

## I.

No one currently working in or around the humanities has been unaffected by the transformations these disciplines have undergone over the last thirty years. Transformation has been evident in a number of ways: in highly contested shifts in the conception of disciplinary objects and methods; in the increasing prominence of new fields of study, such as race, gender and sexuality, that have challenged the integrity of traditional disciplinary boundaries; in the apparent collapse or erosion of those boundaries in the face of interdisciplinary studies. This process has involved two distinct tendencies that are linked within modernity itself: on the one hand, the philosophical and theoretical critique of western culture from within, in terms of its internal contradictions or aporias; on the other, the return into academic and civil society alike of the social types and cultures that western modernity has categorically subordinated. It should not be underestimated how far decolonizing and other social movements involve as much a theoretical understanding of the west as a practical resistance to it. Consequently, the conjunction and intersection of immanent and returning critical movements have posed a profound intellectual challenge to the presumed universality of western

knowledge and deployed alternative theoretical approaches that can no longer be disavowed or looked down upon.

In general, the new formations of knowledge that have arisen out of these conjunctions require interdisciplinary approaches and take for their objects phenomena which do not easily belong within the purview of traditional disciplinary terrains. In fact, they are usually not to be defined by a specific object at all but by their study of the processes of object construction – gendering, racialization, cultural formations, for example – as these take place at the intersections of disciplines and social practices. This emphasis on the processes of representation and contestation in the construction of cultures and subjects puts in question the possibility and status of universal validity as a goal of the human as well as the natural sciences.

Accordingly, the new formations of knowledge in the humanities are defined less by any disciplinary regularities of method or object than by the analysis and critique of hegemonic formations. Whether emerging as interdisciplinary rubrics like Ethnic or Women's Studies, or as tendencies within older disciplines, all eventually entail new spaces and periods rather than simply new objects or sites of inquiry. Subaltern, marginal or

popular cultures as opposed to the national canon of events and figures; the long histories of gendering or racialization rather than the emergence of the public sphere and civil society; the processes of decolonization rather than the colonizers' histories of modernization and civilization: in every case, attention to new materials has led insistently to marking the theoretical and methodological limits of disciplinarity itself. The essays by Natalie Melas and Dipesh Chakrabarty in this volume offer some particularly cogent instances of this process. In each case, the new work challenges the former narratives that once spelt out, for the west, the normative or proper forms of humanity itself. Inevitably this turn demands the rethinking of critical methods. It demands, for example, extending the critique of the normative historiography of modernity, questioning its assumptions as to the emergence of civil society as the index of human development; questioning the autonomy and integrity of disciplines and their methodological assumptions; interrogating the emergence of relatively new and seemingly "natural" rubrics of area and regional studies in terms of their political genealogies. Each of the essays in this volume undertakes some at least of these tasks, as, for example, Lisa Yoneyama explores the emergence of post-war Japanese



studies; Emmanuel Eze explores the racial foundations of European Enlightenment philosophy; and Kamala Visweswaran explores the emergence of the term “new states” and a discourse on their problems in formation, showing the concept of culture is redeployed in response to the challenge of anti colonialism and non-alignment. Such developments within intellectual formations have in part emerged from and been enabled by constitutive contradictions within individual disciplines that can be summed up in the contradiction between their claims to universal scientific validity and the necessary exclusions out of which alone universality can be constructed. But while that negative dialectic could be perceived as a dynamic internal to the disciplines, the high theoretical focus of that insight gains a much broader application and greater force when it is grasped in relation to the transformation of the material conditions that once sustained the relative autonomy of the disciplines.

Transformations and instabilities within the objects and methods of the humanities and, more broadly, the human sciences, have to a great extent been impelled by the entry since the 1960s of new actors into academic institutions; the partial displacement of the traditionally white and male professor and researcher by a more diverse faculty; and student bodies that necessarily pose new questions and demand new formations of knowledge in order to answer them. The entry of new actors into the university has largely been brought about under pressure from and in the wake of social movements – Civil Rights, Third World Strikes, the Women’s Movements and so forth. Crucial

elements of those movements transversed the borders of educational institutions, from desegregation of schooling to student movements themselves. Moreover, at the conceptual level, each movement embodied the insurgence of groups whose subordination marked them categorically as the underside of that unmarked, regulative epistemological concept of the traditional academy, Man. Strictly speaking, these new social and intellectual actors constitute the inassimilable, and more, the inconceivable of the idea of the university, a point that will be clarified later. Not only, then, do these new formations within the university bear with them an accountability or responsiveness to a different public than has been traditionally conceived as that of academics: less to the state and to cultural elites, more to collectivities and communities that have been forged in struggles against elites both in the university and in the wider political society. That accountability is equally epistemological, to do with our regulative categories, in a way that makes their insurgence political in a very deep sense.

Social movements have been one principal factor here, but are themselves articulated with the postwar formation of a global political and economic sphere, a formation that has been long in the making but that has undergone an extremely rapid acceleration over the last twenty years on account both of political changes and technological developments. Along with this new “transnational” political and economic sphere has arisen what is often regarded as an unprecedented degree of global cultural homogenization, enabled quite as much as

are economic exchanges by advances in communications technology and the flow of “information” and commodities. At every level, transnationalism tends to undermine the boundaries of the nation states that formerly furnished the parameters of the university’s public function: where the role of the humanities within the university was directed towards the regulation of a national culture and the formation of citizen-subjects, that role is rapidly coming to seem redundant. In the wake of the national corporatization of the university between the 1920s and the 1940s and the militarization of the university during the cold war, the university is currently being subjected to new forms of transnational corporate control by way of the privatization of funding whose effects have yet to become clear. Within this new formation, it is certain that the role of the humanities and human sciences is undergoing a major reconstitution. This appears, for example, to involve the potential demise of national language and literature departments, the reduction of the humanities to mere service functions, the displacement of the critical functions of disciplines like philosophy, political philosophy and sociology by the concerns of cognitive science, demography and virtual market research.

Yet one of the paradoxes of transnationalism is that it does not just tend towards the erasure of national boundaries and produce a frontierless world in which the flows of capital, commodities, people and culture are increasingly unimpeded. On the contrary, it is increasingly evident that transnationalism works no less through a combination of global homogenization and intense

local differentiation often below the level of nation states. Particular regions and localities undergo quite different patterns of development or underdevelopment, immigration or emigration, political transformation or arrest, for reasons often so complex as to defy the logics that have shaped established theories of social and economic development. In the face of such phenomena, which throughout their occluded histories have defied the terms of “tradition” or “modernity,” “development” or “underdevelopment,” “progress” or “backwardness,” “archaism” or “enlightenment,” customary theoretical manoeuvres become manifestly inadequate, even at the level of description.<sup>1</sup> “Critique” itself, which is the form to which all but the most descriptive representational practices turn, founders in light of its inescapable historical foundation in claims to universal subjecthood when it is faced with cultural formations which are incommensurable with such a conception, “materially” or “spiritually.”

The tendencies of transnationalism thus present a double threat to the traditional ideal of the university as the body of diverse disciplines, harmonized and made whole by a shared conception of the human subject, disintegrates in the face of market-driven priorities and of the irrelevance of liberal social critique. Most of the essays in this volume address ways in which the mutually sustaining concepts of the human and of objective and methodological integrity of the disciplines unravel under rigorous analysis and political genealogy. My own purpose here is to examine how the function of the ideal university links it through and through to the state, to a universal

conception of the human subject and to philosophy, or the humanities, as a principal locus of subject formation. To do so helps us, I believe, to comprehend better the present crisis of the humanities and to gauge the import of that crisis in less apocalyptic but no less fundamental ways.

## II.

For many years now, progressive transformation of the humanities and social sciences, to say nothing of the university and the wider educational system, has been resisted by two principal but largely incompatible tendencies. The first of these is principally ideological, and in that betrays its reactionary nature quite directly: that is, the conservative critique of liberal measures like multiculturalism, women’s and ethnic studies, the diversification of rubrics like “civilization,” and so forth. This critique – purveyed by writers like Alan Bloom, E.D. Hirsch, William Bennett, or Dinesh D’Souza in the 1980s – relies on the call to values, meaning presumedly western values, and standards, meaning an increasingly fetishized and narrow canon of “great thinkers/writers/artists” together with a conception of what constitutes scholarship and teaching that has become manifestly inadequate to the present obligations of educational institutions.

The second tendency appears less in outspoken ideological statements than in the actual practice of universities throughout the modern period. This is the tendency, mentioned already as lying in direct contradiction with the stated ideology of explicitly conservative critics, to

transform the university into a site of applied technological training and research. At times this has involved a massive reskilling of society to meet new modes of capitalist technology and a consequent restratification along racial and occupational status lines. It has entailed, in terms of the segmentation of institutions, for example, the expansion of state and junior colleges in the U.S., or, in Europe, the sporadic extension of technical schools and “polytechnics” from the mid-nineteenth century on.<sup>2</sup>

This dynamic of educational change clearly places the technocratic tendency, with its increasingly dominant emphasis on vocational training and applied research, in contradiction with a conservative idea of the university that has always emphasized the rubrics of “liberal” education, elite culture, and the centrality of a non-vocational course of studies. This contradiction between the two principal tendencies that oppose progressive transformation of education and society, and consequently the very openness of the humanities, possibly offers us “exploitable political space” but in any case suggests certain paths our own critical practice can usefully follow.<sup>3</sup>

The current conservative position locates its origins in the already contradictory aims of nineteenth century thinkers like Arnold and John Stuart Mill who, recognizing and critiquing the effects of mass society and industrialism (they could not name capitalism), sought to resolve them by gradually preparing the masses for political emancipation (franchise) by way of cultural education. That did produce something like a critique of capitalist social relations, and a set of practical interventions in the form of extending education,

but without a critique of capitalism itself. Accordingly they managed to serve the hegemonic needs of capitalism not directly, but by way of shaping the state institutions that protect and maintain capitalist social reproduction.<sup>4</sup> The connection between cultural education and citizenship in capitalist democracy is everywhere evident in this tradition.

However inadequately, this tradition speaks to the historical logic of cultural education in ways that highlight the contradiction between the technocratic and the cultural conservative tendencies. Its apparent opposition to the merely “applied” or vocational training of students, its ideal distance from specific social engagements in favour of disinterested reflection, in principle permit the formation of ethical subjects who will find emancipation in the political sphere as citizens of the national state. That political sphere, needless to recall, is held to be properly separated, in turn, from that of the economic. Nonetheless, that ultimately political function of liberal education, the formation of ethical citizens, subtends the property system precisely by inculcating the notion of a strict separation of spheres, spheres that find their unity in their functional differentiation from one another as organs within the totality of capitalist social relations. The technocratic tendency of post-modern capitalism seems to threaten this function of education in at least two ways: firstly, by dispensing with the requirement for liberal education except as a preparation for certain professional functions such as the law; secondly, as many have been pointing out of late, by eroding the structural differentiations of social spheres

through the “commodification of everything.”

In a brief but suggestive essay, Juergen Habermas has analyzed the crisis of the university in Germany in terms of a discourse on “the idea of the university” and its loss of relevance in face of the increasing differentiations that follow scientific rationality.<sup>5</sup> At the same time, Habermas recuperates for the University a specific socializing role that is predicated on its still performing an exemplary function. Habermas’s guiding assumption is that the exemplary function of the university has been held to lie in its embodiment of an ideal and, moreover, in a representative function by which its unity as a community and as an organic form prefigures an ideal lifeworld:

The functions the university fulfills for society must preserve an inner connection with the goals, motives and actions of its members. In this sense the university should institutionally embody, and at the same time motivationally anchor, a life form which is intersubjectively shared by its members, and which even bears an exemplary character. What since Humboldt has been called “the idea of the university” is the project of embodying an ideal life form. Moreover, this idea does not limit itself to one of the many particularized life forms of early bourgeois society, but – thanks to its intimate connection with science and truth – to something universal, something prior to the pluralism of social life forms [3].

Accordingly, once the high level of differentiation and specialization of the modern university, particularly in the sciences, manifests itself, the idea of a normative and unifying ideal permeating the institution as a whole becomes difficult to sustain but yet retains a crucial role as a counter-balance to technocratic tendencies in academia and in

society [4]. The ideal still appears, if only in vestigial forms such as the seminar or even the industrial research unit based on the seminar model, and in these forms continues to exemplify the norm-giving, unconstrained speech community.

My own position, against Habermas, is that the “idea” of the university, though conceived in slightly different terms than he elaborates from within the German tradition, does continue to organize crucial social functions, related to but not identical with those over which conservative ideologues are so exercised. Those functions involve the formation not simply of citizens for the political sphere but of subjects capable of transferring from one sphere to another within the complex differentiations of capitalist societies. Here, by way of Immanuel Kant’s foundational essay on the university, *The Conflict of the Faculties*, I shall argue that it is in its very differentiation *from* other social spheres that the liberal educational apparatus functions *with* them and that this is quite distinct from the oppositional, utopian and exemplary function that is for Habermas the “idea of the university.”<sup>6</sup> Indeed, the cultural discourse on education from which the conservatives derive their claim to legitimacy in fact consistently mistakes and mystifies its own foundations, material and conceptual. And, what is more, *The Conflict of the Faculties*’ very distinctness from the tradition Habermas invokes will allow us to read a quite other and problematic function for the Humanities than is ostensibly suggested in the text.

Kant’s late essay, *The Conflict of the Faculties*, regarded by some as the unacknowledged blueprint of

the modern university,<sup>7</sup> suggests a subtly different concept of the university than is inscribed in Habermas's somewhat utopian understanding of it as an exemplary community. *The Conflict of the Faculties* opens with a significant analogy that implies a different conception, based on the university's relation to a contemporaneously emerging social form:

Whoever it was that first hit on the notion [*den Gedanken*] of a university and proposed that a public institution of this kind be established, it was not a bad idea to handle the entire content of learning (really, the thinkers devoted to it) by *mass production*, so to speak – by a division of labor [Es war kein übler Einfall . . . den ganzen Inbegriff der Gelehrsamkeit (eigentlich die derselben gewidmeten Köpfe) gleichsam fabrikenmässig, durch Vertheilung der Arbeiten zu behandeln].<sup>8</sup>

The analogy is significant both for the logic embedded in it formally and for its descriptive content. The fiction entertained here of a punctual moment of foundation for the university asks us to engage in a thinking [*Gedanken*] which is in fact governed by the ends rather than the origins and material form of the institution. It attributes its actual disposition to an ideal logic rather than to the contingencies of historical sedimentation.<sup>9</sup> Accordingly, the logic of the analogy between the university and a factory, between the division of its faculties and that of the efficient deployment of labour, is at once revealed as a crucial historical index and simultaneously dehistoricized or naturalized. Historically, Kant – fully conscious, as the second essay emphasizes, of his moment as one of transition from autocratic states to republican constitutions – presciently grasps the institutional form of the university

as he is *rethinking* it in its relation to the larger “organism” of an emergent bourgeois society. I take this notion of the organic society from Kant's own description in the *Critique of Judgement*:

Thus in the case of a complete transformation, recently undertaken, of a great people into a state [i.e., the American Revolution], the word *organization* has frequently, and with much propriety, been used for the constitution of the legal authorities and even of the entire body politic. For in a whole of this kind certainly no member should be a mere means, but should also be an end, and, seeing that he contributes to the possibility of the entire body, should have his position and function defined by the idea of the whole.<sup>10</sup>

What is described here in terms of individual subjects holds equally for the spheres in which they act: the relative autonomy of each sphere as an end in itself “contributes to the possibility of the entire body.” It is not simply that the university functions like a factory, but that both constitute relatively autonomous domains whose differentiation as social spaces within the larger organization of society simultaneously requires the commensurability or analogy of their forms.<sup>11</sup> Without such commensurability, the passage of the increasingly formalized subject between domains would be attended with precarious inconsistency. This is in large part what is meant by a process of rationalization whose simultaneous but by no means contradictory aspect is atomization. The same formal rationality is required of the subject of judgement in the university as of the subject of abstract labour coevally emerging within political economy. The ends of an identical reason govern the division of spheres and

of objects of practice and furnish the rationale for the redistribution of the human being as Subject.

I emphasize this analogical structure from the outset, as it is also the outset of Kant's own essay, for two reasons: one, it allows us to emphasize the latent assumption of the possibility of a transfer between discrete domains of society instituting a principle of equivalence; and, two, in formally embedding that possibility in the very structure of its logic, the passage opens simultaneously the reactive and the projective dimensions of Kant's thinking on the university. For, as is well known, *The Conflict of the Faculties* is put together in reaction to the threat of censorship by the Prussian state of Kant's essay on religion, *Religion within the Limits of Mere Reason* [1793], and argues for the autonomy of a critical philosophy in relation to the major faculties (theology, law, medicine), all of which have an instrumental relation to the state and for which, in effect, philosophy becomes the “censor” in its very non-instrumentality. We will return momentarily to elaborating this conception. At the same time, however, Kant's essay, by virtue of conforming to and expounding the logic of an “idea” of the university, exceeds by far the occasion of its publication in order to foresee the forms and the ends of the modern institution of higher education.<sup>12</sup> As a “blueprint” for the university, and not merely a description thereof, *The Conflict of the Faculties* undertakes a delicate negotiation between what a still autocratic state allows and what it is already possible to envisage: it is in this sense no accident that the second essay, on law, engages with the emergence of a republican con-

stitution in France and its impact for thinking the universal historical ends of humanity. For what Kant is proposing in the idea he sketches of the university is both, once more, an analogical “constitutional republic” of the intellect and the form of university that would be required of such a constitutional republic wherever it were actualized. Indeed, it is as if the very impossibility of realizing either accentuates the clarity of conception of what might be could they be brought into being.

For it is clear enough from the rhetorical covertness and the irony with which Kant presents what would be otherwise quite radical propositions that his argument proceeds under the insurmountable constraints of the state. In what must be the most delicately poised ever of worlds turned upside down, philosophy, by virtue of its very ineffectiveness within the political sphere, is seen as the minor or inferior faculty with regard to those others through which state power in its various domains of interest is communicated. But by virtue of precisely the same condition, it is also seen as crucial to the efficacy of those faculties insofar as it tests continually the truth of their propositions. And while, in the first instance, “the faculty whose function is only to look after the interests of science is called lower because it may use its own judgment about what it teaches” [25–27], as Kant’s argument progresses, that autonomy of judgement becomes with increasing explicitness the grounds for the primacy of philosophy:

It is absolutely essential that the learned community at the university also contain a faculty that is independent of the government’s command with regard to its

teachings; one that, having no commands to give, is free to evaluate everything, and concerns itself with the interests of the sciences, that is, with the truth: one in which reason is authorized to speak out publicly. For without a faculty of this kind, the truth would not come to light (and this would be to the government’s own detriment); but reason is by its nature free and admits of no command to hold something as true (no imperative “Believe!” [*crede*] but only a free “I believe” [*credo*].) [27–29]

A little later, the function of the faculty of philosophy attains its explicit primacy:

Its function in relation to the three higher faculties is to control [*controlliren*] them and, in this way, be useful to them, since truth (the essential and first condition of learning in general) is the main thing, whereas the utility the higher faculties promise the government is of secondary importance. [45]

The logical turn thus far is almost literally deconstructive in its delimitation and inversion of a hierarchical opposition. It has, however, a constructive or, better, constitutive end which turns on the concept of autonomy itself as it governs, explicitly, the proposed autonomy of the university and of the faculty of philosophy within it, and, implicitly, that of the enlightenment subject itself as it is to be constituted by the university. This involves two substitutions. The first is that of the state as an idea of reason for the state as an instrument of arbitrary power with its attendant institutional divisions. This substitution is implicit in Kant’s argument that the model of freedom philosophy provides is superior for government itself to security based in the unquestionable authority of the ruler:

For the government may find the freedom of the philosophy faculty, and the increased insight gained from this freedom, a better means of achieving its ends than its own absolute authority. [59]

The second, which follows from the substitution of the state as idea for the state as absolute but contingent, is the displacement of the arbitrary claims of monarchical power by the claim that the ground of security is freedom. This second substitution subtly moves philosophy from an advisory role within the autocratic state to a founding role for what is, in effect, to be an entirely reconstituted state. The perpetual conflict of the faculties is now rewritten as the motor of a process governed by the final end of human society rather than an irresolvable territorial dispute. Once again, it is in the analogy (with the political sphere this time) that the final significance of the claims for the university is embedded:

So this antagonism, that is, this *conflict* of two parties united in [their striving toward] one and the same final end (*concordia discors, discordia concors*) is not a *war*, that is, not a dispute arising from conflicting final aims regarding the *Mine* and *Thine* of learning. And since, like the political *Mine* and *Thine*, this consists in *freedom and property*, with freedom necessarily preceding property as its condition, any right granted to the higher faculty entails permission for the lower faculty to bring its scruples about this right before the learned public. [59–61]

This freedom which precedes property as its very condition is at once the freedom of subjects under a just political constitution *and* the self-regulating autonomy of the subject to whom property accrues, the subject of law and of enlightenment. This is, of course, no less the political subject of those bourgeois

constitutions that inaugurate the capitalist state form. Just as the autonomy of the philosophy faculty can only be guaranteed by a state which acknowledges the value of discursive freedoms, so also, and more profoundly as it turns out, philosophy provides the conditions for a political freedom predicated on this autonomy of the individual. This is so in a double sense: firstly, philosophy is exemplary in relation to the exercise of autonomy generally precisely because its critical interventions are ultimately subservient to the ends of the state;<sup>13</sup> secondly, because philosophy derives the primacy of freedom both from the pure forms of reason itself as universals and from what is designated in the second essay as universal history [141]. This corresponds to the divisions of the faculty itself between two departments,

a department of *historical knowledge* (including history, geography, philology and the humanities, along with all the empirical knowledge contained in the natural sciences), and a department of *pure rational knowledge* (pure mathematics and pure philosophy, the metaphysics of nature and of morals). [45]

Comprehending what we could now generally term the humanities, Kant's "philosophy" is concerned not with the contingencies of instrumental state power but with the effects of human freedom as manifested in "historical knowledge," that is, with universal history as a progressive narrative predicated on reason. In effect, the two departments are reunited in a conception of the historical as the realization of the ends of human reason, as the synthesis of historical with "pure rational" knowledge.

As the second essay, "The

Conflict of the Philosophy Faculty with the Faculty of Law," elaborates this, the actual historical form of that synthesis is, for Kant in his moment, the French Revolution and the republican constitution that is its ideal form: it is the event that universal history requires to point "to the disposition and capacity of the human race to be the cause of its own advance toward the better, and (since this should be the act of a being endowed with freedom), toward the human race as being the author of this advance." [151] In that sense, it is less important as an actual, concrete advance than "as an intimation, a historical sign (*signum rememorativum, demonstrativum, prognostikon*) demonstrating the tendency of the human race viewed in its entirety." [151] It is, as the temporality of the historical sign suggests (*signum rememorativum, demonstrativum, prognostikon*), a representative moment in the fullest sense, instantiating a tendency of human nature which it at once recalls and prefigures. At the same time, however, the very precariousness and contingency of such an event gives back to philosophy its status as a kind of permanent instantiation of human ends, dependent on a logical rather than a contingent historical temporality:

For such a phenomenon in human history *is not to be forgotten*, because it has revealed a tendency and faculty in human nature for improvement such that no politician, affecting wisdom, might have conjured out of the course of things hitherto existing, and one which nature and freedom alone, united in the human race in conformity with inner principles of right, could have promised. But so far as time is concerned, it can promise this only indefinitely and as a contingent event. [159]

In this reduction of the historically representative moment to "inner principles of right," Kant not only protects his own text from censorship as a philosopher who as an "enlightener" risks being decried as a person "dangerous to the state" [161], but, beyond these contingent and prudent considerations, establishes philosophy – or the humanities – as the locus of exemplary representations. He retrieves, in effect, from the stymied and constrained situation of the critical philosopher in the autocratic state the very form in which that critical philosophy will become institutionalized for and in a state newly conceived around "freedom and property." On the already contested margins of the old state, and by the inversion of its protocols, the institutions of the new state become apprehensible. Hence the possibility of his apparent prescience.

Kant's account of the faculty of philosophy assumes, if not its "privacy," at least its extreme separation from "the people, who are incompetent" [*das Volk, "welches aus Idioten besteht"*] and even from the "businessmen or technicians of learning" [*Geschäftsleute oder Werkkündige der Gelehrsamkeit*] who, as "tools of the government" [*Werkzeuge der Regierung*] must have forgotten much which they have learned philosophically in order to be able to fulfill their essentially conservative functions for the state. [25] As tools, they are mere *means* in the machinery of state and therefore lack the autonomy given to members of a state organized on republican principles. The tendency of his argument, which is after all an attack on state censorship, is to give back to the philosopher a more public role through the "enlighten-

ment of the masses” which consists in “the public instruction of the people in its duties and rights vis-à-vis the state to which they belong.” [161] In the century which follows *The Conflict of the Faculties*, the function of the humanities in “public instruction” becomes not simply the fulfilment of this quite narrowly delimited task of citizen formation. More complexly and in line with Kant’s larger argument, they come to represent (in the fullest sense of the term) the exemplary subject on whose simultaneous formality and autonomy the possibility of the individual’s movement among the increasingly differentiated spheres of human society is predicated and through whose ethical disinterest the necessary conjunction of the individual’s freedom and instrumentality under capitalism becomes conceivable.

This function of education, and in particular of the university as its “highest” representation, is elaborated variously in different western contexts throughout the nineteenth century and down to our own moment. The subsequent elaborations of the ethical ends of education by Von Humboldt, Schleiermacher, Fichte and others, cited and traced by Habermas down to the present debates on the German University, have their influence on and counterparts in the British and American traditions, especially in the seminal work of Coleridge, Mill, Arnold and Newman.<sup>14</sup> What I think needs to be emphasized here is that the reading given here of Kant’s argument allows us to see a different logic which defines the “idea of the university” less as an autonomous space that stands with the idealized, reconciling state against capitalism and materialism than as an institu-

tion that articulates instrumentally with other social spaces in the regulation and transfer of social subjects.

For Kant, the issue at stake is precisely not the actual unity or community of the university, but the conflicts predicated on its internal differentiations and on its differentiation as a social sphere from other spheres. This notion of a constitutive differentiation is embedded in his founding analogy between the university and its divisions and the factory and the division of labour and is sustained in the analogy with political society that later emerges. And what is presumed in the analogy which founds the constitution of the university as if it were merely a “thought” is the objective existence of other spheres through which the institution of the university gets its sense. It is the very fact of the increasing differentiation of modern society that gives the rationale for philosophy’s production of the autonomous subject as one whose capacity to judge is transferable from sphere to sphere. In the last instance, the unity of that subject makes possible the presumptive universality of the narrative of modernity within which the circulations of scientific knowledge and rationality take place.<sup>15</sup> In this respect, and in ways more acute than subsequent discourse on culture, Kant’s *Conflict of the Faculties* indicates the inner logic of the humanities’ relation to the political and economic exigences of the emerging bourgeois states. In doing so, this work no less suggests to us the rationale for the accommodation, if not the reconciliation to one another of a culture and a technocratic discourse on education. It suggests, above all, the gradual but necessary

institutionalization of the functions of an “intelligentsia” (Kant’s scholars or *Gelehrten*) within the university.

### III.

And yet an insistence, correct in certain respects, on this narrative drive in Kant’s argument would lead us to foreclose the problematic status of “philosophy” in relation to the university and its “faculties” as a differentially articulated whole. This would be to ignore the destabilizing ramifications of the pivotal, deconstructive moment of Kant’s argument. Recall that the cunning superordination of philosophy over the faculties of theology, medicine and law depended on an initial marginality which, by removing philosophy from the direct control of the state, permitted it to “control” (*controllieren*, in the sense perhaps of “quality control”) the others. The function of philosophy becomes the critique of the other faculties as instruments of the state. This is, as we have seen, a perpetual and not merely a momentary function of philosophy, suggesting its permanent institutionalization as a mode of both academic and political critique.

But since this function of critique is predicated on philosophy’s relative marginality to any instrumental state function, what happens to Kant’s argument when we trace, as we have, the subsequent institutionalization of the humanities or liberal education in the service of the state? Clearly, in as much as the university continues to play a major ideological role for the state in the formation of effective social discourses through research and publi-

cation, the possibilities of extra-academic intellectual sites are severely limited. Almost inevitably, they are powerfully marginalized if not directly subordinated or, indeed, economically and ideologically co-opted. Equally clearly, without the most idealist of fiats, it is impossible simply to reassert the (in the broadest sense) politically critical role of the humanities. Whatever our political predilections, we are as scholars embedded in the ideological institutions of the university system that at every level constrain and limit the possibilities of thinking and its dissemination. The very collegial protocols of peer review and tenuring, bound as they are to intrinsically conservative paradigms of scholarship and objectivity, have consistently minimized the space for radical critical work within the university. The long process of subordination of teachers and scholars to administrative, commercial and technological demands entailed by privatization has of late, to the contradictory satisfaction of conservative intellectuals, threatened to intensify economically as well as ideologically the restrictions on critical practices and their public dissemination. This threat, increasingly realized throughout western and non-western institutions and public spheres, may yet be resisted, but that resistance cannot occur through the performative assertion of a return to critical autonomy. Indeed, as we have seen, the abstract subject of critique is in itself an element of the problematic insofar as it plays the exemplary role for subject-formation in general.

Yet in that abstract condition of the critical subject we can discern the dialectical move that Kant's own logic demands and for which the

present moment materially as well as theoretically provides the conditions. As Emmanuel Chukwodi Eze argues in his essay here, "Philosophy and the "Man" of the Humanities," the emergence of the category of the human subject in European philosophy from Descartes to Kant is predicated on "racial encounters." And as Candace Vogler argues in "Equiano and Aquinas on Radical Wrong," the forms of those racial encounters, constituted through the violent social relations of colonialism, are determined by the "original sin" of capitalist primitive accumulation that comes to regulate "the disposition of persons, property and land." The domination, expropriation and massacre of non-European peoples is legitimated by the presumption of their sub-human status. In constituting the disposition of the subject that is representatively "Human," the philosophical act of abstraction correspondingly differentiates from itself the materiality of humans in their cultural particularity and in the mere contingency of their acts. As has been pointed out with sufficient regularity, it is evident that this apparent abstraction is embodied in the form of the white male intellectual, something that is unashamedly acknowledged in Kant's *Anthropology* or "What is Enlightenment?" In a certain sense, this fact, of such immense economic, social and political consequence in the long history of the capitalist world system, is of itself indeed a matter of historical contingency. For, in terms of mere historical chronography, things might, possibly, have been different. Only the incorporation of such a violent, material set of historical facts into the universalizing metaphysics that regulates the humanities

and social sciences permits an historiography that comes to seem *probable*, in accord with the ends of human progress. Through the philosophical derivation of the human subject as the subject with ends, "the cause of its own progress," the violent history of the west comes to seem a matter not of the vicissitudes of distributions of forces and technologies, but of the working out of certain principles into "tendencies" that are at once singular and universal in their validity. The "common sense" that the humanities have largely relied on and reproduced is the substrate of this philosophical history, at once "rememorative, demonstrative and prognostic" and the ground of the transhistorical subject of philosophy.

Historically this philosophical narrative has met its limit, more or less violently, in every anti-colonial or minority insurgency, in every act of resistance by the racialized, gendered and classed bodies that have been materially *and conceptually* produced in the working out of its categories. In other words, acts and events that meet us as material effects are no less actively at play in the very philosophical logic of the humanities. This conjunction may help to elucidate the discursive and often material abuse that attends the conservative reaction to the transformations of the humanities that are currently under way, impelled at once by a fundamental and internal instability in the disciplines and by the forces that transverse the borders of the university. For it is not merely that there has been a politicization of scholarship within the academy, but that the actually political foundations of the university and of the conservative function of liberal

education in the reproduction of social relations are undergoing a profound challenge.

This challenge, since it is by no means contingent, is not one that can any longer be effectively reversed by either repression or the repressive sublimation of incorporation. It emerges from the very constitution of the humanities. What appears in the first instance as the separation out of categories on a binary or oppositional axis – universal vs. particular, human vs. subhuman, civilized vs. primitive, formal vs. material, and so forth – immanently undergoes a conversion into the differential production of categories, bodies, or historical cultural formations that are not so much subordinate to as incommensurable with the logic of the humanities. This is so because the formation of the philosophical subject has explicitly nothing to do with the events and agents out of which it emerges as the representative category of the Human. The only form in which its agency can properly be narrated is that of universal historical narrative; universal historical narrative is the only frame within which the agency of this subject in the form of its representative instances can be posited.<sup>16</sup> Thus, for Kant, the real historical significance – and the limits – of the French Revolution for humanity could not be properly deciphered by its agents, but only by a strictly non-participant, inactive spectator, the philosopher. That act of understanding, supplied by the non-agential subject, has nothing to do with the agents in themselves who are, in fact, not strictly speaking subjects in their agency at all. Indeed, the grammatical assumption that an act must be predicated on a

subject, somewhere, seems here to be radically denied.

This condition of philosophical subjecthood in *The Conflict of the Faculties*, which continues to structure the disinterest or self-splitting of subject from agent that constitutes scholarly “objectivity,” comes to crisis precisely at the moment when categories of social agents that have been categorized as inadequate to subjecthood – minorities, women, colonized intellectuals – enter into the university in significant numbers. For at this point, the university can no longer represent itself as assimilating a docile few to the norms of academic subjecthood. The coerced yet courageous performance of normative subjecthood by the isolated and marginal individual, without which she could not have survived, is relieved by the possibility of collective projects of scholarship entailing new questions and new concepts. It is not a question any longer of the incorporation of a plurality of “formerly under-represented groups” into the self-perpetuating institutional forms of the academy, to which terms liberal affirmative action has sought to limit its consequences. Rather, as was suggested earlier, it is a question of the incommensurability of new modes of knowledge with the traditional disciplinary divisions and methods of the university, an incommensurability put in play at the very level of the subject of knowledge.

We are now in a position to see that what is at stake here goes beyond the specific protocols or objective contents of any given discipline, beyond even the emergence of new quasi-disciplinary units within and by analogy with the older structures. What is at stake, more

broadly, is the political and cultural subject in whose formation the university has historically played a constitutive role. Generally speaking, reaction against these new formations disavows, yet symptomatizes, what is at stake in the accusation that they lack objectivity, being political and interested. But, as we know, “objectivity” does not refer to the adequacy of statement with regard to its object, but, like aesthetic judgement in the *Third Critique*, to a certain disposition of the subject as such. This distinction between subjectivity and objectivity, however, can no longer be maintained in any strict sense, since the opposition is not properly conceived as being between subjective and objective dispositions [of the subject], but between subjects and agents. What was termed earlier the transversal of the constitutive borders of the university by social movements in effect displaces the scholarly subject with the scholar as agent. The scholar as agent is not simply the politicized or “interested” scholar any more than the scholar who derives from a minor (*unmundige*) community of whatever kind is necessarily as “agent.” These distinctions have nothing to do with the individual consciousness, designating rather dispositions that are differentially produced and unstably occupied. And what, in the absence of the fully articulated theory of agency we await, differentiates agent from subject is the former’s perpetual transformation of a very marked conceptual lack in relation to the latter into the materials for cultural and epistemological productions that are radically recalcitrant to universalization.

It is by no means sure that we can as yet follow the contours of the

humanities in transformation, let alone categorize their theoretical commonalities. Indeed, if they appear at this juncture mostly in fragmentary and multiple forms, with proliferating contiguities and interconnections, it may be that this corresponds precisely to their status as effects without subjects. In that case, one would not desire that their tendencies become evident nor their common form apparent through, as Antonio Gramsci desired for the “episodic and fragmentary” forms of subaltern history, gaining command in their turn of a state formation.<sup>17</sup> The essays collected in this issue of *Topoi*, in their disparate ways and in relation to different disciplines, seek to contribute to the analysis and transformation of the humanities not by pursuing new protocols but by maintaining the openness of critique and the possibilities for alternative knowledges. No attempt is made here to do more than explore some of the spaces that have been opened for counter-knowledges within and across the boundaries of the university. I suspect that at present no prognostic view of the university’s condition, nor, especially, any prescriptive “ought” with regard to its form is possible without an attempt to restore to its place the subject that is in question. For the moment, it may be sufficient to hold open the space within which new formations of knowledge can continue to unfold and to work out their consequences.

### Acknowledgments

Part of this essay has been adapted from my “Foundations of Diversity: Thinking the University in a Time of Multiculturalism,” published in John Rowe, ed., “*Culture*” and the

*Problem of the Disciplines* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), pp. 15–43. My thanks are due to John Rowe for the colloquia and further discussions that allowed me to rethink parts of the essay even as it was being published and to Mitchell Breitwieser for organizing a colloquium at the American Cultures Center at U.C., Berkeley, which brought me to rethink much of what I had felt so sure about. Conversations with Candace Vogler brought me to some unanticipated realizations without which this essay would have been quite different. This essay was itself first conceived in informal discussions in Fall 1996 at U.C. San Diego on the Humanities and Social Sciences. My thanks to the Camrose Group for those discussions, and especially to Michael Bernstein, Tak Fujitani, George Lipsitz, Lisa Lowe, and Lisa Yoneyama.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> For further exploration of these points about transnational and culture, see Lisa Lowe and David Lloyd, eds., “Introduction” to *The Politics of Culture in the Shadow of Capital* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1997).

<sup>2</sup> For work on the history of interventions by capitalism and the state in the work of education and the University in particular, see: Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis, *Schooling in Capitalist America: Educational Reform and the Contradictions of Economic Life* (New York: Basic Books, 1978); Clyde Barrow, *Universities and the Capitalist State: Corporate Liberalism and the Reconstruction of American Higher Education, 1894–1928* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990); Andre Schiffrin, ed., *The Cold War and the University: Toward an Intellectual History of the Postwar Years* (New York: New Press, 1997). J. Hillis Miller’s essay, “Literary and Cultural Studies in the Transnational University,” in Rowe, ed., *The Problem of*

*the Disciplines*, pp. 45–67, has some interesting reflections on the postnational formation of “citizens” and on the crisis in general. I am not entirely convinced by his notion of the “dissensual” university insofar as it seems a mere levelling out of the conflict of ideas without regard to their structural relation to actual forces of domination.

<sup>3</sup> For this phrase, and some important arguments about the dynamic of educational institutions and their transformation, see Martin Carnoy, “Education, State and Culture in American Society,” in Henry A. Giroux and Peter McLaren, eds., *Critical Pedagogy, the State and Cultural Struggle* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1989), p. 6 and passim.

<sup>4</sup> On this tradition of liberal cultural thinking and its relation to state formation, see David Lloyd and Paul Thomas, *Culture and the State* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

<sup>5</sup> Juergen Habermas, “The idea of the University – Learning Processes,” trans. John R. Blazek, *New German Critique* 41 (Spring-Summer 1987), pp. 3–22.

<sup>6</sup> Jacques Derrida’s essay “Mochlos; or the Conflict of the Faculties,” in Richard Rand, ed., *Logomachia: The Conflict of the Faculties*, pp. 1–34, explores terrain similar to that of Habermas’ essay. See especially pp. 13–17, where he discusses the “borders” of the university re its “outside.” Derrida’s emphasis falls more on the epistemological than the political legitimacy of the university.

<sup>7</sup> See Preface to Rand, ed., *Logomachia*, p. vii: “In *The Conflict of the Faculties*, Kant spells out the blueprint for the modern research university. . . .”

<sup>8</sup> Immanuel Kant, *The Conflict of the Faculties/Der Streit der Fakultäten* [1798], trans. and intro. Mary J. Gregor (New York: Abaris, 1979), p. 23.

<sup>9</sup> Kant later makes this assumption quite explicit:

Whenever a man-made institution is based on an Idea of reason (such as that of government) which is to prove itself practical in an object of experience (such as the entire field of learning at the time), we can take it for granted that the experiment was made according to some principle contained in reason, even if only obscurely, and some plan based on it – not by merely contingent collections and arbitrary combinations of cases that have occurred [*nicht durch bloss zufällige*

*Aussammlung und willkürliche Zusammenstellung vorkommender Fälle*]. [31]

<sup>10</sup> Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Judgment*, trans. James Creed Meredith (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952), II, 23.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Derrida, "Mochlos": "Kant had multiplied his rhetorical precautions, or rather he had somehow guaranteed the analogical statements with, so to speak, a real analogy: the university is analogous to society, to the social system it represents as one of its parts; and the teaching body represents, in one form or another, the goal and function of the social body. . . ." [5]. This, however, seems to me closer to a Habermasian reading of the idea of the university than the one I am seeking to develop here, which does not see Kant as positing the social as the ground for an analogous structure of the university as "goal," but rather sees him grasping an analogy among equivalent parts as the structure of the social of which the university is part.

<sup>12</sup> The actual publication of the work brings together very disparately written essays, those on law and medicine having in fact been written before the essay which effectively gives its name to the collection. It would take a longer and different essay than this to elaborate the connections between these occasional pieces and the systematic elaboration of the major Critiques with regard to the question of the subject. I will attempt here only to draw out the thinking implicit in these essays on the form of subject which a critical philosophy, as core of the university, presumes and would

produce. On the order of their writing and the process of their publication, see Gregor's introduction to *The Conflict of the Faculties*, vii–xxviii.

<sup>13</sup> This subservience is borne out in an otherwise mystifying Appendix in which, after asserting morality as opposed to orthodoxy or dogma to be "the mainstay on which the government must be able to count if it wants to trust the people" [109], Kant goes on to cite at length a letter from a former student, C.A. Wilmans, which points to the coincidence between Kantian religious philosophy and what he describes as contemporary Mysticism. The reason for Kant's interest in this convergence between the philosopher and these "merchants, artisans and peasants" lies less an inclination to Rousseauian republicanism than in Wilmans' assertion that the Mystics' indifference to established religion is conjoined with an "exemplary conduct and complete submission to the civil order" [139].

<sup>14</sup> For an interesting analysis of this tradition in England, see Robert Young, "The Idea of a Chrestomathic University," in *Logomachia*, pp. 97–126; on the movement from such ideas as developed in England to the American University, see William V. Spanos, "The Apollonian Investment of Modern Humanist Education: The Examples of Matthew Arnold, Irving Babitt, and I.A. Richards," *Cultural Critique* 1 (Fall 1985), pp. 7–72.

<sup>15</sup> I should note that the celebrated disintegration of the subject in postmodernity is greatly exaggerated. Like Habermas, even Lyotard's emphasis falls on the proliferation

of "language games" and of opportunities for consumption rather than on the question of the form of the subject of modernity as it persists into the present. There is some difference between a multiplicity of subject positions and an internal disintegration of the subject. Properly understood, it is for that internal disintegration that the theory of minority discourse has argued rather than for any simple celebration of multiplicity. See my "Ethnic Cultures, Minority Discourse and the State," in Francis Barker, et al., eds., *Colonial Discourse/Postcolonial Theory* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), pp. 221–238, which is a more sustained attempt to elaborate some of these issues.

<sup>16</sup> This does not, of course, imply merely the nineteenth century heroic narrative histories of great men or of nation-peoples as subjects of history. It would apply equally to the subsequent, less dramatic histories of bureaucratic and administrative acts within metropolitan and colonial states alike. For a highly suggestive account of such operations of historiography, see Ranajit Guha's essay, "The Prose of Counter-Insurgency," in *Selected Subaltern Studies*, ed. Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Oxford: O.U.P., 1988), pp. 45–86.

<sup>17</sup> Antonio Gramsci, "Notes on Italian History," in *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1971), pp. 52 and 54–55.

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