

Locating a Professorial Voice:

North American Institutional Debates on the Purpose of the University in Historical Perspective

by

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Contents

Acknowledgements		ii
Introduction		1
Chapter 1	20th and 21st Century University Biography's Genre Boundaries	7
Chapter 2	An Institutional Voice as an Artifact	20
Conclusion	Political Activism on Campus: How to Do Things with Words	36
Bibliography		41

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The French semiologist and cultural critic Roland Barthes wrote that, “for those possessed by the fantasy of the thesis (a timid practice of writing, at once disfigured and shielded by its institutional finality),” one of the roles of the teacher is “to guarantee the reality of that fantasy.”ⁱ For that reason, the primary thanks here must go to my supervisor Dr. Tom Saunders, who gave me my first introduction to what one might call “theory,” in this case historical theory, as opposed to simple history or philosophy, and who was then patiently complicit in this project as it veered in that direction. It is precisely the “institutional finality” of the thesis project that provides a difficulty in writing acknowledgements (will my parents even read it, despite having supported me financially, in the form of room and board?) But I will duly give thanks to those who have helped me make this rather long project possible.

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ⁱ Roland Barthes, “Writers, Intellectuals, Teachers,” in *Music/Image/Text*, translated by Stephen Heath (New York, NY: Hill and Wang, 1978), 197.

same vein, I am thanking Ari Finnsson and Kate LeBere, both of whom provided me with support in the same long winter of 2019 that I mentioned above. They also provided a model for how to stay sane with an honours history thesis. Last but not least, and in a paper so focused on the material conditions of scholarship, I have many reasons to thank my parents, who work every day to provide me with a world in which, for the moment, I do not have to work. They provide the much-appreciated but invisible labour that sustains my work at university and without which I would not be able to do a project like this, if any projects at all.

Introduction

Not only in their answers but in their very questions there was a mystification.

—KARL MARX, *The German Ideology*

The field of university studies is huge; each book written on the university sketches only one aspect of the university phenomenon. One finds discursive, autobiographical, historical, and scientific works side by side. Within that heterogeneity, discrete genres exist which address particular terrain in particular ways. Similarly, the critical literature (which we might call historiographical) is itself diverse and wide ranging. To contribute, therefore, to the historiography of this field requires a narrowing of focus. What deserves attention? The genre I have chosen (and which I will define at length in my first chapter) can be sketched as follows. Over a timespan of about 150 years, stretching from the late nineteenth century to the twenty-first, a series of North American¹ authors (mostly men) have produced a body of personalized, argumentative writing from professorial chairs on the purpose of the university. I call that body of work professorial “university biographies” (stories of the life of the *institution* as a whole). Judging first-person, end-of-career biographies of the university written by professors to be significant, I have selected this genre of writing from among other forms of writing on the topic of the university (journalism, lectures, speeches, critical texts, historical studies, sociological treatises, and so on).

By picking one topic among many, it is difficult to avoid turning my contribution into yet another bibliographic essay on a new corner of the field. Although I agree with Jaroslav Pelikan that there is nothing trifling about bibliographic essay writing, the goal is to offer a critical method that is

¹ The reader will notice that I use “North American,” and yet I hardly reference Canada. As a Canadian myself, this is not absentmindedness. Admittedly, the term “North American” represents an alibi for instances when American professors speak from Canadian universities and vice-versa. There will be slippage elsewhere: British authors will undoubtedly crop up, whether in American publications or looking in from outside. There is not much that can be done here: these borders are more porous than one often thinks, especially when one is discussing words, debates, ideas, and publications.

transferable to these other genres.² The genre of contemplative professorial work responds to specific (changing) working conditions and intellectual currents; it is thus important to map it both intellectually and socially/materially across my 150-year period. Social transformations have produced written and oral debates while the modern American university has coalesced through various oft-highlighted conflicts: the displacement of the liberal arts college by the modern research university from the 1880s to the Second World War; the mass democratization of those very institutions after 1945;³ the “culture wars” of the 1980s during which the results of this opening-up were parsed through the canon debates;⁴ and finally, the marketization of the university in the 1990s and in the new century, a “modernization” in terms of economic accumulation that the research university had promised in intellectual terms a century earlier.⁵ Each of these periods can be paired with a major author considered exemplary both of the genre as a whole and of the particular conflict in question: Robert Maynard Hutchins, Jacques Barzun, Allan Bloom, and Martha C. Nussbaum. The approach to the material will not be periodical, however. Framed by this timeline, continuities will be clearer. Throughout all these changes, a professorial voice spoke out, increasingly less self-confident but always intact. Its common traits (intertextuality, personality, professorship, and non-referentialism) have evolved over time but still make up a genre with enduring relevance. This genre remains the legacy of this long century: the myth of the power of the professorial sermon on paper.

² Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Idea of the University: A Reexamination* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992), 213–31.

³ These authors and their works will be cited as they appear in the text; Francis Mulhern, introduction to *Teachers, Writers, Celebrities: The Intellectuals of Modern France*, by Régis Debray, trans. Macey David (London, UK: NLB, 1981), xiv; Mark C. Ebersole, “Utilitarianism: The Distinctive Motif of American Higher Education,” *Journal of Education* 161, no. 4 (1979): 5–19.

⁴ Paul Jay, *The Humanities in “Crisis” and the Future of Literary Studies* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 2–3.

⁵ Geoffrey D. White, preface to *Campus, Inc.: Corporate Power in the Ivory Tower*, eds. Geoffrey D. White and Flannery C. Hauck (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2000), 13–17; William Clark, *Academic Charisma and the Origins of the Research University* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 462–64.

This thesis is composed of two parts, corresponding to a two-part methodology. Chapter one is a definition of the formal characteristics that constitute university biography as a genre. In this context, it can be understood as a systematic way of formulating the university's mission, one that evolved over time, thus exhibiting genealogy, and thereby acquired generic, even canonical, features.⁶ Chapter one most closely resembles the bibliographic essay; its topic has already been presented. Chapter two will sketch an "archeology" of that voice's material context—its conditions of possibility.⁷ These conditions turn genre traits into "rules... that operate beneath the consciousness of individual subjects and define a system of conceptual possibilities that determines the boundaries of thought in a given domain and period."⁸ In other words, what institutional and material constraints have framed this branch of the discourse on the university? And inescapably, *who* produces this writing? Or rather, how can we think of this *who*?

To answer these questions, the concept of "voice" will be historicized: it refers here neither to a real human voice nor to a mere "style" but to the synthesis of generic traits of university biography and the abstract persona of the professor.⁹ It will be argued that this professorial voice, far from expressing timeless and placeless concerns about "the value of education" (or timeless and placeless genre boundaries), is produced exclusively by a certain economy, both professorial and institutionalized, which blends traits of pre-modern labour practices with those of the modern publishing drive. In this ecosystem, where the professor is halfway between a worker and an

⁶ David Armitage gives a good summary of the now-popular "intellectual genealogy" as it emerged from Friedrich Nietzsche's *On the Genealogy of Morals*. "This method does share some features with tracing family history: it digs back through the past; its searches for roots... Genealogical research fastens on continuities... And if the overall aim of family genealogy is self-affirmation, intellectual genealogy encourages skepticism and humility." David Armitage, *Civil Wars: A History in Ideas* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 2017), 16–18.

⁷ Gary Gutting and Johanna Oksala, "Michel Foucault," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (Spring 2019 edition), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2019/entries/foucault/>; As a starting point for this thesis, William Clark pursues this aim for university history, albeit for an earlier timeframe than my own. Clark, *Academic Charisma*, 4–5, 398–432.

⁸ Gutting and Oksala, "Michel Foucault."

⁹ Clark, *Academic Charisma*, 398–432.

intellectual, a guildsman and a priest, professors have maintained their ability to speak as the first-person pronoun of the university, albeit increasingly tentatively as the university modernizes and marketizes itself. In other words, the aim is to materialize the bibliography by locating its voice.

The formal boundaries of university biography have been severely shaken over the past century, a process this paper explores in order to locate that shaken and disorderly voice (the intellectual and the psychological in the material) amidst what Bill Readings calls the modern “university in ruins.”¹⁰ Anchoring this study in the history of academic subjectivity is a way of breaking through a gulf that is produced by attempts to decode academic writing as purely argumentative and not social. A genealogy using university biographies becomes disembodied (purely bibliographic) if it is not tied to a history of time and place, of the writer’s dependence on their scholarly “chair” (literally and metaphorically). Hence, there is a need for historical inquiry of an archeological kind.

To historicize the texts of university biography and their writers (primary material), as well as the writers of (secondary) bibliographies and intellectual histories (myself included), means looking at the moment of production (that is, the moment of writing). A chronology of writers and major texts on the university (already provided in some sense by Francis Oakley) is itself pointless if historicization stops short of the author of the chronology.¹¹ Unhistoricized, a writer of a bibliographic essay can shift from the genealogical to the argumentative, assured that, once traced, past contradictions in the debate will not come up again in their own writing. This is naïve. Without a view of authors within the intellectual and material contexts of the debate, history(-ography) and genealogy become a step-ladder to be pushed away once a given writer enters the debate. The

¹⁰ Bill Readings, *The University in Ruins* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996).

¹¹ Francis Oakley, *Community of Learning: The American College and the Liberal Arts Tradition* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1992), 102.

analysis of rhetorical arguments across history leads to good taxonomies that must be abandoned when the writer themselves attempts to contribute to the debate on the university.

In addition, the skeptical archeological analysis of institutions as they exist in one time and place, as Michel Foucault argued, must be tied to a heritage (a genealogy).¹² This is both for explanatory value and lest the scholar be able to take one step back from the archaic object of their excavation. Materialist analysis is jeopardized when the writer shifts to normative argument (a sort of is–ought fallacy), forgetting how they might share institutional structures with the very writers they are researching. My own approach will allow future authors to demystify other genres of academic writing (and their own!) along these lines, centred as it is on locating a professorial-authorial “voice” as expressed in certain genre forms in the long twentieth century and then on finding that voice’s institutional ecosystem. By demystification, I mean the reversal of the mental procedure discussed by Karl Marx in *Capital* by which “the social character of men’s labour appears to them as an objective character stamped upon the product of that labour...”¹³

Far too often, works produced at the university are taken primarily to be repositories of knowledge and rarely to be the historical product of power relations, or modes of production. Only by looking at their “voice” and its surroundings, which I share to an extent as a student, can we gauge the limits of the power of our own writing to effect the change we desire in our common institution.¹⁴ Once we know what our professional writing cannot accomplish due to conceptual and material limits (and what it can accomplish, through well-honed writing), we will be in the position

¹² Gutting and Oksala, “Michel Foucault,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*; Clark, *Academic Charisma*, 19–21.

¹³ Some might equally call this “de-reification,” although I enjoy the religious analogy in Marx’s language of fetish and myth. Karl Marx, *Capital*, volume 1, in *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, ed. David McLellan (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1987), 436.

¹⁴ I am taking for granted that academic writers *want* something to *happen* when they write, whether they are defending a timeless tradition or plotting a revolutionary path. The historical specificity of the activist academic-cum-intellectual is explored by Francis Mulhern in the introduction to *Teachers, Writers, Celebrities*, vii–xxvi [and the subsequent volume] and in Bruce Robbins, *Secular Vocations: Intellectuals, Professionalism, Culture*. The Haymarket series (London, UK; New York, NY: Verso, 1993), x, xi.

of making, with the most clarity possible but arguably with no greater moral certainty, the fateful decision: keep writing on campus or find somewhere else to write. Or is there another option, a middle course? This binary framing shows us the urgency of the question. At the very least, since very few scholars renounce the project of the university, new stories about our work would need to be told if we should wish to continue writing on campus. “We are left, then, with an obligation to explore our obligations without believing that we will come to the end of them,” writes Bill Readings.¹⁵

In this way, this exploration simultaneously points to my personal reasons for choosing such a research topic. Aware from the start of the limited purpose and audience of my project, I wanted to sketch the origins of that symptomatic feeling of purposelessness in the history of academic writers. By positing the *personal perspective of authors* in the twentieth- and twenty-first-century North American university as the *historical phenomenon in need of analysis* and by including myself therein, I am openly asking myself why and how university-dwellers write. University biography—professors’ biography of the university institution, part laudatory, part retrospective, part historical, and part critical (the story, not the history, of the university’s life)—is the fruit of a lived experience of the university, and it should be read as such. I chose the name *biography* not to refer to the modern practice of writing about one’s life but in reference to the early-modern practice of (mostly French) memoir-writing that sought to locate the writer within the course of a particular important epoch or current, historical and anecdotal. This older genre provides an inkling of the curious blend of personal and institutional imagination at play in my modern version. This leaves my own writing open to similar analysis (a fact to be put aside but never forgotten).

¹⁵ Readings, *The University in Ruins*, 190.

Chapter One: 20th and 21st Century University Biography's Genre Boundaries

In his 1993 book on the curriculum debates, W. B. Carnochan wrote the following:

We have reached a situation of diminishing returns in which the apparent sameness of the argument undermines some of its vitality (if not its volume), even its interest, while obscuring the possibility of an analysis that would distinguish what is merely repetitious from what is—however analogous to earlier debate—qualitatively different and dependent on new circumstances in the society.¹⁶

In this quote, Carnochan opens up two levels of investigation for the historian of university debate: “the sameness of the argument” and “new circumstances in society.”¹⁷ This chapter will begin with the first. The next chapter will take up the second. Scholarship that ignores one or the other is doomed to repeat standard tropes.

Many historiographers of the university have had to deal with the evident repetition in other scholars' writings on the university (and, as a result, in their own). A genre approach to the debate might orient us. Because not everything written on the modern university is cut from the same cloth, it will be impossible and undesirable to find genre boundaries for the whole of modern university biography (indeed, a universal genre is not a genre). I will be defining what I take to be the genre of university biography, also suggesting possible contrasts with other kinds of writing about the university. In what follows, university biography as sketched in the introduction is considered as writing that is intertextual, personal, and professorial. It is also non-referential in its statements, in the sense that these are general and not empirical (*the university, the student, and so on*), which is to say that they do not refer to a specific object “in the world.”

Before I substantiate these claims, a general comment on genre is necessary. What is genre and how does it help understand scholarly nonfiction writing? While genre is primarily a literary or musicological concept, it can in theory cover any “work” (artistic, literary, or argumentative) that,

¹⁶ W.B. Carnochan, *The Battleground of the Curriculum: Liberal Education and American Experience* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), 5–6.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

consciously or unconsciously, exhibits similar social, formal, technical, ideological, commercial, or juridical features.¹⁸ Put another way, the *who*, *what*, *when*, *where*, and *why* of a “work” is generalizable, at least in part. This alone, however, would not be of particular use to the historian, given that a genre categorization of historical texts may be wildly out of line with what the historical period’s authors thought they were writing. There is more at stake. As Whelan and Novak write, “Genres, then, are not merely bundled textual and stylistic features. The rules or conventions of genres are not *there*, nor *pre-established* [...] Genre conventions act as expectations that members of what [has been called] the ‘genre community’ discuss and negotiate (notably in determining whether or not particular works belong to the category).”¹⁹ This perspective is crucial (indeed, decisive) for my project here. Even works of university biography that do not obey the genre rules of my “core” genre often reference them; they construct genre from the sidelines. If this thesis is a project of genre-definition, it is in order to pursue consciously an otherwise-unconscious process.

The evidence that the genre I propose is more than just a heuristic is confirmed by the texts themselves.²⁰ Genre then becomes a historical tool insofar as it constitutes a proposal for how to understand a part of the past.²¹ A certain kind of university writing (whose specific characteristics are the subject of this chapter) is recognizable through a self-referential, intertextual network whose contours can be drawn as a way of introducing the field as I know it. Otherwise, there would be no

¹⁸ I am lifting these concepts from a musicological essay by R. Whelan and A. Nowak, not from literary theory. Raphaël Nowak and Andrew Whelan, “‘Vaporwave Is (Not) a Critique of Capitalism’: Genre Work in An Online Music Scene,” *Open Cultural Studies* 2, no. 1 (2018): 454.

¹⁹ Whelan and Novak, “Genre Work in An Online Music,” 454.

²⁰ Hayden White notes this issue: “what is involved, then, in that finding of the ‘true story,’ that discovery of the ‘real story’ within or behind the events that come to us in the chaotic form of ‘historical records’? What wish is enacted, what desire is gratified, by the fantasy that real events are properly represented when they can be shown to display the formal coherency of a story?” Hayden White, “The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality,” in *The Content of the Form* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 4; I am only proposing that we take seriously a quite gratifying story.

²¹ The notion of history as a proposal to best understand the past is taken from Frank Ankersmit. I think genre is exemplary as a tool for such proposals. Frank Ankersmit, “In Praise of Subjectivity,” *Historical Representation* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2001), 87, 89, 92.

consistent way to select from a possible literature that spans nearly two hundred years and presents many different critical, topical, and formal considerations.

Four Major Characteristics

Intertextuality

The genre boundaries of university biography include a fairly well-defined intertextual network. No historiographer has, for instance, missed John Henry Newman's predominance in the literature.²² Sheldon Rothblatt calls Newman's influence on research into the university "hypnotic."²³ It is not even necessary to participate in conversation with him to be aware of his ideas. Newman's influence extends from his own time in the 1890s to today. Newman surfaces in many works of university biography: R. M. Hutchins's 1936 *The Higher Higher Learning in America*, as well as Clark Kerr's 1963 *The Uses of the University*, Jarsolav's Pelikan's 1992 *The Idea of the University: A Reexamination*, and Fareed Zakaria's 2015 *In Defense of a Liberal Education*.²⁴ These may seem like four chronologically disparate texts, but in fact the return to Newman is instructive for university biography as a genre (although in this respect he is only *primus inter pares*).

The cross-genre frequency of Newman references represents a kind of genre-formation from the outside.²⁵ The difference between university biography's and other genres' use of Newman lies in an intriguing continuity in the former revealed by those who "conceive of their argument in the

²² Sheldon Rothblatt provides a list of works (including his own!) which touch on Newman and his importance for the genre. See also Helen Small's thesis that the British Victorian era is paradigmatic for the debate on the humanities as we currently know it. Sheldon Rothblatt, "The Writing of University History at the End of Another Century," *Oxford Review of Education* 23, no. 2 (1997): 162; Helen Small, *The Value of the Humanities* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2013), 22, 68–88.

²³ Rothblatt, "The Writing of University History at the End of Another Century," 156.

²⁴ It is important in terms of what follows that Zakaria is not a professor; Hutchins, *The Higher Learning in America*, 103; Clark Kerr, *The Uses of the University, With a "Postscript—1972"* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1963), 2, 3; Pelikan, *The Idea of the University*, 8; Fareed Zakaria, *In Defense of a Liberal Education* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, 2015), 71.

²⁵ Sheldon Rothblatt, *The Modern University and Its Discontents: The Fate of Newman's Legacies in Britain and America* (Cambridge, UK; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 1–49; Small, *The Value of the Humanities*, 171–3; Carnochan, *The Battleground of the Curriculum*, 3, 21, 117.

terms that... [historical writers, in this case, Newman] defined...,” as Guy Ortolano puts it, and by those who “invoke... [the historical] argument as a precursor to some contemporary issue.”²⁶ This method can be opposed to historical analysis, undertaken by Ortolano himself, as well as by Sheldon Rothblatt mentioned above, which “is defined here as one that resists the impulse to enter the argument on behalf of” one of the interlocutors in a historical debate.²⁷ In sum, intertexts may be employed cross-genre to solidify a certain canon around which a single genre constructs itself.

Insofar as university biography broaches questions of utilitarianism in education, one important intertext is Matthew Arnold, who is influential here for opposing Utilitarian educational reforms in the second half of nineteenth century in Britain.²⁸ His influence offers a good opportunity to point out that the recurring references do not represent blind repetition but a concern shared with past writers.²⁹ That concern involves an ongoing polemic between defenders of operational utility in education and those who defend some form of personal development (*bildung*).³⁰ Functionally, this distinction comes out strongest in the “two cultures” debate, which opposes the humanities and the sciences along lines of utility, and in general discussions around whether higher education serves

²⁶ This ahistorical treatment persists and becomes more surprising the further into the twentieth century one looks. See, for example, Jaroslav Pelikan, who was writing, as Linda Zimmerman reminds us, after (and in response to) a slew of anti-university works (Allan Bloom’s text, for example) that looked to shatter the professorial self-satisfaction that was a matter of course up until the 1980s. Cf. Linda Zimmerman, “The Long Shadow of Cardinal Newman: New Ideas on the University” [book review], *Stanford Humanities Review* 6, no. 1 (1998): <https://web.stanford.edu/group/SHR/6-1/html/zimmerman.html>; Guy Ortolano, “The Literature and the Science of ‘Two Cultures’ Historiography,” *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science* 39, no. 1 (2008): 143.

²⁷ Ortolano, “‘Two Cultures’ Historiography,” 143.

²⁸ Small, *The Value of the Humanities*, 74–75.

²⁹ Stefan Collini, the British talking head and professor, doubts whether anything can be learned from different institutional contexts like those of Victorian England. Meanwhile, Ferry, Pesron, and Renaut urge us to not abandon philosophies of the university as *philosophy*—structured and systematized thought that cannot be easily transplanted from one tradition to another; Luc Ferry, J.-P. Pesron, and Alain Renaut, introduction to *Philosophies de l’Université: l’idéalisme allemande et la question de l’Université* (Paris, France: Payot, 1979), 9–11; Stefan Collini, *What Are Universities For?* (London, UK; New York, NY: Penguin, 2012), 42; Bruce A. Kimball, *Orators and Philosophers: A History of the Idea of Liberal Education* (New York, NY: Teachers College Press, 1986).

³⁰ I am using Michael R. Harris’s term, “personal development,” which I think is vague enough to capture the requisite diversity of positions and oppositions that keep occurring in the literature. A linguistic survey of the expressions that seek to understand the underlying opposition that pits science against the humanities, research against pedagogy, and vocational training against personal development would be a feat in itself and well worth it. Michael R. Harris, *Five Counterrevolutionists In Higher Education* (Corvallis, OR: Oregon State University Press, 1970), 30.

self-formation or careerism and innovation.³¹ While I think that the two cultures debate stands apart from university biography, they are not insulated from one another.³²

Although one hundred years of university biography may appear too much to put under one label, even recently published texts of university biography and its contemporary critical literature return to signposts this distant in the past. Now-old debates recur as references. The debate between C. W. Eliot of Harvard and James McCosh of Princeton over the free-elective system in the late nineteenth-century United States and the post-war “two cultures” debate between C. P. Snow and F. R. Leavis on the character of scientific versus literary disciplines can all be seen as following in the footsteps of the debate on the value of scientific and humanistic learning between two Victorians, Matthew Arnold and his opponent T. H. Huxley.³³ What Arnold and these other figures provide are signposts from the past on which to hang contemporary perspectives.³⁴ These signposts, while themselves not constituting a genre, certainly help form genre boundaries through intertextual reference.

³¹ Helen Small provides a good overview of the various iterations of the debate on educational value over the past two centuries. Francisco Esteban Bara, in a journal devoted to educational development versus utilitarianism, uses Ortega y Gasset, Newman, and Wilhelm von Humboldt to respond to contemporary concerns over vocationalism; Small, *The Value of the Humanities*, 4, 61, 67–124; Derek Bok, *Higher Learning* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986), 73–113; Francisco Esteban Bara, “Wilhelm von Humboldt, Cardinal John Henry Newman, and José Ortega y Gasset: Some Thoughts on Character Education for Today’s University,” *Journal of Character Education* 11, no. 1 (2015): 2, ISSN 1543-1223; Hutchins, *The Higher Education in America*, 33–58; Martha Nussbaum, *Not For Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), 22–24, 92; Collini, *What Are Universities For?*, 45.

Abraham Flexner and Nuccio Ordine collapse the sciences–humanities distinction into this broader distinction between use-oriented and curiosity-oriented learning, which can take place in either the sciences or the humanities, sensing the deeper logic behind the debate (the humanities–sciences debate is actually about utility–curiosity); Nuccio Ordine, *L’utilité de l’inutile: Manifeste*, trans. Luc Hersant and Patrick Hersant (Paris, France: Pluriel, 2016), 99, 121; Kayo Denda, “The Institute for Advanced Study,” *Serials Review* 27, no. 1 (2001): 72; Richard B. Gunderman et al., “A ‘Paradise for Scholars’: Flexner and the Institute for Advanced Study,” *Academic Medicine* 85, no. 11 (2010): 1784–85; Harris, *Five Counterrevolutionists*, 107–29.

³² Guy Ortolano writes the historiography of an independent field, the “two cultures’ historiography”; Ortolano, “Two Cultures’ Historiography,” 143.

³³ It is important to note that a significant part of the Eliot–McCosh and Arnold–Huxley debates occurred in person. This sort of thing is less conceivable today, when the “enemy” is more impersonal. Administrators do not readily debate their faculty, either; Carnochan, *The Battleground of the Curriculum*, 9–38; Small, *The Value of the Humanities*, 30–47.

³⁴ Small, *The Value of the Humanities*, 9; see Dina Birch, *Our Victorian Education* (Malden, MS; Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing, 2008) for a discussion of the contemporary relevance of Victorian educational history.

Personalism

The second convention of the university biography genre is personalism. If one goes back to the archetypical *Idea of a University* by Newman, one finds an authorial personality reflecting, at least in part, on his life. Explaining his reason for returning to a well-worn topic such as the university, he immediately becomes personal: “it is because the subject of Liberal Education, and of the principles on which it must be conducted, has ever had a hold upon my own mind; and because I have lived the greater part of my life in a place which has all that time been occupied in a series of controversies...”³⁵ Newman’s work was, in its own 1890s context, more of a policy paper than much of his self-appointed successors’ work, but the similarities remain strong.³⁶ Personalism recurs in later works of the genre. Jumping ahead to the other end of our timeline, Martha Nussbaum’s *Cultivating Humanity* (1997) exemplifies this trait: “this book began from many experiences stored up from twenty years of teaching at Harvard, Brown, and the University of Chicago...”³⁷ Derek Bok’s *Higher Learning* (1986) begins as follows: “when I began teaching at Harvard Law School more than a quarter century ago, I found much that exceeded my expectations.”³⁸ In brief, the self-reflective merges with the analytical in this genre.

Stressing personalism may seem like another way of saying that university biography is written by professors (my next convention). Is not all professorial writing “personal”? But university *history* (as opposed to biography) is also written by professors (almost by definition), and yet it preserves distance and objectivity. University biographies are, by contrast, discursive and digressive, argumentative and rhetorical. Admittedly, both university biography and university history can be

³⁵ John Henry Newman, *The Idea of a University*, ed. I. T. Ker (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1976), 19.

³⁶ Newman was writing a proposal for a Catholic university in Ireland. He was thus writing for the Church, although it is not clear who he is addressing when he begins his work with “Gentlemen...” Is there a general or specific referent?; Collini, *What Are Universities For?*, 42–4.

³⁷ Martha C. Nussbaum, *Cultivating Humanity: A Classical Defense of Reform in Liberal Education* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), ix.

³⁸ Derek Bok, *Higher Education*, 1.

contrasted with social-scientific kinds of inquiry into the university: Olmos-Peñuela et al. and Eleonora Belfiore write firmly from within the disinterested epistemology of the social sciences; Olmos-Peñuela et al. try to quantify information on the perceived purpose of the humanities with scientific tables.³⁹ But just because a historical genealogy like Helen Small's and a university biography like *Higher Education* by Derek Bok are both not social-scientific texts does not mean they share the same genre. A personal mode of expression, and not necessarily an epistemology (scientific or humanistic), differentiates these genres. Personalism therefore separates university biography from history and from scientific texts.⁴⁰

Professorship

Linked to personalism but not reducible to it is professorship. University biography is directed at scholarly peers, often in a vague way. That, of course, presupposes that its authors are faculty members, which they almost always are (although I have tentatively included Derek Bok, a university president, among other outliers).⁴¹ Over the last century, professorial contours have been strengthened by the progressive professionalization (and “professorialization”) of “the intellectual,” distinguishing the professor from both the journalist and the bureaucrat.⁴² University biography is deliberative, not informative. It is also a deliberation from within the professorial community. Ultimately, professorship does not just mean that university biography is written by professors but

³⁹ Eleonora Belfiore, “‘Impact’, ‘Value’ and ‘Bad Economics’: Making Sense of the Problem of Value in the Arts and Humanities,” *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education* 14, no. 1 (2015): 95–110, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1474022214531503>; Julia Olmos-Peñuela, Paul Bennenworth, and Elena Castro-Martinez, “Are sciences essential and humanities elective? Disentangling competing claims for humanities’ research public value,” *Arts & Humanities in Higher Education* 14, no. 1 (2015): 61–78, doi: 10.1177/1474022214534081.

⁴⁰ Consequently, university biography may be comparable with the literary prose essay. Interestingly, both consist of the use of non-metaphorical “I” pronouns, a set of rhetorical aims, a poetic expression, and references to a body of culture. These is Jean Marcel’s description of the prose essay; Jean Marcel, *Pensées, passions et proses : essais* (Montréal, QC: L’Hexagone, 1992), 315–319.

⁴¹ Unless otherwise noted (in the cases of Fareed Zakaria, William Lowell, and Derek Bok), every text I have cited as a primary source in the bibliography was written by a university professor. This would be striking if it were not self-perpetuating: I followed a series of texts’ own intertextual references to build my bibliography, and rarely did they lead me outside of the university community.

⁴² “Society today makes room only for professionals”—Bruce Robbins says this is an all-too-common mantra. Robbins, *Secular Vocations*, ix.

that the professorial genre creates a collegial (and collegiate) rhetorical space for the academic, who can preach to the choir and summon his troops (usually *his*) out of the barracks.⁴³

The rhetorical space carved out by the professor can be clearly discerned through contrast with other rhetorical spaces. When a professor writes university biography and denies that discursive space, it stands out. That, in fact, is how Saul Bellow begins his highly devotional foreword to Allan Bloom's infamous *The Closing of the American Mind*, a foundational, incendiary analysis of contemporary higher education written during the "culture wars" of the 1980s.⁴⁴ Bellow begins: "Professor Bloom has his own way of doing things. Writing about the higher education in America, he does not observe the forms, manners and ceremonies of what is called (usually by itself) the community of scholars.... He is not addressing himself primarily to the professors..."⁴⁵ In this way Bellow negatively identifies the genre that I am defining positively.

Inside the ivory tower, the imagined community of university biographers also constructs itself against the polemical anti-university tradition of writing that Bloom was so decisive in legitimizing in monograph form.⁴⁶ Jaroslav Pelikan takes up these modern anxieties from the other side of the debate in the introduction to his 1992 university biography:

University bashing seems to have become a favorite indoor sport... It has also become a cottage industry, with books bearing such titles as *Profscam: Professors and the Demise of Higher Education*, *Tenured Radicals: How Politics Has Corrupted Our Higher Education*...⁴⁷

The genre is related to an inside–outside relationship between the university's imagined community (Pelikan) and the exterior world (Bloom).

⁴³ Throughout this thesis, I have used masculine pronouns when they denote either a notionally male general subject, in a sexist sense which is useful to preserve for accuracy's sake, or a general subject in a time period when only men could teach (like in Germany in the early-modern period).

⁴⁴ Saul Bellow, foreword to *The Closing of the American Mind: How Higher Education Has Failed Democracy and Impoverished the Souls of Today's Students*, by Allan Bloom (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1987), 11.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind: How Higher Education Has Failed Democracy and Impoverished the Souls of Today's Students* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1987), 344–5, 371–6.

⁴⁷ Pelikan, *The Idea of a University*, 12–3.

At the level of professorial identity, anti-university polemics can be seen as a looking glass in which common traits appear but are inverted or distorted, reinforcing the normalcy of the original image.⁴⁸ Bloom's book, which shares many traits with the less-polemical university biography, is a sort of historical "missing link" between conservative anti-university discourse and the self-satisfied professorial writing of yesteryear.⁴⁹ For while Bloom, a professor himself, shares Hutchins's concern for "Great Books" curriculum and Nussbaum's savant classical idiom, *The Closing of the American Mind* is clearly less professorial in tone and self-imagination than is university biography properly speaking.⁵⁰ Readings explains why:

Despite the fact that books about the University marked by the enormous self-satisfaction of its (male) products are still being written..., it is clear that a significant shift has taken place.... the problem that [Bloom] labor[s] under is that no one of us can seriously imagine him or herself as the hero of the story of the university...⁵¹

It is therefore the rhetorical space (and the resulting gentlemanly tone), and not the professor's credentials, that turns a professor into a university biographer.

Non-referentialism

The final aspect of the genre is its non-referential style. *Non-referential* means that the writing makes no conspicuous claim to talk about specific events, objects, or processes "in the world." One might also call it ahistorical. Note Hutchins's use of the general article *the*, as well as the present tense, in a book supposedly dealing with "external conditions."⁵² Hutchins wrote in 1936:

As *the* institution's love of money *makes* it sensitive to every wave of popular opinion [since when?], and as the popular opinion is that insofar as education *has* any object it is

⁴⁸ Oakley, *Community of Learning*, 110–11.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 109–110.

⁵⁰ Carnochan, *The Battleground of the Curriculum*, 80, 85–6, 90; Nussbaum, *Enriching Humanity*, 22; Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind: How Higher Education Has Failed Democracy and Impoverished the Souls of Today's Students* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1987), 344–45, 371–76.

⁵¹ Readings, *The University in Ruins*, 9.

⁵² Hutchins, *The Higher Learning in America*, 1.

economic, both the needs of the universities and the sentiments of the public *conspire to degrade* the universities into vocational schools [italics added].⁵³

Hutchins is idealizing even the grim fight he was waging: there are no dates, no names in Hutchins's whole book. No policy decisions. No politics. There is only "love of money" and "popular opinion" against which the erudite Hutchins, from his armchair, can fight and possibly claim victory.⁵⁴

Although historical distance may explain part of Hutchins's style—that is, it is harder to think confidently about one's place vis-à-vis institutional problems today than it was in the 1930s—it is not only that; it is a matter of genre rules. Martha Nussbaum, an exemplar of university biography, wrote with Hutchins's confident non-referentialism in the late 1990s. Educational problems for Nussbaum were still presented as intellectual, hence her return to the classical past, namely to Socrates, to make educational suggestions; her work is not scarred by the traces of (or references to) overwork, mechanization, and the depersonalization of academic labour.⁵⁵ Rather than claim that Nussbaum is simply ignorant of these things, I propose an explanation that is not only historical but also formal (analyzing genre conventions and boundaries).

To see how the use of non-referentialism is a generic trait and not just a marker of old-fashioned parlance, I will suggest a few comparisons of university biography and some other genres. Let us find a parallel topic, university–business relations. As Hutchins puts it: "Those among us who assert that there is a content [*sic*] to education are almost unanimous in holding that the object of higher learning is utility, and utility in a very restricted sense."⁵⁶ This kind of generality is only

⁵³ Ibid., 31.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 30.

⁵⁵ "Like Seneca, we live in a culture divided between two conceptions of liberal education," writes Nussbaum in *Enriching Humanity*. One cannot help but smirk at the thought that the "knowledge capitalism" of the late twentieth century could be properly dealt with by Seneca. Bloom is just as anachronistic. The only thing as extraordinary as Bloom's anecdote of a student who thought "Mr. Aristotle" was a contemporary is the fact that Bloom *endorsed* this reading of Aristotle; Nussbaum, *Cultivating Humanity*, 293; Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind*, 344; Nigel Tubbs, *Philosophy and Modern Liberal Arts Education: Freedom is to Learn* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014). Tubbs provides an example of an intelligently anachronistic treatment of liberal education.

⁵⁶ Hutchins, *The Higher Education in America*, 30–31.

intelligible to members of a common world who can understand the specific educational alternatives that he implicitly rejects. “Those among us...,” he says—this must be read literally: Hutchins is generalizing these arguments for a tangible scholarly community that could answer him back and understand his subtle allusions.⁵⁷ Half a century later, Martha Nussbaum, too, lets generalities seep into her defense of the liberal arts: “Unlike other nations, we [the USA] ask a higher education to contribute to general preparation for citizenship, not just a specialized preparation for a career.”⁵⁸ For Nussbaum, the difference is that her community is more national than collegial à la Hutchins. This may be because, since the days of Allan Bloom, part of the professoriate has been too hostile (read: neoconservative) to be represented rhetorically in the way that Hutchins does with the word “unanimously.” Hence, Nussbaum transfers her sense of community onto the nation.

The hollow non-referential style of university biography, young and old, can be best seen in contrast with a competing genre. This recent stream of writing has come to be known as “Critical University Studies” (CUS).⁵⁹ Jeffrey Williams places its origins in the 1990s (picking up in the 2000s).⁶⁰ Christopher Newfield’s *Unmaking of the Public University* (2003) and David F. Noble’s *Digital Diploma Mills* (2002) are examples of CUS.⁶¹ Noble says his work was “written from the trenches.”⁶² As Williams writes, “[CUS] focuses on the consequences of corporate methods and goals, like corrupting research and increasing managerial (as opposed to academic) control, cutting labor through reducing regular faculty positions (while increasing adjunct positions), and exploiting

⁵⁷ Ibid., 30.

⁵⁸ Nussbaum, *Cultivating Humanity*, 294.

⁵⁹ Jeffrey J. Williams, “Deconstructing academe: the birth of critical university Studies,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, February 19, 2012 (accessed October 11, 2017), <http://chronicle.com/article/An-Emerging-Field-Deconstructs/130791/>.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 2–3.

⁶¹ Williams, “Deconstructing academe,” 3; Christopher Newfield, *Unmaking the Public University: The Forty-Year Assault on the Middle Class* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008); David F. Noble, *Digital Diploma Mills: The Automation of Higher Education* (New York, NY: Monthly Review Press, 2001).

⁶² Noble, *Digital Diploma Mills*, ix.

students by requiring them to work more and take on more debt.”⁶³ The image that this type of writing presents is, indeed, surveyed from down low, in the trenches. No longer is it confidently diagnosed by a senior professor who wields literary references and confident solutions. By virtue of its very topic, it is anchored in the particulars (the referents) and not in the abstractions. Nothing close to non-referentialism could serve the level of material analysis involved in CUS.

Dates, policies, and institutional accounts overshadow generalities in *Digital Diploma Mills*; literary references are replaced with citations and statistics; a general present tense is replaced by a past tense.⁶⁴ Noble writes, “Another sign [has been] the growing struggle over the future of higher education... the increasing and maturing resistance on the part of faculty organizations.”⁶⁵ This was a struggle, Noble continues, “against the corporatization of higher education.”⁶⁶ Hutchins wrote detachedly about a moralized reality in which he had a hope of achieving his aims against other faculty members (Hutchins’s proposals seem naïve today in their sincerity).⁶⁷ Noble wrote from a position in which the faculty as a whole (and thus Noble himself) was fighting something abstract, “corporatization,” and from a marginalized position (“from the trenches”). In CUS, the problem is no longer merely intellectual, no longer to be debated only by colleagues.

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This chapter has set out a theory of genre and has sketched the boundaries of one particular genre, university biography. Genre is a way of conceptualizing a field in the historiography of the university and of making it tangible as an intertextual, personal, professorial, and non-referential

⁶³ Williams, “Deconstructing academe,” 3.

⁶⁴ A sentence from *Digital Diploma Mills* as banal as the following would be unthinkable in a work like Hutchins’s *Higher Education in America*: “in 2001 MIT announced that it is planning to put all of its course material on websites for free Internet distribution.” If I can be permitted a bit of creative nonfiction, the classic sentence would read something like this: “Some larger universities are announcing their intentions to democratize their course material.” The sentence’s meaning has been generalized and detemporized; it has lost its concrete referents; Noble, *Digital Diploma Mills*, 90.

⁶⁵ Noble, *Digital Diploma Mills*, 90–91.

⁶⁶ Noble, *Digital Diploma Mills*, 90–91. Noble effectively say himself as a pariah on campus.

⁶⁷ Hutchins, *The Higher Learning in America*, 116–17.

form of writing. Moreover, these traits can be seen by examining the texts themselves and by comparing and contrasting them with other genres' traits. One can ask if any ethical or political lessons can be drawn with regard to the problem of producing writing that challenges the political, generic, and material boundaries that the university sets its writers. Naturally, there are strengths in both the biographical genre and in what has developed outside of it. One of the strong points of university biography is how it *symbolically* situates the dilemma of the scholar *in* the institution (not in a material sense, of course, given the absence of referents). For existential and psychological reasons, not to provide a theoretical place for the scholar to write from is unproductive and dissociative. What Jeffrey J. Williams derisively calls the "palliative tradition of 'the idea of the university,'" a shorthand for what I call university biography, is not worse because it is less critical.⁶⁸ It is considered *more* impactful *because* it is less critical, where "critical" means distanced and analytical. Personal and the self-reflective modes of writing deserve to be taken seriously and analyzed.

My goal in the conclusion will be to evaluate the theoretical possibility of a self-reflective space in the twenty-first-century university. First, however, I examine what that space looked like, institutionally and theoretically, in previous decades. This is simultaneously a way of locating the genre that I have developed in this chapter and of gaining an idea as to what the limits posed by institutions on theory might be.

⁶⁸ Williams, "Deconstructing academe," 4.

Chapter Two: An Institutional Voice as an Artifact

What does it mean to search for the “voice” of the “Author” as an artifact and then to situate one kind of voice (the professorial voice found in the corpus of works currently under study) in the North American university in the long twentieth century? To answer this question I begin by suggesting why “Author” should take a capital letter here. Michel Foucault’s thesis is amenable to our purposes: the flesh-and-blood writer and the “Author” are not the same thing, and they developed in historically distinct ways; the latter is an ethos attached to written works.⁶⁹ The Author is what Foucault calls the “author-function,” a social word-concept that fulfills several duties:

These differences indicate that an author’s name is not simply an element of speech (as a subject, a complement, or an element that could be replaced by a pronoun or other parts of speech). Its presence is functional in that it serves as a means of classification. A name can group together a number of texts and thus differentiate them from others. A name also establishes different forms of relationships among texts.⁷⁰

These are only a few of the Author’s functions. Foucault reminds us that the modern Author or author-function is not eternal (folktales and legends long stood without authors) but that its function has historical precursors (“Homer” has always served, says Foucault, as this kind of classificatory device for the Greek epic canon).⁷¹ The birth of the author-function is linked, nevertheless, to modern developments: the legal requirement to print names on books is of modern origin, itself linked to the spread of the printing press.⁷² It is this sort of material account of the origins of one

⁶⁹ Foucault says he puts aside “sociohistorical analysis of the author as an individual,” despite the need he sees for such research. This essay will try to take up some of these small clues left by Foucault. Michel Foucault, “What Is an Author?” in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, ed. Donald F. Bouchard, trans. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977), 115.

⁷⁰ Foucault, “What Is an Author?” 123.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 122, 125.

⁷² Foucault, “What Is an Author,” 130; Clark, *Academic Charisma*, 402. Clark provides the mention of the printing press.

kind of Author (an author-function employed over the previous century of North American university history) that will be attempted in the paragraphs to follow.⁷³

To study the specific *authors* (more properly called *writers*), that is to say the sum total of the flesh-and-blood writers of university biographies, would obscure the formal characteristics of their works. We would be stuck with a history of professors, with dates of birth and death and lineages of alma-mater. These are important, but they pose a problem. The problem is Roland Barthes's and the solution is Foucault's. Barthes questions how to bridge the interpretive gap between the life of a writer and the richness of their *text*. The *text*, for Barthes, is the *work* liberated from the Author as we heroically imagine him or her to be.⁷⁴ But can a text (a series of conjoined sentences) have a history (like the history I am trying to give to the genre of university biography)? Foucault proposes a neat solution, which is the author-function, derived from the fact that works are created by individuals but need not be reduced to this fact; the author-function is historically conditioned, but it resists the biography of the living person with whom a work is associated. In allusion to Foucault's archaeology, I call this text/work, created by a writer within history and circulating under the sign of the author-function, an *artifact*. This usage is also a reference to the actual practice of working with an artifact: when a scholar decodes Egyptian hieroglyphic tablets, they are attentive to the work as both a coded text and as the product of a material culture and of material beings. Through the author-function, which is not indifferent to the real lives of writers, we can bridge the text–work distinction at least tentatively, uniting history and textual analysis.

⁷³ For a social history of “authors” and “writers” as categories of people in the early-modern period, as well as for an etymology of these terms, I suggest Alain Viala's *Naissance de l'écrivain : sociologie de la littérature à l'âge classique* (Paris, France: Les Éditions de minuit, 1985).

⁷⁴ Roland Barthes, “The Death of the Author,” in *Music/Image/Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York, NY: Hill and Wang, 1978), 145; Roland Barthes, “From Work to Text,” in *Music/Image/Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York, NY: Hill and Wang, 1978), 155–64.

William Clark provides a concrete version of this archaeology.⁷⁵ Working from the early-modern period in Germany to the 1830s in the United States, *Academic Charisma* serves as a useful prologue to my investigation. Clark argues that as German university professors (considered paradigmatic by Clark) became state bureaucrats in mid-eighteenth-century Prussia, they began to change their “voice.” An oral culture was replaced by a written culture, an aristocratic culture by a bureaucratic ethic. In concrete terms, this is the incremental, almost millennium-long replacement of the medieval lecture *ex cathedra* (from a kind of chair) by the academic publication.⁷⁶ This meant the decline of the academic voice not only as the literal replacement of speaking with reading but also in the degree of “orality” or conversational tone that the new forms of writing possessed: “the [periodical] journals doubtless played the greatest part in finalizing the triumph of the legible over the oral, as the modern academic article suppressed its origins in the disputational dissertation and the conversational letter.”⁷⁷ This was compounded by the development of modern science. “Scientists developed techniques of registering results immune to the errors of and superior to the abilities of single individuals or groups.”⁷⁸

Anyone familiar with arguments about the quantification of educational performance and output in the twentieth century will not be surprised at this origin story in the early-modern period. Nowadays, a professor is no better than their database.⁷⁹ As Clark says (as true now as in 1800), a

⁷⁵ Clark, *Academic Charisma*, 398.

⁷⁶ Incidentally, complaints about the replacement of the primacy of teaching by research functions are ubiquitous in commentary on the university. This could be seen as a snapshot of a much longer process.

Kurt Spellmeyer has noted the conservative bent in the defense of teaching (often paternalistic towards the students, I might add): “for the most part, [the] appeal to teaching is a conservative, even reactionary gesture.” This is not because of temperament but because a defense of teaching can be seen as a defense of the past, given historical trends; Richard B. Gunderman et al., “Flexner and the Institute for Advanced Study,” 1784–85; Rothblatt, *The University and Its Discontents*, 5; Kurt Spellmeyer, “The Wages of Theory: Isolation and Knowledge in the Humanities,” in *Arts of Living: Reinventing the Humanities for the Twenty-First Century*, 121–43 (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2003), 133. Cf. Bok, *Higher Learning*, 77; Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind*, 338–39.

⁷⁷ Clark, *Academic Charisma*, 423.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 404, 405.

⁷⁹ Jean-François Lyotard, *La Condition postmoderne : rapport sur le savoir* (Paris, France: Éditions de Minuit, 1979), 88.

remnant/revenant was left over from the time before modern alienation; people never became fully subordinate to “the Machine.”⁸⁰ “Disembodied genius raises the specter of the creative and the original agent in science and academia, the subjectivity fabricating objectivity. If objectivity constitutes the modern machine, this latter genius plays a ghost haunting it,” writes Clark.⁸¹ It is my claim that this “genius” (the voice of the professor) is such a ghost in our own Machine. University biography provides us with the shape of this ghost; giving it a ghostly nickname reveals its marginal position on campus. The professorial university biography represents the remnant of oral culture in written works (hence the fact that some of these authors themselves reference oral iterations in their own imagined intellectual tradition).⁸² It is the remnant of a collegial form of conversational address to an imagined community in a world that has substituted, as Clark notes, actual collegial cooperation for global, figurative, or digital forms of scholarly community, epitomized by the first academic conferences in Germany in the 1820s.⁸³

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Having addressed the question of what I am locating (a “voice”), it is finally time to discuss the setting of our subject, the modern North American university. Modernity in the university has always borne a close relationship to the written word and thus to publications.⁸⁴ Until the late nineteenth century in the United States, the model was still the pre-modern institutions of Oxford and Cambridge. As Sheldon Rothblatt points out, the idea of original research and discovery, the hallmark of later German-inspired Ph.D. programmes, was nonexistent in Anglo-America almost

⁸⁰ Clark, *Academic Charisma*, 405.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² The Huxley–Arnold debate is a touch-stone, as I have noted. Neither was a professor, although both were learned, and the debate took place through the oral interface of the academies (soirées, gatherings, banquets); David A. Roos, “Matthew Arnold and Thomas Henry Huxley: Two Speeches at the Royal Academy, 1881 and 1883,” *Modern Philology* 74, no. 3 (1977): 316–24.

⁸³ Clark, *Academic Charisma*, 424–25.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 403–407.

until the end of the nineteenth century.⁸⁵ Universities, and particularly the colleges they housed, were for forming young sociable minds; scientific academies could churn out research on their own, without undergraduates and dons.⁸⁶ Newman famously even denied that “scientific and philosophical discovery” was the proper “object” of a university with undergraduates.⁸⁷ Up until the late nineteenth century, this could still be denied across the Atlantic, too, with the president of Harvard, Charles Eliot, denying a teacher a research sabbatical on the grounds that a new publication was not likely to “serve any useful purpose here.”⁸⁸

This was all set to change. Johns Hopkins University was opened in Baltimore, Maryland, in 1878, “emphatically” beginning the modern research institution in the United States.⁸⁹ Graduate studies, noted for their very different (German) character, were brought in before undergraduate programs at Johns Hopkins.⁹⁰ This was part of a trend of “specialization”: at Harvard, fixed liberal-arts programmes were replaced by the free-elective system under the leadership of Charles Eliot.⁹¹ Students had the freedom to choose their entire course load. Eliot’s successor, Lawrence Lowell, reversed this change, opting instead for the hybrid elective-major system in 1910 that is now dominant, in a modified form, in North America as a whole.⁹² The final touch was the modern university department, first established at Cornell and Johns Hopkins in the 1880s and adopted widely thereafter.⁹³ Symbolically capping off a period of intense growth, Abraham Flexner’s

⁸⁵ Rothblatt, *The University and Its Discontents*, 16; Clark, *Academic Charisma*, 183.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 19–22, 125–34, 389, 420–21.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁸⁸ W. H. Cowley, “College and University Teaching, 1858–1958,” *The Educational Record* 39 (1958): 321.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ Harvard President Lawrence Lowell noted the difference between graduate and undergraduate education in his 1938 book, published at a time when it was still a fresh issue. Lawrence Lowell, *What a University President Has Learned* (Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1969 [1938]), 33; Ebersole, “Utilitarianism,” 11.

⁹¹ Charles W. Eliot, *Charles Eliot and Popular Education*, ed. Edward A. Krug (New York, NY: Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1961), 29–46; Rothblatt, *The University and Its Discontents*, 30–31; Carnochan, *The Battleground of the Curriculum*, 9–38.

⁹² Cowley, “College and University Teaching,” 320.

⁹³ Martin Trow, “The American Academic Department as a Context for Learning,” *Studies in Higher Education* 1, no. 1 (1976): 12, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075077612331376813>.

Institute of Advanced Study, which the *New York Times* called the “ultimate ivory tower,” opened in 1930 at Yale, dedicated to research without teaching.⁹⁴ The university was now ready, even in its increasingly specialized undergraduate programmes (now set up to allow for pre-academic work), to produce research—which, of course, meant publications. This they did, especially into the 1940s when the Second World War prompted an exponential expansion in both student headcount and what is often termed “R&D” (co-operative research and development with government or business partners).⁹⁵

Despite debate among proponents of these various changes, a broad consensus favoured the research drive as we know it still. However, many writers since have railed against these late nineteenth and early twentieth-century changes.⁹⁶ More aggressive publishing practices and changes to curricula shaped the psychological burden and time constraints under which professors could write for pleasure and the edification of the public.⁹⁷ The works under discussion here also bear the paratextual traces of this advancing “research culture.” While Hutchins’s 1936 book, *The Higher Learning in America*, has no bibliography and has only footnotes for classical references (plus, strangely, for Lenin), contemporaries of our period, such as Louis Menand or Martha Nussbaum, cannot get by with such sparse documentation.⁹⁸ One can speculate that this represents (to paraphrase Max Weber) a loss of the charisma and authority of the professor-cum-president and their

⁹⁴ Kayo, “The Institute for Advanced Study,” 71; Francis Mulhern, introduction to *Teachers, Writers, Celebrities*, xiv.

⁹⁵ This is true for the United States and for Canada; Olmos-Peñuela, Bennenworth, and Castro-Martinez, “Are sciences essential and humanities elective?” 63; F. E. L. Priestley, *The Humanities in Canada: A report prepared for the Humanities Research Council of Canada* (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 1964), 75–77; Oakley, *Community of Learning*, 80–81.

⁹⁶ Please refer to W. B. Carnochan’s *Battleground of the Curriculum*.

⁹⁷ Oakley looks at some self-reported faculty preferences between teaching and research; most still argue that teaching is the primary role of a professor, but that number has been falling over the course of the twentieth century. Oakley, *Community of Learning*, 112–20.

⁹⁸ Certainly, Hutchins would never cite a contemporary, a report, or a statistic. Nor would Alfred North Whitehead, a British Harvard professor of the same period, have done so. Hutchins, *The Higher Learning in America*, 84, 96, 99, 103, 105; Louis Menand, *The Marketplace of Ideas*, 1st ed. (New York, NY: W.W. Norton, 2010), 13–155; Nussbaum, *Not For Profit*, 45–152; Alfred North Whitehead, *The Aims of Education and Other Essays*, 2nd ed. (London, UK: Williams and Northgate, Ltd., 1955 [1932]), 1–247.

replacement by a rational legitimizer, the footnote.⁹⁹ For a look at that ancient charisma, one need only read *What a University President Has Learned* by Lawrence Lowell of Harvard (president between 1909 and 1933). Lowell, in his biography of the university, sets down laws for future administrators and makes comparisons between university administrators and King Louis-Philippe of France; these comparisons are impossibly bold for today (Harvard's president from 1971 to 1991, Derek Bok, admitted an occasional sense of powerlessness).¹⁰⁰

The loss of bravado is presumably linked to the evolution of rationalizing and quantifying impulses within the university, oft-critiqued but rarely understood in their full psychological impact. It helps to recall the more than twenty-five-fold increase (from 24,000 to 603,000) in the number of American faculty members between 1900 and 1972; this no doubt changed the professor's world.¹⁰¹ Moreover, since a glut of Ph.D. holders in the 1970s could not find positions on campus, new appointees could no longer take themselves for granted as professors.¹⁰² This is one of many examples of a material change (perceived as a kind of intrusive modernization, marketization, or institutionalization of creativity) that is reflected in writing. Plotting the progress of this influence from the early-modern period to our own time, one notes that the notion of the professor as an embodied member of the community, not as a mind-for-hire, was already in tatters by the time of the expansion of the research university in the United States. When and where did this process start?

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* *

The drive for original research in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries was already germinating in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The origins of the modern institution

⁹⁹ Clark, *Academic Charisma*, 8–10.

¹⁰⁰ Lowell, *What a University President Has Learned*, 18, 21; Bok, *Higher Learning*, 159–61.

¹⁰¹ Oakley, *Community of Learning*, 98–99.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

are often placed in the nineteenth-century German university, the model for American planners.¹⁰³ The German university reformers (notably, Wilhelm von Humboldt, who founded the University of Berlin in 1810) saw no conflict between teaching and research: the teacher was to present his research *to* the student and lead him through his own work (this, effectively, would become the graduate programme in North America, although as Clark says, it would no longer possess the metaphysical glory it had had in Germany).¹⁰⁴ The new University of Berlin exemplified a model by which each instructor (from lowly *Privatdozent* up to chair-holding professor) researched in his own corner of the given field and led his students through it, arm in arm.¹⁰⁵ But this tale of the glorious march of Knowledge, no doubt told by many of its proponents, was a gloss of actual events. It was hardly so collegial (many late nineteenth-century Americans saw in the German import precisely the alienating system that it proved to be).¹⁰⁶

In reality, the situation was much more ambiguous for the scholar. Clark calls “disembodiment” the process by which the medieval-Renaissance professor, defined by his quasi-clerical legal status, became first the state bureaucrat of the Enlightenment and finally (although paradoxically) the disembodied genius of the Romantic period.¹⁰⁷ Somewhere between the 1600s and the 1800s, professors went from instilling the canon in students (that is, they would speak with the “voice” of whatever chair they held, say philosophy or metaphysics) to showing their own originality

¹⁰³ Clark, *Academic Charisma*, 462–63.

¹⁰⁴ Clark, *Academic Charisma*, 459–463; Sorkin, “Wilhelm von Humboldt,” 62–63; Floris Solleveld, “Conceptual Change in the History of the Humanities,” *Studium* 7, no. 4 (2014): 225, e-ISSN: 2212-7283; Bara, “Wilhelm von Humboldt, Cardinal John Henry Newman, and José Ortega y Gasset,” 5.

¹⁰⁵ Max Weber, “Science as a Vocation,” in *Max Weber’s “Science as a Vocation,”* eds. Peter Lassman and Irving Velody (London, UK: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 3–4.

¹⁰⁶ Clark, *Academic Charisma*, 463.

¹⁰⁷ The disembodiment of the academic in the early-modern period also had important democratizing effects: women, the blind, the dead, and the maimed could now be (theoretically) considered for vows as academics. The word “body,” therefore, is meant literally. There is an important analogy here with what Bill Readings points to in the post-war university much later: the white male subject was decentered again when women and people of colour were allowed into American universities; Clark, *Academic Charisma*, 199–201, 238; Readings, *The University in Ruins*, 141.

(although this was best done in print).¹⁰⁸ Fichte was one of the first lecturers not to read from the canon lists; Kant still read from them.¹⁰⁹ This older ideal was that of the *stallum et votum* (a chair and a voice)—passed down from academic to academic like an heirloom, unchanging, on the model of a peerage.¹¹⁰ Something radical was developing from the middle of the eighteenth century into the early nineteenth: instead of displaying erudition (showing oneself to be one of the flock, an equal of the quasi-clerical body), scholars began to submit to their disputation committees original research that could build on previous research.¹¹¹ In place of works of momentary eloquence came (often-dry) data gathering—philological analysis of Greek fragments, as in Clark’s example—which could be compounded and synthesized by generations of scholars on the march to Truth.¹¹²

A major contradiction lies in this development. More rigorous, perhaps even tedious, work was being brought under the label of individual genius.¹¹³ The doctoral dissertation, born from this amalgam of Enlightenment and Romantic thinking in Germany, spread by the beginning of the twentieth century to England and the United States.¹¹⁴ Therefore, academic writing in modern Germany was marked by the same tensions that beset later North American professorial university biographies. Tracts written in a personalized voice did so under the incredible burden of a professional culture of production and accumulation of knowledge that both underwrote and undermined its own “geniuses.”

¹⁰⁸ Clark, *Academic Charisma*, 410–12.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 197–98, 410.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 211, 218.

¹¹² “The provisional nature of results and the necessity for doing simple, boring things first... remained foreign notions for academic production until the modern mentality of research took hold.” Clark, *Academic Charisma*, 220, 228–38.

¹¹³ “Although Romanticism postulated the charismatic moment of originality in the doctoral candidate as a work of art, the doctoral dissertation as a work of research rather more realized a sort of industrial view of masterpieces formulated by the imperial ordinance on the guilds in 1731 [subjecting them to outside quantitative analysis to check their usefulness]... by enlightened German police states.” Clark, *Academic Charisma*, 238.

¹¹⁴ Clark, *Academic Charisma*, 462–66.

Here, I can think of no better example than myself (although I hope to apply this to the texts I have examined as well). As the writer of a “graduating essay,” justified in the course registry as preparation for future scholarship, I am caught between two poles.¹¹⁵ In the pre-modern style, I am partaking in a demonstration of *erudition* (like so many people writing university biographical work), and hence I will get my “disputation” (or thesis “defense”).¹¹⁶ In the modern style, I do so amidst a research culture of faculty and specialized majors geared towards, in the German Idealist style, demarcating one’s little corner of the empirical field. This is also the paradox of the professorial biography. It is not *essential* work to the institution (research); what it illuminates empirically is uncertain, but after all it is often written long after a (tenured) scholar needs to prove him- or herself as an empiricist.

Other than in the comfort of tenure or retirement, why exactly does this non-research writing still get produced in an ambiguous modern–pre-modern institution that stresses production over erudition? Cardinal Newman wrote his essays still as a man of leisure in a class of leisure; the question of production was only beginning to be posed. The demonstration of erudition is, historically, a remnant of a certain kind of academic labour (an ambiguous position in the economy) which is anachronistic in the best sense and which permits faculty creative latitude in writing. In a word, if the modern professorial voice is, in Clark’s sense, a pre-modern ghost in a modern bureaucratic Machine, then it is for purely material reasons that this voice has not been fully exorcised by market forces. It needs to be recalled that research culture was fostered by state

¹¹⁵ “Faculty of Humanities,” in *UVic Undergraduate Calendar* (Victoria, BC: University of Victoria, January 2020), 191.

¹¹⁶ As of March 2020, due to the novel coronavirus, I will not be getting to dispute in person, which is a shocking end to a several-hundred-year-old medieval tradition. The final element of the “embodiment” of the bachelor candidate has been killed by a virus.

intervention (in Clark’s example, by Prussian ordinances).¹¹⁷ Today, market pressures may play a similar disciplinary role.

Professorial university biography is evidence of a margin of material freedom (to write as one pleases). It is the remainder of as-of-yet un-alienated labour time. This margin of liberty needs to be accounted for historically. Put crudely, if the modern North American professor did not have latitude to direct their own labour, works like Nussbaum’s *Enriching Humanity*, published by Harvard University Press, would probably not be produced at all. This kind of writing takes place in what the philosopher Fredric Jameson calls “precapitalist enclaves”; they form the “foothold for critical effectivity.”¹¹⁸ Enclaves are *imagined* (by the critic, as the basis for their critique), but they are also material. This raises a key question. What is the organization of labour that has permitted the maintenance (perhaps until recently) of these enclaves for writing in the university?

Certain processes—the failure to fully marketize the university and the beginnings of the bureaucratization of professors and intellectuals up through the middle of the twentieth century—can help answer this question. Christopher Newfield proposes a way of understanding the bizarre positioning of the researcher between the market and the classroom, while fully capturing this position’s pre-modern lineage. He argues that “ivy” always went with “industry,” at least in the United States. Major universities like Cornell, Johns Hopkins, Chicago, and Stanford were all founded by wealthy donors; their status as “eleemosynary” (that is, “charitable,” or private) institutions was confirmed in a Supreme Court case in 1817.¹¹⁹ The intention of university donors and their managers in the early days of the American research institution was that the universities serve functionally like any other part of the economy. One example from Clark’s text will suffice: in

¹¹⁷ Clark, *Academic Charisma*, 211–12.

¹¹⁸ Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991), 48, 49. For Jameson, these are disappearing and are largely an imaginary trope used by critics.

¹¹⁹ Newfield, *Ivy and Industry*, 21, 36.

1909, the president of MIT wrote to Frederick Taylor, the specialist in factory efficiency, “seeking advice on sponsoring ‘an economic study of education.’”¹²⁰ In the end, Clark continues, “management could give orders regulating the physical labor of manufacturing more easily than it could dictate the motions of office work.”¹²¹ Similar to Clark’s story of the research drive in early German universities, this American story foregrounds the professor as a vestige—as someone who, for reasons which seem to follow almost from the nature of the work, could not be fully incorporated into either nation’s modernization drive. My contention is that professors’ written work even today, primarily their work that is not strictly speaking empirical research (such as university biography), bears witness to this historical fact.

Many books written today lament some of the following nouns using the suffix *-ation*: corporatization, marketization, bureaucratization, or professionalization. They have titles like *Campus, Inc.* and *Digital Diploma Mills*.¹²² To understand the professor’s position, it is necessary to be somewhat more specific in the attribution of these *-ation* words. For professionalization and marketization, for instance, do not always go in concert.¹²³ This brings us to the second process mentioned above, partial bureaucratization. University professions, especially a profession housed in a bureaucracy, as to some extent professorship is, can be shielded from the market. As Bruce Robbins writes, “Unlike doctors or lawyers [paradigmatic professionals], academics don’t have to address their market directly; except in moments of legitimation crisis or emergency, it is largely

¹²⁰ Ibid, 34.

¹²¹ Ibid., 35.

¹²² The uproar over the professionalization and institutionalization of intellectuals is dealt with in Bruce Robbins’s *Secular Vocations*. There is an important contention that intellectuals have been consumed (and de-radicalized) by the university. If this is true, the professor would not be a pre-modern soul trapped in a modern Machine but a free-wheeling intellectual now-institutionalized.

¹²³ Nor must professionalization and bureaucratization go hand in hand. Robbins mentions the antagonism between bureaucracy and professions. The difference mirrors the distinction within the university between administrator and professor. Robbins, *Secular Vocations*, ix, 218; Geoffry D. White and Flannery C. Hauck, eds., *Campus, Inc.: Corporate Power in the Ivory Tower*, 3.

organized and controlled by the institution for which they work, the university.”¹²⁴ So if the university as a whole is being marketized (becoming Campus, Inc.), it is the bureaucratic administration (and the professor’s half-way position in it) that allows the professor to watch this without being swept away. This is a fact rarely noticed in the literature. A fixed (if stagnant) salary,¹²⁵ an unsupervised work environment, and ready access to publishing houses: this is not the situation of most workers facing “marketization,” such as copy-editors or attorneys.

The tension in professors’ multifaceted role, exhibited through a blend of bureaucracy, market-pressure, craft labour, and clergy-like public profile, might have allowed them to take a critical stance from within their institution (at least, that has been the thinking).¹²⁶ Such a blend has meant that bureaucratization could never dominate professors, given that their work is largely self-directed (especially university biography, which no research council promotes under its mandate).¹²⁷ Newfield calls the special (distinctly pre- or early-modern) ingredient in professorial work “ostensibly lost ideals of self-managed craft labor.”¹²⁸ “The university was part of a Taylorizing industrial system that preserved anti-Taylorist conditions on campus. Its faculty could be described as ‘semi-autonomous wage-earners’ who were their own bosses on the job though they had little influence on the overall institution or educational system.”¹²⁹ To put it another way, neither nurses, corporate administrators, school-teachers, nor private research teams (all the near-analogues to professors) could have hoped to pen a text like *The American University: How It Runs, Where It Is*

¹²⁴ Robbins, *Secular Vocations*, 91–95.

¹²⁵ Oakley, *Community of Learning*, 99.

¹²⁶ Robbins makes an economic and structural comparison with the clergy. The British nineteenth-century philosopher S. T. Coleridge had a more laudatory goal in mind when he styled the bearers of culture the “clerisy.” Actual lineage with the secular orders of the Church aside, professors have not abandoned their public role, on radio, TV, and in the press; Small, *The Value of the Humanities*, 138; Clark, *Academic Charisma*, 408–10; Robbins, *Secular Vocations*, 219.

¹²⁷ For a discussion of SSHRC funding schemes, please refer to *Retooling the Humanities: The Culture of Research in Canadian Universities*, 185–202, eds. Daniel Coleman and Smaro Kamboureli (Edmonton, AB: University of Alberta Press, 2011).

¹²⁸ Newfield, *Ivy and Industry*, 216.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

Going by Jacques Barzun (1968). His book exemplifies both panoptic knowledge of the institution, commandingly set down from on high (“Now the most conscientious department is too busy to converse with itself let alone with the young”), and striking alienation (“There are no longer campus heroes...”).¹³⁰ Moreover, none of those other bureaucratic personnel would have been paid to write it.

The institutional-professional perch of academics has had an effect on the professor’s work in another way—this time a rhetorical effect. As Bruce Robbins writes, professions depend to a certain extent on public acceptance.¹³¹ (An intellectual, which many lament that university denizens used to be before “professionalization,” may do as her or she pleases and despise their public—at least in theory.¹³²) Professionals are structurally and ideologically dependent on “the public” for support and for funding. This dependence is the cause of much self- and other-directed justification. Clearly, therefore, books on the university, in professorial style, must have some authenticating function for the erudite individual scholar, because as I have mentioned, there is no obvious internal institutional or market justification for such works (I will put Allan Bloom’s massive sales figures aside, which in any case he reportedly did not expect; though again he addressed *the public* not the professorship, as we have seen).¹³³ *The University in Ruins*, *Community of Learning*, *The Value of the Humanities*, and other works that I have appreciated are written at an oblique audience halfway between the public and the profession.

¹³⁰ Jacques Barzun, *The American University: How It Runs, Where It Is Going*, 2nd ed., introduction by Herbert I. London (Chicago, IL; London, UK: University of Chicago Press, 1993 [1968]), 70, 255.

¹³¹ Robbins cites the interesting case of psychiatrists and lawyers who, in the mid-twentieth century, fought a battle for public support over the control of criminal populations using two different justifications. The lawyers won, not out of superior logic, but due to public identification with the lawyers’ identification of crime with personal responsibility, as opposed to with psychic disorder; Robbins, *Secular Vocations*, 92.

¹³² Erich Auerbach, “Germinie Lacerteux,” in *Mimesis: the representation of reality in Western literature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), 493-501; Robbins, *Secular Vocations*, 1–12.

¹³³ Herbert I. London, introduction to *The American University: How It Runs, Where It Is Going*, 2nd ed., by Jacques Barzun (Chicago, IL; London, UK: University of Chicago Press, 1993 [1968]), xiii.

One potential angle of approach is Weberian: the particular authority of a professor could be seen as “charisma,” the power granted to an individual “genius.”¹³⁴ This goes beyond the power of traditional authority (like a faculty chair) and beyond rational acceptance (as in a university administration).¹³⁵ It is not surprising that works like *The Closing of the American Mind* by Bloom and *Not For Profit* by Nussbaum continue to be published with, respectively, Nietzschean and Socratic allusions.¹³⁶ The mixture of the authority of these philosophers and the charisma coming from their skillful employment in a contemporary debate are a form of intertextual power that cannot be understated—part of the cultural capital of the elite, in Pierre Bourdieu’s sociological model.¹³⁷ Bloom and Nussbaum’s fiery tone is also a charismatic crutch. But who is the audience to which this power is displayed? Bruce Robbins tries to supply that answer in his *Secular Vocations*. “The public,” argues Robbins, is a rhetorical set-piece.¹³⁸ The construction of a “public” can be seen in Paul Jay’s *The Humanities in “Crisis” and the Future of Literary Studies*: “I believe humanists and their supporters must take a pragmatic and nuanced approach to articulating the value of the humanities... I believe it is important that we respond to the questions students, their families, college and university administrators, and the wider public have about why a humanities education matters...”¹³⁹ Do students and parents have questions? Probably, but Jay does not survey any real parents or students. As Robbins explains, “Versions of ‘the public’ have been *internalized* by critics and... these internalizations act with real force upon the profession’s psychic economy, whether they correspond faithfully to extra-professional collectivities.”¹⁴⁰

¹³⁴ Clark, *Academic Charisma*, 14–19.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

¹³⁶ Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind*, 389 [index]; Nussbaum, *Not For Profit*, 18, 47, 65.

¹³⁷ Dylan Riley, “Bourdieu’s Class Theory,” *Catalyst* 1, no. 2 (2017): 1–28, <https://catalyst-journal.com/vol1/no2/bourdieu-class-theory-riley#po-fn> (accessed online February 20, 2020).

¹³⁸ Robbins, *Secular Vocations*, 87–91.

¹³⁹ Jay, *The Humanities in “Crisis,”* 4.

¹⁴⁰ Robbins, *Secular Vocations*, 89.

In sum, the academic enjoys a particular structural relationship to the public. The profession gains legitimacy because it can think in this way, because it knows how to defend itself to itself and to the public Other (imaginary and real).¹⁴¹ This implies obligation to do both. In sum, far from opening up a sociological question (who in “the public” actually *reads* books written so high up the ivory tower?), we have a conceptual concern: “the public” *is* the professor, at least in the rhetorical play of this genre of defensive professorial biography. This goes to show that the standpoint of the professor within the university, as I have argued, is the key to understanding the work both as an argument and as an expression of the pressures of an institution. It is through rhetoric (instrumentalized speech) that argument and institutional pressure most closely unite.

¹⁴¹ Robbins, *Secular Vocations*, 84–95, 109; Collini, *What Are Universities*, 115–119.

Conclusion: Political Activism on Campus; How to Do Things with Words

As we have seen, archeology provides a way of examining written works as they are produced within material and intellectual conditions. It is up to genealogy to recount the lineage of the ideas in those works. This thesis began by delineating a genre of writing (university biography). In chapter one, I gave university biography four characteristics: intertextuality, personalism, professorship, and non-referentialism. I then asked whether this typology can help us answer some political and ethical questions that arise through the process of writing on campus.

This required a clear view of the moment of writing/production—an abstraction from the particular writer to the general Author—which was provided by Foucault's author-function in chapter two. I then drew on three scholars to provide the contours of professorship and to sketch the interactions between intellectual and material trends. The development of the author-function out of the German university in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was tackled with the help of William Clark. Christopher Newfield's theory of craft labour and of the academic's ambiguous position between bureaucracy and the market provided a useful way of connecting this intellectual history to the history of the institution itself. Bruce Robbins's work allowed for some reflections on the rhetorical function (the motivated use of language) that lies behind a common trope in professorial writing, which is the creation of a "public." In sum, this paper has attempted to develop a theoretical understanding of university biography as a genre that, while frequently reviewed in the literature, is rarely seen as the expression of historical and intellectual changes rather than just as markers of evolving arguments.

All this has been done in the service of an ethical question: how can we best write and remain on campus? Or does our desire for change, to control the limits of our writing, require us to abandon

the idea of the university? Ultimately, the real force behind all research is not theoretical but political (in a broad sense).¹⁴² As Bruce Robbins puts it:

There is of course an element of personal apologia in this argument. In order to believe that what we do is meaningful... some effort to understand how oppositional work is conceivable within a professorial framework seems required... Recognizing the personal, even existential, motif that overtly or covertly animates the topics of intellectuals, the suggestion that what is at stake is not merely ideas, but the possibility of living out one's ideas within a given set of circumstances and a given mortal span...¹⁴³

The Duke University philosopher Rick Roderick put it another way: “to the extent that the social critic succeeds in paralyzing us, which in a way is his job (to paralyze us with horror)... he contradictorily loses by paralyzing us for action. And the response to this paradox is not itself a theoretical response, but should be an activist response.”¹⁴⁴

But activism how? The title of my conclusion comes from British language philosopher J. L. Austin's well-known work *How to Do Things with Words*.¹⁴⁵ Austin was concerned with situations in which *speaking* was *doing*, what he called the *speech-act*.¹⁴⁶ A (successful) speech-act is that of a judge sentencing a defendant: the phrase “you are hereby condemned to life in prison” is not so much a statement as it is an action with legal consequences. Implicit in this, however, is an upsetting truth. If people only rarely produce speech-acts, then most of us are only saying (and writing) things with no concrete effect. Furthermore, the problem of language is a moving target; it confronts new generations of academics with increasing problems for their desire to effect proposals. The amount of power one's speech follows changes in one's own profession.¹⁴⁷ For example, the distinction

¹⁴² Rick Roderick calls this a “practical postulate of action, and not theory.” Rick Roderick, “Invitation to Dialogue: Philosophy and Science,” hosted by Anne Buttimer, University of Texas at Austin, 1987.

¹⁴³ Robbins, *Secular Vocations*, x, xi.

¹⁴⁴ Roderick, “Invitation to Dialogue”, 1987.

¹⁴⁵ J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, 2nd ed. (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1976), 40.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁷ Jacques Rancière, “The Politics of Literature,” *SubStance* 103, vol. 33, no. 2 (2004): 14, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1353/sub.2004.0012>.

between university presidents, whose speech is traditionally tied to executive power, and professors, whose speech is progressively weakening under contemporary conditions, can be parsed through the problem of language.

Nowadays, the professor-bureaucrat can only urge “the public” to do such and such a thing, given that their own institution has sealed them off from decision-making. This historical fact dogs discursive attempts to craft writing that can break out of philosophical and institutional dead-ends, often by convincing “the public” of something. If every piece of writing penned at the university is *linguistic*, so the thinking goes, the next step is to carve out a place where the exemplary writing is *supralinguistic* (a speech-act). Some new movement within discourse will then produce an effect “outside of it” by being the best of its own category: namely, a rhetorical effect will convince the “public” (or the community of scholars) to *do* something in the name of the speaker’s “imperative” ideas. Robbins writes, “If there is at present a rhetoric common to the disciplines of the humanities, it is the epideictic rhetoric of praise and blame, a rhetorical mode appropriate to raising questions of value (in our case, the value of the monuments of the cultural heritage) before a general public (rather than before judicial or legislative assemblies).”¹⁴⁸ I hope it is clear that this problem of language, while not intellectually unique to the university, is actually a response to an institutional setting.

Is there another way out of this linguistic dead-end that does not involve rhetoric and a “public”? The reason that I suggested artefact as a means of discussing the texts of university biography (and by extension, all of the university’s written products) is that the word captures the different ways of treating language (as text, a formal network; as work, a social-intellectual symbol; and as book, an anthropological product). This tripartite way of thinking is a possible path for future research, both as it is applied to new genres and in terms of the written products of the university as a

¹⁴⁸ Robbins, *Secular Vocations*, 101.

whole. It proposes the need to think about our work sociologically, in addition to intellectually and rhetorically. To write and to wish for effects (the stopping of a budget cut or of an invasive funding scheme) is to engage in rhetoric. So instead of asking whether a given article will convince “the public” to value the humanities, therefore, we could ask: will this writing permit the building of co-operation between university students, staff, and faculty so that the real institutional battles will not be lost to cash-starved administrators?

If I have strayed too far into speculative intellectual history at the expense of historical sociology, it is only to open up, from within, the rigid genre codes in university biography that divorce form and style from historical questions and political aims. The genre conventions of university biography examined throughout this thesis breed unwitting hostility to the treatment of their own contents and form as the vehicle for material aims in the concrete environment of the campus.

One concrete point of entry is to consider where students are positioned vis-à-vis research and politics. Institutionally, students are marginal: as Rick Roderick notes, students are unpaid workers in an institution which is selling them a (defective) product.¹⁴⁹ The Cohn-Bendit twins, in their 1968 book *Obsolete Communism*, drew on marginality and ambiguity: “we work, but we produce nothing. Often we have no money, but few of us are really poor.”¹⁵⁰ Consequently, students today can become prisoners of discourse and not contributors. Professors like Jacques Barzun (witness to 1968) could say what they wanted about the causes of student frustration in the 1960s.¹⁵¹ Students (such as myself) also adopt the professorial voice in papers written for professionalizing honours programmes. As Readings puts it, “Thus, student autonomy is the end of product of the pedagogical

¹⁴⁹ Roderick, “Invitation to Dialogue”, 1987.

¹⁵⁰ Daniel and Gabriel Cohn-Bendit, *Obsolete Communism: The Left-Wing Alternative*, trans. Arnold Pomerans (New York, NY: McGraw-Hill, 1968), 256, quoted in *The University in Ruins*, by Bill Readings, 147.

¹⁵¹ Commentators can appeal to students as an imagined “public” against which they construct their legitimacy, effectively silencing the student; Jay, *The Humanities in “Crisis” and the Future of Literary Studies*, 4; Robbins, *Secular Vocations*, 87–91; Barzun, *The American University*, 255, 265.

process, which is nothing more than the replication of the autonomy of the master.”¹⁵² Combatting this tendency, students could discover how assigned readings function ideologically and materially. Students would be capitalizing on their insider-outsider status to demystify the professor’s work. Professors, meanwhile, could lead the way in encouraging students to see students’ own absence from the scholarly texts they are assigned. Combatting the inability of language to effect change requires teachers and students to inspect, side by side, their own sociological production of knowledge. Collaboration like this would be more effective in bringing together political energies than would university biographies, a genre which is predicated on a tradition of professorial authority and erudition that excludes students and can put professors at odds with their own emancipatory politics. The tension is clear: the weakening of the academic’s position and of its accompanying speech is both liberating and impoverishing. Rather than lament the current inability of university biography to address our problems, one can hope to make the most of the potential this offers.

The question whether objective truth can be attributed to human thinking is not a question of theory but is a practical question. Man must prove the truth, i.e. the reality and power, the this-sidedness of his thinking in practice. The dispute over the reality or non-reality of thinking that is isolated from practice is a purely scholastic question.

—KARL MARX, *Theses on Feuerbach*, thesis II

Words: 10,618

¹⁵² Readings, *The University in Ruins*, 157.

Bibliography

The bibliography has been divided into several sections, given that several distinct fields have been covered in this thesis. The first category, *Primary Literature*, contains those works which are either university biographies themselves or which fit somewhere in the genealogy of university biography. Then comes a section called *Critical and Historical Literature*, which contains works that look at questions of the history or historiography of the university with scholarly distance. This is followed by the *Contemporary Issues* section, which contains a selection of more social-scientific literature, aimed not so much at interrogating the changes and vagaries of the educational system as at establishing some of the news-worthy facts of today's campus. Finally, I have attached a section called *Theoretical Literature*, which lists a series of works of indirect relevance here but that offered me ways of thinking of the problems underlined in this thesis.

Primary Literature

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