

FOURTEEN

The Modernity of America and the Practice of Scholarship

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The humanities have been decisively reshaped by their transformation into a competitive profession. This transformation is, at present, most advanced in the United States, where growing professionalization encourages a race for new and “original” insights, which compete for visibility. The result is an academic culture of constant redescription, which, in turn, leads to a growing fragmentation of knowledge. While the volume of scholarship increases steadily, the volume of available knowledge is thus constantly reduced. Ironically enough, however, scholars in the humanities have little interest in working against this trend, because they are profiting from it in two significant ways. First, professionally, the increasing fragmentation and decontextualization of knowledge provides the individual scholar with a golden opportunity for individual distinction, because decontextualization is a useful precondition for offering new and apparently original readings.¹ Second, culturally, the practice of scholarship in the humanities that has become dominant, especially in the United States, opens up entirely new possibilities for an expressive individualism that bases its claims to recognition on the notion of “difference.” The current cultural radicalism in the humanities, which defines itself in contrast to an earlier form of political radicalism, can be seen as manifestation of this expressive individualism.²

Advanced stages of professionalization and individualization thus reinforce each other, which explains why the American model is spreading and taking hold in other parts of the world. The “Americanization” of the humanities, which is only one of innumerable areas in which the American model is gaining dominance as a world standard, is thus not an effect of cultural imperialism but of a promise of new possibilities of self-empowerment and self-fashioning. The worldwide triumph of the American model is therefore almost effortless (and criticism of it is largely hy-

pocritical, inasmuch as the cultural Left does not acknowledge its own contribution to this development and the stakes it has in it). If one wants to change this development, then a reconsideration of the current institutional conditions of the production of knowledge in the humanities and their ties to certain cultural formations is overdue.

In a way, the development of the humanities in the period after World War II is a success story. On the institutional level, the number of professional positions created in colleges and universities all over the world is remarkable. As a consequence, humanistic knowledge is spread more widely than in the past, and more of it is available to us nowadays than in the past. At the same time, this successful institutional expansion has intensified an ever-increasing proliferation and fragmentation of knowledge.³ Paradoxically, this development threatens to undermine the very promise that underlies the success story of the humanities: the promise of meaning.⁴ The case is most obvious in literature and arts departments. If there are twenty different theoretical approaches to the interpretation of *Huckleberry Finn* and more than a thousand interpretations of the book, all defining themselves against one another, and thus differing from other readings as a matter of principle, it is no longer even possible to establish relations among them in order to sort out their respective strengths and weaknesses. The hermeneutic rule of entering into a dialogue with other positions and aiming at an integration of insights is replaced by a race for readings that are original in the sense of differing from other positions by setting up strong counterclaims.⁵ But, in a somewhat lesser form, the problem plagues other disciplines of the humanities as well. The proliferation of ever more detailed studies of historical material or ever more specialized discussions of philosophical problems has increased fragmentation to a point where knowledge becomes a matter of willful choice.⁶

A paradoxical professional logic that transforms an indispensable strategy of critical insight and interpretive correction into a source of fragmentation and potential disorientation is at work here. In principle, a plurality of interpretive approaches helps give us a critical perspective on an object, thus correcting for the apparently inescapable dialectic of blindness and insight that characterizes all interpretations of world and text. Once plurality becomes endless proliferation, however, the initial gain threatens to become a loss.⁷ Because we are overwhelmed by a flood of new approaches and interpretive claims, scholarly work begins to lose its power of correction and functions instead as mere displacement.⁸ There are simply too many different claims to assess their validity or to establish meaningful connections between them in order to put them into perspective. The full impact of this constantly increasing proliferation of meaning-making is demon-

strated by the fact that even those with a critical perspective on the competitive or disruptive nature of the present social and academic system cannot help but contribute to this process, because they have to work within the same institutional framework. Under present conditions, the institutionalized mode of production of knowledge has therefore gained priority over any ideological position in determining the function and effects of work in the humanities. The political Left and Right are equally affected by it. One could argue, for example, that the recent revisionism in American studies has provided a fundamental and long-needed change in perspective. But once this perspective is established, it becomes part of the same formation of knowledge production that characterizes the scholarship it replaces.⁹ Another race for professional distinction through difference begins. But the more interpretations we get, the greater the dispersal of meaning, because all of these interpretations must, by definition, correct prior interpretations in order to justify their existence. What started out as a heroic effort to undermine false generalizations thus leads to an endless flow of new claims, which ultimately begins to undermine any basis for a claim to representativeness on the part of the knowledge produced.

No particular approach or position is to blame for this situation, because it is produced by historical developments that go beyond the impact of any particular position. My argument should thus not be confused with the conservative criticism of the alleged fragmentation of canons or values brought about by the recent revisionism in American studies. Actually, I think that the impact of these developments on the idea of the canon is often exaggerated, because, inevitably, these movements merely replace older canons with a new set of preferred and canonized material, to which scholars return again and again. Thus, in discussions in which challenges to existing canons of cultural or historical material are blamed for fragmentation, the term "fragmentation" is often used as code for value conflicts or political disagreements.

The fragmentation of knowledge I am talking about here was going on before such recent revisions and has gone on after them, and it is not tied in any causal and unique way to any of them. It has epistemological, social, and institutional reasons. Its origin lies in historicism and its insistence that sense-making and interpretation are historical acts; consequently, each period, generation, and group will feel the need to offer its own interpretation of a phenomenon. This tendency has been accelerated, in fact, institutionalized as a professional practice, by professionalization and the emergence of an academic culture of knowledge production. Gradually, but especially after the explosion of higher education after World War II, this professionalization has begun to change the function of cultural and historical reinterpretation and has inverted the priorities. While professionalization originally had the purpose of providing interpretation with a solid institutional

and methodological base, it has now tied reinterpretation to professional advancement. This means that, while in the past each generation or group had its reason for reinterpretation, now each scholar has. This reinterpretation, in turn, must be defined by disagreement and difference, for otherwise it would not meet professional criteria for qualification. A feminist scholar cannot simply publish an essay in which she praises another feminist's interpretation of the cult of domesticity. There has to be, at least to a certain extent, a revision, disagreement, or contradiction in order to justify her intervention professionally.¹⁰ Historicism may thus authorize reinterpretation, but professionalization institutionalizes disagreement and difference as professional necessity. The result is a breathtaking proliferation of work, whether "conservative" or "progressive,"¹¹ that undermines (and delegitimizes) all interpretations in similar ways, because, in a professional culture of institutionalized difference, a text can no longer be taken as representative of anything but the author's professional position.¹²

Quantity is not the only or the major problem of the current proliferation of meaning-production, however. Even if one had the time, energy, and institutional capacity to sort out the strengths and weaknesses of the diverse approaches and innumerable interpretations and aim at an integration of the knowledge produced by these various approaches, there would no longer be any point in doing so, because these interpretations are generated by the professional need to be different, so that a meta-theoretical comment on their adequacy or inadequacy or an unsolicited integration would be considered "policing." Such a metatheoretical position would be inconceivable anyhow, however, because it would have to be based on the premise that it is possible to evaluate interpretive truth-claims, which would have no consensual basis after the demise of the "grand narratives." Methodological discussions thus nowadays proceed in exactly the opposite way, namely, seeking to unmask theoretical or methodological claims to interpretive adequateness as disguised power games. The only consensus remaining seems to be a broadly defined antifoundationalism, which is strong in subverting arguments for general criteria on which claims for interpretive adequateness could be based but weak in suggesting possible alternatives, unless one wants to accept the neopragmatist advice to do what one does anyway as such an alternative.

The current antifoundationalism reflects the changing institutional and social conditions of a profession that has gone from being a self-appointed guardian of cultural and social values to being a white-collar profession with its own pressures for professional distinction.¹³ The basic social problem of democracy, already diagnosed perceptively by Tocqueville, namely, that of distinguishing oneself from the mass of others, repeats itself on the professional level and creates an escalating logic of "strong" (over)statements, which serve the purpose of standing out from the rest.

The more professionals in the humanities, the greater the need for difference and distinction. Thus, an endless spiral is set in motion: the more scholarly work exists, the greater the need for difference and interpretive disagreement in order to distinguish oneself. The greater the disagreement, the greater the fragmentation. The greater the fragmentation, the greater the need—and room!—for new interpretations. Inevitably, however, these new interpretations come at a price that carries a counterproductive logic of its own. For the more interpretations we get, the greater the need to devalue individual interpretations, and thus, in turn, the greater the need to stand out by forceful overstatement.

For a while, the solution to this proliferation of meaning production seemed to be an increase in theoretical and methodological reflection. Theory was defined as the intellectual discipline of reflecting systematically about the premises and methodological problems of interpretation. By now, however, theory has been transformed from a systematic philosophical discipline into another area of professional empowerment. In its current use and application, theory has not solved the crisis of orientation in the humanities. On the contrary, it has deepened the crisis, not only by becoming useful "symbolic capital" in the professional race for distinction, but also by feeding and accelerating that race in entirely new and unforeseen ways. The special usefulness of theory for this purpose lies in two aspects. To start with, theory can function as a shortcut, because it permits the description and characterization of an interpretive object without long, extended study. This extended study can be avoided because theory, as a rule and for good reasons, aims at general statements (often of a sweeping nature), so that explanatory claims tie the interpretation of cultural material to historical laws, social conditions, human faculties, linguistic or cultural mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion, and so forth. In the appropriation of theory by a new generation of scholars, it has begun to change in nature, however: it, too, becomes a form of symbolic capital that is judged not by its capacity for clarifying and justifying underlying premises but by its strong claims potential.¹⁴

This explains two striking facts about the present theory boom in the humanities. On the one hand, it has been observed that almost none of the thinkers who have influenced critical theory in the humanities recently really fare well in their original disciplines, where their theories and statements are considered to be too sweeping and undifferentiated—which is, on the other hand, exactly the basis for their appropriation by other disciplines. The fact that the exchange value of theory as symbolic capital dominates its current application also explains the fact that many European theories developed over years of patient scholarly work were imported

wholesale into the new American market for theory and used up in rapid succession, so that, by now, American scholarship seems to have run out of imports. The reason for this mode of appropriation is that theory has become another instrument in the white-collar race for difference. Nobody has actually refuted the approaches or thinkers that are quickly discarded. They cease to play a role in theoretical discussions, not because they have been disproven, but because they are no longer on the cutting edge of professional distinction.

However, the most striking aspect of recent developments in the humanities is not their theoretical but their radical nature. The dominant approaches of the past fifteen years, ranging from poststructuralism and deconstruction, new historicism and cultural materialism to the various versions of race, class, and gender studies, may be widely different in many of their arguments, premises, and procedures. What unites them is a new form of radicalism, which, in contrast to older forms of political radicalism, I would like to call cultural radicalism, because the central source of political domination is no longer attributed to the level of political institutions and economic structures but to culture.¹⁵ The origin of this paradigm shift in the definition of power lies in the student movement of the late 1960s. In response to the puzzling and irritating fact that the "oppressed" did not form coalitions with the students, and following the lead, above all, of Herbert Marcuse, a critique of the capitalist system based on instances of political repression was replaced by the idea of "structural" or "systemic" power,¹⁶ that is, by a redefinition of power as exerted not by agents or institutions of the state but by the system's cunning ways of constituting "subjects" or ascribing "identities" through cultural forms. Thus, recent critical theories in the humanities, different as they may be in many respects, nevertheless have one basic premise in common (and are amazingly predictable in this one respect): they all take as their point of departure the assumption that there is an all-pervasive, underlying systemic element that constitutes the system's power in an invisible yet highly effective way. The names given to this systemic effect change; they have included "the prison-house of language," "ideology redefined as semiotic system," "the reality effect," "the ideological state apparatus," "the cinematic apparatus," "the symbolic order," "discursive regime," "logocentrism," "patriarchy," "whiteness," and "Western thought."¹⁷ But the basic claim is always the same: the invisible power effect of the systemic structure derives from the fact that it determines meaning, and the perception of the world before the individual is even aware of it, by constituting the linguistic and cultural patterns through which we make sense of the world.

This redefinition of power has led to a constant pressure to outradicalize others.¹⁸ If power resides in hitherto unacknowledged aspects of language, discourse, or the symbolic order, then there is literally no limit to ever new

and more radical discoveries of power effects. And if it is power that determines cultural meaning, then the major question must be the possibility or impossibility of opposition. "Opposition," however, also changes in nature. In view of the shrewd containment of all resistance by discursive regimes, the only way out lies in radical otherness or difference. Thus, the development of cultural radicalism has taken a characteristic course: from neo-Marxism with its critique of the market (which still implies the possibility of resistance) to Foucauldian neohistoricism (which unmasks this form of resistance as really a hidden form of complicity) to race, class, and gender studies (which revive the possibility of resistance by locating it in "difference"). Actually, the current umbrella concept "race, class, and gender" is a misnomer, because the category of "class" cannot constitute radical difference. Consequently, class analysis no longer constitutes a genuine theoretical option for the new cultural radicalism, while, sexual preference, on the other hand, constitutes elementary, unbridgeable difference and has therefore moved to the center of revisionist approaches.

By resting all hope of resistance on the category of difference, another theoretical problem is created, however, because a term for denoting unbridgeable otherness is used as the basis for a broadly defined group-identity that does not account for the possibility of difference within this group. Hence, a constant movement or "sliding" in the use of the category "difference" can be observed: in order to make the concept politically meaningful, it must be used as a comprehensive category of distinction and must be equated with a particular gender, ethnic or racial group, or form of sexual preference. Such redefinition of difference as, for example, racial or engendered identity runs the danger, however, of reessentializing identity and works against the very idea of difference. The problem arises from the fact that a category taken from linguistic and semiotic analysis, where it describes an uncontrollable dissemination of meaning, is employed to justify claims for social recognition. In the first context, it is an antirepresentational term, used to deconstruct a belief in the possibility of representation; in the second, the idea of representation is not only revived but becomes the central criterion for judging and classifying cultural texts.¹⁹

Arguments within race, class, and gender studies constantly oscillate between the two options and arrest them almost at will wherever needed. In accordance with the professional culture of performance, difference is used as a means of self-definition and of self-empowerment. This, in fact, is the thrust and net result of the current cultural radicalism in the humanities. Since "power" is redefined as an effect of systemic structures that are virtually everywhere, the term is no longer a category of political analysis but a word for all possible barriers to the self. And since the self is, in principle, constituted by systemic effects or is seen, at best, as the site of conflicting systemic effects, it can only be defined through difference, so that the claim

or assertion of difference becomes the supreme form of self-empowerment.²⁰

The far-reaching radicalization of the humanities in the United States has been an entirely unforeseen and highly surprising development from a European point of view. More specifically, there were two surprises. For once, radicalism reemerged in the United States after it had just turned dogmatic in Europe and thereby discredited itself completely. One of the recurring arguments of conservatives during the heyday of the student movement in France, Germany, and other European countries was the charge of ideologization, which was considered a typically European weakness and regularly contrasted with Anglo-Saxon "common sense." As it turned out, however, "common sense" was no match for radicalization. Why? And why was there no consideration of the negative experiences in Europe? The explanation, I think, lies in the fact that this new-wave American radicalization is not what it appears (and often claims) to be, namely, a critical theory with political goals and a political theory. Although it is constantly pointed out that not only the private but literally every aspect of social life is political, there is no systematic reflection on the structures or procedures through which the claims of difference or "the other" could become political reality. One reason surely is that the realization of one claim inevitably runs the danger of violating the claims of somebody else. Such "violations" can only be justified on the basis of a set of normative ideas, but normative ideas violate difference, as the various forms of post-structuralist and neopragmatist antifoundationalism point out again and again. There was nothing to be learned, then, from European political radicalism, because the new form of cultural radicalism has entirely different goals: it pursues a politics of self-empowerment, and its analyses thus need no longer be based on Marxist or other social theories that attempt to describe the relation between various groups and members of the political system as a whole. Instead, radicalism can focus on the systemic barriers to self-empowerment, while, politically speaking, it remains a form of interest group politics or an untheorized form of radical egalitarianism. The problem, then, is not that the humanities have been instrumentalized by politics, as conservatives have it. As cultural radicalism rightly claims, there is no way around politics. The interesting theoretical problem is that they have been appropriated by what, in following the lead of Robert Bellah, I would like to call the politics of expressive individualism.²¹

The important point to grasp here is that expressive individualism is not a narcissistic deformation but the successful end-product of a central project in the humanities. It does not reflect the humanities' crisis but rather their success. Self-empowerment through cultural difference is not a pathologi-

cal distortion of the true goals and function of the humanities but a modern manifestation of a promise of self-empowerment in which the humanities have played a crucial role since their inception. The intellectual justification and support of individual development and self-assertion is a major element of what we call modernity (in the sense of *Neuzeit*). Crucial "break-throughs" in Western intellectual development that stand at the center of the humanities, such as the philosophical "discovery" of the subject, the idea of the Enlightenment, the doctrine of individual rights, the modern understanding of the aesthetic as a nonmimetic mode of experience, and the "reinvention" of art as a fictive realm to transgress the boundaries of existing worlds have all contributed to this process of individualization and provided it with both intellectual tools and moral justification.²² My claim is that, contrary to its self-perception, the current cultural radicalism does not stand in opposition to this process but merely represents a new, radicalized stage of it.

The process of individualization in Western societies can be divided into two major stages, as suggested by Bellah and his co-authors in their study *Habits of the Heart*, where a distinction is made between economic or utilitarian individualism and expressive individualism. Disregarding the nostalgic communitarian context of their argument, I find these terms heuristically useful in drawing attention to two different manifestations of individualism in the modern age, which, in going beyond Bellah, can best be distinguished by reference to two different sources of self-definition and self-esteem. In the traditional form of economic individualism, as analyzed by Max Weber and numerous others after him, self-esteem is derived primarily from economic success and social recognition. In order to obtain these, the individual has to go through an often long and painful act of deferred gratification and self-denial. Analogous to the act of saving, the goal is to accumulate a stock of capital, in both economic and social terms, which will eventually yield its profits in the form of increased social approval and a rise in the social hierarchy. The prototypical narrative genres of this economic individualism are the autobiographical success story, but also the bildungsroman or the story of female education, such as, for example, the domestic novel. They are teleological in conception, their basic narrative pattern is that of a rise or fall, their recurring emotional dramas are the experience of injustice and the withholding of just rewards, but also, possibly, a final moment of triumphant retribution; their ideal is the formation of a character that is strong enough to survive this long ordeal of social apprenticeship.

In contrast, the culture of expressive individualism is not primarily concerned with a rise of the individual to social respectability or its (tragic or melodramatic) failure, but with the search for self-realization. Its major issues are no longer economic success or the promise of social recognition,

but the assertion of cultural difference, that is, the ability of the individual to assert his or her own uniqueness and otherness against the powers of cultural convention and encroaching disciplinary regimes. If development and growth are key concepts in economic individualism, difference is the key concept in expressive individualism.²³ This change in the main sources of self-esteem is the logical outcome of an ever-intensified process of individualization and, along with it, increasingly radical forms of cultural dehierarchization. In this process, the individual has to assert his or her self-worth in opposition to those forces that stand in its way. Initially, these were obvious sources of inequality such as caste, class, or patriarchy. With the increasing democratization of Western societies—in itself a result of individualization—these sources of inequality have been undermined in authority, and have, in fact, often been dissolved or weakened decisively. Inequality remains, but it can no longer be as easily attributed to social structures.²⁴ Hence the search for new “systemic effects” of inequality, and hence an increased importance of self-fashioning by means of cultural difference.

If the source of power is cultural, however, then culture must also serve as the source of counterdefinition and the search for self-realization must become the search for alternate cultural options. It is therefore culture that takes the place of the economy as the major model for self-realization, self-assertion, and self-fashioning, because the realm of culture provides something like an archive or storehouse of different models of self-definition. In contrast to the realm of the economy, where self-discipline and a strong “identity” are the most desirable qualities, culture offers an almost inexhaustible supply of options for role-taking and imaginary self-empowerment. Ironically, it is nowadays not a ritual of consent that absorbs “the radical energies of history,” as Sacvan Bercovitch has it,²⁵ but a new stage of individual self-empowerment, articulated most forcefully by cultural radicalism, that redefines political engagement or professional activities as a cultural option of self-definition, and thus as one possibility of role-taking among many.

As a form of expressive individualism, radicalism changes its function. Instead of providing an ideological base for political analysis, it becomes an intellectual instrument for the pursuit of difference. This explains its most striking feature: its focus on, if not obsession with, the question of oppositionalism. The striking fact that cultural radicalism’s interest in art and history seems almost entirely absorbed by the problem of whether their objects of study were truly oppositional or not is closely linked with the question of cultural difference: “Opposition is the best way to assert cultural difference, for it is opposition that allows difference to emerge most clearly and pointedly.”²⁶ Thus, cultural radicalism can nowadays be regarded as one of the supreme manifestations of expressive individualism in the realm

of the humanities. Although it sees itself as a political turn in cultural or historical studies, it really represents, at a closer look, another turn of the screw in the cultural history of individualization. This individualism needs radical dehierarchization to eliminate cultural restrictions on self-empowerment, but it also needs the cultural construction of difference to escape from the consequences of radical equality. In this sense, cultural radicalism does not provide an alternative to individualism, but a more radicalized version of individualization, not a critique of individualism by “politics” but a critique based on the politics of expressive individualism.

My point, then, is that it is the transition from economic to expressive individualism that stands at the center of recent developments in the humanities.²⁷ The effects of this development have been ambiguous. By turning intellectual and scholarly work into imaginary role-taking, the attractiveness of the humanities for the individual has increased, while their importance and social relevance have decreased.²⁸ The more important and useful the humanities become for the individual in search of imaginary self-empowerment, the more irrelevant insights or claims to representativeness become for society. It is, thus, the expressive reconfiguration of individualism that I see as the driving force in the current development of the humanities. As long as cultural radicalism uses the category of the political to give authority to its own claims of self-definition, this aspect is effectively obscured. In this version, the political is opposed to individualism, because individualism is regarded as a typical manifestation of capitalism. Actually, however, individualism is a product of modernity, whose idea of self-development also provides a base for cultural radicalism, although the extension of the possibilities of the individual is no longer seen in terms of “growth,” but in terms of an increased space for “performance.”²⁹

To talk about individualism is thus not to pass moral judgment on “selfishness.” Tocqueville already noted that individualism is not to be confused with egotism or selfishness. Individualism is a social attitude that also attracts those who would distance themselves strongly not only from egotism but from cultural radicalism. To give but one example from my own professional background: in its redefinition of literary meaning as (partly) the result of an actualization through the reader, reception theory has given a theoretical boost to individualization within the humanities—as has modernism in general. The reason for this was not “selfishness,” but quite the opposite, namely, an antitotalitarian impulse that sought to strengthen the individual through the perspectivizing potential of its own reading experience, always basing this liberating move, however, on the interpretive truth claims of hermeneutic theory. This, in fact, is a recurring event in the history of modernity. Its interventions on behalf of the individual are

almost always based on the expectation of a new consensus of liberated individuals who are finally able to realize their true human potential. But it never turns out that way. Individualism gladly welcomes the new opening but soon disregards the norms and values that served as its justification.

My analysis seems in many respects to tie into what must be considered the most penetrating recent analysis of the state of the humanities, John Guillory's *Cultural Capital*, which draws on Pierre Bourdieu's theory of symbolic capital. For Guillory, the crisis of the humanities reflects the fact that, as a form of creating capital, the humanities have become increasingly obsolete in a society in which technobureaucratic values dominate. Basically, Guillory attributes the crisis of the humanities to the emergence of a professional-managerial class in the university that "no longer requires the cultural capital of the old bourgeoisie": "The decline of the humanities was never the result of newer noncanonical courses or texts, but of a large-scale 'capital flight' in the domain of culture."³⁰ The turn toward theory in the humanities thus "has the oblique purpose of signifying a rapprochement with the technobureaucratic constraints upon intellectual labor." But if "the career of the college professor is increasingly structured as a mimesis of the bureaucratic career,"³¹ why are intellectuals all over the world, and especially young people (often, and increasingly so, from marginalized groups) submitting themselves to this regime in the first place and in ever-growing numbers, despite an often bleak professional outlook? The bureaucratization of higher learning along the lines of greater economic efficiency is indeed a crucial aspect of recent developments in the humanities. However, the deterioration of working conditions connected with it is obviously not yet strong enough to offset promises of self-definition and self-empowerment that have increased with recent developments in most disciplines within the humanities. On the contrary, cultural radicalism has provided a profession once associated with the dust of archives with the allure of an avant-garde existence in postmodern times. As a consequence, what we are witnessing today is not, or not primarily, a redefinition of the humanities on the basis of the needs and values of a new "professional-managerial class" with its "technobureaucratic constraints" but a redefinition of the humanities in terms of the needs of expressive individualism.

In Guillory's Marxist view, class analysis remains the best way to comprehend the crisis of the humanities. Since it is the function of the humanities to produce cultural capital, any crisis must signal a social and economic realignment. A new "class" needs new cultural capital. This argument perpetuates a view in which economic structures shape culture. It may be, however, that the cultural realm has turned into a sphere that is, increas-

ingly, contradicting (not opposing) dominant economic and social structures (and thereby creating problems for them): while the economic sphere may indeed be governed by technobureaucratic values, the cultural realm is nourishing forms of imaginary self-empowerment that contribute to a growing individualization of society—and, for that matter, to a potential subversion of technocratic values. Contrary to what Guillory claims, the distinction offered by cultural material nowadays is no longer "based on inequality of access to cultural goods"³² but on its performative and expressive potential for representing "difference." Guillory is right in claiming that the humanities, despite their own official self-image as a disinterested search for meaning and aesthetic value, are seriously affected and transformed by professionalization. But the main pressures—and possibilities—that these professional structures exert do not tend to technobureaucratic streamlining but, on the contrary, to a proliferation of individual expression and self-definition. Guillory's theory of modernization as a relentless extension of technobureaucratic values to all areas of cultural meaning-production tells, at best, one side of the story, the organizational one. However, the work currently being done in the humanities is not simply homologous with the organizational pressures under which it is produced. On the contrary, if anything, it stands in opposition to such pressures and provides a whole array of arguments for the critique of systemic effects.

If one looks at the general development of work in the humanities since 1970, one unmistakable tendency stands out: what drives this development is neither a growing adaptation to technocratic values nor simply a drive for professional newness per se.³³ To be sure, there is a constant and constantly growing professional pressure for newness, but this race for newness stands in the service of an ever-increasing process of individualization. To give an example, let me briefly trace some crucial stages of this development in my own field, that of American studies. In doing this, I shall focus on a central question in the interpretation of cultural and historical material, that of the representativeness of one's material. For, clearly, the usefulness of a historical study or cultural analysis will depend on the insight this material can provide beyond itself. To interpret a cockfight in Bali is only of interest if the interpretation goes beyond the mere physicality of the act and manages to bring forth some helpful insights into the culture or society under study.

Debates in American studies have therefore, from the start, focused on the question of what objects and categories are best suited to provide insights into American society and culture that can be considered representative. In the beginning, American studies answered the question by following the traditions of intellectual and literary history and based its interpretations of "the American experience" on the assumption that spe-

cial artistic and intellectual achievements provide a kind of condensed insight into its inner nature. Scholars such as Perry Miller and F. O. Matthiessen concentrated on high culture because they looked for "profound" expressions of a given period in American history. In this approach, key documents in the history of ideas and works of art embody the highest potential of American civilization. The main objection to this view came from sociological studies of American culture and, more specifically, of popular culture and the media. American studies was criticized for linking a claim of representativeness with material that did not appear to speak for a large number of Americans. The answer to this challenge was provided by the categories of myth and symbol, through which individual texts could be described as manifestations of a widely shared cultural pattern and yet, at the same time, could also be interpreted as significant expressions of subjective experience (cf. Henry Nash Smith's definition of myth as "an intellectual construction that fuses concept and emotion into an image").³⁴

The claims of the myth and symbol school in American studies were undermined in the 1970s by the new social history, which questioned the representativeness of the kind of American myths analyzed in books like Henry Nash Smith's *Virgin Land*³⁵ and replaced it with a more complex model of different social groups that stand in changing and varying relations to society's dominant myths. At the same time, the claims of the myth and symbol school were also undermined from within by a politicization of the study of patterns of thought, in which American myths were redefined as disguised, and therefore especially effective, forms of ideological control.³⁶ After these challenges from the outside and inside, it was no longer possible to regard a myth as an expression of *the* American experience. On the contrary, one had to assume a countertradition that was not yet fully incorporated and that had to be unearthed from underneath the official self-definitions of American culture. In this revisionist form of American studies, what were "truly" representative were the cultural manifestations of oppressed groups and oppositional movements.

One such movement was the women's movement. However, no sooner had its perspective, together with that of other groups, begun to influence and shape work in American studies than it was, in turn, criticized for its unwarranted generalizations and unacknowledged essentialism. One point of this charge of "essentialism" is that an identity construction as "woman," based exclusively on the fact of sexual difference, is not considered adequate for capturing the whole range of female experience. Instead, it imprisons women in a fiction of sexual identity. To work against this discursive trap, the category of gender was introduced in order to emphasize the cultural constructedness of sexual identities. Identity is thus discursively ascribed and not determined by biology, but even such "liberation" from biological fate still traps the female individual in a binary scheme. Feminist

scholars may disagree on what constitutes female identity, but they still assume that there is such a thing, and that it can be represented in the double sense of the word. Hence, the next move in feminist debates leads to the idea of "performed gender," in which gender is part of an open, mobile staging of identity and any claim to group representativeness is thus radically dissolved. Consequently, to analyze a text or person in terms of the performance of gender can, in the final analysis, no longer provide any insight beyond itself, for no two performances are alike. The individual has liberated herself from the iron grip of group identities, but this achievement can only illustrate her own potential. In this, it ironically comes close to the single creative performance of the work of art from which early American studies set out—with the one essential difference that the performing individual herself has now become the work of art. The radical claims to individuality originally reserved for special artistic achievements have been democratized.

In Perry Miller's intellectual history, women—the Anne Hutchinsons and Anne Bradstreets aside—do not have a voice of their own. The clerical elite speaks for them. In principle, the same applies to the myth and symbol school, although there is the hint of something like an indirect representation, since the relevant works express deeper needs of all members of society. A myth is no longer restricted to an elite. In the new social history and in feminist studies, this "universalism" is finally discarded and women gain a voice of their own—but only insofar as their fate is representative of that of women in general. A domestic novel, for example, can merit interpretation as an example of the ideological limits or subversive possibilities of the cult of domesticity. The subsequent development in feminist scholarship, however, is characterized by ever-intensifying debates about how representative such material really is as an expression of female experience. Black women do not feel represented; lesbians seek to retreat from a biological definition or from a mere male-female binarism. Inevitably, in each case, different historical or cultural material is considered representative. Consequently, the development in American studies has had an unmistakable trajectory: general claims have been undermined by more and more detailed and differentiated studies of particular groups, which, in turn, are then questioned for their unexamined "universalist" or "essentialist" assumptions. In this sense, historical or cultural studies will never run out of work, for they can always point out that prior work on the subject is still based on unwarranted generalizations. Ultimately, the individual can only represent her- or himself.³⁷

The analysis I have offered so far seems to follow a familiar pattern, that of the European discussing American developments in terms of excess or de-

formation. The word that stands at the center of this type of analysis is "Americanization." And indeed, I have followed the pattern by characterizing the development I have analyzed as the "Americanization of knowledge." However, as I indicated earlier, in the context of my analysis, the term "Americanization" is not used to evoke insinuations of imperialism but to refer to a trend of modernity that for a number of reasons has emerged most clearly and strongly in the United States, so that "America" has come to signify this promise of modernity. But this trend is also becoming dominant in other parts of the world, including most European countries, even though the humanities in those countries have a long and venerable tradition of their own. This raises the interesting question why the American practice of scholarship in the humanities is becoming dominant.

Cultural imperialism would be an easy answer. To be sure, with influential international institutions like the Salzburg Seminar, the Rockefeller Center at Bellagio, and the Wilson Center, not to forget the drawing power of America's elite universities, Americans have developed powerful and effective instruments of cultural politics in the humanities. After a beginning inspired by humanistic ideals of personal growth, many of these institutions have left their early idealist phase behind and have turned into active centers for the recruitment and training of an international political and cultural elite.³⁸ And yet, so far, these institutions have had little influence on the directions disciplines in the humanities have taken. Even American studies, with its obvious political usefulness for a Cold War agenda, eventually, and in entirely unexpected ways, developed ideas highly critical of American exceptionalism. The truth of the matter is that official or semi-official American cultural politics have remained haphazard, inconsistent, and underfunded and have not been instrumental in shaping current intellectual agendas in the humanities. Nevertheless, the gradual Americanization of knowledge production, and, more specifically, of the humanities seems to spread almost effortlessly.

One obvious conclusion is that the process of "Americanization" does not need additional political or institutional support. Whether the developments I have described are likely to transcend their American context is no longer an open question. By and large, it has already been decided. What the cultural imperialism paradigm does not grasp in its focus on national interests, whether political or economic, is that the nation is itself part of a larger historical context, that of modernity. The reason why the United States is not in need of imperialist politics in the traditional sense of the word is that American society is realizing certain tendencies of modernity more radically than other countries. In fact, one might argue that it is not Europe that poses the norm for the historical development of modernity, to which the United States is exceptional, but the other way round. In making this case, Tocqueville is more helpful than other well-

established theoreticians of modernity.³⁹ In contrast to thinkers like Weber and Habermas, Tocqueville does not put reason or the iron grip of rationality at the center of his understanding of modernity, but democracy—a democracy defined as a way of life in which the elimination of the institutionalized hierarchies of aristocratic society creates the specifically "modern" drama of a restless individual in incessant search of recognition and self-esteem. Central aspects of modernity, such as the disenchantment of the world, the loss of traditional authority, and increased mobility, intensify the need for new sources of self-esteem.

Marshall Berman has put these developments in the larger context of the culture of modernity. In his book on cultural modernity, with the fitting title *All That Is Solid Melts into Air*, taken from Karl Marx, Berman focuses on the promise of individual self-realization established by the culture of modernity and, linked with it, the unlimited dynamic of self-development unleashed by modernity. Modernity introduces a promise of individual self-realization and self-development that provides the drive for distinction and recognition, diagnosed by Tocqueville, with its own logic of acceleration. A restless individualism, as Berman calls it, throws all culture into a constant flux. All sources of authorization or self-legitimation are subject to constant change. As a consequence, this restless individualism constantly seeks a form of recognition that will provide distinction from the mass of others.

As Tocqueville has pointed out, democracy complicates and intensifies this search. Because the link to a chain of family tradition, characteristic of aristocratic societies, is broken, and a person's worth is no longer automatically established by her or his social position, the individual becomes responsible for establishing his or her own worth in the eyes of others. This task, however, is complicated by the fact that under the premise of equality, everyone else pursues the same task, so that the challenge is to find a way of distinguishing oneself from all the others. Tocqueville, in fact, attributes the strong elements of performance in American culture—the striking persistence of a theatrical or, as he puts it, "bombastic" style of communication that draws attention to itself—to this challenge. The developments in the humanities I have described can be seen as a manifestation of the same tendency, albeit one that Tocqueville could not possibly have anticipated.

As mass democracies spread on a global scale, conditions begin to resemble those that Tocqueville already observed in the United States. The future global system will look "Americanized" in the sense that it will bear the marks of the American model. There won't be much coercion in order to achieve this. At present, for example, as a result of European unification, a far-ranging Americanization of European universities is under way. The professional mode of knowledge production institutionalized in the United States will become the common transnational practice of scholarship. The result will not be homogenization, however, but an increase in diversity,

not because more nations enter the global dialogue but because the new global standard is one that, as I have argued, has an insatiable hunger for diversity—not primarily for political, moral, or cultural reasons but for professional ones. Thus, institutionally, an internationalizing of American history is to be expected, but the effects on American historians will still be negligible, because they will hardly take note of that new diversity, for a few simple reasons: (1) there is little professional distinction to be gained from it in the American academic world; (2) the networking effect is not substantial enough; and (3) the numbers are against it. In view of the increasing proliferation of scholarship, American historians will have their hands full in keeping up with the American scene; the great size of the U.S. history profession, its “continentalism,” makes American humanities largely self-sufficient.

Similarly, unless there is an attempt to take the current institutional conditions of knowledge production into consideration, the—well-intentioned and long-overdue—project of establishing a “transnational” point of view in the writing of American history will encounter the same structural problems that I have outlined above: either this extension is based on a specific theory or view of why such a contextualization is necessary, in which case it will become another new approach among others, or it will not be based on the authority of a single “grand theory,” in which case it will open up undreamt-of new possibilities of going in all directions, and will thereby only add another dimension to the already-existing tidal wave of studies. We end where we began. As I have tried to argue, in the present situation, all questions of disciplinary development have to take into account the current direction of professionalization, because this institutional base determines the practice of scholarship more decisively than any ideological commitment. On the contrary, such ideological commitments have been co-opted as new options of self-fashioning in the advanced culture of professionalism that has emerged at American universities. If we want to work toward change in the humanities, a rigorous self-examination of the conditions that shape the direction and function of current scholarship has to be the starting point. Unless these conditions are changed, all well-intended disciplinary reorientations are bound to fall prey to the same institutional logic.

NOTES

1. The four C's of interpretive integration—comparison, connection, contextualization, and categorization—are therefore going out of fashion.
2. For an elaboration of this point, see pp. 350–54, below.
3. My own approach to the question under debate is through the field of American studies from which most of the following examples are taken. However, I think

that my argument can be applied to the humanities in general, including the discipline of history.

4. In his report on Conference II of the Project on Internationalizing the Study of American History, Thomas Bender reminds us of this goal when he speaks of history as “a contextualizing discipline, a discipline whose claims to knowledge consists in locating events, ideas, and persons in explanatory contexts” (4).

5. Methodologically, this rejection of comparison and connection has another welcome advantage: because questions of integration and contextualization are not addressed, claims about single objects of study can function metonymically, that is, they come to stand for a larger whole without ever having to justify this implication.

6. In his introduction to a recent volume of essays, Martin Jay traces the consequence of this development to its logical end:

Is it possible, let me ask in conclusion, to soar above these essays and provide a sovereign overview of the argumentative pattern they reveal? Can we find a figure in this bewildering carpet of attempts to explore the multiple contexts of visibility. . . . In short, we have a welter of competing interpretations of the meaning and implications of vision and visibility. Choosing among them, moreover, is no easy task, as it is not clear what would count as evidence for or against one or the other. Evidence, after all, is a word derived from the Latin *videre*, which suggests it may be based on a visual metaphor whose innocence can no longer be assumed. As is the case with Lacan's suggestive, if not always fully coherent, theories, on which so many of these essays depend, a certain leap of faith is required before one account can be accepted as superior to another. (“Vision in Context: Reflections and Refractions,” in *Vision in Context: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives on Sight*, ed. Teresa Brennan and Martin Jay [New York, 1996], 9–11)

7. The same could be said of specialization. As a research strategy, specialization is indispensable and an important source of insight. As an institutionalized mode of dealing with knowledge, the gain may become a loss when the sheer number of observations or interpretations can no longer be integrated and quantity minimizes the meaningfulness of knowledge. On this point, see my essay on “The Americanization of Literary Studies,” *American Studies International* 28 (1990): 9–22. In the (European) institute in which I teach, we recently had a particularly shocking illustration of the degree of specialization at American universities when we asked a well-known American guest professor to teach a survey course on American history to first-year students, in order to provide them with a perspective from abroad, and then got the following reply: “As to the survey course, covering all of American history from beginning to end does pose a serious problem for me—probably a typically American problem, given how specialized we are in U.S. universities. I have never in my entire career taught the first half of American history (until 1865), and haven't taught the late nineteenth century in thirty years. Nor am I familiar with Boyer's textbook. Nor, except when I'm on or chairing search committees (as I am at the moment), do I have even the vaguest idea of what's been written on, say, Puritanism, the Revolution, or the coming of the Civil War.”

8. On this point, cf. David Bordwell: “[I]t is just that, in American institutions of higher education, intellectual disputes among competing premises and methods tend to be avoided simply by adding the ‘new approach’ onto existing structures.” *Making Meaning: Inference and Rhetoric in the Interpretation of Cinema* (Cambridge, Mass., 1989), 96.

9. See, e.g., Cornel West's comments on the situation of black intellectuals: "Black intellectuals are affected by the same processes as other American intellectuals, such as the professionalization and specialization of knowledge, the bureaucratization of the academy, the proliferation of arcane jargon in the various disciplines, and the marginalization of humanistic studies." West, *Race Matters* (New York, 1994), 62.

10. This does not mean, of course, that a claim for representativeness cannot be made, but as the history of recent critical approaches demonstrates, such a claim will not survive for long and will immediately become the target of another critical intervention.

11. The recent revisionism in the humanities has further intensified this process but only in consequent application of historicist premises.

12. Again, there is, in my view, no escape from this development, because one cannot ignore the postmodern and poststructuralist critique of the arbitrariness of each act of centering. This, in fact, provides an important theoretical justification for professional developments such as the new social history, cultural studies, or race, class, and gender studies, because the less we can privilege certain texts or interpretations as representative sources of insight, the more we need to extend the scope of our material. However, the more we extend our scope, the more we accelerate the process of diffusion and proliferation. This problem cannot be solved by taking back the claim of representativeness to a privileged subculture or to one's favorite dissenting voice, because, inevitably, the process of diffusion will renew and repeat itself on this level for the institutional reasons described.

13. I have called this development the "Americanization" of the humanities in a different context. By "Americanization" I mean an advanced stage of professionalization developed most clearly and strongly in the United States but setting new standards for scholarship in the humanities all over the world. Again, one should emphasize that this professional structure characterizes and shapes work of the Left and the Right with equal force. For a more extended discussion of some of the consequences, cf. my essay on "The Americanization of Literary Studies."

14. Cf. David Bordwell: "In an institution that favors novelty, the stakes constantly rise. The critical exemplars get mastered, and for all their merits, they come to seem obvious. They must be surpassed." *Making Meaning*, 246.

15. For a more detailed analysis, see my essay on "Literature, Liberalism, and the Current Cultural Radicalism," in *Why Literature Matters*, ed. Rüdiger Ahrens and Laurenz Volkmann (Heidelberg, 1996), 211–34. In the following analysis, my purpose is not to discredit this new form of radicalism, which has opened up important new perspectives, but to understand the logic of its choices.

16. The German student movement called this systemic effect *strukturelle Gewalt*, which not only expresses the central idea of a form of power that does not manifest itself through an agent or somebody's action (= the usefulness of the idea of structure) but also describes this "invisible" exertion of power through structure as a form of coercion or violence (*Gewalt*).

17. It would be fascinating indeed to compare these categories as different versions of the idea of systemic effect: their range of explanation, their implied definition of the system, their definition of what can constitute resistance, and so on.

18. Again, my goal here is to describe the inner logic of a development and the

problems it creates. The redefinition of power as all-pervasive systemic effect provides valuable insights into the manifestation of power effects in seemingly "natural" or "innocent" aspects of social life. But it also creates the problem of where to locate power and how to specify its social and political consequences. On this point, see the excellent analysis of Wolfram Schmidgen, "The Principle of Negative Identity and the Crisis of Relationality in Contemporary Literary Criticism," *REAL—Yearbook of Research in English and American Literature* 11 (1995): 371–404.

19. In his book *Cultural Capital*, John Guillory speaks of "a confusion between representation in the political sense—the relation of a representative to a constituency—and representation in the rather different sense of the relation between an image and what the image represents." *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation* (Chicago, 1993), viii. I think it is more adequate, however, to speak not of a confusion but of a conflation.

20. This cultural self-empowerment is not to be equated with "real" social or political empowerment (although it may have such consequences—witness, for example, the impact of feminism on American society). The term is understood here as an imaginary construct and refers to the possibility of imagining and fashioning oneself as different—stronger, weaker, nonwhite, etc.—and thereby as distinct and exempt from an all-pervasive systemic effect.

21. Robert N. Bellah et al., *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1985). Although I do not see a ready alternative, I am aware of the difficulties the term "expressive individualism" poses. One is the communitarian bias in Bellah's use of the term "individualism." As the following paragraph is to show, I do not share this view.

22. I am deliberately using the term "individual" here, and I am using it in the Tocquevillian sense of the smallest social unit. In this sense, "individual" is not to be confused with "individualist," "individualistic," or an ideology of individualism defined by claims of personal freedom or autonomy. It is also not to be confused and conflated with philosophical conceptualizations of the individual as "subject" or "self." Deconstructing the category of the subject does not affect the use of the term "individual" as a sociological category, because it only deconstructs a particular philosophical interpretation given to that social unit. The fact that the concept of the subject may be an illusion of Western thought and that, consequently, there are no (unified) subjects, does not mean that there are no individuals. Every scholar in the profession acts as such an individual, no matter what his or her status of self-definition as a subject (illusionary unity, correctly decentered, or happily performative) may be said to be. That such a retreat from the category of the "subject" might be of use for philosophy as well, is pointed out by John Smith, who notes:

Over the past several years, however, a change has been taking place. The focus in the human sciences has been shifting from denunciations or affirmations of the subject to a "reconstruction" of the individual in a way that avoids the nostalgia for an undeconstructed self. These new efforts do not strive for a return to or of the (repressed) subject. Rather, they work through the crisis of subjectivity toward a new definition.

In this context, subject and individual are defined in the following way:

The "subject" I shall relegate to a philosophical paradigm culminating in Descartes. That paradigm attempts to define "self-consciousness," which I take to be a fact, mistakenly in terms of self-reflection. Moreover, that paradigm tends to limit notions of

selfhood to self-conscious subjectivity. I shall argue, in good measure following Manfred Frank's lead, that the concept of the "individual" is more fruitful for our self-understanding. It allows us to shift attention away from the (historically) limited views of subjectivity and self-reflection without abandoning ontologically, politically, epistemologically, and semiotically necessary notions of particularity (resistance to the universal) and interpretation (dialectic between individual and universal). In short, we can abandon the subject but need the individual to arrive at richer conceptions of meaning, self, consciousness, and action. (John Smith, "The Transcendence of the Individual," *Diacritics* 19 [1989]: 82)

23. In many of these cases, the poststructuralist notion of *différance* provides a major inspiration but the conceptualizations of difference go far beyond poststructuralist versions. In historical terms, poststructuralism (including deconstruction) provides only one manifestation of this search for difference and is thus part of a larger trend of cultural and intellectual history. One reason for the growing historical importance of the need to be different can be inferred from Tocqueville's observation that democratic societies take away symbolic distinctions. By doing so, they settle the individual with the task of making up for this loss. In economic individualism, the possibilities for doing this are still limited in comparison to expressive individualism, where the resources of culture have moved to the forefront.

24. This statement requires qualification: it only describes a tendency, of course, not a fully achieved reality. Class differences continue to exist in the United States and other Western countries, but they no longer play an important social or cultural role for the middle class, including the white-collar worlds of art and scholarship.

25. Sacvan Bercovitch, *The Office of "The Scarlet Letter"* (Baltimore, 1991), 90.

26. Winfried Fluck, "Cultures of Criticism: *Moby-Dick*, Expressive Individualism, and the New Historicism," *REAL — Yearbook of Research in English and American Literature* 11 (1995): 222–23.

27. Obviously, these two forms are not neatly separated in their actual historical appearance. There are mixed forms and many forms of coexistence. Benjamin Franklin, whom Bellah mentions as exemplary representative of economic individualism, is also a master of self-fashioning. But this talent is still instrumentalized for, and subordinated to, the goal of a social rise to material success and social respectability. On the whole, it seems warranted to say, that (a) the social role of expressive individualism has dramatically increased since its first breakthrough in the Romantic period; (b) this development was propelled decisively by the growing authority of art and other forms of cultural self-expression, but, especially, by the increased possibilities of imaginary self-empowerment offered through fiction; and (c) this gradually emerging expressive individualism has found a whole new range of options in the era of postindustrialism and postmodernism with its new "postmaterialist" values of self-realization and radical self-determination. While the Romantic period and the experimental culture of modernism can be seen as avant-garde movements of expressive individualism, the postmodern period has witnessed the broad "democratization" of their cultural insistence on the right (and need) to be different.

28. This development was already noted with regret by, among others, Herbert Gutman in his essay "The Missing Synthesis: Whatever Happened to History?" *The*

Nation (November 21, 1981): 553–54, and Thomas Bender in "Wholes and Parts: The Need for Synthesis in American History," *Journal of American History* 73 (1986): 120–36.

29. An excellent discussion of the ambiguities of modernity, which could provide a useful basis for a reconsideration of the contribution the humanities have made to modernity and the process of modernization, is provided by John Tomlinson in *Cultural Imperialism* (Baltimore, 1991), ch. 5, in which he draws on the work of Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (New York, 1982), and Cornelius Castoriadis, *L'institution imaginaire de la société* (Paris: Seuil, 1975), trans. by Kathleen Blamey under the title *The Imaginary Institution of Society* (Cambridge, Mass., 1987). Tomlinson, who considers modernity as the "fate" of all cultures within the global capitalist market (which are "condemned to modernity" [141]), also argues against the conflation of the concept of modernity with concepts like modernization and so-called modernization theory, which has prevented recent cultural criticism, including the new revisionism in the humanities, from seriously considering the concept of modernity as an analytical frame: "The problem for cultural analysis is that the modernisation theorists have tarred all theories of cultural modernity with their brush and so there has been a reluctance amongst radical theorists, until quite recently, to speak of development and modernity in the same breath" (144). Recently, the concept of modernity seems to have fallen prey to the postmodern critique of "grand narratives," because it has been equated with a naïve story of emancipation. However, most theories of modernity, in contrast to modernization theories, express a deep ambivalence about the impact of modernity and, consequently, trace a paradoxical logic of gains and losses. For Berman, for example, it is not the literature of Enlightenment that provides the key sources for his analysis of the culture of modernity, but, as the title of his book suggests, Karl Marx and his analysis of modernity, especially in the *Communist Manifesto*.

30. Guillory, *Cultural Capital*, 45.

31. *Ibid.*, 253.

32. *Ibid.*, 339.

33. For a succinct evocation of the role of "newness" in the writing of American history, see the beginning of Thomas Bender's essay "Wholes and Parts": "The American cant of newness, so pervasive in the general culture, is all the more remarkable for its capacity to penetrate even specialized professional discourses. What a succession of 'new' histories populate the profession's recent past: the new economic history, the new labor history, the new social history, the new urban history, the new political history, and other greater or lesser 'news' too numerous to list" (120).

34. Henry Nash Smith, *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth* (Cambridge, Mass., 1950), vii.

35. Cf., e.g., Laurence Veysey's exemplary critique of the "lack of precision" in *Virgin Land*, which is, at a closer look, really a doubt about the representativeness of Smith's material: "Another classic instance of this lack of precision is found in Henry Nash Smith's *Virgin Land*, where for long stretches we are not sure whether given thought patterns are being attributed to all Americans, to Westerners, to Easterners thinking about the West (as Smith insisted was the case in a letter to

me many years ago), or, what is more believable, to second-rate novelists and poets." Veysey, "Intellectual History and the New Social History," in *New Directions in American Intellectual History*, ed. John Higham and Paul K. Conkin (Baltimore, 1979), 21.

36. See the argument of Richard Slotkin in his influential study *Regeneration through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860* (Middletown, Conn., 1973), which traces modern America's problems in Vietnam and elsewhere to the mythic belief in a regeneration through violence.

37. In his summary of a lecture by Jacques Revel, Thomas Bender's Report on Conference III of the Project of Internationalizing the Study of American History (1999), provides a neat formulation for this trend: "History is no longer the grand tradition, the reign of Louis XIV but rather 20 million Frenchmen in the era of Louis XIV."

38. Where the American government has become involved in cultural policies, as, for example, in the cultural centers established in postwar Germany, the so-called *Amerikahäuser*, a similar development can be observed.

39. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (1835-39; Garden City, N.Y., 1969). I am referring specifically to the second volume. There is a tendency in the current revisionism to dismiss Tocqueville in passing, with no actual discussion, because of the well-known fact that his sources of information were mostly conservative. However, the perceptiveness of Tocqueville's analysis vastly exceeds the conservatism of his informants, because he is not primarily interested in democracy as a moral ideal but as a whole way of life, that is, as a cultural practice that affects and transforms all spheres of life.