

The Demands of the Day

Colin Jager

You must change your life.

—Rainer Maria Rilke

Nothing is gained by yearning and tarrying alone, and we shall act differently.

We shall set to work and meet the “demands of the day.”

—Max Weber

Most years I teach a large lecture course on Romantic poetry, and most years, after we have finished with William Blake, a student will approach me after class. Dropping his or her voice, the student will tell me, perhaps with a glance over the shoulder, “Blake changed everything for me! I see it all differently now!” The other fifty students in the class could care less about poor mad Blake — they do not get him, they are too lazy, Blake’s poetry is just too weird — but for that one student, everything is different now.

As the years have gone on I find myself waiting for that student to emerge. Typically, though not always, it is the student sitting on the edge of the class, a bit unkempt, perhaps alienated. This student cannot be bothered to impress me, and I am never sure if he or she is paying attention. Often, having been charged up by Blake’s visions, the student is disappointed by the comparatively pedestrian concerns of Wordsworth or Coleridge. And forget Jane Austen. The student sinks back into silence and gets a C on the final exam.

I wish I had more students like this.

1. Out of Time

I teach English literature at a large, good, underfunded state university. Our governor and legislators are more interested in the football team than in the English department. Yet we have a top-twenty graduate program of which we are justifiably proud. We have about seven hundred undergraduate majors. I like and admire my colleagues — though there are ever fewer of them to like and admire. When I arrived eight years ago the department had about sixty-five full-time tenured and tenure-track faculty members. Now there are about fifty, with little chance that things will turn around anytime soon: a large department like ours has to run three or four searches a year just to maintain its size, and we have not had permission for that in some time. Still, we teach a full roster of courses, we sponsor and attend lectures and events, we do all the thankless committee work that makes a big department run, we try to carve out some time to write books and articles. Because there are fewer of us doing these things, we all have to run a little faster.

While I am running a little faster, I sometimes wonder why I do not get more students for whom Blake — or something else, *anything* else — changes everything. It might be my fault, of course. Maybe I do not teach the material well enough; maybe I am not inspiring; maybe my colleagues' classes are overflowing with students who have suddenly awakened, like Robin Williams's students in *Dead Poets Society*. But maybe there are structural impediments to that kind of transformative experience, too. I know that I never have quite enough time. I squeeze in my class preparation between everything else I have to do; because I have more students, I assign fewer papers and hire a graduate student to grade them; the rooms I teach in are uninspiring, a bit dingy, always too hot or too cold. And when I look out at my students, what I think I see is a rough analogy. To save on room and board, some of them commute from home (and the New Jersey traffic being what it is, they often arrive late); many of them work part-time jobs, or babysit little brothers and sisters; a few have children of their own. Most are harried, stressed, and out of time. Going to college is one of several things that they are juggling at any given moment. And often those other things are more pressing and immediate. How much time do they have to ponder what Blake meant when he wrote that "Milton was of the Devil's party without knowing it"? Do they spend much time in a milieu where it is interesting or cool to think about such things? Are they likely to run into someone from class, or the poetry editor of the student literary journal? Are they hanging out in coffee shops, or getting riled up about Plato at the bar, reading their bad poetry at open-mike nights? Some of them are, of course. But lots of them are in their cars on the way back home, or to

the part-time job they have taken. So they are thinking about other things, as they must.

We have all seen the statistics, but any discussion of pedagogy these days must begin with the reminder that it is getting harder to go to college. “College May Become Unaffordable for Most in U.S.,” proclaimed the *New York Times* in December 2008 (Lewin 2008a). Tuition is going up (by 38% between 2000 and 2005), aid is going down, and loans are harder to find (Glater and Dash 2008). Students are taking longer to finish college and taking on more outside work to pay for it. As colleges and universities are getting pricier, they are also becoming less pleasant places to be (Delta Cost Project 2009). Just this year alone, Arizona State and the University of Massachusetts absorbed cuts of \$25 million, while in California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger followed up a \$48 million reduction by proposing an additional \$65.5 million cut for the University of California system. All this happened before the current economic crisis really started to take hold. (Across the board, and around the country, things look even worse now.) “Budget cuts mean that campuses won’t be able to fill faculty vacancies, that the student-faculty ratio rises, that students have lecturers instead of tenured professors,” said Mark G. Yudof, president of the University of California system. “Higher education is very labor intensive. We may be getting to the point where there will have to be some basic change in the model” (quoted in Lewin 2008b).

But maybe the model has already changed. Tenured and tenure-track teachers now make up only 35 percent of the pedagogical workforce, and this number is dropping. Filling the gap are the ever-expanding ranks of adjuncts and part-timers, who are unprotected by tenure and structurally barred from participating in the wider intellectual life of departments and universities. Unsurprisingly, women disproportionately fill these jobs. These phenomena have been analyzed recently, in historical terms by Frank Donoghue in *The Last Professors* (2008) and with activist anger in Marc Bousquet’s *How the University Works* (2008). Even the Modern Language Association, as usual a bit behind the curve, has weighed in with a report called “Education in the Balance” (ADE Ad Hoc Committee on Staffing 2007), which finds that English departments lost three thousand tenure-track lines in the decade before 2004—that is, during the relative boom *before* the current financial meltdown. “Most undergraduate education,” concludes Bousquet (2008: 2), “is conducted by a superexploited corps of disposable workers.”

What is true for the faculty is perhaps even more true for the students. One horrific chapter of Bousquet’s book describes a scheme, called “Met-

ropolitan College,” whereby students in Louisville work part-time at a UPS shipping plant, loading boxes onto trucks from midnight to 4 a.m., five nights a week, for \$8.50 an hour and a chance to earn tuition credits (“education benefits”) at Louisville-area colleges. It is a good deal for everyone except the “students.” The colleges get tuition dollars (a portion of them taxpayer funded thanks to state incentives given to UPS). UPS solves a chronic turnover problem among its low-wage employees, keeping wages low while getting employees to “stick” with the promise of tuition credit and thus the better life down the road that a college degree supposedly promises. The students, meanwhile, get work-related injuries, days without sleep (most work a second part-time job), and, usually, no degree: in the decade the program has been running, approximately 12 percent of Metropolitan College students have received an associate’s or bachelor’s degree.

And so an increasingly occasional student body is met by an increasingly occasional professoriate. Neither group can give its full attention to what is happening in the classroom. I write this with some embarrassment, for I am well aware that in the general scheme of things I am very fortunate, and given what some of my fellow professionals go through on a daily basis it seems churlish to complain. And yet, to be honest, my actual teaching life is some distance from the life I imagined when, as an undergraduate, I dreamed of one day being like my professors. What I found so intoxicating about my own undergraduate experience was the sense that all of us were acting within a jointly created context in which what happened in today’s class retrospectively altered what had happened last week or last month or last year, and thus opened out onto new and heretofore unimagined futures, futures that might spill beyond the boundaries of the classroom and into hallways, offices, and bars. No doubt some of this is the product of a dreamy backward glance — I am sure not all of my undergraduate days were like this. But I do know that if at least *some* of them had not been like this, I would have found another line of work.

Metropolitan College may be an extreme example, but even the less bad situations of many of our students are bad enough to keep them distracted, harried, and unable to find either the time or the resources — literal and figurative — to be changed by their studies. Popular media might give us images of twenty-somethings partying all night, living off their parents, putting off the real world, but for far too many students the “real world” — the world of work, car payments, and fatigue — is the only world.

2. Master All Things by Calculation

One response to this situation, generally presented as hard-headed realism, is that these are the demands of the day and we might as well adjust. As Stanley Fish (2009) put it in his review of Donoghue's book, "Healthy humanities departments populated by tenure-track professors who discuss books with adoring students in a cloistered setting . . . have largely vanished." Maybe Fish is right, but I dislike how his description runs the essential (tenure-track professors discussing books with their students) together with loaded descriptions of "cloistered settings" and "adoring students." Such a conflation invites readers to indulge in antielitist populism and encourages them to think that the only educational models out there are Oxford and for-profit outfits like the University of Phoenix. Of course this is exactly what the proponents of the business model of education think, but letting your opponent define the terms of the debate is never a good first move.

A better first move is to trace a genealogy of the kind of thinking Fish takes for granted. Donoghue begins his story with Andrew Carnegie's 1891 commencement address to the Pearce College of Business and Shorthand in Philadelphia: "I rejoice," Carnegie told the graduating students, "to know that your time has not been wasted upon dead languages, but has been fully occupied in obtaining a knowledge of shorthand and typewriting . . . and that you are fully equipped to sail upon the element upon which you must live your lives and earn your living" (quoted in Donoghue 2004: 95–96). In evidence here is a particularly American emphasis on practicality and instrumentalization, where the chief opposition is between business values (profitability, efficiency) and learning for its own sake, which Carnegie associates with the traditional academy and dead languages.

Carnegie's speech offers an illuminating contrast to another graduation speech, Max Weber's "Science as a Vocation," delivered in Munich in 1917, near the end of Weber's life. Speaking to a roomful of future professors, Weber produced a characteristically sober yet inspiring vision of what it might mean to enter a scientific career in the academy. In what way, Weber asked, are we moderns different from our primitive forbears? Not in technical knowledge, for we actually know less about the tools we use than our ancestors knew about theirs. Instead the difference lies in what Weber calls "intellectualization," namely, our largely implicit belief that, if we chose, we *could* learn such technical knowledge. The laptop on which I am composing this essay is largely a mystery to me, but I do not need to suppose that just because it is a mystery to me it is one *tout court*. Somewhere out there is someone—or a team of someones—who can tell me how it works. And just because I know

they are out there, I do not need to waste time on that knowledge myself. For us, concludes Weber (1948 [1917]: 139), “There are no mysterious incalculable forces that come into play, but rather . . . one can, in principle, master all things by calculation. This means that the world is disenchanted. One need no longer have recourse to magical means in order to master or implore the spirits, as did the savage, for whom such mysterious powers existed.”

The comparison between Carnegie and Weber is instructive. Where Carnegie distinguishes between business and the academy and would just as soon dispense with the latter altogether, Weber makes a more fine-grained distinction between different academic orientations. For Weber, the reality of intellectualization — the simple fact of Andrew Carnegie, as it were — means that academics must change their self-understanding. Do not, Weber cautions his audience, imagine your future role as professors along the traditional lines. Academics should not be in the business of addressing questions of meaning and value — of how we should live and what we should do. Only “a prophet or a savior” can address those kinds of questions. And “if there is no such man, or his answer is no longer believed in, then you will certainly not compel him to appear on this earth by having thousands of professors, as privileged hirelings of the state, attempt as petty prophets in their lecture-rooms to take over his role” (153). Aware that this may not be what a room full of future professors wants to hear, Weber offers them an alternative kind of solace. Science is a vocation, he tells them, in the very precise sense that it is bigger than they are. Rather than aspiring to be prophets holding forth on the meaning of life, offering something unique or original, successful scientists know they will become obsolete: “In science, each of us knows that what he has accomplished will be antiquated in ten, twenty, fifty years. . . . It is our common fate and, more, our common goal” (138). Weber’s point is that you should not aspire to a career in science if you cannot let go of your narcissism and accept the larger good of the scientific vocation. Science — and, by implication, intellectual endeavor in general — is not about you.

The thing to stress here is the interplay between these two sets of oppositions: Carnegie’s crude but rhetorically powerful American distinction between business and the academy and Weber’s subtler European distinction between education as the austere commitment to a disenchanted vocation and education as an exercise in self-development and originality. The pressure of Carnegie’s distinction between academy and world makes Weber’s distinction between different academic ideals salient. A pedagogical practice focused on subjective transformation, on questions of meaning and originality, will seem

narcissistic and embarrassingly self-indulgent *only in the context* of the larger pressure exerted on the academy as a whole by instrumentalized business and corporate values, by targets, calculations, outcomes, and managers.

If you ask most people what the necessary components of higher education are, they will tell you “faculty and students.” Yet over the past quarter century those two elements have been swamped by a managerial and corporate culture and its related emphases on marketing, athletics, investment portfolios, and business partnerships. This is why our world is not so much Weberian as neo-Weberian. Bousquet claims, plausibly, that the dominance of this new culture is directly related to the casualization of the academic workforce and thus to our collective failure to graduate in a timely manner students who know something. The joint transformations of tenured professors into part-time labor and of students into part-time workers are small pieces of the larger process that the sociologist Randy Martin (2002: 2) calls the “financialization of daily life,” by which even the most mundane aspects of our life attune themselves to the rhythms of the market. “Advertised here,” writes Martin of one financial-services ad, “is not simply a different way to bank, but a new way of life. Precise time-allocations, clear-minded calculations, uninterrupted self-control, unceasing escalation of output — these are no longer just the tokens of career success, but of domestic bliss” (ibid.).

For me, this description retrospectively alters how I read canonical neopragmatist texts like “Against Theory,” the hugely influential 1982 essay by Steven Knapp and Walter Benn Michaels. Knapp and Michaels famously argued that theory (“an account of interpretation in general”) always fails, and fails in the same way, for the plain reason that “the meaning of a text is simply identical to the author’s intended meaning” (724). For them there is no interesting debate to be had about whether an author’s intentions are realized in the work at hand, or whether there is a surplus of meaning beyond intention. To think that there *is* an interesting debate to be had about these questions is the mistake that makes theory possible: “The moment of imagining intentionless meaning,” write Knapp and Michaels, “constitutes the theoretical moment itself” (727). At one time this kind of argument — and even more, the kind of no-nonsense attitude it evinced — appealed a great deal to me. It seemed grown up, worldly wise. And politically right, since on Knapp and Michaels’s argument intentionless meaning is a way of preserving the class structure, allowing professors to invent conundrums and mysteries where none exist, inviting them to peddle their solutions to these pseudo-problems to a passive and ignorant student body. Disenchantment for all!

These days, though, I am inclined to think the opposite. “Theory,” general accounts of meaning and significance, the big questions, the mysteries — these are what matter; these are the things we ought to be offering our students, getting worked up about, tendering as an alternative to the fetish for measurement, calculation, and output that dominates our shared life. And I am inclined to read an essay like “Against Theory” as an early effort at reconciling us to our rapidly financializing day, an inauguration of a small genre of neo-Weberian advice literature masquerading as hard headed realism, carving out a small-minded common sense as the proper domain for literary study, and turning the big questions over to the magical rhythms of the neoliberal marketplace.

More recently Peter Stallybrass, in an essay on using databases titled “Against Thinking” (2007), drives the populist implications of “Against Theory” to their logical conclusion. Stallybrass provocatively opposes “thinking” to “working” and tells us that he encourages his students not to think. “When you’re THINKING,” he writes, “you’re usually staring at a blank sheet of paper or a blank screen, hoping that something will emerge from your head and magically fill that space. Even if something ‘comes to you,’ there is no reason to believe that it is of interest, however painful the process has been. . . . The cure for the disease called thinking is work” (1584). Like Knapp and Michaels, Stallybrass emphasizes the democratic implications of his approach. Excited about the pedagogical possibilities opened up by archives and databases, he wants to “free us from the tyranny of proprietary authors, solitary thinkers who produce knowledge out of their own minds” (1583). That model “preserv[es] knowledge for the rich and powerful” and is the “mystified privilege of an elite” (1585). Those of us still tied to a “regime of originality” are, like the priests of old in their cloisters, holding our students back. Working with a database, in company with others, however, is something we all can do if we want to put in the time and effort. On offer here is a new kind of educational lifestyle.

Because these essays do not address themselves explicitly to questions of economy (aside from Stallybrass’s metaphorical appeal to “working”), it can be hard to spot their elective affinity with neoliberal management culture. Yet their implicit assumption is that both we and our students are in the business of knowledge production, that this is a good thing because it is inherently democratic, and that anything that obstructs it (thinking, theory) is needlessly mystifying and inherently antidemocratic, particularly if it takes time. On this argument, going to college should be more like working and less like thinking, more like being an adult and less like being a child. Waiting

around for something to “come to you” looks, from this perspective, suspiciously like loitering. Within that basically Weberian matrix, too, resides a more contemporary, neoliberal assumption that the rhythms of financialization make it possible to work all the time without it really feeling like work.

Now, there is nothing wrong with what Stallybrass calls working or what Knapp and Michaels call practice. What *is* wrong is insisting that the choice between working and thinking operates independently of the larger neoliberal world in which universities today exist. If we don’t show our students how to loiter, how to wait around for something to happen, some marketing genius will offer them other ways to fill their time. “Financialization promises a way to develop the self, when even the noblest of professions cannot emit a call that one can answer with a lifetime,” writes Martin (2002: 9). So questions of meaning, value, and self-development, pushed to the side by Weber, come in from the cold. But they do not come back into the classroom — you are much more likely to find them in the various units charged with managing, marketing, and promoting your university.

3. Unapprehended

The present is a hard thing to resist. But the poems and stories that filter through my classroom sometimes give me a glimpse of how one might do it. Several years ago, in an introductory poetry class, I gave my students a clutch of poems by Robert Pinsky, a New Jersey native and recent U.S. poet laureate. Our discussion quickly centered on a poem called “Shirt,” from 1990, which documents a meeting between the speaker and a desirable shirt, presumably in an upscale suburban department store. Contemplating the shirt, admiring its craft, the speaker is led to consider its probable origins in a sweatshop, and from there we enter the history of the garment trade, including the 1911 Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire in New York:

One hundred and forty-six died in the flames
On the ninth floor, no hydrants, no fire escapes —

the invention of fake history in Scotland:

The clan tartans
Invented by mill-owners inspired by the hoax of Ossian,
To control their savage Scottish workers,

and finally the history of slavery in the United States:

The planter, the picker, the sorter
Sweating at her machine in a litter of cotton
As slaves in calico headrags sweated in fields.
(Pinsky 1990: 53–54)

Having sketched in this checkered background, Pinsky's speaker does not tell us what to do. Indeed, one is left with the impression that he does buy the shirt; certainly its workmanship pleases him. But the point of the poem is not what the speaker does but the imaginative journey on which the shirt has led him and the understanding he carries away: that though one of the effects of capitalism is to strip the commodity of its history and context, we cannot escape other people so easily. To buy this shirt is to become entangled in a series of relationships that stretch from Scotland to Malaysia to South Carolina, from 1750 to 1990.

Percy Bysshe Shelley, for one, thought that this sort of imaginative act was simply what poetry *was*. Every new use of language, he writes (1977 [1820]: 487) in "A Defense of Poetry," "awakens and enlarges the mind itself by rendering it the receptacle of a thousand unapprehended combinations of thought." A century before Weber, Shelley offered an identical diagnosis of the modern world, in which "the accumulation of the materials of external life exceed[s] the quantity of the power of assimilating them." Unlike Weber, however, Shelley thought he had a cure: the cultivation of poetry, "unapprehended combinations of thought" that "[awaken] and [enlarge] the mind itself." Famously, Shelley's essay ends with exactly the combination of pedagogy and prophesy that Weber was to dismiss: "Poets are the hierophants of an unapprehended inspiration, the mirrors of the gigantic shadows which futurity casts upon the present. . . . Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the World" (508).

This is heady stuff, and even I find the language a bit bombastic, but in his understated way Pinsky is after something equally ambitious. Driving together artistic technique and the history that trails behind the shirt, his poem legislates a different relationship to its object:

Wonderful how the pattern matches perfectly
Across the placket and over the twin bar-tacked

Corners of both pockets, like a strict rhyme
Or a major chord.

(Pinsky 1990: 54)

In one of those impossible-to-script moments that happen sometimes in the classroom, it turned out that the parents of one of my students owned a small textile import business, and another one's grandmother had worked in the garment factories of Bangladesh. Pinsky's image of trapped workers perishing in the burning Triangle Shirtwaist Factory, moreover, resonated movingly with the horrific images of the World Trade Center that were then fresh in all of our minds. Suddenly this poem was coming alive and generating connections all over the place, connections that took in past, present, and possible futures, many of them deeply personal but also profoundly structural and institutional.

So let us go back to that Louisville UPS plant, and the students who sort and load the boxes there. The plant is called Worldport, and every UPS package shipped within the United States passes through it. It is five miles around, and eighty football fields could fit inside it.¹ Within, workers and Metropolitan College "students" sort a million packages a day, mostly between 11 p.m. and 4 a.m. Worldport is not only a distribution center, though: UPS is the exclusive warehouse and distributor for a number of companies, including Toshiba, Louisville Slugger, Rolls Royce, and Jockey. If I order a T-shirt online from Jockey (Bousquet 2008: 145), the Worldport hub in Louisville handles every part of the transaction; the T-shirt is stored there, retrieved from there, and shipped rapidly and efficiently from there. In tune with our globalized marketplace, Jockey's headquarters and institutional identity reside in Kenosha, Wisconsin, but it has not made a shirt in Wisconsin since 1994.² My shirt will have been manufactured in Costa Rica, Honduras, or Jamaica, from cloth produced in textile mills in North Carolina (Barclay 2000: 101).

Jockey, along with several of its competitors, began apparel assembly in the Caribbean and Central America in the 1980s, in response to significant incentives from the U.S. government's 1983 Caribbean Basin Initiative (CBI), which granted duty-free status to some imports from a number of Caribbean and Central American nations provided that a certain percentage of their manufacture—the actual textile production, in this case—remained in the United States.³ Part of the growing hemispheric free-trade movement that eventually gave us the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), CBI also functioned as a crucial piece of Reagan-era cold war policy designed to isolate some countries, like Nicaragua, whose leftist inclinations were part of what Reagan in 1986 famously called the communist "sea of red . . . lapping at our own borders."⁴ CBI thus "rewarded" nations friendly to U.S.

interests by introducing them to neoliberal economic policies. Apparel companies, whose vertical integration meant that they could weave textiles in one place and assemble the pieces in another, immediately took advantage. While textile production requires a reasonably skilled labor pool and significant capital investment, assembly is largely low-skill work. A legally employed Jamaican immigrant working in textile assembly in New York City might earn eight dollars an hour, while his counterpart in Jamaica might earn a dollar an hour.⁵ Even without free trade agreements like CBI it therefore makes economic sense for large international clothing companies like Jockey to move their assembly operations offshore; with those agreements in place, it becomes irresistible.

The point of this return to Worldport is simply to document the extraordinarily complicated webs of connection between the students sorting boxes in Louisville, garment workers in the Caribbean, cold-war politics, government policy, and a thousand private decisions — connections generated by the same economic management that has converted our homes into financial assets, subjected our own lives willy-nilly to the rhythms of the market, and turned our colleges into corporations peddling education as a lifestyle. In my New Jersey classroom in 2003, half of us were probably wearing clothing whose assembly and production brought us into uncomfortable proximity with an economic system that was also taking a toll on us emotionally and spiritually, evidenced for example in those of my students taking five courses while working twenty hours a week and commuting from home — a system that includes at one terminus the college student sorting T-shirts at 2 a.m. in a Louisville UPS plant.

One can draw out these connections in academic prose, of course, but it quickly becomes haranguing and tedious. Shelley and Pinsky suggest that these rhythms can be more effectively portrayed by the magic of literary language, through a simple but powerful meditation on the relation between form and content, and a rigorous placing of subjective experience in the context of historical and institutional decisions. Did anybody change their life because of “Shirt”? Probably not. Anyway, I was offering my students something more like “critical reflection” than like Rilke’s soul-altering encounter.⁶ Still, Shelly insists, and I think he is right, that whenever two thoughts, two words, that had been kept separated come together, something crazy and unexpected might just happen. Shelley’s favorite word in “A Defense of Poetry” is *unapprehended*. That is the funny thing about change: you cannot script it, and you might not recognize it.

Sometimes I wonder if the classroom is a place particularly resistant to change. We do, after all, want our students to grow up, get to work, learn something. As Charles Taylor (2007: 29) puts it, somewhat mournfully, “Each one of us as we grew up has had to take on the disciplines of disenchantment, and we regularly reproach each other for our failings in this regard.” There is our inner Weber again, telling us that the time has come to put away childish things. As Weber (1948 [1917]: 155) himself put it in the lecture’s most famous passage: “To the person who cannot bear the fate of the times like a man, one must say: may he rather return silently, without the usual publicity build-up of renegades, but simply and plainly. The arms of the old churches are opened widely and compassionately for him. After all, they do not make it hard for him.” In contrast to this nostalgic and solitary quest, Weber himself joins those who are clear-eyed about the world in which they live and who will get on with the task of meeting its challenges: “Nothing is gained,” he concludes, “by yearning and tarrying alone, and we shall act differently. We shall set to work and meet the ‘demands of the day,’ in human relations as well as in our vocation” (156).

And yet the stubborn fact remains that the modern world is hardly disenchanted. I am not speaking of religious fundamentalism, which is for the most part *highly* disenchanted, but rather of the stranger, marginal, yet astonishingly widespread persistence of a whole host of beliefs, orientations, and practices that Christopher Partridge (2005: 4) has dubbed “occulture.”⁷ It has long seemed that emergent spiritualities, which tend toward the narcissistic and personal, are a perfect match for the world order of the contemporary West, where religion is refitted as a luxury lifestyle option. Partridge insists, however, that entwined with this superficiality is an important level of dissatisfaction with the rationalization and instrumentalization that were for Weber and other prophets of modernity the mark of our maturity. In particular, he finds a remarkable “spiritual” subtext in contemporary youth culture, from goth and rave subcultures to contemporary neopagan, holistic healing, and environmental movements, and outward to what he calls a “general ambient spirituality” evident in popular culture at large (52). None of this is particularly new, of course, and the fact that it has registered only recently with academic elites might tell us something about our own intellectual subculture. Perhaps disenchantment is less about making the world safe for democracy and more about securing the status of those elites who have managed to take on the disciplines of disenchantment.

To us, perhaps, enchantment seems inherently undemocratic.⁸ Mean-

while, out there, the arms of the “old churches” are still open, but so are the arms of the new churches, and the nonchurches, and all the other collectives that make up Partridge’s occulture. The false binarism by which Fish runs tenure together with the crypto-religiosity of the “cloistered setting,” implying that we cannot have one without the other, links enchantment to some bygone era of religious belief. But the facts suggest otherwise.

Defenses of enchantment, fairy tales, and the like generally confine themselves to arguing that such things allow children, naturally given to magical thinking anyway, a trial run at the complications of the adult world. Eventually we grow up, we learn that frogs do not turn into princes and magic rings do not access mysterious powers; we take on the disciplines of disenchantment, we get down to work. There is a kind of instrumental pedagogy here — of “skills” and “targets” and their “transferability” — all too familiar to those of us who teach for a living. Yet children do not by and large live so instrumentally. “The child,” John Milbank (2005: 7) writes, “is not initially concerned just with his own success or otherwise, but also with the very *defining* of worthwhile projects to pursue. The latter depends upon a conception of an ideal world, to whose ideality such projects would contribute.”

Helping students “define worthwhile projects to pursue” is something like a baseline definition of pedagogy itself, and yet if I am honest it is a long way from the more instrumentalized terms in which I typically think about my own teaching. Perhaps language like this has, for us, collected too many connotations of which we are suspicious.⁹ It was Weber, again, who warned professors not to behave like “prophets or saviors,” and whenever we do we are duly disciplined both by the reactionary right, with its hysteria about “tenured radicals,” and the pragmatic left, which wants us to get serious and stop dilly-dallying. It might help, then, to listen to where Milbank takes this idea:

Nor is play just a preparation for reality. To the contrary, the sane adult must continue to play — to keep the world of her work in perspective, she must continue to imagine other realities. To sustain, for example, a political critique, within the United Kingdom, she must retain the mythical sense that the island of Britain belongs not just to the current government but to nature, to the past, to the future, and to many hidden communities and changing racial configurations. Perhaps the great British-Irish literary theme . . . that the islands really belong to the *Longaevi*, the fairies (or else to the giants) is to do with just such an exercise of the critical imagination. (ibid.)

On this argument, any politics worth the name is in an important sense child-like, for it remains committed to “impossible” alternatives, most important among them the impossibilities that adhere in a future yet to be achieved, the worthwhile project yet to be defined.

Children, of course, are themselves supposed to be representatives or symbols of better and different future possibilities, yet perhaps nothing suggests how ruthlessly our own imaginations have been curtailed than our society-wide tendency to think of childhood and especially youth not as a potential to be cherished but as a problem to be managed. Children are always being rhetorically celebrated, yet most policy decisions of the past quarter century suggest that we do not care very much about children, and even less about youth.¹⁰ As Henry Giroux (2004) points out, it tells us a great deal about our own collective imagination of the future that we incarcerate our youth at an astonishing rate and celebrate childhood largely through fantasies of limitless consumption. The most victimized young people do not end up in our college classrooms, but even the ones who do arrive there will have been subjected to regimes of standardized testing, surveillance, and commercialization that make them simultaneously docile and anxious. This gloomy situation, Giroux concludes, “may say less about the reputed apathy of the populace than it might about the bankruptcy of the old political languages and the need for a new language and vision for expanding and deepening the meaning of democracy.”

To suggest that such a “new language and vision” might be found in stories about fairies and giants — or their functional equivalents — is either silly or exactly right, and with each passing day I am more and more inclined to the latter. This would tie our pedagogy firmly, though not exclusively, to what most of us mean by “literature.” The unapprehended combinations for which I seek, and which seem to me necessary for feeding any sustained resistance to the management of our professional and public lives, are created nowhere with such force and power as in the poems, plays, stories, novels, and nonfiction that circulate in our classrooms. If we could imagine unapprehended pedagogy as a way to help students *not* grow up — or, more accurately, to grow up differently — would that make it continuous with the decisions we make about what we will pass on to our children, both what we teach and how we teach it?

This would raise the stakes enormously; it would make teaching more like parenting and less like checking in at the office. Perhaps this seems conservative. But despite the grotesque manner in which contemporary Ameri-

can conservatives have clambered all over the (heterosexual) nuclear family, there is nothing intrinsically conservative about good parenting. Indeed, one could argue that it is just about the most revolutionary thing going. Or perhaps it seems demeaning; we are supposed to respect our students and recognize their legitimacy as fellow citizens and almost-adults. But teaching has always been about changing people, which sometimes means helping them to realize and articulate what they already know, and sometimes means telling them things they do not want to hear. What if we thought of student life, in this sense, as a continuation of childhood? As, that is to say, a space worth protecting from adult work not because children's primitive fantasies cannot handle adult realism but because those "fantasies" provincialize adult realism, show it up as the pinched and unimaginative thing it can too easily become, and (if we are lucky) suggest new languages for meeting the demands of the day.

■

The fact of the matter is that the neo-Weberian management culture that has been my target throughout this essay has been busy peddling its own fantasies. And the demands of the day are shifting as the scale of the current crisis becomes clear. Not to put too fine a point on it, management culture has made a colossal mess of things. So although everybody expects that the humanities will take the biggest hit in the current economic climate, the financial meltdown might become something of an opportunity for us. For what has now become clear to almost everybody is that large swaths of the managerial class, from McKinsey and Company to Merrill Lynch to the Bush administration (our first president with an MBA, remember?) have spent the last decade or so *just making stuff up*. If the questions of meaning, value, and self-transformation have been carjacked and driven off a cliff by a class currently in more disrepute even than the pointy-headed liberal elitists who supposedly populate our universities, this might be the time for us to start driving again.

Notes

1. For more on Worldport, including videos, see Wilson 2009. For a more lyrical account, see McPhee 2005.
2. Funding Universe 2009.
3. Barclay 2000: 97. The program was reaffirmed and expanded in 1990 and then again in 2000 in order to bring it into line with NAFTA.
4. In 1986 Reagan asked Congress for \$100 million in aid for the Nicaraguan rebels: “If we don’t want to see the map of Central America covered in a sea of red, eventually lapping at our own borders, we must act now” (Reagan 1986).
5. See Fiscal Policy 2004.
6. Not that critical reflection is anything to sneeze at. For important defenses of the aesthetic in relation to critical reflection, see Waters 2005 and 2007. For a related argument that connects the aesthetic to globalization and everyday busyness, see Robbins 2001 and 2002.
7. Meanwhile, Christian fundamentalists agree with Richard Dawkins that Harry Potter is a bad influence on children. See Beckford and Khan 2008 and Dyer 2007.
8. For an analysis of the relationship between democracy and enchantment, see Bilgrami 2006 and Raza 2008, including subsequent posts to this Web symposium. For an argument that connects enchantment to the way sexuality is lived today, see Warner 2004.
9. The sharp-eyed will note that Milbank is himself a Christian theologian. Yet nothing in his formulation strikes me as especially “theological.” In fact, the presupposition that “enchantment” is a stalking horse for “religion” is both a conceptual mistake and a pedagogical problem.
10. Leonard Cohen’s song “The Future” is the best commentary on this.

Works Cited

- ADE Ad Hoc Committee on Staffing. 2007. “Education in the Balance: A Report on the Academic Workforce in English.” www.mla.org/report_aw (accessed 1 June 2009).
- Barclay, Lou Anne A. 2000. *Foreign Direct Investment in Emerging Economies: Corporate Strategy and Investment Behavior in the Caribbean*. London: Routledge.
- Beckford, Martin, and Urmee Khan. 2008. “Harry Potter Fails to Cast Spell over Professor Richard Dawkins.” *Telegraph*, 25 October. www.telegraph.co.uk/news/3255972/Harry-Potter-fails-to-cast-spell-over-Professor-Richard-Dawkins.html.
- Bilgrami, Akeel. 2006. “Occidentalism, the Very Idea: An Essay on Enlightenment and Enchantment.” *Critical Inquiry* 32: 381–411.
- Bousquet, Marc. 2008. *How the University Works: Higher Education and the Low-Wage Nation*. New York: New York University Press.
- Delta Cost Project. 2009. “Trends in College Spending.” www.deltacostproject.org/analyses/delta_reports.asp (accessed 21 April 2009.)
- Donoghue, Frank. 2004. “The Uneasy Relationship between Business and the Humanities.” *American Academic* 1.1: 93–109.

- . 2008. *The Last Professors: The Corporate University and the Fate of the Humanities*. New York: Fordham University Press.
- Dyer, Clare. 2007. "Teaching Assistant Quit in Protest at Harry Potter." *Guardian*, 8 June. www.guardian.co.uk/money/2007/jun/08/workandcareers.harrypotter.
- Fiscal Policy. 2004. "Immigrant Workers and the Minimum Wage in New York City." www.fiscalpolicy.org/ImmigrantWorkers&MinimumWage.pdf (accessed 26 February 2009).
- Fish, Stanley. 2009. "The Last Professor." *New York Times*, 18 January. fish.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/01/18/the-last-professor/.
- Funding Universe. 2009. "Jockey International, Inc." www.fundinguniverse.com/company-histories/Jockey-International-Inc-Company-History.html (accessed 26 February 2009).
- Giroux, Henry A. 2004. "Class Casualties: Disappearing Youth in the Age of George W. Bush." *Workplace* 6.1. www.cust.educ.ubc.ca/workplace/issue6p1/giroux04.html (accessed 21 April 2009).
- Glater, Jonathan D., and Eric Dash. 2008. "U.S. Buying More Loans to Students." *New York Times*, 7 November. www.nytimes.com/2008/11/08/business/08loan.htm.
- Knapp, Steven, and Walter Benn Michaels. 1982. "Against Theory." *Critical Inquiry* 8: 723–42.
- Lewin, Tamar. 2008a. "College May Become Unaffordable for Most in U.S." *New York Times*, 3 December. www.nytimes.com/2008/12/03/education/03college.html?em.
- . 2008b. "Tough Times Strain Colleges Rich and Poor." *New York Times*, 7 November. www.nytimes.com/2008/11/08/education/08college.html.
- Martin, Randy. 2002. *Financialization of Daily Life*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- McPhee, John. 2005. "Out in the Sort." *New Yorker*, 18 April.
- Milbank, John. 2005. "Fictioning Things: Gift and Narrative." *Religion and Literature* 37.3: 1–35.
- Partridge, Christopher. 2005. *The Re-enchantment of the West*. London: Continuum.
- Pinsky, Robert. 1990. *The Want Bone*. New York: Ecco.
- Raza, S. Abbas. 2008. "Introduction to the 3 Quarks Daily Online Seminar on Akeel Bilgrami's 'Occidentalism, The Very Idea.'" *3 Quarks Daily*, 3 September. 3quarksdaily.blogs.com/3quarksdaily/2008/09/introduction-to.html.
- Reagan, Ronald. 1986. "Remarks to Jewish Leaders during a White House Briefing on United States Assistance for the Nicaraguan Democratic Resistance," 5 March. www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1986/30586c.htm.
- Robbins, Bruce. 2001. "Very Busy Just Now: Globalization and Harriedness in Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Unconsoled*." *Comparative Literature* 53: 426–41.
- . 2002. "The Sweatshop Sublime." *PMLA* 117: 84–97.
- Shelley, Percy Bysshe. 1977 [1820]. "A Defense of Poetry." In *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, ed. Donald H. Reiman and Sharon B. Powers, 478–508. New York: W. W. Norton.
- Stallybrass, Peter. 2007. "Against Thinking." *PMLA* 122: 1580–87.
- Taylor, Charles. 2007. *A Secular Age*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Warner, Michael. 2004. "Tongues Untied: Memoirs of a Pentecostal Boyhood." In

- Curiouser: On the Queerness of Children*, ed. Steven Bruhm and Natasha Hurley, 215–24. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Waters, Lindsay. 2005. “Literary Aesthetics: The Very Idea.” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 16 December.
- . 2007. “The Rise of Market Criticism in the U.S.” *Context* 20: 21–24.
- Weber, Max. 1948 [1917]. “Science as a Vocation.” In *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, trans. and ed. H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, 129–56. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Wilson, Tracy V. 2009. “How UPS Works.” How Stuff Works. money.howstuffworks.com/ups.htm (accessed 26 February 2009).

