

Higher Education and Everyday Life

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The 20th century history of American higher education was periodically punctuated by allegations that its institutions had been seriously compromised by corporate and state influence in the conduct of academic inquiry, and by administrative infractions against the traditional aspiration of shared governance. Thorstein Veblen's *Higher Learning in America* (1918), and Robert Lynd's *Knowledge for What?* (1939), were prescient indictments of a not yet mature corporate university. Asking whether the higher learning should serve the public good or private gain, Veblen and Lynd's rants were regarded with considerable skepticism even as the authors were accorded the status of respected cranks. At the moment of their interventions mainstream America was preoccupied with each of the two world wars and were seriously considering mobilizing its intellectual resources, including the universities. Under these circumstances appeals to academic freedom and autonomy tended to fall on deaf ears. Indeed in contrast to some European countries where scientific and technological research was conducted by independent institutes rather than universities, President Franklin D. Roosevelt's science advisors recommended that a handful of elite public and private schools such as Berkeley and Princeton be charged with the responsibilities associated with scientific and technological aspects of the war effort. Although the decision was made to outsource the bulk of weaponry production to private firms rather than producing most materiel in government-owned plants (the components of the atomic bomb was a major exception), the government remained the client of nearly all research products. Still war and the Cold War that followed generated not only a massive arms industry but resulted in the vast expansion and diversification of the chemical, electronics and transportation industries which were, collectively, the engines of economic expansion until the 1970s.

By the 1950s under the hegemony of the Cold War, no less a conservative than president Dwight D. Eisenhower warned against the "military-industrial complex", already discussed at great length by C. Wright Mills in his magisterial *The Power Elite* (1956) four years earlier. Veblen went so far as to argue that since the Morrill Act in 1863 by which Congress for the first time committed the Federal government to support public higher education, primarily with land grants, the business of the university was to provide knowledge and a trained cadre for private industry, especially science and technology of agricultural production. The burden of his claim is that the concept of an autonomous university, revered since the Enlightenment, remained an ideal that was far from the existing situation. More than two years before the entrance of the United States into World War II changed the landscape of the relation of higher education to the Federal government, Lynd raised the disturbing question: should the university serve the public rather than the private interest.

These were chiefly works of social criticism that pointed to corporatist tendencies within universities, even as most institutions of higher education promulgated the fiction that their faculty were dedicated to the disinterested pursuit of knowledge. Of course the decision of the Roosevelt administration, in the context of preparations for World War, to

invest its primary war research in a handful of leading universities had already raised doubts that scientists could remain free to perform their work independent of the influence of the military or the imperatives of the Cold War. Throughout the Cold War era, these doubts occupied the work of social critics and scholars such as I.F. Stone, Michael Klare, Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman, among others. But the argument that the national security interests of the United States overrode the concerns about their autonomy persuaded many scientists to collaborate with the Federal government's military program, especially because the Department of Defense provided significant support to basic research not directly linked to the war effort. One of the most important functions of the defense contracts was to support the university-based liberal arts, especially the humanities and social sciences. In fact, absent alternative sources of funds, national defense contracts were frequently the vehicle through which natural and social scientists were able to do theoretical research or work not directly connected to the war imperatives.

.By the 1980s writers like Martin Kenney discovered the "University-Corporate complex", focused not on government contracts but university/business partnerships In *Academic Capitalism*(1997) Sheila Slaughter and Gary Rhoades' drew similar conclusions the pursuit of knowledge as a public good, let alone for its own sake, were no longer shared values of the academic community, if they ever were. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the demise of its successor states as military superpowers and political rivals to the United States raised profound issues for the scientific establishment. How to sustain the high level of research within American universities in the post-Cold War era? The meticulous empirical research of Slaughter and Rhoades demonstrated that, in the wake of stagnation of federal financing in the 1980s and 1990s of basic and applied research in the sciences leading research universities added to their dependency by entering into "partnerships" with large pharmaceutical, chemical, and electronic corporations. A 1992 conference attended by the presidents and other key officials of leading research universities was dedicated to responding to the challenge. According to conference organizer Jonathan Cole, Columbia University's Provost, they had only one main option, turning to private industry for support. Under these arrangements corporations provided significant funds to the university in exchange for joint patents, and "early access and review of all proposed publications and presentations by faculty members whose work the company supported".(CHE by Sharon Walsh "Berkeley Denies Tenure to Scientist who Criticized Ties to Industry"). While research in the so-called "policy" sciences associated with branches of sociology and especially political science have not been as subject to direct corporate control and influence, these sub-disciplines have long been adjuncts of the state.(Fisher: *Fundamental Development of the Social Sciences*) These relationships have prompted critics to ask whether the decline in terms of real dollars of the federal government's allocations to basic, disinterested research was primarily a reflection of the conservative program of privatization of knowledge rather than budgetary constraints. Or put another way are the decades of "budget" crisis an ideological and political mask for an attack against public goods framed in purely fiscal terms? .

Moreover the privatization of scientific knowledge has led to widespread secrecy. Scientists who otherwise would have unswervingly accepted the doctrine that it is in the nature of their work to share knowledge were now, by contract, sworn to secrecy. The emergence of partnerships has had a chilling effect on the tradition of scientific transparency, shared knowledge, and open debate about scientific discoveries. It is not uncommon for presenters at scientific meetings to purge their papers of information that might violate the patent rights of their corporate sponsors. And, since the reward system of research universities is results-driven and, in a fiercely competitive global market, corporate partners demand that researchers keep ahead of the competition, the erosion of the ethic of honesty has led to frequent instances of fraud in reporting evidence. Moreover some scientists have invested, or received lucrative consulting contracts, in the corporations that support their research, often reaping substantial dividends. That such practices are condemned as unethical by leading spokespersons for the American Association for the Advancement of Science and other institutions, is a measure of how widespread they are within scientific circles.

But there is barely a murmur about the underlying fact of the commodification of knowledge that has become the main consequence of the end of the bipolar world created by the Cold War. If knowledge is subject to market forces that is, it can be bought and sold like any other commodity, what follows is that scientific knowledge has become private property and the research university is sustained by its ability to sell its wares to the highest bidder, in which case it becomes itself a corporate entity. Holding trade secrets are common practice among corporate competitors. But, contradicting one of the first principles of the 17th century scientific Enlightenment-- that in the interest of encouraging criticism and revision scientific knowledge be widely shared--- commodification signifies the reverse: to the degree that the university remains a key producer of scientific knowledge it may no longer be a bastion of open inquiry. Whether we determine that the subordination of knowledge to the commodity form is in the public interest is a complex question. If the fund of fundamental knowledge upon which technological innovation depends is deemed adequate for a multiplicity of applications many corporations decide that a high volume of basic research is not only unnecessary but unproductive. Federal agencies such as the National Science Foundation may allocate some funds for these projects but, absent a compelling case such as was provided by race to develop a nuclear weapon during World War Two or during the Cold War, policy-makers have concurred with drug and electronics firms that new science must take a back seat to product development that can facilitate the investment, circulation and the profitability of capital. In short as long as knowledge is viewed as a commodity the concept of “disinterest” in research is bound to suffer eclipse.

But perhaps the most serious challenge to the independence of the academic system of American society is the effect of these practices upon the most fundamental right still possessed by the professoriate: academic freedom. That Federal agencies such as the National Science Foundation and the National Institutes of Health charged with dispensing research funds have increasing privileged proposals that are “dedicated” to producing knowledge that can be readily translated into products is by now almost commonplace. Since the Clinton administration Federal science policy is to encourage

dedicated rather than basic research. The relative decline of funding for theoretical physics, for example, may be attributed to the long time period of transition between basic science and practical consequences. Since the transformation of biology into a techno-science--where the fundamental molecular paradigm is intimately linked to applications-- funds have become scarce for those who persist in working in the field of evolutionary science or in the old functionalist perspective. Today, if the university is not prepared to support such research, and private foundations, whose scientific sensibility is not far from the mainstream consensus, are not favorably inclined, the evolutionist as well as practitioners of some older biological disciplines find themselves without the laboratory facilities, travel funds and assistants to facilitate their work. Money is available virtually exclusively for research in molecular biology and biophysics, whose knowledge can be rapidly transformed in commercial bio-technological applications, especially for genetically modified organisms in food, and pharmaceuticals. These deprivations do not appear as a violation of academic freedom because no authority is telling biologists they cannot engage in the fascinating work associated with finding the origin of our species or of any other more than physicists are prohibited from addressing the building blocks of matter or the history of the universe. However, if money is no longer available save for a tiny corps of investigators, the priorities themselves are tantamount to refusing such projects and scientists who wish to stay “relevant” are well advised to fall into line.

Of course, during the period of war emergency (not yet ended) the Federal government, in the interest of national security, claims the right to establish priorities in scientific research and deploys fiscal incentives to enforce its position. This approach is particularly effective at a time when the costs of scientific research, specifically in technology needed to perform experiments, have led to the distinction between “big” science and “little” science. The exemplars of big science are well known: groups engaged in applications of physics and engineering to space travel; the huge accelerators needed for experiments in high energy particle physics; the massive biophysics programs at MIT and at various University of California campuses, especially Berkeley, Davis, San Diego, Irvine and Santa Barbara. But even at centers of so-called little science such as New York’s Mount Sinai School of Medicine where, during the 1980s, the focus was sharply limited to finding molecular biological solutions to problems of brain research, funding opportunities drove the research program of the entire school and there is no reason to believe that any significant research institution today would take a different approach. Under such circumstances leading theoretical physicists such as the late Richard Feynman or Steven Weinberg or evolutionists and biologists Stephen J. Gould and Richard Lewontin are important to the university as ornaments signifying their commitment to intellectual excellence. Meanwhile in the knowledge factories of lucrative research most of the work that the university needs for its financial sustenance gets done.

But with rewards go punishments. Immediately after September 11 among the many reconfigurations of civil liberties and of academic freedom, the Bush administration launched a program of harassment of professors, mainly of Middle Eastern background, who were not US citizens. Some state universities collaborated with the Justice Department by dismissing them or permitting the government to implement a program of

surveillance. As serious as were these acts of political repression the government justified them on National Security grounds and as a result, save for the objections registered by human rights and civil liberties organizations, went largely unchallenged. More recently, again on national security justification, the administration is floating a proposal to enable the Federal government to intervene more directly in monitoring curricula offered by American universities to foreign students. But a recent case at the prestigious University of California-Berkeley raises far more serious issues for our conceptions of the core mission of higher education. In Fall, 2003 the university administration denied tenure to Ignacio H. Chapela, an assistant professor of ecology, overriding his department's unanimous recommendation and that of the faculty senate to grant him tenure. In November 2001 Chapela, and a graduate student, David Quist, published an article in the British scientific journal *Nature* that "claimed that native corn in Mexico had been contaminated by material from genetically modified corn".... Six months later the journal received a number of letters contesting the research" and the journal issued an editorial note acknowledging the evidence not "sufficient to justify the original paper." As the controversy brewed Chapela said that he suspected the journal had been pressured by scientists working with the biotechnology industry and noted that he had been a critic of a 1998 deal between UC-Berkeley and Novartis, a Swiss biotechnology company in which the university receives \$5 million each year for five years "in exchange for giving the company information on faculty publications and presentations"(Walsh op cit)

The Chapela affair is only one of the more blatant instances where the administration of a leading research university is strongly suspected of invoking non-academic criteria for turning down a candidate for tenure. During the 1960s academic dissent was frequently met by university authorities with retributive contempt. While some stood up to government pressure to discipline recalcitrant professors, Columbia University's administration looks pains to create an inhospitable environment so that even some prominent tenured professors felt obliged to leave; at the same time it became an open secret that after 1968 when the entire campus was rife with student demonstrations, that the administration, which held the right to grant tenure tightly in its hands, routinely denied that status to radicals, even as it claimed that it was free of prejudice since most assistant professors were denied tenure. Of course, the principle and practice of academic freedom is at the heart of the matter. But alongside the capacity of the institution to tolerate criticism, especially of its own corporate relationships, lurks the long-contested issue of the role of the faculty in academic governance at a time when higher education is increasingly privatized. During the past fifteen years the professoriate has stood by as the allegiances of administration have, with the encouragement of state governments, shifted from their commitment to higher education as a "public good" to becoming contract players in the theatre of capitalist hegemony. With the exception of a few relatively privileged departments and elite institutions the humanities and social sciences have suffered near-crippling cuts or stagnation even as the science and technology programs are funded in order to prepare them to seek private money.

The Chapela tenure case was hardly controversial either in his own department or at the level of the faculty as a whole. That the administration made the decision to override a consensual judgement in his favor of Chapela's peers, underscores a problem which has

bedeviled advocates for decades of what has been termed “shared governance”. Although they have acknowledged the governing role of university administration—mistakenly I would argue—they have insisted on the equal role of the faculty, especially on academic matters such as tenure and promotion. Indeed the establishment of promotion and tenure committees which, in most instances, are composed exclusively of peers, perpetuates the perception of shared governance. Yet, in all public universities and colleges and the large majority of private institutions, decisions of promotion and tenure committees and deans have the standing of being recommendations to a sovereign administration which, according to its own lights may, with impunity, turn down the recommendations of lower bodies. In fact, the arbitrary authority of the president and his office is frequently challenged by candidates, faculty senates and unions. Many schools have established appeals tribunals which hear cases of faculty discharge, discrimination in salary issues, refusal of tenure and of promotion. In some schools where unions have bargaining rights, the case is subject to a formal grievance procedure. But in many instances candidates are obliged to go court in order to obtain restitution and, in general, courts are extremely reluctant to intervene in what they believe are purely academic decisions.

If the broad application of tenure, won after decades of agitation and struggle, signifies that the faculty is free to pursue channels of inquiry that may be unpopular and unprofitable for the university and its partners, then there is reason to believe that its short sixty year reign is under siege. That both public and private universities and colleges have, in the wake of budget constraints and their own priorities, adopted the practice of employing adjuncts and graduate students to teach the bulk of introductory courses is fairly known. Many adjuncts are superb teachers. In any case they are no worse than the full time faculty. In pedagogical terms the difference resides primarily in the fact that the part-timer is rarely paid for the time required for student academic advisement, nor for class preparation. Beyond these egregious conditions, the spread of a vast, contingent workforce in academe threatens both tenure and academic freedom: it undermines tenure because the overwhelming majority of part-time adjuncts are hired by semester or by the academic year; the condition of their reappointment militates against their participation in free intellectual inquiry. Unfreedom may be ascribed not so much to policy as to their uncertain situation. Any conflict with a department chair-- personal, intellectual or political—can be, and often is, an occasion for termination of even a long standing relationship to the institution. And, recently, many schools have hired faculty on one to five year non-tenure track contracts, some of which are renewable at the discretion of the administration, others not. At Harvard, Yale and other elite institutions these appointments may become stepping stones to permanent jobs elsewhere. However in ordinary third-tier four year colleges and universities, after finishing their stint, faculty members often migrate to another temporary assignment.

We are at the beginning of an era where tenure is rapidly becoming a privileged status reserved for a minority of faculty. When this or the next generation of tenured faculty retires from active service, unless the professoriate as a collectivity is better organized and mobilized than at present, we may experience a return to the situation that prevailed from the 19th century to the first four decades of the 20th century. Then tenure was only rarely granted by boards of trustees at private institutions and the situation was no better

at public colleges and universities. For example, one of the leading literary scholars and critics of the post-World War II period, Lionel Trilling received tenure at Columbia after more than ten years on one year contracts during which he held the rank of instructor, despite having earned a PhD and published a major biography of Matthew Arnold and innumerable articles in leading cultural journals. Similarly, although one or two professors at Columbia's Anthropology department were tenured, important figures such as Ruth Benedict and Margaret Mead never held a permanent position.

The presumption of tenure for qualified scholars and intellectuals was achieved by determined and dogged advocacy by the small, but prominent American Association of University Professors (AAUP). Founded in 1915 as a national organization dedicated to academic freedom at a moment when presidents—most of whom were politically conservative-- wielded almost unlimited power, AAUP placed the institution of tenure for all qualified faculty alongside its dedication to the ability of faculty to engage in free inquiry and speak and write dissenting opinions without facing discharge and other forms of discrimination, and shared governance as its three key objectives. While the Association's efforts were crucial in the post-World War II adoption and routinization of tenure by most schools, fears of a post-World War II recession must be awarded equal credit. From an academy attended by some one and a half million students in 1941, nine years later the number had doubled, largely due to the enactment by Congress in 1944 of the Servicemen's Readjustment Act (popularly known as the GI Bill) that sanctioned tuition-free school attendance for returning veterans and provided them with financial support and housing during the transition between service in the armed forces and paid work. It was, next to social security, the most comprehensive New Deal reform.

But the Cold War was no less beneficial to higher education. The dramatic increase of enrollments combined with Federal funding through the Department of Defense for student loans as well as graduate assistantships continued almost unabated for twenty five years until the end of the Vietnam War. From the Depression era, when the relatively small number of teachers with PhDs constituted a glut on the academic market, to the first twenty years after the war during which graduate programs expanded as fast as they had public funds to do so but were still woefully behind the demand, according to the popular saying all one needed to get an academic teaching job was a PhD and a heartbeat, many academic institutions hastened to institute tenure, chiefly as a motivation to attract qualified applicants. While pay was modest, at least in comparison to other opportunities for educated workers in the rapidly expanding service and industrial sectors, the prospect of lifetime job security was attractive to many who still had vivid memories of Depression hardships and may have experienced the effects of the post-war recessions of 1954, 1958 and 1960-61.

Only the rise of academic unionism from the late 1960s through the 1980s that witnessed the organization of more than 30% of faculty and staff in colleges and universities, and growing enrollments which increased by a factor of 500% from 1950 to 2000, temporarily saved tenure from a powerful counterattack. Yet as many institutions, beleaguered by fiscal constraint and shifting priorities, met their curricular and pedagogical needs in the human sciences with part-time and contingent labor the routine

practice among non-elite institutions of granting tenure to faculty who met certain informal publication, teaching and service requirements came under scrutiny. Of course the claim of some educational economists and leaders of academic disciplines that graduate schools had saturated the “market” by overproducing PhDs was a fallacy born of their naïve acceptance of administrative claims. For if the various constituents of the higher education industry had insisted that colleges and universities replace retirees, the deceased and others who left university employment on a one to one basis, indexed the number of full time hires to enrollments, and enforced limits on faculty/student ratios, we might still suffer from a continuing shortage in some fields. In any case the concept of “glut” is an corporate ideological construct whose success is attributable not to natural “market” causes but to the prevailing relationship of political forces within the academy. If the “handwriting is on the wall” it is not fated to come to pass. As long as professors refuse to deconstruct the ideology of overproduction they are likely to transfer blame from the institution to themselves. Or, as in the beleaguered disciplines of language study, emulating the building trades prominent professors began to call for limiting the supply of PhDs by raising admissions standards or, as two progressives argued, institutionalizing a two tier professoriate by establishing a special “teaching” credential. (Berube and Nelson *Higher Education Under Fire*)

Why has the collective higher education administration been so compliant? After all most middle level administrators and a considerable fraction of top officials were and remain recruited from the professorial ranks despite a powerful push from a variety of sources to install high level corporate bureaucrats into leading academic administrative position. The common explanation for the capacity of administrators to adjust to the new market-driven realities of their “industry” relies heavily on two detours from the historical experience of expanded public funding.. Under the weight of federal and state tax cuts and recessionary conditions that combined to reduce state revenues state legislatures throughout the 1980s and 1990s(which were years of official prosperity), have sharply reduced funding for education as a whole but, particularly in the Northeast and the West Coast, they have been harsh on state colleges and universities. In the past three years even some Southern and historic Midwest land grant universities which were previously protected by the fact that many legislators are their graduates, have suffered some funding cuts. According to this wisdom higher education got a bad name because of student and faculty dissent from the 1960s to the present, but began to suffer when many state governments were captured by the Right. Under these conditions, it is argued, administration which is, after all, a professional bureaucracy and not a political party, has little choice but to adjust its strategies to the new realities—privatization of the sciences and technologies, outsourcing many services such as building maintenance, food and bookstores, and unrelieved cost-cutting in the least economically viable branches: the arts, humanities and the “soft” social sciences such as anthropology which do not raise outside money.

To these I would add a third transformation, which helps explain why we have seen so little resistance within the top echelon administrators. Historically, presidents, provosts and deans were, and still are, mainly recruited from faculty ranks and accepted these posts as an entailment of academic citizenship. After six or at most nine or ten years they

looked forward to returning to the ranks of the professoriate. If they were serious intellectuals—scholar, social critic or scientist—administration was considered a “duty”, like the armed services, not a career. However with the advent of the corporate university teaching and research are now regarded by many as a prelude to a much more lucrative career as administrator. The corporatization of the academy requires the formation of a cadre whose loyalty is no longer to their erstwhile colleagues whose main duties are teaching, research and writing, but to the new institutional mission of making the university relevant to the dominant forces within the political economy. The measure of a successful administrative career is no longer academic leadership—indeed many deans and presidents seem curiously indifferent to what goes on in the classroom or in the public life of the college or university. What counts is the size of the endowment, the quantity of research funds and, in the public universities, success in holding the line against legislative budget cuts. How to consolidate a “team” at the top of the corporate university whose loyalty is firmly ensconced in the institution and its corporate partners?

The major requirement is to reconfigure the institution on the model of the American corporation. The corporate hierarchy has a chain of command where, in contrast to the old collegial university or even the small, family firm, the boundaries between executives and line employees is fairly rigid and the division between intellectual and manual labor is strictly enforced. In the private corporation these tiers are rarely porous. Executives are rarely recruited from the professional ranks and manual workers may rise only to the level of line supervision. As previously mentioned the trend in colleges and universities is to recruit presidents and vice-presidents for finance, administration and other posts from the ranks of corporate chief executive, financial and operating Officers, top military commanders. In the old regime residents who come from these ranks may earn as much as 50% over their base pay, but search committees cannot offer such pittances to CEOs, CFOs and generals. The solution, gradually put in place over the past decade or so, is the Executive Pay Plan.

This plan replaces the former practice of offering a 50% stipend and 10%-25% “stipends to vice-presidents, deans and provosts over their professorial pay which terminates when they return to academic ranks. Now the president is considered to be a CEO and, as university executives and corporate executives have become increasingly interchangeable, their salaries tend to become more competitive, although by no means identical. In 2003 some presidents of leading universities were earning \$500,000-\$750,000 a year plus stipends for housing, a car and driver, and unlimited travel funds. In addition many of them sit as paid directors of corporate boards, even those with whom the university has relationships. The sticky position is the academic affairs vice president or provost for which tradition still demands a genuine academic. But the executive pay plan for the top academic officer tends to separate them from the professorial ranks. It is not uncommon for provosts and academic vps in private universities to earn twice the top rate of the elite professoriate or three times the median rate of the full-time faculty. At most public universities the ratio of provosts’ to top professors pay has risen to 1 and a half to one. It is not likely that these individuals would appreciate term limits or, more to the point, look forward to returning to the classroom.

What has resulted from the adoption of the corporate model to higher education is the interests of the institution are now everywhere separate from those of the collegium and we have seen the formation of a professional/managerial class whose relationship to the intellectual life of the institution is increasingly remote or, to be more exact, tends to reduce faculty and staff to employees in both the private and public sectors. The administration is charged with “management”, not merely of buildings and grounds, services and finances, but also of its core activities: teaching and learning. In many of the 3200 institutions of post-secondary education provosts, under presidential direction, no longer depend on faculty initiatives to undertake innovative programs, or devise new curriculum. “Academic planning” has become the province of the administration and, under the rubric of “service to the university” faculty are invited—or assigned-- to do the basic work needed to put their ideas into practice. At the community colleges, which enroll half of all students in post-secondary learning—mandates from above ordinarily entail prescription of certain textbooks and even pedagogies. Since many two and four year degree programs are undertaken in partnership with private corporations, the curriculum may be packaged by the company. In which case the faculty is relegated to transmitter of received knowledge and this is no longer a symbolic act, but becomes a literal mandate.

What Are the Implications for the Future of the Higher Learning?

Jacques Derrida has issued a strong but gentle plea to protect and defend academic freedom and the autonomy of the university against the nefarious consequences of corporate takeover and the consequent subordination of academic knowledge to private interests. To which we have added the dangers of the formation of a distinct administrative class whose economic and ideological interests are tied to the corporate order and of an increasingly intrusive state in everyday academic affairs, especially abrogating faculty’s control over hiring, tenure and promotion, curricular matters, and its own production of knowledge. But we have learned that the American system of higher education has been, for almost a hundred and fifty years, partially integrated into the state and, as if to belie its image of an ivory tower, a practical adjunct to the scientific and technological basis of both the production and administration of things as well as people.

If these theses are true—and one’s evaluation will depend almost entirely on her or his standpoint—the task of preservation, let alone restoration, of what remains of academic freedom is nothing less than monumental. Plainly, the starting point must be to challenge the professoriate to recognize the assault upon free inquiry, the autonomy of the faculty as a collectivity and on its most powerful weapons, especially tenure. Those who would defend academic freedom are obliged to recognize that a substantial portion of the faculty has been so bludgeoned by recent developments that it has lost hope. Another, much smaller segment may be afflicted with unease at the measure of how much they have become complicit with corporate and government funders who dictate the nature and direction of much scientific research, including most of the social scientific disciplines and education. A third group lacks all reflexivity because it has been formed in the era when the concept of partnership—read faculty subordination to corporate control—seems a thing of nature and, more to the point, the royal road to academic and financial reward.

Who is left? Philosophers, social theorists, “humanists”, unrepentant liberals and radicals and a tiny fraction of libertarians who bridle at corporatization because they realize that it has little to do with the free market. Many are to be found in faculty senates and councils, among academic union activists, and public intellectuals. Needless to say, in the main, their voices remain muted in the avalanche of crises that have afflicted higher education. If Derrida’s call to arms is to be heeded his interlocutors will require strategic acumen to enter the fray. Where to start will depend on what issues arouse a powerful minority to focused outrage.

The experience of social movements, especially the labor movement, tells us that which grievances will induce a group to take action is, from the standpoint of analysis often not the most consequential. At a time of war mobilization faculty may not pay heed to the blatant violations of the rights of alien professors and under pressure of fiscal constraint, may shrug off the evidence of creeping privatization. But will they rationalize administrative refusal to heed faculty recommendations for tenure and promotion?. They might take umbrage at administrators, who never tire of invoking the doctrine of sacrifice in a time of emergency, treating themselves to huge salaries while imposing a salary freeze on the faculty and staff. Or at public universities and colleges they might bridle against the state’s effort to subvert the faculty’s prerogatives by imposing mandates—funded as well as unfunded-- on the curriculum. In short what gets the professoriate to act is indeterminate in advance. But one thing we do know. The more abstract the appeal, the least likely it will provoke practical activity. Phrases like academic freedom, corporate university, shared governance retain ideological resonance. More difficult is to find the concrete instances by which these ideals are violated. Such is the task of a good organizer.