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BEING IN SHADOW AND LIGHT

Academics in Post/Conflict
Higher Education

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WITHOUT TRIAL
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Edited by Dina Zoe Belluigi



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10. The Conflict of the Faculties, Again

Richard Hudson-Miles

Introduction

In this chapter, textual fragments and composite images constitute 'scenes' of university history. They narrate histories of conflict. Perhaps, conflictual histories. They are broadly chronological but are not intended to be teleological. Rather, what follows is a non-linear scenography of the Western university. I prefer 'scene' to analysis, exegesis, exposition, interpretation, and such terms associated with theoreticist critique. My approach is inspired by Jacques Rancière's in his book *Aisthesis* (2013, p. ix). A scene suggests something theatrical, constructed, a stage for encounter. A scene is also a space which foregrounds sensible knowledge. Perhaps, it allows us to recognise the sensible fabric which precedes and delimits intelligible knowledge. Classical philosophy has always been sceptical about the merits of artistic knowledge. In response, Rancière (2003, pp. 45–47) weaponised the Platonic portmanteau 'theatrocracy' (*Laws*, III, p. 701; 1975, p. 154) to describe the aesthetic effects of political subjectification. In particular, the effects of a subject making itself visible within a discourse which would otherwise render them invisible. My scenography therefore relates to both the politics of aesthetics and the aesthetics of politics (Rancière, 2004). It is a contribution towards deconstructing the logocentric privilege afforded to textual expression above oral or visual, especially within academic writing.

In the chapter, I counter the words spoken on conflict and the university by Derrida (2004), Kant (1979 [1798]) and others, with images of the university invented through visual art. Some of the source images romantically depict a university devoid of conflict. Occasionally,

they present trivialised forms of university conflict, as if to disguise the always already conflictual character of the university that Kant first identified. At other times, the gaze of these images of the university drifts away from its lofty ideas and celebrated figures, focusing instead upon the sensory effects of prosaic university life. I want to suggest, following Readings (1996), that the contemporary university exists in a state of psychic conflict with its repressed foundational ideals. As an implicit form of base materialism (Bataille, 1985, pp. 20–24), the following scenography demonstrates how such lofty foundational ideals are constantly reworked, even sullied, by the material, sensory and political experience of the university, on a day-to-day basis. Finally, I wish to show that the discursive and aesthetic conditions which make the university recognisable as such are also those which render its conflicts inaudible or invisible.

This scenography also contributes to a tradition of critique. Specifically, concerning the trajectory of the neoliberal university (Brown, 2015; Raunig, 2013; Edu-Factory Collective, 2011; Readings, 1996). To use Marxian terminology, one might describe these as conflict theories. Against corporate mission statements, value for money rhetoric and interpellative university branding, voices of university ‘dissensus’ (Rancière, 2010) have grown exponentially during the last decade. The title ‘university’ is derived from the Latin *universitas*, meaning the universe, the whole, the totality or the world. Anyone who has worked in a contemporary university knows that its titular universality is a very bad joke. From my perspective, the university seems narrow and unrepresentational. Rancière’s (1995, p. 8) work has taught me that repressive politics always coalesces around the ‘rational deployment of the One’, whereas emancipatory politics enacts a disidentification, slowly, as the political *universitas* forms outside the ivory tower, or within its undercommons (Harney and Moten 2013). Increasingly, voices of opposition to free market university financialisation (McGettigan, 2013) are coalescing with pluriversal voices of difference (de Sousa Santos, 2018) as a counter-hegemonic multitude (Hardt and Negri, 2005). Within this movement, each articulation of ‘the part of those who have no part’ (Rancière 1999, pp. 29–30) is a red brick removed from the consensus reality of the neoliberal university. To borrow the words of

Gordon White, the university is an eight-hundred-year project which feels like it is winding down.

I have been asked to define a position; to specify my terms of engagement, to delineate belligerents, weapons, tactics. Furthermore, to make my voice audible. Hesitantly, I write about conflict, from a position of conflict. During this last decade, I have repeatedly argued (Hudson-Miles, 2022, 2021; Hudson-Miles and Broadey, 2019; Miles, 2016b) that the arts and humanities simply do not fit within the HE sector's instrumental logic of economisation (Brown, 2015). With the artistic collective @.ac [www.attackdotorg.com], I have attempted to facilitate ways that the art school can 'write back' to such economisation. By working with the UK alternative art school movement, I have relearned the art school's civic and political function (Hudson-Miles, Goodman and Jones, 2021; Miles, 2016a). If pushed, I would say that I declare, like Herbert Read, for anarchy. Specifically, the an-arkhé of the popular university. I declare, then, for Mondragon, for The School of the Damned, for the Copenhagen Free University, for the Other MA, for the Anti-University London, for the Global Autonomous University, the Lincoln Social Sciences Centre, for the Free Black University. I also declare for the abolition of student debt. My position is forged at the intersection of these struggles, through years of precarious hourly-paid contracts, through redundancy letters, through the 'vampire castle' (Fisher, 2018, pp. 737–746). Through an eight-year struggle to complete a PhD whilst teaching a strictly regimented 37.5 hour working week in a further education (FE) college. Through the oxymoronic identity of the working-class academic. Through a 175-mile commute to work. Through fifteen years of pay suppression. Through unmanageable workloads, rampant managerialism and the infiltration of academic work into everyday life.

I am writing this in late October, watching the autumnal rain bounce off expanding puddles on the ground. The leaves on the oak trees outside have long since turned golden, then russet and now fall to rot. The rain, momentarily, makes me think of Althusser writing his last words in the hospital overlooking the cemetery at Père Lachaise. Althusser used the metaphor of a single raindrop, veering off course, to describe a new philosophy of aleatory materialism. This is the

materialism of the encounter, the swerve, the throw of the dice, the chain reaction which sets off a string of unpredictable events. For this unfinished work (Althusser, 2006, pp. 163–207), Althusser turned to Ancient Greek atomism, a comprehensive materialist philosophy which denied teleological or divine theories of historical progress. In any given age, there are always rival epistemic regimes competing for the right to interpret and validate sensible information. In pagan Britain, way before Enlightenment rationality stamped its name over the university, this time was called *Samhuinn*. This was the end of the pagan year, the season of death and finality, the time of no time. Here, the worlds of the living and the dead became interconnected. Rituals were enacted and spiritual forces invoked. During *Samhuinn*, the glow of reason ceded to darkness and irrationality. This was a time for licentiousness, and for abandoning public personas. In what Bakhtin would later call the carnivalesque (1984 [1965]), men dressed as women, and women as men. Farm gates were unlocked and animals freed (Carr-Gomm, 1994, p. 70). As part of this, *Samhuinn* represented the renewed hope for change. In contemporary academia, this is the period when the university machinery kicks back into gear. The time of dreams and debts, when the loans which shackle students to the neoliberal system are issued and cashed. Over the last years, the University and College Union (UCU) have launched repeated industrial action in protest over low pay and untenable working conditions. Echoing the chthonic forces summoned during *Samhuinn*, their most recent campaign was called UCU Rising (UCU 2023). The composite images in the following scenography are partially composed of mobile phone reportage from previous UCU strikes. This conflict photography encounters the pictorialist exorcism of conflict and the university voices which speak, incessantly, of conflict. For my part, I offer these encounters as dialectal images. That is, moments ‘wherein what has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation’ (Benjamin 1999, p. 462; n2a, p. 3)—encounters, images, memories, which can be retrieved as weapons in service of a struggle renewed.

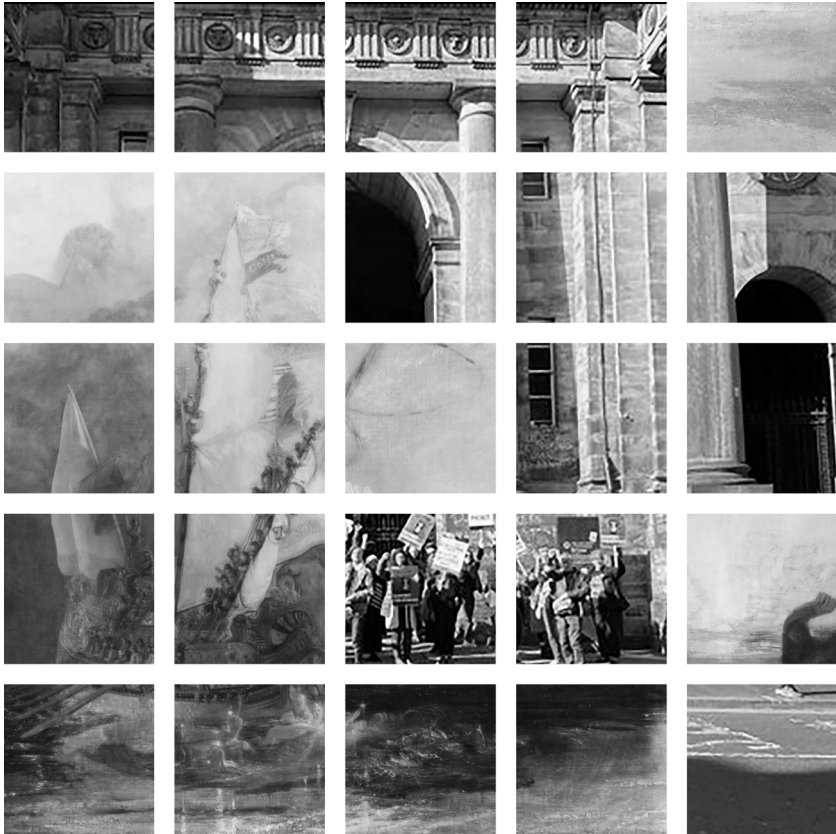


Fig. 10.1 After Samuel Bough (1853), *Snowballing Outside Edinburgh University*. Scene created by the author from images sourced, with permission, from UCU members and the digital archives of Yale's Paul Mellon Centre for British Art', <https://photoarchive.paul-mellon-centre.ac.uk/collections>

1. Conflict

Composed of texts on the university and the teaching of the humanities written between 1975 and 1990, Derrida's *Du droit à la philosophie* [The Right to Philosophy] (1990) was published in English in two volumes, *Who's Afraid of Philosophy?* (2002) and *Eyes of the University* (2004). These texts are Derrida's most important contributions to the philosophy of education. The second volume includes an influential essay called 'Mochlos, or the Conflict of the Faculties' (2004, pp. 83–113). This concerns the Enlightenment ideals of the university, and the persistent internal and external conflicts which undermine those ideals. From a close reading of Kant's *The Conflict of the Faculties* (1979 [1798]), Derrida builds a discourse on the responsibility of the university in the age of its contemporary techno-political, transnational and bureaucratic institutionalisation. One of his aims, in returning to Kant, is to uncover an original conflict within the foundational university ideal which could be mobilised as a hauntology of the conflicted university of the present.

The Conflict of the Faculties was one of Kant's last published works. It was considered marginal before Derrida's critical resurrection. It analysed the structural dynamic of the early modern Prussian university, which was composed of four interrelated faculties. Of these, Medicine, Theology and Law were understood as 'higher' faculties, given that they directly equipped students with the skills necessary to enter the major graduate professions. The remaining faculty of Philosophy was understood as 'lower'. This was because it was presumed to merely service the other faculties. Kant reverses this understanding, arguing that philosophy was the only autonomous discipline, and therefore the true higher faculty—indeed, that philosophy is the essential and irreducible essence of the university. For Kant (1979 [1798], pp. 33–43), the three higher faculties are heteronomous, meaning that they ultimately answer to some external authority, law or standard. The faculty of Theology, for example, is delimited by, and reproduces, the doctrines of the church. Similarly, the faculty of Law teaches the skills of legal interpretation, logical argument and jurisprudence. However, they still operate within the constraints of state legislation produced by 'the

precepts of the legislative power' (p. 39). Furthermore, by proceeding by an oath sworn on a Holy Book, all legislative processes submit to the authority of God and religion. Kant concedes that the medical faculty is freer than the first two. Rather than external laws, medicine is regulated by professional bodies. This reflects the professional autonomy of a self-determining discipline whose practices are so specialist that the state cannot dictate its limits. In the final analysis, however, medical practices are still subject to the laws of the state and what Kant calls the 'medical police'.

For Kant, the faculty of Philosophy is autonomous, meaning that it does not answer to the directives of an external authority. Instead, it inculcates the skills of reason, which allow its practitioners to independently determine truth from falsehood, or right from wrong. Philosophy therefore stands as the critical interlocutor of the supposedly higher university faculties. It pushes them towards disciplinary self-reflexivity whilst mitigating against instrumentalism. For Kant, Philosophy was the true higher faculty of the university. Kant's text therefore doubles as a foundational manifesto for the modern university of reason. As Derrida recognises, Kant's essay also implies that this university is essentially founded within conflict. This conflict is interfaculty, but also fought over divergent interpretations of the ends of education itself. Crudely put, this is a conflict between education as vocational training and education for education's sake.

Kant's reading of the university as an essentially rational institution haunts the contemporary university. Instead of reason, Readings (1996, p. 14) argues that our neoliberal universities are driven by the empty 'techno-bureaucratic notion of excellence'. 'Excellence', which is also the watchword of the modern service industries, has subsumed all preceding paradigms of the university. For Readings (1996, p. 59), this most influential historical model of the university was proposed by the Prussian minister and philosopher Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767–1835). The Humboldtian model emphasised the cultural function of university education. Politically, it was liberal-humanist. Pedagogically, it valorised the synthesis of research and teaching. This philosophy found its physical manifestation in the University of Berlin, 1810, arguably the first modern university. The philosophical 'founding fathers' of this university were

the German Idealist philosophers Schelling (1803), Fichte (1794; 1807), Schleiermacher (1808) and Humboldt himself. Collectively, these thinkers figure the university's mission as the development of *bildung*, or national character building. Here, the university operates in a quasi-autonomous relationship with the state. Instead of Kant's dynamic conflict, we have a relationship of benevolent reciprocity. The state authorises the university, which in turn realises national consciousness and cultural unity. The university professor is the living embodiment of this ideal. Intrinsic to this are the concepts of *Lehrfreiheit* and *Lernfreiheit*. In turn, the freedom to teach and the freedom to learn, outside of state interference. These concepts understand education as the disinterested pursuit of truth, achieved through a perfect synthesis of research and teaching. The contemporary concept of 'academic freedom', protected in a very limited sense in legislation, is a diluted version of these Humboldtian ideals.

Ultimately, as Derrida (2004, p. 98, 103) recognises, Kant's model of the university is its own rhetorical front. It depends on the delineation of various university borders, which also serve as battle lines. Firstly, the frontlines between the lower and higher faculties. Secondly, between the university inside and outside. In the name of academic freedom, Kant wished to stage an 'unavoidable conflict' between the 'scholars in the university and businessmen of learning or instruments of government power' (2004, p. 103). Romantic art supplements the frontlines between autonomous rationality and heteronomous commerciality with a third term: sensibility.

Take the example of the nineteenth-century painting of Edinburgh University by Samuel Bough, incorporated within the dialectical image above (Fig. 10.1). A self-taught artist, Bough began his career as a theatrical scene painter. Maintaining a painting practice through this income, he rose to prominence, becoming one of the most influential Scottish landscape painters and eventually being accepted by the Royal Scottish Academy. Given his outsider status, it is perhaps unsurprising that Bough's painting relegates Edinburgh University, high temple of the 'Athens of the North', to the backdrop to a scene of juvenile reverie. Bough's gaze rests on footsteps in the snow, frosted lintels, the hubbub and commixture of the crowd. 'Snowballing Outside Edinburgh

University' was painted at the tail end of the Romantic era, and two years after the Great Exhibition of 1851, arguably the high point of Victorian cultural imperialism. It bears the hallmarks of a reckoning between rival regimes of meaning. Firstly, the classical age of reason, order and idealisation, embodied in the architecture of the University. Secondly, the age of industry, mercantile capitalism and the imperial nation-state, all of which would transfigure the ideal of the university in the centuries to come. Finally, the 'cult of sensibility' which became popular in mid-eighteenth-century Britain. This emphasised emotion and imagination. Here, the capacity to feel and empathise become valued over the capacity to rationalise. Though the second paradigm of marketisation has arguably become preeminent, the others still haunt the university, perhaps as forgotten dreams.

Unfortunately, no ideological or rhetorical university battle line can hold in the face of absolutist state power. Following the publication of *Religion within the Limits of Mere Reason* (1793), Kant was censured by King Frederick William II (1744–1797) for daring to 'distort and disparage many of the cardinal and basic teachings of the Holy Scriptures and of Christianity'. Kant was accused of acting against his 'paternal purpose' and 'duty as a teacher of youth' (1979 [1798], p. 11), and threatened with severe punishment if this irresponsible behaviour continued. As Readings (1996, pp. 59–60) suggests, ultimately the Kantian university of reason is a fiction, which collapses when institutionalised. This is not to suggest that the fiction of the university of reason, nor the university of culture, nor the university of sensibility, should be hastily abandoned as a historical oddity. Especially, when questions of university responsibility, or the ends of university education, are raised.



Fig. 10.2 After Nathaniel Buck (1731), *The South West Prospect of the University and City of Oxford*. Scene created by the author from images sourced, with permission, from UCU members and the digital archives of Yale's Paul Mellon Centre for British Art', <https://photoarchive.paul-mellon-centre.ac.uk/collections>

2. Two Worlds

The battle lines of the university were made apparent in quite a different way during the University of Paris strike of 1229. Active from 1150, and officially recognised by the French monarchy in 1200 and the Catholic church in 1215, this was one of the Western world's earliest universities. Alongside the University of Bologna, founded 1088, the University of Paris was the model replicated by a wave of mediaeval universities established in Europe throughout the thirteenth century. Like Kant's eighteenth-century university at Königsberg, the University of Paris was composed of three higher faculties of Medicine, Theology and Law, and a lower faculty of the Arts. The conflict of 1229, however, did not result from the Kantian frontlines between reason and instrumentalism. Instead, the confrontation erupted from a spatial, cultural and ideological conflict commonly referred to as 'town and gown'.

This phrase is ubiquitous today, frequently used within media reports of anti-social student behaviour. The ancient university town of Cambridge, UK, has a gastropub named after this cultural division. The phenomenon has also been studied repeatedly in the social sciences. Writing in the *American Journal of Sociology* in 1963, Delbert C. Miller analysed the power relations in an American university town, which he referred to pseudonymously as 'Cerebrille'. He noticed a distinct separation between the values of the university and local communities. For him, Cerebrille was a town composed of 'two worlds'. On the one hand, locals who were concerned with community and personal relationships. On the other, academic cosmopolitans who were largely indifferent to the local community and their issues. For these academics, Cerebrille was simply one provincial town amongst many. Deep down, the university workers knew that their personal career ambitions could be realised equally well elsewhere. Indeed, these cosmopolitan academics were more likely to channel their intellectual energies towards political and cultural centres like Washington. Though some university leaders involved themselves with community institutions, the experience of faculty staff would remain largely untapped. Miller sees this as a missed opportunity. He argues that the university and community have settled into a compromised social contract regulated largely by self-interest. For Miller, each of the

two communities lives 'in peace with, and contributes to, the other, but neither is able to harness the total potentialities for the good life which is inherent in the people' (Miller, 1963, p. 443).

Miller's Aristotelian conclusion seems almost comically nostalgic today. Only the most ideological or romantic thinkers would argue that the neoliberal university is in any way concerned with promulgating 'the good life', communally nor individually (Aristotle, 1992, p. 187; *Politics*, 1278b, pp. 15–30). Media representations have done much to integrate the idea of a university with the specifics of a particular locale. The recent British TV show *Endeavour* (2012–2022), about the early life of a young Oxford graduate and fledgling detective, featured the quads of Christ Church so frequently that unfamiliar viewers would be forgiven for assuming that Oxford was nothing more than University Colleges and their estates. The cloisters and dining hall of Christ Church also served as the backdrop to the *Harry Potter* series of family fantasy movies. These simulations, implicitly or explicitly, now precede our experiences of these universities, whose sign-value therefore includes magic, derring-do, the roman-à-clef, alongside academic excellence. Commercial art, designed to appeal to aesthetes, tourists and local sensibilities alike, also has a part to play in this chain of signification. When the Buck Brothers, the eighteenth-century English engravers, created a prospect of Oxford (Fig. 14), they purposely integrated the city and university within a pictorialist landscape designed for mass appeal. Representations like these prefigure and reproduce one another, in a procession of simulacra (Baudrillard, 1994). The consequence is that the university is not just a metonym for its host city but the reality of that city itself. However, despite the work of national research councils, local government initiatives, widening participation departments and student unions, most would still recognise the persistence of the town versus gown dichotomy.

This phrase dates back to the early mediaeval universities, where university students and staff would be visibly demarcated from fellow citizens due to their dress and language. Unlike contemporary universities, they lacked the enclosed campuses which delineate the cultural border separating town and academy. Masters and students would live in city lodgings; teaching spaces would also be rented from the city. This gave the institution certain powers of leverage against their

host cities. Students and staff were given privileged status which, if withdrawn, may result in the university decamping to another town. This distinction was performatively displayed through dress. Under the influence of the Catholic church, the students wore monastic robes and shaved their heads in tonsure. The area around the University of Paris was known as the Latin Quarter because of the preponderance of Latin, the language of academic citizens of the time, rather than vernacular French, in this area.

The riot of 1229 occurred during the Parisian *mardi-gras* celebrations, following Shrove Tuesday. This is still a significant day in the Parisian cultural calendar. Meaning 'Fat Tuesday', it is a Bacchanalian feast of drinking, music and excess. Like the carnivalesque described by Bakhtin, the Parisian *mardi-gras* was a space where the 'extreme corporative and caste divisions of the mediaeval social order' (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 10) were cast aside. Social hierarchy ceded to familiarity. Bodies intermingled and new identities adopted. Like all mediaeval carnivals, social authority figures were satirised. Bakhtin argues that masquerades allow people to adopt new personalities and social roles. For him, the carnivalesque is a political and aesthetic mode: 'people were, so to speak, reborn for new, purely human relations. These truly human relations were not only a fruit of imagination or abstract thought; they were experienced' (p. 10).

The *mardi-gras* of 1229 achieved the opposite effect to Bakhtin's carnivalesque. A student fracas erupted after a drunken dispute with a local tavern landlord. After being beaten and thrown out of the tavern, the students returned the following day to take revenge. The tavern was ransacked and a riot ensued, with various shops in the vicinity being damaged. Under the protection of the Catholic church, students were usually protected from the local authorities. However, following the pressure of an appeal to the Pope, the university granted permission to punish the guilty students. Immediately, a gang of armed city guardsmen rounded up the first students they could find, killing several of them.

The university responded by going on strike. Classes were cancelled for two years and students and staff dispersed to other cities. This had a measurable effect on the local area, given that many local businesses relied on university rental incomes. Gorochov (2018) has called this

'the great dispersion'. Today, this might be called a 'brain drain'. Some scholars quit teaching altogether, many moved cities to revitalise the teaching in other European universities. Henry III persuaded some to come to Oxford, which had stagnated since its own dispersion in 1208. Here, scholars fled to Cambridge to form a rival university after persecution from townsfolk.

The two-year Paris university strike was also notable for the role of what contemporary socialists call scab labour. This is a pejorative for workers who cross picket lines, therefore undermining industrial action. According to Demkovich (2013), the teaching roles were filled in part by itinerant Dominican monks, who otherwise 'lived off the alms they begged' (p. 440). Their role as strike-breakers caused wide resentment amongst the university faculty. The Dominicans were harassed and taunted. As well as having mud and waste thrown at them, students turned their name into the pun *Domini Canus*. To emphasise the joke, students would bark like dogs whenever one of the 'begging friars' walked past (p. 440–441).

Self-evidently, the history of the university is marked by incomprehension and antagonism with its local community. However, Miller's lament of missed opportunities needs to be tempered against the dismal reality of recent partnerships between local business and the university. For example, the partnership between Ohio State University and Ford Motors in 1994. Ford had a large car production plant in Ohio. Their ambition for this partnership was to implement the 'Total Quality Management' procedures, which had exponentially increased the productivity of workers at the production, into the university. As a quid pro quo, Ford would receive educated graduates who 'understand quality principles and concepts' and are 'ready to hit the ground running' (Ohio State University, 1994; cf. Readings, 1996, pp. 21–22). The TQM ideology, which has been adopted widely by universities since the 1990s (Meirovich and Romar, 2006), depends upon a singular and unchallenged problematic: that higher education is a business, and that students are its customers.



Fig. 10.3 After Filippo Juvarra (1729), *Album of Architectural Fantasies (Frontispiece), Dedicated to Lord Burlington*. Scene created by the author from images sourced, with permission, from UCU members and the digital archives of Yale's Paul Mellon Centre for British Art', <https://photoarchive.paul-mellon-centre.ac.uk/collections>

3. Excellence

Since its posthumous publication, Bill Readings' (1996) *The University in Ruins* has become a staple text within the field of Critical University Studies. Beyond suggesting the Kantian university of reason was always already a fiction, its central argument is that neoliberal capitalism has permanently destroyed all foundational ideals of the university.

As stated, for Readings, the 'University of Reason' has been subsumed by the 'University of Excellence'. This means that the university, which was formerly the sight of autonomous critical thinking, and the site where national culture was thought through and developed, is now simply one of many sites for the reproduction of corporate logic. The term 'excellence' is directly appropriated from the self-assessments and mission statements of corporate firms. Fundamentally, 'excellence' is the language of 'Total Quality Management' transposed to education. Within the university, 'excellence' serves a bureaucratic function within standardised assessments, customer satisfaction surveys and institutional quality audits. However, the term has become so ubiquitous it has achieved a form of transcendence, operating as the guiding principle of the university, in lieu of the aforementioned lost ideals. This is undoubtedly a reflection upon this increased influence of internal university Quality departments, since the first experiments in university TQM and managerialism in the 1990s. However, it is also a reflection of the financialisation, marketisation and commodification of higher education (McGettigan, 2013) which has rebranded universities as service providers and students as customers.

This is part of a broader neoliberal assault on the socius which Wendy Brown (2015) has simply called 'economisation'. For Brown (2015, p. 17) 'neoliberal reason [...] is converting the distinctly political character, meaning and operation of democracy's constituent elements into economic ones'. For Brown, one of the most important 'constituent elements' of democracy is education. For her, the economisation of education is also its neutralisation and depoliticisation. The term excellence is a superlative. Its intrinsic hyperbole protects it from criticism. Anyone who criticises the aspiration of excellence is de facto rendered a cynic or reactionary. This disguises the limitations of

'excellence' as an objective criterion. Excellence is an empty abstraction, malleable to the point where it becomes almost meaningless. If everything can be understood as excellent, from the service in fast food restaurants, to the management structure of corporations, to the calibre of undergraduate essays, then nothing can. Describing the publicity materials of modern American universities, Readings (1996, p. 12) observes 'they all claim that theirs is a unique educational institution. On the other hand, they all go on to describe this uniqueness in exactly the same way'.

That said, it would be a mistake to dismiss 'excellence' as empty corporate rhetoric. As an institutional principle, it is a mechanism of integration and standardisation (Readings, 1996, p. 29). The global university of today is standardised to the effect that one university curricula is roughly transferable to another. Legislation such as the Bologna Process (1999) was written to achieve precisely this integration within the European Union. The global standardisation of university education disguises the fact that it is ultimately a Western university model which is being expanded aggressively across global markets, as a new form of cultural imperialism. The globalisation of standardised Western business models, also globalises their malpractices and deleterious social effects. Ritzer (2009 [1993]) has referred to this as McDonaldisation, where society increasingly operates according to the principles of a fast-food restaurant. Here, every sector of Western culture becomes standardised and franchised, from food, to entertainment, to sport, to education. To speak of the global university today is really to speak of the McDonaldised university. Just like most metropolitan cities have a McDonald's restaurant, soon they will also have a campus from a leading Western university. One obvious consequence of this is cultural assimilation, through which hegemonic Western culture encloses all of the cultural and epistemological spaces where its subalterns might otherwise flourish. As Readings argues, the Humboldtian ideal of a university of national culture makes no sense in the era of globalisation. Here, 'capitalism swallows up the idea of the nation-state' (1996, p. 44), and formerly national universities become indivisible from the transnational corporations (TNCs) which dominate the globe.

As a TNC in its own right (Readings, 1996, p. 45), the franchising of degrees to overseas private for-profit providers has now become a major activity for Western universities (Healey, 2013). An extension of these practices has been the scramble to open overseas campuses in emerging markets. In the UK, the employers' representational body Universities UK recently announced a new UK University Overseas Campuses Network to facilitate this pedagogical-imperialist expansion. It initially includes seventeen UK universities with twenty-seven campuses located in seventeen countries across the world (Universities UK, 2021). Notable UK examples include the University of Nottingham, Malaysia (est. 2000); University of Reading, Malaysia (est. 2011), University of Birmingham, Dubai (est. 2018) and De Montfort University, Dubai (est. 2021). Reading's Malaysia campus has been a financial disaster, resulting in multi-million-pound losses and staff redundancies. Commenting on this, the Shadow Education Secretary Angela Rayner said that both staff and students were 'victims of a free-market experiment in higher education' (McGettigan and Adams, 2019). Beyond its original university campus in Coventry, West Midlands, UK, the Coventry University Group now has premises in London and Scarborough, North Yorkshire, as well as offices in China, Nigeria, Kenya and Pakistan, and 'global hubs' in Kigali, Rwanda, and Brussels, Belgium and Dubai, UAE.

TNCs are indifferent to national borders, ever since the processes of off-shoring begun by Western economies in the 1970s (Metters and Verma, 2008). Many TNCs move headquarters from state to state chasing tax benefits, cheaper labour and lighter regulations. One consequence is widespread wage suppression and unemployment (Slaughter and Swagel, 1997). This has only accelerated following advances in technology and communication systems which have almost achieved the full integration of the global labour markets. Like 'excellence', mythologies of 'multiculturalism' disguise the processes of domination at work beneath globalisation. The normalisation of online learning in a post-pandemic era has allowed Western universities to recruit even more international students, and to teach those students with significantly lower overheads. Criticisms of hastily constructed 'emergency remote teaching' (Hodges et al., 2020) to serve these new

markets might not be enough to preserve the traditional role of the lecturer within these contexts. In the age of online learning platforms, lecture capture software and metaverse integration, the final conflict of the faculties might be fought between the sovereignty of the university worker and the infinitely reproducible, globally scalable, digitally automated, online service model of the university.

Readings' symbol of the university in ruins is the Bard point columns at the State University of New York at Buffalo (1996, p. 169). These neoclassical Ionic columns were formerly located at the entrance to a bank in downtown Buffalo. Fragments were salvaged and reconstructed next to a lake on the SUNY campus. Deliberately, they have been arranged to resemble the ruined temples which young, aristocratic gentlemen would have encountered during their seventeenth- and eighteenth-century grand tours. This aesthetic sensibility is embodied in a book of 'architectural fantasies' (Fig. 10.3) sent by the architect Filippo Juvarra to Lord Burlington as a memento of his own grand tour of Italy. Over a third of these fictitious architectural landscapes depict ruins. The fascination with ruins, real and allegorical, was that for sensitive ears they spoke a lament for lost civilisation. For Ruggero (in Bianchi and Wolf, 2017, p. 258) 'a noble construction reflected the morality and freedom of the society that produced it'. A classical ruin, therefore, also represents morality, freedom and civil society in ruins. As a distant simulacrum of this, the Bard Point columns are mainly used today as a marketing image for the university or as the scenic background for student selfies.



Fig. 10.4 After C. C. Hamilton (1810), *The University Church of St. Mary's Oxford from Beside the Radcliffe Camera*. Scene created by the author from images sourced, with permission, from UCU members and the digital archives of Yale's Paul Mellon Centre for British Art', <https://photoarchive.paul-mellon-centre.ac.uk/collections>

4. Rebellion

Harvard University would eventually publish Readings' (1998) *The University in Ruins* on its own university press. Founded in 1636, it is the oldest higher education institution in the United States, and one of the most prestigious universities in the world. It was also the site of the first recorded university protest in North America. This is now referred to as The Great Butter Rebellion of 1766. Ostensibly, this was a protest about the quality of food in the university dining hall. One student leader, Asa Dunbar, climbed upon one of the dining hall tables and shouted 'Behold, our butter stinketh!—Give us, therefore, butter that stinketh not'. This became a protest slogan which echoed around campus in similar demonstrations throughout the next month. University authorities reacted heavy handedly, rounding up groups of students in order to coerce them to disclose the names of protest leaders. At one point, the university suspended almost half of the student body in an ultimately vain attempt to extract this information. Eventually, Harvard's Board of Overseers intervened and provided the canteen with better quality butter. However, the general quality of food remained poor. Buoyed by the success of their initial revolt, protests would resume in the following years. Firstly, the Bread and Butter Rebellion in 1805 and the Cabbage Rebellion in 1807. The latter was triggered specifically by the preponderance of maggots in the student's cabbage soup. These may seem like the inconsequential grievances of an entitled student bourgeoisie. Nevertheless, they represent an origin point for the ideological alignment of university students with anti-establishment struggle which would reach its apotheosis in the North American university protests of the mid-twentieth century.

The triviality of the 1766 Butter Rebellion's central object disguises a subtler connection to the revolutionary sentiment fomenting throughout America at this time. The symbolic epicentre of this was an ancient Elm tree at the heart of campus, which the students referred to as the 'Rebellion Elm'. It was given this name because it was the site where students gathered to protest. Preceding this, in the student imaginary, there was a powerful symbolic motivation for choosing this specific congregation point as mythic. This 'Rebellion Elm' is connected in a chain of signification back to another ancient Elm tree, known as the Liberty Tree of Boston. This tree stood outside the house of Andrew

Oliver, a Boston Merchant and government tax collector. The British parliament had recently imposed a hated Stamp Tax on the American colonies, which many people could not afford. According to Fischer (2015), the Stamp Tax was not just a form of revenue raising for the British imperialists. It was also a tax on liberty. Britain was concerned about the number of independent American lawyers, newspapers and educated citizens, all of which were fostering liberal values and critical opposition to British rule. The Stamp Tax introduced levies on newspaper advertisements, legal decrees, school diplomas or 'any grant of liberty, privilege, or franchise' (p. 21). It therefore explicitly sought to impede the spread of democracy.

Enraged by this oppressive tax, a large protest mob gathered by the tree outside Oliver's house. The crowd grew throughout the day, hanging an effigy of him from the tree's branches. Eventually, Oliver's house was ransacked and his wine cellar drunk dry. He promptly resigned the next day. Subsequently, the tree was adorned with a gold plaque which referred to it as the Tree of Liberty. The leaders of the protests became known as the Sons of Liberty, identifying themselves through specially manufactured medallions with an image of the Liberty Tree. Similar trees were symbolically adopted by other US cities in the years leading up to the American Revolution of 1775. In the War of Independence, the Liberty Tree became a symbol of resistance and could be seen on military flags and other insignia (Fischer, 2015, p. 30). Though apparently trivial, the Harvard protests symbolically aligned themselves with this growing revolutionary spirit. The student protest leaders self-identified as the Sons of Harvard. Their Rebellion Tree was their own metonym for a revolutionary generation.

In countries across the world, the university campus became a recurrent stage of anti-government protests. Each protest fed off and reanimated its antecedents like a dialectical image. The 1960s, 1968 in particular, witnessed an explosion of campus protests globally. Invariably, these were called by the student movement in the name of radical democracy. The Port Huron Statement (1962) was the manifesto of a radical American student movement called Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). They also revealed the hypocrisy of a country which mythologised Jefferson's (1776) Declaration of Independence, which enshrined 'that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life,

Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness'. Against this national-cultural ideology, the SDS pointed to the racial inequality in America's southern states, and 'its economic and military investments in the Cold War status quo'. The American military-industrial complex received exponentially increased governmental funding during the Vietnam War (1955–1975). This was justified by anti-Communist ideologies and national myths of manifest destiny (Fleming, 1968, p. 141). Against US militarism and imperialism, the SDS called for a participatory democracy, where all decisions were made through public gatherings, in the manner of the very earliest democracies of Ancient Athens. They also called for the replacement of 'power rooted in possession, privilege or circumstance by power and uniqueness rooted in love, reflectiveness, reason, and creativity' (SDS, 1962). This confrontation between love, reason and creativity and military-industrial complex would reach its nadir at Kent State University, Ohio. Here, the SDS had an active and militant branch, and were instrumental in organising protests. On May 4, 1970, the Nixon government called in the National Guard to suppress an anti-Vietnam protest. In order to defend American democracy against agitators, Guardsmen fired on these protests which were also called in the name of democracy. Four students were shot dead, nine wounded.

More recently, England saw a wave of university demonstrations opposing the trebling of undergraduate tuition fees in 2010. Like the Liberty Tree of Harvard, the most symbolic university buildings became the key sites of strategic interest for protestors. On November 24, 2010, Oxford University's most picturesque building, the world-famous Radcliffe Camera (Fig. 10.4), was stormed by student-activists wearing animal masks. Subsequently, they occupied its inner rooms and unfurled banners from its windows saying 'Fuck Fees' (The Oxford Student, 2010). This was part of a coordinated 'day of action' by the National Union of Students, following a joint demonstration with UCU on November 10. Alongside a peaceful mass-demonstration of roughly 50,000 people, the central headquarters of the governing Conservative Party were ransacked. Despite this, and subsequent protests, nothing has been done to reverse the commodification of HE enacted by the Browne review of 2010. Despite concerns about the sustainability of the current HE funding structure, the subject has become so politically toxic that politicians have become reluctant to change the status quo.



Fig. 10.5 After Henry William Bunbury (1772), *The Hopes of the Family... An Admission at the University*. Scene created by the author from images sourced, with permission, from UCU members and the digital archives of Yale's Paul Mellon Centre for British Art', <https://photoarchive.paul-mellon-centre.ac.uk/collections>

5. Representation

Derrida begins the Mochlos essay with the following sentences: ‘if we could say we (but have I not already said it?), we might perhaps ask ourselves: where are we? And who are we in the university where apparently we are? What do we represent? Whom do we represent?’ (Derrida, 2004, p. 83). These apparently elliptical sentences open on to important questions of representation and university responsibility. Derrida’s contention is that, if it is possible to think of a university responsibility, it must begin by posing the questions listed above; questions which increasingly make the universal character of the university creak under its ideological weight.

These questions are made with the most urgency under the banner of ‘decolonise the university’. These were initiated by the anti-colonial ‘Rhodes Must Fall’ protests at Cape Town University, South Africa during March 2015. Here, Black students demanded the removal of a statue of the British colonialist and documented white supremacist Cecil Rhodes. The statue was forged in bronze by Marion Walgate, who was one of the first white female sculptors in South Africa. Unveiled in 1934, it depicts Rhodes in a pensive position, chin in hand, and gazing into the middle distance. In his hand, he clutches a scroll, presumably in reference to the scholarships established in his name. This is a laboured reference to Rodin’s (1904) *The Thinker*, a sculpture which has now become the visual metonym for philosophy itself. Rhodes is seated on ‘the bench which he caused to be erected for his own use looking over the Cape Flats towards the glorious panorama of the Hottentots Hollands mountains’ (Mills, 2024). This composition invites comparisons to the Lincoln memorial made by Daniel Chester French in 1920. Such comparisons are both unfortunate and prescient. Unfortunate, because against Lincoln’s steely determination, iron grip and foreboding solemnity, Walgate’s Rhodes sculpture looks like a sentimental caricature. Prescient, because the statue of the ‘Great Emancipator’ Lincoln framed one of the defining moments of US political history. With Lincoln at his back, Martin Luther King Jr. delivered his legendary ‘I have a dream’ speech, following the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom on August 28, 1963. The connection between the nineteenth-century emancipation of the slaves and the twentieth-century civil rights struggle was obvious to a national,

and international, audience. Similarly, the connections between Rhodes' statue and the history of Apartheid in South Africa were obvious, to the point of affront. For the students of Cape Town University, Rhodes' statue was not just an homage to a white colonialist and racist but also an embodiment of the university's institutional racism. In a series of student protest actions throughout May, the Rhodes statue was covered in human excrement and wrapped in black bin bags (Schmahmann 2016), like a bathetic version of a Christo and Jean-Claude land work. On April 9, 2015, the sculpture was removed, symbolising the democratisation of a newly pluralist university and the first steps towards the fall of white privilege on campus.

The campaign spread to Oxford, where a statue commemorating Rhodes is displayed over the entrance to Oriel College. Rhodes used part of the wealth he personally expropriated from the colonies to establish a scholarship to allow underprivileged students from across the world to study at Oxford. However, as Rhodes believed that Africans were an inferior race, he stipulated that only white students should benefit from these posthumous awards (Keogh, 2016). Following numerous student protest actions, the college's governing body considered removing the statue. However, in May 2021 the college suspended removal plans, citing 'regulatory and financial challenges' (Mohdin, 2021). In June 2021, 150 scholars wrote a letter to Oriel stating that they would refuse to teach in the building adorned by Rhodes' statue (Peltier, 2021). Shortly after, in October 2021, Oriel installed a small white plaque, roughly two feet in length, at the base of Oriel's Corinthian columns. This plaque was installed during Black History Month (October), which originated in the USA as a consciousness-raising event, specifically intended to critically contextualise the tragic legacy of the African diaspora and Black resistance. The Oriel plaque includes only three short paragraphs, which acknowledged that 'some of [Rhodes'] activities led to great loss of life and attracted criticism in his day' but that his statue will not be removed 'following legal and regulatory advice'.

Following protests against similar public monuments, such as the statue of British slave trader Edward Colston on June 7, 2020 by Black Lives Matter protestors in Bristol, the UK government rushed through legislation to protect 'England's heritage' (UK Govt, 2021). These new legal protections insisted that the country's historic statues should be

'retained and explained', rather than defaced or erased from history. The Culture Secretary Oliver Dowden MP said that 'it is our duty to preserve our culture and heritage for future generations' (UK Govt, 2021). Speaking of the Rhodes plaque at Oriel, the Oxford Professor Dan Hicks described the plaque as an embarrassment and reveals the incoherence and futility of the ideology of 'retain and explain' (Clayton, 2021). For him, the plaque simply represents an additional memorial to Rhodes at the college.

Commenting on the contrived, earnest character of election campaign photography, Roland Barthes observed that such images presuppose 'a kind of complicity: a photograph is a mirror, what we are asked to read is the familiar, the known; it offers to the voter his own likeness, but clarified, exalted, superbly elevated into a type' (Barthes, 1993, p. 91). For Barthes, such images function as an 'anti-intellectual weapon' which 'tends to spirit away "politics"' (Barthes, 1993, p. 91). Public sculptures often carry out a similarly ideological function, naturalising historically contentious figures within smooth narratives of national culture and progress. Yet, art and artists have also historically disrupted such national-cultural ideology. Infamously, the critic Ruskin once described the 'art for art's sake' proto-abstraction of Whistler's *Nocturne in Black and Gold: The Falling Rocket* (1875) as 'flinging a pot of paint in the public's face' (Merrill, 1992, p. 1). The apparently reactionary character of Ruskin's dismissal is evidence that Whistler's art forced the critic, unwittingly, to recognise a paradigm shift in the nature of art. A similar paradigm shift, this time moving from the colonial to decolonial mindset, is evident in the shit thrown in Rhodes' face by CTU protesters. Hastily introduced statue-protection legislation, supported by governmental rhetoric and exaggerated outrage amongst the right-wing UK media, are merely knee-jerk attempts to contain a threat to the dominant-hegemonic world view; a threat which the establishment knows is impossible to contain. Herein lies a triple denial: the denial of politics, which is caricatured as mindless vandalism, and the denial of responsibility, through recourse a rearguard defence of the social order, presumed to be uncritically benevolent, through ideological concepts such as heritage, culture and education. Both disguise the more profound denial that the world could be otherwise.

One of the conclusions we can draw from this example is that the institutional structures of imperialism are incapable of reflecting on their legacy, nor reforming themselves within. De Sousa Santos' (2018, p. vii) *The End of the Cognitive Empire* begins by insisting that 'modern ideologies of political contestation have been largely co-opted by neoliberalism'. Therefore, 'the reconstruction or reinvention of confrontational politics requires an epistemological transformation'. For him, Western centric thought, in both radical and conservative form, has formed a fatal alliance which represses the 'epistemologies of the South'. For him, there is a permanent 'abyssal line', which demarcates Western thought from its others, and which Western universities are incapable of crossing without coercion.

If universities are incapable of reflecting on questions of representation and responsibility, then where can critical reason be located, if at all? Harney and Moten (2013) believe that genuinely counter-hegemonic thought still exists within the contemporary university, but only within what they call the 'undercommons'. Against the *universitas*, the undercommons is an endlessly deconstructing procession of intersectional disidentifications. It is composed of 'maroon communities of composition teachers, mentorless graduate students, adjunct Marxist historians, out or queer management professors, state college ethnic studies departments, closed-down film programs, visa-expired Yemeni student newspaper editors, historically Black college sociologists, and feminist engineers (Harney and Moten, 2013, p. 104). Against these, the modern university represents the institutional mechanism for the 'social reproduction of conquest denial'; the logic of consensus.

This is an aspect of the 'University of Excellence'. Excellence is the discourse which dilutes, even co-opts, the specificity of intersectional struggles. For Readings, it is an 'integrating principle that allows 'diversity' (the other watchword of the University prospectus) to be tolerated without threatening the unity of the system' (Readings, 1996, p. 32). Within the university of excellence, dissent can readily become co-opted as the achievement of diversity targets, or as an impact factor on cultural studies research audits. Against this, de Sousa Santos (2018) has called for the 'pluriversity', which subverts the university ideal in the name of a radical and inclusive polyphony. The pluriversity generates

the post-abyssal thinking which potentially reverses both the colonial effects of the white Western university episteme and the centripetal effects of globalisation. An emerging example of the pluriversity is rising in the UK. The Free Black University, crowdfunded by the Black activist Melz Owusu, recruited its first cohort in September 2022 and has now concluded, at least in its first iteration. Designed specifically as an alternative to the abyssal University, the FBU focused on the 'multiple and infinite routes to producing knowledge outside of the evidence-based Eurocentric rationalist model' (Free Black University, 2024a). Their self-published 'Radical Imagination Labs' journal includes a mission statement which declares a commitment to 'centering Black radical futures, liberation, abolition and African and Caribbean philosophies about life, time, and linearity'. They cite bell hooks (1994) as a formative theoretical influence, amongst others. Accordingly, their teaching is simultaneously an act of transgression and cathartic love. Owusu claims she founded the institution as a testament to 'the power and possibility of education as a tool of healing and liberation' (Free Black University, 2024b). Furthermore, as a release to 'the knowledges which may have become knotted-up within us and that which we may try and push down and hide because if we allowed it to escape into the light, we would be confronted by a world that denies our truth' (Free Black University, 2024b).

In 1772, the 'gentleman cartoonist' Henry William Bunbury depicted a satirical image of a young man being scrutinised by an Oxbridge don for admission to university. The subtitle reads 'the hopes of the family'. Oxbridge colleges maintain an idiosyncratic, arguably archaic, interview process for undergraduate admissions to this day. However, the intergenerational investment implied by Bunbury's image has now ceded to the capitalist realist acceptance that Generation Z, despite their education, will be significantly worse off than their parents. In 2021, in the face of campaigns to decolonise the university, Oxford accepted a record number of Black students (Yeomans 2021). Despite this, just like Bunbury's cartoon, elite British universities remain demonstrably white.



Fig. 10.6 After John Carter (1790), *The Entry of Frederick into the Castle of Otranto*. Scene created by the author from images sourced, with permission, from UCU members and the digital archives of Yale's Paul Mellon Centre for British Art', <https://photoarchive.paul-mellon-centre.ac.uk/collections>

6. Revolt

On the morning of Monday May 13, 1968, a wave of militant students poured into the Sorbonne University, placing key buildings under student control. In the weeks before, similar actions by student militants at the University of Paris' expansion campus in Nanterre had inspired a wave of copycat high school occupations. These student protests also inspired a large general strike by the French trade unions, also organised for May 13. In turn, this generated a call for the occupation of all French universities (Fraser, 1988, p. 215). In this vortex of protest, the Sorbonne was occupied by a crowd of 20-30,000 students (Ali and Watkins, 1998, p. 100), who covered its walls with graffiti, revolutionary posters and banners. These proclaimed the death of the Sorbonne and its rebirth as the 'Autonomous People's University' (Kugelberg and Vermès, 2011, p. 78). In the radical newspaper *Black Dwarf*, Clive Godwin (1968, p. 4) labelled it 'The Sorbonne Soviet'. They quoted a firebrand speech from a young student who declared: 'this revolution is for the red flag of socialism and the worker's state, and for the black flag of anarchy and the individual' (Godwin, 1968, p. 4). To add to the spectacle, a large piano was dragged into the university's main quadrangle and the whole occupation was soundtracked to a live improvised jazz score.

Within twenty-four hours, students then occupied the historic art school of the Sorbonne, *L'École de Beaux-Arts*. Its print rooms were commandeered to produce propaganda leaflets and posters, which were then distributed around the university to foment the revolution. A manifesto statement on May 14 declared the art school had been renamed to *L'Atelier Populaire* [The People's Studio]. The Beaux-Arts is an elite and hierarchical institution, highly selective, and indivisible from the historic *Prix de Rome*—the competition traditionally figured as the golden route professional success for academic artists. These occupations transformed the school into a space of democracy, horizontality and co-production. By May 15, organised committees for the design and distribution of this agitprop had been formed. These designs were democratically selected by daily assemblies open to the public. These images of revolution inspired a wildcat strike at the

Nantes Sud-Aviation factory, immediately followed by the occupation of the Renault factory at Cléon. Shortly, red and black flags flew over the Doric columns at the entrance to the historic and symbolic Odéon theatre, now hosting a sister occupation of 2,500–3,000 students (Kugelberg and Vermès, 2011, p. 78). Like the Sorbonne, 'l'ex-Théâtre de France' was covered with banners proclaiming solidarity between students. By May 16, strikes were erupting across France and significant solidarity actions had taken place at 'Flins, Le Mans, and the 30,000 strong Renault-Boulogne-Billancourt factory' (Kugelberg and Vermès, 2011, p. 79).

Rather than oil paint, these revolutionary occupations were captured in celluloid, via the conflict photography of Marc Riboud, Guy Le Querrec, Henri Cartier-Bresson and other Magnum photographers. However, the spectacle of '68 has archetypal precedents which can be recognised throughout visual culture. In the French revolutionary imaginary, the occupation of university buildings connects directly to the storming of the Bastille at the outset of the revolution of 1789. The defence of student leader Daniel Cohn-Bendit, when arrested for making Molotov cocktails, was that 'violent revolt is in the French culture' (Kurlansky, 2004, p. 226). Another esoteric connection is the Tower card, or La Maison Dieu, from the Tarot de Marseille. This depicts a regal tower exploding, like the Bastille, and its 'crowned jugglers' being cast to the floor. Many siege images relate to this archetype, which in the final analysis probably emerges with the parricidal desires of the Oedipus Complex. This can be recognised in even the most innocuous images, such as John Carter's (1790) *The Entry of Frederick into the Castle of Otranto* (Fig. 10.6). This illustrates a key moment of Horace Walpole's gothic novel, which centres around a dispute about the titular castle and crown of Otranto. The scene, which depicts Frederick's army triumphantly marching into Otranto, actually represents the moment the father reclaims his daughter from the hand of Manfred, potential suitor and would be usurper. The story is underpinned by ancient prophecy. Namely, that the crown should be relinquished 'whenever the real owner should be grown too large to inhabit it' (Walpole, 1996).

This tale of power, hubris and oedipal conflict maps very well onto the scene of '68. The student protests very nearly deposed the government of Charles de Gaulle. He ultimately held on to power through divide and conquer tactics, buying the unions off with unprecedented pay rises. The eventual failure of the May '68 movement should not detract from the world-historic synthesis of revolutionary, artistic and libidinal energy it unleashed. In *Declaration* (2012), Hardt and Negri suggest that 'an occupation is a kind of happening, a performance piece that generates political affects'. For them, the prevalence of 'occupation' as the primary political strategy for the twenty-first-century global resistance movements, results from its effectiveness at communicating an essential political truth. This is that 'the class and the bases of political action are formed not primarily through the circulation of information or even ideas but rather through the construction of political affects, which requires a physical proximity'. For them, 'nothing can replace the being together of bodies and the corporeal communication that is the basis of collective political intelligence and action'. Togetherness, and the solidarity generated through actions which manifest being-together, are the prerequisites for rebuilding the commons.

Ken Knabb's *The Joy of Revolution* (1997), like Bakhtin (1984 [1965]), draws parallels between images of Bacchanalian and revolutionary situations. Here, the strategic differences between wildcat, sit-down and consumer strikes are eroticised into subheadings entitled 'foreplay' and 'climaxes'. Knabb characterises revolutionary situations as 'collective awakenings' energised by 'open-ended public dialogue and participation'. Such situations amplify critical and satirical attitudes to the status quo, resulting quickly in the revelation of the normal as abnormal. Here, qualitative change becomes conceivable and achievable. For Knabb, the revolutionary event is where 'the old order is analysed, criticised, satirised. People learn more about society in a week than in years of academic 'social studies' or leftist 'consciousness raising'. Long repressed experiences are revived. Everything seems possible—and much more is possible' (Knabb, 1997).

Similarly, Gerald Raunig has recently discussed university occupations using Deleuzo-Guattarian concepts of 'deterritorialisation' and 'reterritorialisation' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988, pp. 3–21), and

'modulation' (Deleuze, 1992). For Raunig (2013, p. 29), an occupation oscillates between 'a striating, standardising, modularising process and at the same time a permanent movement of remodelling, modulating, re-forming and de-forming the self'. In the contemporary neoliberal university, the 'striated space' to which Raunig refers is the space of disciplinary divisions and subdivisions, modular curricular and assessments, performance metrics and institutional league tables. All of these generate behavioural self-regulation and the modular reproduction of institutional subjectivities. The activist Edu-Factory Collective (2011, 2009), with which Raunig is associated, have similarly described the current educational conjuncture as the 'system of measure', underlining its disciplinary character. University occupations, as politics, expose these striations whilst smoothing them into nomadic spaces of becoming. Defined thus, the university 'in occupation' embodies what Deleuze and Guattari call the 'war-machine' (2010).

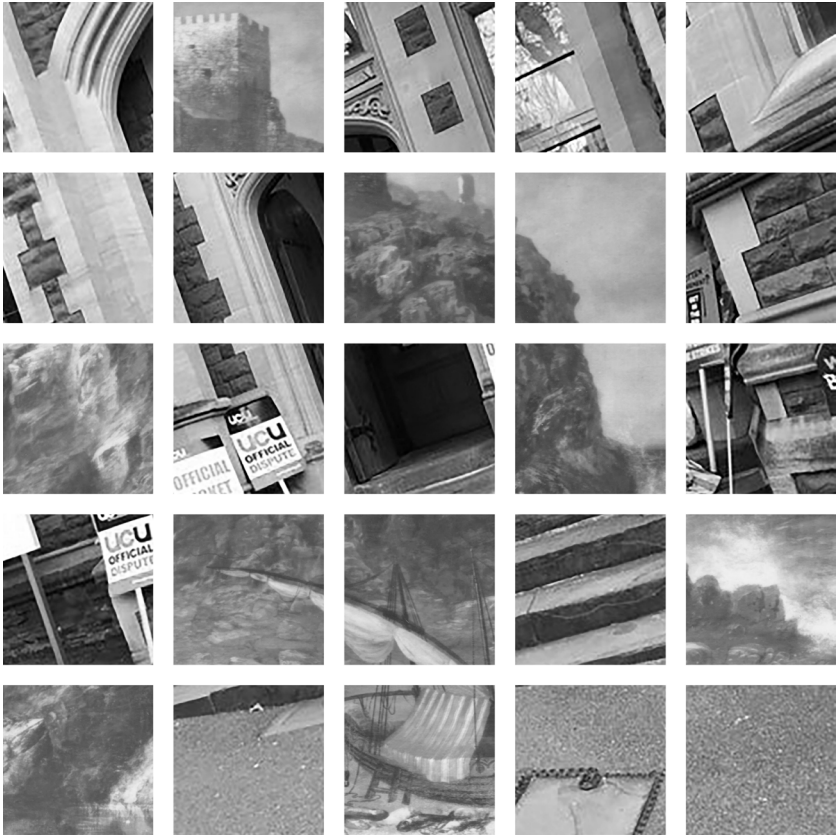


Fig. 10.7 After Sydney Herbert (c. 1870), *The Castle of Ari, with a Distant View of the Cyclops Scropuli or Rocks which Polyphemus Hurlled at Ulysses*. Scene created by the author from images sourced, with permission, from UCU members and the digital archives of Yale's Paul Mellon Centre for British Art', <https://photoarchive.paul-mellon-centre.ac.uk/collections>

7. Strike

On February 21, 2018 UK's higher and further education workers' union, the University and College Union [UCU], commenced strike action. At the time, Bergfeld (2018, p. 233) claimed this as the biggest industrial dispute in the history of UK universities. It involved academic and academic related staff at sixty-one institutions. As Bergfeld noted, the dispute was fought on many fronts simultaneously, but ostensibly it was called in defence of pay, working conditions and pensions. Over the next five years, UCU called a series of increasingly serious industrial actions, culminating in an ultimately unsuccessful five-month long marking and assessment boycott (MAB), called off on September 6, 2023. The fallout from these latest actions has been severe. University staff morale is at an all-time low (Jackson, 2023) and two-thirds of university staff are seriously considering leaving the sector (UCU, 2022d). This protracted dispute, especially the MAB, was costly to UCU members and its lack of success has depleted the spirit of the membership. Consequently, the general secretary of UCU, Jo Grady, faced a leadership challenge which she survived in a narrow victory on March 1, 2024. Grady is a rank-and-file general secretary, elected in a landslide in 2019 on the back of her grassroots branch activism. She comes from the working-class mining city of Wakefield, West Yorkshire. Her father participated in the two-year long National Union of Miners' strike against the Thatcher government in 1984–1985. Nevertheless, in an increasingly dysfunctional and factional union, Grady has become synonymous with counter-revolutionary bureaucracy in the eyes of the union's ultra-Left (Kelly and Ozanne, 2024).

The complexity of the UCU dispute, and UCUs internal politics, results partly from the fractured nature of the UK tertiary education system. This is divided into a sector of traditional 'red brick' universities, a sector of former polytechnics granted university titles in 1992, and a sector of further education colleges. The UCU was founded in 2006, as an amalgamation of two specialist sector interest trade unions, with the aim of representing all post-compulsory education workers with a united voice. Following their formation as a united union, UCU won a historic concession from university employers. Workers were awarded a 13.1% pay rise over three years in 2006 (Smithers, 2006). This appears

like a lesson in the efficacy of union organisation, solidarity and class struggle. However, 2006 would also be the last time that university workers won a pay deal above the rate of UK inflation (UCEA, 2022). Most 'pay awards' since that time have been sub-inflationary. UCU introduced pay modelling software in 2021 which calculates that pay suppression in the sector has cost university workers' 20% of their salary in real terms since 2009. This pay suppression is compounded by high rates of inflation, measured at 9.4% by the Office for National Statistics, as of June 2022 (ONS, 2022).

UCU's ambition to be a single voice for all post-compulsory education workers has been made deliberately more difficult by anti-trade union legislation introduced by different right-wing governments. Specifically, the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act (1992), revised as the Trade Union Act (2006). This legislation made secondary striking unlawful, so workers can no longer take action in solidarity with sister disputes. Also, branch specific turnout thresholds were introduced, alongside time-bound limits on balloted mandates, which complicate the organisation of national disputes. In order to take united national action, UCU must now coordinate multiple ballots for sector-specific disputes. From February 2018, workers at the historic pre-'92 universities acted in defence of their pension, the University Superannuation Scheme. This was in response to severe cuts to the pension scheme's benefits, imposed following a tokenistic consultation process, based upon misleading data (Cumbo, 2022). UCU research (Grant et al., 2022, p. 9) estimates that these cuts could cost workers under 40 up to £200k in lost pension income. Despite widespread scepticism about their necessity (Cumbo, 2022; Smith, 2020; Grove, 2018; Wilkinson and Curtiss, 2018), these cuts were pushed through on April 1, 2022, whilst many institutions were on the picket lines.

The post-'92 members of UCU have a different pension scheme, so were not legally eligible to join their fellow members in this dispute. Instead, in 2019 post-'92 members joined after winning a ballot to strike on pay suppression, unmanageable workloads, anti-casualisation and workplace inequality. This has become known as the 'Four Fights' (UCU, 2022a). Alongside the aforementioned pay suppression, UCU estimates that 68% of the HE workforce is currently on casual contracts. Furthermore, their research indicates that the average university

working week is above fifty hours. Depressingly, the same research indicates that there is a gender pay gap of 15%, a pay gap between Black and white workers of 17%, and a pay gap between able-bodied and disabled workers of 9% (UCU, 2022a). UCU's FE members, again, are ineligible to strike in this dispute so have been forced to ballot on FE pay specifically. In July 2022, these members voted for strike action about the most recent pay offer of 2.5%, merely a quarter of current rates of inflation. UCU (2022b) estimates that FE staff pay has fallen 39% in real terms since 2009. Currently, a fully qualified FE Lecturer enters the profession with a starting salary of less than £26,000 p.a. This is less than half the base pay of a Transport for London underground train driver, who earns £55,011 p.a. before bonuses (Herbert 2019).

In *Disagreement* (2009, p. 41), Rancière characterises the political demonstration as a 'polemical scene' which paradoxically 'bring(s) out the contradiction between two logics, by positing existences that are at the same time nonexistences'. His example is the French socialist Jeanne Deroin (1805–1894) who stood in a French legislative assembly, despite being legally prohibited from taking up her seat if victorious. The motivation was to spectacularly demonstrate the hypocrisy of a republic built upon democratic ideals, but whose legislation systematically prevents the realisation of truly democratic equality. Politics, for Rancière, consists of three key elements. Firstly, it is the visible and spectacular demonstration of a 'wrong' (p. 35), the making audible of a voice where previously there was just silence (p. 35). Secondly, it enacts a disidentification from the 'natural order' or presumed social ethos (p. 36). Politics is the force of dissensus against consensus; the paradoxical revelation of 'the part of those who have no part' (p. 65) within the status quo. Finally, it stages a reckoning between the logic of inequality and the logic of equality (pp. 41, 49–51).

Bergfeld's (2018, p. 234) account of the 'creative, large and vibrant picket lines' of the recent UCU demonstrations contains ample evidence of all of these elements. For example, he documents how the Leeds University UCU produced music videos to spectacularly raise awareness of the dispute. The 'Four Fights', criticised by some for its incoherence, actually gained strength through its cumulative revelation of 'parts who have no part'. Indeed, Bergfeld reports how institutionalised divisions between professors and casualised staff were broken down through

the act of protest. Furthermore, the placards, aesthetics and banners of the student movement were adopted by striking staff. There are ample documents of various workers' Twitter feeds which show how university campuses were transformed into heterotopic carnivalesques of humour, laughter and liberty. Bergfeld even recalls how picketers sang 'do you believe in life after work?' (2018), reworking a famous pop song by Cher. This is not just a glib pop culture reference. It is a refusal of a world order where workers are only defined by work, the remuneration of that work and the overarching discourses of the workplace (Rancière, 1999, p. 29).



Fig. 10.8 After J. M. W. Turner (1829), *Ulysses Deriding Polyphemus*. Scene created by the author from images sourced, with permission, from UCU members and the digital archives of Yale's Paul Mellon Centre for British Art', <https://photoarchive.paul-mellon-centre.ac.uk/collections>

8. Mochlos

Derrida's Mochlos essay ends on a quite remarkable deconstructive turn, which seems incongruent from the rest of the essay, and completely lacking the conventional requirements of a conclusion. Derrida's 'inconclusion' is partly an homage to Kant's own tangential conclusion to his Conflict essay. Here, Kant drifts away from the central subject to discuss sleep regimens, eating habits, controlled breathing, 'pathological feelings' and the relationship of all of the above to the mind's capacity for critical thought. In these passages, Kant writes about his conviction that the mind can control any pathological or physiological states, including the impulsive desire for sleep or food. Indeed, Kant believed that the mastery of these 'feelings by sheer steadfast will [is] the superior power of a rational animal' (Kant 1979 [1798], p. 205). Kant even implies that there is a continuity between the rational mastery of one's bodily impulses and the mastery of the logical argumentative structure of a text.

In lieu of a conclusion, Derrida cites two lengthy citations from the final sections of *The Conflict of the Faculties*, without commentary. The first concerns Kant's technique of avoiding stomach cramps by concentrating on 'some neutral object... (for example, the name of Cicero)' (Derrida, 2004, p. 112). The second excerpt discusses military training within the Prussian infantry. Specifically, that physical deficiencies can be corrected with proper training. This ends with the discussion of a specific military technique, where the soldier uses the left foot as a lever to mount an attack with the right. Kant compares this to a hypomochlium, meaning an orbital joint, fulcrum or pivot point. Buried in the final footnote of the essay, after the last sentence has concluded, Derrida introduces the titular theme of the essay. Derrida: 'Let us repeat here the name of Polyphemus' (Figs. 10.7 and 10.8). This was the name of the man-eating cyclops who imprisoned Odysseus (or, Ulysses), the eponymous hero of Homer's *Odyssey*. Derrida continues: 'Mochlos is also the name for the "wedge" or wooden lever that Ulysses [...] puts into the fire before driving it into the pupil of the Cyclops' (Derrida, 2004, p. 289). At the risk of enclosing the signification of Derrida's essay, it is worth underlining that one of Derrida's ambitions is to foreground thought itself as a tool of leverage, or resistance, and also a weapon. Implicitly,

the cyclops must also signify the increasingly panoptic, carceral and disciplinary character of the contemporary university, where thought is situated, within and against.

This resonates with the analysis of both Readings (1996) and Brown (2015, pp. 175–200). Brown devotes a whole chapter, entitled ‘Educating Human Capital’, to the differences between education as discipline and thought as freedom. One conclusion is that the economisation of higher education has not only depoliticised university education but also extinguished the criticality necessary for a free and democratic society. Her central case study is US Liberal Arts education. This saw an unprecedented mass expansion throughout public universities and community colleges in the twentieth century. Like Raymond Williams’ (1988, p. 127), Brown recognises that the Liberal Arts are historically rooted in the culture of the ruling class. Their mass expansion is therefore also a form of cultural democratisation. Originating in fourteenth-century England, Williams insists that the Liberal Arts were intended for ‘men of independent means and assured social position, as distinct from other skills and pursuits (cf. Mechanical) appropriate to a lower class’. Williams’ reference to ‘mechanical’ is a nod to the Aristotelian distinction between philosopher-kings and ‘mechanical men’ (*Politics*, 1339a41, p. 463). The latter are merely ‘hirelings’. They use their bodies as a means to an end and are therefore not free. In contradistinction, a Liberal Arts education was understood as the means by which free men would come ‘to know the world and engage the world sufficiently to exercise that freedom’ (Brown, 2015, p. 184).

Brown argues that the postwar expansion of the Liberal Arts was no less than a democratic revolution. Studying these subjects opened ‘the door through which the descendants of workers, immigrants and slaves entered onto the main stage of the society to whose wings they were historically consigned’ (Brown, 2015, p. 180). Access to the Liberal Arts gave mechanical men the opportunity to think like free men (Rancière, 2013, ix, 2004, pp. 31–34). By disseminating the philosophy of freedom ‘this extension importantly articulated equality as an ideal’ (Brown, 2015, p. 186). Brown warns that ‘we can no longer speak this way about the public university, and the university no longer speaks this way about itself’ (p. 187). Within the economised university, the Liberal Arts are routinely attacked as ‘expensive and outmoded’, irrelevant to the job

market, poor value for money or an expensive indulgence (pp. 180–181). This instrumentalism was identified earlier by Jeffrey Williams (in *Edu-Factory Collection*, 2009, 89–97) as the entirely predictable consequence of the economisation of education.

In 2022, the University of Roehampton, London, announced the closure of nineteen courses, including most of its Liberal Arts provision. The discarded courses include Anthropology, Classics, Creative Writing, Drama, English, Film, History, Literature and Philosophy. These course closures will also come at the expense of sixty-four academic positions. Roehampton is one of the post-'92 universities, historically created as amalgamations of provincial art schools, polytechnics and further education colleges. Their student demographic, in comparison to the elite pre-'92 Russell Group universities, includes more ethnic, cultural and class diversity. In the early twentieth century, Roehampton was a leading site of women's education. Now, Roehampton recruits 97% of its cohort from state schools, which is unheard of at Russell Group universities. The closure of the Liberal Arts at Roehampton represents the closure of a door of access to culture for the unrepresented and socially marginalised.

Roehampton management cite under-recruitment, rising costs and market forces as the reasons for the closures. Jo Grady said that Roehampton were complicit in a governmental agenda 'to restrict access to the arts and humanities—subjects that are well known for encouraging critical thinking' (UCU, 2022b). In response, Roehampton students have set up a lobby group to resist the cuts, inviting figures from across the arts and humanities sector to send letters of support. The British Bangladeshi dancer and choreographer Akram Khan submitted a statement which said 'in a time of real turmoil within our identity as a nation and as a global species, we are cutting the very thing that challenges, guides, nourishes and reminds us to question our actions and to be compassionate and understanding' (Khan, 2020). Khan does not cite Aristotle, but he is speaking directly of the Good Life, *eudaimonia*, human flourishing.

In an oil painting of 1829 (Fig. 10.8), J. M. W. Turner depicted the moment when Odysseus' crew escaped the island of the cyclops Polyphemus. In vain, the giant hurls rocks at the sailors to prevent their escape (Fig. 10.7). The hero stands on the deck of his Homeric

Galley, triumphantly raising the flaming mochlos to the sky beneath an unfurled red flag. Retrospectively, we can recognise another archetype within this image, connecting Turner's *Odysseus* to Bartholdi's (1876) 'Statue of Liberty', and Mukhina's (1937) 'Worker and Kolkhoz Woman'. In addition, to the scarlet standards and protest songs of workers' struggles. The flame of freedom held aloft; the powerless standing up to the powerful. The vertiginous neoclassical architecture on the façades of university architecture is designed to humble the individual before the weight of intellectual tradition. Nowhere is the chasm between the university's inflated ego-ideal and its attitude to its workers more apparent than on the picket lines. Similarly, Turner depicts Odysseus and his men as so infinitesimally small, so that they appear almost insignificant in comparison to the eternal, tempestuous, seascape behind. This, of course, is the express intention of a romantic art of the sublime. Precisely the opposite to the aggrandisement of heroic workers within socialist realism. During Samhuinn, candles are lit to banish the darkness and guide spirits home. Behind Turner's tempestuous sea, a sunrise guides the sailors away from the dark cave which imprisoned them.

Like Derrida, I eschew formal conclusions here. The university struggles in the UK, though temporarily paused, show no signs of conclusion either. As the academic year turns, so does the pagan wheel of the year, towards the fires of Beltaine, *le rire du mai*, freedom from the cold, death of winter. The sun rising, workers rising. The burning mochlos thrust into the cyclops eye of administration.

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I would also like to express solidarity to all those involved in the global university struggles. My essay is dedicated to you all: *la lutte continue*.

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