatic" is, in the popular imaginary, associated with the "other," this ideological defense of the dominant class and power relations is not only xenophobic but also racist. If resistance without compromise to dominant power and to a workplace in which the "savagery of the market" prevails and "corporate theft" passes as "vision," as Zaidi puts it, is considered "fundamentalism," then I want to pause and ask: what is wrong with fundamentalism? If the objection is "epistemological"--that fundamentalism is a species of "essentialism"--then opposing "fundamentalism" is itself a form of "fundamentalism" since to say categorically and "fundamentally" that all forms of fundamentalism are wrong is itself a mode of fundamentalism. The non-fundamentalist (as opposed to the anti-fundamentalist) has to "tolerate" all versions of truth including "fundamentalism." Whereas the anti-fundamentalist cannot critique fundamentalism by any "argument" that does not itself eventually become "fundamentalist" since to reject fundamentalism requires a "fundamental" belief and a belief in the "fundamental": the

"fundamental" belief that "fundamentalism" is false. All anti-fundamentalist arguments are therefore subject to the very objection that anti-fundamentalism makes to fundamentalism.

If the objection is "ethical" that fundamentalism is wrong because it imposes a "must"--a categorical imperative--and thus does not "tolerate" any other views, then anti-fundamentalism is equally unethical because it too is founded on a "must": it states that there "must" not be "fundamentalism." The non-fundamentalist, on the other hand, (unlike an anti-fundamentalist) is one who accepts fundamentalism as one of the possible versions of ethical practice and as such cannot be opposed to it.

To take a "pragmatic" view and say that in "real life" one is faced with degrees of consequences and not such "radical" choices, however, is not so much a coherent response to the problem as an evasion by appealing to the complexities of "real life." Such a pragmatic appeal is, in actuality, a surreptitious legitimating of "opportunism." Opportunistic equivocations are finally political equivocations aimed at finding excuses not to become engaged in the struggle for social change. They are, to be more precise, equivocations that in the name of epistemological subtlety, moral and ethical ambiguities and individual freedom of choice legitimate the status quo by refusing to oppose the status quo. The charge of "fundamentalism," in short, is used to discredit any "decided" opposition to that which exists: to accept what *is* as what *ought to exist*. It is used to intimidate any questioning of "is" as a species a totalitarian "must," forgetting that there is "always already" a "must" in what is: a "must" that *is* enforced with all the violence of the state and its ideological state apparatuses--including the dominant philosophy which is only a thinly disguised propaganda for "pragmatism."

The objections of the privileged to fundamentalism, in other words, are not so much "epistemological" or "ethical" (although they are commonly represented as "epistemological" objections to essentialism and ethical critiques of the "must") as they are "political." The objections are, in the end, defenses of the status quo; they naturalize the way things are by "showing" that all attempts to transform the existing power system are "fundamentally" (by their root premises) ungrounded. In other words, the charge of "fundamentalism" made against oppositional intellectuals has become a rehearsed response to change: anyone who struggles to change the system by questioning the root terms of the system is seen as a "fundamentalist": a totalitarian obstructionist. The only anti-fundamentalist way to work for change is to accept the terms of the system and pragmatically work "within the system." The rejection of transformative theory as "fundamentalism" is a rejection of a historical "outside," but this rejection is, itself, a "fundamentalist" assumption. The "American Revolution"--and its democratic "pluralism" to which the anti-fundamentalist appeals--is itself based on a mode of "fundamentalism": "No taxation without representation." This is a "fundamentalist" view; it does not tolerate varying degrees of consequences: "some taxation without representation." It is a categorical (not a hypothetical) imperative: it affirms universally, without exception, the democratic principle that public funds cannot be spent without public debate and public consent. In other words, there is no radical change (e.g. the American Revolution) that is not "fundamentalist," and there is no anti-fundamentalism

that is not a defense of the status quo and its class politics. If "fundamentalism" is a move that has no epistemological basis and is based on a religious faith, so is the rejection of fundamentalism. This is so because the epistemological criticism of fundamentalism is based on anti-foundationalism: that there is no way to establish the truth of the fundamental since all our knowledges are heavily mediated (by language and other media). If the truth of fundamentalism, according to its critics, cannot be verified and thus all fundamentalisms are based on faith, it is equally the case that the truth of the rejection of fundamentalism can not be established either. In other words the skepticism that denies fundamentalism its truth also reflexively denies any anti-fundamentalist truth. For the critics of fundamentalism, then, uncertainty invades both fundamentalism and its opposition. The one who rejects fundamentalism as a religious rather than a rational case, is himself/herself acting religiously: asserting, by faith, the untruth of fundamentalism without having any access to the truth of untruthfulness, the certainty that is needed to reject fundamentalism.

The anti-fundamentalist defense of the class politics of the status quo is clear: after rejecting radical change (as fundamentalist) what remains is a pragmatic acceptance of the existing power structure and a working within the system: the ethics of going along to get along. In other words, the answer to my question: "what is wrong with fundamentalism?"--it becomes clear after one has seen through the initial epistemological and ethical mystifications--is that it is wrong because it seeks root changes in the system. What is wrong with "fundamentalism" is that it rejects the existing system in its totality and searches for a new beginning--a new beginning that will bring about a new social order in which the privileged will not be able to keep their privileges.

Although it is represented as an epistemological-ethical objection, the rejection of radical change as fundamentalism is a defense of the pro-business forces in the university--forces that are "fundamentally" opposed to critique. Business and the free market depend on (the ideology of) the total freedom of desire of the individual. This ideology of (free) individual desire(ing)--and consumption--is the project of a retrograde approach to the humanities that claims an individual's uniqueness is guaranteed by the seeming uniqueness of his experience which cannot be explained by any theory since theory is seen as a form of "fundamental" explanation. Business supports this retrograde view of the humanities as an expression of individual experiences and is in turn supported by it. Radical collectivity--which is rejected as a mode of "fundamentalism"--is a resistance to the tyranny of the desire for consumption.

The administrative coup d'etat, which was carried out "because" there was a "crisis," is actually prepared for in a telling part of the Vice President's May 7, 1996 text, a part that further marks her partisanship when she discusses what she calls the "leadership of the Department" (p.1). "I want to take this opportunity," she declares, "to review the institution's policies and practice regarding the appointment of Department Chairs" (p.1). There is no explanation for the sudden need for a "review" of the existing policies concerning "the appoinment of Department Chairs" other than the fact that the candidate of the Group had lost the election. One is led to ask the question: would the Vice President have undertaken such a review had the candidate of the Group won? Certainly

no review of appointment procedures had been undertaken the previous year when the tensions in the Department were just as high, if not higher, at the election of the Group's candidate as Interim Chair (the candidate of the Group was the sole candidate and some faculty members questioned the validity of the procedures at the time). The Vice President's May 7 text anticipates what is to come. "While it is customary," the Vice President states, "for Departments to advance candidates for this position through the applicable school or College Dean, the final decision is made by the Vice President..." (p.2). A procedural move, in other words, is being introduced to prepare for overturning democratic principles. The question is: which of the two--a technical procedure or the fundamental principle of democratic self-governance--has priority for this administration? What does the administration stand for: bureaucratic proceduralism or the commitment to democratic participation?

Any bureaucrat can (when he/she so desires) justify his/her arbitrary acts by invoking some technicality, amendment, code or procedure. The test of whether a procedural move is invoked to obstruct justice and democracy or not requires examining the history of the practice. What is the history of administrative appeals to such a procedure: how often has it been invoked to block an act? In short, what is the ratio of the use of such a procedure in the history of the institution? Is it used as a matter of course: does the Vice President always review the institution's policy on chair appointments whenever she receives the names of a new candidate from ALL departments? If not, why now? Why on this particular occasion when the the candidate of the power elite in the University has lost by a landslide in the English Department? How many times has the Vice President of Academic Affairs NOT appointed the majority elected chair in a Department? Helen Elam in her June 10, 1996 letter to President Hitchcock writes,

> a small power clique that has been holding sway in departmental and university affairs...was defeated when Professor Cable won the chair's election by a landslide. A landslide is an unusal occurrence in the history of this department, yet she obviously had the full confidence of two thirds of the department. So what happened? This small power clique, who had secretly moved to partition the English department at the same time that signatories of this document were also department officers, managed to get the administration to set aside a democratic election in order to maintain whatever hold they can on power.
>
> Dr. Genshaft's clearcut statement to the department was that officers serve at the pleasure of the adminstrators. But then why go through the charade of elections? If elections do not mean anything, or can be undone by administrators, or can be set aside when the results are not to the liking of a small power group, why have them at all? This was the first time in my nineteen years here when there was hope for a new spirit, for a change, for a more open department, and this was precisely the point at which the administration decided to clamp down and make such change impossible by putting the department into receivership. If ever there had been any

> cause for putting the department under receivership, this was the least justified time. (p. 2)

3

The de-formation of the university--away from a place of critique-al thinking toward one producing useful and pragmatic products (skills)--is carried out by what I have called "quango-ing." Academic quangos are quasi-autonomous units that incorporate the general features of free-enterprise practices: their goal is to do what is directly or indirectly "profitable," to do what brings in money from private sources. These business models undercut "basic research" in the humanities: the disinterested pursuit of truth which is thus indifferent to the "profit" consequences of its findings. In its place, they put practices and activities that appeal to the business world (usually by such codes as the "pursuit of excellence" which means the "pursuit of the profitable"), which in turn underwrites these practices with private funds. These models marginalize academic structures such as "departments"--that are set up to protect "critique-al thinking" and "research" from "commerce" and are thus self-governing bodies--and work to weaken their freedom of intellectual activities (by invoking the criteria of "profit" and the "pragmatic," e.g. "usefulness").

"Excellence" has become the alibi for introducing business practices and procedures into the university. As Bill Readings observes in his *The University in Ruins*,

> Generally, we hear a lot of talk from University administrators about excellence because it has become the unifying principle of the contemporary university....As an integrating principle, excellence has the singular advantage of being entirely meaningless, or to put it more precisely, non-referential...Its very lack of reference allows excellence to function as a principle of translatability between radically different idioms: parking services and research grants can each be excellent, and their excellence is not dependent on any specific qualities or effects they share. (22; 24)

Given Reading's conservatism, it is not surprising that his "reading" of "excellence" is largely semantic and thus isolated from the specific historical situation in which the term has acquired its currency. "Excellence" belongs to a new generation of concepts that signal the post-ality of the current situation. Like Fukuyama's notion of "history," Butler's notion of "performativity," Stuart Hall's "ethnicity," and Baudrillard's "consumption," "excellence" in the university has become the code word for the university's entrance into a new phase: a phase which is post-contestational (beyond ideology). The "excellent" university stands for "pragmatism" and "techne" beyond the "old" fundamentals of (non-profit) "truth and justice." "Excellence," as I have pointed out in my "For a Red Pedagogy," is the discursive device by which inquiries into "root" social and material problems, for example, "class" are displaced by talk about procedures--how to manage

large lecture courses. "Excellence," in short, marginalizes "critique-al knowledges" in favor of "skills" and thus turns the university, in Zaidi's words, "into little more than a corporate annex."

Academic quangos usually by-pass the established processes of academic self-governance, based on faculty involvement in open discussion, dissent and decision-making, and instead "report" directly to one of the "senior" administrators of the university. They undermine freedom of inquiry in setting priorities and erode collective and democratic academic-decision making processes by a priori setting agendas on "useful" things that are by definition "worthy" of doing. To insure that these "useful" (profitable) things are indeed recognized as "useful" and worthy of doing, they establish a "core" faculty: a minority of privileged faculty who "go along" with the main policies; teach choice courses and reap rewards for guarding the "useful" things that are deemed the appropriate subject of teaching and other work in the quango. In addition, they "invite" a secondary group of faculty (if the director/core faculty finds them congenial and in agreement about the "useful" things that should be taught and done) to teach a course or two in the quango. This non-core faculty is essentially a "contingent" labor force. In other words, like profit-making business enterprises, the academic unit relies for its highest "profit" on a temporary labor force that serves not to produce disinterested research results but on the projects/courses that the director/core faculty have already decided to be "useful" ("important," "the wave of the future") and thus worthy of being pursued/taught. The "important," as I have already suggested, is that which "brings in money."

CETL (the "Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning") at SUNY- Albany is an example of an academic quango: its director is responsible to the University's central administration, it is composed mostly of a "contingent labor force"--faculty from other academic units and graduate teaching assistants. It justifies its practices by what has become the all-important criteria in a (public) university more and more interested in "privatization"--"bringing in the money. It is thus "bringing in the money" (not intellectual practices) that gives the "director" a great deal of "power" and autonomy.

The fundamental way in which a quango such as CETL undermines "basic research" in the humanities is that it displaces disinterested research by useful "problem solving." The quango turns the university from a "critique-al" site in society for exploring truth and working to build a just democratic society on that truth into a pragmatic trouble-shooting agency. The pursuit of disinterested truth is too much of a "big word"--it is out of sync with business protocols of profit; it is an abstract "ivory tower" sort of "vision thing" for the business community and its allies in the university. "Truth," for business and its allies has a pragmatic test: what "works," and what works is always what works within the already existing socioeconomic structures based on profit and power for the profit-makers. Pragmatism is the philosophical justification of pro-business conservatism; it keeps society divided into the polar binaries of "haves" and "have nots" and justifies that division of wealth as the outcome of useful/ unuseful practices.

It is in such a context that the Vice President's notion of a department as a unit for the "delivery" of a program acquires its full sense. The un-said in her trope is that knowledge is a commodity (not a critique-al contesting process of inquiry) and, as such, a ready-made "thing." Education, in this pragmatic and anti-intellectual paradigm is a "delivery" of already made knowledge to be adapated to "useful" practices, such as "problem solving."

To see a demonstration of this violent reduction of critique-al work and basic research to "problem solving" and "useful" skills, it might be helpful to "read" a recent issue (Vol.2, no. 1, Spring 1996) of *Focus on Teaching* which is the CETL "Newsletter." CETL also operates according to the idea of knowledge as commodity. It announces that its "Project Renaissance" is "designed to *deliver* the University at Albany's general education program" (p. 2) and stresses that at the core of its teaching is an emphasis on "Human Identity and Technology" (p. 2). "Technology," the items in the *Newsletter* make quite clear, is not a subject of philosophical or historical inquiry in this project--as it should be in a research university's "general" education programs (such as CETL's "Project Renaissance"). Instead "technology" is a code word for learning "useful" skills. At the core of this theory of pedagogy--based on usefulness--is a sustained and systematic attempt to posit knowledge as merely a set of formal procedures cut off from social structures and the economic and political practices of the larger culture. There is no hint here that "technology" will be interrogated in light of, for example, Heidegger's critique or Derrida's probing questions (*Archive Fever*) or that it will questioned in relation to materialist theories of capitalism and the falling rate of profit. Technology is technology: following current cliches, it is treated as a self-evident "given" to which citizens simply have to adjust.

To take a specific example of this anti-critique-al and technicist approach to pedagogy: one of the main issues in the contemporary political economy of cyberspace and cyberknowledges is the question of the "hyperlink"; how does one entity relate to others. As far as CETL is concerned the matter of "linking" is purely a technical and formal issue that has nothing to do with the class relations of society at large. The core of CETL's "A Project Renaissance Report" is therefore devoted to a discussion of the hyperlink:

> What links with what? What is the nature of any linkage--analogy, subordination, antinomy, restatement, synthesis? How can links be sequenced to create logically extended paths? What are the best ways to map linkages to give an effective overview? How do varying perspectives create different maps of the same territory? What mix of text, graphics, sound and video will most effectively convey the matter? (Newsletter 6)

For CETL, the issues in "linkage" are, in short, all "formal" issues--matters of skillful manipulation of the various "assets" and "sources" available. Even when the question of "perspective" is introduced into the matter of mapping, it is simply in relation to individualistic traits: how different perspectives foreground the signature of the specific mappers.

What is studiously avoided in this view of hyperlink is, of course, the question of class and the power relations that follow from them. The CETL project not only does not show any interest in these issues, it is completely unaware of the rigorous debates on the question of "linkage" and the matter of "power" in the New Humanities and critical theory. To be more precise: the question of "linkage" as Jean Francois Lyotard--among others--has indicated is above all a question of "conflict" and contestation--a question of the organization of the social in a democracy. Any "linkage" (how one phrase is related to another) is thus, the "'victory' of one...over the others." What is not "linked" (what is by-passed in a "linkage" thus "remains neglected, forgotten, or repressed" (*The Differend* 136). As far as the "Renaissance Project" is concerned, however, the critique of "hyperlink" is simply non-existent: all that matters is to learn how to manipulate the link and pay no attention to what is, in fact, repressed in the linked/unlinked. It is the "skill" that matters; critique-al thinking about the consequences of that "skill" for the social is simply too abstract an intellectual exercise! But, as Lyotard explains, to limit the matter of linkage to formal issues ("analogy, subordination...") is to suppress the fact that there are acceptable and unacceptable linkages: to suppress, in other words, that "There are hegemonies of genre, which are like figures of politics. They fight over modes of linking. Capital gives political hegemony to the economic genre" (141). The function of the university--as the space of critique-al thinking--is to investigate the political economy of the genre (that is, the tissue of texts created by linkages) and not simply teach the "useful" skill of linking without questioning the social consequences of the links. CETL does not indicate any interest in these complicated issues: all it cares about is the "technical" and the "useful." Lyotard pressures the linkages (and genre) further: "What politics is about and what distinguishes various kinds of politics is the genre of discourse" (142). To know the power relations of linkages, for Lyotard, is the sole goal of critique-al thinking ("philosophy" he calls it). What are the links, for example, of poverty and race; women and rape; queer and exclusion? What is the link of the labor of the periphery and the wealth of the metropole? It is, however, to the "useful" that CETL is devoted (what is the link of "useful" and "power"?). The longest text in this issue of the *Newsletter* is thus given to "Some Proposals for Making Large Classes (More) Interactive" (pages 7-8). The useful "advice" concerns such "novel" and "innovative" practices (to which CETL says it is devoted) as "1. Assign seats/establish a seating chart. 2. Establish and enforce a clear attendance policy, 3. take attendance on a rolling basis...." (p. 7).

The historical role of a quango like CETL is to re-locate the university from a place of critique-al knowledge into a site of useful skills. It does this by jettisoning the structures of "basic research" and at the same time introducing projects and rhetorics that sound and seem "new." This "new-ness" is what makes the ideological effects produced by the quango appealing. The "new" works in the academy as a code word for the "marketable," and what is "marketable" receives the support of the dominant power in the university. One of the "new" things in the academy (and the humanities) now is, of course, the introduction of the computer and other cyberpractices. These practices are, by and large, deployed as new "techniques" (without any philosophical and theoretical questioning of their status in relation to epistemological or political questions) to re-produce the existing structures of power/knowledge by new means. Or as Umberto Eco, whom I have already quoted, states: this is simply a new way of resurrecting logocentrism and empiricism.

These uses of the computer, which in many cases act to cover the old contents in the wrapping of a new form, have the double appeal that a) they do not disturb the political economy of knowledge and b) they look "new."

In this connection, it is, interesting that, having failed to partition the English Department at SUNY-Albany in the spring of 1997, a group of "writing faculty" started to again move to partition the Department (and appropriate the privileges and resources that they had failed to do so when the project for a "Writing Studies" Department was cancelled); this time along new lines by carving out of the Department what is basically a "Virtual" unit. The "writing faculty," realizing that soon its light teaching loads and other privileges will end, has claimed that unless the Department allows them to teach "writing" by deploying "computers," the Department will miss an opportunity and fall behind the times. However, they have also been claiming that in order to teach by computers they should be given special privileges--including teaching in "flexible" ways and exemption from "undergraduate" teaching. When asked by Helen Elam, in a Department meeting, to explain how what they proposed to do was, in fact, intellectually and conceptually new and whether what they had suggested was not reproducing "correspondence courses" in a new guise. She has received no response except the usual evasions. The very persons, who have been blocking the introduction of new knowledges in the Department and, in the age of transnationalism argue for establishing an old-fashioned "American Studies" program, suggest that unless "we" adopt virtual teaching (and allow some to use this as an excuse for course reductions and exemptions from undergraduate teaching), we will fall behind the time! The very persons, who have been blocking the redrawing of the map of "pedagogy" courses and keep teaching the "oldest of the old," turn to the computer for rescue!

The destruction of "critique," it seems, is done in order to bring in "new-er" things to the curriculum when in fact the "new" is simply a strategy for renewing very old profit motives and practices. Projects such as CETL do this in two stages. In the first stage, as I have implied, they propose to introduce novel subjects and methods based on new "technologies" to the university curriculum": for example, the "Human Identity and Technology" or "Hypertextuality and Fiction" (in the case of creative writing). This is one way that capitalism gets rid of what has become historically inefficient in raising the rate of profit. The introduction of the "hyperlink" notion, for example, is an efficient mode of dealing with multiplicities (of all kinds) that mark the economics and culture of post-industrial societies. However, these "new" themes and the curricular patterns are as committed to the "old" ideologies as the "old" curriculum. Both the "old" and the "new" curricula, in other words, are situated in the world of commerce and their primary objective is the naturalization of that world and the marginalization of critique. The "new" (CETL-type) quango, simply renews the old in a "new" rhetoric and a "new" organization so that the same ideological effect is re-produced more effectively.

This double-move is perhaps most clear in CETL's proposal for a first-year English/writing project which was called, the "University Wide Writing Program." The project (as I have argued in my paper "CETL Proposal for University-Wide Writing Program") to some extent goes beyond the old empiricist project of "writing" and

introduces the idea of "discourse" into the teaching of first-year English, just as it introduces the question of "linking" into the Renaissance Project. However, it also treats "discourse" in the same way it treats "linkage": it more or less reduces it to a formalist project. The concept of "discourse" takes the traditional project of teaching writing a step forward, but a formalist treatment also limits it so that it does not become transgressive of established practices. As I have argued in my critique, "discourse" implies that the "writing" project will attend to the question of "language in its entanglements and complications in social institutions of knowledge" (p. 2), and although such entanglements involve questions of "class" and other socioeconomic determinants, the CETL first-year English writing project at no time addresses them. In fact it systematically avoids them. The purpose of the project becomes not a study of "discourse" (in its postmodern sense) but a remedy for the "tremendous difficulties many of our students have in reading and writing academic prose and in speaking articulately in class discussions" (*Proposal: University-Wide Writing Program*, p. 1). "Discourse" (which promises a shift in conceptualizing "writing" as traditionally taught) is quickly reduced to teaching "skills." It becomes a set of formalized "problems" to be "solved." Under the novel concept of "discourse," CETL reverts back to what all "writing" projects have done: to substitute critique-al work for "skill" acquisition. In other words, by introducing "hyperlink" and "discourse," CETL abandons some of the old practices (and this is why, for example, its project was opposed by some empiricists, in the English Department, who believe that such a move is wrong-headed and and, as a consequence of exposure to it, students' writing "will get worse"). I should point out that after behind-closed-doors "negotiations," some of those who opposed CETL on these grounds are now its supporters and have joined the CETL faculty and are working to establish the "Writing Studies Department." What was proposed as the "Writing Studies Department," was, of course, itself a form of quango, since it would have been composed out of such quangos as CETL. CETL abandons the old "writing" methods not for a more progressive and critique-al goal but rather to update the old goals in a new rhetoric. "Writing" is still a "skill," but "skill" itself has now changed because of changes in technologies. "Skill" is now a more complex set of practices that includes (as befits the age of cyberspace) abstract thinking. (This is why most writing faculty at SUNY-Albany who teach "writing" as a "skill" are outraged by this critique: they think that since the "skill" they are teaching is different from the old "skill" that they are no longer teaching skills!) But abstract thinking itself has largely been reduced to a form functional skills in the age of computational literacy--as required by the fact that the labor force must be capable of manipulating computer programs.

Producing these new skills which are useful for big business has become the goal of education: a goal that as Zaidi writes: "diverts resources from the humanities and theoretical sciences in order to fund applied research that profits corporate sponsors" and has turned the university from a place of critique-al knowledge "into little more than a corporate annex" (51).

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## Notes for Part Three

18 For a Discussion of Perloff's notion of reading as un-critique-al, see M. Zavarzadeh, "The Purpose of Studying Literature."

19 In his "Seduced by Civility: Political Manners and the Crisis of Democratic Values," Benjamin DeMott demonstrates how the demand for "civility" by the ruling class is an attempt to erase critique-al contestations from the scene of the social.

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