Taking an Administrative Turn: Derivative Logics for a Recharged Humanities

The crisis of the public university has been made acute in the recent financial meltdown. There is purportedly no money for higher education, no future for students but one of mounting debt, and no purpose for studies that cannot demonstrate their value in the marketplace. We have witnessed the spectacle of enormous sums of taxpayer money (more than $9 trillion of the $11 trillion set aside for economic assistance) being made available to bailout private institutions like American Insurance Group ($182 billion), Citigroup ($245 billion), Bank of America ($125 billion), or General Motors (which received $60 billion of the $110 billion set aside for the automobile industry). Moreover, the material integuments of the public, the very institutions and efforts through which something like a common humanity is imagined, sink, shrivel, and shrink. Surely this demonstration of which institutions need to be saved and which sacrificed has proven disorienting to the very idea of “public” to which a higher education available to all was in service.

In the rush to make the values on display in present decisions self-evident and necessary, the humanities especially are treated as an extravagant attention to obscure traditions that are no longer affordable, rather than as an investment in the future we cannot live without. Making that promise actionable in the present might just require a different charge for the humanities as well as a more steadfast engagement with the administrative decisions that have proven so fateful. And yet, if the humanities, or critical knowledge more broadly, is not to be left to the managerial discretions of others, some measure will need to be taken of where these capacities reside among faculty, which might in turn enable an assertion of what is worthy of learning, of what can be done with an education, and what can be asked of knowledge. Despite this apparent reversal between what merits public support and what is best left to private initiative, the etiologies of financial and educational malaise...
share a common narrative. Obscure and specialized methods of analysis proved beyond reasonable regulation, eluded understanding by those who needed to make decisions based upon them; their purposes were corrupted and expert knowledge failed to serve society adequately. This mistrust of expertise jostles uneasily with the notion that we live in a world ruled by professional knowledge credentialed through higher education. For academics, this sense that their own fields and institutions have lost their autonomy is as likely to engender a winsome nostalgia for a now surpassed golden age as an engaged assessment of how to fashion a critical and creative response commensurate with the challenges and opportunities posed by what their world has become.

Finance Otherwise

What follows is an invitation to take seriously the entanglement of university and financial calamity, to see them as mutually constitutive not simply of further ruin, but of prospective routes out of the dilemmas we face. In one way this is a call to divine possibility, even optimism, from these bleak times as a kind of political obligation, to refuse the despair that hastens defeat. It is also an analytic perspective that we need to think afresh the critique of capitalism not simply as the old monster with its familiar growl, but as a beast that forces people into complex association and feeds on the novelties of social life they yield while disengaging itself from the encumbrances to share the wealth it would claim as its own. Marx’s formulation of this problem was to enter the mind of capital, to ask how it might rationalize itself through the very socializing labor it both depends upon and disavows; his account was not of how some sui generis realm called the economic determined all human activity, but rather of how capital itself is a social relation that allows us to recognize what it means to make a world together and to posit what might be done with the wealth amassed in our name. We would be well served to return to the scene of this crime, to reenter the body of capital anew, or with present concerns, and ascertain what logics of entanglement, mutuality, and possibility it might disclose.

The dull necessity of creative destruction—tearing up established life ways in order to create new business opportunities—has long been used to naturalize and justify the pernicious effects of capital’s progress that today takes the form of an assault on the public in its myriad expressions. The evident and abundant human costs are surely depleting, but they also force people into dependencies and affiliations from which prospective expressions of sociality and alternative conceptions of public engagement emerge. Clearly what is lost and what stands to be gained is of crucial concern to worldly minded humanists, particularly if valuing what is expansive and
potentially creative of mutual interdependence becomes part of their own brief, a path to their own future. Beyond the verities that any historical moment is composed of something made and unmade, that every sign of civilization is also one of barbarism, that present debts augur promises of different kinds of repayment, there is also a specificity to the logic that informs our current undoing and potential remaking.

At the heart of the financial debacle and indeed intrinsic to the interdisciplinarity that drives the movement of the humanities lies a common figure, that of the derivative. It is not that forms of finance and knowledge are transhistorical, share a singular origin or a unitary history, but that they have arrived at a consequential intersection or conjuncture. Indeed, contemporary disciplines themselves have emerged over the past two hundred years from combinations and weavings derived from kindred fields, and the antecedents of financial derivatives appear thousands of years ago. Rather, the entanglements of knowledge and finance over the past thirty years provide key insights into how higher education operates. Now notorious in finance, derivatives also pertain to many fields including law, medicine, geology, engineering, chemistry, music, calculus, and grammar. While forms vary across these domains, derivatives express a shared social logic: a transmission of some value from a source to something else, an attribute of that original expression that can be combined with like characteristics, a variable factor that can move in harmony or dissonance with others. It is not simply that “derivative” has meaning across many fields in some analogical or metaphysical sense, but that the parsing and combination of knowledge that comes from many domains positions interdisciplinarity itself as a derivative form. In the present conjuncture, the financial form that operates as risk management has come to bear directly on all manner of knowledge work. Hence, some specification is required before it is possible to grasp the broader social logic that applies across disparate knowledge domains.

In their most straightforward application, financial derivatives manage risks of unwanted or unexpected variations in price. A premium, like an insurance policy on the total or underlying value of some bundle of goods is paid to hedge or protect against the volatilities of the marketplace where terms of exchange like interest or currency rates vary. The same collection of goods could have all manner of derivative contracts taken out on them—some anticipating that prices would rise, others that the prices would fall short of expectation. As a consequence, derivatives can take all manner of different commodities and connect them through a particular attribute that renders local goods into a global market for various kinds of credit and debt. Commodities would be aggregated and priced in a market through their properties of exchange rather than their purposes of use. From this perspective, derivatives provide the medium of circulation, like a global form of money, that fuels production yet
also generates its own economic opportunities and dynamics. Derivatives have a temporal aspect, making a future possibility actionable in the present, and a spatial dimension where certain features of what is local take on global salience and the far becomes near.

While individual derivative contracts are meant to render a particular risk predictable and therefore priceable, the density of hedging and betting engenders an environment where risk is heightened and its aggregate impact unknown. Before the market imploded in mid-2008, derivatives contracts were denominated at more than a quadrillion dollars—more than fifteen times the world’s gross domestic product—while generating revenues for their hedge fund managers in the tens of billions of dollars. Yet what was designed to harvest risk revenues predictably induced a generalized state of volatility that the particular devices could neither contain nor control. Given the intricate braid of interdependency and mutual indebtedness, failed bets (in this case, that housing prices would continue to rise, that people would continue to be able to pay their mortgages, and that various expectations of risk outcomes could be combined effectively to offset one another) rippled throughout the entire financial architecture and in turn the making and marketing of goods and services with which it had become so intimate.

This partial and interested rendering of derivatives, meant to highlight their social implications and not simply their technical operations, evokes some features of interdisciplinarity as well. Such epistemological initiatives blend and make commensurate attributes of larger fields and constitute a future promise on what a field might become that can be realized, at least partially, in the present. Further, interdisciplinarity has certainly become expansive, even obligatory, over the past decades as a way of enhancing flexibility and embracing risk, and has been associated with the intellectual volatility of academia where a cluster of controversies has rippled through the educational field. But what if the relation is more than metaphorical, what if the derivative displays a social logic—by no means exclusive of all modes of reason or exhaustive of every approach to explanation—that discloses the very sociality by which the value of our labors might be more fully recognized and placed in circulation? Why, in other words, might or should humanists (or for that matter anyone else) adopt the perspective of the derivative for thinking political responses to the challenges facing higher education today?

First, we could say that a derivative logic speaks to what is otherwise balefully named as fragmentation, dispersion, or isolation in dismissing or diminishing prospects for alternative courses of action. It allows us to recognize ways in which the concrete particularities, the specific engagements, commitments, and interventions we tender and expend might be interconnected with and through the work of others without first or ultimately needing to appear as a single whole or unity of practice or perspective. Second, derivatives articulate
in specifiable and tangible form what is made in accelerating motion, how production and circulation are mutually constitutive but nonetheless retain an immediate materiality, and, as such, how the value of our work is asserted in the midst of volatility. Third, derivatives work through the agency of arbitrage, of small interventions that make significant difference, of a generative risk in the face of generalized failure but on behalf of desired ends that treat the future not simply as contingent, uncertain, or indeterminate but also as actionable in the present, as a tangible wager on what is to come.

The humanities have frequently been defended for their intrinsic virtue as a thing in itself while increasingly being subjected to protocols of risk management and administrative demands they are called to be in the service of, but over which they hold little purchase. Alternatively, the theoretically robust turn in the humanities signaled by critical interdisciplinarity or various “studies” (such as postcolonial, cultural, queer, critical race, disability) is here a shorthand for the expansion of ways and objects of knowledge. When humanity is pressed to incorporate dimensions of difference borne by the whole field of the world’s peoples its impact is staged through various kinds of engagement, affiliation, activism, and organizing. The work of the humanities is thereby rendered part of all manner of learning places and social purposes. That some piece of the humanities moves in spheres of activity not so named does not cancel what the humanities have been any more than an assertion of a particular kind of investment for a renewed sense of the future obviates the worth of historical understanding or interpretive nuance. This braiding together of some parts of what is taken to be inside and outside the humanities is precisely an instance of the derivative form in action.

Engaging a social logic of the derivative may help craft a different future. Against the moralizing claims that derivatives are epiphenomenal, ungrounded, fictitious, and therefore expendable, the labor that they reference yet disavow is managerial and administrative. More specifically, implementing new knowledge in institutional settings requires a kind of work academics are directed to undervalue or dismiss: the administrative and managerial labor they actually perform that goes by the name of service. Increasingly, such work is not a thing in itself, a monastic answer to discharge one’s obligation to a professional calling, to a civic or institutional common good, but a feature of doing any kind of work that takes place in the university. Derivatives, which are made and maintained through a kind of administrative labor (more commonly referred to as portfolio management), reference the moil of setting other productivities to work, of implicating future outcomes in present performances, of measuring value before it has come to pass.

The past thirty years have also witnessed the proliferation of managerialism through all walks of life, while public affairs become matters of private self-administering efforts by which the erosion of public goods and services
shifts the tasks of making things run and life secure to the private realm.\(^\text{10}\) In this respect, mining a derivative logic for insights about sociality can disclose not only where management has sought to become humanized through performance assessment but also how the humanities and other forms of academic labor have been rendered managerial in their own approach to knowledge making and valuation.\(^\text{11}\)

What follows therefore seeks to use the social logic of the derivative otherwise to recharge the humanities by taking seriously the administrative work that has become so central to the so-called knowledge society of which the university is now but a part. To see our way through the crisis of the public university entails asserting an “us” that parses what of our efforts pertain to professional identity, what is part of a larger industrial sector, and what of our critical knowledge makes a claim on the very contours of the polity as such. Recognizing a “we” that moves through these interlocking and consequential spheres of decision entails translating the worth or transvaluing the work that has been left to others. For the humanities to continue as more than the objects of ruin requires consideration of what forms of association are being visited upon us and what practices might emerge; which capacities lie to hand; and what work of governance, organizing, and activism these circumstances portend. The humanities, which could once locate themselves as specialized guardians of tradition or as having privileged access to universalizing claims now must be specified in contemporary terms of how knowledge is made, what it represents, and what it is for.

The public university that arose after the Second World War was one feature of a larger social compact that promised access to specialized credentials as a portal to the upwardly mobile professional managerial class, the meritocratic route to the American Dream. The expansion of access to publicly funded higher education, made tangible in the financial aid programs and construction boom of community colleges, state colleges, and universities during the sixties and seventies, would be a means of aligning these particular knowledges with civic purposes of democratic participation. The unmaking of this public promise has spelled the demise of autonomy for the professional managerial class and higher education alike, even as the ranks of both have continued to swell.\(^\text{12}\)

As the perquisites of finance swept the land, risk management trumped professional expertise, and administration overwhelmed the aims of research. Whereas the ideal of the public that emerged with the Cold War imagined an integrative and unifying national space to advance mass democracy within a market order adjusted for justice and equality, today the public is in many respects a derivative of private values. Education is an investment in future earnings, government assistance to the disadvantaged impedes their self-initiative and places them at risk of failure, cutting taxes is the most direct
route to promote the common good. Rather than a level playing field in the
game of consensus, the public is a scene of active differentiation around who
can play and who is sidelined. And yet what is called private relies upon and
crafts all manner of public presence, whether to expand markets, maintain a
healthy business climate, or enlist further participation in the glistening malls
of subjectivity.\footnote{13}

**Administered Derivatives**

The derivative logic that inheres in both disciplinarity that has lost
its promise of self-mastery and organizational affinities that become entan-
gled in one another is profoundly contrarian. Under the sign of this difficult
and risky logic, it is possible to rethink what might be done with and through
the humanities so that present efforts might be leveraged toward a different
future. Instead of simply refusing the urge to self-management that underlies
the erosion of publicly funded entitlements and institutions, faculty could
consider how a critical engagement with these distributed decision-making
capacities might reposition how they can intervene in and transform their
present predicament. To the assertion that there is no alternative would come
the rejoinder that the means to craft education otherwise through critical
interdisciplinary initiatives are already to hand. The challenge comes in figur-
ing out how these efforts are valued and their potential amplified.

A key response to this challenge is to recognize the ways in which aspects
or attributes of humanities work are increasingly connected to societal affilia-
tions and organizational applications that link what takes place inside the uni-
versity to the changes swirling around it. Here humanists share a predicament
with other faculty and with the professional managerial class more broadly;
namely, that externally oriented measures of performance and value have
overtaken internally established professional criteria of worth. Managerialism
in this respect is the aspect of work that runs throughout professional occupa-
tions as inner-directed expertise must be translated into intercommensurable
measures of outcome and efficacy.\footnote{14} When peer review, academic freedom,
and disciplinary autonomy were clearly delineated from administrative con-
trol over institutional matters, faculty could treat their own bureaucratic
duties as a necessary annoyance or needless distraction. Consequently, in the
hierarchy of faculty activities, this work, conventionally called “service,”
receives scant recognition, critical attention, or pecuniary worth. But when
placed in a larger historical and genealogical context, service is marked as an
unpaid contribution to the bureaucratic machinery through its ties to
domestic labor and slavery—the cognate categories of service for those who
labor without compensation, discretion, or authority in the homes and the
fields.
At the same time, service on campus is linked to the raced and gendered performance of staff duties that maintain, feed, and construct the institution and that process, account for, and circulate the knowledge it claims as its purpose. Off-campus, service entails ministering to underserved populations who, as extracurricular, would otherwise find no place in classrooms and be unworthy of credit. In order to shift perspective on service away from the passive, unrecognized, and undervalued toward the active capacity for and consequences of decision making that needs to become activated in faculty work, service must be transvalued as administrative labor. Doing so permits that missing part to be reconsidered critically, creatively, and collaboratively as the dimension of all activity that concerns how work gets done, how efforts are coordinated, how organizations or institutions are directed, who they are accessible to, and how priorities are set and rewarded.

As an attribute of their work that all are called upon to perform, as an ongoing measure of the worth of particular activities that translate them into comparable and scalable standards, and as a means for linking current decisions to what the future will be, administrative labor articulates in practical terms the otherwise abstract presence of a derivative logic. The administrative profile of the faculty portfolio, which weaves together the decision-making process around what gets taught and what knowledge is for, can also be engaged through affiliations with others to refigure what risks are worth taking and to what ends education should be reshaped.

Whether performed by faculty or noninstructional employees, administrative labor is the most actively expansive category at the university. The continuously lengthening workweek of full-time faculty in the United States now clocks in at more than fifty-three hours, with a fifth of that time categorized as administration and service—which does not count the administrative aspects of teaching and research. Meanwhile, the number of faculty has fallen to a third of overall campus personnel while the number of non-teaching professional staff has doubled from 10 to 20 percent. Unlike entrepreneurial faculty who may reap the fruits of intellectual properties developed under incentive schemes of what has been called “academic capitalism,” administrative staff often can make no such proprietary claims, nor can they enjoy the protections of academic freedom. Yet, as Gary Rhoades observes, “managerial professionals are more than an increasing administrative cost. They are increasingly involved in key activities from assessing quality and ensuring accountability to providing student and consumer services to facilitating the production of instruction and research to engaging in entrepreneurial activities.”

On the other hand, administration names what is typically seen as over-priced and mis-interested decision making. Concentration of authority, numbers, and pay has made the administration—as both personnel and
function—a common target of faculty ire. Symptomatic here is the increasing number of college presidents whose compensation has passed the million dollar mark—twenty-three in 2007 and thirty in 2008—on decidedly upward trends for pay among top administrators. Reflecting current budgetary priorities, these gains have taken place over a period in which overall faculty salaries have remained flat while inequalities between fields has increased. For example, in 1987, salaries (controlled for inflation) for full-time faculty in the humanities averaged $60,760 while for health fields the average was $92,900. In 2003, average salaries in the humanities had declined to $59,970, while those in health increased to $98,480.

The focus on recruiting and rewarding singular and unique leadership at the expense of an egalitarian campus ethos that supports peer governance is itself in tension with the waves of standardized management devices introduced to higher education in the past half-century. The aim has been to create an academic administrative science that would claim to substitute politics for analysis by switching backroom whims for spreadsheets in the plain light of day. But the efforts to apply rationalizing systems have proven through their very ineffectiveness to regulate knowledge production to be volatile in their own right. The result has been what Robert Birnbaum calls “management fads in higher education”: new paradigms fail to live up to their promise, producing reams of data but little evidence that the reorganization schemes actually work. The planning-programming-budgeting system from the sixties used then-new computer technology to optimize costs first in weapons systems then in higher education. It proved fruitless in clarifying which investments in higher education delivered the highest returns and was replaced by the business model of strategic planning that fostered inter-organizational competition for resources in the seventies. Then in the eighties the practice of benchmarking key indicators of progress according to standardized outcomes was adopted by universities as a result of IBM’s efforts to regain lost market share.

The problems of the unpaid and the overpriced need to be brought together if faculty are to realize the greatest impact for their interdisciplinary initiatives whose success relies upon mastering the intricacies of the administrative environment. Indeed, the most ambitious prospects for current critical interdisciplinarity draw upon various forms of managerial knowledge and administrative labor. Such interdisciplinary initiatives can link the professional activities that govern the campus, the places where university-based knowledge articulates with its industrialization (creative/media/teletechnologies; bio-physical/medical/environmental capital; finance and managerial protocols), and the circumstances in which critique addresses the state in the many ways that a political party or policy orientation might.
Interdisciplinarity, administrative labor, and organizational circuits or registers each in their way display a derivative logic. They are but particular attributes of what we do; small, focused interventions are leveraged to larger ripple effects; knowledge making circulates near and far within and beyond the university. If what has been called corporatization of the university imagines one such relationship between inner purposes and outward aims, the more robust response lies not in a return to some monastic ideal of education for itself, but in a redirection of what it might be for, of how it might align with populations, and where its uses lie.\textsuperscript{22}

Some profile of administrative work articulates with the three major organizational forms of the past century. First are the governance issues that extend from faculty committee work to promulgation of peer-based criteria of specialized knowledge that are the purview of professional associations. Second is the labor organizing that led to dense faculty unionization during the decades of expansion and is now tied to cross-sectoral trade unions that reflect the industrialization of knowledge across culture industries, biotechnology, and financial services. Third is the political activism that propels the project of a political party, as forms of critical knowledge are treated as challenging the authority of the state, something evident in the attacks on humanities scholars in the aftermath of September 11. More than a means to rebalance inequities between the most and least valued work on campus, administrative labor is tied to the organizational capacity already immanent to what faculty now do, that enmesh us together and with our surround. If the knowledge to remake the university is already part of our critical work, then it is not a question of faculty giving up what the university does best to become something else, but of activating how its work might matter most once it takes stock of its own organizational capacities.

\textbf{Recharged Humanities}

In the order of university things, the humanities are threatened with relegation to the status of service, a common but undervalued realm that situates them as a cognate of administrative labor. If the sciences (natural and social) yield property and promise professions, what is the charge of the merely human? The humanities might disavow these resonances or energize themselves through a critical engagement with the derivative logics that join interdisciplinary initiatives and administrative labor navigating the shoals of what has proven expansive yet disruptive. This approach bears more difficulty and ambition than do some recent defenses of the humanities that advocate a pragmatic shrinkage to fit available constraints (Louis Menand’s); an appeal to the traditions of civic requirements (Martha
Nussbaum’s) or a digital universalism to counter fragmentation, lost quality, and labor costs (Mark Taylor’s). Certainly these authors’ prescriptions operate on questions of complexity, difference, and critique to which the humanities must be answerable. But a recharging would need to move beyond the conventional conception, now predicament, of the professions that have traded internal disciplinary norms for those of adding value, prefiguring their outcomes through transparency, and translating their efficacy into measures of accountability—regimes by which their own autonomy has been evacuated.

Rather than mourning this loss or appealing for autonomy’s return from those authorities responsible for expropriating it, working through a derivative logic may help link parts of what humanists have undertaken to different ways of valuing their significance in relation to the work of others. Several lines of endeavor can be considered that can help revalue what the humanities are now best positioned to do. The first entails taking up the humanities as a place or site within the overall curricular apparatus that is structured more as an investment in the future than a past legacy to which one is entitled. A core curriculum that might include composition and requisite common knowledge has been a mainstay of humanities real estate, the basis of its economy—both moral and political. Doubtless, students will continue to need to engage texts profoundly, to mine their inner workings and produce engaging and unexpected interpretations even as the materiality of texts change and the purposes of engagement are altered. If interpretation is framed as an encounter with what is received, with a tradition already made, or with exemplars in need of transmission, then filling the space of general education is unproblematic. For what that space contains, whether it is the best that has been thought, or the key facts that unlock the ages, or the ethical orientations by which civic sensibilities are fostered is something faculty can decide by looking into their own disciplinary archives, deploying the methods over which they have mastery, and invoking the authority that their credentials and rank confer.

If, on the other hand, whatever is called tradition cannot provide this orientation, not simply because it is contested or partial or uncertain but because the future no longer looks like something extrapolated from even the most usable past, then students will need something more like generalizing education than general knowledge. The good of the humanities is no longer treated as axiomatic, but as a means to position and project students in the public realm that may itself have become hostile to them, to open a space by advancing a critically informed and engaged voice in which their work and lives become possible. As with terms like “freedom,” “merit,” and “reciprocity,” the value of a public in which the ideal of humanity resides cannot be treated as axiomatic; rather, it needs to be produced as a particular
end, an effect of critical engagement. Understanding the contested trajectory of what has been included and excluded within the rubric of humanity requires an active consideration of how perspectives are inscribed in contexts, of what it means to move from some specifiable part or position to some imagined whole, whether this be universal, global, worldly, imperial, or something else.

This work of prospective mapping, of understanding how to locate oneself when the landscape is itself changing, of how to project oneself into the world so as to open up a space within it for what one seeks to do, is a subtle but salient modification of the humanities brief. It requires students to think more actively about what they are using knowledge and skills for, about what their modes of writing and representation achieve, of how private voices might be rendered public, and of what this future might entail. When loss of jobs and the crush of debt seem to cancel the future for conventional student aspirations, and financial protocols of risk-management seek to make the future actionable in the present, helping students generalize from their particular predicament takes on a speculative, even utopian, promise. The demand to generalize from a shifting location at once mandates an elaboration of what learning is for in the moment and effects a deferral of what education is for, of when its rewards might be reaped, and of why its maps-in-the-making might need to be continually consulted.

Reworking a core curriculum is a tremendous political undertaking, but one that mobilizes forces, provides internal metrics of commensurability in research, opens practices of teaching. A renewed core relies upon a mastery of university governance that operates through the administrative knowledge tied to professional associations. Reinventing the core provides an occasion for the norms of faculty governance to be exercised for a university-wide interest in the name of its proximate public, the student body, while invoking the collective wisdom of professional peerage across disciplinary organizational partitions. Here faculty governance authorized by the professional association joins a double session of knowledge flows inside and outside a given university campus.

A second orientation to recharging the humanities engages the problematic of lateral mobility in which lifelong learning becomes a euphemism for interrupted careers that require a return to education. Instead of a one-time, permanent qualification for upward mobility, higher education becomes part of an ongoing, value-adding, continuously assessing attribute of labor. The formation and decomposition of the professional managerial class described here, with its attendant loss of the promise of a progressively more rewarding career (of which tenure might look like the apotheosis) opens to something that could be described as postprofessional. As with other “posts,” this one does not come after the professions are gone but is an
internal condition of their limitations, a reflection of what else this condition of professionalization brings than more of the same. Higher education has become the medium where this lateral mobility is staged. Students are getting older, coming in from the workplace, separated from a job that will not be replaced, trying to retool, reorient, relaunch. More or new skills will not be enough. A change of perspective is required, different cultures of knowledge, an awareness of what is left out of work itself when jobs are undeliverable or no longer deliver. This postprofessional public is vast, and their relation to education is but one attribute of their lives, one derived from their circumstances of life and labor. The number of those who undertake continuing or adult education in the United States is 100 million, more than five times the number of matriculated students.24

For the humanities to address this public, which begins to approximate the demographic majority of the working population, requires a series of shifts in orientation of whom it takes as its student body. More, to rename the people as something other than statistical, to focus away from stars, celebrities, and high performers to the ongoing condition of knowledge transformation, is to ready the university for this return of learning-labor. Humanists would in turn be well served to devise programs, to open affiliations, to activate the links to knowledge and cultural sectors where these alternative demands for knowledge are being formed. This too might demand a more profound rethinking of the material forms for inscribing and disseminating knowledge than what sometimes occupies the attentions of digital humanities initiatives. Doing so might entail a more explicit affiliation with the various segments of the knowledge, cultural, or creative industries more broadly in ways that organize the organic intellectuals of industrial organizations.

Certainly there has been an enormous expansion of the kinds of texts, practices, and commodities that qualify as legitimate objects of study, just as there has been an elaboration of what senses are activated—beyond the heavy traffic between word and eye, when being human embraces touch and technology, sound and smell, bodily parts and multiplicities. Yet this expanded field of knowing (or what else), or humanness, now also points to all manner of expertise and activity that mixes and circulates those working inside and outside of universities, that also pose questions of what the communities of reception and affiliation, the publics of critique and interest, and the myriad sites where the value of humanistic endeavor might be realized.

In this regard, postprofessional programs name a reorientation of where humanities can see their publics and what they can meet them with. Such efforts would need to imagine the conditions in which people return to the university and what they might seek there. So too, the question of what comes after the degree, of how ideas, practices, and initiatives get incubated and articulated would call upon different kinds of alumni relations. When so
much of the public, the spaces of community affiliation, are under duress, at issue is not whether people still take to the streets but how to interpret and evaluate what comes from these acts of critical assembly, of what it means for criticism, interpretation, contextualization, mapping, and the like to enter these spheres and recognize their interest in these constituencies. To achieve this possibility entails an embrace of the analytics, constructivism, and modeling by which populations are sampled and represented that would move the interpretive palette of humanists into the studios and collaborative processes identified with critical social sciences, policy studies, community-based knowledge, and labor centers.

Both of these two shifts bear on questions of methods, an internal reworking of what interpretation takes as its received material and a lateral move toward social analytics. Certainly these are already the conditions of contemporary interdisciplinarity, whether in feminist and queer studies; cultural and environmental studies; or postcolonial, ethnic, and area studies, but also within those rubrics cast as poststructuralist. If the industrialization of knowledge expands the learning places and terms of exchange between those whose principal address lies inside or outside the university, humanists may need to confront more directly the relation between the authority of their specialized knowledge and the general claims to judge anything and everything that are part of what renders the public expansive and volatile.

From a conventional perspective it would be easy to decry publics as insufficiently critical, anesthetized by the surfeit of information, and flattened and rendered unreflective by the society of the spectacle. It is difficult to deny the powerful vectors of influence that flow from media ownership to corporate interest and the highly selective nature of what gets anointed as common sense in the name of the people. Yet matters of judgment and authority are rendered both pervasive and precarious now in ways that can make the public seem entirely ungovernable as much as government loses hold of its authority for representation. Keeping in abeyance for a moment the question of what this knowledge is for, expanded access to higher education and an elaboration of the precincts of knowledge where we work and play brings with it not a deficit, but an excess of criticality. This is surely one feature of installing managerialism, the expectation of directable, decidable, and enhanceable performance, into every sinew of life. Judgment abounds; all are called to stand in continual assessment while underlying value becomes all the more difficult to stably reference.

While all are called to account, the limits of knowledge are abundantly evident. How might the humanities be considered as a medium for gathering this excess criticality from without and not simply assembling specializations from within? What methods would be allowed into this mix and how might they incorporate nonacademically based communities, constituencies, and
cultural practices that populations attend to? Whereas managerialism operates through professional associations and industrial organizations, its ultimate authority—the claim, even the desire, to manage society, to authorize who can participate and through what means, to decide upon the direction or future of populations, invokes the power of the state. In organizational terms, the means of assembling publics toward a particular political end or project falls to a political party. Within the norms of representational democracy, one voice speaks for the many, the capacity for self-rule is alienated to elected authority, and critique is formalized through political debate in legislative halls. No doubt all of this still takes place, but when judgment is generalized and critique reconsiders the purposes of society, these voicings tacitly assume a state address associated with a political party.

Academics who have challenged the most instrumental knowledge claims of the state—prosecution of war in the name of national interest—have certainly found their own knowledge treated as if it bore the threat of an oppositional political party. From the perspective of a derivative logic, how might such critical claims circulate with respect to the broader assembly of public judgment? If much of this public sentiment is captured and stilled in opinion polls while eluding representation through conventional political processes, what kinds of representational approaches might be applied to articulate recognizable value in what is otherwise dismissed as noise, incoherence, or ignorance? Claiming the excess criticality of publics would in some measure counter the dismissal of some populations as a dispensable surplus: abject, alien, undeserving, or subprime.

Transvalued Futures

Giving form, situating, and articulating such a cacophony of voices is bound to be unsettling and might risk the very dismissal of relevance by those who have been excessively critical of what they see as arcane or unscientific in recent interdisciplinary expressions. How might we begin to assemble these bits and shards of initiative into more focused interventions that might come to circulate more broadly? How, in other words, might the humanities turn its own interpretive prowess, which has been developed through a critique of representation in textual forms, to public matters—not in the sense of a topic, which it already is, but in the sense of a form of materiality whose value and impact remains still very difficult to discern? How might fields of language arts divine the densities of critique, mobilization, and aspiration for which there are so many utterances and expressions but perhaps no or inadequate language? What would it mean to see in this massive interpretive undertaking the contours of knowledge forms through which the work of political parties, societal aspirations, and available futures might even be thought?
This different risk, nonprobabilistic perhaps, would need to join what is expansive outside the humanities, the notions of public critique, participation, and engagement it might take as its object, with what is treated as internal to the humanities’ own approaches—with how it assembles itself as a critical public and not simply a received collection of departmentalized disciplines. This risk specifically entails asking what happens when we give up the emphasis on what belongs to the humanities in the name of preserving or rescuing it, to pursuing where its entanglements might lead. Here again, the ability to discern how attributes from one thing appear elsewhere, how seemingly modest interventions get leveraged, and how future values are registered in the present are features of what has been here called a derivative logic—albeit now with a more expansive prospect of self-appreciation.25

Generalizing at the core, lateral mobility through postprofessional programming, and expanding the means and objects of analysis for excess criticality—these represent three possible and potentially intersecting dimensions of a humanities engaging the crisis of its publics and a public university at risk of not seeing its own futurity. Surveying these capacities for leverage, for amplifying the consequences of the interdisciplinary work that can issue from the humanities, might best be viewed as a transvaluation of the risk that has been so disrupting the public order. The free labor through which the investor is hailed joins together the do-it-yourself ethos; the risk profile of extreme sport; and the master-of-the-universe arbitrager, hacker, squatter, even terrorist. These derivative bodies now occupy the traditional gap between citizen and worker, state and market, which the humanities had once been asked to mediate. That mediation might now be rethought as a marshaling of the potentialities of self-production (generalizing), self-representation (lateralizing), and self-dissemination (critical mobilizing). Seizing these internal capacities as well as orienting the work of crafting publics requires a more explicit reappraisal of administrative work, the aspects of what we do that allows us to make institutional spaces with affiliated others.

In this light, administrative labor is an amalgam of governance, organizing, and activism. Administration requires consideration of how the university works through its professional associations, of how knowledge is industrialized and circulates across sites, and of how it mobilizes interest and speaks of and to a public state complex. A key question for university (as opposed to simply faculty or curricular) governance is what might provide a counterweight to the focus on intellectual property. One response lies with partnerships with the communities near and far that have, like administrative labor itself, been relegated to passive objects of service learning or uneven exchanges of civic engagement. A crucial problem for organizing is how to align with and make sense out of the myriad expressions of alternative knowledge that rise from the cracks and interstices of the crumbling professional edifice. This is precisely the gap
between what gets formally credentialed and new materializations of knowledge that are emerging inside and outside the university in the larger circuits of industrialization. Activism would seem the most elusive of these three dimensions of administrative politics, as it is speculative in its mode of presentation as a demand or question and indeterminate in its outcome. The failure of activism to produce tangible and immediate results is often grounds for dismissing it. Another way to think of activism is that, by temporarily occupying and repurposing public space and making recognizable excess criticality, it renders the present contingent and gives immediate presence to an otherwise intangible future. The long-held view of the value of the humanities as self-evident has in a sense interred it in a vault where its place might be securely underwritten by classical or enlightenment protective frameworks. The latest excavations on campus have left the humanities to minister to what they can no longer service. The grammar by which the liberal arts found its home in the university through a partition between humanities and social and natural sciences has been undone by various administrative and professional turns that have demanded accountability and deprived disciplinary-speak a legible voice as resources and publics have moved their centers elsewhere. None of these moves is totalizing, exclusive, or exhaustive of what faculty actually do, but the managerialism that has resulted from the diffusion of the derivative logic has entangled our lives and made us mutually interdependent in unexpected ways. This is not a cry to jettison what we know. Rather, grasping the ways in which these various attributes lie already in our midst, it is a way of tracking the pathways through which our knowledge moves and linking us through partial interventions that can be sustainably leveraged. The financial crisis that sought to parse abundance from scarcity and leave the public with the latter can meet an effective rejoinder from a humanities that avidly pursues its own criteria of excess. Valuing these conditions of work may move us more readily to making more of it.

Notes

My sincere appreciation goes to the co-editors of this volume, James Vernon for the opportunity, Chris Newfield for the inspiration, and Colleen Lye for the incisive interlocution. Every writer should be as fortunate to have them as primary readers.

1. These figures include a range of loans and credits from emergency short-term funds to a safety-net account or loan-loss backstop. Of the $1.2 trillion stimulus, much of the money was allocated to business as well. $456 billion was for tax cuts including $51 billion for businesses, another $195 billion to banks to compensate for losses on student loans, and $8 billion to extend unemployment benefits.

2. Surely, one way of understanding the history of Marxism is as an ongoing burial and disinterring of Marx, a trope captured by Jacques Derrida’s notion of “hauntology” in his Spectres of Marx: The State of the Debt, The Work of Mourning, and the New International (New York, 1994). Using a moment of declared crisis to stage a return of Marx is not without its own perils, especially if the theory is exiled again when the economy is said to have recovered. My own efforts to think the occasions for reading Marx can be found in Randy Martin, On Your Marx: Relinking Socialism and the Left (Minneapolis, 2001), and more recently with respect to the financial debacle, “What’s In It for Us? Rethinking the Financial Crisis,” Rethinking Marxism 22, no. 2 (April 2010); “Whose Crisis Is That? Thinking Finance Otherwise,” Ephemera: Theory and Politics in Organizations 9, no. 4 (2009), and “The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly: Economies of Parable,” Cultural Studies 24, nos. 3–4 (May–July 2010): 418–30.

3. The term creative destruction was developed by Joseph Schumpeter in Capitalism, Socialism, Democracy (New York, 1942).


7. There are now a plethora of accounts of the financial crisis that most commonly distribute blame among overzealous financiers, inept regulators, irrational behavior of investors, insufficient reserves and industry safeguards, ungovernable speculative bubbles, failed quantitative risk-management models, and insufficiently policed credit protocols. For accessible perspectives see, Paul Mason, Meltdown: The End of the Age of Greed, 2nd ed. (London, 2010); Gillian Tett, Fool’s Gold: How the Bold Dream of a Small Tribe at J. P. Morgan Was

8. That the present would be experienced as fragmentary underlies David Harvey’s analysis of postmodernity in The Condition of Postmodernity (Malden, MA, 1990) or a departure from an earlier era of commonality as in Todd Gitlin’s The Twilight of Common Dreams: Why America Is Wracked by Culture Wars (New York, 1996). Conversely, the disunifying effects of calls for unity have been noted by Judith Butler, “Merely Cultural,” Social Text 52/53 (Autumn/Winter 1997): 265–77, and Michael E. Brown and Randy Martin, “Left Futures,” Socialism and Democracy 9, no. 1 (Spring 1995): 59–90. These discussions from two decades ago continue to reverberate when coming to terms with the current crisis.


10. See, for example, Jacob Hacker, The Great Risk Shift: The New Economic Insecurity and the Decline of the American Dream (New York, 2008).


Taking an Administrative Turn: Derivative Logics for a Recharged Humanities


19. In 2007 more than half of college presidents earned less than $400,000. The following year, median compensation passed the $400,000 mark. Andrea Fuller,


22. The notion of education for itself comes from John Henry Cardinal Newman, *The Idea of the University*, originally published in 1852, although, interestingly, Newman was crafting the autonomy of lay learning before the higher purposes of religious calling. Abraham Flexner’s formulation of research-based professional education, *Medical Education in the United States and Canada* (Boston, 1910), proposed a mission of original knowledge production for the university; while Clark Kerr’s *The Uses of the University* (Cambridge, MA, 1963) imagined a managerially driven multiversity. In 1968, sociologists Christopher Jencks and David Riesman would speak of an *Academic Revolution* (Garden City, NY, 1968), in which universities were led by faculty in the role of middle managers. More recently, the tone of loss is evident in Frank Donoghue’s *The Last Professors: The Corporate University and the Fate of the Humanities* (New York, 2008), while Cary Nelson, in *No University Is An Island: Saving Academic Freedom* (New York, 2010), argues for the necessity of academic freedom and shared faculty governance to be achieved and maintained through organizing efforts.

