

enment faith or Romantic nostalgia leads to an investigation in Chapter 12 of the way in which we can rethink the modernist claim that the University provides a model of the rational community, a microcosm of the pure form of the public sphere. This claim for an ideal community in the University still exerts its power, despite its glaring inaccuracy—evident to anyone who has ever sat on a faculty committee. I argue that we should recognize that the loss of the University's cultural function opens up a space in which it is possible to think the notion of community otherwise, without recourse to notions of unity, consensus, and communication. At this point, the University becomes no longer a model of the ideal society but rather a place where the impossibility of such models can be thought—practically thought, rather than thought under ideal conditions. Here the University loses its privileged status as the model of society and does not regain it by becoming the model of the absence of models. Rather, the University becomes one site among others where *the question of being-together is raised*, raised with an urgency that proceeds from the absence of the institutional forms (such as the nation-state), which have historically served to mask that question for the past three centuries or so.

## ≈ 2

### *The Idea of Excellence*

The significance of making a distinction between the modern University as ideological arm of the nation-state and the contemporary University as bureaucratic corporation is that it allows one to observe an important phenomenon. “Excellence” is rapidly becoming the watchword of the University, and to understand the University as a contemporary institution requires some reflection on what the appeal to excellence may, or may not, mean.

A few months after I first gave a talk on the significance of the concept of excellence, Canada's principal weekly news magazine, *Maclean's*, brought out its third annual special issue on the Canadian universities, parallel to the kind of ranking produced by *U.S. News and World Report*. The November 15, 1993, issue of *Maclean's*, which purported to rank all the universities in Canada according to various criteria, was entitled, to my surprise, *A Measure of Excellence*.<sup>1</sup> Now what this suggests to me is that excellence is not simply the equivalent of “total quality management” (TQM). It is not just something imported into the University from business in the attempt to run the University as if it were a business. Such importations assume, after all, that the University is not really a business, is only like a business in some respects.

When Ford Motors enters into a “partnership” with The Ohio State University to develop “total quality management in all areas of life on campus,” this partnership is based on the assumption that “the mission[s] of the university and the corporation are not that different,” as

Janet Pichette, vice-president for business and administration at Ohio State, phrases it.<sup>2</sup> Not “that different” perhaps, but not identical either. The University is on the way to becoming a corporation, but it has yet to apply TQM to all aspects of its experience, although the capacity of Ohio State’s president E. Gordon Gee to refer to “the university and the customers it serves” is a sign that Ohio State is well on the way. The invocation of “quality” is the means of that transformation, since “quality” can apply to “all areas of life on campus” indifferently, and can tie them together on a single evaluative scale. As the campus newspaper, the *Ohio State Lantern*, reports it: “Quality is the ultimate issue for the university and the customers it serves, Gee said, referring to faculty, students, their parents, and alumni.”<sup>3</sup> The need felt by the author of this article to clarify the question of to whom the president was referring in speaking of the University’s “customers” is a touching sign of an almost archaic vision of education, one that imagines that some confusion might still arise on the issue.

Hence we might suggest a clarification for President Gee: quality is not the ultimate issue, but excellence soon will be, because it is the recognition that the University is not just *like* a corporation; it *is* a corporation. Students in the University of Excellence are not *like* customers; they *are* customers. For excellence implies a quantum leap: the notion of excellence develops *within* the University, as the idea around which the University centers itself and through which it becomes comprehensible to the outside world (in the case of *Maclean’s*, the middle and upper classes of Canada).

Generally, we hear a lot of talk from University administrators about excellence, because it has become the unifying principle of the contemporary University. C. P. Snow’s “Two Cultures” have become “Two Excellences,” the humanistic and the scientific.<sup>4</sup> As an integrating principle, excellence has the singular advantage of being entirely meaningless, or to put it more precisely, non-referential. Here is one example of the way in which excellence undermines linguistic reference, in a letter to faculty and staff from a dean of engineering (William Sirignano) complaining about his dismissal by the chancellor of the University of California at Irvine (Laurel Wilkening), reported in the campus newspaper:

“The Office of the President and the central administration at the UCI campus are too embroiled in crisis management, self-service and controversy to be a great force for *excellence* in academic programs,” Sirignano wrote in the Mar. 22 memo. He encouraged the new dean, department chairs and faculty to “create those pressures for *excellence* for the school” . . . The transition in leadership “will be a challenge to the pursuit of *excellence* and upward mobility for the School of Engineering,” he said. “It’s not going to be easy to recruit an *excellent* dean in this time of fiscal crisis.”<sup>5</sup>

In a situation of extreme stress, and in order to oppose the University president, the dean appeals to the language of excellence with a regularity that is the more remarkable in that it goes unremarked by the staff writer covering the incident.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, the staff writer has selected those phrases that include the word “excellence” as being those that most precisely sum up what the letter is about. Excellence appears here as uncontested ground, the rhetorical arm most likely to gain general assent. To return to the example of the Ford–Ohio State partnership, a significant number of academics, I would guess, could see through the imposition from the outside of “total quality management,” could resist the ideology implicit in the notion of quality and argue that the University was not as analogous to a business as Ford claimed. But Sirignano is an academic, writing to an academic, for an audience of academics. And his appeal to excellence is not hedged or mitigated, is not felt to require explanation. Quite the contrary. The need for excellence is what we all agree on. And we all agree upon it because it is not an ideology, in the sense that it has no external referent or internal content.

Today, all departments of the University can be urged to strive for excellence, since the general applicability of the notion is in direct relation to its emptiness. Thus, for instance, the Office of Research and University Graduate Studies at Indiana University at Bloomington explains that in its Summer Faculty Fellowship program “Excellence of the proposed scholarship is the major criterion employed in the evaluation procedure.”<sup>7</sup> This statement is, of course, entirely meaningless, yet the assumption is that the invocation of excellence overcomes the problem of the question of value across disciplines, since excellence is

the common denominator of good research in all fields. Even if this were so, it would mean that excellence could not be invoked as a “criterion,” because excellence is not a fixed standard of judgment but a qualifier whose meaning is fixed in relation to something else. An excellent boat is not excellent by the same *criteria* as an excellent plane. So to say that excellence is a criterion is to say absolutely nothing other than that the committee will not reveal the criteria used to judge applications.

Nor is the employment of the term “excellence” limited to academic disciplines within the University. For instance, Jonathan Culler has informed me that the Cornell University Parking Services recently received an award for “excellence in parking.” What this meant was that they had achieved a remarkable level of efficiency in *restricting* motor vehicle access. As he pointed out, excellence could just as well have meant making people’s lives easier by increasing the number of parking spaces available to faculty. The issue here is not the merits of either option but the fact that excellence can function equally well as an evaluative criterion on either side of the issue of what constitutes “excellence in parking,” because excellence has no content to call its own. Whether it is a matter of increasing the number of cars on campus (in the interests of employee efficiency—fewer minutes wasted in walking) or decreasing the number of cars (in the interests of the environment) is indifferent; the efforts of parking officials can be described in terms of excellence in both instances.<sup>8</sup> Its very lack of reference allows excellence to function as a principle of translatability between radically different idioms: parking services and research grants can each be excellent, and their excellence is not dependent on any specific qualities or effects that they share.

This is clearly what is going on in the case of the *Maclean’s* article, where excellence is the common currency of ranking. Categories as diverse as the make-up of the student body, class size, finances, and library holdings can all be brought together on a single scale of excellence. Such rankings are not entered into blindly or cavalierly. With a scrupulousness of which the academic community could be proud, the magazine devotes two whole pages to discussing how it produced its ratings. Thus, the student body is measured in terms of incoming

grades (the higher the better), grade point average during study (the higher the better), the number of “out of province” students (more is better), and graduation rates within standard time limits (achieving normalization is a good thing). Class size and quality are measured in terms of the student-teacher ratio (which should be low) and the ratio of tenured faculty to part-timers or graduate teaching assistants (which should be high). Faculty are evaluated in terms of the number with Ph.D.’s, the number of award winners, and the number and quantity of federal grants obtained, all of which are taken to be signs of merit. The category “finances” judges the fiscal health of a University in terms of the proportions of the operating budget available for current expenses, student services, and scholarships. Library holdings are analyzed in terms of volumes per student and the percentage of the university budget devoted to the library, as well as the percentage of the library budget dedicated to new acquisitions. A final category, “reputation,” combines the number of alumni who give to the University with the results of a “survey of senior university officials and chief executive officers of major corporations across Canada” (40). The result is a “measure of excellence” arrived at by combining the figures at a ratio of 20 percent for students, 18 percent for class size, 20 percent for faculty, 10 percent for finances, 12 percent for libraries, and 20 percent for “reputation.”

A number of things are obvious about this exercise, most immediately the arbitrary quality of the weighting of factors and the dubiousness of such quantitative indicators of quality. Along with questioning the relative weight accorded to each of the categories, we can ask a number of fundamental questions about what constitutes “quality” in education. Are grades the only measure of student achievement? Why is efficiency privileged, so that it is automatically assumed that graduating “on time” is a good thing? How long does it take to become “educated”? The survey assumes that the best teacher is one who possesses the highest university degree and the most grants, the teacher who is the most faithful reproduction of the system. But what says that makes a good professor? Is the best University necessarily the richest one? What is the relation to knowledge implied by focusing on the library as the place where it is stocked? Is quantity the best measure of

the significance of library holdings? Is knowledge simply to be reproduced from the warehouse, or is it something to be produced in teaching? Why should senior university officials and the CEOs of major corporations be the best judges of “reputation”? What do they have in common, and isn’t this compatibility worrying? Does not the category of “reputation” raise prejudice to the level of an index of value? How were individuals chosen? Why is the “reputational survey” included in ranking designed to establish reputation?

Most of these questions are philosophical, in that they are systematically incapable of producing cognitive certainty or definitive answers. Such questions will necessarily give rise to further debate, for they are radically at odds with the logic of quantification. Criticism of the categories used (and the way upon which they are decided) has indeed been leveled at *Maclean’s*, as it has at the *U.S. News and World Report’s* equivalent survey. This is perhaps why *Maclean’s* includes a further three-page article entitled “The Battle for the Facts,” which portrays the heroic struggle of the journalists to find the truth despite the attempts of some universities to hide it. This essay also details the reservations expressed by a number of universities, for example the complaint of the president of Manitoba’s Brandon University that “Many of the individual strengths of universities are not picked up in this ranking by *Maclean’s*” (46). Once again, the president argues only with the particular criteria, not with the logic of excellence and the ranking that it permits. And when the authors of the article remark that “The debate sheds a telling light on the deep unease over accountability,” they do not refer to a critique of the logic of accounting. Far from it. Any questioning of such performance indicators is positioned as a resistance to public accountability, a refusal to be questioned according to the logic of contemporary capitalism, which requires “clear measures to establish university performance” (48).

Given this situation, to question criteria is necessary, yet a more general point needs to be made concerning the general compliance of universities with the logic of accounting. The University and *Maclean’s* appear to speak the same language, as it were: the language of excellence. Yet the question of what it means to “speak the same language” is a tricky one in Canada. This survey is going on in a country that is

bilingual, where the different universities quite literally speak different languages. And behind the fact that the criteria are heavily biased in favor of anglophone institutions lies the fundamental assumption that there is a single standard, a measure of excellence, in terms of which universities can be judged. And it is excellence that allows the combination on a single scale of such utterly heterogeneous features as finances and the make-up of the student body. A measure of the flexibility of excellence is that it allows the inclusion of reputation as one category among others in a ranking which is in fact definitive of reputation. The metalepsis that allows reputation to be 20 percent of itself is permitted by the intense flexibility of excellence; it allows a category mistake to masquerade as scientific objectivity.

Most of all, excellence serves as the unit of currency within a closed field. The survey allows the a priori exclusion of all referential issues, that is, any questions about what excellence in the University might *be*, what the term might *mean*. Excellence is, and the survey is quite explicit about this, a means of relative ranking among the elements of an *entirely closed system*: “For the universities, meanwhile, the survey affords an opportunity for each to clarify its own vision—and to measure itself against its peers” (40). Excellence is clearly a purely internal unit of value that effectively brackets all questions of reference or function, thus creating an internal market. Henceforth, the question of the University is only the question of relative value-for-money, the question posed to a student who is situated entirely as a *consumer*, rather than as someone who wants to think. (I shall return to the question of what it means to “think” later in this book.)

The image of students browsing through catalogues, with the world all before them, there to choose, is a remarkably widespread one that has attracted little comment. While I would not want to imply that students should not get the chance to choose, I do think it is worth reflecting on what this image assumes. Most obviously, it assumes the ability to pay. The question of access to tertiary education is bracketed. Tertiary education is perceived simply as another consumer durable, so that affordability or value-for-money becomes one category among others influencing an individual choice. Think of magazine consumer reports about which car to buy. Price is one factor among others, and

the effect of the integration of heterogeneous categories of ranking into a single “excellence quotient” becomes apparent. Choosing a particular university over another is presented as not all that much different from weighing the costs and benefits of a Honda Civic against those of a Lincoln Continental in a given year or period.

In its October 3, 1994, issue, *U.S. News and World Report* even takes advantage of this potential parallel between the car industry and the University.<sup>9</sup> An article straightforwardly entitled “How to Pay for College” is followed by a series of tables that rate the “most efficient schools” and the “best values,” comparing “sticker prices” (advertised tuition) to “discount tuition” (actual tuition once scholarships and grants are factored in). Student and parent consumers are reminded that just as when they buy a car, especially in the years of the U.S. auto industry’s scramble for customers, the first price quoted is not what they are expected to pay. *U.S. News and World Report* reminds its readers that there are similar hidden discounts in university education, and that wise consumers—who now span all the income brackets (the logic of consumerism no longer only influences the “less-well-off”)—should pay attention to value-for-money. Fuel efficiency, whether calculated in miles per gallon or spending per student, is a growing concern when measuring excellence.<sup>10</sup>

However much such a vision might scare us, or however much some of us might think we can resist the logic of consumerism when it comes to tertiary education, everyone still seems to be for excellence.<sup>11</sup> It functions not merely as the standard of external evaluation but also as the unit of value in terms of which the University describes itself to itself, in terms of which the University achieves the self-consciousness that is supposed to guarantee intellectual autonomy in modernity. Given that, who could be against excellence? Thus, for example, the Faculty of Graduate Studies of the Université de Montréal describes itself as follows:

Created in 1972, the Faculty of Graduate Studies [*Faculté des études supérieures*] has been entrusted with the mission of maintaining and promoting standards of excellence at the level of master’s and doctoral studies; of coordinating teaching and standardizing [*normalisation*] programmes of graduate study; of stimulating the development and coordination of research in liaison with the research departments of the

University; of favoring the creation of interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary programs.<sup>12</sup>

Note here the intersection of excellence with “integration and standardization” and the appeal to the “interdisciplinary.” The French “normalisation” gives a strong sense of what is at stake in “standardization”—especially to those familiar with the work of Michel Foucault. Is it surprising that corporations resemble Universities, health-care facilities, and international organizations, which all resemble corporations? Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish* explores the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century reorganization of the mechanisms of state power, especially the judicial system, around the surveillance and normalization of delinquents in place of their exemplary punishment by torture and execution. Criminals are treated rather than destroyed, but this apparent liberalization is also a mode of domination that is the more terrible in that it leaves no room whatsoever for transgression. Crime is no longer an act of freedom, a remainder that society cannot handle but must expel. Rather, crime comes to be considered as a pathological deviation from social norms that must be cured. Foucault’s chapter on “Panopticism” ends with ringing rhetorical questions:

The practice of placing individuals under “observation” is a natural extension of a justice imbued with disciplinary methods and examination procedures. Is it surprising that the cellular prison, with its regular chronologies, forced labour, its authorities of surveillance and registration, its experts in normality, who continue and multiply the functions of the judge, should have become the modern instrument of penalty? Is it surprising that prisons resemble factories, schools, barracks, hospitals, which all resemble prisons?<sup>13</sup>

The notion of excellence, functioning less to permit visual observation than to permit exhaustive accounting, works to tie the University into a similar net of bureaucratic institutions. “Excellence,” that is, functions to allow the University to understand itself solely in terms of the structure of corporate administration. Hence, as I mentioned briefly in Chapter 1, Alfonso Borrero Cabal, writing the report *The University as an Institution Today* for UNESCO, consciously structures his vision of the University in terms of administration: “Part I—the Introduction—deals with administration in terms of the internal institutional

organization and the external or outward-projecting idea of service . . . Part II deals with the first meaning of administration: the organization and internal functioning of the university . . . Part III deals with the external sense of administration, that of service to society.”<sup>14</sup> This primarily administrative approach is explicitly situated as a result of the University’s need to “become part of the international scene” (19). Globalization requires that “greater attention is given to administration” in order to permit the integration of the market in knowledge, which Borrero Cabal situates directly in relation to the need for “development.” With the end of the Cold War, as Marco Antonio Rodrigues Dias remarks in his preface, “the main problem in the world is ‘underdevelopment’ ” (xv). What this actually means is that the language in which global discussions are to be conducted is not that of cultural conflict but of economic management. And the language of economic management structures Borrero Cabal’s analysis of the university around the globe. Hence for example he argues: “Planning, execution, evaluation: the natural actions of responsible persons and institutions. They make up the three important stages that complete the cycle of the administrative process. In logical order, planning precedes execution and evaluation, but all planning has to start with evaluation” (192).

The idea that the sequential processes of business management are the “natural actions” of “responsible persons” may come as a surprise to some of us. What kind of “responsibility” is this? Clearly not that of a parent to a child, for example. The only responsibility at stake here is the responsibility to provide managerial accounts for large corporations, something that becomes clearer when Borrero Cabal begins to flesh out what he means by planning: “Since ‘strategic planning,’ . . . ‘administration by objectives,’ . . . and systems of ‘total quality’ are frequently discussed, it is natural to adopt these means of planning, which are as old as humanity even though they were not formalized until the end of the 18th century” (197).

Once again, the “natural” is invoked. Borrero Cabal cites a number of authorities in order to suggest that early hunter-gatherers were, in fact, engaged in reflection on total quality management, an argument that reminds one of the fine scorn Marx pours upon Ricardo:

Even Ricardo has his Robinson Crusoe Stories. Ricardo makes his primitive fisherman and primitive hunter into owners of commodities who immediately exchange their fish and game in proportion to the labour-time which is materialized in these exchange-values. On this occasion he slips into the anachronism of allowing the primitive fisherman and hunter to calculate the value of their implements in accordance with the annuity tables used on the London Stock Exchange in 1817.<sup>15</sup>

Borrero Cabal’s recourse to anachronism is, of course, the product of a desire to make the exclusive rule of business management not seem discontinuous with the prior role of the University. Although he does admit that economic criteria and cultural development are at odds, he simply notes the fact and then passes on to give more outlines for the management of University administration by analogy with a large corporation. Hence he admits that he has omitted “the all-essential ingredient of culture” from his analysis of the relation between “the university and the work world,” saying that: “Consequently it is often felt that economic criteria take precedence over the cultural development of people and nations. This reduces professional work to quantitative purposes: the profession is not conceived of as ‘the cultural and moral elevation of people and nations’ (Garcia Corrido 1992), but reduced to what is necessary but not sufficient, that is, tangible output and per capita income” (161).

Having acknowledged the conflict between a strictly economic rationale and the traditional cultural mission, Borrero Cabal goes on to provide a strictly economic description of the functioning of the University in terms of cost and benefit. He does make occasional remarks that we should not forget about culture but seems unsure where it should fit in. Hence, and not surprisingly, he is more at ease with the invocation of excellence. He approvingly quotes the Director General of UNESCO: “Federico Mayor (1991) gives the following qualifying terms: It is impossible to guarantee the quality of education without having the aim of excellence resting on the domain of research, teaching, preparation, and learning. . . . The search for excellence reaffirms its pertinence and closely links it to quality” (212). The aim of excellence serves to synthesize research, teaching, preparation, and learning, all the activities of the University, if we add administration (and one

of Borrero Cabal's only concrete recommendations is that university administration should be made a program of study). What is remarkable is how Borrero Cabal could suggest that these are "qualifying terms" in order to understand what "institutional quality" in the University might be. Excellence is invoked here, as always, to say precisely nothing at all: it deflects attention from the questions of what quality and pertinence might be, who actually are the judges of a relevant or a good University, and by what authority they become those judges.

What Borrero Cabal suggests for the University is a process of constant self-evaluation, in relation to "performance indicators," which allow us to judge "quality, excellence, effectiveness and pertinence" (212). All of these terms are, he acknowledges, "taken from economic jargon" (213), and permit the University's self-evaluation to be a matter of accounting, both internally and externally. In short, for Borrero Cabal, accountability is strictly a matter of accounting: "In synthesis, if the concept of accountability is accepted as part of the academic lexicon, it is equivalent to the capacity that the university has for accounting for its roles, mission, and functions to itself, and for accounting to society how they are translated into efficient service" (213). Note the use of "translation" in this passage; although "accounting" may exceed bookkeeping in the sense that it is not merely a matter of money, it is the principle of cost and benefit that acts as a principle of translation. Cost-benefit analysis structures not only the University's internal bookkeeping but also its academic performance (in terms of goal achievement) and the social bond with the University at large. The social responsibility of the University, its accountability to society, is solely a matter of services rendered for a fee. Accountability is a synonym for accounting in "the academic lexicon."

In this context, excellence responds very well to the needs of technological capitalism in the production and processing of information, in that it allows for the increasing integration of all activities into a generalized market, while permitting a large degree of flexibility and innovation at the local level. Excellence is thus the integrating principle that allows "diversity" (the other watchword of the University prospectus) to be tolerated without threatening the unity of the system.

The point is not that no one knows what excellence is but that ev-

eryone has his or her own idea of what it is. And once excellence has been generally accepted as an organizing principle, there is no need to argue about differing definitions. Everyone is excellent, in their own way, and everyone has more of a stake in being left alone to be excellent than in intervening in the administrative process. There is a clear parallel here to the condition of the political subject under contemporary capitalism. Excellence draws only one boundary: the boundary that protects the unrestricted power of the bureaucracy. And if a particular department's kind of excellence fails to conform, then that department can be eliminated without apparent risk to the system. This has been, for example, the fate of many classics departments. It is beginning to happen to philosophy.

The reasons for the decline of classics are of course complex, but they seem to me to have to do with the fact that the study of classics traditionally presupposes a subject of culture: the subject that links the Greeks to nineteenth-century Germany, and legitimates the nation-state as the modern, rational, reconstruction of the transparent communicational community of the ancient *polis*. That fiction of communicational transparency is apparent from the erroneous assumptions of nineteenth-century historians (still apparent in mass-cultural representations) that ancient Greece was a world of total whiteness (dazzling marble buildings, statues, and people), a pure and transparent origin. That the ideological role of this subject is no longer pertinent is itself a primary symptom of the decline of culture as the regulatory idea of the nation-state. Hence classical texts will continue to be read, but the assumptions that necessitated a department of classics for this purpose (the need to prove that Pericles and Bismarck were the same kind of men) no longer hold, so there is no longer a need to employ a massive institutional apparatus designed to make ancient Greeks into ideal Etonians or Young Americans *avant la lettre*.<sup>16</sup>

This disciplinary shift is most evident in the United States, where the University has always had an ambiguous relation to the state. This is because American civil society is structured by the trope of the promise or contract rather than on the basis of a single national ethnicity. Hence where Fichte's university project, as we shall see, offers to realize the essence of a *Volk* by revealing its hidden nature in the form of the

nation-state, the American University offers to deliver on the promise of a rational civil society—as in the visionary conclusion to T. H. Huxley’s address on the inauguration of Johns Hopkins University. It is worth quoting at some length the extended opposition between past and future, between essence and promise, that characterizes Huxley’s account of the specificity of American society and the American University, in order to see exactly how he can speak of America as a yet-to-be-fulfilled promise even on the hundredth anniversary of the Declaration of Independence:

I constantly hear Americans speak of the charm which our old mother country has for them . . . But anticipation has no less charm than retrospect, and to an Englishman landing on your shores for the first time, travelling for hundreds of miles through strings of great and well-ordered cities, seeing your enormous actual, and almost infinite potential, wealth in all commodities, and in the energy and ability which turn wealth to account, there is something sublime in the vista of the future. Do not suppose that I am pandering to what is commonly understood by national pride . . . Size is not grandeur, and territory does not make a nation. The great issue, about which hangs a true sublimity, and the terror of overhanging fate, is what are you going to do with all of these things? What is to be the end to which these are to be the means? You are making a novel experiment in politics on the greatest scale which the world has yet seen.<sup>17</sup>

Huxley himself, as Rector of Aberdeen, played an important role in the development of the Scottish University in the later nineteenth century, its independence from the Oxbridge model being marked by an openness to the natural sciences and medicine as disciplines and by the fact that it was not controlled by the Anglican church. These two features make the Scottish University more clearly “modern,” which is to say, closer to the American model.<sup>18</sup> And Huxley’s speech picks out the crucial feature that will define the modernity of Johns Hopkins: the fact that the United States as a nation has no intrinsic cultural *content*. That is to say, the American national idea is understood by Huxley as a promise, a scientific experiment. And the role of the American University is not to bring to light the content of its culture, to realize a national meaning; it is rather to deliver on a national *promise*, a con-

tract.<sup>19</sup> As I shall explain later on, this promissory structure is what makes the canon debate a particularly American phenomenon, since the establishment of cultural content is not the realization of an immanent cultural essence but an act of republican will: the paradoxical contractual *choice* of a tradition. Thus the *form* of the European idea of culture is preserved in the humanities in the United States, but the cultural form has no inherent content. The content of the canon is grounded upon the moment of a social contract rather than the continuity of a historical tradition, and therefore is always open to revision.

This contractual vision of society is what allows Harvard to offer itself “in the service of the nation” or New York University to call itself a “private university in the public service.” What such service might mean is not singularly determined by a unitary cultural center. The idea of the nation is always already an abstraction in America, resting on promise rather than on tradition. Excellence can thus most easily gain ground in the United States; it is more open to the futurity of the promise than is “culture,” and the question of cultural content was already bracketed in the American University in the late nineteenth century, as Ronald Judy points out. The contemporary advent of excellence may therefore be understood to represent the abandonment of the vestigial appeal to the *form* of culture as the mode of self-realization of a republican people who are citizens of a nation-state—the relinquishing of the University’s role as a model of even the contractual social bond in favor of the structure of an autonomous bureaucratic corporation.

Along the same lines, one can understand the point that I have already made concerning the status of “globalization” as a kind of “Americanization.” Global “Americanization” today (unlike during the period of the Cold War, Korea, and Vietnam) does not mean American national predominance but a global realization of the contentlessness of the American national idea, which shares the emptiness of the cash-nexus and of excellence. Despite the enormous energy expended in attempts to isolate and define an “Americanness” in American Studies programs, one might read these efforts as nothing more than an attempt to mask the fundamental anxiety that it in some sense *means nothing* to be American, that “American culture” is becoming increas-

ingly a structural oxymoron. I take it as significant of such a trend that an institution as prestigious and as central to an idea of American culture as the University of Pennsylvania should have recently decided to disband its American Studies program. That universities in the United States have been the quickest to abandon the trappings of justification by reference to national culture should hardly be surprising in a nation defined by a suspicion of state intervention in symbolic life, as expressed in the separation of church and state.

The United States, however, is by no means alone in this movement. The British turn to “performance indicators” should also be understood as a step on the road toward the discourse of excellence that is replacing the appeal to culture in the North American University.<sup>20</sup> The performance indicator is, of course, a measure of excellence, an invented standard that claims to be capable of rating all departments in all British universities on a five-point scale. The rating can then be used to determine the size of the central government grant allocated to the department in question. Since this process is designed to introduce a competitive market into the academic world, investment follows success, so the government intervenes to accentuate differentials in perceived quality rather than to reduce them. [Thus more money is given to the high-scoring university departments, while the poor ones, rather than being developed, are starved of cash (under the Thatcher regime, this was of course understood as an encouragement to such departments to pull themselves up by their bootstraps). The long-term trend is to permit the concentration of resources in centers of high performance and to encourage the disappearance of departments, and even perhaps of universities, perceived as “weaker.”

Hence, for instance, the University of Oxford has been moved to envision the construction of a Humanities Research Center, despite traditional local suspicion of the very notion of the research project as something that only Germans and Americans could think of applying to the humanities. Benjamin Jowett is supposed to have remarked of research, “There will be none of *that* in my college.” Such changes are hailed by conservatives as “exposure to market forces,” whereas what is occurring is actually the highly artificial creation of a fictional market that presumes exclusive governmental control of funding. However, the

very artificiality of the process by which a version of the capitalist marketplace is mimed throws into relief the preliminary necessity of a unified and virtual accounting mechanism. This is coupled with the structural introduction of the threat of crisis to the functioning of the institution. And the result is nothing less than the double logic of excellence at work in its finest hour.

Indeed, a crisis in the University seems to be a defining feature of the “West,” as is evidenced in the Italian students’ movement of 1993, or the repeated French attempts at “modernization.” Of course, it was the Faure plan for the modernization of the University that produced the events of 1968 in France (which I shall discuss in Chapter 9). However, such attempts at modernization have continued, and the arguments presented recently by Claude Allègre in *L’Âge des Savoirs: Pour une Renaissance de l’Université* display a striking consonance with the developments I have discussed in the United States, Canada, and Britain. Allègre was the special counselor to Lionel Jospin at the Ministry of Education from 1988 to 1992, and his book is essentially an exposé of the arguments guiding the reform of the French University, perceived as a locus of stagnation and resistance to change (an argument with which few could disagree). Interestingly, he argues that this drive to reform is “above all a resurgence of the aspirations of 68 . . . but a discreet and calm resurgence.”<sup>21</sup> Just to whose aspirations he is referring is never spelled out, but it turns out that what 1968 meant above all was *openness*. And the twin characteristics of this new opening are, the reader will hardly be surprised to learn, integration and excellence:

We tried to develop [reforms] by opening up a University that was folded in on itself and bringing it closer to the City.

Opening up the University to the City: this is its adaptation to professional needs.

Opening up the University to knowledges: this is the effort to renew research and to recognize *excellence*.

Integration of the University in its City: this is the University 2000 at the heart of urban planning, it is the policy of partnership with local groups.

Integration of the French University in a European ensemble: this is the meaning of European evaluation.<sup>22</sup>

The internal policy of the University is to be resolved in France by the appeal to excellence, which serves as the term that regroups and integrates all knowledge-related activities. This, in turn, permits the wider integration of the University as one corporate bureaucracy among others, both in the direction of the city and of the European Community. The city is no longer the “streets,” nor even a vision of civic life (the Renaissance city-state that Allègre’s title might lead us to expect). Rather, it is an agglomerate of professional-bureaucratic capitalist corporations whose needs are primarily centered upon the supply of a managerial-technical class. The city gives the University its commercial form of expression. And the European Community supplants the nation-state as the figure of the entity that provides the University with its political form of expression, an expression which is explicitly tied to the question of evaluation. The University will produce excellence in knowledges, and as such will link into the circuits of global capital and transnational politics without difficulty. This is because there is no cultural content to the notion of excellence, nothing specifically “French,” for example, except insofar as “Frenchness” is a commodity on the global market.

Excellence exposes the pre-modern traditions of the University to the force of market capitalism. Barriers to free trade are swept away. An interesting example of this is the British government’s decision to allow the polytechnics to rename themselves as universities. Oxford Polytechnic becomes Brookes University, and so on. This classic free-market maneuver guarantees that the only criterion of excellence is performativity in an expanded market. It would be an error to think that this was an *ideological* move on the part of the Conservative government, however. The decision was not primarily motivated by concern for the content of what is taught in the universities or polytechnics. Even if the tendency of polytechnics to form links with business in the interests of incorporating practical training into degrees might seem to fuel the strand of petty-bourgeois anti-intellectualism in the British Conservative party, it is also true that it was in the polytechnics that the work of the Birmingham school of Cultural Studies had had its greatest impact. Hence the sudden redenomination of polytechnics as universities is best understood as an *administrative* move: the breaking

down of a barrier to circulation and to market expansion, analogous to the repeal of sumptuary laws that permitted the capitalization of the textile trade in Early Modern England.

One form of such market expansion is the development of interdisciplinary programs, which often appear as the point around which radicals and conservatives can make common cause in University reform. This is partly because interdisciplinarity has no inherent political orientation, as the example of the Chicago School shows.<sup>23</sup> It is also because the increased flexibility they offer is often attractive to administrators as a way of overcoming entrenched practices of demarcation, ancient privileges, and fiefdoms in the structure of universities. The benefits of interdisciplinary openness are numerous—as someone who works in an interdisciplinary department I am particularly aware of them—but they should not blind us to the institutional stakes that they involve. At present interdisciplinary programs tend to supplement existing disciplines; the time is not far off when they will be installed in order to replace clusters of disciplines.

Indeed, this is a reason to be cautious in approaching the institutional claim to interdisciplinarity staked by Cultural Studies when it replaces the old order of disciplines in the humanities with a more general field that combines history, art history, literature, media studies, sociology, and so on. In saying this, I want to join Rey Chow in questioning, from a sympathetic point of view, the unqualified acceptance both of interdisciplinary activity and of Cultural Studies that has been fairly common among academic radicals.<sup>24</sup> We can be interdisciplinary in the name of excellence, because excellence only preserves preexisting disciplinary boundaries insofar as they make no larger claim on the entirety of the system and pose no obstacle to its growth and integration.

To put this another way, the appeal to excellence marks the fact that there is no longer any idea of the University, or rather that the idea has now lost all content. As a non-referential unit of value entirely internal to the system, excellence marks nothing more than the moment of technology’s self-reflection. All that the system requires is for activity to take place, and the empty notion of excellence refers to nothing other than the optimal input/output ratio in matters of information.<sup>25</sup> This

is perhaps a less heroic role than we are accustomed to claim for the University, although it does resolve the question of parasitism. The University is now no more of a parasitical drain on resources than the stock exchange or the insurance companies are a drain on industrial production. Like the stock exchange, the University is a point of capital's self-knowledge, of capital's ability not just to manage risk or diversity but to extract a surplus value from that management. In the case of the University this extraction occurs as a result of speculation on differentials in information.

The implication of this shift in function is that the analysis of the University as an Ideological State Apparatus, in Althusser's terms, is no longer appropriate, since the University is no longer primarily an ideological arm of the nation-state but an autonomous bureaucratic corporation. To take another, perhaps less weighted, example we can compare the University to the National Basketball Association. Both are bureaucratic systems that govern an area of activity whose systemic functioning and external effects are not dependent on an external reference. The game of basketball has its rules, and those rules allow differences to arise that are objects of speculation. And while Philadelphia 76ers' victories have effects on their fans, and fans have effects on 76ers' victories (both as supporters and as financiers), those victories or defeats are not directly linked to the essential meaning of the city of Philadelphia. Results are not meaningless, but they arise within the system of basketball rather than in relation to an external referent.

For the University to become such a system involves a major change in the way in which it has been understood to produce institutional meaning. As I shall show later on, Schiller positioned the University of Culture as the quasi-church appropriate to the rational state, by claiming that the University would perform the same services for the state as the Church had for the feudal or absolutist monarch. However, the contemporary University of Excellence should now be understood as a bureaucratic system whose internal regulation is entirely self-interested without regard to wider ideological imperatives. Hence the stock market seeks maximum volatility in the interest of intensifying the profits attendant on the flux of capital rather than the stability of exchange that might defend strictly national interests.

The corollary of this is that we must analyze the University as a *bureaucratic system* rather than as the ideological apparatus that the left has traditionally considered it. As an autonomous system rather than an ideological instrument, the University should no longer be thought of as a tool that the left will be able to use for other purposes than those of the capitalist state. This explains the ease with which former West Germans have colonized the Universities of what was once the German Democratic Republic (GDR) since reunification. The Universities of the old GDR have been purged of those considered to be political apparatchiks of the Honecker regime. No parallel purges, however, have occurred in the Universities of the former Bundesrepublik, despite the fact that reunification was not supposed to be the conquest of the East by the West. The conflict, that is, is not presented as that between two ideologies (which would have necessitated purges on both sides), but as a conflict between the East, where the University used to be under ideological control, and the West, where the University was supposed to be non-ideological.

Of course, the Western universities had a massive ideological role to play during the Cold War, and much can be said about individual cases. But overall one is struck by the silence and speed of this replacement, by the fact that the counter-arguments that could be mounted in favor of the intellectual project of the former East Germany simply *cannot be heard* any longer. This is because the fall of the Wall means that the University is no longer primarily an ideological institution, and those from the West are better positioned to play the new roles required. If the posts of the purged have in many cases gone to young academics from the former West, this is not because they are primarily agents of a competing ideology, but because of bureaucratic efficiency. The young former West Germans are not necessarily more intelligent or more learned than those they replace; they are simply "cleaner," which is to say, less easily identifiable as ideological agents of their state. This is a primary symptom of the decline of the nation-state as the counter-signatory to the contract by which the modern University, the University of Culture, was founded. As my remarks on Allègre's invocation of the European Community have already suggested, the emergence of the University of Excellence in place of the University of Culture can

only be understood against the backdrop of the decline of the nation-state.

The demand for “clean hands,” be it in German universities or in Italian politics, may be presented as a desire to renew the state apparatus, but I think it is better understood as the product of a general uncertainty concerning the role of the state, a call for “hands off.” Complex and often contradictory, such a desire may result, as in Italy, in such paradoxical alliances as that of integrationist Fascists (the MSI) with separatists (the Northern League). Notably, this alliance occurred under the umbrella of Berlusconi’s oddly transparent organization, Forza Italia, whose nationalism is the evocation of a football chant, and whose claim to govern is based on a rather dubious assertion of “business success.” If I may offer a rather strange diagnosis of this apparent paradox, it is that the alliance in Italy is between those who wish for the question of community in Italy no longer to be posed: either because the Duce may return to provide an answer about “being Italian” and impose it with brutal violence (the Lega will tell people to “be regional”) or because Berlusconi will reassure us that it is not a question, that the answer is as transparent and obvious as the light blue haze emanating from a television screen, or the light blue shirt on a footballer’s back. Berlusconi does not offer a renewed nationalism (as his alliance with the MSI might lead us to fear) but a sanitized nationalist nostalgia that blankets and suppresses all questions concerning the nature of community.

Instead of the question of community, which was once posed both within and against the terms of nationalism, we get a generalized but meaningless nationalism that pushes aside questions. The national question, that is, is simply accepted as a generalized matter of nostalgia, be it for the evils of Fascism (Fini, the current leader of the MSI, is not a Duce, even in his dreams), or for the light blue colors of the royal house of Savoy. And the government is to get on with the matter of running the state as a business.

The nation understands itself as its own theme park, and that resolves the question of what it means to live in Italy: it is to have been Italian once. Meanwhile, the state is merely a large corporation to be entrusted to businessmen, a corporation that increasingly serves as the hand-

maiden to the penetration of transnational capital. The governmental structure of the nation-state is no longer the organizing center of the common existence of peoples across the planet, and the University of Excellence serves nothing other than itself, another corporation in a world of transnationally exchanged capital.