THE PUBLIC HUMANITIES

In seeking to think once again about the present condition of the humanities I looked over the publications of the predecessor conference held in 1968 on The Future of the Modern Humanities, a conference dominated by a concern with its historical occasion.

For the opening speaker, Harry Levin, this is 'a moment of uncertainty, a crisis in the universities which reverberates to a greater turbulence in the extramural world'; a moment defined by student barricades on the Boulevard Saint-Michel and by 'the occupation and evacuation of Morningside Heights'.[1] Levin cites with a certain horror a manifesto sent him by a French colleague in which 'not only students but the *concierges* demanded the right to participate in the appointment of faculty and the supervision of examinations' (ibid.). More generally, Levin complains that 'at a time when the multiplication of students must be met by a rapid increase of teachers, and so long as the licence to teach at the highest level is more or less equivalent to the doctoral thesis, it follows that the quality of research stands in some danger of being diluted' (pp. 1–2). At the same time, Levin is concerned to put the present crisis in historical perspective. The history of student riots is, he argues, as old as the university itself—and he draws a direct parallel between the discontented hippies of 1968 and the Goliards who rioted against the papal authorities at the University of Paris as early as 1229 (p. 2).

The subjection of the humanities to practical and commercial ends is of parallel antiquity. Although 'Seneca had distinguished the *artes liberales* from the *artes mechanicae* on the grounds that the former offered no mercenary rewards' and were therefore 'worthy of free men, and indeed were agents of liberation', nevertheless, says Levin, 'impracticality is not in itself a criterion for a liberal education, and usefulness has unexpected ways of breaking in'. Both the arts of the Quadrivium—arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music—and those of the Trivium—grammar, rhetoric, and dialectic or logic—had in the early Middle Ages become 'practical instruments rather than modes of enquiry'. Rhetoric, for example, had become an *ars dictaminis*, a set of letter-writing skills employed by skilled clerics in 'worldly service, where they contributed public documents as notaries, diplomats, and administrators. Under the influence of *dictamen* the University of Paris had virtually become a business school' by the thirteenth century, and the classics had retreated to the University of Orléans (pp. 3–4).

In the conference's concluding presentation, William Riley Parker describes another historical context for the present crisis of the university. This is the legacy of German positivist philology which became entrenched in departments of English in the United States in the 1860s and 1870s and which gave rise to

[1] Harry Levin, 'The Modern Humanities in Historical Perspective', in *The Future of the Modern Humanities: The Papers Delivered at the Jubilee Congress of the Modern Humanities Research Association in August 1968*, ed. by J. C. Laidlaw (London: Modern Humanities Research Association, 1969), pp. 1–17 (p. 1).

the system of curricular organization by area and period, and what Parker calls a 'training [. . .] to penetrate the deserts of literary scholarship and pluck the thorny Ph.D.—that scentless flower of specialization which since 1861 has grown on the grave of the humanities in the United States'.[2] Levin too laments disciplinary specialization. 'When we talk about a Renaissance man, in the Modern Language Association', he writes, 'we do not mean a polymath like Erasmus; we have in mind a man who knows his way through Pollard and Redgrave's Short-Title Catalogue' (p. 15).

But Parker's criticisms of specialization are perhaps a little disingenuous, since the specialization of knowledge is central to the concept of the academic discipline, and since a major part of his argument is that the 'humanities' do not exist as such: all that we can meaningfully talk of is a set of institutionally associated disciplines. 'There is', he writes, 'no combination of from three to [. . .] nine and more academic disciplines with common subject matters, methods, attitudes, objectives, and results that set them apart from the sciences and social sciences' (p. 107).

This is a position that cuts against the grain of many of our pieties about the humanities, yet it seems to me demonstrably true, and it opens up a prior question for this conference, namely that of whether there is such a thing as 'the humanities'. Perhaps I can illustrate this *a contrario* by briefly discussing the difficulties that the Research Committee of the AHRB gets itself into in a recent paper when it tries to define what the humanities disciplines have in common. The first thing it does is specify what these disciplines are: the list, defined by the AHRB's designated domain, includes archaeology, classics, history, English, the history of art and architecture, linguistics, languages, library and information sciences, museum studies, musicology, philosophy, religious studies, theology, and law.[3] Now this is of course a pragmatically organized list which reflects the historical politics of the organization of academic departments rather than a conceptually coherent plan. Nevertheless, there are some significant peculiarities, and some puzzling omissions. Literary studies exist only in the form of English and, by deeply hidden implication, what is called 'languages'. The study of art exists only as its history, and the syntax leaves it ambiguous whether it is architecture or only the *history* of architecture that is included here. Library and information sciences, which I understand to be taxonomic rather than interpretative disciplines, sit oddly in the list; and law is surely located here only by virtue of an interpretative and philosophical dimension which is foreign to much of what actually goes on in the teaching of black-letter law. The omissions are equally striking: why is the study of film and other media absent? Why are communications studies alien to the humanities? Do not cultural geography and cultural anthropology have at least as much in common with the humanistic study of culture as they do with the harder social sciences, and are there not some vestigially humanistic areas of psychology that would fit at least as comfortably here as over there?

   [2] William Riley Parker, 'The Future of the "Modern Humanities"', in *The Future of the Modern Humanities* (see Levin, above), pp. 106–26 (p. 114).
   [3] 'The Arts and Humanities: Understanding the Research Landscape' (Bristol: AHRB, November 2003), p. 3 (available at http://www.ahrb.ac.uk/strategy/policy.asp).

The assumption nevertheless is that, as the authors put it, 'disciplines such as these remain the building blocks of the domain', and that they are so because of what they call 'a shared history rooted in the complex unfolding through the century and a half that followed the Enlightenment's project to embrace and classify human knowledge' (p. 3). The implication of the syntax is that these disciplines share in some common way in some unspecified dimension of that Enlightenment project—indeed, it almost implies that that project of 'embracing and classifying human knowledge' in some sense defined and gave rise to the domain of the humanities. When the committee tries to define what the core of this domain might be, however, the difficulties become apparent: 'Research in the arts and humanities', they argue, 'takes as its core concern the study of human activity, experience, creativity and understanding': as indeed, we might add, do sociology, psychology, psychiatry, ethology, economics, commerce, and many other non-humanities disciplines. What distinguishes the humanities, it turns out, is that it studies these dimensions of human experience and behaviour from the standpoint of *individuals*: all of the humanities disciplines 'begin their analysis from individual experience [. . .]. Individual human experience and agency [. . .] provide the starting point for analysis' (ibid.). The methodological individualism that some among us might take as a sign of a deeply ingrained ideology is here taken as the distinctive and unproblematic heart of the project. There then follows a list of 'core and continuing modes of access and objects of research' (p. 4), or in other words core themes, which is precisely a list: a random agglomeration of some of the things that some humanists currently do.

What seems initially a more fruitful tack then emerges with an attempt to define the specificity of the humanities in terms of the structure of the evidence it deals in: 'A great deal of arts and humanities research', it appears, 'has to base its analyses on evidence which is often difficult, fragmentary and ambiguous' (p. 7). 'A great deal' and 'often' are not, however, a promising start; and really that is all that we are offered. How the 'difficult, fragmentary and ambiguous' nature of evidence in the humanities might differ from the difficult, fragmentary, and ambiguous evidence that every social and natural scientist works with is never explained.

Parker's argument in the 1968 proceedings that there is in fact no core methodology or subject matter that would distinguish the humanities disciplines from those to be found elsewhere in the university is an attractive argument to me, for three reasons. The first has to do with the forms of coherence presumed to bind the so-called humanities disciplines together, forms of coherence which the Research Committee of the AHRB so signally fails to describe and which have to do, in the final analysis, with the figure of the human, a supposed common humanity which is manifested in the 'soft' disciplines (the *humaniora*, the more humane disciplines) but not in the 'hard' ones. To embrace this figure requires more faith in its conceptual validity than I find myself able to muster. The second reason is that the concept of the humanities is always posited in relation to a historically variable Other: the mechanical arts for Seneca, religion and scholastic orthodoxy for the humanists of the Renaissance, science and mass culture for the humanisms of the modern university, the more or less arbitrarily delimited research domains of the other funding councils

for the AHRB. I have little interest in differentiating my work from that of scientists, on the one hand, or from an apparently degrading mass culture on the other. The third reason is that the concept of the humanities supposes at some level the unitary structure of all humanistic knowledge, whereas it seems to me that since Foucault we understand that knowledges are always relative to particular institutionally grounded discursive frameworks which organize and delimit the objects, methods, techniques, and protocols for the generation and the recognition of those propositions that are true and valid for that framework. For our purposes, these frameworks are the academic disciplines, which are machines for the production of true knowledges and which are not beholden to a generalized structure of knowledge. This is the point made by both Jim Chandler and Stanley Fish in a recent *Critical Inquiry* symposium. Chandler writes:

My sense is that the totality of the disciplines at any given time should be articulated not as a set of territories, or even as a set of parallel functions, or box of tools, but as a network of relatively autonomous practices in asymmetrical relation to each other. Properly understood, the disciplinary system will thus appear to have a different structure from the perspective of each discipline in it. Literary criticism's relations with history and musicology, for example, are not symmetrical with anthropology's or linguistics' relations to those disciplines.[4]

And Stanley Fish, noting the historical contingency of the way in which certain disciplines are assembled in the faculty of arts or humanities, adds:

This does not mean that disciplines have nothing to say to one another but that the interest one discipline might have in what is being said in the precincts of another will be a function of the first discipline's already-in-place investments and goals and not of some ambition or general effectivity all disciplines share or should share.[5]

Yet, if this assembly of disciplines in an apparent coherence is in one sense untenable, there is another sense in which they can be said to have a set of common interests, and this sense has to do with the politics of funding and influence in the contemporary university; although I want immediately to add that it is not only the humanities disciplines that often feel they are fighting a losing battle.

   Bill Readings has an interestingly polemical argument about this politics. In his view the forms of disinterested thought that he takes to characterize the humanistic disciplines can be characterized as rubbish or waste. Thinking, he writes, 'belongs rather to an economy of waste than to a restricted economy of calculation. Thought is nonproductive labour, and hence does not show up as such on balance sheets except as waste.'[6]

   I find two problems with this formulation, however. The first is that, as a matter of empirical fact, thought *does* show up on the balance sheets: for example, as intellectual property, or on promotion applications, or as returns in the RAE. The second is that I think it is important to resist the defensiveness

   [4] James Chandler, 'Critical Disciplinarity', *Critical Inquiry*, 30 (2004), 355–60 (p. 360).
   [5] Stanley Fish, 'Theory's Hope', *Critical Inquiry*, 30 (2004), 374–78 (p. 375).
   [6] Bill Readings, 'The University without Culture?', *New Literary History*, 26 (1995), 465–92 (p. 488).

of this argument. Its terms derive from Bataille's critique of utilitarianism, according to which the sphere of the useful belongs to one, 'restricted' economy; waste, *dépense*, by contrast, figures in a 'general' economy as generosity, as gift, as the absence of calculation, and takes the forms of war, of sexual expenditure, of sacrifice, of the aesthetic, of the gratuitous. Thinking in the humanities thus takes the form of the uncalculated, of play, of a principled generosity of spirit.

However attractive this description of our activities might be, I have the reservation about this line of argument that it concedes the ground in advance, concedes that the humanities are indeed not useful; and we do this, of course, in part because of our resistance to the principle of performativity or efficiency that informs the modern university, and in part because we are just so tired of arguing that what we do is useful and valuable, and of losing the argument over and over.

Why are the odds against us? Why is it now perfectly possible to imagine a university without a humanities faculty, and indeed to see them all around us? Let me suggest three lines of thought about this.

(1) The first has to do with the incremental commercialization of the university in the post-war period—a process, of course, that happens differently and in different degrees in different countries and in different kinds of university. David Noble puts the case succinctly:

The most momentous change to befall universities over the last two decades has been the identification of the campus as a significant site of capital accumulation, a change in social perception which has resulted in the systematic conversion of intellectual activity into intellectual capital and, hence, intellectual property. There have been two general phases in this transformation. The first, which began twenty years ago and is still under way, entailed the commoditization of the research function of the university, transforming scientific and engineering knowledge into commercially viable proprietary products that could be owned and therefore bought and sold in the market. The second, which we are now witnessing, entails the commoditization of the educational function of the university, transforming courses into courseware, the activity of instruction itself into commercially viable proprietary products. In the first phase the university became a site for the production and sale of patents and exclusive licenses. In the second phase it is becoming a site for the production of—as well as the chief market for—copyrighted videos, courseware, CD-ROMs, and Web sites.[7]

This process of commercialization brings with it a concomitant defunding by government, part of a more general historical shift against the public sector. Sam Weber summarizes the process in *Ideas of the University*:

To remain 'competitive' in the 'global market', the budget deficit of the state must be reduced. And to reduce the budget deficit, there seems for many government policy-makers no other way than that of reducing public spending, either by curtailing public services, such as education, health, transport, communications, or by privatizing them, which is to say, turning them over to corporations whose finality is not that of providing a service but rather that of making a profit.[8]

Harry Harootunian, writing in the same issue of *Critical Inquiry* as Chand-

[7] David F. Noble, 'Digital Diploma Mills', *October*, 86 (1998), 107–29 (p. 109).
[8] Samuel Weber, 'The Future of the University: The Cutting Edge', in *Ideas of the University*, ed. by Terry Smith (Sydney: RIHSS, 1996), pp. 43–75 (pp. 52–53).

ler and Fish, puts this even more forcefully when he writes of 'the immense transformation of educational institutions into administered knowledge factories that have already eviscerated the humanities, making them into service centres'.[9] In this environment, demands for accountability add a layer of administrative burdens to a professoriate whose time is increasingly allocated by forward-planning mechanisms, both externally imposed and internally devised.

(2) The second line of thought has to do with the increasing imbalance between the funding of science and medicine and the funding of the humanities and social sciences. Stefan Collini gives the following figures:

In the 1930s, half of the students at British universities were in the arts faculties; more strikingly still, at Oxford and Cambridge the proportion studying in arts faculties was 80 and 70% respectively. Now, those studying pure 'humanities' subjects [. . .] account only for some 18% of undergraduates and 12% of postgraduates in British universities.[10]

We should perhaps qualify these figures by noting that they are distorted by changes in what counts as tertiary education; it is likely to be the case that many of the students now counted as being outside the humanities would previously have been counted in other kinds of institution, and it is worth saying that in absolute terms the demand by students for humanities subjects remains strong.

Nevertheless, these shifts are accompanied by changes in expenditure which have dramatic consequences: internal funding systems are uniformly stacked against the humanities; different areas of the university receive different loadings for different types of teaching (small groups are seen as legitimate and necessary for the teaching of medicine and dentistry but not for language teaching or the literature seminar); and research is funded at the expense of teaching, and is increasingly linked to the recruitment of funding from outside sources, with a diminution of those disciplines that cannot do so. In relation to research, Collini argues,

it is hardly surprising that so many of the characteristics of the funding system under which universities operate, from the reliance on winning large grants from commercial and charitable sponsors to the categories of the Research Assessment Exercise, should reflect the economic clout of the sciences. (p. 5)

We might point to such consequences as the design of university research protocols, which are inevitably couched in language appropriate to the sciences—the language of the pre-given, ready-formed research object and of calculable outcomes; and to the emergence in recent years of a semantic distinction between research and scholarship which has the tendential effect of excluding the humanities from the university's core business of producing new knowledge (as opposed to its conservation and re-evaluation).

(3) The third line of thought has to do with the erosion of some of what were perceived to be the core functions of the humanities as universities moved towards a quantitatively and thus qualitatively different form of education. Those

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[9] Harry Harootunian, 'Theory's Empire: Reflections on a Vocation for *Critical Inquiry*', *Critical Inquiry*, 30 (2004), 396–402 (p. 397).
[10] Stefan Collini, 'HiEdBiz', *London Review of Books*, 25.21 (6 November 2003), p. 5.

functions took the historical form of 'the social mission of the humanities', or of the formation of character that German calls *Bildung*. This is to say that they had the object of training a small intellectual elite for a central role in government and the higher professions, and that this training was not specific to its governmental or administrative tasks.

Here the key factor in change has been the massive expansion of the tertiary education sector as a whole and of vocational and professional education as a proportion of it. Changes in overall participation rates (from about 6–8 per cent of the age cohort at the beginning of the 1960s to about 43–44 per cent at present) have corresponded (although not necessarily in any causal sense) to changing patterns of recruitment to business and, in particular, to the public service, where training in economics or management is increasingly preferred over a generalist training in the analysis of and critical reasoning about texts.

At the same time, the expansion of the universities has entailed a socialization and credentialization of training and research, a shifting of educational functions that were once the preserve of the private sector or of non-university institutions to the tertiary sector. Apprenticeships disappear and are replaced by further education courses; nurses are taught in universities rather than primarily in hospitals, managers in MBA courses rather than on the job; and the universities provide publicly trained personnel and government-funded expertise to private laboratories, or else take the place of those laboratories as a form of government subsidy to industry.

In these circumstances it becomes increasingly difficult to find a language in which to redefine our social 'mission' (and indeed the word 'mission' itself, with its mix of religious and managerial jargons, exemplifies the poverty of the language in which we are able to speak at all). The future of the humanities depends crucially on our finding alternatives to the justificatory rhetoric of the human, of universal truth, of critique, of the organic wholeness of knowledge, of the best that has been thought and said.

Yet many of the changes that I have outlined are not to be lamented, and in many ways they should be taken—to use the upbeat rhetoric of managerialism again—as opportunities and challenges rather than as a loss. I want to suggest three broad sets of understandings by means of which we might seek to come to terms with them.

First, we need to understand the social uses of the humanities within a class and an economic context, broadly defined. Our work is that of knowledge workers, and we have class interests that correspond to those of the more general knowledge class, the new middle class of managers, professionals, scientists, and technicians. I have argued elsewhere that this class has become a distinct social entity as knowledge has come to have a more directly central role in the economy, and that although it is weakly formed as a class, it does nevertheless have distinctive class values.[11] The formation of the knowledge class characteristically takes place around the professional claim to, and the professional mystique of, autonomy of judgement; this forms the basis both for the struggle over the organization of work and for individual self-respect (that is, for a par-

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[11] John Frow, *Cultural Studies and Cultural Value* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), pp. 97–130.

ticular mode of subjectivity) grounded in this relation to work. It underlies the differentiation of middle-class from working-class forms of work: one based in 'knowledge' and structured around loyalty, 'social exchange', and responsibility, the other based in 'skill' and structured around 'low trust, economic exchange and direct control'.[12] At the same time the claim to autonomy underlies the complementary strategies used in the struggle to achieve appropriate working conditions: a professional strategy of arguing that access to specialized mental labour can and should be achieved only by way of institutionally controlled credentials; and a strategy of protecting managerial prerogatives from direct interference by owners. The historical shaping of the knowledge class accordingly took place around a process of legal and industrial struggle over the conditions for autonomy of work practices.

The knowledge class thus acquires legitimacy through the acquisition of credentials, and at the same time achieves a measure of class closure by integrating the community of those with appropriate credentials and excluding those without. It structures its Other in terms of its own claim to knowledge. This closure is then reinforced through the 'cultural' mechanisms of taste and lifestyle. At the same time, however, the fact that the knowledge class is formed primarily at the level of culture, rather than in relation to economic exploitation, and thus the fuzziness of this class's relation to other classes mean that this is a class which is coherent only in its lack of structural cohesion. Its interests in the political sphere, reflecting its internal divisions, are structured by its ambivalently tutelary and antagonistic relation to the working class and its ethos of professional autonomy and service. Above all, it is formed by its close relation to bureaucracy in both sectors and to 'flexible' forms of bureaucratic rationality—and thereby to the forms of governmentality most characteristic of advanced capitalism.

If we are to take seriously the fact that our acquisition of cultural capital forms the basis for the interests that drive us, we must stop pretending that the culture we practise and advocate and which forms the core of what we teach as humanists is socially innocent. It is not, and we cannot continue to claim that it gives us access to a wisdom which would allow us to speak for all others.

Readings accordingly argues that abandoning the 'strong', normative sense of 'culture' entails 'relinquishing our claims to be intellectuals and giving up the claim of service to society as a whole, the claim to both know and incarnate the true nature of society, behind which academics have masked their accumulation of cultural capital for centuries' (p. 466). This is not to say that we should abandon the values we have espoused in our professional lives; it is to say only that these values are not and cannot be universal, and that we should not argue the case for the humanities disciplines as though they were.

Second: it is important that the present condition and the future health of the humanities be understood in relation to the infrastructures that make them possible. In so far as the category of the humanities is that of a set of

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[12] Wolfgang Littek and Ulrich Heisig, 'Work Organization under Technological Change: Sources of Differentiation and Reproduction of Social Inequality in Processes of Change', in *Organization Theory and Class Analysis: New Approaches and New Issues*, ed. by Stewart R. Clegg (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 1990), pp. 299–314 (p. 300).

academic disciplines engaged in both the production and the transmission of knowledge, we should attend to the institutional conditions of existence of these knowledges. These are in part bureaucratic conditions, which have to do with the funding of our activities and our research infrastructure of libraries, of databases, of space, and of time. If this is so, then it is crucial not to get caught in the pathos of victimization by the bureaucratic university. Harootunian's complaint about educational institutions becoming 'administered knowledge factories' makes an easy point about government and bureaucratic control of the production and transmission of knowledge; yet that control is, at least in part, for purposes of accountability and egalitarian access which we should not lament, and administration is largely a function of the size and complexity of the modern institutions of learning. How could knowledge not be 'administered'? In what universe did it ever flow directly and immediately from master to pupil, from colleague to colleague?

If knowledge and the production of knowledge are to be shaped and directed by funding bodies, this does not mean that we cannot and should not fight to direct these controls to useful ends. I am thinking here of the direct intervention of the ESRC in the training of graduate students, and of the ways in which the AHRB and shortly the AHRC will follow in its footsteps to be more directive in relation to postgraduate education; of the way the Rockefeller Foundation in the United States has acted in even more directly and transformatively interventionist ways—and ways that seem to me almost entirely positive—to reshape area studies; and in general of the way the designation of priority research areas—something the AHRB will increasingly do as it moves from 'response mode' to 'directed mode'—has helped shape the agenda of tertiary research. These are the facts of life of the evolving systems of research funding in Britain and elsewhere, and our task should be to come to terms with them, to help shape them by our feedback, and not to lament the loss of some mythical autonomy of the humanities-based university. If governments are requiring us to account for our research in terms of knowledge transfer, and if the prevailing system of measurement of knowledge transfer is narrowly commercial, we must propose alternative forms of measurement which indicate the mediated and longer-term forms of effectivity that characterize our work; whatever we do, we must not abandon the idea that the knowledge we do has effects and that we can, in some more sophisticated form, account for them. At the same time, however, we must fight fiercely to protect those freedoms and those public goods that are at the heart of our work. One bureaucratic initiative that does seem to me directly to threaten the conditions in which we conduct research is the planned introduction of full recovery of the costs of research. Not only will this mean the introduction of complex and perhaps institutionally variable accounting mechanisms, based on the usual accounting fictions, but it is likely that it will lead to a flow-on devolution of cost-recovery to the research services we employ. Thus libraries and computer networks will in turn be obliged to charge for their services, space will be charged to research budgets, and the whole model of research as a form of directed play will vanish.

It is not only the humanities that will be affected by such measures, and it is important that we do not define our relative lack of influence and prestige

against the supposed power of the sciences. The more important tension is that between pure or basic research and applied research, and we have potentially strong allies among pure physicists or mathematicians whose work is equally threatened by the transformation of knowledge into intellectual property. Lyotard has argued at some length the case for the damage done by the model of performativity to science, to the extent that it supports only routine science, not breakthrough science.[13] The scientific ethos of the free exchange of information, however badly eroded it has been in recent years, is still a culture to which many scientists are fiercely committed, and it remains the best model that we have of a free public sphere. Indeed, one of the fundamental definitions of scientific activity, formulated in Vannevar Bush's 1945 report to President Roosevelt entitled 'Science: The Endless Frontier', which shaped science policy in the United States for the crucial post-war decades, could read, with an appropriate substitution of terms, like a blueprint for research in the humanities: 'Scientific progress on a broad front', it argues, 'results from the free play of free intellects, working on subjects of their own choice, in the manner dictated by their curiosity for the exploration of the unknown.'[14]

The third set of understandings that I want to propose involves the need to assess the broader community of interests to which we humanists belong. We know that our immediate professional allegiances are divided between a 'vertical' loyalty on the one hand to the institutions that employ us and, on the other, a 'horizontal' loyalty to the invisible college of our disciplinary peers around the world, and through that college to the structure of knowledge to which we contribute. I want to suggest that there is a third dimension of our loyalty—although I seem to have run out of spatial metaphors with which to characterize the direction in which it runs. This loyalty is to the public sphere of the free circulation of ideas, and to the public domain which is the legal condition of possibility of that circulation. In a more general sense, our allegiance is to the idea of publicness, and it is an allegiance that we share with many other professional groups. At least in this country I believe that we are, as an a priori condition of our profession, committed to a politics of the public sector which would go beyond the sectoral interests of the universities and which, I stress, need not be hostile to a recognition of the appropriate distributive roles of markets, nor indeed to the possibility that the university might be technically situated, as many are in the United States, in the private sector. The politics to which we are professionally committed is an alliance politics in defence of a range of threatened institutions: public education, the health system, the public dimensions of the legal system, the public broadcasters, and non-governmental aid, civil rights, and charity organizations. Such a politics of the public *domain* and the public *sphere* would not be directed solely towards a call for appropriate funding, but addresses above all the need for ways of functioning which advance universal rather than particular interests.

[13] Jean-François Lyotard, *The Post-Modern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. by Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

[14] *Science: The Endless Frontier. A Report to the President by Vannevar Bush, Director of the Office of Scientific Research and Development, July 1945* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1945). Available at http://www.nsf.gov/od/lpa/nsf50/vbush1945.htm#ch1.1.

Recognizing the structure of allegiances in which we are inscribed would require us to think again about the possibilities for intellectual intervention in the world of politics, an intervention which would follow from our relinquishment of that 'claim of service to society as a whole, the claim to both know and incarnate the true nature of society', and which would thus depend upon the specifically disciplinary nature of our skills rather than on a general assumption of humanistic wisdom. In the most general sense this possibility was enunciated by William Riley Parker in the 1968 conference as a call for a 'transfer of learning', by which he meant the application of our professional skills of 'accuracy, scepticism, objectivity, and careful judgement' both to our personal lives and to the public affairs of state (p. 120).

Yet Parker's call depends for its force upon a classical definition of the public sphere as a domain of rationality and informed dialogue. There is surely strong evidence that, even were this ever the case, it can now no longer be understood in this way. My argument here has to do with the transformation of the subject of citizenship into the mass-mediated and mass-interpellated subject of the culture industries and of the social imaginary of consumption, and the concomitant transformation of politics such that, in Michael Warner's argument about this, the political public sphere and mass consumption now become at once alternatives and mutually determinant: publicness in the West now has to do with iconicity, a rhetoric of embodiment, the display of bodies for the purposes of 'admiration, identification, appropriation, scandal, etc.', rather than with the classical 'rhetoric of abstract disembodiment';[15] and public figures 'increasingly take on the function of concretizing that fantasmatic body image, or in other words, of actualizing the otherwise indeterminate image of the people' (p. 388). There is thus now a tension between the generalized abstraction of the public subject in its classical form and 'the always inadequate particularity of individual bodies', and it is this tension that generates the contemporary public sphere's dedication to what Warner calls 'a violently desirous speculation on bodies' (p. 397).

Warner's vision of the public sphere is thus of a domain that has come to be overdetermined by the sphere of commodity consumption and become the site of a fantasmatic identification. This process corresponds, of course, to the pun that Habermas describes as sliding across the historical continuum of the concept of *Öffentlichkeit*, a slide from the public sphere of rational judgement to the realm of publicity in which politics comes to function as public relations.[16] Margaret Morse has written powerfully of the difficulty of strengthening genuinely 'public' values in a world structured by an 'attenuated fiction effect in everyday life' which slowly and pervasively undermines the 'sense of different levels of reality and of incommensurable difference between them'. The difficulty is that of appealing to traditional notions of civic responsibility and the public space of the agora in the context of 'a built environment that is al-

    [15] Michael Warner, 'The Mass Public and the Mass Subject', in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. by Craig Calhoun (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), pp. 377–401 (p. 385).
    [16] Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. by Thomas Burger (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989), especially §18.

ready evidence of dream-work in the service of particular kinds of commerce, communication, and exchange' and of a representational apparatus in which 'the public and private worlds outside are distanced ontologically under several other layers of representation'. Thus, she writes, 'older notions of the public realm and of paramount reality have been largely undermined, and a return to a pre-televisual world of politics, the street, or the marketplace is unlikely'.[17]

Yet this, too, is what we do; our expertise across the range of humanities disciplines lies precisely in the analysis of theatre, of the image, of the rhetoric of texts and the processes of imaginary identification that they perform. Thinking about the public sphere as a site of 'violently desirous speculation on bodies' does not give us a licence either to give up on rational debate and on the critical analysis of social interests, or to reduce political action to the working out of fantasmatic identifications. What it does is to impose a methodological imperative on us not to separate our thinking and the teaching of our specific disciplines from the real world of public representations, of public fantasies, and of public lies.

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[17] Margaret Morse, 'An Ontology of Everyday Distraction: The Freeway, the Mall, the Television', in her *Virtualities: Television, Media Art, and Cyberculture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), pp. 99–124 (pp. 122–23).