

STUDENTHOOD:
A LYOTARDIAN REWRITING
OF LIBERAL ARTS EDUCATION

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The candidate confirms that the work submitted is his/her/their own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

For

E L I Z A B E T H

who studies

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Abstract

This thesis engages three modes of critique to resist contemporary neoliberal and historical ideas of liberal education as well as articulate and endeavor studenthood, the liberal art of study. The first form of critique follows the academic convention of critical argument; it criticizes present neoliberal learning as illiberal and historical iterations of liberal education as inherently pessimistic, relying on transcendent defenses. The thesis engages the work of Jean-François Lyotard on that of infancy, affect, and the differend to articulate studenthood and study as liberal education's other: simultaneously what liberal education needs in order for it to be but also what it occludes in its projects. In the articulation of this (un)educational dimension, the thesis engages a more Kantian form of critique, contrasting studenthood ontologically, epistemically, phenomenologically, and intersubjectively against the figure of the learner and the studier in educational thought. The thesis also engages in a formal mode of critique by endeavoring the kind of studious liberal art it articulates in three Study Traces. The form of the thesis invokes the differend between studenthood and liberal education, questioning the stakes of what it is to write and assess a thesis that tries not to be a thesis.

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DOSSIER¹

TITLE

Studenthood: the state of being a student, a play on the (mis)translation of Lyotardian *l'enfance* to childhood. *Infans*, referring to the inability to speak, the state of not knowing how; to consider what it is the student does, which is to act without fully knowing, fully understanding. The indefinite article “A” suggests that this is not an essential writing, nor the end of the educational genre, merely one among a number of possibilities. The adjectival use of “Lyotard” designates that this particular writing is influenced by the works and writings of the French thinker and essayist Jean-François Lyotard. The notion of “rewriting” is likewise borrowed from Lyotard (1987)². “Re-Writing Modernity” is meant as a salve for the misunderstandings of what is invoked by the phrase “postmodern” in his work; it invokes a working through what is occluded in modern thought, not a simple return to its foundations. The title then suggests that it is in rewriting liberal arts education that studenthood is enacted, *hic et nunc*.

OBJECT

The object of Part I, Poverty of the University: the liberal arts tradition of university education and the philosophy of this education; this particular higher educational project is characterized by breadth of curriculum content, indirect utility, and aims to cultivate the student’s intellectual virtues (or employable characteristics) to liberate the individual; the present state of this tradition, as animated by the logic of a labor market and financed by debt, makes of it an

¹ Here I have borrowed the format of Jean-François Lyotard’s “Reading Dossier” that serves as a preface for *The Differend* (1998). He suggests, “the present reading dossier will allow the reader, if the fancy grabs him or here, to ‘talk about the book’ without having read it” (p. xiv). Lyotard is entirely earnest in this jest; satire percolates through his many essays and philosophic texts to soften the blow of his most scathing critiques. Here I have borrowed the joke and the gesture. The dossier here serves as a synopsis of the following thesis, to clarify how the form, structure, and performance of the thesis work in the meta. It also pokes fun at the strange predicament we are in; it questions the demands of formal university assessment by writing from the position of studenthood which is precisely what those very practices are designed to educate out of the student.

² Or rather, the notion of “rewriting” was suggested to Lyotard by conference organizers when he presented at the University of Wisconsin in 1986 (Lyotard, *Re-writing Modernity*, 1987).

illiberal education; the academic discipline of the philosophy of education that seeks to critique or redefine educational projects.

The object of Part II and III: studenthood and study itself.

THESIS

The narrative of liberal arts education, whether it operates under the future anterior of liberation or fetishizes a past for enculturation, effaces the student. Philosophy of education attempts to supersede education through its commentary upon it. As an applied philosophy, the philosophy of education fails to take itself seriously as an educational act. To impugn the nihilism of these projects, it is then a question of what is always already in advent and what cannot be tolerated by the commentary of liberal education: the student, study.

QUESTION

How to take the figure of the student seriously? Not as the object of education, but as what animates it, remains outside of it? No longer “Who shall we educate you to be become and how?” nor even “What is educative?”. Rather, how does the student and their study impugn the nihilism of these educational questions? How to write in a state of studenthood and not comment upon it?

PROBLEM

The performative contradiction of writing a thesis of and to studenthood as a means to rewrite liberal education in fulfillment of the requirements of a doctoral thesis. What is created or produced will be ascribed to the student, as a sign of the capabilities, knowledge, and competencies of the author, and not the advent of study. Moreover, the problematics of attempting to write studenthood itself, which was the call to write. Its endeavoring is its undoing.

STAKES

There are two competing sets of stakes.

First, there are the stakes of the thesis as fulfillment of the criteria for Level 8 of the RQF/CQFW. The criteria adjudicate the awarding (or not) of a doctoral degree to the author as evidenced by the author’s capabilities in the thesis to be published, to exteriorize in-depth and

systematic knowledge of the subject at hand, and therefore the ability to make an original contribution to the field.

The second set of stakes, in opposition to the ones above, are to petition to the reader that the project of liberal education and the philosophy of education, need rewriting. To defend the honor of studying in its differend against its adversaries: the plight of the liberal democratic market and a philosophy of education only applies itself to education by commenting upon it. To rewrite liberal arts to study study itself.

CONTEXT

In the tertiary arena: massification of university attendance, debt-funding of higher education, matched with the erosion of traditional liberal arts disciplines from university campuses. Driven by market logic, performativity, and “student-centeredness”, higher education demand that students actualize and externalize learning and skill for measurement. The weariness in regard to different pedagogic games, devices, and theories, that still seek to efface what it is to study, to be a student. In philosophy of education: a shift from critique and toward what it is that education is, affirming educational practices (even studying) that are other than learning, or an impoverished notion of learning, but through a commentary that supersedes education. The time has come to study in itself.

PRETEXT

The writings that call this author to the task of study are that of Jean-François Lyotard. It is a name that defies easy categorization. A name indelibly marked by misunderstandings: relativism, the fetishization of difference, and even “postmodernist”. These misunderstandings have perhaps been refuted in recent scholarship. The writings themselves, the body of work that we call Lyotard’s, question what it is to put thought into words. The form of the text ensnares and incites what cannot be said. What remains unsaid in Lyotard’s many and varied writings is why they bear the name of philosophy, or what I call a work of study or of essaying. The title of the thesis stipulates that at stake here is only *a Lyotardian rewriting*. The name Lyotard refers to multitudes, but here I focus explicitly on Lyotard’s work on infancy, affect, and the differend, and their pretexts. It is here that the author finds an ethico-ontology that calls forth study, thinking, reading, writing, working from a state of not knowing, that does not culminate in knowing.

This is of course still a thesis, whose stakes also demand that it situate itself in the field of scholarship in order to articulate its contribution. The thesis takes as pretext scholarship in the field of educational philosophy that has utilized Lyotard's writing, well or badly, and scholarship that articulates study as a distinct educational dimension other than learning.

MODE

This thesis's mode is that of a performative contradiction: the author performs study in a thesis that would demand studenthood be dressed in knowledge, argument, and the articulation of a thesis through analysis and synthesis. It invokes this contradiction in its form, structure, and the genres and styles of writing invoked. Part I of the thesis, "The Poverty of the University," is performed in the mode of academic convention. These chapters are written in the prevailing mode of academic work: critique. It critiques various objects: present practices of liberal arts education (for consigning the student and the educational project to predetermined ends), narratives of liberal education (for effacing the student), and finally educational scholarship on Lyotard, (for continued emphasis on the teacher or teaching). This critical mode of writing, however, fails to affirm what the author is called to affirm, study. This invokes a shift in the mode of the thesis carried out in Parts II and III under the "as if" clause (which serves as the title of Part II); that it must be essayed before understanding, before knowing. This shift begins with the first of three "Study Traces"; these essays interrupt the text and the author remains cognizant that by absorbing them into the surrounding synthesis they have been transgressed. It concludes with a reflection on the performative contradiction that pervades the thesis, that tries to be of study but is forced be about study. The only resolution offered is in the text's own meta-awareness of itself as a text that transgresses.

GENRE

The mode of performative contradiction is carried out by two genres of writing: studious and unstudious. Studious, so therefore not educational and essayistic, sometimes poetic and sonorous. And unstudious, so therefore scholarly, replete with explication, ostentation, and signposting. Writing in these two opposing genres renders the thesis to its own paradox. Its endeavoring is its undoing, remaining aware of this irony and the impossibility of its stakes.

STYLE

The style of the studious essays is hesitant, vulnerable, pondering; the author awaiting the words incited by what is without words. The style of the unstudious and scholarly content is ironic, acerbic; it enacts and undoes the stakes of the academic arena's necessary athleticism. It uses figures and footnotes in jest, to puncture the analysis with what can only be understood in laughter.

READER

In its writing and rewriting, the author retains the privilege of first reader. Student of her own study.

In its submission, the reader of the thesis is an appointed one. The remit of the academic arena demands this to ensure the fair adjudication of the conferral of the doctoral degree. This requires a reader with the prerequisite knowledge and expertise to make such a judgement. The reader may be sympathetic enough to what the author endeavors here to be in on the joke.

AUTHOR

Only a student.

ADDRESS

We are in the future and there are plenty of books. We are in the future and there are more academic journals than ever before. We are in the future and what is published, in print or on the web, is more than we could ever read. We are in the future and there are more conferences in the academic calendar than we could ever attend. We are in the future and there are more young people registered at university than ever before. We are in the future and there are more universities and campuses and colleges than ever before. We are in the future and there are more lecturers (although fewer professors) than ever before to teach and assess all those young people, some not even young, at universities than ever before.

But there are no students.

Yes, there are students in the sense of being registered on an academic course. Yes, there are students in the sense of people who are not counted as unemployed. Yes, there are students as in a whole market of folks with pocket money borrowed from the government that retailers entrap with 10% discounts. Yes, there are students in the sense of learners who come to be filled in with

a predetermined end through active learning, co-learning, fulfilling potentials, actualizing capacities. Yes, there are students in the sense of people over whom tutors and lecturers fret, are annoyed by their indifference, and assess by their personalized learning needs. Yes, there are students in the sense of people in whom we entrust our vision of the future, saviors of our democracy (but mostly globalized labor markets) and heroes with the solutions to the geopolitical problems caused and continued by those who have made this university matrix compelling things to be the same, i.e. calculable in monetary units of deficit.

No, there are no students. For all our outputs of academia there seems also little tolerance for their inputs. In fact, the student, is what education cannot tolerate. Education wants to educate out what is studious in the student. Education can only tolerate the uneducated if it is fulfilled. This manifests in getting the temporality wrong; either education is obsessed with the future or with the past, fetishizes whatever is *not* now. It is always *You will be...* or *We have been, so you are also*. The student and study are what education needs in order for it be. But studenthood, acting without knowing, is not in want of education. And what does it matter that this will have been assessed? What does this matter when studenthood already testifies that there *is* something outside the extant systems of education? And what is that but a liberal art?

PART I

POVERTY OF THE UNIVERSITY

The question (overt or implied) now asked by the professionalist student, the State, or institutions of higher education is no longer “Is it true?” but “What use is it?” In the context of the mercantilization of knowledge, more often than not this question is equivalent to:

“Is it saleable?”

—Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*

CHAPTER ONE

THE ILLIBERAL ARTS

Hic et Nunc

In his polemical eulogy for the American mind—what that ever was Allen Bloom (1987) evades—he identifies those few students still ripe for a liberal arts education by their favorite book. It is not those who love Ayn Rand or the Bible, but those who come to university still clinging to *Catcher in the Rye* that Bloom says might still be made whole by a liberal education; “Theirs is the most genuine response and also shows a felt need for help in self-interpretation. But it is an uneducated response. Teachers should take advantage of the need expressed in it to show such students that better writers can help them more” (p. 63).—It is possible that Bloom means better people; J.D. Salinger became who Holden was destined to, preying on teenage girls through the post. But that is beside the point.— If Bloom’s is a litmus test, I have passed it. I entered a crumby regional state university at eighteen, my paperback *Catcher in the Rye* in hand, and declared “Undecided” as my major. For Bloom, it is only those students who come to university yearning for a “*je ne sais quois*,” (p. 64) that the nihilism that has crept into the hallowed halls of learning might be thwarted by providing them with a thorough education. The only way to resist the intellectual relativism that has foreclosed thought and ruined what it is that universities ought to be for, is through a thorough education in the Great Books and such like of those worthy few. I will not take up the polemical bait that many critics have on Bloom. Indeed he has my sympathies but he misdiagnoses the problem.

A better writer has called me to the task of study and it is certainly a writer of whom Bloom would disapprove; that writer is Jean-François Lyotard. The response to the question at stake here will be an uneducated one by Bloom’s standard, but it will be a studious one. The question of

salvaging liberal education is perhaps already passé. It is not that this studious *je ne sais quoi* is a void in need of filling nor is it that “the belief that the here and now is all there is” (Bloom, 1987, p. 64) has precluded thought. It is rather the inverse. The liberal arts have become illiberal by effacing the student, either by a forward-looking narrative of what they will become once educated (whether that be leader of humanity, or cultivated human capital) or the trap that Bloom falls into, that the individual can surpass the present by returning to the past. It is rather in the radically present, from the *hic et nunc*, that thought commences and where study may begin.

I. The Totalizing Logic of (II) Liberal Arts Practices

Allen Bloom mourned the university before the massification of the higher educational system³, the ballooning of student debt⁴, the tolling of the death knell at smaller liberal arts colleges⁵, and the discontinuation of traditional liberal arts subjects at some institutions⁶, let alone the after-effects of the COVID crisis that remain to be seen⁷. While Bloom decried the spiritual rot at universities, in the wake of these seismic shifts in higher education it is now beyond cliché to denounce the prevailing logic of neoliberalism or late capitalism. This, however, is the plight we are in and where we must begin. Here I demonstrate how current practices, defenses, and ideas of

³ In 2018, 41% of young adults, aged 18-24, were enrolled in higher education in the US (National Center For Education Statistics, 2020).

⁴ As of 2021, there is a total of \$1.7 trillion in student debt in the US (Friedman, 2021).

⁵ Some smaller colleges in the United States have shut down or have threatened to close their campuses for good; though Kim Clark (2015) reports that only 12 of the 1650 private campuses in the United States had shut down at the time of publication, these smaller liberal arts colleges face steep competition for tuition dollars. A notable story is that of Sweet Briar College in Virginia. This historical all-women’s liberal arts college announced in March 2015 that it would close down before the following academic year but was narrowly saved from closure by alumnae who raised \$12 million and a legal battle, ending in state government intervention to dismiss the Board of Directors and then-president James F. Jones, Jr (DeSantis, 2015). Since then Sweet Briar has reorganized its academics and renewed its curriculum, emphasizing its existing engineering program, as well as lowering the sticker price of its tuition-fees (Biemiller, 2017).

⁶ Notably, the historically black institution, Howard University, announced in April 2021 its plans to shut down its classics department (Redden, 2021). Even before enrolment declines in the wake of the pandemic, institutions within the University of Wisconsin system announced plans to dissolve traditional liberal arts majors from their curriculum. In March 2018, the University of Wisconsin Stevens Point (2018b) released the proposed *Point Forward* plan. The proposal was to no longer use austerity measures to deliver the same education with less financial support, but to reduce the amount of degrees on offer in order to better fund a smaller number of degrees. The degrees and disciplines on the chopping block were those largely under the umbrella of the College of Letters and Sciences, which had experienced declines in enrolment (University of Wisconsin, 2018a). The decision-makers responsible for these blatant market-driven changes stipulated that the curriculum changes did not equate to an abandonment of liberal education: “It is vital to distinguish between *majors* in the traditional liberal arts, majors in liberal arts with specific professional pathways, and the *broad liberal education* we need to strengthen for all our graduates” (University of Wisconsin, 2018b, p. 5).

⁷ As of spring 2021, overall undergraduate enrollment declined by 4.5%, but only by 2.9% at traditional college campuses (National Student Clearinghouse, 2021).

the liberal arts are *illiberal* under the totalizing logic of late capitalism. First, however, it is necessary to establish working definitions to contextualize this critique of the illiberal arts.

What are the liberal arts or the broader vision of a liberal arts education? These are vague and ambiguous terms that are often invoked either wistfully or apocalyptically—the present chapter is no exception on that score. Broadly, liberal arts education is defined by its *inutility*; it is a higher education without a specific vocational or professional focus. In the US context, liberal arts education is defined by curriculum breadth in traditional disciplines, alongside a specialized emphasis of study. In 1869, Charles W. Eliot praised the restructuring of Yale’s Department of Philosophy and Arts degree program to include a three-year general education curriculum including physical sciences, languages, and humanities as the distinctly new and American blueprint for higher education (Eliot, 1869). Eliot would later become president of Harvard and would instate the familiar structure of American university learning in which students are required to take university-wide general education classes in addition to a chosen major (Long, 2016). As such, liberal arts education is not only to be found at dedicated private liberal arts colleges but also in state and regional universities. The Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U), the self-proclaimed *voice and force for liberal education* in the United States includes 1400 member institutions ranging from community colleges, to iconic liberal arts colleges, to state universities, to Ivy League universities and even higher education institutions abroad (AAC&U, undated(d)).

The Association of American Colleges and Universities is a remarkable case study in what I call the illiberal arts. I will focus heavily on their visions for higher education, proposed pedagogic activities, and assessment guidelines here. But first there is a nuance in terms here that must be addressed; *liberal arts* versus *liberal education*. The question, or refutation, of their equivalence is a curious symptom of the prevailing nihilism in higher education, as Bloom (1987) has so vociferously rebuked. While in the following chapter I will consider historical narratives of liberal arts and liberal education, and later on I will explicate my particular attachment to the term *liberal arts*, for reasons that will not become clear until Part II As If when I explicitly *drift from education*, here I will focus on the logic that divides liberal arts from a liberal education. The AAC&U (2020) stipulates that the liberal arts and a liberal education are not synonymous:

The relation of liberal education to specific academic disciplines and institutional settings is also a source of potential confusion. While a *liberal arts education* may also be a liberal education, and while a *liberal arts college* may offer a conducive

campus setting, liberal education is the exclusive province of neither. The academic subjects and disciplines that constitute the liberal arts serve as highly effective staging grounds for a liberal education, but so, too, can the STEM fields and most professional programs. What distinguishes liberal education is the spirit in which students engage with disciplines and the overarching educational ends toward which that engagement is ordered. (p. 8)

By this logic, it does not matter *what* is learned or studied, but rather a question of *how* the desired ends of that education are achieved. What is exactly is the end of liberal education whose content is negligible? The AAC&U (2020) states, “A liberal education is a liberating education in that it frees the mind to seek after the truth unencumbered by dogma, ideology, or preconceived notions. A liberally educated person can think for himself or herself, is both broad- and open-minded, and is, therefore, less susceptible to manipulation or prejudice” (p. 7). What liberal education is is also defined by what it is not, the AAC&U states, “The antithesis of liberal education is not *conservative* education but *illiberal* education—indoctrination, rote and purely instrumental learning, unquestioned transmission of a closed system of thought... illiberal forms of education are appropriate to authoritarianism and totalitarianism, autocracy and theocracy, and other systems of government that are predicated on obedience and that restrict freedom of thought or behavior” (p. 8). At face-value, it is difficult to disagree with such a benign statement; who does not want our students to become independent thinkers and better stewards of our democracy? Who wants education to be indoctrinating?

The irony is that what the AAC&U hails as a *liberating* education is predicated on the logic *a closed system of thought*, or rather an *unthinking system*. Their very definition of liberal education *is* instrumental; it is an education *for* democracy, to produce the citizens necessary *for* democracy. Education in itself is effaced for its use. In addition, the AAC&U’s position that students can study or learn *anything* as part of a liberal education renders the practice of education to a hollow performativity, dependent on general education requirements and requisite learning outcomes that prepare the student for democratic life—or rather, their careers. Finally, the AAC&U fails to contextualize the practice of liberal education in a debt-funded market, that is symptomatic of the larger and prevailing ideology of late capitalism or neoliberalism over that of democracy, and everything else for that matter⁸.

⁸ In several ways however, I feel that this statement is already out of date or out of step. Is it only neoliberalism that thwarts democracy? In the wake of January 6th, is it not outright anti-democratic domestic terrorism that poses a bigger threat to democracy? That being said, it is not necessarily the cooptation of democracy that is the object of this

Late capitalism is a complex web of policy initiatives, priorities, social restructuring, (a)politicism, financialization of the economy resulting growing inequality and precarity, among other changes that has resulted in a closed and totalized system. Here, I follow Wendy Brown's (2015) critique of neoliberalism in *Undoing the Demos* as a hegemonic ideology that coopts all areas of life into economic terms. Brown characterizes the insidiousness of neoliberalism as the following, "But neoliberalization is generally more termitelike than lionlike . . . its mode of reason boring in capillary fashion into the trunks and branches of workplaces, schools, public agencies, social and political discourse, and above all, the subject (p. 35-36). Indeed for Brown, neoliberalism has emaciated what it is that democracy is, the function of the state, and to be a citizen within it; "one of the paradoxes of the neoliberal transformation of the state is that it is remade on the model of the firm while compelled to serve and facilitate an economy it is not supposed to touch, let alone to challenge" (p. 40), this makes citizens mere entrepreneurs and consumers under a governance system totally devoted to facilitating the economy. This results in an ontological disfigurement of the human subject, or rather an entirely new human subjectivity defined solely and wholly as *human capital*. Brown demonstrates the ways in which neoliberal policy and rationality circumvent universities from offering liberal arts education for the public good: metrics, rankings, return on investment, employability, the precarity of academic work and teaching positions, themes well-known to any of us in the academy. But the crucial thing that Brown gets wrong in her analysis of the university as a training site for the development of human capital is her consistent thesis that liberal arts education is endangered by market logic. It is not that the liberal arts are endangered but that they are already forceful operators on market logic.

My analysis here is also heavily indebted to Jean-François Lyotard and the first text of his I ever encountered, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1984, published in French in 1979). Unfortunately this is where many readers stop and start with Lyotard. A simple Google Scholar Search will indicate that this "occasional text" (Lyotard, 1984, p. xxv) has been cited a whopping 25,456 times, as compared to the later text, *The Differend* (for which *The Postmodern Condition* could be read as a heuristic tool in Lyotard's thought), which has only 4,000 citations (Google Scholar, 2017a; Google Scholar, 2017b). The notoriety of this text has occluded his other philosophic work and has conflated the name Lyotard indelibly with the "postmodern";

discussion, but rather the cooptation of educational thought and practice by the totalizing (and therefore nihilist) structures of late capital.

this is a gross misunderstanding that I will address later in Chapter Three. For the present analysis the value in revisiting *The Postmodern Condition* is that, rightfully understood, it is not a straightforward critique or analysis of its object, but as Lyotard has said a “parody” (Lyotard, undated, p. 17) of the academic report. This has much to do with report’s inception; Lyotard was commissioned by the Quebecois government, to examine “the condition of knowledge in the most highly developed societies” (1984, p. xxiii). The question in itself belies a bureaucratization of the university and its function in society, exactly what Lyotard critiques or satirizes in the report. This is both in the content of the report and its form. In the introduction he warns, “It remains to be said that the author of the report is a philosopher, not an expert. The latter knows what he knows and what he does not know: the former does not. One concludes, the other questions” (1984, p. xxv). Lyotard questions the very idea of “a report on knowledge” by both its content and its form. Foremost, Lyotard examines the logic of the operativity in academic as one of terror in the content, while simultaneously parodying the format and style of such a report that purports to comment upon the totality of knowledge. For instance, the report has 231 footnotes, most of which make little sense or have nothing to do with the main body of the text. Lyotard, having been tasked with the writing of an “academic report,” later confesses “I referred to a quantity of books I’d never read, apparently it impressed people” (Lyotard, undated, p. 17). With Lyotard’s writing, *how it is written* is of equal, if not more, consequence than *what is written*. In the satirical form of the report, Lyotard subverts the genre of academic or expert knowledge and in doing so gestures that straightforward critique exacerbates this *condition* he rebukes.

Largely, the thesis of *The Postmodern Condition* is that education, the university, and knowledge are subject to the logic of neoliberalism, most evident in the prevailing value of performativity. A banal observation at this point, but Lyotard does not make an easy exit strategy from the totalizing logic of markets, efficiency, and operationalization. There is nothing wistful or melancholic to Lyotard’s observation of the “incredulity toward metanarratives... The narrative function is losing its functors, its great hero, its great dangers, its great voyages, its great goal” (p. xxiv). By “narrative” Lyotard refers to a binding perspective or viewpoint to which all manner of life in a given culture adheres; this narrative of the people is what gives credence to all parts of life. Lyotard’s diagnosis of the postmodern moment⁹ is that the traditional Western narratives of

⁹ In *The Postmodern Condition*, Lyotard insists on using the clumsy phrase *postmodern*, and in the report itself I believe he is suggesting that the postmodern is a time after the fall of modern narratives of legitimation. However,

the Enlightenment (the liberator of man by knowledge and through will) and of speculative philosophy (that the state and science are governed by an ideal) are no longer valid. (I will look more in depth at these narratives and their impact on historical ideas of liberal education in the following chapter). The lack of faith in these criteria for legitimacy has created a vacuum of *delegitimation* in which the value of exchange has come to be the only logic to validate all things. Lyotard, however, does not mourn the erosion of these narratives nor does he imply that we can simply restore them as legitimation for universities and their education. Rather, in the original French publication, Lyotard suggests that even posing the question of “the state of knowledge in developed societies” comes from the Western “blind spot”: “it knows many things but not what it is” (1979, p. 2, author’s translation). The inherent nihilism to Occidental thought is what Lyotard, in his entire oeuvre, is trying to subvert and will inform my approach in Parts II & III. For the present question of the illiberal arts, the critique and satire in Lyotard’s *The Postmodern Condition* provides a structure for my investigation of what is illiberal in liberal education as currently practiced and legitimated.

Much like Wendy Brown’s (2015) definition of neoliberalism as a termite-like logic that has come to define all areas of life, Lyotard talks of the new criterion for the university and its functions in tyrannical terms:

The decisions makers, however, attempt to manage these clouds of sociality according to input/output matrices, following a logic which implies that their elements are commensurable and the whole is determinable... In matters of social justice and of scientific truth alike, the legitimation of that power is based on optimizing the system’s performance—efficiency. The application of this criterion to all of our games necessarily entails a certain level of terror, whether hard or soft: be operational (that is, commensurable) or disappear. (p. xxiv)

There is a certain tone of jest in the last line but it is not altogether inaccurate of the totalizing logic of liberal education practices. Lyotard’s analysis still applies to how the contemporary university coerces students into debt, reduces all inquiry to the cultivation of skills and learning how to learn or lifelong learning, and subjects all manner of educational life and activity to the logic of performativity. This a term that Lyotard coins in *The Postmodern Condition* to describe pedagogy and learning without recourse to the Enlightenment principle of liberty now only educates to

this is the only writing in which Lyotard endorses the view as the postmodern being a period after modernity. I will revisit the subtleties behind this further in Chapter Three. For the present discussion however I follow Lyotard’s lead in the report.

“supply the system with players capable of acceptably fulfilling their roles at the pragmatic posts required by institutions” (p. 48); Lyotard predicts that under the criterion of performativity “the institutions of higher learning are called upon to create skills, no longer ideals” (p. 48), “job training and continuing education” (p. 49), and “subordinate the institutions of higher learning to the existing powers” (p. 50) which are exchange and efficiency. Following Lyotard’s analysis of the university under the criterion of performativity, I will now consider the ways in which the institution and its education are illiberal through student debt, employability, a marketable student experience that demonstrates a pervasive pedagogy, and the reduction of education to performance and assessment.

Student Debt: Borrow or Disappear

American higher education is financed primarily through student debt. This is a phenomenon that has ballooned in North America since Lyotard wrote *The Postmodern Condition*, but student debt is endemic to the logic of neoliberalism. The total amount of student debt is \$1.7 trillion (Friedman, 2021). In recent years, with the help of Obama-Era repayment plan options, defaults have decreased but repayment has slowed among student loan borrowers (Kamenetz, 2017). The COVID-19 crisis and its impact on student debt remain to be seen; since the beginning of the pandemic the federal government as imposed an emergency forbearance for borrowers and President Biden has waffled over whether he has the authority to or would cancel any amount of student debt. This will not be an exploration of the economics of this system, rather here I consider the ways in which debt-financing exacerbates the ways in which higher education has become illiberal under performativity.

As Maurizio Lazzarato (2012) has argued in *The Making of Indebted Man: An Essay on the Neoliberal Condition*, it is not even the financialization of the economy but rather the creditor-debtor dynamic that has coopted all forms of life. In fact, for Lazzarato, debt *is* the social order of the day. Debt, and not exchange or production or industry, is the primary mode of subjectification; as Lazzarato observes it is the power dynamic that we are all born into by way of national deficits and exacerbated by individual forms of debt (credit, mortgage, student). Most salient to the logic of student debt is Lazzarato’s analysis of the subjectivity implied by debt-financing:

What is credit/debt in its most elementary sense? A promise of repayment. What is a financial asset, a share, or bond? The promise of future value... Consequently, the task of a community or society has first of all been to engender a person capable

of *promising*, someone able to *stand guarantor for himself* in the creditor-debtor relationship, that is, capable of honoring his debt. (p. 39-40)

Debt then defines subjectivity in neoliberal society; a person is defined by their debts and subject to the financial agreements they have entered. As Lazzarato observes, debt subjectivity also redefines the nature of work; “debt is an economic relation which, in order to exist, implies the molding and control of subjectivity such that ‘labor’ becomes indistinguishable from ‘work on the self’” (p. 33). What is this but the logic of debt-funded university education? Exorbitantly expensive at the point of purchase, many young people, and their families, entering university most borrow just to enroll. They borrow to pay their tuition and living costs, guaranteed by their future ability to pay for the very degree, a placeholder for four-years of self-work sellable on the labor market, they need to make that promise in the first place.

Likewise, Jason Wozniak (2016) has demonstrated how debt has been and continues to be a force for racism and colonialism in education in the Americas. Wozniak states, “Debt structures, in part because of its ability to colonize the future, epistemic frameworks and ways of being in the world. It demands the rationalization and instrumentalization of ways of thinking and being” (unpaginated). For Wozniak, education funded through debt undoes the promises of freedom inherent to liberal educational narratives; the debt through which it is funded binds the student to the debt and has differential impacts for borrowers; Black and minority students as well as low-income students tend to borrow more for their education, a socioeconomic position created by past injustices and debts, and as such their future earnings and socio-economic mobility are hampered by the repayment of the debt. In all, the promise of liberation promised by campuses entraps students into indebted subjectivity and reifies systems of colonization.

So inherent to the discourse on higher education is this logic of indebted subjectivity that embarking on a degree is spoken of in purely economic terms. For example, the Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce investigated the returns on investment (ROI) of degrees from liberal arts colleges at a time when more students choose more career-oriented majors (Carnevale, Cheah, & Van Der Warf, 2020). Overall, the researchers found that liberal arts colleges provided a \$918,000 ROI. The report stipulates that this overall ROI rate varied; it was found that the more selective the liberal arts institution, the fewer low-income students it had, its geographical location (those in New England offered higher ROI), and those colleges with STEM subjects offered relatively high ROI compared to other higher education institutions but only 40 years after graduation. Crucially, however, the calculation of the ROI based on the net present

value of the degree was only calculated by the marketed total cost of tuition, *not* what those students who must borrow and pay interest actually pay for their degrees. The researchers conclude that while traditional liberal arts have seen decreased enrollment, there are still monetary advantages to be gained, especially with a degree from the most elite colleges, however the researchers note that a liberal arts degree yield a much lower ROI after the first ten years.

It is not enough to find employment after graduation, because *underemployment* can affect lifetime earnings and reduce the ROI of a degree. The Strada Institute's (2018) report *The Permanent Detour: Underemployment's Long-Term Effects on the Careers of College Grads*—the cover of which depicts a young man leaning listlessly on the counter of a bar, who has presumably squandered his university education by electing to major in film studies and not engineering or software programming—uses resume data from databases of individuals seeking employment to observe the match of qualifications needed for job postings and the education and qualifications the job seeker possesses. The researchers found that “Graduates who accept or are forced into subbachelor’s-level jobs early in their careers suffer significant long-term consequences; they may be consigned to underemployment for years to come” (p. 30) and as such a reduced ROI for their degree. This leads the researchers to also question university educators’ defense that “they prepare students for their fifth job” (p. 7) through high-level instruction and learning outcomes not directly transferable to first graduate level jobs. The Strada Institute suggests that universities should do more to help students gain more employable skills for that first graduate job. As Mark Schneider and Matthew Sigelman (2018) suggest in their report *Saving the Liberal Arts*, increasing the earning potentials of students graduating in the traditional disciplines of the liberal arts is not so much a question of what they studied, but the skills they gained, which might no longer need to occur in the university setting “other skills-building mechanisms... may supplement or even supplant the noisy signals that college degrees and majors now offer” (p. 13). These skills however, tend to be specific and technical, like programming and coding, very different from the diffuse liberal education skills like innovative thinking. Here the authors suggest pedagogic and curricular reforms such as career oriented liberal arts majors and short courses in coding. This analysis is unthinkingly steeped in the notion that going to college, getting a degree is only an investment in the individual student’s human capital, to be invested in, to obtain a return on that investment as a better position in the credit-debt market.

At the tertiary level, the “work on the self” or cultivation of human capital implied by a degree funded through debt or as an investment is the ever-present criterion of *employability*, the signifier of an individual who can take on debt following Lazzarato’s analysis. Because the liberal arts or a generalist liberal education are not professional programs, defenders of this education focus on the liberal arts’ unique ability to prepare students holistically for their careers. For example, the AAC&U, mindful that “students expect not only to be well prepared for the particular career anticipated by their choice of major, but also to be empowered to move among jobs and even careers—including jobs and careers that do not yet exist” (2020, p. 19), suggest that the generalist learning opportunities of liberal education are uniquely placed to prepare students for non-existent jobs. So endemic is the logic of indebted subjectivity, that we are not even preparing students for jobs that exist, but endowing them with the transferable skills and capacity for lifelong learning to continuously labor upon themselves to maintain their status as worthy holders of debt, or employable. Recall that for the AAC&U, what one studies is of less importance than the educational outcomes achieved. These employable outcomes are intrinsically linked to the labor of the self in the credit-debit market. For example, the AAC&U suggests,

a student who elects to major in a STEM field—engineering, perhaps—recognizes that a liberal education will make him or her a better engineer by ensuring that technical mastery will be complemented by habitual attention to ethical, environmental, and social implications of engineering design choices. Similarly, a student who elects to enroll in a professional program—nursing, perhaps—recognizes that a liberal education will make him or her a better nurse because clinical skills will be complemented by intercultural competencies that lead to better patient outcomes. A student who elects to major in a liberal arts discipline—history, perhaps—recognizes that a liberal education will make him or her a better historian because knowledge of the sweep of human history will be complemented by scientific and technological literacies that inform the critical exercise of historical understanding in contemporary contexts shaped by scientific discovery and technological innovation. (2020, p. 18)

These examples of students embarking on the generalist liberal education concentrate on cultivating the habits, skills, virtues, and perspectives in the individual student to be better at their chosen careers (or to be a more worthy holder of debt by their ability to obtain employment. The example given of the history student is particularly emblematic of the degree to which liberal arts have been engulfed by the logic of debt. This history student does not study history, nor the other generalist disciplines required by their liberal arts degree, for the sake of it. Rather, the history student embarks on this education to become *better* at history, presumably to become a

professional at the study of history, i.e. an academic. The education in itself, then, is of little importance; it is what is achieved through it, cultivating individuals prepared for work/taking on debt, that matters. AAC&U's vision for liberal education is in itself instrumental for the credit-debt market and as such an illiberal education by their own definition that illiberal education utilizes "purely instrumental learning, unquestioned transmission of a closed system of thought" (p. 8). So unquestioned is the logic of the credit-debt market wherein labor is the cultivation of the self for employability that it goes unthought in the AAC&U's vision for liberal education.

Debt logic of higher education is spoken of critically when it comes to students' ability to access higher education and its presumed effects on their choices for careers. For instance, in their rallying cry for liberal education the AAC&U (2020) mention the "escalating and unconscionable student debt burden" (p. 27) as a barrier to their vision for equitable liberal education; they also note that the increasingly unaffordable tuition rate for university "creates an opening for educational providers who seek to lure students away from institutions where liberal education happens by making false promises of return on investment" (p. 27). Presumably this refers to for-profit technical colleges, but what is interesting to note is that the AAC&U does not consider the loss of potential students to for-profit technical colleges as a failure to market better to these students, but the result of nefarious schemes of other educational providers. The only worthwhile education is their own education. Other educational researchers have focused on the effects of student loan burdens on career choice and how it perpetuates inequities. For instance Nicholas Barr, Bruce Chapman, Lorraine Dearden, and Susan Dynarski (2019) compared the US "mortgage-model" of student loans with a fixed amount due monthly regardless of income and subject to changes in the interest rate to that of income-contingent student loans. The authors argue that mortgage-style student loans of the US encourage borrowers to choose career paths that earn higher incomes at "the expense, for example, of jobs like teaching" (p. 47). Further, they suggest that since US student loan repayment plans are not as sensitive to falls in income, "have considerable potential to affect borrowers adversely: they create inequity and, if they lead to too little investment in human capital, also inefficiency" (p. 40). While the researchers are sensitive to the ways in which student debt constrains student choices, they fail to imagine anything beyond tinkering with the terms of repayment to alleviate the pressures of debt subjectivity.

Given the all-encompassing debt logic of liberal education, Lyotard's prescient parody "be operational (that is, commensurable) or disappear" (1984, p. xxiv) is apt. By borrowing for tuition

in order to present oneself as able to hold that debt in the first place, liberal education fuels indebted subjectivity. Under this logic and practice of education, the student is effaced for their ability to become a debt-holder. The question is how to subvert this tyranny? It might very well be in the act of disappearing. I think it appropriate then to finish the analysis of student debt with the words of Stefano Harvey and Fred Moten (2013), who in *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study*, find pathways to resist neoliberal logic. They state:

The student is not home, out of time, out of place, without credit, in bad debt. The student is a bad debtor threatened with credit. The student runs from credit. Credit pursues the student, offering to match credit for debt, until enough debts and enough credits have piled up. But the student has a habit, a bad habit. She studies. She studies but she does not learn. If she learned they could measure her progress, establish her attributes, give her credit. But the student keeps studying, keeps planning to study, keeps running to study, keeps studying a plan, keeps elaborating a debt. The student does not intend to pay. (p. 62)

Student-Centric Experience: All-encompassing Pedagogy

Universities, however, have ways of keeping their students from disappearing. While the function and purpose of liberal arts is to cultivate good debt holders by effacing the student and whatever else they could have become, this is achieved through the means of an all-encompassing pedagogy packaged as an educational experience to be consumed. Learning can and must happen in all corners of the student experience. Institutions are at pains to attract students and pander to them, accommodate the student voice, encourage active participation, increase student satisfaction all in service to the demand that students learn. There is no choice but to actively comply with university pedagogy; it bleeds everywhere in student life. The AAC&U observes that from the onset of the 21st century, “*learning* was displacing *instruction* as the *raison d’être* of colleges and universities” (2020, p. 11). This phenomenon can be summed in the cliché adage that the professor must relinquish their role as the sage on the stage to the guide on the side. Students, their peers, the professors, and the university as whole are all expected to actively ensure that everything is dedicated to learning: “A liberal learner is an active participant and a partner in his or her own education and the education of others, engaging in forms of inquiry that train the intellect through a focus on real-world problems that draw the learner into relationship with others—extending well beyond student-faculty interaction and traditional classroom settings and into wider communities” (2020, p. 9). In fact, students cannot even flunk out anymore; the AAC&U also advises that poor academic performance cannot alone be attributed to the student’s failings but also the institution’s:

“Previously, testing for reception of instruction could well result in a progressive and unchecked accretion of unsatisfactory course grades that ultimately congealed into a low GPA—an unhappy outcome likely to be attributed to inadequate preparation, lack of motivation, inaptitude, or some other student deficit. Now, by contrast, it is widely accepted that unsatisfactory academic results are at least as likely attributable to poor design or delivery or to other institutional factors” (p. 11).

This is a shift that Lyotard foresaw in *The Postmodern Condition*, where he anticipated that the push for interdisciplinary teamwork for more efficient performance would equate to the “sounding knell of the age of the Professor” (1984, p. 53). While Lyotard satirizes the replacement of professors with computers, modern universities have made the lecturer, advisor, graduate teaching assistant, and adjunct faculty accessory to this all-encompassing student-centered pedagogy of learning. All of which is intended to satisfy students’ expectations that they become employable at the end of their studies or get the experience they are paying for, because there is no other way to be. The pedagogue’s role in facilitating this active and broad learning in and out of class is the subject of much educational research. Pedagogues are encouraged to take accountability for active student learning by the following: in-class collaboration for deep-learning and critical thinking (Lo, 2010); setting high standards, encouraging students to find connections between their general education classes, and show concern for student development (Hall, Culver, & Burge, 2012); and in order to engage students in their general education requirements, “tap into a deep and immediate need of students: *to find meaning and purpose in their lives or, what some have called, answers to life’s big questions*” (emphasis in original, Kirk-Kuwaye, Sano-Franchini, 2015, p. 101). The faculty and staff of the institution are responsible for not only for facilitating learning in the classroom but also beyond it; the university is now architect for learning that pervades all areas of life.

This unescapable pedagogy, facilitated by tutors, advisors, and faculty, and all-inclusive student experience is a selling point for the liberal arts. I look now at the prospectus for Amherst College, an iconic liberal arts college nestled in “The Happy Valley,” so they call it, of Massachusetts (2017, p. 52). It is an A-Z guide of all that it is to live and learn, and *be*, a part of Amherst; the educational experience bleeds into all aspects of student life, temporally, spatially, interpersonally, intellectually, and even bodily. The following are some examples of this insidiously ever-present educational experience offered at Amherst. The experience spans the student journey from admissions, Amherst searches for “exceptional students” (p. 5), especially

those from underrepresented backgrounds, to the three-day orientation program titled LEAP (“learn | explore | activate | participate”, p. 22) and the “singular, profound, paradigm-shifting” (p. 22) first year at Amherst, to the first five years after graduation when “80 percent of our graduates pursue advanced work in graduate or professional school” (p. 22), and bizarrely enough the education at Amherst is also “becoming the future” (p. 8) with the construction of a new science building. Students can actively occupy all planes of time through the Pathways Mentoring Program; “A highly effective way to connect the past, the present and the future of Amherst. An alumni-student mentoring program, sponsored by our Career Center” (p. 40) that helps students achieve learning outcomes but mostly find jobs. The all-encompassing learning experience from courses, contact-time, and beyond are listed too: the open curriculum which Amherst claims “is one of the boldest, most productive experiments in higher education. It ensures that each classroom is filled with fully engaged students, committed to the topic at hand” (p. 40); there is even an “interterm” during which students partake in non-credit carrying learning experiences such as research or athletics and “generally embrace the joys of winter” (p. 29); the availability of and connection to Amherst faculty is also listed, such as the Take Your Professor Out (to dinner) program and the president’s regular open hours for anyone. The learning experience is also within interpersonal relationships on campus: residence life, themed housing, and fostering respect with the help of “the Amherst Men’s Project, the Cadigan Center for Religious Life, the College Council, ConsentFEST, the Multicultural Resource Center, Peer Advocates of Sexual Respect, Pride Week, the Queer Resource Center, Student Health Educators, the Women’s and Gender Center” (p. 45). Even taking a piss is part of the student experience; Amherst showcases “The bathrooms on B Level of Frost Library, whose walls students have covered with excerpts from the letters of Rainer Maria Rilke and the diaries of his intellectual and romantic partner Lou Andreas-Salomé. Not to be confused with the Joyce bathroom (in Johnson Chapel, featuring excerpts from *Ulysses*) or the Rowling bathroom (in Chapin Hall, featuring quotes from the Harry Potter books). It’s not graffiti; it’s love” (p. 44). Even transgression, vandalizing the bathroom stalls, is part of the student experience.

There is nowhere for the student to disappear in this labyrinthine learning experience. All areas of student life are rendered to the imperative to learn, to be active, to be engaged. It is more than selling what students are buying, but ensuring that students achieve and perform along the projected learning outcomes of their liberal education, that I will consider in the following section.

It is then worth revisiting the social structure that the AAC&U defines as appropriate for illiberal education: “systems of government that are predicated on obedience and that restrict freedom of thought or behavior, discourage civic involvement, and prohibit or severely limit self-governance” (2020, p. 8). Is this not however what the university has become in its architecture of a spatio-temporal experience where the imperative is to always be learning? Is this pervasive student experience not then a kind of terror enacted by the institution upon the student body?

The statement of the St. John’s Program and the provisions contained in the Statement are not and may not be regarded as an express or implied contract between any person (including any current or prospective student, faculty or staff member) and the College. The Statement is for general informational purposes only. The College reserves the right, in its sole discretion to change any provision of the Statement, including program requirements, courses, fees, schedules, deadlines, calendars and any other information contained within the Statement, without notice.

Figure 1: *The above is a disclaimer found on the last page of the St. John’s College 2017-18 Program statement. This iconic liberal arts college is known for its now somewhat anachronistic Great Books curriculum conducted in a seminar setting, where “The tutors function as guides, more intent on listening to the students and working with them than imposing upon them their own understandings” (2017, p. 7). However, the student experience is always subject to change according to the facilitators of education; they do not even adhere to contracts.*

Student Performance

Lyotard in *The Postmodern Condition* aptly predicted that universities, subject to the all-encompassing logic of late capitalism, would gain legitimation by the criterion of *performativity*. With this phrase Lyotard invokes something other than performing, such as enacting, initiating, or gesturing. Rather, performativity for Lyotard is not doing for the sake of doing but for the sake of optimization and adhering to metrics. In illiberal education, the ends of which are to ensnare students into indebtedness through an all-encompassing pedagogy of the student experience, students are subject to stated learning outcomes and assessed accordingly. The AAC&U suggests that liberal undergraduate education is “embodied in a defined set of learning outcomes that transcend the variety of institutional settings and major courses of study and whose achievement prepares students to contribute to, and flourish within, the personal, civic, and economic spheres of their lives and, thereby, to advance the common good” (2020, p. 12).—There is something insidious in the phrase *embodied* here, the law of liberal education that *Thou must learn!* needs a student body to inscribe itself upon and that inscription is assessment of performance.—The AAC&U does not only define what liberal education is, they also offer rubrics and pedagogic guidelines to manage and assess undergraduate learning. This includes the following: Liberal

Education and America's Promise, Essential Learning Outcomes, and Valid Assessment of Learning in Undergraduate Education rubrics.

AAC&U's Liberal Education and America's Promise (or LEAP) is an initiative for liberal education and effectively a soft lobbying campaign with representatives at the national, state, and institutional levels through the following subgroups: The National Leadership Council and Presidents' Trust, LEAP States initiative, and the Campus Action Network (AACU, 2015). In short, LEAP sets the parameters for the desired outcomes of liberal undergraduate education through "work to engage the public with core questions about what really matters in college and to connect with employers and educators as they build new partnerships" (AACU, 2015, p. 1). What is crucial here is that the LEAP initiative aims to bridge civic education with that of the desires of employers, thereby rendering the desired outcomes of liberal education to both the criterion of employability and democracy. The needs of democracy and the economy are habitually equivocated and rationalized through the needs of "a nation dependent on economic creativity and democratic vitality" (AACU, 2017, p. 1), requiring "higher levels of learning and knowledge as well as strong intellectual and practical skills to navigate the more demanding environment successfully and responsibly" (AACU, 2017a, p. 1). But through indebted subjectivity, the needs of the nation-state and labor market are one in the same. For example, through consultation with employers the LEAP initiative suggests that education providers utilize the pedagogic practice of "Signature Work" such as a project or portfolio of work as a requirement for all students with the rationale that "91 percent of employers say that critical thinking, communication, and problem-solving abilities are *more important* than a potential employee's undergraduate major" (undated(a), p. 3). Presumably those skills can only be proven through a tracked e-portfolio of student performance for future employers to decide whether or not the graduate is suitable for work, and as such a good holder of debt.

The skills, virtues, capacities, and knowledge that students must achieve in order to be liberally education the AAC&U delineates in the Essential Learning Outcomes or ELOs (AAC&U, undated(b)). Excellence in such an education is defined by the extent to which a liberal arts curriculum is designed to cultivate, and prove through assessment, the outcomes identified as essential for a liberal arts graduate. I will quote in full the list of outcomes deemed essential for the liberal learner by the AAC&U:

Knowledge of Human Cultures and the Physical and Natural World

- Through study in the sciences and mathematics, social sciences, humanities, histories, languages, and the arts

Focused by engagement with big questions, both contemporary and enduring

Intellectual and Practical Skills, Including

- Inquiry and analysis
- Critical and creative thinking
- Written and oral communication
- Quantitative literacy
- Information literacy
- Teamwork and problem solving

Practiced extensively, across the curriculum, in the context of progressively more challenging problems, projects, and standards for performance

Personal and Social Responsibility, Including

- Civic knowledge and engagement—local and global
- Intercultural knowledge and competence
- Ethical reasoning and action
- Foundations and skills for lifelong learning

Anchored through active involvement with diverse communities and real-world challenges

Integrative and Applied Learning, Including

- Synthesis and advanced accomplishment across general and specialized studies

Demonstrated through the application of knowledge, skills, and responsibilities to new settings and complex problems

(AAC&U, undated(b))

What is striking about these essential outcomes of liberal learning is their grammar. The subset of outcomes are all nouns: knowledge, skills, responsibility, and even learning, again what the AAC&U defines as “the *raison d’être* of colleges and universities” (2020, p. 11), becomes a grammatically awkward noun under the outcome of “Integrative and Applied Learning.” The list, however, does stipulate *how* such capacities should be cultivated, as passive verbs: the intellectual and practical skills should be “*practiced extensively*”, personal and social responsibility should be “*anchored* through active involvement”, and finally the action come skill, “integrative and applied learning” is “*Demonstrated*” through the application of other competencies. There is circular logic at play here: only the performance of the identified outcomes are legitimate and they are legitimate only in doing them. Here Lyotard’s conception of legitimation through performativity is apt because these essential liberal learning outcomes are legitimated through no other reason than their own development.

It is not enough to achieve these outcomes for liberal education, students' performance along with outcomes are assessed through the AAC&U Valid Assessment of Learning in Undergraduate Education (VALUE) initiative. According to the VALUE Institute, "The VALUE approach is both evidence-based and evidence-generating. It is a methodologically sound, authentic, and creative response to the need for direct evidence of the quality of student learning across critical skills and abilities associated with success in life and work... the VALUE Institute bases its assessment of student learning achievement on the actual work that students produce in response to assignments from the curriculum or co-curriculum" (AAC&U, undated(c), p. 1). Again, the logic of performativity is the reasoning for assessment of student performance; learning will have only taken place if students can perform the performance required and are assessed to demonstrate the "evidence of quality." AAC&U however cautions that the VALUE rubrics they provide for each Essential Learning Outcome should not be used for grading purposes, but to evaluate student progress along the designated benchmarks for each skill and subset of skills as demonstrated in the work for course assignments (Rhodes, 2009). While not intended for grading, the VALUE rubrics delineate a pre-destined map of development and performance markers. For each learning outcome, the subset of skills and capacities students are expected to demonstrate are divided into four benchmark stages, progressing from the lowest level of one (or zero if a student fails to demonstrate the skills altogether) up to a level of four, the most outstanding. Here, the number four is significant: the standard number of years a bachelor degree program takes, indicating the assumption that students will progress linearly over these stated standards through their undergraduate careers. Moreover, many colleges and universities use a 4.0 grading scale, a score of 4.0 being perfect. Despite the caution that the VALUE rubrics are meant solely for the purposes of substantively evaluating student work, they are classified with numeric scores. This might seem par for the course in education, where students are normally graded with scores, however, the these rubrics are intended to assess student performance of learning outcomes in areas such as *Ethical Reasoning*. The rubric for this learning outcome suggests that while a liberal education should prepare students to *act ethically*, it is easier to evaluate a portfolio of student work where students externalize their ethical thought (AAC&U, 2009a). The question of ethics is not what is ethical or unethical and why, nor even the student's own ethics, but their ability to *perform ethics* in pedagogical assignments. The ethics of assessing a student's performative ethical

reasoning along predetermined benchmarks seems to have been missed by the AAC&U; it is only a measure of practicality that they cannot assess student's actual ethical actions.

The grading rubrics also reflect the all-encompassing pedagogy at the university, where even activities outside of class are part and parcel of the learning expected of students. The social, residential, and co-learning demanded of students are also expected to cultivate the essential learning outcomes, for example, Intercultural Knowledge and Competence (AAC&U, 2009b). The subset of capacities and skills for Intercultural Knowledge are delineated as follows: "Knowledge, Cultural self-awareness and Knowledge of cultural worldview frameworks; Skills, including Empathy and Verbal and nonverbal communication; Attitudes, including Curiosity and Openness"(AAC&U, 2009b). That even *empathy* has been reduced to skill that can be demonstrated for assessment belies the totalizing logic of learning outcomes. Empathy is assessed as the following Capstone benchmark: "Interprets intercultural experience from the perspectives of own and more than one worldview and demonstrates ability to act in a supportive manner that recognizes the feelings of other cultural groups" (AAC&U, 2009b, p. 2). Empathy is not something that one *feels* or is moved by, but something the student must prove they have learned and externalize their empathetic ethical reasoning for evaluation and proof of standards. Empathy in itself is not enough, it is only validated by performativity and expected to be cultivated even beyond the classroom but in all avenues of the student experience.

The assessment of student performance feeds a circular logic in liberal learning. The essential learning outcomes adhere to cultivation of a subject worthy of debt, are cultivated by an inescapable pedagogy sold as a commodity, the performance of which are assessed to ensure that the education yielded the promised results. The AAC&U argues that its rubric guides and assessment practices "provide evidence of student gains but also yield actionable evidence of the efficacy of the teaching and learning practices that contributed to them—or did not.... as well as enabling comparisons among students on campus and across campuses, institutions, and states" (2020, p. 20-21). The performance of students along their learning outcomes is used to ensure optimum performance of the system. What is of note is the AAC&U's attempt to distinguish illiberal from liberal educational assessments. For them illiberal education is amenable to standardized tests: "If the student can respond correctly to questions whose answers are already known to others and can solve problems others have solved already, then transmission has succeeded (p. 20). This is entirely unreflective upon the ways in which the AAC&U have

established numerical scores for predetermined benchmarks for learning outcomes that assess the student's whole person through an all-encompassing pedagogic lens validated only through performativity.

II. Illiberal Education: The Student Effaced

In the above, I have considered the ways in which liberal education practices are *illiberal*. My investigation has been inspired and informed by Lyotard's still apt analysis of the predominant validation of university education through performativity and through the totalizing logic of late capitalism. The most obvious way by which liberal education has become illiberal is through debt funding. More than narrowing student choices and rendering education to the logic of ROI, indebtedness defines what students are educated to become, worthy of the debt they took out in the first place through the cultivation of employable skills and temperaments. This is seen in the all-encompassing imperative to *always be learning*. While the unaffordability of university tuition is often considered only in terms of the commodification of the liberal arts degree, the marketing of the student experience masks the omnipresence of pedagogy, which is always at the discretion of the institution to cultivate or change. The outcomes of which are assessed in student performance of predetermined outcomes with predetermined standards to ensure quality. The AAC&U's rationale for what they call a liberal education demonstrates its own totalizing logic:

the answer to the *what* and *why* of undergraduate learning situates the private benefits that accrue to individual students within the civic mission and the democratic and economic purposes of higher education. The expectation is that the use of the knowledge and skills gained in college will be directed according to the habits of heart and mind developed there as graduates enter into relationship with others through their personal and professional lives, through their participation in the civic life of democracy, and through their engagements in the proximate and global communities of which they are a part. In short, the goal of undergraduate learning is to produce liberally educated graduates. (p. 12)

Through the student-centeredness of this logic, the student is effaced, there are no options to be otherwise. The student, in this illiberal education must surrender totally to the labor upon the self that the university demands and is continually improving, utilizing all aspects of student experience for the imperative to learn. It is a project entirely invested in an already determined future, at the expense of the *hic et nunc* that the student occupies. Of course, these observations and insights are entirely banal. The university is accustomed to its own critique. The question is

how to go on from this illiberal education that calls itself liberal? The next chapter is dedicated to the impossibility of reclaiming, restoring, or recovering a past notion of the liberal arts or liberal education, because the problem of nihilism is not only the neoliberal, but as Lyotard suggests with the sly words in his *Report on Knowledge*, there is a “blind spot” (1979, p. 2, author’s translation) Western thought that doesn’t trust that there is. In fact, in the history of liberal arts education has always been invested in effacing the student, who, as I will gesture, can resist what is illiberal in education in the *hic et nunc*¹⁰.

¹⁰The here and now, as in the present gesture writing that finds itself the first chapter of a thesis that attempts to rewrite liberal arts education, is in itself a critique of critique. It sets a thesis, that liberal arts education is illiberal which is in itself critical. It proves that thesis with evidence and argument. The gesture is entirely in the negative because it attempts to prove the negation of what is liberal and as such the gesture becomes a parody of the academic convention of criticism. It also parodies the nature of assessment and evaluation; the chapter demonstrates learning through obsessive citations. In sum the gesture of the present chapter is demonstrate that the learner can know many things but fail to study.

CHAPTER TWO

THE RUINATION OF THE LIBERAL ARTS

Re-legitimation from the Blind Spot

If it is banal to critique the rampant neoliberalism that has legitimated all educational functions of the university, it is equally commonplace to defend or reclaim the liberal arts and the liberal educational idea. For example, Christopher Martin (2016) refutes debt-funding for higher education, contending that any amount of student debt places undue burdens on borrowers by restricting their career choices and undermining their autonomy; he states, “In a liberal democratic society we need educational institutions that support autonomy through the adult stage of life. This means rethinking the fundamental value of higher education provision—from a privileged opportunity for individuals with specific tastes, talents and interests to a morally important good that has value for all citizens” (p. 363). Wendy Brown (2015) likewise defends liberal education in civic terms: “if, historically, a liberal arts education pertained to a leisured class that was also a ruling class, the extension of such an education to the general citizenry configures an ideal of this leisure and power as widely shared” (p. 189). Similarly, Susan McWilliams (2013) defines liberal arts education as endowing students with the *arts of liberty*: “it offers a means by which a large modern republic might elevate the character and tone of its public life. Liberal education can on these terms be understood to aim at a view of citizenship in which the citizen stand both within the law and outside of it, capable of judging the regime with an eye to improving it” (p. 219). In fact, the AAC&U’s also invokes such democratic notions of liberal education to defend their identified learning outcomes:

Liberal education is the form of education appropriate to democracy. Democracy is not self-sustaining; rather, it depends on the sustained engagement of a free people who are united in their commitment to the fundamental principles it is intended to

preserve and advance—justice, liberty, human dignity, equality of persons. The task of an education allied to democracy is not simply to help students gain knowledge and skills, but in so doing also to form the habits of heart and mind that liberate them and that equip them for, and dispose them to, civic involvement and the creation of a more just and inclusive society. (2020, p. 4)

As we have seen in the previous chapter, however, this ideal cannot be trusted even by its proponents. It gets dissected into essential outcomes, in which the skills, habits, and virtues for citizenship and employment are one in the same; “Prepare Students for Citizenship and Work through Engaged and Guided Learning on “Real-World” Problems” (AAC&U, undated(a), p. 9) is the fifth Principle of Excellence of AAC&U’s Liberal Educational and America’s Promise. It is not enough to liberally educate; it must be legitimated and proven by its own performativity.

Why doesn’t reclaiming, rediscovering, or re-legitimizing liberal arts education seem to work? I contend that it is not only the present totalizing logic of neoliberalism but a deeper pessimism within the university that effaces the student and what it is to study. In this chapter I will explore historical iterations of liberal arts education to support my thesis, that if this education is to be anything other than handmaiden to the market, we cannot reclaim historical ideals of education. But first I will examine a case study of this argument for reclaiming the university. In his essay, “The Neoliberal Arts: How College Sold its Soul to the Market,” William Deresiewicz¹¹ (2015) argues for the reinvigoration of the liberal arts. Deresiewicz’s argument broadly goes like this: university education is so entrenched in careerism and credentialism that it occludes what liberal education should be for; “Instead of seeing it in terms of market purposes, we need to see it *once again* in terms of intellectual and moral purposes” (emphasis added, p. 32). Deresiewicz assumes that the university once had a moral fabric, it merely needs to be restored. Just what is the moral function of the university? Deresiewicz looks back to the liberal arts tradition in American higher education. He claims that the “Great Books courses and other humanities and ‘general education’ sequences and requirements” (p. 27) were an egalitarian and secular approach to offering the sort of character-education of religiously affiliated colleges to a wider student body, widened even more by the land-grant institutions in the late nineteenth century. The original university mission is to educate students to “live confidently, courageously, and hopefully” (p. 26).

¹¹ Deresiewicz, who also published *Excellent Sheep: The Miseducation of the American Elite and the Way to a Meaningful Life* (2014), in this later essay apparently realizes that it is not only the elite colleges that have been coopted by neoliberalism’s educational logic.

Deresiewicz argues that this mission was revitalized with the massification of enrollment in the post-World War II era; “The heyday of public higher ed, the 1960s, *was* the heyday of the liberal arts. If those middle- and working- class kids were going to college just to get a better job, why did so many of them major in English?” (p. 27). In sum, higher education has lost its way it needs to be redirected to its rightful course. While Deresiewicz looks to the past to reinvigorate the university of present, he is not so hopeful that the institutions themselves are up for the task, so entrenched they are in performativity they are unable to think beyond it. It is rather real activism, by students and politicians, to change the status quo; ultimately, Deresiewicz contends that what is needed is to reinstate “high-quality, low- or no-cost mass public higher education” (p. 32). Only by divorcing higher education from careerism can we reclaim education’s mission to cultivate individuals ready to lead lives of their choosing.

I find, however, a deeper pessimism in liberal arts education that Deresiewicz’s essay touches upon but misses in the final conclusions. This is found both in his critique of current university practices and how it has diminished what he views as the university’s original and proper mission. Largely, Deresiewicz’s critique of the neoliberal university is that it occludes the practice of thinking or reduces thought to an employable skill:

If college is seldom about thinking and learning anymore, that’s because very few people are interested in thinking and learning, students least of all.... The college classroom does or ought to do one thing particularly well, which is to teach you to think analytically. That is why a rigorous college education requires you to be as smart as possible and to think as hard as possible, and why it’s good at training people for those professions that demand the same... (p. 29)

Deresiewicz characterizes this paradox of the contemporary university well: *thinking in itself* is not worthwhile unless it is *learning how to think*, to use those critical thinking skills on the labor market. However, Deresiewicz fails to see a similar force at play in the historical ideals of liberal arts education he defends. For Deresiewicz, the university’s ultimate purpose to educate students to live freely is connected to what he sees as the duty of youth in modernity: “the historical mission of youth in every generation was to imagine a way forward to a different state” (p. 28). This youth, however, requires an education to fulfill their mission and to lead the happy, fulfilled lives promised to them in a liberal democracy. So what does a university education *do* when it is uncorrupted by neoliberal ends? For Deresiewicz, in his earlier manuscript *Excellent Sheep* (2014), it teaches students to think, of course! This is a very old thought about what liberal education ought

to do, in fact it is antique. What exactly does this mean for Deresiewicz?: “It means developing the habit of skepticism and the capacity to put it in practice. It means learning not to take things for granted, so you can reach your own conclusions” (p. 79). He alludes to the Socratic method as an ideal educational paradigm for teaching students how to question their preconceived notions upon entering university and replace them with their own ideas; in sum to teach students “not what to think but how” (p. 81). This for Deresiewicz is the educational work upon the soul; through this rigorous reflection one becomes capable of answering the questions: “what is the good life and how shall I live it?” (p. 85).

It would be almost heartless to disagree with this notion of liberal education. Who does not want students to learn how to live good lives of their choosing? Or in the more civic-minded ideas of liberal arts education, who does not want students to be prepared for their civic duties? What I find dubious in attempts to restore the original purpose of education, to lead a good life or to instill civic or any other virtue, is firstly that there has never been consensus on what liberal arts education is for, but also because these ideals still make education *functional*. The primary function of which is to make students no longer students. For instance, in Deresiewicz’s notion of what education really ought to be like it is not enough that students always already have a soul, that they already think, they must learn *how* to think to further investigate their souls. This is the Occidental blind spot that Lyotard (1979) refers to, *thought* is not trusted, it must be perfected, it must be for something else.—*Hence why liberal education is very easily co-opted by neoliberalism. The ends differ but the means are one in the same.*—A similar pessimism runs through the gambit of the West’s ideals for liberal education or liberal arts education and that is why attempting to restore this education from a historical idea will leave the university further impoverished.

I. Liberal Education: Ruined from Inside-Out

The notion of *ruins* I borrow from Bill Readings’ (1996) *The University in Ruins*, that advances Lyotard’s (1984) analysis of the de-legitimation of the university’s Enlightenment and speculative narratives in the rise of neoliberalism. As discussed in the previous chapter, in *The Postmodern Condition*, Lyotard identifies two prevailing ideas that historically validated the institution of the university and its education in modernity. For Lyotard, the Enlightenment

narrative motivates the university's education for the cultivation of "humanity as the hero of liberty" (p. 31); the knowledge created and transmitted by the university under this narrative must be in the service of freedom.—Broadly, this is the narrative invoked by commentators above that would have liberal arts education prepare students as free citizens.—The other narrative Lyotard identifies is what he calls the speculative narrative to be found in the University of Berlin; wherein the pursuit of knowledge is in service of the engendering of a Spirit; or as Lyotard describes this logic, "knowledge first finds legitimacy within itself, and it is knowledge that is entitled to say what the State and Society are" (p. 34). But as Lyotard diagnoses the postmodern condition as "incredulity toward metanarratives" (1984, p. xxiv), we are no longer able to believe the stories we told ourselves about the university. Readings (1996), writing at the neoliberal University of Excellence, contends that in the Anglophone world, the university and its education has been most influenced by the speculative legitimation knowledge. For Readings the Anglophone adaptation of the university's cultural engendering is not through a philosophy but through literature.—Not unlike the Great Books curriculum that William Deresiewicz (2015) posits as the secularization of character education in America.—Readings, much like Lyotard, suggests that these historical iterations of the university are *historical*; "History grants no essential or eternal role to the modern research University, and it is necessary to contemplate the horizon of the displacement of that University" (p. 128-129). Instead of reinstating a redemptive narrative to validate the university, Readings suggests that what is left is to accept the University as a ruined institution and what he calls an "institutional pragmatism" that navigates these ruins to let *Thought* commence. This is by no means defeatist, but a commitment to Thought, a commitment to what might happen at the university.—Indeed, in *The Postmodern Condition*, Lyotard (1984) makes a similar move, anticipating his later work in *The Differend*, by suggesting that in the postmodern university we must resort to *paralogy*, or to finding instabilities in the pragmatics of knowledge creation. As it stands in the report on knowledge, this is rather underdeveloped, but takes shape with Lyotard's later writings that attempt to write thought itself. I will return to this in the following and later chapters.

For the present chapter, however, I will complicate Readings' position that we must dwell within the university's ruins. His analysis focuses on the university as an institution, but here I investigate the history of the liberal education ideal and what it intends for its students. Across the Western tradition, I have found a pervasive pessimism; students must not be students. Students

must be educated out of their studenthood. Broadly, this is through either one of two mechanisms: a progressive method that emphasizes who the student is cultivated to become or able to do and a conservative method that seeks to endow the student with their cultural heritage, though often a feigned heritage that is solely Western, white, and male. Both are part of a “liberal” tradition of education. Both efface what is present and immanent in education for what has been and is no longer (conservative), or what will be after what will have been achieved through education (progressive). Either ideal of the tradition are predicated on effacing the student. It is this pervasive pessimism that ruins what is to practice liberal arts, to study. And this is why, if the liberal arts are not to be consigned to the nihilism of the market, they cannot also be restored by a historical ideal.

To Lead Out

“To educate is to lead out. The moderns have stressed the efforts necessary to lead and let oneself be led out of nature toward language” (Lyotard, 1995, p. xx); this is how Lyotard defines the progressivist vision of liberal education in the terse text “Spaceships”¹². These two laconic lines encapsulate the assumptions of a progressivist liberal educational idea that predates modernity. The child, or the student, is impoverished and needs to be freed from their state of dependency and of ignorance. They must be educated and brought into the world of discourse and reasons so they might live a life freed from slavish nature. What is this but the Occident’s oldest liberal educational idea?

“They’re like us” Socrates assures Glaucon (Plato, 1991, 515a). Those who find themselves shackled, in the dimmest, darkest, most base mode of human existence. These prisoners of Socrates’ imagination find themselves in a cave, shackled to see only the shadows of puppets cast by a fire and their keepers behind them. So the allegory goes, a prisoner finds himself unshackled and stumbles into the light of day, to see, at first—and this is important—the images and reflections of The Sun, and then finally to turn to The Sun itself. The prisoner, whose eyes had been trained in darkness, finds this blazing light painful but comes to True Forms, the world as it actually is and not as he imagines it to be. Burdened with the knowledge of all that is Good and True, the freed prisoner must return to the lowly place of the cave and educate his ignorant brethren. This supreme education to reach that which *is* takes the form of the Socratic dialogue; “by means of

¹² Which acts as a forward to the collection of educational scholarship on Lyotard’s thought: *Education and the Postmodern Condition* (Peters, 1995).

argument without the use of senses—to attain to each thing itself that *is* and doesn't give up before he grasps by intellection itself that which is good itself, he comes to the very end of the intelligible realm" (Plato, 1991, 535a). Hence, as Lyotard notes, through language and reason alone this education promises freedom. Of course, *The Republic* would fail our modern egalitarian sensibility; Socrates does not believe that all prisoners will reach the "end of the intelligible realm"; but with the philosopher king's help the prisoners might at least have faith in the Good and the True. The conventional take away from this ancient allegory is that liberal education is to lead the student into the light. To free the student from their preconceived opinions, from a state of nature, and into enlightenment so they may be free from erroneous beliefs and live more truly. For example John Malcom (1962), who contends that each stage of exiting the cave, seeing the shadows versus the puppets themselves, and above, seeing the reflections of the sun versus seeing the Sun itself, as analogous to the stages of the line, and a trajectory of one person's actual intellectual journey toward a free and good life.—Of course in the advent of mass higher education and universal schooling, we believe that all children are capable of this education.—This is exactly the idea of liberal education that William Deresiewicz (2014, 2015) proposes. He is not the only commentator who looks to antiquity for a liberal educational ideal.

Other educational thinkers take the method of education in the allegory more literally, such as self-proclaimed Socratic method teachers. Let us take for example, Peter Boghossian (2012). Boghossian is at pains to explain that the Socratic dialogue is not intended to perplex or embarrass pupils, merely to demonstrate a pupil's unjustified belief and any flummoxing experience that occurs is only due to the complexity of the ideas (or the True Forms) at hand. Boghossian contends that the Socratic method of teaching follows the following five steps: 1) a question that invokes wonder, what is x ?, 2) a hypothesis is given, 3) the given hypothesis is refuted, or *disproved*, 4) the initial hypothesis is accepted (though often rejected), 5) the pupils act in accordance with the accepted or rejected hypothesis. That pupils might be perturbed or unsettled by this method is not due to the method, but induced by their previously held, erroneous beliefs. Boghossian even gives an example from his own critical thinking classes, in which he asks his students if he were to throw an egg out of the window of their third floor window whether or not it would break. His students answer that it would break, he throws it out and it almost never breaks. For Boghossian, that his students are not flummoxed by the unbroken egg is testament to the fact that the Socratic method is not intended to humiliate students but to petition students to alter their erroneously held beliefs.

Boghossian, however, sidesteps the problem that an unbroken egg is not a closely held belief like that of say, what virtue, courage, or justice are and people almost never act in accordance with unbroken eggs—except to crack them. Further this method of disproving the hypothesis, through empiricism that relies on visual sense is at odds with the dialogue that Socrates promotes, that is completely devoid of the senses that led us astray in the first place. Is there not something absurd in treating a historical idea of what liberal education ought to be as gospel, using it as a guide or defense of what liberal education ought to be like?

Moreover, in such attempts to reclaim this classical idea of liberal education, we see a pessimism repeated. A pessimism toward the student and toward thought and what *is*, resulting in a hollow procedural idea of liberal education that is justified by its ends. The allegory of the cave is predicated on the assumption that in our natural state, human beings are slaves to our senses, to the false opinions and beliefs that those senses tell us about the world. We must have a method to getting at the Truth. Hence, Boghossian's (2012) five-step dialogue or Deresiewicz's (2014) suggestion that students must learn *how* to think. This requires a certain disdain for the student.

By giving students so much independence to question and inquire so early, the system sometimes eventually produces upperclassmen who, as a result of naiveté and peer pressure, have fallen prey to intellectual fads... It is much harder to get these students to work through the ideas in a Socratic manner than it would be with freshmen.

Figure 2: *The above is a direct quotation from Martha Nussbaum's (1996, p. 48) Cultivating Humanity: A Classical Defense for Reform in Higher Education in which she advocates an education guided by classical philosophy to cultivate the humanity of university students "most of whom are intellectually unaggressive" (p. 79). The hero of antiquity in Nussbaum's liberal educational ideal is Diogenes, the cynic who abstained from the norms of genteel Athenian public by preferring to eat in the streets and defecate in private (the inverse of polite society in his day). A liberal education, for Nussbaum, ought to cultivate students more like this cynic, but through more rigorous and systematic intellectual preparation. This way students will become better able to critique their own cultural traditions, which Nussbaum characterizes as a commitment to the universal: "it recognizes in people what is especially fundamental about them, most worthy of reverence and acknowledgement, namely their aspirations to justice and goodness and their capacities for reasoning in this connection" (p. 60). The intellectual and mental habits are not only what must be improved through this classical liberal education of self-examination but students must also gain knowledge of other cultures, through literature; "It means learning how to be a human being capable of love and imagination" (p. 14). As if being fully human is something that humans must learn to do.*

That current educational thinkers and commentators so openly expose their hatred of students, for their inability to think aggressively or to be fully human without education, is perhaps connected to a deep pessimism in Socrates' allegory. Even though Socrates states that "education is not what the professions of certain men assert it to be. They presumably assert that they put into the soul

knowledge that isn't in it, as though they were putting sight into blind eyes" (Plato, 1991, 518c) he still has little faith in *what is*. Socrates says, "this power is in the soul of each, and the instrument with which each learns—just as an eye is not able to turn toward the light from the dark without the whole body—must be turned around from that which is *coming into being* together with the whole soul until it is able to endure looking at that which *is* and the brightest part of that which *is*" (Plato, 1991, 519c). This means that each soul has the capacity of sight, to see the Ideal Forms, it is rather that this gift of vision is misplaced, looking in the wrong direction. Education is what turns the soul toward "that which *is*": "in the knowable the last thing to be seen, and with considerable effort, is the *idea* of the good; but once seen it must be concluded that this is in fact the cause of all that is right and fair in everything" (Plato, 1991, 517c).—How could this be pessimist? It does not trust the being there in being there. For Socrates, the soul in want of education has missed what *is*. Which is to say that the student, so unattuned to the good, is mistaken in believing the being in being there. They must be led away from this misplaced faith in the being of being there, to supersede it in the idea of the good. For Lyotard, this leading out, for this "education" to be educational must not be educational. He says in *Spaceships*, "But 'out' is possibly not 'outside'. It is no doubt within, far inside" (p. xx). It is within the cave, within the student, with what is only just coming into being that this pessimism can be averted.

And that is Plato, who is the *student* of Socrates. While Socrates is an educational midwife, turning the head of the student, Plato is as J. David Blankenship (1996) says "the poet who is serious about the imitation of education because he is serious about the deed of education... Plato in his dialogues gives an idealized particular, Socrates, a paradigm in speech of the just human being and philosopher" (pp. 82-83). In other words, the allegory is a story that was told by Socrates to Glaucon and then to Plato, who wrote it down. For Richard Smith (2011) this makes *The Republic* (and all of Plato's oeuvre) inherently textual and we must not look for a rubric for education, or a republic, but unravel the poetry and prose within text. As Smith points out, the Republic of *The Republic* is only make-belief, which Socrates himself forgets: "I was forgetting that we are amusing ourselves [*epaizomen*: literally, 'we were playing'] with an imaginary sketch and was getting too worked up" ([536b-c], qtd. in Smith, 2011, p. 228). We can take Plato, as seriously as he is himself playing at education, at becoming wise. He cannot, but tries anyway. He studiously dwells in the ruination of this liberal educational idea.

At Leisure

At the beginning of the previous chapter, I gave a working definition of the liberal arts or liberal education as education that is *not* vocational or professional. As we saw in that chapter however, the liberal arts' very inutility is often conceived of instrumentally, whether through the cultivation of employable skill or civic virtue. If the liberal arts were to be truly divorced from utility, from instrumentalism what would it be like? Deresiewicz (2014) in his defense of the liberal arts offers an idea: an interval for the youth to contemplate what the world ought to be like. He is by no means the first to defend such a useless education in these terms. For this idea we must return to the student of Socrates' student: Aristotle.

In Aristotle's *Politics* (1991) we find the philosopher's sketch of the education proper to a political community that goad us until today: what is the right balance between education that is useful and education for its own sake? In Aristotle's account, there must be both but there is a distinction in their purposes. It is important to bear in mind that Aristotle's main concern is the happy and virtuous state; "happiness is the realization and perfect exercise of virtue" (p. 170). As such, Aristotle concludes that for the state to be virtuous it must be governed by those who are virtuous. Indeed for Aristotle, there are the governors and the governed, both in want of education but the governing class must excel in virtue over the governed; "therefore their education must be the same but also different" (p. 172). The governed and governors might study the same disciplines and arts but they do so in a different manner. The liberal education of the governors is pursued divorced from ends or use. The governed learn as a means to an end. As Aristotle puts it "There are also some liberal arts quite proper for the freeman to acquire, but only in a certain degree, and if he attained to them too closely, in order to attain perfection in them, the same evil effects will follow" (p. 181). The distinction comes in that of leisure versus the crass vulgarization of the same arts; that which is leisurely is an end in itself, and requires the virtues of temperance and justice to partake in it responsibly. That which is vulgarized has been committed as a means to another end.

This can be seen in Aristotle's thoughts on the educational value of music, which is a leisurely pastime, giving pleasure to those who enjoy and partake in it. For Aristotle, however, those elite youths destined to govern must not only be taught to enjoy music, but also to play, but not in a slavish way, as any vulgar minstrel might. The elite youth, destined to govern, must only play leisurely, to enjoy the rhythm and melodies of music that imitate that which is good and

virtuous. It is an aesthetic training of their judgement and taste for these good things. In contrast, vulgar music education the student is slave to perfecting the instrument, to perform better because they are destined to play for the enjoyment of others. It is being free from these pressures that liberal arts are liberal and in which one can cultivate virtue. Aristotle makes the enigmatic conclusion, “Thus it is clear that education should be based upon three principles—the mean, the possible, the becoming, these three” (p. 192). The tensions in Aristotle’s liberal arts ideal endure. It is both non-instrumental and instrumental.

Aristotle’s notion of same but different educations illustrate the conflict in the AAC&U’s example of the history student partaking in a liberal education. Again, they state, the history student “recognizes that a liberal education will make him or her a better historian because knowledge of the sweep of human history will be complemented by scientific and technological literacies that inform the critical exercise of historical understanding in contemporary contexts shaped by scientific discovery and technological innovation” (2020, p. 18). Using Aristotle’s distinction, this history student would *not* be engaging in the study of history *liberally*. The student is slavishly subject to being a better historian, the ends are to become an academic historian, to make countable research outputs for optimal university rankings. However, even Aristotle’s non-instrumental liberal arts education *is* instrumental because it is the cultivation proper to one destined to govern. Again, our egalitarian sentiments would find this difficult to stomach. That is why commentators that defend the liberal arts as non-vocational highlight the cultivation of civic, and not governing, virtue. Even education for itself is not for itself.

John Henry Newman is perhaps more Aristotelian than Aristotle in defending the liberal arts in his lectures *The Idea of a University* (1996) at the then Catholic University of Ireland, now University College Dublin, in the 1850s. Newman, who had been educated in the upper crust of higher education, changed his faith and defected from Oxford and ultimately became rector of the Catholic University of Ireland. Simply and straightforwardly, Newman’s idea of liberal education can be summarized in his own words: *knowledge its own end*. For Newman, a Catholic, knowledge is no substitute for faith in instilling virtue. He states, “Knowledge is one thing, virtue is another; good sense is not conscience, refinement is not humility, nor is largeness and justness of view faith. Philosophy, however enlightened, however profound, gives no command over the passions, no influential motives, no vivifying principles. Liberal education makes not the Christian, not the Catholic, but the gentleman” (p. 89).

While Newman dismisses liberal education's role in cultivating virtue; knowledge in and of itself is its own educational good. This requires Newman to distinguish between mere learning or what he calls "acquisition"—this I think is what Aristotle means when he talks of the vulgarization of a craft—and knowledge. Knowledge, in and of itself, *is* philosophical knowledge; he states that the proper end of liberal education for its own sake "is Thought or Reason Exercised upon Knowledge" (p. 101). This realm of knowledge beyond mere learning is what is proper to what bears the name liberal education. What distinguishes Newman's ideas on liberal education from his classical forefathers is his attention to the education proper to the institution of the University. This might seem rather obvious, after all Newman's *The Idea of a University* was a series of lectures given at a university but in the wake of the institution of the university in European culture, Newman makes explicit reference to the type of education that ought to occur in the distinct space of the university¹³. For Newman, in order for the university to bear the name, the institution cannot engage in a slavish sort of learning, where knowledge is reduced to the acquisition of facts. A gathering of students, or community of minds without this perverted instruction for Newman would be more proper to what it is that university is and the education it

¹³ It is crucial to distinguish a university from its antecedent and also the groups that made up the university when it was incorporated: *studia*. A *studium* was a group of teaching masters and their students while the university was the collective, incorporated whole, a more legal distinction than anything else. As Helene Wieruszowski (1966) explains, "Fundamentally, the medieval universities were meeting places of students and masters drawn together by a common desire for learning. It was a spontaneous movement and not the result of planning. Students gathered around teachers or resorted to famous schools attached to cathedrals in centers soon known as studia" (p. 16). The University of Paris is a poignant case of how these loose collective of students in the Île de la Cité became a formal institution with defined curricula and pedagogy. The teaching and learning at the studia had always had some connection to the church; dioceses often had internal schools for future clergy members and external schools where lay people could study the liberal arts (Verger, 1973); the archdeacon of the church had the right of giving the *licentia docendi*, or teaching license, though when universities started to act in cooperative guilds, the conferring of the teaching license saw further regularization (Wieruszowski, 1966). Studia thus held an ambiguous position, under both the remit of the church and state, both of clergy and of lay scholars, both local and foreign students and scholars. This was also the case for what was studied; as Jacques Verger (2000) notes, students attending these informal schools made their own course of study, whether following particular lecturers or subjects, or putting together hasty courses to then pursue more profitable studies like medicine. Indeed the early form of the university were entirely chaotic and anarchic. And it is through chaos that the institution of the university as we know it was established. More precisely, a brawl. As the studia held an ambiguous and precarious position, quasi-clerical-quasi-lay it was not uncommon for fights to break out between students and local residents. One such tavern brawl in Paris in 1229 ended in the state police retaliating brutally against the students, killing several without proof of their involvement in the brawl (Wieruszowski, 1966). In response, and in the true French spirit, the masters invoked the Great Dispersion, a rather lofty name for a university strike. Teaching masters and students disbanded from the Île de la Cité (notably many fled to Oxford, with which Parisian scholars already held intellectual interaction and discourse). In 1231 the dispersion ended with a papal bull, titled *Parens scientiarum* or "Mother of the Sciences" which made the scholars clerics and as such outside the domain of the state but under ecclesiastical authority (Wieruszowski, 1966). As such, the studia became a university, with considerable autonomy to govern its own affairs, separate and yet a part of the church. And with the formalization of cooperative efforts, came formalized syllabi and curricula.

ought to foster. Thus it would appear that Newman's liberal education ideal is very much invested in the student, however he ultimately endorses completes a paradox he attempts to avoid. If for liberal education to be divorced from utility, it must be divorced from ends it must be invested in knowledge for itself. Newman consistently, however, endorses the cultivation of the intellect as the end of such a liberal education: "A habit of mind is formed which lasts through life, of which the attributes are, freedom, equitableness, calmness, moderation and wisdom; or what in a former discourse I have ventured to call a philosophical habit" (p. 77) while also stating, "Now, when I say that knowledge is, not merely a means to something beyond it, or the preliminary of certain arts into which it naturally resolves, but an end sufficient to rest in and to pursue for its own sake, surely I am uttering no paradox, for I am stating what is both intelligible in itself, and has ever been the common judgement of philosophers and the ordinary feeling of mankind" (pp. 78-79). But is this not a paradox? A liberal education for knowledge as its own end is defended for the cultivation of the student's mind that it brings. Ultimately, Newman in his grand ideal of the educated mind endorses the same pessimism that Socrates does. This is evident in his sweeping statements of what such a cultivated mind is like:

the intellect which has been disciplined to the perfection of its powers, which knows, and thinks while it knows, which has learned to leaven the dense mass of facts and events with the elastic force of reason, such an intellect be partial, cannot be exclusive, cannot be impetuous, cannot be at a loss, cannot but be patient, collected and majestically calm, because it discerns the end in every beginning, the origin in every end, the law in every interruption, the limit in each delay because it ever knows where it stands, and how its path lies from one point to another (p. 100)

The cultivated mind supersedes what is, to know everything in "the eternal order of things" (p. 101). And Newman believes without irony that his defense of this intrinsically worthwhile education for the cultivation of mental habits it brings about is not a paradox but the "accurate vision and comprehension of all things" (p. 101) and it must be achieved through a break from the world, the special community of intellect fostered at a university.

Michael Oakeshott, another influential commentator upon the purpose of liberal education in the Anglophone tradition, is most remembered for his essay "The Voice of Poetry in the Conversation of Mankind" (1974). Like Newman before him and Aristotle before that, Oakeshott posits that what makes liberal education liberal is its inutility. That is the crux of his argument in favor of the *voice of poetry* is to protect the humanities, the arts, and literature from a budding scientism and instrumentalization of the university. For Oakeshott, poetry is not part of the

curriculum for any instrumental gains, it does not cultivate imaginative empathy like in Nussbaum's formulation, but is a poetic endeavoring to articulate something of the human condition. This non-instrumental view of liberal education is sedimented in Oakeshott's (1989) conceptualization of the School. For Oakeshott, if the School is to be a site of liberal learning it must not be denigrated by the demands of *relevance*. Oakeshott understands the criterion of relevance differently from career-preparation; he refutes the defense of liberal education as a method of "socialization" or "cultivation" of the intellect. This for Oakeshott is to deeply misunderstand the pursuit of the liberal arts, or the conversation of mankind. It is rather that "Liberal learning is learning to respond to the invitations of the great intellectual adventures in which human beings have come to display their various understandings of the world and themselves" (p. 32). It is not that through liberal education one becomes fully human—as Nussbaum (1996) posits. For Oakeshott, what makes liberal education liberal is to completely free the pursuits of human intellect from any utility, not even the cultivation of an individual. He even goes so far to call liberal education, and its place in the School or the University, as a break from the demands of the *here and now* (p. 32), and it is the responsibility of elders to provide this space for the younger generation to enter the discourses through which men have articulated human experience. Oakeshott's view of liberal education is a radicalized version of Aristotle's and Newman's; his emphasis on liberal education's inutility is furthered by his insistence that we must not look to liberal education in order to cultivate the intellect or virtue of its students. Rather, for Oakeshott, education is liberal when it is freed entirely from ends, the practice is entirely its own end.

We have followed a thread that posits liberal arts education as an education of *leisure*, or literally *free time*, free from outcomes and returns on investment. There is something in this that is resonant with Lyotard's remarks in "The Survivor" when he contends, "one inevitable effect of totalitarianism is that children are not allowed enough time for childhood" (1999, p. 160). As we saw in the last chapter, the liberal arts have become illiberal by subjecting students to debt, subjectivity, and neoliberal logic. Students have little opportunity to be anything other than what their education has attempted to cultivate within them. While we can look to history to find such an account of liberal education to divest it of use-value. There are problems in doing so. First of which is the unironic contradiction touted by both Aristotle and Newman; they both defend liberal education from utility while simultaneously positing that such an education cultivates virtue or intellect. Still

it would be strange to redefine present educational practices through historic conceptions of liberal education as leisure; such as Masschelein and Simons's (2010) who look to antiquity to define the school. They contend that that the school, often conceived as means to equality through education, is a subversion of its status as a democratic institution. They seek to reinvigorate and redefine what the school is through a historical idea of a liberal education, divorced from utility and ends. They state

... in the Greek world the school was not a place and time organised to reproduce the social order, or the way of life of its elites. Separated from both the *oikos* and the *polis*, and hence freed from daily occupations, the school was a real space with a real inner place and time, where people were exposed to real matter (school material and occupations). A typical feature of the separateness of the school, then, is *suspension*. Economic, social, cultural, political or private time is suspended, as are the tasks and roles connected to specific places. Suspension here could be regarded as an act of de-privatization, de-socialisation or de-appropriation; it sets something free. (2010, p. 674-675)

The authors argue In accordance with the ancient Greek practice of Scholè, the school was a radically democratic place in which all things were divorced from their utility to encounter equally “for common and free use, and hence, anything can happen here” (p. 680). Except of course for the enslaved and women.

We Are

In the classical tradition then, the art of rhetoric is not the art of persuasion as such but rather the art of making judgements about practical, political and human matters. Of course, the eloquent expression of right judgements is inherently persuasive, but eloquence itself is really only the outward expression of inner thought and wisdom. To exercise the art of rhetoric requires, therefore, the development of a personal culture or *paideia*, and this in turn entails developing the humane knowledge needed to understand one's self and others as social, political and cultural beings. (Miller, 2007, p. 196)

In the above extract from Alistair Miller in “Rhetoric, *Paideia* and the Old idea of a Liberal Education” (2007) he attempts to recover a different liberal education ideal from antiquity: the rhetorical or oratory tradition. Miller contends that we have inherited an impoverished notion of the value of rhetoric from Plato and too often privilege rational autonomy as an end of liberal education. It is rather, an education in rhetoric that Miller contends can bring a holistic cultivation to current generalist curricula, through “the cultivation of the mind or self” (p. 204). Which is

precisely what the other liberal educational idea purports to do. Here I consider what I call the conservative branch in historical ideas of liberal arts education. By conservative I do not mean the political right, rather I mean the *conservation of culture*. Here I look at defenses of non-vocational education from Antiquity and from the German idealist model of university education. In these accounts, education is defended with recourse to specific ethnic, cultural, and linguistic heritage; liberal education's purpose under the conservative account is to endow the student with their cultural heritage so they may better serve their country or culture.

It is not controversial to state that the name Socrates is better remembered than the name Isocrates, the orator and tutor, from Greek antiquity. We know the Socratic method as the pedagogy par excellence, lest we forget that Socrates was put to death for it. He was not well liked in his time. As Bruce Kimball (1986) asserts it is rather in the words of Isocrates that we will find Athens' preferred and prized ideal for liberal education which was carried over into Roman antiquity. It is important to remember that in *The Republic*, Socrates' ideal education cultivates the philosopher kings who ruled, whereas Athens was governed by free citizens, for whom public discourse and appeals to the glory and significance of Hellenistic culture were a necessity. This is precisely what Isocrates advocates for his educational vision.

Isocrates was no sophist. In fact in "Against the Sophists" (1929) he criticizes these self-acclaimed educators for their own hypocrisy; they "are on the watch for contradictions in words but are blind to inconsistencies in deeds" (7). For Isocrates these sophists cultivate clever wordsmithing, at the expense of cultivating their own virtue. Isocrates, like Socrates, doubted the wisdom and worth of the many sophists hawking their craft of speech, but still saw fit that liberal education should culminate in one able to speak well. It is no wonder why in Isocrates' later years he is quite perplexed at being accused of such sophistry, of hoodwinking the youth through clever speech. Indeed he takes to defending his life, his philosophy, and his craft in the *Antidosis* (1929), the name of the particular type of court case. This speech was his own defense for being taken to court for a trierarchy, that is he was accused by Lysimachus for hoarding his wealth failing to pay his taxes, but also of *corrupting the youth* with his tutelage (89). He is at pains to distinguish himself from the orators of the courts "I considered that their foolish babble had no influence whatever and that I had, myself, made it manifest to all that I had elected to speak and write, not on petty disputes, but on subjects so important and elevated that no one would attempt them except those who had studied with me, and their would-be imitators" (3)—humility, apparently is not part

of his defense. Rather than mere argumentation, Isocrates concerned his rhetoric with matters of importance, of virtue, of philosophy, though not in the dialectic scribed by Plato. For Isocrates, it is beyond mere wordsmithing and beyond the exercise of mere rational intellect that constitutes the “study of eloquence” (177) which he Isocrates calls a “liberal education” (176). It is rather that this education be in service to the state:

I suppose that you are not unaware of the fact that the government of the state is handed on by the older men to the youth of the coming generation; and that since the succession goes on without end, it follows of necessity that as is the education of our youth so from a generation to generation will be the fortune of the state.
(174)

That is, the ultimate good and virtue under this educational idea is that of an unquestioned cultural good, Athens and its honor. As such, philosophy, and its oration is in service of this ultimate cultural good. This does not sound all too unfamiliar in some of the contemporary practices of liberal education, in which cultivated citizens are the end. Because for Isocrates, philosophy is good in the extent to which it is expressed and useful, it must rise to the “occasion” as he speaks of the art of the orator, it is weighing and choosing all the subjects at hand for the present occasion to speak of. While the sophists only seek to win cases at court, Isocrates puts his philosophy and wisdom into execution under the name of Athens. The ultimate educational good is the cultural heritage and state; Isocrates’ liberal education is the development of intellect, virtue, and the aesthetic sensibilities to speak well in order to serve the state.

This notion of the rhetorical tradition of liberal education was furthered in Rome by Quintilian in his guidebook for the education of orators, *Institutes of Oratory* (1903). Both Isocrates and Cicero are important sources for Quintilian’s vision of oration: “With this character of it, the definition that *oratory is the science of speaking well*, agrees excellently, for it embraces all the virtues of oratory at once, and includes also the character of the true orator, as he cannot speak well unless he be a good man” (p. 146). Quintilian rejects definitions of rhetoric that resign it only to persuasion, or only to political matters; he maintains that to persuade others along one’s own will is not a good or virtuous act. The ultimate virtue in the rhetorical tradition of liberal education is to civil polity, what is in service of the people. The rhetorical tradition is intentioned to cultivate not only good reasoning, eloquent speech, but to endow the student with their cultural heritage and duty.

Another iteration of what I call the conservative perspective of liberal education is the idea of the university given by Wilhelm von Humboldt, the Prussian philosopher and education

reformer. As mentioned above, the University of Berlin characterizes what Lyotard (1984) calls the speculative narrative that has lost its credibility in validating the university and its education. While Humboldt's model of the university and its imitators are not always characterized as a liberal university¹⁴ I examine here in his educational ideas the inherently cultural pedagogy in university activity and the cultural cultivation in his writings on *Bildung*. In the posthumously published, "On the Internal and External Organization of the Higher Scientific Institutions in Berlin" (Humboldt, written in 1810) Humboldt contends that the university structure must facilitate the inherently pedagogic act of *Wissenschaft*. The pursuit of science is at once pedagogic, and pedagogy is at once scientific; Humboldt suggests that professors have "arrived at their advances in their field precisely through their teaching. For the free oral lecture before listeners, among whom there is always a significant number of minds that think along for themselves... In fact, science cannot be truly lectured on as science without again conceiving of it as self-actuating each time, and it would be incomprehensible if people did not in fact in the process come upon discoveries" (p. 5). This, Humboldt contrasts to academies, which have the benefit of less governmental intrusion, but alas lack the advantage of the universities' "large number of strong, robust, and youthful minds" (p. 5) that help advance *Wissenschaft*. Humboldt's idea of a community of minds in pursuit of science emphasizes the intrinsic value of this unattainable and perfectible knowledge, "everything depends on preserving the principle of seeing science as something that has not been and can never be entirely found, and to constantly pursue it as such" (p. 3). Humboldt's ideas on the structure of the university are not only beholden to the pragmatics of *Wissenschaft*, rather the university is "the pinnacle of where everything that happens directly for the moral culture of the nation comes together" (p. 1). The pursuit of science, the community of teachers and students pursuing it are invested in it because it is beyond mere or vulgar learning but the engendering of the people, the character of the nation.

This is why Humboldt must also invoke "subjective education" (Humboldt, 1810, p. 1) or *Bildung*. This word lacks a useful English translation but can be loosely understood as formation

¹⁴ For instance, Johns Hopkins University is often understood as an early American adopter of the German research model, culminating in a graduate school funded by its undergraduate school (Labaree, 2017). Even in the inaugural address of Johns Hopkins' first president, Daniel Coit Gilman (1876), we can see that the foundation of the university was not a simple adoption of The German Model, but an attempt to distinguish the university from other American colleges by way of offering a doctoral track and not the traditional four-year bachelor degree: "This plan will give us an opportunity to introduce some features of the English fellowship and German system of private-docents; or in other words to furnish positions where young men desirous of a university career may have a chance to begin" (pp. 14-15).

of the self (Bohlin, 2008). This idea is not exclusive to Humboldt, but I shall look to his enigmatic writings on this particular educational idea that he attempts to bridge to the pursuit of *Wissenschaft*. For Humboldt (2000), his ‘Theory of *Bildung*’ is the view of how our individual pursuits connects us to the larger pursuit of knowledge; that timeless question of where our selves stop and our societies begin. Though Humboldt has a particular idea of this, “Although all these demands are limited to man’s inner being, his nature drives him to reach beyond himself to the external objects, and here it is crucial that he should not lose himself in this alienation, but rather reflect back into his inner being the clarifying light and the comforting warmth of everything that he undertakes outside himself” (p. 59). The edification of the student consists in extending beyond the self, outward toward the people and their pursuit of knowledge, much like formation of virtue in Isocrates’ and Quintilian’s notion of rhetoric.

This narrative of liberal education effaces the here and now of the educational pursuit, which the student occupies. The rhetorical tradition supplants the student by emphasizing the cultural endowment, the past, and how the student must serve it in the future. Though the emphasis of this liberal education is cultural conservation, it defends itself in its ability to cultivate virtue and intellect much like the progressivist and leisurely iterations. The most concerning issue with this cultural liberal education is its potential for political disaster. As Lyotard (1984) observes in the failing legitimacy of the German University through recourse to the people, the nation, or Spirit, by 1933 it had been replaced by a race of people resulting in the use of science for one of the greatest atrocities we have ever seen. It is more than dubious to reclaim this ideal of liberal education or the University given its propensity for disaster.

I Am Able To

Finally, I consider here historical ideas of liberal education that most closely reflect the arguments of contemporary defenders of liberal education at the opening of this chapter. This is the Enlightenment narrative of liberal education. It is a progressivist notion of education in that it is invested in cultivating the capacities natural to man to exercise their will and autonomy. This project is so entrenched in our thought about liberal education that commentators often invoke liberal education as the education proper to a democracy without much recourse to the historical ideas that inform them.



Figure 3: This is Joseph Wright of Derby's (1768) *An Experiment on a Bird in an Air Pump*¹⁵. It illustrates nicely the aims of the Enlightenment liberal educational project. In the painting, the figures are illuminated by a single hidden source of light while a boy in the right corner draws the curtain over the light of the full moon. A figure who fits the trope for the mad scientist with his loose overlong hair holds the valve of the eponymous air pump with a bird in it. It is a pedagogic painting of a pedagogic moment. He is demonstrating the presence of air through its absence. The scientist has created a vacuum in the air pump in which the bird is suffocating (one hopes the lesson will end when he lets the air back in so the bird can breathe). It tells us what we ought and oughtn't do in cultivating our reason. In the foreground, a man in green counts the time toward the bird's final breaths. To his left a young boy looks up in rapture. In the right foreground a man sits in somber contemplation, his eyeglasses in his hands, perhaps contemplating the meaning of the experiment. These masculine figures exercise their rationality to observe or to reason about something important in the world; even though we cannot see air, we can observe the effects of its absence and deduce its importance for sustaining life. This is how we ought to be. The feminine figures demonstrate how we ought not to be. The young lady in the left is too distracted by a suitor, in turn distracted by the experiment, to exercise her reason, if she even has it. The little girls in the center, their figures most illuminated by the light, huddle in tears and fears while a fatherly figure comforts but also cajoles them to observe the experiment, and put their irrational emotions to the side. The empty bird cage above them, however, indicates that the little girls are weeping for their pet.

Whether or not Rousseau is remembered rightly or wrongly as a “progressivist,” in the sense of a student-centered constructivist, in educational thought, I include him here in this

¹⁵ This image is licensed for non-commercial use by the National Gallery: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>

discussion of liberal education because his educational ideas show the tensions inherent in educating one to be free. For Rousseau, what is natural is good and right. It is false and illegitimate society that is the problem, hence his attempt to correct the faults of political life with his normative account of *The Social Contract* (1913), the political state is only just and legitimate to the extent to which free and consenting individuals unanimously agree to come to together and form a common will and sovereign power, to which they choose to subject themselves and maintain responsibility for protecting the will and rights of others. Yet in doing so, in subjecting themselves to this general will, they are “forced to be free” (p. 18). Rousseau loves a paradox: that only through being subject to a common sovereignty can one be at liberty.

How then to educate these individuals who are forced to be free? In *Emile* (1911) Rousseau creates a fictitious account of the lifelong tutelage of the titular imaginary student. The educational project here is that of unlocking the innate reason and abilities in the child endowed by nature, learning comes in stages of increased understanding. For Rousseau, the most perilous aspect of education is exposing the child to that which he cannot yet understand, mostly the influence of others, which, left unchecked is liable to instill an *amour-propre*, the mediation of the self through the opinions of others. Rousseau would rather that little Emile is secluded from others and society, until he is ready to enter it with a robust *amour de soi*. Yet, as Rousseau writes it, this natural development of Emile happens under the almost tyrannical eye of the tutor. Emile is allowed to play and discover things for himself: “Let him not be taught science, let him discover it. If ever you substitute authority for reason he will cease to reason, he will be merely a play thing of other people’s thoughts” (p. 138). This only happens under the careful manipulation of the tutor, who gets himself and Emile lost in the woods, without breakfast no less, in order to make Emile feel the lesson of navigating south via the shadows cast by the sun. There is something coercive and paradoxical about this freedom to exercise reason under carefully constructed conditions, which Rousseau seems cognizant of

If there is any cure for this social evil, it is to be found in the substitution of law for the individual; in arming the general will with a real strength beyond the power of any individual will. If the laws of nations, like the laws of nature, could never be broken by any human power, dependence on men would become dependence on things; all the advantages of a state of nature would be combined with all the advantages of social life in the commonwealth. The liberty which preserves a man from vice would be united with the morality which raises him to virtue. (p. 49)

Notwithstanding that the laws of nations can and usually are broken by man, the gist is that this bridled liberty, the freedom which is naturally good and without vice, becomes more virtuous when subjected to general will. Paradoxically at liberty and restrained by democratic social bonds, we see the paradox at the heart of this social contract and the education necessary to function within it. Caught, because there is no empirical reality of a social contract, within a legitimate social democracy, we are of course subject to the general will, and no longer naturally free, but this paradoxically gives us freedom: “what man acquires in the civil state, moral liberty, which alone makes him truly master of himself; for the mere impulse of appetite is slavery, while obedience to the law which we prescribe ourselves is liberty” (Rousseau, 1913, p. 19). While Rousseau’s educational ideas are entirely hypothetical, it was the Americans who put these Enlightenment ideas into practice with all of their faulty foundations.

Thomas Jefferson advocated a publicly funded school system in the oft-cited, and failed bill: *A Bill for the More General Diffusion of Knowledge*. Jefferson (1779) writes “whom nature hath endowed with genius and virtue, should be rendered by liberal education worthy to receive, and able to guard the sacred deposit of the rights and liberties of their fellow citizens.” Two remarks on this: democracy can only function for Jefferson with the general elevation of the mind through education, but this is also a meritocracy. Jefferson’s educational ideas were elitist, not based on birth, but talent. Only the best and brightest were destined for further education and to lead the country; Jefferson believed that these individuals would distinguish themselves in their school years. Everyone else would only receive the bare minimum of schooling. This is still very much the logic of schooling and admissions. Jefferson (1814) fleshes out this two-tiered system in a letter to Peter Carr: all children are to receive an elementary education within a precinct, “wherein they should receive three years instruction gratis, in reading, writing, Arithmetic as far as fractions, the roots, and rations, and Geography” (p. 2-3). There are then schools for laborers, to learn business and agriculture so that they may maintain their private interests, and colleges for “the learned”, for those who display talent to become a professional or a leader, to study language, mathematics, and philosophy. Though Jefferson’s bills on education failed, the logic of the system he envision still runs American education; it runs on false merit.

Rousseau and Jefferson offer liberal educational ideas directly intertwined with a democracy, however racist, sexist, and classist, it may be. It is predicated on the assumption that a liberal education develops the innate reason and capabilities to lead oneself and others. The liberty

promised in these narratives is through the cultivation of reason, which the “London School” of the twentieth century fully categorized. By the London School I refer to the academics of the Institute of Education in London (now a department of University College London), particularly the trifecta of Hirst, Peters and Dearden, who in the 1970s and in direct opposition to the rise of progressive education in England, conceptualized a particular form of liberal education. Largely the scholarship of the London School focuses on the nature of reason and how it leads to the good life. Hirst (2010) explains the relationship between education, knowledge and the cultivation of the mind: “the ‘harmony’ is a matter of the logical relationship between the concept of ‘mind’ and the concept of ‘knowledge’, from which it follows that the achievement of knowledge is necessarily the development of mind—that is, the self-conscious rational mind of mind—in its most fundamental aspect” (p. 39). For Hirst, this justifies a generalized and therefore liberal educational curriculum in the traditional forms of knowledge. R. F. Dearden (1984) more explicitly formulates his educational ideas for the cultivation of autonomy. Though here, he designates his educational ideas not necessarily as liberal but as *intellectual*. This can largely be understood as an education comprised of different knowledge forms and disciplines; “It implies also an endeavor towards precision, articulateness, order and an interrelation between the parts” (p. 112). Hirst concludes that an intellectual education, comprised of a general curriculum, provides the content necessary as well as the critical thinking skills needed to be autonomous but also “a sense of responsibility towards intellectual standards, a fundamental principle and a whole range of virtues” (p. 119). Knowledge, reason, and leading a good life are all rolled into one. Though of course all of these narratives of liberal education presume the child or student is naturally capable of cultivating reason, it is through education this is achieved. It is defined by its ends.

II. The Ruinous Student

But the students of our day, whether from ignorance or unwillingness, fail to hold to a fit method of study, and therefore we find many who study but few who are wise. Yet it seems to me that the student should take no less care not to expend his effort in useless studies than he should to avoid a lukewarm pursuit of good and useful ones. It is bad to pursue something good negligently; it is worse to expend many labors on an empty thing.

Figure 4: Hugh of St. Victor (1961, p. 87), a highly esteemed scholar of the medieval ages, saw in the liberals arts the *way* to divine truth, it is the student who perverts the course through “a wicked will” (p. 43), far worse than mere ignorance or incapability, to disdain knowledge.

This study of the historical ideas of liberal or liberal arts education is by no means exhaustive. Even so, the many iterations of liberal educational ideas belie a pervasive hatred of one thing: the student. Whether the student is assumed to have a natural capacity in need of development or is deficient and in need of enrichment, both progressivist and conservative accounts of liberal education are intentioned to expunge the student. Liberal arts education will not have succeeded unless the student has been lead out into enlightenment or is no longer ignorant of their cultural and intellectual heritage. Something has gone awry if the student remains incapable, ignorant, impoverished. Even in the medieval ages, Hugh of St. Victor laments the wickedly willed students who never become wise and remain only students. This exploration of the history of liberal educational ideas, however, leads me to conclude that the “empty thing” is the educational pursuit itself. It must found itself upon what is not yet, or no longer, that is to say what is *not*, in order to efface what is.

If we are to resist this penchant for effacing what is *hic et nunc*, if we are not to replace the present nihilism of neoliberal education with the pessimism of the past, where else might we resist than within the ruinous student? To study and never become wise, to not even have a fit method of study, to operate from and testify to the *hic et nunc*.

CHAPTER THREE

THE POVERTY OF PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION

What is the question of this thesis?

It is very far within the present project to ask the question of what its question is. Thus far this thesis has operated through a mode of critique. The argument thus far has been one of negation: finding the problems with present and past iterations of liberal education. I have demonstrated through this critical approach that present liberal educational ideas are *illiberal*. I have critiqued and problematized contemporary defenses, and practices, of this education to demonstrate that they are *illiberal* in that they are entirely subjected to the logic of neoliberalism and aim to cultivate the student for employable-citizenship, or rather indebted subjectivity. This is followed by an investigation of the gamut of the idea of liberal education in Occidental thought. Through this critique I have demonstrated that *liberal education* has never been one cohesive ideal. More than that, in my critical reading of these historical ideas of liberal education I have found a pervasive pessimism in the notion of education: liberal education has always been intentioned to make the student no longer a student. Whether that is through the cultivation of the intellect or the will, or endowing the student with their cultural heritage, liberal education continually defends itself by what is not in itself liberal arts education. Even notions of liberal arts education as leisure, as free-time, still defend its function for cultivating virtue, intellect, or fostering democracy (exempting of course the ideas of Michael Oakeshott for whom liberal education is found in its enactment). I have critiqued the history of this idea to demonstrate that simply reclaiming or restoring one of these historical narratives will not suffice in resisting the totalizing logic of the market; a deeper pessimism has been at work since antiquity. All of this is *not* to answer a question, but to prove a

negation. Critique as such operates from the same pessimism I find in current and historical iterations of liberal education.

What precisely is this pessimism, this melancholy I find in the history of the liberal educational idea? That education needs a function which is to found its purpose on what is not but what it is for. All of which is about making students no longer students. What the student does is only meaningful or worthwhile if it is in service of larger idea: freedom, cultural inheritance, democracy, the market, gaining credit. This calls for a shift in the mode of the thesis and the question it attempts to answer.

Is it “*What is liberal education?*”? No. Why is it *not* this question? Have I not been examining and critiquing answers to this question thus far? To answer this question is to remain in this mode of pessimism. To answer this question is to apply philosophy to an educational question, to solve its problems, to clarify intentions and purposes; this is after all a thesis in the philosophy *of* education. What have I been doing if not critiquing the history of the philosophy *of* liberal education up until now? What have I been critiquing but the blind spot of this applied philosophy, of Occidental thought?: the blind spot predicated on the supersession of commentary, of knowledge over what is *hic et nunc*.

This calls for a new mode, a new question, a different form of critique. This calls for thinking from the very poverty of the university, of philosophy of education. The calls for acting educationally from the *hic et nunc*, which is to be in the realm of the un-educative, the student. As such, the question of the thesis is *Why not study?* This requires different modes of critique, acritical critique: a “Kantian” mode and a stylistic or formal mode. By “Kantian” I merely mean the gesture of Kant when he differentiates the faculties of the mind; by asking “*Why not study?*” I do not suggest that there is no such thing as education, or learning, or other ideas of what it is to study. I merely gesture from another space of liberal education: studenthood and its study. It is this state of studenthood and studying from it that I believe is invoked when Lyotard inverts liberal education’s stress on *leading out* when he says:

But “out” is possibly not “outside.” It is no doubt within, far inside. One cannot reach it by uprooting oneself but by plunging deep within toward what is most intimate, where lies desire. The child knows a lot more than we do about this state of dependency not only in relation to adults, but to what he cherishes in itself, with or against “big people,” well or badly. (1995, p. xx)

Well or badly, I engage in an acritical critique through the form of this thesis, writing out of studenthood that attempts to play with the form of a thesis. Yet, it is a thesis. The stakes of which require me to petition the reader/assessor that the question *Why not study?* is worth asking, whether answering the question constitutes a novel contribution in the field of the philosophy of education. I have thus far spent considerable time petitioning the reader that current liberal educational practices are illiberal culminating the totalizing logic of neoliberalism—rather an unoriginal hypothesis, but perhaps more originally—and that the idea of liberal education has always been about effacing the *hic et nunc* of the educational paradigm. To resist this, I gesture that we must operate from the very impoverished position from which liberal education has always been intended to lead the student out. Entirely aware of the performative contradiction that I am about to make, the thesis requires a critical reading of the discipline of philosophy of education to justify the switch in modes and the question at stake. It also requires the author to defend the line of thought that invoked the thesis, that of Jean-François Lyotard.

I. Impoverishment of Philosophy of Education

Liberal education, both its present neoliberal nihilism and past pessimism, fail to pose the right questions: What is it for? What is liberal education? The answers to which can only efface what is immanent in education. One avenue to remedy this is to embark in philosophy of education. Here too, however, as an academic discipline there is the same nihilism: it is impoverished in its inability to conceive itself as anything other than a commentary on educational questions, clarifying, complicating, quarreling. Positioning itself as an academic discipline and as such removed from education. It fails to be educational and it is from this failing that I ask the question *Why not study?*. The notion of impoverishment, however, is not mine. It is a title given to a posthumously published collection of Lyotard's essays: *Misère de la Philosophie* (2000), which is of course appropriated from Marx's *The Poverty of Philosophy* (1955). What exactly is meant by this enigmatic phrase, the poverty of philosophy as it pertains to Lyotard's writings? I will here make another brazen claim, akin to Geoffrey Bennington's (1988) suggestion that Lyotard in his entire oeuvre has been attempting to *write the event*. That is, in the expanse of his writings, I find in Lyotard's work a consist struggle to write with and from the failings of philosophy to put thought into words, to put what is into words, to put what ought into words. This is a bold claim to make

about a philosopher infamous for his resistance the totalization or systematization of thought, but for Lyotard, where we fail is precisely where we must begin. This I find in themes in his later works in essays: the differend, affect, infancy. I will delve more deeply into this in the second half of this chapter where I defend my use of Lyotard's writings in this gesture of study. For now, however, I must appeal to the reader that there is a failing the philosophy of education and it requires working differently if we are not to consign liberal education entirely to the nihilism of the market, to the pessimism over philosophy's failings.

Founding a Discipline, Forgetting Education

To some extent, philosophy has always been invested in education. If philosophy is to live up to its name, *the love of wisdom*, is not education what we would call philosophy's means? The preceding chapter is an audit of the history of the philosophy of the ideas of liberal education. In it I demonstrated a consistent pessimism toward the student. There is a distinction, however, between philosophical inquiry about the point and purpose of liberal education and the academic discipline of educational thought and theory. Here, however, I wish to focus on philosophy of education as a field of scholarship. In doing so, this analysis considers explicitly the foundation of the academic discipline in the Anglophone world. This discipline is closely entangled with the expansion of teacher training in higher education, from smaller colleges dedicated to teacher training to the formalization of advanced and graduate degrees at universities in the mid-twentieth century. By considering the express analytic roots to the field and its early foundation as an academic discipline applied to the practice of education, I focus on the academic journals dedicated to the philosophy of education and figures important to the development of the field, including Israel Scheffler. Within these specific parameters, I consider what I call the impoverishment of the discipline of philosophy of education; in its haste to apply philosophy to education, the field forgets to be educative in itself.

To begin, I will consider the proliferation of academic journals dedicated to the discipline in the mid-twentieth century. The first of which is *Educational Theory*, aligned with the Philosophy of Education Society (PES), first published in 1951. There is also, *Studies in Philosophy of Education*, first published in 1960, with Archibald Anderson listed among the editors who also helped create *Educational Theory*. Further afield there is the *Journal of the Philosophy of Education* sponsored by the Philosophy of Education Society of Great Britain,

which was first published in 1967 and *Educational Philosophy and Theory* journal associated with the Philosophy of Education Society of Australasia, first published in 1969. Here I consider the first issues of *Educational Theory* and *Studies in Philosophy of Education* to examine how the discipline was positioned.

In the inaugural issue of *Educational Theory*, the editor Archibald Anderson (1951), describes how the John Dewey Society and the College of Education at the University of Illinois (at which Anderson was based) co-created the journal. As the title of the editorial, “The Task of Educational Theory” would imply, Anderson seeks to find the object of *educational theory*, which is to find and elaborate upon the “fundamental problems”; on the remit of the journal, Anderson states “It should not only publish studies in the various of foundations of education, but also in those related disciplines outside the field of education which can contribute to the development of educational theory” (p. 15). Anderson points to the need for space to interact with the theoretical problems of education, in lieu of focusing solely on practical concerns of education. For Anderson, educational theory should establish a systematic approach to education; “There is need to pull together, the contributions of research studies in these fields and to examine them from the standpoint of the improvement they may make possible in the over-all structure of educational theory” (p. 21). Yet, three years, later, *Educational Theory*, to some extent reorients itself with the editorial “The Distinctive Nature of the Philosophy of Education” (Champlin, et al, 1954). This statement, adopted by the PES attempts to define the academic discipline as a subfield of philosophy with its area of concentration the educational field. The statement specifically defines the remit of this field as schooling, relegating its object to the institutionalization of education. The statement stipulates the remit of philosophy of education to the examination and analysis of educational concepts and criteria in accordance with philosophical ones, according to whichever school of philosophy is followed. The philosopher of education may then take up three distinct tasks: the ‘descriptive-analytic’, the ‘critical-evaluative’ and the ‘speculative’ (p. 3). The descriptive-analytic task for the philosopher of education “relate[s] these criteria to philosophic positions, and examining them in terms of consistency, meaning, expectation, and method” (p. 3), belying a distinctly analytic bent to the conceptualization of the field. All three tasks for the discipline, however, demonstrate that the philosophy of education supersedes the practice, whether to clarify the terms or ideas in education, critique practice, or set new ideas and norms for it. It is

a philosophy *removed* from the practice of education, nor is it in itself educational, it is removed from the practice of education.

Likewise in the first issue of *Studies in Philosophy of Education*, the editors justify the journal in “An Adventure in Publishing” with the following: “the philosophic problems and issues of education are of sufficient importance to warrant a publication exclusively devoted to technical philosophic inquiries that are carried out in depth” (Anderson and Belth, 1961, p. 3). This task of “technical” inquiry seems like an inherently analytic pursuit, much like the descriptive-analytic task in *Educational Theory*, devoted to clarifying educational matters through philosophical thinking. What is most compelling is how the editors pose the discipline; they state, “We offer yet another journal to our colleagues in education, in philosophy, and the growing discipline that stands in between.” It positions philosophy of education as a distinct discipline outside education and outside philosophy.

An influential figure in the development of the discipline of philosophy of education is Israel Scheffler, who took up the post of philosophy of education at the Harvard Graduate School of Education in 1952 (Biesta, 2014). In “Toward an Analytic Philosophy of Education” (1954), Scheffler establishes the remit of philosophy of education as the clarification of the concepts and criteria fundamental to education. According to him it is only through analytic analysis we can understand the nature and stakes of the practice of education; “a careful analysis of or explication of our original concept, aimed at the distillation of a more precise counterpart, and finally an examination of what consequences result for educational theory from rewriting it with such newly-achieved precision” (p. 229). What can we conclude that philosophy of education is from Scheffler’s approach? Philosophy understood here is meant to clarify matters, even if that is only to demonstrate the messiness of an activity like moral education. It is, however, *applied*. It is meant to clarify matters for better educational practice.

As quickly as scholarship in the philosophy and theory of education proliferated, R. F. Dearden (1984) notes it just as quickly fell from favor. Dearden suggests that the disillusionment with educational theory and philosophy among both educators and theorists is its perceived uselessness for educational practice. Dearden, one of the London School philosophers of education and as such an advocate for the discipline, argues that the distinction between theory and practice in education is perhaps quite hazy but contends that it is not always the case the practice poses questions for theory, but the other way round. He lists the “hopes” of what theory can do when

applied to educational practice: “a deeper grasp of the nature of learning... a more adequate and considered set of educational values... a degree of reconstruction of ideas through a critical reconsideration of their truth and adequacy, and hence *greater intellectual control over practice*” (p. 19, emphasis added). While Dearden exposes the difficulties in judging the purpose and value of educational theory, it is judged by its effects in “real life” but in its development is far removed from the doing of education. This is precisely what I find wanting in the discipline of educational theory and philosophy. It conceives of itself as a commentary upon education; much like the philosophies of liberal education that place its redemption outside of it. This is to ignore, that we are always in the thick of it. More recently, however, in philosophy of education, academics have petitioned the field to move away from the application of philosophy to education, but as Gert Biesta (2011a) in the fiftieth anniversary of *Studies in Philosophy of Education*, encouraged contributors to the special issue “to *do* philosophy of education from the range of traditions they have grown up in and find themselves familiar with” (p. 432) as opposed to applying their favorite philosophers or philosophies to an educational question. Biesta (2011b, 2014) himself coming from the German tradition of educational study, composed of *Didaktik* or *Pädagogik*. Biesta (2011b, 2014) pushes us not to think of philosophy as applied to education, but to think of asking “educational” questions through philosophy. I am not convinced that this gets beyond the problem; asking “educational” questions presumes to already know what it is that education is, to have superseded it with commentary, to no longer be in the midst of education.

Educational Thought In the Wake of Postmodernism

If the discipline of philosophy of education began with analytical roots in the Anglophone world, as personified in Israel Scheffler’s work, this project was interrupted by the influence of continental thought, or postmodernism, in last quarter of the twentieth century. In the following section, I will consider more closely educational scholarship that engages “postmodernist” thought, namely that of Lyotard. Here, however, I consider how “postmodernism” has impacted the discipline of philosophy of education. Much educational thought after the publication of Lyotard’s *The Postmodern Condition* posits “postmodernism” as a philosophic approach. For example, Harland Bohland (2005) characterizes Lyotard as a pessimistic postmodernist who “attacks and negates modernism using much of the poststructuralist vocabulary” (122). This is to

consign “postmodernism” solely to Lyotard’s observations in *The Postmodern Condition* (1984), that performativity has arisen from the failings of the metanarratives of modernity. As I have stated in Chapter One, the repost should be read as a piece of satire and it is not that Lyotard is a pessimist, but is responding to the pessimism that he sees in these grand narratives. As such, the term postmodernism is a misnomer when it comes to describing the arc of thought it intends to invoke. As Paul Standish (2004) contends, educational research has been plagued by misuse and misunderstanding of the term: “postmodern has become a trendy catchword, used to excess and with a lack of precision by both its advocates and its detractors” (p. 488). Standish suggests that it is better to think of postmodernism as the broad cultural changes in art and design in the 20th century, but prefers the term “poststructuralist” to refer to the vein of Continental philosophy of the 20th century that developed from the complications of structuralism, finds inspiration in Kant, Nietzsche and the linguistic turn to think ethics, knowledge, and truth without foundationalism. These can be thought of as Lyotard’s contemporaries, including the likes of Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, and Gilles Deleuze. Even so, post-structuralism is perhaps an unfair way to truncate these, not dissimilar, but certainly distinct philosophers and their projects.

But what does the import of this thought mean in the discipline of philosophy of education? Is it a tool for better clarifying educational questions or further problematizing educational practice? Or does it require a very different approach? Nigel Blake, Paul Smeyers, Richard Smith, and Paul Standish (1998) in *Thinking Again: Education After Postmodernism*, contend that poststructuralist philosophy “offers some useful tools” (p. 19) for philosophy of education “to engage with the quotidian realities of educational practice... for describing institutions and languages and discourses, their interrelationships and the knowledge that is discovered, produced and maintained in within their content” (p. 18). This seems very much akin with the described tasks of philosophy of education in the above: to clarify and complicate educational practice through a commentary. However, one of the author’s most compelling statements about practicing philosophy of education with poststructuralist philosophy is that the post-foundationalism of this philosophy presents an educational impasse. Without recourse to a universal subject, the authors state it is impossible to answer the question “Who is the educated *man*?” that informed the approach of analytic philosophers of education at the London School. To traverse this impasse calls for “thinking imaginatively and innovatively” (p. 19). Ultimately, and I will further this in the following chapters, Blake and his coauthors fail to conceive of education differently from a

process of enculturation or becoming—albeit with no fixed end—that is guided by a teacher—whose task is complicated by the complexities of language and ethics without a system. This seems an odd criticism; surely we cannot fault the authors for what education *is*? If however, as Blake and his coauthors suggest, poststructuralist thought disavows the question, *Who is the educated man?*, mustn't we ask different questions of education?

Richard Edwards (2006) also considers what postmodernism means for educational thought. He notes that while Lyotard's observations in *The Postmodern Condition* clearly articulated the growing logic of performativity, which Edwards calls the criterion of lifelong learning, he indicates that postmodern critique demonstrates "a loss of mastery as a goal of education" (p. 276). This for Edwards is emblematic of postmodern thought's ability to "surface the ambivalence in the contemporary" (p. 277) and to simultaneously critically and playfully demonstrate the ambiguities and follies in overarching goals and aims for education. With this, I think Edwards suggests that much of the "critique" of postmodernist, or rather poststructuralist, thought occurs in the forms it takes, writing or otherwise. I should mention, that Blake and his coauthors (1998) question what it is to write a book of educational philosophy through the very form; their manuscript comes with a warning that it will offer no advice or blueprint for educational practice and consists of disconnected chapters and analyses that are inherently textual. As such, this style of philosophizing calls for thinking education differently. However, Naomi Hodgson and Paul Standish (2009) demonstrate the ways in which radical critique can be reduced to orthodoxy in educational research, ultimately reifying the criterion of performativity. They criticize educational researchers who utilize Lyotard's critique of grand narratives to inform narrative research methods; "What is imagined to be subversive then quickly conforms to a particular genre of writing the self" (p. 325). This cautionary tale demonstrates the ways in which any critique in educational theory and practice can become co-opted by and perpetuate the nihilism of performativity, efficiency, and metrics in academia.

This is by no means an exhaustive introduction to postmodernism or poststructuralism; I will provide more on this for contextualizing Lyotard's work in the following section. However here I merely consider what this means for philosophy of education. As many of the authors listed in the above indicate, this branch of philosophy serves as a powerful critique not only of current practices but of educational projects in general, hence why Blake and his co-authors call it an *impasse*. If this style of philosophizing prevents us from asking and answering questions about

what it is that education is, can it still be said to be a philosophy of education? If it calls for us to be wary, of the ways our critique can be sublimated into orthodoxy, how to philosophize education differently? Moreover, postmodern and poststructuralist thought disallow the defenses inherent to modernist ideas of liberal education: universal knowledge, the autonomous subject.

Philosophizing Educationally

If the discipline of philosophy of education began as a method to clarify educational issues, pose new problems, or to criticize educational practice (I have spent the last two chapters doing), recently the discipline has seen attempts to think differently of education, or perhaps even to *philosophize educationally*. For example Joris Vlieghe and Piotr Zamojski (2018) suggest that after the “death” of postmodernism, whether as a trend in theory or as a method to critique the advent of neoliberalism, educational thought must be preoccupied with the “right questions”; they suggest rather than endless critique, “a view that is fully predicated on exposing the inherent evils of our world” educational thought must emanate from the “logic of education [that] starts from what is good in the world” (p. 1502). This is furthered by their later (2019) manuscript, *Towards an Ontology of Teaching*, in which Vlieghe and Zamojski argue that much philosophy of education, and indeed popular opinion, only defines education through its use-value or function; this renders education a means to another end outside of itself. As such, Vlieghe and Zamojski suggest that educational philosophy should be invested not in critique but in defending what education is *as it is*. This work is predicated by the earlier *Manifesto for a Post-critical Pedagogy* (Hodgson, Vlieghe, and Zamojski, 2017) that in the titular “post-critical” argues that educational thought should no longer be invested in continuous and constant critique, but to “It is time to put what is good in the world—that which is under threat and which we wish to preserve — at the centre of our attention and to make a conceptual space in which we can take up our responsibility” (p. 19). This recent literature in philosophy of education seeks to *affirm* what is educational. It is in a kind of acritical critique, in which the point is not to rebuke the status quo but to affirm the educational. This is in itself a kind of Kantian critique of philosophy of education, demonstrating that criticality can only go so far in educational thought. Still, however, much of this work is a commentary of education, investigating and defending what it is, and still not in itself educational.

Tyson Lewis's (2018) *Inoperative Learning* offers another method of doing philosophy of education that is not philosophy of education. Lewis calls his approach a *weak philosophy* of education and it is a gesture of a doubled critique: it is not only critique, in the critical sense, of the hegemony of learning in educational practice but moreover, is a positive critique, in the formal sense, of presenting a new kind of educational form of life that is affirmative in-and-for itself (even if it is weak though not impoverished). What is meant by this strong philosophy of education? It is a method of doing philosophy of education that perpetuates the notion that education is merely a means to an end; it functions through "the temporality of learning, which enables the author to craft narratives of progressive understanding... of theoretical application, of resolution, or of culminating judgement" (p. 13). In order for philosophy of education to be strong in this sense, there is a fundamental assumption that education is a means to an end.—This is precisely the pessimism I have found in the history of liberal education ideas in the previous two chapters.—As such, in Lewis's weak philosophy of education, through the very form of the text, replete with interruptions that are examples that do not seem to serve a "function", he continuously resists making a commentary on education but enacts, in the very writing, educational potential that is not rendered to any end. In writing a parodic form of philosophic-educative potentiality, Lewis finds "a tiny freedom" (p. 13) that divests educational conduct from the ends of learning, or in liberal education's language cultivation of intellect, virtue, citizenship, or employability. Ultimately, what Lewis offers in *Inoperative Learning* is no commentary but an *enactment* of philosophic-educational potential.

Again, the question of this thesis I have elaborated in the above is *Why not study?* This is an odd sort of question to entertain in a thesis and one that comes rather late within it. It does not ask what study is, it does not ask what study is for, it does not ask how to study, it does not ask how study is educational, it does not ask how study is liberal. It is rather a *challenge*, a challenge posed more to the author than the reader. If philosophy of education is just as impoverished as liberal educational practices, in its inability to see liberal education as it is or to be in itself liberally educational, than what is left but to study? Where else can a tiny freedom be found *from* liberal education so invested in its purported ends and, as I will demonstrate in the remainder, so focused on learning or the teacher? Why not engage, *hic et nunc*, the liberal art of study? Which is to perform study, to act without knowing, which is to subvert the expectation of mastery, which is not commentary upon liberal education but to endeavor liberal study.

II. Apology for Lyotard

Thus far, my critique of current liberal education practices as well as its history of ideas, has been informed by Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition*. While the report offers the apt criticism that universities are now validated through performativity, rightly understood however, this report should be read more as a satire of academic convention than an academic report. This is a reoccurring theme in Lyotard's work: what it does is often more important than what it says which leaves it susceptible to misunderstanding. This is precisely what attracts me to this oeuvre and to the present task of study; I do not read Lyotard as a philosopher or theorist, but rather an essayist, a student. In my reading, Lyotard is consistently writing out of the failings of philosophy where words fail, where knowledge fails. While Bennington (1988), as mentioned above, describes this as Lyotard's continued attempt at *writing the event*, I qualify this further by stating that Lyotard is always trying to remind us that there is, and this is where thought commences, even if we cannot but fail in its endeavor to do justice to what it is. Hence the compulsion for continual rewriting, rereading, rethinking, reeducating, In another words, to study with the only sure knowledge that in every essay is a failing.

It is also Lyotard's many and varied writings that have led me to conclude that if liberal education is not to be consigned to the nihilism of the market or to its purported ends, then what is needed is to perform or enact study. Lyotard's work does not allow for easy solutions, new systems or paradigms, or any straightforward critique. Instead, it gestures a rethinking from the *hic et nunc*. What is required is to transgress what education is said to be by performing what it is not. Here I will give an overview of the body of work called Lyotard's as well as its import in educational philosophy. In doing so, I will demonstrate that largely this literature fails to rethink or rewrite education or acts as commentary about education, failing to take itself seriously as an (un)educational act. I am entirely aware that these criticisms are a performative contradiction of the type of study I essay in the second half of the thesis. In this chapter, however, I engage in the criticism expected in academic convention: demonstrating the failings in other scholars' readings of texts, the problems in their arguments, and so on. Engaging in this form of criticism is to suppose oneself to have a privileged knowledge of the texts and materials at hand, while my thesis is that

studying is acting without knowing. Can these two contradictory positions be present in the same document? The remit of the thesis, as work assessed for the conferral of the doctoral degree to the author demands that the author petition to the reader the content is a novel contribution to the field. As such, my task here is a contradictory one: at first to acquiesce this demand, but secondarily to invoke the failings of those stakes and institute a mode of writing that exceeds education: that of the liberal art of study.

An Introduction to Lyotard

Jean-François Lyotard, born in 1924 in Versailles went on to attend the Sorbonne, teach philosophy in Algeria during French occupation—a time that had lasting consequences on his political thought and engagement with communism—was a member of Socialisme ou Barbarie, which he left to form Pouvoir Ouvrier which he promptly left, taught at Nanterre outside Paris during the student revolt and worker strikes of 1968, then taught at University of Paris VIII, continued his studies of art, politics, philosophy and even curated the experimental exhibition *Les Immatériaux* au Centre Pompidou, had academic engagements across the world, divorced and remarried, and died in 1998 (Bamford, 2017). This, I believe is all we need to know about the person whose name signifies the line of thought I study here. But what is this work? How to approach, contextualize, or understand it? Or, as the thesis demands, how to convince the reader I have sufficiently mastered the literature? Ought one to periodize the oeuvre, to find through lines in it? Much of the secondary literature would suggest that to do so is a transgression of the oeuvre: Lyotard's anti-systematic brand of philosophy and his allergies to the sovereign subject. In this chapter I will, however, do just that because what demonstrates learning better than a crude reduction of the material? Here I provide a brief overview of the oeuvre paying attention to the larger manuscripts: *Discourse, Figure*; *Libidinal Economy*, and *The Differend*, and how they relate to reoccurring themes in his many essays and small work; I would like to emphasize, what I think is often lost in educational readings of Lyotard's work, is that Lyotard's project is that of resisting nihilism both in his response to capitalism as well as in his resistance to philosophical foundations.

Discourse, Figure serves as Lyotard's thesis for the Doctorat d'Etat, originally published in French in 1971 and in English not until 2011. The manuscript demonstrates Lyotard's commitment to writing philosophy differently, to put the sensible in words and therein gesturing that what exceeds the effable is what motives it. Lyotard prepared this thesis during his time

teaching at Nanterre, and often used his lectures as opportunities to rehearse his ideas (Bamford, 2017). Few of his texts are quite as performative as *Discourse, Figure*.—I will confess, that of all his writings I have attempted, this is the most perplexing. I find myself quite unable *to say* anything about it. I have only been able to read it studiously; every time I revisit it, it feels like I am seeing it again for the first time. I find myself flipping back and forth between the text, the figures, the notes, and plates of art, without being able to follow. I think, however, this is exactly what is intended in the manuscript.—To be little crude, the gist of the book is in the strange title: *Discourse, Figure*. The comma serves as a hinge between discourse, that is language and signification, and figure, that is the sensorial, plastic, visible world. The comma demonstrates that this radical difference between the said and the visible is only separated by a thread. With the comma Lyotard suggests that as much as discourse tries to divorce itself, to supersede the figural, the figural will always haunt discourse and disrupt its attempts to voice what *is*.

Discourse, Figure largely serves as a rebuke of phenomenology's reduction of experience to cognition. According to Lyotard, for the phenomenologist and the structuralist, wherein meaning emanates from a system of differences in a semiotic system, "Experienced space cannot enter thought space without remainder, and the union of body and soul hinders their separation" (p. 178). When it is rather that, "The mind's inquiry has a childhood, which is the murky and phantasmagorical" (p. 178) and takes place in three-dimensional space, in the visible, sensorial world. For Lyotard, it is the figural that animates discourse, not discourse that speaks figure, though the system of discourse will certainly try to erase it; "Herein lies the limitless power of the system, to still be able to utter what reduces it to silence, and to allow the commentary of precisely what resists it, namely the operations of condensation, displacement, and figuration" (p. 56). The figural is then absolute difference from discourse, but it is not posed as dialectical against discourse. This comes to fruition in Lyotard's consideration of Freud's (1900) *The Interpretation of Dreams* to demonstrate how discourse is made to feel the figural: "The dream cannot be made to speak? Then we will try to make discourse dream. That is more accurate, closer to what really happens, and I am convinced that the figure dwells in discourse like a phantasm, while discourse dwells in the figure like a dream" (p. 249). That is, through Freud's method of interpreting dreams as the unconscious manifestation of desire, Lyotard suggests that the figural makes things of words: the inverse of words signifying things, the force of the figural demonstrates the plasticity of words (as both pictorial and sonorous). This is a dense, and crude account of a rather complex

manuscript, but the essential is this: for Lyotard, the nihilism in discourse is disavowing the figural, when in fact the two are *hand in glove*, when in fact the soul must animate thought space.

Discourse, Figure as I mentioned was written during Lyotard's time at the University of Nanterre, a campus-style university founded in largely working class and migrant communities was built in the Northwest suburbs of Paris (Bamford, 2017). The juxtaposition of this privileged university site amongst Paris' less well-off proved explosive and Nanterre would become an epicenter of revolt in 1968. In 1963, the year before the opening of Nanterre, the Fouchet reforms introduced a two-tiered higher education system in which working class students were tracked into shorter technical degrees as such reducing access to university study (Benét and Daniels, 1980). The lack of university spaces meant that in 1967, classes were overrun and teaching faculty went on strike (Bamford, 2017). In the early months of 1968, Nanterre saw several incidents of unrest. Most notably, was the March 22 movement during which students occupied the university buildings in response to the arrests of National Vietnam Committee members (Lyotard, 1970). Lyotard was directly engaged in this movement, even drafting a document urging workers to join the protest of the students (Butor, 2001), which rejected the educational reforms, and largely the French political order. Nanterre saw the suspension of classes, as on May 3 police broke up protestors at the Sorbonne, May 10 saw a riot in the Latin Quarter of Paris, and on May 13 the start of a general strike of workers, culminating a call for a referendum by de Gaulle with groups of the political right gaining ground against the left (Marxist Internet Archive, n.d.). The events of May '68 had a profound impact on Lyotard's political thought. As Joan Brandt, in the preface to the 2001 *L'Esprit Créateur* special issue, "The Legacy of May 1968" summarizes the two main interpretations of May 68's non-revolution: it is thought of as either an exposure of the Marxist utopianism as a mythic metanarrative, or as a failure demonstrating the prevailing order of liberal capitalism. For Lyotard, May '68 was both: Lyotard's writing on the revolt addresses the poverty of such a protest or *event* to incite revolution, the system of liberal capitalism is poised to neutralize all dissent through its own process of making all things commensurable to money, and the linear time of development.

This marks a complication in Lyotard's relation to Marxism, most evident in his self-proclaimed "evil book" (Lyotard & Beardsworth, 1994): *Libidinal Economy* (1993a, published in French in 1974). Here, he takes up the acriticism that he finds in Deleuze and Guattari's (1983, published in French in 1972) *Anti-Oedipus*, to further distance himself from what he sees as the

rigid dialectical materialism of an Althusserian understanding of Marxism. Lyotard's libidinal materialism however sides more with Freud than Deleuze and Guattari's use of Nietzsche, it is more of an "acting out" (Lyotard and Beardsworth, 1994), fleeing from nihilist representation, the structure of capitalism. To summarise brutally and reductively, the advance (*not* message, "we deliver no message, we bear no truth" (p. 260)) of *Libidinal Economy* is that all systems dissimulate, in the interest of reproduction and their perpetuation they are driven to stabilize through the machinations of signification. This analysis is written in the form of "energetics", the stabilization of these forces is also their annihilation.—The straw man of this acritical critique is the Hegelian dialectic, which always served as a foe of Lyotard's¹⁶.—*Libidinal Economy* serves as a rebuke of what he sees as the pessimism in Western thought; instead of offering the Truth and the Good, the ideals offer us only the Great Nothing:

the Nothing with which the philosophers and priests have furnished us as the maximum and optimum of consciousness or knowledge to wisdom, and thanks to which the vivacious and deadly intensities that shoot across us shall be *discredited*, this Nothing, it is their desire that produces it, it is not it that produces their desire (p. 13).

Again we see the supersession of thought space over experienced space, a desire to supplant by taming it with signification. Much is the same with how Lyotard rebukes Marxism for its propensity to dissimulate intensity for its dream of an authentic subject, which he calls "little girl Marx." That Marxism desires, dreams of an authentic subject and a natural political economy: "What Marx perceives as failure, suffering (and maybe even lives through as resentment) is the mark on his work of a situation which is precisely the same as that of capital, and which gives rise to a strange success as much as to an awful misery: the work cannot *form a body*, just as capital cannot form a body" (p. 102). That is, Lyotard sees in Marxism, what he also sees in credit capitalism, the series of exchange of signs (the 'pure writing operations' of capital as it exists today) as the nihilism of reproduction of the same; reducing what is to come (capital, time) to what has already been (capital, time). Lyotard displays the nihilism in all semiotic structures: "Thus the sign is enmeshed in nihilism, nihilism proceeds by signs; to continue to remain in semiotic thought is to languish in religious melancholy and to subordinate every intense emotion to a lack and every force to a finitude" (p. 49). Instead, Lyotard does not offer a new system but puts thought into

¹⁶Whether this is fair to Hegel is beyond the remit of this introduction to Lyotard; Browning (2012) has criticized Lyotard's reading of Hegel in "Lyotard and Hegel".

words as dancing, a completely non-dialectical affirmation of intensities, tensors (the force of the figural) that representation would repress.

The explosive blip of the libidinal soon gives away to Lyotard's "postmodern" writings. I have already suggested that calling Lyotard a postmodernist is a gross misunderstanding. Lyotard laments the equivocation of his philosophic work with an "ism", which would be to make it "a theory" (Lyotard and Beardsworth, 1994). So if the postmodern is no "ism" in Lyotard's work, what is it? Lyotard himself states that he only uses the term "postmodernism" when he refers explicitly to postmodernist architecture (Lyotard and Beardsworth, 1994, p. 102); I would also point out that in the opening lines of the report, Lyotard (1984) footnotes that the term "postmodern" he borrows from American literature studies, from the likes of Ihab Hassan's (1971) use in *The Dismemberment of Orpheus: Toward a Postmodern Literature*. In Anne Tomiche's (2017) reading, the postmodern of *The Postmodern Condition* invokes the "postmodern moment" of Europe in the aftermath of World War II shifting to postindustrial society and coupled with technological advances: "So, postmodernism is temporally anchored in the post-1950s and in the era of the 'computerization of society'" (p. 36). There is also the secondary meaning of postmodern in *The Postmodern Condition*, which is the condition of disillusionment with the narratives that have traditionally qualified the social bond. Tomiche states: "The 'postmodern condition' differs from the condition of a period referred to as 'modern' in so far as the term'" (p. 36) refers to the narrative of progress and promised emancipation through knowledge, which is no longer valid. For Lyotard, who *laments* this condition, his project is one of eschewing this pessimism, much as in the figural and libidinal works.

If Lyotard aims to find reprieve from the terrorizing, totalizing system of capital, of efficiency, and he is not a "postmodernist", the question is how to think of his philosophic projects more positively. It is easy to fall for the red herring of the "post" in postmodernity as indicating an epoch after modernity. This is not what Lyotard means. Nor does it signify a "returning to" the modern, as Lyotard states in "Note on the Meaning of 'Post'": "the 'post' of 'postmodern' does not signify a movement of *comeback*, *flashback*, or *feedback*, that is, not a movement of repetition but a procedure in 'ana-': a procedure of analysis, anamnesis, anagogy and anamorphosis which elaborates an 'initial forgetting'" (Lyotard, 1992, p. 93). What is it that modern thought is always forgetting? The figural, intensity, the sensorial, affect, that is initially forgotten. Hence the term "re-writing" that better describes the gesture of his postmodern works: it invokes a working

through what is occluded in modern thought, not a simple return to its foundations (Lyotard, 1987). It asks of us to re-engage with the commitments of modernity: truth, justice, enlightenment, with the knowledge that there will be no last word, no universal system or rule. Lyotard's approach to literature and art is illuminating in considering this aspect of the postmodern. In "Return upon the Return" Lyotard (2006) uses *Ulysses*, to illustrate the quick sand of language in the realm of thought, complicating modernist assumptions about the ability to make manifest the will to truth through Reason. Lyotard suggests "This memory is that nothing returns, that everything is an advent. This is what anamnesis means: a thinking, a struggle backwards, of which the work of writing consists. And this is endless. A peregrination without return" (2006, p. 144). We can see in this multifaceted oeuvre a continuous attempt at philosophizing rather than establishing a systematic stable philosophical foundation.

I have mentioned above that *The Postmodern Condition* can be seen as a heuristic for the later *The Differend*, published in French in 1983 and in English in 1988. *The Differend* (1988) is in Lyotard's reckoning his only "real book" of philosophy as his widow, Dolores Lyotard (2000), writes in the introduction to the posthumously published *Misère de la Philosophie*. It is at once the least literary of his manuscripts but among the most performative. As *The Differend* is what I draw on most heavily in the second half of the thesis to connect it to the later themes of infancy and affect in my studious attempt to rewrite the liberal arts, I will summarize in-depth this work of Lyotard's. I will preface my summary with Lyotard's own statement of what he views as the stakes of his philosophy of the differend:

To refute the prejudice anchored in the reader by centuries of humanism and of 'human sciences' that there is 'man', that there is 'language', that the former makes use of the latter for his own ends, and that if he does not succeed in attaining these ends, it is for want of good control over language 'by means' of a 'better' language. To defend and illustrate philosophy in its differend with its two adversaries: on its outside, the genre of economic discourse (exchange, capital); on its inside, the genre of academic discourse (mastery). (p. *xiii*).

This is evocative of Lyotard's thought on the figural, the libidinal, the pessimism in Western thought, but here Lyotard radicalizes this even further to show that much like the figural, there is no mastery over language. In short, a differend is "the unstable state and instant of language wherein something which must be able to be put into phrases cannot yet be" (p. 13, §22). To begin unpacking these enigmatic lines, we must first consider the "pre-texts" that Lyotard identifies for his work on the differend: Wittgenstein and Kant, where Lyotard finds "prologues to an honorable postmodernity" (p. *xiii*).

It is Wittgenstein of the *Philosophical Investigations* (2009, first published 1953) whose language games Lyotard radicalizes in *The Differend*. In the *Investigations* Wittgenstein demonstrates that meaning of phrase is determined by its use in a web of rules for its use across different forms of life. Already, we can see Lyotard's attraction to this: there is no one universal rule for the meaning or signification of a phrase. Lyotard radicalizes the notion of languages games into what he calls the incommensurability of phrasing regimens and genres. But what is a phrase for Lyotard? In *The Differend* it is not only a linguistic unit, more than a word, anything that is is a phrase, "to doubt is to phrase" (p. xi), even sneezing and blinking are phrases. A phrase is phrased in the extent to which an addressor addresses an addressee and a sense is fixed to a referent. It is strange to think of this non-anthropocentrically but for Lyotard it is the linguistic structure itself that dictates the sense according to referents, in the phrasing regimens, which provide the rules for such linkages while their genres stipulate the stakes of their rules. Differend occur when the rules for linking phrases under the remit of a regimen wrong the phrase, what seeks to be voiced, but cannot without inflicting a damage, changing its meaning or its sense. There are two competing theses in *The Differend*, one the one hand Lyotard suggests that the differend persists in general due to the lack of "a universal rule of judgement" (p. xi) but also that there are simultaneously litigations, when there is a rule that can ascribe the rules for linking phrases together without damaging the phrase. How can the two theses be at once? The differend in general refers to the ethico-ontology of infancy, but this will not be made clear until later in this thesis. It is evocative of *Discourse, Figure* where Lyotard identifies the that "The mind's inquiry has a childhood, which is the murky and phantasmagorical" (2011, p. 178) between experienced space and thinking space. The differend is what cannot be voiced without making a wrong of it. The differend is felt in silence; it could be said that what Lyotard is actually responding to in Wittgenstein is the enigmatic phrase in the *Tractatus*: "whereof one cannot speak thereof one must be silent" (2010/1922, p. 23).

An affective silence is what is experienced in the aesthetic of the sublime, which is the other important pre-text for Lyotard's work of the differend: Kant of the *Critique of Judgement* (1987), or as I will refer to it the *Third Critique*. Given Lyotard's thesis that the differend occurs because there is no universal rule for judgement it is perhaps already clear what attracts him to Kant's aesthetic judgement, though Lyotard certainly radicalizes it. In short, Kant in the *Third Critique* attempts to find a bridge for the first two Critiques: between pure and practical reason. In Kant's writing, the aesthetic experience, or judgement of taste, has no rule. There are three

aesthetic experiences that Kant refers to: agreeable, beautiful, and sublime. The judgement of taste in the agreeable is an interested delight, that is the judgement is connected with the object in itself. For example, I like to eat underripe bananas, they simply taste better to me than oversweet freckly ones. My enjoyment of the object, the banana, is in the consumption of it. I do not expect others to find the taste of underripe bananas agreeable, (in part because I have been informed that my taste for green bananas is weird, but also because it is simply a manner of personal preference in my taste buds. This differs, however, from the judgement of the beautiful and the sublime, where we expect others to agree to our judgments, in fact in the judgement of the sublime universal assent is a necessary precondition of the judgement. In the judgement of the beautiful, it is the experience of a “disinterested delight” (§42) on the occasion of the object judged to be beautiful because it accords our imagination with our idea of the good, inciting a feeling of respect. Unlike the agreeable we expect others to assent to our judgement of the beautiful, even though our judgement is not based on a rule.—Though Lyotard will also find a differend in the beautiful.—Whereas the feeling of the sublime is a feeling of both pain and pleasure. There are two types of sublime for Kant: dynamical, that which is a force so powerful it confounds our understanding (I think of volcanic eruptions) and mathematical, what which is so absolutely large it confounds our imagination (I think of the infinity of space). The feeling of the sublime is also pleasurable in that our reason can create an idea for what we cannot even understand or imagine and hence is a sign of our teleology as moral and reasonable beings. Lyotard certainly radicalizes Kant’s aesthetic judgement, ultimately finding a differend between the affect in the aesthetic judgment and our attempts to articulate it. This is based on what he reads as a hesitancy in Kant’s writings (Lyotard, 1994; Lyotard, 1991), his inability to state with certainty the bridge of judgment between the faculties. Which as Lyotard emphasizes operates only under the “as if” clause; “this signifies that a family of phrases not only encroaches upon another but also that it cannot avoid resorting to another in order to establish its own legitimacy” (1988, p. 123, Kant No. 2).—While for Kant the sublime is to be found in nature, Lyotard’s writings on the sublime, or rather the avant-garde, are often about art. Lyotard’s philosophic work consists of continual interest in the impossibility of presenting materiality, of experienced space, of affect whether in language or in plastic arts. For instance in the *Writings on Contemporary Art and Artists* (2013b) collection of Lyotard’s writings he considers the works of artists such as Duchamp, Adami, Arakawa, Monory and more. For

Lyotard, the sublime in art is not presented, but what art cannot present.—In sum, for Lyotard, the differend is the wound of the unrepresentable in presentation.

This is more than a thesis in *The Differend*, but in its very writing the differend is enacted. It can only be felt in reading the text. Here I will crudely explicate how this functions in the manuscript. It is divided into numbered paragraphs, interrupted by “Notices” on specific philosophies (hence why in my citations I refer to the specific paragraphs with a § or to the specific Notice along with the page number). These numbered paragraphs constitute “phrases” within the manuscript. Lyotard invokes the differend by creating a labyrinth of reading referring to the other paragraphs creating wormholes of reading through new linkings of the paragraphs beyond their chronological layout. In fact, in the very last line of the last numbered phrase Lyotard invokes the thesis of the book that there can be no final phrase by referring the reader back to the first paragraph with the note: “No. 1 ff” (p. 181, §264), calling the reader into an infinite loop of rereading.

In my reading, *The Differend* serves as a confluence of forces in Lyotard’s thought: still invested in rebuking the nihilism of western thought and systems of signification, there is also an undercurrent of ethics, affect, and what I will call the ethico-ontology of infancy, which informs my studious endeavor in the second half of this thesis. In sum, what attracts me to Lyotard’s thought is its continued resistance of nihilism that offers no simple solutions. It calls for us to work from the thick of things and not to comment upon them, which is what I find lacking in much educational philosophy that engages his work.

Lyotard in Educational Thought

To comment upon education, instead of perform the educational in the very writing of educational thought, is to have missed the biggest “lesson” of Lyotard’s thought. A few notes on the audacity to make such a claim: it supposes that Lyotard’s writing is designed to have a lesson and that I have a privileged reading of Lyotard’s work which allows me to critique the deficiencies of other readings of Lyotard. To suppose that Lyotard’s writing has a lesson is in itself a misunderstanding; as he says in *The Differend* “the A. [author] had the feeling that his sole addressee what the *Is it happening?*” (1988, p. xvi). There is no lesson to be learned from Lyotard; but there is a call in what is within but is not voiced in educational thought. It calls those serious about education to take it seriously, to enact it instead of writing about it. It calls for what is beyond

critique. Academic convention and the metrics of research outputs demand the scholar to articulate their novel contribution to the field and so I must first critique the field of educational philosophy in which the application of Lyotard's thought demonstrates the failings I define at the start of this chapter.

I will begin by considering volume of educational theory *Education and the Postmodern condition* (1995) edited by Michael Peters, which is emblematic of the outside influence *The Postmodern Condition* has had on educational thought. In the preface to this volume, Henry Giroux, the educational theorist and critical pedagogue suggests that the volume offers a way for postmodernism to be *useful* pedagogically, to respond to postindustrial society's volatile and changing landscape. This situates the contributions as a strong or applied philosophy of education that might clarify the "critical attitude or mode of thought about time as succession and time as an atemporal subject" (p. xxxiv) for educational practitioners. In J. M. Fritzman (1995) contribution, "From Pragmatism to the Differend" Fritzman emphasizes the ways in which Lyotard and Richard Rorty's postmodernity differ through the lens of pedagogical problems namely in the selection of national curriculum content in a multicultural society. For Fritzman, Lyotard's *differend* wins out over Rorty's reliance on consensus-building criteria: "Any attempt to adjudicate these controversies must presuppose a prior determination of what society is now and what it is to become in the future. Of course, such a determination would beg the question, since the disputing partners disagree on what society is and what is to become" (p. 69). As such, Fritzman leans toward the Lyotardian politics of the lesser evil, suggesting that in light of the differend, "education should encourage students to develop new ideas and to challenge critically what passes as common knowledge" (p. 69). As if those were not also the education outcomes demanded by the neoliberal university, where creativity and service leadership are already sellable outcomes. But this presupposed education's ends which is to assign education a line, a purpose, a function, we can then know what it is for and actualize it. As if one could write about education philosophically, and not be educated in the performing of that very philosophy.

This leads me to Peter McLaren's (1995) "Critical Pedagogy and the Pragmatics of Justice" in the volume. This is a particularly interesting contribution due to McLaren predominate interest in critical pedagogy, having worked extensively with Henry Giroux, who wrote the preface for the volume. McLaren's response to Lyotard here is intriguing due to his affiliation to Marxism. At first glance, McLaren's concerns with education strike a chord with Lyotard's; McLaren criticises

the educational objectives of US schooling and its subjugation of students: “Whilst students are exhorted to ‘be all they can be,’ such a transgressive challenge—of saying no to drugs and yes to books, for instance—is always already situated within total obedience to normative codes of conduct and standardized regimes of valuing” (p. 92). He finds Lyotard’s acknowledgement of radical alterity and incommensurability ultimately fruitless for a critical pedagogy: “intractable difference becomes something to be endured rather than activated as a common ground of struggle against structures of domination” (p. 102). McLaren also picks up Lyotard’s libidinal phase and finds Lyotard’s acritical resistance to capital insufficient, rebuking Lyotard for his notion of the imploded subject. McLaren states “For Lyotard, experience constitutes an irreducible complexity that can never be grasped, since the sublime always occupies the gap between the experiential and the conceptual. This makes it exceedingly difficult to mount a pedagogy of critical self-reflexivity” (p. 113). This is an interesting cataclysm, precisely where McLaren finds Lyotard unhelpful is where Lyotard’s thought might be helpful; McLaren, it seems, wants students to be able to think seriously about themselves and social structures, with an eye for making things more just, suggesting that there are skills or habits that can be cultivated for this self-reflexivity. This is entirely procedural knowledge. Whereas for Lyotard, thought must commence precisely where the subject is imploded!

The question of the subject of education leads me to Bill Readings’s contribution, “From Emancipation to Obligation”, in the Peters edition (1995). Bill Readings, author of (1991) *Introducing Lyotard: Art and Politics* and *The University in Ruins* (1996), puts a forth a very insightful reading of Lyotard’s performative writing. Readings, like McLaren, is interested in the Lyotardian subject, but Readings finds a positive educational implication of Lyotard’s imploded subject in its rebuke of the sovereign subject, demonstrating the ways in which educational thought is often considered by the point of view of a sovereign individual: the administrator, the professor, the (consumerist) student. Rather than effacing the relationship between teacher and student to a false symmetry, Readings instead considers education as an ethic of relational obligation, by considering the dialogic nature in which many of Lyotard’s works are written. For example in *Just Gaming* (1985), it is an actual dialogue between Lyotard and Jean-Loup Thébaud where the interlocuters do not oppose one another but meander. For Readings, these non-dialectical dialogues make Lyotard’s work pedagogical: “because it is structured, with all its ethical weight” (p. 197). Using Lyotard’s work, Readings contends that we must change the paradigm of teaching:

Rather, to listen to thought, to think beside each other and beside ourselves, is to explore an open network of obligations that keeps the question of meaning open, a locus of debate—doing justice to thought, listening to our interlocutors, means trying to hear what cannot be said, but which tries to make itself heard, a process incompatible with the production of (even relatively) stable and exchangeable knowledge. (p. 205)

I believe that this is what Readings means by dwelling within the ruins in *The University in Ruins* (1996). Readings does not define education by its ends but through its means and as such engages in what might be called a weak philosophy of education. This is a position I will radicalize further, demonstrating that if we are to take seriously our debt to thought and thinking, it is no longer a pedagogy but an apedagogy. No longer the remit of teaching, but of study.

I will now consider the other volume in the Anglophone world on Lyotard's work and educational questions. This is the 2000 volume edited by Pradeep A. Dhillon and Paul Standish, *Lyotard: Just education*. Here the loosely held theme is that of justice and ethics in educational questions. In the introduction to the volume, "Jean-François Lyotard: Just Education in Passing" the editors Dhillon and Standish spend some time to set the scene for the contributions by renouncing the emphasis on *The Postmodern Condition* in educational literature. Rather, they emphasize the influence of Wittgenstein and Kant for the later Lyotard of *The Differend*. They suggest that Lyotard's philosophy can move us toward a more *just* education. Justice in education is invoked here through "invention and intensity, lack of harmony, releasing of affects" (p. 22), but this is a little ambiguous in the volume. It is not clear if the stakes are making education more just to those who have been harmed by schooling systems or to do just to education itself. While Lyotard's philosophy demonstrates the ways in which ethics are always already implied in all manner of life, it would not be in keeping with Lyotard's work to make justice the purpose of education or to educate more just individuals, which is the conclusion of many of the contributors.

This is what Pradeep A. Dhillon (2000) considers in "The Sublime Face of Just Education", with the Lyotardian differend. Dhillon's argument is that Lyotard *is* a liberal thinker, in that he seeks a sense of justice of heteronormativity but without a Rawlsian contract. That is, Lyotard's notion of the differend and the affect of the sublime allow for a sense of justice that is sensitive to difference and goes beyond the law. The *process* of liberal education in Dhillon's imagination is largely untouched, only that Dhillon invokes the importance of aesthetic education for educating students with a sense of justice of the sublime and the differend: "Thus aesthetic education is responsible for cultivating an attention to this feeling, which provides us with a means to negotiate

the differend, especially amidst processes of globalization” (p. 123). This, however, is still to conceive of education in terms of its ends. Similarly, A. T. Nuyen (2000) also takes up the Lyotardian notion of the sublime to rethink education. Nuyen claims that Lyotard is a “moral educator”: “What we can learn from Lyotard’s political strategy is that it must be part of the aim of education to instil in the learner the idea that we must accept certain restrictive rules and regulations as necessary for maximum game playing” (p. 102). Here, Nuyen looks at both the philosophy of the differend and that of *Just Gaming* (1985). Nuyen then endorses a moral maxim of relativism: conflating the maximizing of games (or phrasing regimens) as Lyotard’s ethical imperative. Here the mistranslation from the original French title, *Au Juste* might be at fault. The French emphasizes the lack of a final justice, that justice can only ever be reached for. Whereas the English, *Just Gaming*, suggests a more anthropocentric understanding wherein justice is “maximizing” the amount of phrasing regimens available to voice differends, by which Lyotard suggests that there is no final rule for the just. Nuyen concludes that education is about sublimation, through education of the imagination. As such, Nuyen’s recommendations are in a similar vein to Dhillon’s, that education is meant to teach students to be better sensitized to sublime feelings, by educating the imagination, so that they can be more moral. The above two contributions to the *Just Education* volume, display the problems with applying Lyotard’s philosophy to education. It is to presuppose that education is defined by its ends, which makes it even more susceptible to managerialism. It also decides the meaning of the educational pursuit before the student even arrives.

In a more affirmative reading of Lyotard’s work, Blake, Smeyers, Smith, and Standish (2000) draw upon Lyotard’s libidinal work to revitalize education. They employ the plot of the play *Equus*’s in which the main character, psychoanalyst Dr. Martin Dystart, treats a young patient with a criminal obsession with horses. In his work with the juvenile horse ripper, Dystart finds that it is actually he who lives a life deprived of the passion or the intensity. By interplaying their analysis of the forces of Apollo and Dionysus with the play, the authors indicate the ways in which education systems have been depleted of their intensity, though I doubt the authors would suggest that we start harming any animals to revitalize education. They are emphatic that the libidinal should not be confused for a relativism or an excuse to think poorly, but to think with intensity. Their notions of libidinal education are still skewed toward the place of the educator; they suggest, “Make the classes you teach then flows of intensity that are both energizing and responsive. Let

thinking dance” (p. 116). This still posits education from the sovereign position the educator or the teacher, and not the student.

Michael Peters (2006), the editor of the Peters (1995) edition, revisits Lyotard in his article “Lyotard, Nihilism, and Education” to contend that Lyotard should be engaged in educational thought resist the nihilism inherent in the optics of performativity. For Peters, *The Postmodern Condition* is primarily a way for Lyotard to grapple with the nihilism of late capitalism: “Lyotard’s notion of delegitimation refers to the state of contemporary culture and society following the decline of the unifying and legitimating power of the grand narratives of speculation and emancipation” (p. 308). This clarification is necessary, because the performative nature of Lyotard’s writing often suggests the opposite of what he means. For example, Robin Usher (2006) contends that Lyotard underestimated the place of performance in a world of decentered knowledge, which is how Usher describes the proliferation of areas of research and inter or multidisciplinary in higher education research institutions. For Usher it is an economy of difference that motivates university research, but mistakenly believes Lyotard to be endorsing this with *The Postmodern Condition*; he states that Lyotard “not only describes that condition— incredulity, little narratives, and of course performativity—but *enacts* it and by doing so participates in its realization” (p. 287). This is emphatically not the case; as I have mentioned earlier, the report should be seen as a parody of this economy of difference. Usher here has confused the performativity that Lyotard laments with the performance of his work, which is to satirize the very criterion of performativity.

Kristen Locke (2016, 2017) engages the performance of Lyotard’s work to enact resistance within education. Locke (2016) contends there are two types of performance: that of the capitalist genre but also performance (or performativity in Lyotard’s lexicon), “performance in this sense becomes central to the capitalist quest to save time and, by doing so, becomes central in the contradictory *erasure* of time” (p. 252) versus performance as an aesthetic experiment. Wary of the ways that the system can co-opt anything, Locke suggests that the event or the figural, or the artistic performance, can be conceived as a disruption of the criterion of performativity. For Locke, artistic performance, especially that of music, is a possible site of resistance; “Music education could, potentially, be both the privileged space of critical activity and the model for rethinking processes of learning through experimentation” (p. 258). This is furthered in Locke’s (2017) investigation of Lyotard’s work curating the *Les Immatériaux* exhibition, which she describes as

a “conglomeration of material objects that drew on artefacts spanning centuries of Western civilization up to and including contemporary 1985 Paris” (p. 1). The exhibition did not offer a set path through the artefacts, visitors had to decide how to encounter the objects themselves. As Locke, concludes the exhibition aimed to demonstrate the immateriality of the presentation of artistic expression; where Lyotard enacted a pedagogy of affect “to serve as a disruptive device that made visible that which cannot be seen through questioning what makes it *possible* to see” (p. 2). She suggests that this “pedagogy that dwells in the space of indecision and unknowing” (p. 8) is a radical approach to rethink education, that is predicated on mastery and knowledge transmission. To presume that this is a pedagogy however, is to presume that in the artistic gesture, the artist speaks to an audience. Whereas for Lyotard, the painter, the artist are only “responsible to the question, ‘What is it to paint?’ (1991a) which cannot be confused with the task of making their works understood by the masses. Lyotard quips, “That would be as though the philosopher confused his/her responsibility to thought with his/her responsibility to the public” (1991a). Rightfully understood, there is no pedagogy to be found in Lyotard’s thought.

Thus far, I have found in educational thought that engages Lyotard’s work and writing a failure to rethink what it is that education is and a tendency to write *about* education, to enact a strong philosophy of education that has superseded it. Now, however I turn my attention to Derek Ford’s recent manuscript *Inhuman Educations: Jean-François Lyotard, Pedagogy, Thought* (2021) because we are both attracted to Lyotard’s thought for the same reasons. Ford pays particular attention to what he calls the “inhuman system” in Lyotard’s writings: “As a logic, the system isn’t just a way of thinking, it’s a way of organizing—or trying to organize—the entirety of the world” (p. 4), particularly Lyotard’s observations of how malleable the capitalist system is and how proficient it is at swallowing up and commodifying critique: “The system tends to work best when it’s open to modification and contestation, rather than when it’s strict, rigid, or closed” (p. 8). Lyotard’s thought does not lend to easy fixes, straightforward critiques or solutions. Indeed this is what I have demonstrated in the narrative defense of liberal education in the previous two chapters: the performative outputs of neoliberal education are uncannily intertwined with historical defenses of liberal education, defending such education with a new narrative only fuels this system. Posed with this problem but compelled by a desire for something beyond the dismal offerings of universities, how to rethink, or rewrite the educational, all the while knowing that the system for counting research outputs will tally such an endeavor? Ford and I—in the following chapters—

have both turned to Lyotard's writings on *infancy*. Thus far I have only intimated toward infancy (sometimes erroneously referred to as childhood in English literature) in Lyotard's writings with its precursors in the figural, libidinal, the differend; for now, however I will say, that much as we are born without speech without knowing who or what we are, this condition endures in what we cannot speak or know. For Lyotard, who continuously tried to voice what always haunts discourse, signification, ethics, this infancy is what thought owes itself to.—Ford like many avid readers of Lyotard hesitates to call infancy, or anything else, a project in Lyotard's oeuvre. I, however, like Bennington (1988) think that it is entirely apt to say that Lyotard was always trying to put thought into words, or at least to demonstrate that very impossibility.

In Ford's reading of Lyotard, it is this infancy that constitutes our inhumanity; "The primary question will be how we relate to this debt, how we bear witness to and try to enact infancy to resist the system, to interrupt development, to remain inhuman and, therefore, to stay human" (p. 11). For Ford, Lyotard's writing and thought that attempts to make this infancy speak to disrupt extant structures of knowledge *is pedagogy*; "Lyotard's writing is deeply pedagogical in that, if we accept the challenge of reading him, we practice becoming childlike through an exposure to the infancy to which he seeks to bear witness" (p. 4).—This feels reminiscent of Ford's earlier work with Tyson Lewis, "On the Freedom to be Opaque Monsters" (2018) when they claim: "Lyotard's pedagogy, at its base, entails teaching one to be open to alterity, to be seized and held by the monstrous childhood of thought" (p. 7).—Ford (2021) follows the "pedagogical forces" (p. 13) of Lyotard's work so that we might encounter infancy in the educational acts of writing, reading, voicing, and listening, each of which serves as a chapter in the manuscript. It is the return to infancy, that I think for Ford, is the absolute of education; much like the inhuman is the absolute of humanity. There is a sense then in Ford's work with Lyotard that infancy *must be practiced*, that infancy has a lesson in store for us. This seems to me an inversion of infancy; one does not need to be taught what is always already fundamental to our (in)humanity. It is rather a question of what one does with it. In Ford's engagement with Lyotard, this is decided, infancy is for resisting the system: "Politics proceeds by mobilizing energies in response to given conditions into indeterminate pagan humor that sustains the revolutionary movement without constituting a new order" (p. 66). It seems to me that the pedagogy, the absolute of education incited by infancy in Ford's reading of Lyotard is for destabilizing extant systems "by breaking away while still being part of it but throwing it off course at the same time" (p. 67). It is revolutionary without a

revolution. In other words infancy is here justified through transcendent terms, what it does in the world but not what it *is*.

This is precisely where I differ from Ford, though I will engage the same themes from Lyotard's work: infancy, rewriting, affect. I am not in want of Education. I do not need to practice being childlike to experience infancy; infancy is always already what exceeds me, us. What I desire is to endeavor from *the thick of it*, to be free from Education. To be free from what an infantile pedagogy might even enact in the world. I desire only to endeavor the liberal art of study. This of course is still a thesis which demands that I must endeavor this through the stakes of an institutionalized degree. Here, I ask the question *Why not study?* It is here, in this writing, that I endeavor what education needs in order for it to be but seeks to efface: the student, study. I am, at the very least, aware of the performative contradiction I here make in order to acquiesce the criteria of a doctoral thesis that forces me to read, write, and think *unstudiously* to justify my studious endeavor. As such, the reader must now indulge a critique of Ford's *Inhuman Education*, and by critique I do mean the sort of "critical reading: when we read for what the author *didn't* say but *should* or *could* have said" (p. 19) that Ford laments. Because this thesis is a studious *rewriting* of the liberal arts, I will consider Ford's notion of the pedagogic forces of infancy to be found in the educational practice of writing and the need for a sublime aesthetic. In writing, Ford suggests that we might experience the pedagogical force of infancy:

The idiocy of writing is the unthought, that which always indicates there is something that language can't capture, that can't be reduced to information or knowledge. That said, there are some forms of writing that might be more open to infancy than others... In describing childhood, I might seek to articulate something new about childhood, to show how it's unique. But this would remain tied to the logic of development, in which an event is transformed into innovation, something new that can be sold or circulated throughout the infinite exchange routes of the system. (p. 30)

My critique, however impertinent, is that there is nothing idiotic in Ford's book. He writes about what idiocy in writing *would do* which is not to write in stupor. Likewise, in the manuscript's "Intermezzo" Ford considers Lyotard's extensive writings on aesthetics to suggest that in re-writing modernity, which invokes a working through what is occluded in modern thought, not a simple return to its foundations (Lyotard, *Re-writing Modernity*, 1987), it is a sublime aesthetic that is called for and not a beautiful one. Ford states that, "Re-writing modernity under the order of the beautiful is a pleasurable experience of imagination and understanding encountering an

unknown. We experience some excess in the narrative, which propels us to consider the endless ways it could be given a form or accorded a rule” (p. 43). That would be to write in a beautiful form, whereas the sublime, following Lyotard’s many writings about the sublime or the avant-garde fracture of forms, Ford states: “Re-writing modernity under the order of the sublime takes modernity itself as an excessive and immeasurable process or moment that bars understanding from any attempts and, in its monstrosity, links us with a pure infancy that persists” (p. 43). What is needed is the sublime’s negative presentation; its gesture toward what cannot be presented.—If the reader will forgive my impudence: *How beautifully put!*

PART II

“AS IF”

It is the sovereign pressure of an imbecilic “you must go there,” which does not say where.
—Jean-François Lyotard, “Endurance and the Profession”

STUDY TRACE NO. 1

This is a pre-text to the fourth chapter, *Drifting from Education*. Why must I engage, in brevity and succinctness, Lyotard's reading of Kant, or Lyotard's Kant? To demonstrate, if it has not already been made explicit in Part I Poverty of the University, that there is no imagined future subject of the educational process and no historical idea of liberal education that we can retrieve to guide or give principle to a liberal education. The highest, and as such the lowest, of our faculties, our sense. And already we come to the problem of "we", of "our" of the *sensus communis*. And if we are not to anthropologize it, or to humanize it, we find ourselves very much adrift. And also very much alone.

Lyotard's interest in the sublime, is perhaps sometimes happenstance. Sacrilege. That is, it is not only the aesthetic of the sublime, but aesthetics, or aesthesis in itself that, in Lyotard's Kant, is always already beyond the grasp of knowledge, or determinative concepts, or explicability. This pulsating realm of excess—be it sublime, beautiful, and perhaps even agreeable—this underworld of the sensorial is at bottom the de-individuated subject, the no man's land of Reason.

If the postmodern has made an indelible mark on the memory of Lyotard, the sublime has as such made an inerasable impression. But the sublime is not just, or perhaps only not unjust. The sublime is the negative presentation, but of *what?* This *what* is the excess and also simultaneously the lack. This is why I look to "Sensus Communis" (Lyotard, 1991c), which is not the aesthetic of the sublime, but the beautiful. And here Lyotard, with his reading of Kantian aesthetics, resists what he also wants to resist with the sublime. The cognizing of the excess to all that is. (An accidental metaphysics?).

Precisely because aesthetic judgement is reflective, that the feeling precedes our knowledge of it, is where the subject is demolished, from Lyotard's reading of the Kantian Solution to Antinomy of Taste (Kant, 1987, §56 & §57). But first, let us think through the judgement of the beautiful; this form instills in me a feeling of pleasure, but it is not the form itself, only my feeling that this form is beautiful. This is not a matter of agreeableness, as I demand that others feel the same: *You find this beautiful too, don't you?* But this move signals a riff, between the singular feeling and the universal demand. How can a lowly feeling be universalized, generalized so that all others agree? A feeling has no recourse to a concept; a transcendental universality must be mediated by an Idea. Kant's solution: "Yes." Or:

A judgement of taste must refer to some concept or other, for otherwise it could not possibly lay claim to necessary validity for everyone. And yet it must not be provable *from* a concept, because, while some concepts can be determined, others cannot, but are intrinsically both indeterminate and indeterminable... reason has a concept of the second kind: the transcendental concept of the supersensible underlying all that intuition, so that we cannot determine this concept any further theoretically. (Kant, 1987, p. 212)

This, the supersensible substrate of humanity.

There is something amiss here. At least in what Lyotard wants to do with this, the *Yes* by which Kant responds to the antinomy of taste, finding the site of the euphony of the faculties in that which is beyond the sensorial, within the realm of concepts, but not determinately so, for all of humanity, that is universally.

Lyotard takes the Idea part quite to heart, but there is a remainder that seems to me unrejoined. Though the lack of rejoining in Lyotard's work is often just where the work is, as it is

written or remains unwritten, so therefore unreadable or illegible. Lyotard ends “Sensus Communis” with the following:

The essential is this: the feeling of the beautiful is the subject just being born, the first equalling-out of non-comparable powers. This feeling escapes being mastered by concept and will. It extends itself underneath and beyond their intrigues and their closure. This is what Kant understands by the ‘natural substratum’ which he places as its principle in his deduction. (Lyotard, 1991c, p. 24).

But is *this* what Kant means as the substratum? Here in Lyotard this cataclysm is between aesthesis (a pleasurable one) and “concept and will”. But the supersensible substratum of humanity that is natural to us, paradoxically free and causal, is what it is says on the tin, supersensible. How then can Lyotard call this a natural substratum, this seat of aesthetic feeling?

It is clear what he wants to do with it; “This pleasure is an inscription without support, and without a code by which it can be read off. Miserable if you like” (Lyotard, 1991c, p. 24). I prefer “impoverished”—en français, <<Ce plaisir est une inscription sans support, et sans code de lisibilité. Misérable, si l’on veut>> (2000, p. 41). It is clear that Lyotard wants to grapple after what he is always grappling after, that which exceeds our “concept and will”. But is it the “natural substratum” that can offer this? And it is crucial here what Lyotard drops from Kant in the closing lines of “Sensus Communis”, which are “supersensible” and “humanity”. Or maybe what Lyotard is after is the following: “It is absolutely impossible to provide a determinate, objective principle of taste that would allow us to guide, to test, to prove its judgements, because then they would not be judgements of taste” (Kant, 1987, §57, p. 213). There is a difference between the lack of determinative concept for aesthetic judgement and the indeterminate Ideas of reason. Or is there?

Lyotard wants both to say that we must abandon the notion of a unified subject of humanity, who can replace the communis and is replaceable by the communis. Perhaps it is my reading that is amiss? Perhaps the French will help us here: <<Il échappe à la maîtrise par concept et volonté. Il s’étend en dessous et au-delà de leurs intrigues et de leur clôture. C’est ce que Kant entend par le « substrat naturel » qu’il place déductivement à son principe>> (Lyotard, 2000, p. 41). It is perhaps the deductive argument, its styling and sense that is at play here. Where Kant *hears* this “natural” grounding of the indeterminate concepts.

How can it be for Lyotard to maintain the “natural substrate” as the sight of resistance to concept and will? If affect is tautegorical, how then can it also be a sign of the substratum? And what is it a substratum of? The seat of knowledge? The seat of feeling? Both? If the communis is not to be empirical, it must then be transcendental. How does Lyotard have this cake and eat the tautegorical, disrupting event of aesthesis? The universal assent of the aesthetic is guided only in an indeterminable idea of this assent? No. Lyotard says “This Idea is that of the suprasensible... It is the Idea that it’s in the nature of the subject (it is this ‘nature’ which is the supersensible in question in aesthetics) for all his faculties to agree to make possible knowledge in general” (Lyotard, 1991c, p. 18).

But such an agreement is only done analogously, we can only judge *as if* we could know. Already I’ve gone too far, past “Sensus Communis”. To make this move, we must engage in some intertextual digging, turning to *The Differend* (1988), in particular the third Kant Notice, where Lyotard begins by suggesting that in the Kantian oeuvre, there is no “Critique of Political Reason” but that the *Third Critique* is as much one; Lyotard here reads Kant’s unification of philosophy, of nature and reason much more analogously than perhaps Kant himself intends. For if judgement is to adjudicate between the faculties of understanding and of reason, we must consider judgement the passage between the archipelagos of these disparate faculties. This is why judgement has no

object but itself. And as such, we are condemned to this “circulus” from which judgement cannot deliver us:

It remains that if the critical watchman thinks he can supplement for the absence of a legal provision and go ahead and pass sentence over the differend concerning freedom, it is because he believes himself to be authorized by the Idea that nature pursues its ends by means of this supplementarity. But now, what authorizes him to resort to this Idea of a natural end capable, according to him, of authorizing him to judge without laws? Since it’s an Idea (that of nature and thus of ends), he cannot provide an ostensible this to validate the authorization. He can present an “as-if this,” an analogon, a sign. (Lyotard, 1998, Kant Notice 3 §3, p. 133)

What then does Lyotard want with judgement? What does he want with aesthesis? What he wants in the end make little difference. So here we are, a unison of the faculties that make knowledge possible demolished. Our last hope for a guiding thread relegated to the lowly status of analogy. And to return to “Sensus Communis,” its early and enigmatic phrase, “We have never finished with the true and the just” (1991c, p. 6), we can only continue *as if* we could know the just, *as if* we could know the true.

And here again is that niggling *we*. There isn’t one. Nor is there an *I* to the feeling that guides these passages: “This substratum isn’t a subject, not the subject, only an Idea which isn’t implied in the concert, but in the analysis of the concert” (1991c, p. 21). Affect comes along to disrupt the unified *I* at the seat of knowledge. The subject, demolished. The unity, disunited.

I have said above that it is not only the sublime. Even with the beautiful, Lyotard still finds the “as-if” clause that haunts all judgment. Even with the beautiful, Lyotard finds the impossibility of a unified subject of humanity, of knowledge. Even with the beautiful, Lyotard makes the call: “It is the task of literatures and arts, the task of what is called writing, to reinscribe it according to its miserable state, without filling it full, without getting rid of it” (1991c, p. 24). Even with the beautiful, Lyotard does not find unity.

So how to go on? How to judge?

If the educational bearing of this tangent seems far off, it is not. For if Lyotard has demolished the unity of the subject, who then are we to educate? We have no recourse to the *someone* that the student ought to become. How to educate if the “natural substratum” of our faculties can only operate on an *as if* clause? The ideas that mediate such a practice are indeterminate and as such we would only engage in the most woeful negation to seek to substantiate our practice by them. We therefore have no recourse to an “education” as a process of subjectification. We can only carry on in a state of impoverishment. Studying, and not educating, is meditating within the *as if* clause. We are consigned to the act of studying, without the promise of becoming.

AFTERWARDS

The above text, which I will call an essay, marks a departure in what has preceded. Except the correction of a few typos, the essay appears in fidelity to its an first enactment. It took only an afternoon. This is nothing to boast about. There are many problems in it (and problems that arise from it still). Yet, I have elected to include these three pages as they are. I have been advised that it is naïve to do so in a thesis, which is the ultimate piece of school work. The academy is in a rush to be in control, to prove one's merits, to prove what one has apprehended or one's ability to make a novel contribution. These demands must be appeased first, before the studious ramifications of the above essay can become salient. I correct its problems here.

The essay takes little time to explicate the texts with which it deals. This is a break with convention, wherein the more biographic and sophisticated the citation, the more credit is earned. The essay above deals with the following: "Sensus Communis" by Jean-François Lyotard, both the English publication in the 1991(c) volume *Judging Lyotard*, edited by Andrew Benjamin, and the French publication in *Misère de la philosophie* (2000). This text was first published in French in 1987, in *Le Cahier du Collège international de philosophie*. But before all this, the text was delivered as a lecture by Lyotard at a conference on community in 1986. These details add little to the "analysis" above, except only to note that "Sensus Communis", interests itself with the Kantian Analytic of the Beautiful and comes during Lyotard's long-term engagement with The Analytic of the Sublime as found in *The Differend* (1983 in French/1988 in English) and *Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime* (French 1991/1994 in English). The above essay also deals with *The Differend* and a selection of Kant's *The Critique of Judgement*, namely sections §8, 9, 19, 20, 21, 22, 40, 41, 42, 56, 57, 58, 59, and 60. In hindsight the essay is also influenced by "The Affect-Phrase" (2006) and "Anima Minima" (1997).—And does the precision of bibliographical detail enhance anything of the essay, besides providing some semblance of empirical evidence that I really had read and knew the texts with which the essay is concerned?

The crux of the essay is how Lyotard grapples with Kant's solution of the Antinomy of Taste, which is the Idea of the "supersensible substrate of humanity" (Kant, 1987, p. 213 §57). It is on the whole unclear exactly what at stake of what is written above, how it fits *into* the thesis. It trips on the sting of the question "So how to go on?". It makes an answer that is lost in the midst of some crucial misunderstandings.

I can correct these now. When I set out to write it, I did not fully grasp a concept, determinate or not, in the Kantian critique of judgement. For example, the essay reads: "How then can Lyotard call this a natural substratum, this seat of aesthetic feeling?"; "There is a difference between the lack of determinative concept for aesthetic judgement and the indeterminate Ideas of reason. Or is there?", and "How can it be for Lyotard to maintain that the 'natural substrate' as the sight of resistance to concept and will? If affect is tautogorical, how then can it also be a sign of the substratum? And what is it a substratum of? The seat of knowledge? The seat of feeling? Both? If the communis is not to be empirical, it must then be transcendental. How does Lyotard have this cake and eat the tautogorical, disrupting event of aesthesis?". Confused indeed!

The phrase, "the lack of determinative concept for aesthetic judgement and the indeterminate Ideas of reason," is tautological. A concept is determinable if it has proof and since one cannot prove a judgement of taste, there is no determinable concept. So the lack of determinative concept and an indeterminate Idea are one in the same. It is the *Yes* by which Kant answers the antinomy; judgements of taste have no determinable concept (hence why they are exterior to the realm of knowledge) but because judgments of taste and their demand for a universal

assent are where our faculties come into their own harmony, there must be an Idea (an indeterminate concept) to guide this, which in taste is what one could call the supersensible substrate of humanity (our finality as good and rational beings).

But it is also an essay of Lyotard's take on Kant's solution to the antinomy. It asks: "How does Lyotard have this cake and eat the tautological, disrupting event of aesthesis?". At once this reaches beyond what is available in the texts, it anticipates the affect-phrase, and belies my doubts of Lyotard's reading of Kant. It errs, productively so, but it does err. It is for Lyotard the *analogous clause* that solves the antinomy that matters. There is no knowledge of these Ideas. The true and the just are endless. It is understandable to stumble through what is a stumbling through Kant.

These corrections are within the learner's gamut. It is a demonstration of my having learned what an indeterminate Idea of reason is in Kant and that Lyotard picks up on the many hesitations of Kant, to emphasize the analogous clause of those Ideas, of truth, justice, and so on. It is one thing to understand it, to have learned it. It is another thing entirely to *study it*.

To find what is studious here, requires returning to the question in the essay "Why *must* [emphasis added] I engage, in brevity and succinctness, Lyotard's reading of Kant, or Lyotard's Kant?" "Must" is an obligation, a debt, an owing to. It is also a questioning of that debt, *Why do I feel I must?* There is hesitation. I truly did not know what I was doing as I wrote it or what it would do to write it. Yet it was written. I did try. Something was essayed. I acted without knowing. In short, the above essay is nothing more or less than an endeavor of study.

CHAPTER FOUR

DRIFTING FROM LIBERAL EDUCATION

On drifting

Part I Poverty of the University has critiqued the ways in which liberal education is presently defended in market terms or for the cultivation of a global citizenry. It has demonstrated that there is no unified idea or notion of liberal education that can be reclaimed and reinstated. It has demonstrated that philosophy of education also suffers from the pessimism of needing validation, or to supersede education and as such the question of this thesis cannot then be “What is liberal education?”. Instead the question is the entirely unacademic, unscholarly question *Why not study?* This question defies the stakes of the project, it is already drifting from liberal education. The notion of drifting is not mine. It comes from Lyotard’s (1973) *Dérive à Partir de Marx et Freud*, a loose collection of essays that have not found themselves translated in their entirety into English, but rather translated piecemeal in English language volumes: *Driftworks* (1984a) translated by Roger McKeon and a considerable portion of Lyotard’s writing explicitly on education finds itself in the “Students” section of *Political Writings* (1993c). That students signify a drift for Lyotard is not happenstance. *Dérive*, first published in 1973, comes five years after the tumultuous and notorious May 1968. A time memorialized in black and white photographs of students occupying streets, classrooms, lecture theatres, toe-to-toe with the police and representatives of the state. Their revolt matched with a massive labor strike brought everyday life in France to a grinding halt. There was no unified or coherent set of demands or an alternative system proposed by the students—perhaps a betrayal against their allies, the factory workers. This, a period of resistance and not revolution, marks a series of “drifts” in Lyotard’s writings. And it is just as well that the essays of *Dérive* find themselves scattered, fragmented, and in another language. For in the preface to the works, “Adrift”, Lyotard invokes the many ways in which the acts of thinking and writing and reading resist a cohesive line, resist the authority of the author

himself; “*pour un voyage sans but, collection de fragments, ne parvenant jamais à s’unifier du fait qu’elle dérive avec sa nef et que cette dérive donne*” (1973, p. 8-9).

To be *adrift* is not to be against or opposed to an object of critique. It must be said what it is that critique is and what is wrong with it—which is to critique critique, which is either to fall wholesale into its rules, or to subvert it. Critique is hyper-rationalism, the mechanized right arm of development. Each new position, towards the better, is made from the negation of the previous position, which was once the better of a worse position, and is now the worse of the better position, which somehow maintains them all in a state of negation, of not-this-nor-that-but-this which will become a not-that. Lyotard calls this material critique “the good student’s vision of life” (1984a, p. 12). To be *adrift* from the logic of liberal education is to be *a bad student*, though it is perhaps enough to merely be a student:

30/05/2017

Dear Katie,

Thank you for your interest in [University name withheld].
Could you please let me know the time frame of your visit?
I presume you wish to conduct research instead of “study”?

Thank you for this information!

Kind greetings,
[Name withheld]
[University name withheld].

Figure 5: *Response to the author’s enquiry about pursuing a visiting scholar semester at a university by an administrator. Regrettably I stated that I wished to “study with” scholars at the university, an activity apparently not worthwhile at a university.*

The proposition at stake shifts from a liberal educational ideal, to what is always haunting it: the student, studenthood, study. In doing so, it less a question of posing an alternative to liberal education or a new narrative for validating it, or elaborating on a pedagogy that liberates us from development, but rather enacting study *hic et nunc*. As I have already endeavored in Study Trace No. 1. It is not enough for a thesis to merely endeavor study, that is not “research”. What is demanded is that the endeavor of study be articulated, explained, justified. This is the performative contradiction on which this chapter hinges: first it endeavors study, then it justifies study which is to transgress study, the juxtaposition invokes the differend between education’s and its other: study. This is to disrupt liberal education’s temporal project. In the following justification for the

act of study that prefaced this chapter, I allow several themes to return: the post of postmodern, ontological defenses in philosophy of education, reflective judgment. In doing so, I will demonstrate that liberal education is predicated on the future anterior. Beneath these narratives of liberal education, there is a productive impasse and paradox, which is simultaneously what animates education and what is meant to be eradicated in the future anterior project: the student.

I. Post-Education

Is drifting from liberal education then to instate a “post-education”? It would be, for a student of Lyotard’s, the first attempt, the first essay, a “post-education”. It is a false start; one does not *instate a post anything*. Misunderstanding of postmodernity were discussed in Chapter Three, but will be fleshed out further here in educational terms. A post-education, which is perhaps only in name insincere, would demand that first “education” itself be defined. Indeed, areas of educational philosophy have veered away from critique and toward more positive, affirmative answers to the question “What is education?” or to find new educational trajectories. However, in *drifting from education*, with Lyotard’s work on “post-” and Kantian reflective judgement I find a productive paradox that will unleash what is always within but occluded by education.

In defining what is “educational” I would like to look backwards in the philosophy of educational literature to Nigel Blake, Paul Smeyers, Richard Smith, and Paul Standish’s (1998) *Thinking Again: Education After Postmodernism* again. There is a fitting anchor here from which to drift. This is an extremely dense and multilayered text of educational philosophy, and while the authors warn they will not provide any tidy guides for educational reform, the crux of the text hinges upon a search for what it is that education is *after postmodernism*. The authors frequently engage Lyotard’s *The Postmodern Condition* to critique the ways in which the educational has been replaced with performativity in educational settings, which is to merely critique or to negate. For example, the authors engage the Lyotard’s work on the differend to paint a grim picture of education overtaken by the ends of managerialist performativity. This is through an exposition of *Bleak House*, wherein a lawsuit, a language game whose ends we cannot control, becomes all consuming; this is the very condition of the performativity model of schooling for the authors. While Blake and his co-authors utilize Lyotard to critique unthinking performativity in education it is, however, their dismissal of postmodernist thinking as an impasse to questions of what is

educational that is arguable too hasty. Blake and his co-authors question, “What is less clear is how, in the wake of writers such as Lyotard, we are to go about questioning the nature and purpose of education in general, or indeed whether the question any longer makes sense” (p. 132). They state: “The philosophical choice that Lyotard confronts us with between an account of language as subjectless and the Cartesian myth of a perfectly self-transparent subject, is therefore unhelpful. It is particularly unhelpful if we want to account for the creation of new meaning, escape from cliché, and articulate new modes of saying and doing things” (p. 72). What is needed is “an amended postmodernist position” (p. 73), one that accepts post-foundational ethics but with a better handle on the particularity and inter-subjective aspects that make education educational. In short, they need a subject for that. In short, the author’s dismiss Lyotard’s thought because it is not useful for what education is presumed to be. It is precisely what education is presumed to be that I drift from.

The rediscovery of education in educational thought

In the last chapter, I considered the ways in which philosophy of education has made the case to no longer apply philosophy to education, but instead defending and defining education for what it *is*. In revealing what education is, these many iterations also reveal what is not educational, educative, or educable. Yet, what is not educated is precisely its *raison d’être*, and so while this turn in educational thought boldly sidesteps nihilist critique of an ever-nihilist game, it likewise fails to address education’s other: the student, study.

Joris Vlieghe and Piotr Zamojski (2019) continue this post-critical thread in their ontological defense of teaching. Their position is informed by Hannah Arendt’s thought and in particular “The Crisis in Education” (1954). Teaching, following their ontological approach and Arendtian natality, is little to do with teachers and students themselves, but rather on what *matters*, whatever is under study in the pedagogical relation. Precisely because teaching and education do not emphasize the educational players and rather the things that are taught or studied, makes *renewal* possible. They rely on a common sense definition of education, wherein the older generation give to the younger generation, the emphasis however is not on conservation but upon change. The ontological conditions for education to be under Vlieghe and Zamojski’s position are the following: it must be rooted in love for the world, and that love is enacted through teaching, whereby the teacher demands students attend to what they attend to. Teaching is thus the enactment

of love for the world. This ontology of education is however, very teacher-centric in that it does not fully take into account the receiver of teaching. They state “There is another reason why an ontology of teaching doesn’t start from the student’s perspective, and fully concentrates on the ethos of the teacher as a form of self-care... It’s thanks to rephrasing particular ideas again and again, coming up with new and more accurate formulations and examples, etc. that one gets to the bottom of things” (p. 107). Here the teacher is *studier par excellence*: dedicated to the subject matter (and so to the world), who calls others to study, and so loves the world and enacts their faith in it by giving a part of it to the “next generation” in teaching.

This ontological defense and emphasis on the public enactment of study through teaching renders the students, the younger generation as mere receiver, with the promise that the sharing of the world leads to its renewal. While this ontological defense of teaching goes some way in refuting transcendent claims on education, the position of the student as the student goes on unthought, goes unaddressed. That is because the domain of education is always in the register of *it will have happened, the future anterior*¹⁷. Once they have been educated, they will renew the world. Education is then indelibly future-oriented, yet hung up over the past, the authority of the teacher is based in their mastering of a thing that has been handed down to them. These temporal problematics are unproblematic for what education is, but a violence to the student, who is stuck in the *hic et nunc, both a little too early and far too late*.

Education is still entangled with *the new* in Eduardo Duarte’s (2012) phenomenology of learning: “Attunement, the seizure of the imagination, arises from the steadfast openness of the learner that receives the radical possibility dispersed in the dispersal, Being’s presencing... Learning is on-going birth of wonder, the bursting forth of the imaginative with the wide awakesness to the Being of beings. The artwork (re)presents the birth of the new and is an expression of the re-collection of natality and the reception of the (re)calling of the originary dispensation” (p. 325). Like the above, Duarte’s phenomenology of learning, is indelibly linked with Arendt’s notions of natality and also that of Heidegger. It is then no wonder that even this shimmering account of learning is still teacher-centric, in that those who teach are themselves

¹⁷ It should be noted that for Richard Beardsworth (1992) Lyotard’s reflective judgement is within the clause of the future anterior; “The a priori principle that reflective judgement gives itself is the analogical one of judging nature ‘as if’ nature formed, as a whole, a unity of experience. The principle is the finality of nature in its multiplicity” (p. 65). This for Beardsworth, means that judgement is already entangled in reflective judgment. But the analogy as if we did know is not quite the certainty of the finality assumed in the future anterior. Beardsworth makes of the analogy something much more forward looking than it is.

teachable by Being (and its emergence). This is to maintain the educational temporality of new against old. Though Arendt is decidedly more humanist than Duarte: “the world, in gross and in detail, is irrevocably delivered up to the ruin of time unless human beings are determined to intervene, to alter, to create what is new (1954, p. 11), the teacher is always the shepherd of this renewal, against the weight of the past, looking toward new beginnings by revisiting what has been.

The teacher likewise figures heavily into Gert Biesta’s (2017b) missive against the “learnification” of education (which is quite different from the poetic sort of learning that Duarte conceptualizes above). Biesta corrects the notion of teacher as facilitator of student learning by re-conceptualizing teaching through Levinasian terms. It is then inherently relational, a reversal of the entirely self-referential notions of the student in the prevailing paradigm, yet also not a “traditional” notion of the teacher who exerts their power over the student through control. For Biesta, teaching takes place when the student is seen as a subject by the teacher. And yet, in Biesta’s (2017a) contribution to the Ruitenberg collection on studying, that subjectivity of the student, the one who obligates the teacher to teach, seems to fall to the wayside. Biesta here continues his rebuke of student-centeredness, and rejects study as what it is that students *do*, but rather study is “being taught” (p. 80). The position of the student as passive (and not active in the learning models of student-centeredness) is what makes teaching what it is, “the point of teaching is precisely to bring something new into the ‘orbit’ of the student and not to give the students what they already have or already know” (p. 80). Here the educational logic of the new is maintained, teachers are obligated by students (who are new to the world) to give to them what they do not already know.

In these accounts of what education is, it is defined by what teaching is out of hope for the renewal of the world, in perceiving and being open to what is emerging, or to give to students what is new to them. This still relegates education in the domain of the teacher. It also introduces the temporality of the educational, it will have happened; I leave it in Hannah Arendt’s words: “But one can quite easily teach without educating, and one can go on learning to the end of one’s days without for that reason becoming educated” (1954, p. 13). Without the proper essence of education (that it is the renewal of the world) it cannot have happened. Education in itself is wrapped up with the past and the future, its anticipation that if done correctly, it will have happened, there is a renewed future. So this rediscovery of education in educational thought is in part a reversal (or the

maintenance) of what I have found to be *illiberal* in accounts of liberal education (as hashed out in Part I: liberal education for employability/citizenship, or liberal education for the conservation of a tradition, or liberal education for a progressive future). These more recent ontological defenses of education are still in the logic of pre- and post-education, the future anterior. Even if such an account is a poetic unfurling (Duarte) or the enactment of study (Vleighe and Zamojski), there is still the inability to think what is not educated, educative, or educable. All of which is the reason for the being of education, it rests in tandem and opposition to what it is not.

A perforation in the liberal educational trajectory

Education, which it has been established above is predicated on the new, that something new will have happened through it, a continuous renewal of the past, in its handing over, in attending to what is coming to Being, or giving to students what is new in their horizons. This is indelibly hopeful and future-oriented, though recursive to its past. To drift from liberal education is to occupy a distended moment within this trajectory. Liberal education, its diachrony of pre and post of before and after, assumes an uneducated child who is in want of education. Vlieghe and Zamojski and Biesta, and even Duarte too, all conceive of their uneducatedness being in need of a teacher. Whether that teacher is learner, studier par excellence or not, their role is to bring the world to the child, or to share what is coming into being.

I think it worth dwelling with the words of Hannah Arendt (1954) in “The Crisis in Education” to demonstrate the temporality inherent to the liberal education trajectory. The end of this educational ideal is *political, and a politics that is based on equality and freedom from the same*. For Arendt, the crisis in education is in part the failure of adults to take up their responsibility and obligation they have toward younger people precisely because they are unequal. The adult, more experienced, more learned, bigger. This inequality is tolerable for Arendt, because it is only temporary: “These newcomers, moreover, are not finished but in a state of becoming” (p. 7). Childhood is a stage of development. The inverse of Arendt’s ideas about children is of most salience to the temporal project of liberal education; she states “whoever wants to educate adults really wants to act as their guardian and prevent them from political activity” (p. 3). The future anterior clause is inherent to this educational project. If education is for the renewal of the world, and that world is inhabited by both its old and new members, wherein the elder must be responsible

for the younger by educating them, the *it will have happened* is what defines this project. Arendt states “The world, in gross and in detail is irrevocably delivered up to the ruin of time unless human beings are determined to intervene, to alter, to create what is new (p. 11). The world is conserved through its re-creation; education is at once the linchpin between the old and the new, and the necessary step for children to leave their impoverished life through the gift of the world in the teacher’s gesture. The anticipation of the world’s renewal against the weight of its past. It will take education, for the newcomers to become old-timers, to have shared in the world and so to remake it. *It will have happened*.”

There is something undeniably prophetic about this temporal trajectory. A savior-seeking future anterior. So Arendt closes “Unpredictability and the Power of Promise” of *The Human Condition* with the tidings: “A child has been born unto us” (1958, p. 247). It is in human action, of these political community of equals, the promise of new beginnings. And that is really needed, for without it, for Arendt, human beings would be condemned to the ravages of time in their brief glimmer of mortality against the binds of tradition; “It is, in other words, the birth of new men and the new beginning, the action they are capable of by virtue of being born” (p. 247). Though, of course, it is not only by birthright, it is by edification that makes the child an adult. A member of a community of political equals.—I cannot help but find a whiff of Kant’s *sensus communis* in this. It is not the “not yet cultivated” sense (1987, p. 160) as found in our vernacular *common sense*. But for Kant, it is rather the tessellation of minds, the second maxim of enlightened thought: to think from the standpoint of others; he concludes: “We could even define taste as the ability to judge something that makes our feeling in a given presentation *universally communicable* without mediation by a concept” (p. 162). Why this awkward and hesitant conclusion, what realm are we in without the grounding of concepts? Beyond taste, but judgement. Less than reason, messier than understanding. Kant does not know what to do with taste, with aesthetic feeling, which was meant bridge the faculties of pure and practical reason; it is more slippery, more unwieldy than perhaps Kant had anticipated. To summarize briefly, a judgement of taste is particular and private: This *x* instills in me a feeling of beauty. Or as Arendt glosses it “(If you say, What a beautiful rose! You don’t arrive at this judgement by first saying, all roses are beautiful, this flower is a rose, hence it is beautiful.)” (1978, p. 256, Appendix). That a judgement of taste is particular and yet we are apt to quarrel about it is a sticky point for Kant’s *Third Critique*. He wonders, “In other words, is taste an original and natural ability, or is taste only the idea of an ability yet to be acquired and

[therefore] artificial, so that a judgement of taste with its requirement for universal assent is in fact only a demand of reason to produce such agreement in the way we sense?" (1987, p. 90, §22). Taste, either a higher principle of reason or an idea, when brought to a *sensus communis*, a presumed shared faculty is relegated to judgement. For it contains an antinomy: even though judgements of taste are particular, we still quarrel about them, which is to say that judgements of taste do not rely on a concept by which to determine them, because they are subjective and particular. Yet we quarrel about them, so we must be able to communicate them, meaning that must rely on concepts, only not determinate ones. So Kant concludes: "the basis that determines the judgement lies, perhaps, in the concept of what may be considered the supersensible substrate of humanity" (p. 213). Kant also adds: "the antinomies compel us against our will to look beyond the sensible to the supersensible as the point [where] all our a priori powers are reconciled, since that is the only alternative left to us for bringing reason into harmony with itself" (p. 214). In judgement guided only by indeterminate concepts, the horizons of an Idea, we must anticipate the possible judgements of others. Sense guided by what is beyond sense, that community of rational beings.

Arendt's very late lectures on Kantian aesthetic judgement rely on the *sensus communis*, the enlargement of mind. For Arendt, aesthetic judgement is inherently political: "Judgment, and especially judgments of taste, always reflect upon others... This is necessary because I am human and cannot live outside the company of men" (1978, p. 265). The necessity of the essence of education: we live with others in this exceptional natality. And so the animating event of such a political community: "They arise, on the contrary, directly out of the will to live together with others in the mode of acting and speaking, and thus they are like control mechanisms built into the very faculty to start new and unending processes" (1958, 246). But education, if we are to avoid a crisis, is to always know what it is for, the failsafe against monotony, the project for new beginnings.

For Lyotard, this is a "resolutely anthropologized reading" (1999, p. 151) of Kant's *Third Critique*. For Lyotard, it is the analogy by which Kant concludes that antinomy that bars the tidy cultivated (educated) subject from entering this political community. Looking further afield, in *Au Juste/Just Gaming*, Lyotard's interest in Kant becomes plain: how to judge without rational criteria, without a finality. There is only a hazy horizon; "what allows us to decide is not that which has been attained, but that which remains to be attained; it is ahead of us, like an idea... the

problem of knowing how this horizon is to be defined remains whole, since there is no possible knowledge of it” (Lyotard and Thébaud, 1985, p. 83). Returning to that supersensible substrate: we must operate on a humble *as if*.

It is the temporality of anamnesis, or rather anamnesis’s dispersion of a diachrony. I look to Lyotard here, who in his many essays, gestures toward what comes back, to what disrupts, the poverty of thought but also its saving grace. What presents itself as not itself, what is because it is not understood, or known. So three essays that intersect on anamnesis and thus pose a temporal problem for the rediscovery of education: “Note on the meaning of ‘Post-’” a letter within the volume *The Postmodern Explained to Children* (1992)¹⁸, “Anima Minima” in *Postmodern Fables* (1997), and “Return upon the Return” (or “Retour” of *Lectures d’enfance*, 1991b) in *Toward the Postmodern* (1999). An observation: postmodernism (in its full sense and not its shallow relativist interpretation) is enmeshed in infancy and anamnesis. Lyotard (for once) puts the meaning “post” in clear, albeit terse, terms in “Note on the meaning of ‘Post-’”. He delineates the multiple meanings of postmodernism: first, as an architectural movement; second, is the meaning of postmodernity as bad faith performativity, professing “(and I have to admit that I’m no stranger to its misunderstanding)” (p. 90); and finally, tersely the question of postmodernity that is “first of all” (p. 92) what is enacted at the edges of thought, of arts, and letters. No ludic play here, but rather a “responsibility” (p. 93), to question the stakes of modern projects. Rather, “the ‘post-‘ of ‘postmodern’ does not signify a movement of *comeback*, *flashback*, or *feedback*, that is, not a movement of repetition but a procedure in ‘ana-’” (p. 93). It is what is nascent in the modern, because it is excluded from it. Whatever is without and therefore very much within the project: what returns, what comes back. And so *Ulysses* would be avant-garde literature par excellence as Lyotard analyzes it in “Return”. Without a complete exegesis, how can this be relevant to questions of liberal education? That the modes of prose fluctuate and the sections refer back to episodes of Odysseus’s journey, the Romanticized name, that it is replete with blue content, this, for Lyotard, is the avant-gardism of *Ulysses*. Finally and briefly, in “Anima Minima” another childish text,

¹⁸ Though the volume is not without a tongue-in-cheek jab on Lyotard’s end; the English version includes the “Preface to the French Edition” (p. 6), signed enigmatically by “The Editors”. It suggests that it was difficult to convince Lyotard to agree to such a publication; “We argued that it could help to clear him of certain accusations: irrationalism, neo-conservatism, intellectual terrorism, simple-minded liberalism, nihilism, and cynicism, among others. We seemed quite untroubled by these attributions” (p. 6). There were, however, no editors for the French version; the volume was collated by Lyotard himself and the letters enclosed are addressed to the actual children of scholars and colleagues. Here ‘children’ is meant in its literal and figurative sense; he states “And it is only as children that we can approach an understanding of this Idea” (p. 6).

Lyotard finishes the line of thought on the philosophification of aesthetics, the taming of sensibility, with the lines “What comes back in this time to come is not located in the time of clocks and consciences, and is not worth remembering. The relation must be reversed: what is to come comes forth as a coming back. That’s why the gesture always induces a nostalgia and motivates an amnesia” (p. 249).—This last word is a mistranslation of anamnesis from the original French *anamnèse*, or anamnesis (1993b, p. 210).— Though here the object is very much arts and their workings in the mausoleum of the Occident. But hasn’t this veered considerably from the liberal educational concerns that animate this chapter? How can the complications of arts and letters and time as Lyotard continually engages them have any bearing on the liberal education project that animates this chapter?

It is shock of affect, the desubjectification of the subject, the irruption of time, the failures of knowledge of which Lyotard speaks, to which he gestures again and again are in principle *aesthetic*. The open wound of sensibility, the barrier that is no barrier between self and world. We bridle it, we give it a name, we give this pleasure or this pain a word, a meaning, put it into syntax. Rational man cannot handle the immediacy of sensual (dis)pleasure. He, and decidedly so a He, with sculptures and statues and beautiful forms, and cultivated landscapes cannot tolerate the suddenness, the particularity, the shock of affect. He will always try to tame it, in good judgements, in good taste, in perfect sense. And yet, the pollen that fell a spring years ago still adheres to the door handle, its powdered chartreuse stubbornly refuses the winds and the rains and the sun. Still it remains. Still it is fecund. For in what comes back, in what is expelled by discourse, in what was named, so made tame, is a reminder that speaker and spoken of are *hand in glove*. Though every attempt to articulate it is a transgression, a failure.

II. What is Left But to Study?

To drift from educational projects, no matter how noble their aims are, is to sit uncomfortably within the paradox of what it is to feel obligated to search, aim, or attempt what is not known. The unstable state, this amorphous not knowing is the *raison d’être* of the liberal educational project, which no matter how thingly the pedagogy, is still a cultivation, and still *a pedagogy*. It aims to do away with the student, caught in the chasm of feeling compelled to grapple

after what is unknown. This state is to be done away with, filled in with knowledge, even if that is knowing that we cannot know. The student drifts in a realm without recourse to knowledge: which is affective and ethical. And this can never be fully done away with. Study, studenthood, the student upend educational trajectories, confound pedagogy, and interrupt education.

The student who remains only in the realm of study disrupts educational trajectories. It disrupts the unproblematic notion of it as the old vis-à-vis the young, the deferred renewal of the world, or the subject who can be cultivated in an educational pursuit. For such educational trajectories make of the student an *object of* education by inculcating the student into the glorified past of a culture. Either one effaces the subject of education, the student, by subjecting the student to either the future or the past, forgetting that ‘education’ or rather, the educative, occurs *hic et nunc*, a distended moment, a rupture in the narrative, beyond the closures of subjectivity itself. Properly understood, the student is both less than and more than a subject of education. Less than a subject, because they can be no auteur of what they do not know, compelled only *to act as if they did know*. Without recourse to the ideals and finalities under the banner of liberal education, the student can only enact study.

To make such a claim requires me to anchor this argument in the parameters of the field it critiques. I have critiqued the practice of liberal arts education for its nihilism, the history of liberal educational ideas for their pessimism, and for the scholarship of philosophy of education for its commentary upon education. Yet, below I will also critique the literature on study in the field of educational philosophy for rendering the wild seed of study to pedagogy, to education. Surely this is a contradiction? I say not, but this requires an explanation of the specific study literature I engage as well as a distinction to be drawn in the words “education” and “pedagogy”.

Here I look to two scholars who feature heavy in the following analysis to tease out their definitions of education, pedagogy, and study to anchor my arguments. First I consider Tyson Lewis (2011) and then Derek Ford (2019) to demonstrate how their subversion of learning in stupidity still reifies the pessimism inherent to educational thought. In conventional educational logic, stupidity is a failing to be remedied with learning. Tyson Lewis (2011), whose work on study I will consider throughout the remainder of this thesis, treats study and its stupidity as the redemptive space of education. Lewis, following Agamben, asserts study as the suspension of the ends necessitated by educational logics (such as the narratives of liberal education I explored in Chapters One and Two) wherein the learning expected in such a trajectory is suspended in study,

a state of stupefaction. Yet this is the very crux of education for Lewis, it is an *impotent* education as he calls it, it is education as not education and therefore free from the ends inscribed by narratives. The stupidity of study *is* a pedagogy, and it is the actions of the teacher that arouses this for the student; “the teacher’s particular work is to help transform the messianic mood from one of sadness to inspiration. As opposed to the anxiety of learning to meet standards or expel students, the teacher in Agamben’s formulation helps the student transform the infinite sadness and pain of study into a type of intellectual activity that has” (p. 596) been untethered from its ends. This is a consistent theme in Lewis’ studious pedagogy, the teacher, albeit a teaching fool, must arouse this supremely educational state, the studious state of stupidity exempted from the goals of education, within a student. It is pessimistic; it doesn’t trust the student who is still in want of an education that can be remedied by the teacher.

Ford (2019) also looks to stupidity as an educative force. Ford is interested ways to resist capitalist structures of the city in the *urban* and looks to Lyotard’s work on the intractable, which I will consider further in the following chapters, to present a pedagogy of stupidity. Much like Lewis, Ford here posits the subversion of pedagogy as a pedagogy: “Pedagogy is not about the pursuit of knowledge but exactly the opposite: the endless pursuit of stupidity, of stupor. The pursuit is without end because stupidity is a permanent excess that escapes presence even as it structures presence” (p. 164). For Ford, stupidity is pedagogical in that it subverts educational trajectories and it emanates a call, “Ubiquitous, stupor calls to and interrupts us” (p. 165). Put simply, whatever stupefies us by way of interrupting our educational trajectories and narratives, *is* pedagogical without being a Pedagogy, *is* educational without being Education. But it is still pedagogy particularly in what Ford still wants it to do, in its wanting us to do, which is to confront capitalism. For as much as the ends of education are to be subverted by stupidity in both Lewis and Ford’s thought, there is still a pessimism, a mistrust that the student cannot get to this preferred exceptional state without a teacher or a something to teach them, a pedagogy, an education whose end is itself. So here I must make a subtle yet important distinction, I aim to evade the trappings of pedagogy and education, to tease out the differend between studenthood and the education that aims to root it out by means of its pedagogy. As such, this constrains the literature from philosophy of education on study that I consider below, predominately the work of Tyson Lewis, Samuel Rocha, Derek Ford, as well as Joris Vlieghe and Piotr Zamojski. While these authors do not represent the entirety of the literature on study, I have selected these works because while we have

similar interests in subverting the nihilism of conventional educational logic, I wish to demonstrate that the ways in which these authors aim to subvert educational logics belie a pessimism toward the student and their studenthood that I aim to radicalize in my reading of the work of Lyotard and set into motion through the Study Traces included in the thesis.

Study without the student?

Student-centeredness, with its emphasis on individual learning goals, personal responsibility, accountability, and consumerism is but a symptom of this neoliberal tertiary education regime. Teaching and learning are therein testable inputs and outputs for this prevailing educational logic. Recent work in the philosophy of education has rightfully sought not to critique this paradigm but to defend what is properly educational. *Study*, an educational experience distinct from teaching and learning has factored heavily into these attempts to reclaim, rediscover, or find new educational potentialities. As Claudia Ruitenberg (2017) argues, with the prevalence and emphasis on learning outcomes in educational discourse, studying has become a near-obsolete term or concept due to its very unobservability and therefore its unaccountability. Here I delineate recent iterations of study in educational discourse (which are largely acritical). Many of these iterations of study consider it in terms of a teacher or master, also effacing the student.

To reiterate the above, Gert Biesta (2017d), defines studying as being taught which is render study to the teacher's domain and to efface the student. Likewise, for Vlieghe and Zamojski (2019) the teacher is studier par excellence: who is dedicated to the subject matter (and so to the world), who calls others to study, and so loves the world and enacts their faith in it by giving a part of it to the "next generation" in teaching. Claudia Ruitenberg (2017b) also considers studying through the teacher, the *maître à étudier* carrying the double entendre of the master of studying as well as a master to study. That is, for Ruitenberg, teachers and how the study are an example for their students to study. Here Ruitenberg wants to emphasize that studying is the attention to something external to the student, but this not the endowment of study skills (which I think would be too much akin to the logic of learning), but that *studying*, or attending to external things, "is possible" (p. 143). Though Ruitenberg is interested in the gendered and otherwise socially designated role of the master student, often a white man privileged enough to render his full attention to something outside of himself (though is this *not* the narrative of mothering?),

regardless for Ruitenberg, studying is different from thinking, which occurs within an individual, but a way of attending to things outside oneself. The emphasis of study is still on the teacher.

Whereas, in Tyson Lewis's (2013, 2018) prolific work on study, the differential between teacher and student are made into a symmetry. For Lewis study is a potentiality in education, specifically to eschew the ways in which actualization is embedded in educational thought. Through Agamben's (im)potentiality, Lewis posits study as the inactivation of capabilities wherein those capabilities are experienced as not those capabilities and as such the studier experiences human freedom which is steeped both in being able to and being able not to. Bartleby the Scrivener is the student par excellence for Lewis (2013); he'd just rather not do what he is meant to do. But in order for this studying to be, the studier in Lewis' reckoning must already have learned, or be able to, or is capable of whatever it is that is held in (im)potential. It follows on for Lewis (2018) that he rejects tragic accounts of teaching, wherein the teacher is always set to fail, because that would imply that teaching is an activity, an actualization of something. Rather, for Lewis, teaching is comedic (the other side of the coin of tragedy) and, like study, is inactive. It is the act of teaching as not teaching "in the undercommons where study groups gather and teachers illicitly and irresponsibly enact parodies" (p. 121). Although Lewis drops the teacher-centeredness of Biesta and Vlieghe and Zamojski, he likewise omits the student in favor of the studier. In this account teaching is performed, as not teaching, with other studiers, relegating pedagogical relationships to a community of friends, or equals.

Stephanie Mackler (2017) also emphasizes the student at their task, but unlike Ruitenberg study for Mackler is primarily composed of thought. It is a certain type of thinking that is best suited to the practice of liberal education study according to Mackler. For this, Mackler looks to Hannah Arendt's phenomenology of thought, and this is precisely to maintain liberal education inutility. For Mackler, Arendtian *stop-and-think*, maintains thought's separation from everyday life and ends. Moreover, this is Arendtian reason, which is the faculty that asks question for which there are no determinable or cognitive answers. Using Oakeshott, Mackler maintains that studying as reason's thought, is an interval of freedom from ends. It should be noted that for her conceptualization of study, Mackler forgoes her earlier (2003) attempt at bridging Lyotard and Arendt for education; she uses the Lyotardian differend to further her educational interest in Hannah Arendt's *natality*. For Mackler, the experience of the differend is what invokes us to bring in the new, or perform natality. I am sympathetic to this pairing: Mackler is correct in finding some

harmony between Lyotard's resistance to any form of totality and likewise Arendt's concerns, though she does distinguish Arendt's more modern approach from what she calls Lyotard's postmodern one. Though I find odd the educational implication that Mackler deduces here; that to seduce natality, education is *for* sensitization to the differend. Again, giving education a trajectory which is to make of the student not a student.

Study not in terms of a teacher's pedagogy, or part of a trajectory of education, but what remains outside and therefore animates education. The student. The unknown. Being compelled to act without knowing. And how could this subvert, resist, and also animate liberal educational thought? So here I offer a humble interjection, which feels more like turning over a rock, to see its squirming underbelly, teeming with life.

Studenthood

Looking to Lyotard, who I think is best remembered only as a student, and themes which have already pulsed through the analysis. There is another kind of study, studenthood. So here a brief trajectory of this Idea: ontologically, epistemologically, phenomenologically, and inter-subjectively.

Studenthood, Ontologically Speaking

When we speak of ontology, we speak of the necessary conditions for something to be. Bar minimum what must be for x to be? What must be for studenthood to be? It must be said then where 'studenthood' comes from, the Lyotardian "childhood" which is a poor translation of *l'enfance* or *infans*. The French invokes both childhood, but also infancy. Which is, the infantile babel, chirping, and scream. It is a not yet, a not able to. It is steeped in negation and yet it is. It persists despite efforts to the contrary. How can I say that? Discourse, knowledge, education always tries to fill it in. There is a sense of failure in the feral child, one who was never given the gift of language. Yet, this not speaking, this inability to say is the remainder of discourse. For all that is said and sayable there is a left over, an excess: which is and *is not*. A reliance on what is other to what it is. Where thought and presentation fail is the opening of studenthood, which is the

state of being, of the open wound of what is not, and what is is in tension with what is not.—And so there will be ethical stakes.— It is what education fails to eradicate in the world and in the child.

So explicitly, how do we get from *infans* to studenthood? I like the subversion of the poor translation! On the tin, it will look like a stage of study in an educational trajectory. Studenthood is what precedes and endures in education, much like childhood/*infans* is what predates and endures subjectification, thinking, and discourse. Studenthood is education's other and the fact that the word is a misnomer, that it is cumbersome, that it does not evoke what it is demonstrates thinking's failure, language's failure, education's failure, that it cannot think everything, that it cannot say everything.

Studenthood, Epistemologically Speaking

More than the studier's knowns as unknown (by which what is known is experienced as not known), or how the learner knows what they do not know, the student has no recourse to knowledge. Studenthood is a state outside , the student is compelled to act as if they could know. The emphasis is no longer on the knowledge of or about, but what is enacted in this essaying, this trying without knowing, where there is no aim, and it is without end.

Studenthood, Phenomenologically Speaking

How does studenthood *feel*? What is the intuitive, sensorial, or affective aspects of it? How to imagine what it is that is felt?—To ask and answer these question is to no longer be in the realm of studying.—Dwelling in a register of negation or failure, which is as yet a reminder that there is other. *At thinking's end*. Exasperated, thwarted, discombobulated, dispossessed, seized by, gripped by, affected. All in a moment distended, bubbling past chronological time, an instant protracted, of being compelled, pushed forward by what emerges as yet sayable and pushed backward by the inability to say it.

Studenthood, Intersubjectively Speaking

Studenthood only drifts from education, it does not oppose it. It does not replace it with something else. It is not to deny that teaching takes place, or learning, or even other iterations of study. It does not deny asymmetry between teacher, pedagogue and student. The student seen as a student, confounds pedagogical relations and upends them. Studenthood renders pedagogy an apedagogy.

A Performative Contradiction

This chapter ends quite differently from how it begins. It begins in the remit of a student in Study Trace No. 1. It ends in the remit of a scholar. That is, it begins with a trace of study, an essay, where being compelled to act without knowing is enacted in writing. It ends with scholarly critique and analysis, which is to say what it is that studenthood is (and the next three chapters will do so). A performative contradiction indeed! Or perhaps, rather a paradox. For this is still a thesis. Still very much in the educational paradigm, both for its Ideas, and for its performative nihilism. It still is a “course” in the training ground of academia, the conferral of a degree. And yet teeming under the surface is that current, that pulse, of doing because I do not know, and do not come to know. The student animates that scholar. It is the paradox that Meno presents to Socrates, once he has been stung by the ray’s barb of Socrates’ intellect and is dumbfounded to find that he does not, in fact, know what virtue is. Meno asks: “How will you search for it, Socrates, when you have no idea what it is? What kind of thing from among those you are ignorant of will you set before yourself to look for? And even if you happened exactly upon it, how would you recognize that this is what you didn’t know?” (Plato, 2012, 80d). For which Socrates can only regress into divinations to demonstrate that the immortal soul only needs reminding of what it has known and has been lost to it: “And because all of nature is of the same kind and the soul has learned everything, nothing prevents a soul that has recollected everything for itself, so long as it is brave and doesn’t give up the search. For searching and learning are, as whole, a recollection” (Plato, 2012, 81d). Here I must side with the Sophist, who has put forth a perfectly reasonable question, if what you search for is compelled by an imbecilic force of not knowing, how will you know once you’ve found it? Socrates has resolved this with superstition, that the soul was once with the whole and will return with learning.—Did not I say that Lyotard’s gesture of re-writing is that of anamnesis? Yes, but an anamnesis that differs from Socrates’. Socrates’ arrogant modesty is undone by the

fact that he knows that he does not know and knows how to get to knowing. That is why every step towards knowing is a step backward, to when the soul was once one with the whole. This is the pessimism in Western thought that Lyotard is ever struggling against to save the honor of thought. Lyotard's anamnesis is the Freudian of the dreamwork, the unrepresentable, the anima glossed over in discourse, the differend that must be felt. The student who must be educated. But I will petition that what is compels the student to study. Study, both its state and its enactment which is *to be compelled to act without knowing*, is to take Meno seriously.

PART III

STUDENTHOOD

But the idea of creating an academic work is not mine because it entails what Lacan called “the discourse of the master,” and I’m not about to take myself as a master, just a perpetual student, a child.

–Jean-François Lyotard

CHAPTER FIVE

STUDENTHOOD

Learner, Studier, Studenthood

Three educational figures have thus far been implicit in my discussion of liberal education and drifting from it in study: the learner, the studier, and the student. Here I explicitly disentangle these figures to better examine the state proper to the student: studenthood. There is first the learner, who dominates most discussions on education. The learner knows what they do not know and takes action to acquire that knowledge or knows what skills they lack and takes action to develop those skills. Education is presumed to have failed if the learner fails to have learned anything. The learner operates in the temporality of the future anterior necessitated in education. For figure of the studier, I will explicitly focus on the work of Samul Rocha (2015) and Tyson Lewis (2013, 2018). The studier's gesture in education resists the logic of learning and presents a particular relation with knowledge and capability and so opens potentialities beyond learning in education.

There is then what I will call *studenthood*, deeply influenced by Jean-François Lyotard's *childhood, infancy*. This is not a stage but a state that endures. It is a state characterized by the inability to know, or even un-know what is known. It is a state preoccupied with an ethico-ontology that does not render knowledge or knowing. As such, the ontological conditions from which studenthood arises are enmeshed with epistemological constraints and obligation. To state what it is that studenthood is is to transgress it, to no longer be within the state. It is the performative contradiction that the thesis demands. The analysis will be interrupted by Study Trace No. 2, an essay on Pierre Menard's attempts to write the *Quixote* itself without reference to it (Borges, 2000). This performative student writing will be followed by a discussion of Lyotardian *infancy* and its implications for what is other in liberal arts education: studenthood.

I. Learner, Studier: Ontologically and Epistemologically Considered

The Learner

To the extent that learning is translatable into computer language and the traditional teacher is replaceable by memory banks, didactics can be entrusted to machines linking traditional memory banks (libraries, etc.) and computer data banks to intelligent terminals placed at the students' disposal. (Lyotard, 1984b, p. 50)

Lyotard's dry and ire-filled characterization of higher learning under the criterion of performativity in *The Postmodern Condition* is, decades later, still apt. This shallow sense of learning demonstrates the ontological and epistemological underpinnings of what it is to learn. For example, Souchong Wang (2008) considers the importance "ontological" taxonomies for computer systems of learning objects: "Without the support of ontologies, tagging all types of meta-data and relevant keywords to every learning object could be prohibitively expensive and will eventually make any search engine practically powerless. On the other hand, an ontology of a specific domain for a learning objects repository serves as a map and suggests paths for retrieving candidate learning objects to reach a certain objective of learning or teaching" (p. 4).—I must confess, that upon a first read of this paper I thought I had mistakenly selected from a journal on machine learning and artificial intelligence. It was not until this line, with the explicit reference to teaching, that I realized that the paper was in fact about the education of human persons.—Along a similar line, Michael Jacobson, Manu Kapur, Hyo-Jeong So, and June Lee (2011) are concerned with helping students shift their "ontologies" of "clockwork" to "complexity" when learning about scientific concepts of complex systems. They state: "A central goal of the study reported in this paper is to explore ways in which a hypermedia environment might be designed to provide learning experiences to help foster shifts across selected ontologies associated with complex systems, with the expectation that learners who experience this ontological shift will demonstrate enhanced problem solving in this domain" (p. 767). As uncannily as Lyotard's (1984b) prescient satire matches these accounts of learning in computer environments, much can be gleaned of these notions of what it is to learn.

Wang (2008) is concerned with designing the very memory banks that Lyotard wryly predicts—I do not wish to disparage these search engines because they are a fact of life in the

university and educational institutions. It is simply how resources, texts, and information are stored and made accessible. The more cogently they are organized into retrieval systems, the easier it is for us!—it is rather, what learning *is* in this context that I will consider. As Wang (2008) suggests there are objects to be learned in a web of knowledge, the more semantic connections between learning objects in a system, the better. This illustrates nicely, Lyotard’s (1984b) prediction: “If we accept the notion that there is an established body of knowledge, the question of its transmission” (p. 48) solved the pragmatics of a university pedagogical design. As such, learning is the retrieval of units from this established body of knowledge that are accessed and looped into a system of semantic linkages. It *is* playing within a language game with increasing efficacy as Lyotard once speculatively satirized.

The notion of learning illustrated by Jacobson and his colleagues (2012) demonstrates a similar ontology. While their goal in itself is to change student’s ontological understandings of scientific concepts, the underlying assumption of what learning *is* is similar. Their reasoning is that, presented with the correct learning object, the correct didactic exercise, learners will learn whatever is intended to be learned by gaining a unit of knowledge. The authors, however, found that in their quasi-experimental design, the hypermedia learning environments they designed did not have differential effects on pupils’ understanding of complex ontologies according to their scoring scheme for assessment. The assumption about what learning *is* is an equation of input-output. What ought to be known is already known. Nothing is unknown. A pedagogue designs an environment with an intended outcome, an object of knowledge to be obtained, with which a learner interacts, and at the end the learner will have obtained that knowledge, demonstrated in their assessable understanding. What learning is under this logic is predicated on the future anterior; it is a trajectory of becoming, the end of which was already decided from the beginning.

Here I revisit Gert Biesta’s (2017b) analogy for the “learnification” of education to consider what these underlying assumptions of learning mean. Biesta exemplifies the hegemony of student-centered learning with a robot Hoover. For Biesta, these automated machines, imprinted with algorithms, will perform their task of hoovering and even perfect it when they are placed in different rooms is akin to the prevailing logic of learning. While Biesta is more concerned with the impoverished capacity for educational relationships under this paradigm, this little robot Hoover itself is helpful for considering the above ideas of learning in instructional sciences. These examples demonstrate that learning is thought to really *be* algorithmic, a mathematic equation,

wherein objects for learning are variables and equate to knowledge attainment on the part of the learner. Like little robot hoovers perfecting the efficiency by which they can Hoover a room, learning *is* such that learners, imprinted with language and the hardware of the human brain can, in different web-based platforms, use that hardware to engage with and ultimately obtain knowledge units. But does this even work? As I mentioned above, Jacobsen and his co-authors (2011) found that their intervention in a computer-based learning environment (akin to placing one's robot Hoover in a new room to hone its Hoovering) did not change what the pupils learned. Again, their intention was to shift pupil's *ontological understanding* of science, from "clockwork" to "complexity". That is pupils erroneously believed that complex scientific models are based on the world being like a clock, a neat system of cause and effect. The researchers manipulated learning media so pupils would learn that the ontology proper to these scientific models is one of complexity: characterized by "non-linearity", "dynamic" and "unpredictable" change (p. 773). The researchers' conception of what learning *is* is belied by their own schemata of codes to assess pupil understanding of ontology. An example they give of a "clockwork" ontology *is* education! It is classified as merely an "event" (they do not invoke the philosophic meaning) with a "beginning, middle, and end" as distinguished from "an ongoing, dynamic process" of complexity (p. 773). Learning, under their own understanding, *is* mechanized, like the motions of a clock. Of course, their intervention in these machinations was unsuccessful. This would indicate that learning is in itself, not so clocklike. These two articles are of course not representative of all notions of learning, nor are they even representative of learning in the liberal arts. However they have allowed us to consider what learning is believed *to be*: a mechanized attainment of knowledge within a learner after a pedagogical intervention.

Traditionally liberal accounts of learning would have something *deeper* be the object of learning, it is rather some essential change, whether in knowledge, skill, or habit, in the person that is what learning *is* in these accounts. For example Mezirow (1997) defines "transformative learning" as what distinguishes post-secondary education from the schooling of children, which is "to help the individual become a more autonomous thinker by learning to negotiate his or her values, meanings, and purposes rather than uncritically act on those of others" (p. 11). Mezirow offers suggestions for what the educator can do to encourage this change in the *adult* learner (signifying a maturity, a distinguishment from children), from group problem-solving, discourse-based learning, and "creating an environment in which learners become increasingly adept at

learning from each other and at helping each other learn” (p. 11). Yet, what is to have been learned in this transformative learning is a change in the habits of mind, to think for one’s self. Learning *is* such that the learner has transformed their habits of mind, has critically reflected upon their perspective, cross-referenced that with others’, and come to truly think for themselves. In sum, to achieve the ideal of the Enlightenment. This is what learning is in the notion of the liberal education posited by the American Association of Colleges and Universities as discussed in Chapter One. In fact, liberal education according to the AAC&U (2020) is steeped in learning and *not* instruction; the liberal learner is the designer of their own learning, except what ought to be learned is codified in Essential Learning Outcomes: “knowledge of human cultures and the physical and natural world”, “intellectual and practical skills,” “personal and social responsibility,” and “integrative and applied learning” (AAC&U, undated(a), p. 9). This is learning in a “deep” sense in that learning is expected to have changed the person, their habits, actions, and general conduct. While the AAC&U list these in assessable learning outcomes that render these capacities more like nouns—things one has or does not have—I think it is best exemplified in what Ben Kotzee (2016) defines as virtue-based knowing-how. For Kotzee, it is not simply enough that one can do something, but that one has also developed the responsibility for that action. Learning is more than copying behavior, but requires the individual to hold the concordant virtues for what it is that one knows how to do. Liberal learning consists of attaining the knowledge or habits of mind that accords one to live freely. Again, there is nothing that is unknown, only not yet known. It relies on the future anterior temporal project of transforming the student.

Whether it is the attainment of knowledge through didactic intervention under the performativity criterion or the learning inherent to more diffuse liberal educational aims such as the cultivation of virtue, learning is the process by which (neo)liberal education’s future anterior project is achieved. Whatever ought to be known, to be learned by the learner, is already known and knowable. Learning is the means of the ends of transcendental accounts of liberal education.

The Studier

I stopped, blinked: I understood nothing. Nothing, nothing about anything: I didn’t understand the reasons for things or for people, it was all senseless, absurd. And I started to laugh.... Yet, even now, every time (often) that I find I don’t understand

something, then, instinctively, I'm filled with the hope that perhaps this will be my moment again, perhaps once again I shall understand nothing, I shall grasp that other knowledge, found and lost in an instant. (Calvino, 1996, p. 9-10)

These opening and closing lines to Italo Calvino's extremely short story, "The Flash", illustrate the second educational figure: the *studier*. As discussed in Chapter Four, educational philosophy has recently focused on study an educational dimension in its own right, something other than learning. This is the remit of the studier. As I have demonstrated in the previous chapter, while these attempts to reclaim study in educational thought diverge in their philosophical backgrounds, they still efface the student and what I will call *studenthood*. Here I consider this figure of the *studier* for its ontological and epistemological characteristics beginning with two observations from Calvino's short story. In the span of two pages, an unnamed narrator describes succumbing to a "flash" of unknowing. Suddenly, they cannot understand what they have understood. This sudden not knowing washes over the narrator; they have done nothing to bring this about and yet they crave these sudden flashes of "that other knowledge" (p. 10). This is sudden and instantaneous. The *studier* then is not set to gain knowledge or developing capacity, but experiences what they do know as unknown. The studier is left with a desire to return to this state. This is not through intentioned action, but experienced in a wave, as such the studier is not interested in gaining or actualizing any knowledge or skill. These are themes that I will consider by revisiting Samuel Rocha's and Tyson Lewis's accounts of study to characterize the studier ontologically and epistemologically.

Here I consider Samuel Rocha's (2012, 2015) account of study to consider the figure of the studier, I rehearse here his heavily ontological idea of what study is. Rocha begins with a "trinitarian lens" (p. 14) of ontology: Being, subsistence, and existence. Study for Rocha is a subsistent force, somewhere between raw Being (capitalized for its wondrous and mysterious ability to, well, *be*) and existence, the plane of being we normally and consciously occupy. What is study dwells in the intermediary realm of subsistence according to Rocha; subsistence is comprised of those animating forces that stem from Being, that persist. Most importantly, from Rocha's account of study, it is not something that can be willed. One does not choose to study and then do it, rather study is a desirous and subsistent force, where Education is beyond it but . Not quite as mystical as what is that Education is, but not quite as concrete as intentional and achievable objectives of learning. Much like the narrator of "The Flash", study for Rocha is not something that can be

willed into being. The studier cannot intend to study, rather the studier must be open to seizure by subsistent forces in Being, and succumb to their desire for Education.

To consider more closely the ontological and epistemological underpinnings of the studier, contra the learner, I turn now to Tyson Lewis's (2013, 2018) prolific works on study. Lewis' extensive work on study, heavily influenced by Giorgio Agamben and Walter Benjamin, largely hinges upon the clause "as not". I wish to put forth what I am sure is a contentious reading of this notion of the studier: that their milieu is unfettered learning. Lewis continuously demonstrates that the logic of learning is not the entirety of educational experience: "study is not concerned with the measurement of what is (or can be) actualized, so much as with dwelling in an immeasurable impotentiality that prefers not to be quantified" (2018, p. 88). There is a particular ontology at work here, by which Lewis' studier evades the logic of learning. It is Agamben's (1993a) whatever being: (im)potentiality. I think of it as primordial ooze. Not quite any *thing* per se, but also the *stuff* of things. This is wherein the studier dwells: "Study is the *capability for incapability* or the experiencing of a having (a capability) as a not having (an incapability), an 'I can' as an 'I cannot,' as a potentiality as an impotentiality" (2013, p. 45). Remember learning, as stated above *is* such that an intentional endeavor to gain, attain, or acquire a capacity is achieved. Lewis' studier is radically nonplussed by these demands; it is rather "this *and* that are held together in a moment of inoperability or suspension" (2013, p. 45). It is not about being capable, but to experience whatever capability *as not capability*. Study is such that nothing is rendered, completed, gained, achieved; it is and is not the doing of *x*. This has particular ramifications epistemologically: "Only with the development of capabilities can these capabilities undergo such a privation or withdrawing from actualization, and this is a moment of a most precarious kind of freedom—freedom from the capability to" (2013, p. 45). It is only "–ability" (Lewis, 2018) with which the studier meditates. And yet, they must first *be able*. Whatever the studier holds in (im)potential they must first be capable of it, the first must have learned it, they must already know it, to occupy the space this *not* either being able to and not being able to. Much like the unnamed narrator in Calvino's story, Lewis' studier is obsessed by "that other knowledge" (Calvino, 1996, p. 10). It is not that the protagonist knows nothing, but rather to experience "that other knowledge" (Calvino, 1996, p. 10) wherein they know they might experience what they know as unknown. But one does have to first know.

In sharp contrast with the learner, the *studier* performs learning as not learning. Rather than achieving Education, studying is what is immanent in education, uninterested in any ends. It cannot be willed but is experienced, in waves, in a dance with learning. It hinges upon the assumption that the studier already knows or can do and dwells in the space of (im)potential. The learner signifies the development of knowing whereas the studier signifies knowing as not knowing.

But what about not knowing and not coming to know? That which cannot be eradicated through education, whether through the development of its ends or the neutralization of its ends?

STUDY TRACE NO. 2

Here, I shall essay—try in writing—an essay in response to the question “But what about not knowing and not coming to know?”. I must write from a state of not knowing. Certainly not permissible under the logic of learning, wherein one must know what one does not know and fill in that gap with knowledge. But still, what is it to write without knowing? And even then, why write?

Subsuming argument with analogy and concept with narrative, I here essay a figure of this paradoxical and impossible impulse to write without knowing what it is to write. This is the short story by Jorge Luis Borges (2000) “Pierre Menard Author of the *Quixote*”. What attracts me to this story is Borges’ use of “essay” as a verb and not a noun, as it often used in educational scholarship. In the story an unnamed narrator documents the 20th century “Symbolist from Nîmes” (p. 67) Pierre Menard’s attempts to write the *Quixote* itself. Menard endeavors not to write a contemporary *Quixote*, but an iteration without reference to the prose of Cervantes’ *Quixote*. Menard dismisses writing the *Quixote* by becoming more like Cervantes by learning the Spanish of antiquity and forgetting history since its publication; as the narrator describes it, “the undertaking was impossible from the very beginning and of all the impossible ways of carrying it out, this was the least interesting” (p. 66).

Menard selects as his method for this impossible attempt to write the *Quixote* two rules that cancel each other out: the first “to essay variations of a formal or psychological type” (p. 68); the second “to sacrifice these variations to the ‘original’ text and reason out this annihilation in an irrefutable manner” (p. 68). The former rule forces Menard to write his *Quixote* not from his authorship, but from the psychology of its characters. This must of course be cancelled out by the secondary rule, which is fidelity to the original text. Menard cannot but fail in this endeavor. As such, in Menard’s practice of essaying the *Quixote*, what he writes must be undone by the act of writing it, because what is written is not the original *Quixote*. Menard’s project is in itself a performative contradiction. These contradictory rules are also indicative of a deeper problem with the practice; Menard observes, “it is not in vain that three hundred years have gone by, filled with exceedingly complex events. Among them, to mention only one, is the *Quixote* itself” (p. 68). Menard is attempting to compose a book that already exists; it is a writing that is unable to bring its object into being of the written word, because it is an event that has already past. Any attempt to compose the *Quixote* itself is not the *Quixote* itself, only the impossibility of its return.

Nothing then is produced by Menard. Not only because the task is impossible but also because Menard destroys any evidence of his labors. The narrator states that Menard would make a “merry bonfire” (p. 70) of his notebooks even though “He multiplied draft upon draft, revised tenaciously and tore up thousands of manuscript pages” (p. 70). Menard wishes to eschew all authorship of his endeavor. As the narrator explains, Menard “decided to anticipate the vanity awaiting all man’s efforts” (p. 70) and thwarted the assumption of an individual’s mastery over written word. It is an *invisible* work, in sharp contrast to the story’s beginning which is a bibliography of the “*visible* work of Menard” (p. 64) which are his published writings. Thus, Menard’s essaying is no exteriorization of his mind or ability, but something else entirely.

Even if it were a “visible” work, is Menard’s project simply an act of plagiarism, the cardinal sin of any university or educational institution? Menard is after all endeavoring to write a book, word for word, that already exists. Given the infamy of the *Quixote*, this would be a rather poor attempt at plagiarism and a brazenly obvious copy. However, that is not Menard’s method; he does not transcribe the text but seeks to write it itself without reference to it, which is not possible. Most importantly, Menard actively denies any claim to authorship over his attempts by destroying their traces. The principles of Menard’s endeavors—a denial of authorship, composing without copying—are at odds with the objectives of plagiarism. The plagiarist’s objective is not to do the work but to be credited with it. Menard’s objectives are entirely different: he endeavors without seeking to produce anything nor to be credited with the production of anything. It is worth reflecting upon why plagiarism is so impermissible in the mechanics of teaching and learning; it is because it is the false accreditation of learning, whether knowledge or skill, to an individual. As such, Menard’s attempts are very much outside the remit of the learner’s stakes who essays in order to better understand or to personalize or to externalize their knowledge. It also not in the studier’s remit, for Menard is *not* able to, which is not to be able not to and able to.

But why even write it? Why would Menard partake in such an impossible task and seek not to be credited for his labors? Menard elects to essay the text precisely because he *does not know* the *Quixote*; “My general recollection of the *Quixote*, simplified by forgetfulness and indifference, can well equal the imprecise and prior image of a book not yet written” (p. 67). It is not a literary work that he personally considers essential or knows well. In endeavoring to write the *Quixote*, he refuses the ease of writing the chapters of it he does know. He endeavors to write a written book because he does not know it and because he must write what it is, without knowing what it is that it is. It is an exercise in futility. But Menard is merely a fictitious character in a short story about an imagined effort to write a book that already exists, the nameless narrator does consign this fictitious endeavor to the immortality of the printed word. The narrator confesses, “I often imagine that he did finish it and that I read the *Quixote*—all of it—as if Menard had conceived it” (p. 66). The narrator describes what he understands Menard’s efforts to write the *Quixote* as a “palimpsest”: “through which the traces—tenuous but not indecipherable—of our friend’s ‘previous’ writing should be translucently visible” (p. 70). But this is only the narrator’s attempts to recreate Menard’s hidden labors in an effort “to justify this absurdity” (p. 65). Indeed, the narrator concludes of Menard’s project that he “(perhaps without wanting to) has enriched, by means of a new technology the halting and rudimentary art of reading” (p. 71). And so, in writing, Menard was all along only reading and failing to obtain the *Quixote*.

II. Studenthood: Ontologically and Epistemologically Considered

Pierre Menard's endeavors are of another kind from the studier. Menard is *not capable*. It is *impossible*. He acts, by *essaying*, without knowing and cannot come to know. This is the frustrated, paradoxical, and confounding state of the student: studenthood. It confounds liberal and neoliberal narratives of education. The student is also not quite the *studier*, who experiences the as not of education. The student or the state of studenthood it is . Studenthood is what I find not only in Lyotard's oeuvre as a whole, but especially in the ethico-ontology of Lyotard's writing on *in-fans*, *l'enfance*, the poor English translation of "childhood," or the more accurate English translation "infancy".

To consider this state of studenthood, contra the learner and not the studier, I will first reflect upon the many and various gestures of and toward *infancy* in Lyotard's work. Then I will consider the ontological dimensions of infancy for Lyotard. This will help me to contemplate how studenthood arises from the ethico-ontology I see in Lyotard's writing on infancy and its epistemological constraints. In this discussion, I will refer back to Pierre Menard's endeavors as an example of studenthood and how it differs from the figure of infant/child in educational literature.—Note that giving an example of study differs from the figure of study in Study Trace No. 2. The former illustrates a concept, the latter tells a story of a story of a study of a story.—I refer back to the commitments of (neo)liberal notions of education to demonstrate that studenthood, simultaneously within and without this narrative of education, confounds it projects.

What is l'enfance?

Childhood, "l'enfance", *infans* or most accurately translated, infancy, haunts the Lyotardian oeuvre from even as early as the lectures of *Why Philosophize?* (delivered in French in 1964, published in English in 2013a) and past *The Differend* (1988), most notably in the collection *Lectures d'enfance* (1991b, or *Readings in Infancy*, the forthcoming English translation). It would be misleading to present *l'enfance* as a stable and consistent notion in Lyotard's work; the term signifies a multiplicity of iterations. The phrase itself *l'enfance* is ambiguous. In French, *l'enfance* can mean both infancy and childhood, whereas in the English language we distinguish between

the two stages of human development. However, in Lyotard's work, what is called infancy is not developmental, but a recurring and persistent state. The emphasis is on *the lack of speech*, so the English "infancy" is a better term for this notion and when discussing Lyotard's works I will use that here.

The most explicit treatment that Lyotard gives "*infans*" is the likewise titled one-page introduction to *Lectures d'enfance* (1991b). The collection of essays in the volume veers on eclecticism, with papers on authors from Kafka, Arendt, Sartre, Joyce, Freud, to Valéry. But for Lyotard there is something of *infancy* to be read in all of them. Lyotard defines this thread in the negative, stating what it is not:

What does not speak. An infancy that is not an age of life and does not pass. It haunts discourse. The latter does not cease to put it aside, it is its separation. But it stubbornly persists thereby in constituting it, as lost. Unknowingly, therefore, it shelters it. It is its remainder...

(Translation by Fynsk, 2007, p. 137; Lyotard, 1991b, non-paginated)

How Lyotard defines infancy, or rather fails to define infancy, is of importance here. Lyotard negates the definition of *infancy* (*l'enfance*). In its everyday understating as a development stage of a human life. It defies the signification of the phrase. This move in itself gestures toward what Lyotard means when he invokes "infancy": it is beyond what can be said and yet he attempts to *speak it*, to phrase it.

Lyotard, the perennial old sophist, in subtle ways encourages the reader to read "infancy" quite literally in its everyday meaning. There is *The Postmodern Explained to Children: Correspondence 1982-1985* (published in French in 1986, and in English in 1992). Children playing in the surf decorate the cover, their pudgy little bodies in primal squats tinkering in the sand. The titular letters, however, were never sent; in ire they are addressed to the children of colleagues, one of which is addressed to his own son David, the addressee of "Gloss on Resistance" (Lyotard, 1992). On the 2013 English translation of Lyotard's 1964 lectures at the Sorbonne, *Why Philosophize?*, a child's legs dangle from a tree. Most earnestly is what Lyotard invokes in the short, occasional text "Spaceship" (Lyotard, 1995) as mentioned in Chapter Three. It is somewhat autobiographical and centers on David who recites poems and dreams of flying a rocket to a planet in order to escape his homework. In this little text, explicitly about education, what is invoked by the figure of the child converges with our everyday understanding. Yet it confounds what it is be liberally educated:

To educate is to lead out. The moderns have stressed the efforts necessary to lead and let oneself be led out of nature toward language. But “out” is possibly not “outside”. It is no doubt within, far inside. One cannot reach it by uprooting oneself but by plunging deep within, toward what is most intimate, where lies desire. The child knows a lot more than we do about this state of dependency not only in relation to adults, but to what he cherishes in itself, with or against “big people,” well or badly. (Lyotard, 1995, p. xx)

Here the *child* surpasses the grown up, quite the inverse of educational thought, and indeed *cherishing* is the quiet locus of obligation in infancy. I will return again to these sincere words on education to gesture toward what I read as a “studenthood” in his works of infancy. This will be considered against the notion of the studier and the liberal learner to demonstrate that rather than fulfilling the promises of (neo)liberalism or to dwell in the (im)potentiality of human freedom, studenthood confounds it. It is within and without what it is to educate.

First, however, I will demonstrate the many iterations of infancy in Lyotard’s works: the infantile body, indebtedness, and indeterminate. This will lead into discussion of its ontological and epistemic implications. All of this I will use to gesture toward what I call studenthood, that acting without knowing, that cherishing without reason, which is the reason for and the undoing of liberal education, Pierre Menard’s absurd task.

Infantile Body

In “Prescription,” the essay on Kafka’s “In the Penal Colony” in *Lectures d’Enfance* (1991b), Lyotard quotes the officer’s explanation of the text inscribed by the Harrow on the prisoner’s body: ““Yes... it’s no calligraphy for school children [*es ist keine Schönschrift für Schulkinder*]. It needs to be *studied* closely” (Kafka as ctd. In Lyotard, 1991b, p. 182, emphasis added)¹⁹. That the voyager cannot read, is not able to decipher the text inscribed by way of execution in the unsettling short story, is for Lyotard an example of the differend between the body and the law.—To reiterate, as presented in Chapter Three the differend is the state of silence, of a wrong between two phrasing genres deprived of a rule to link unto the silent phrase.— That the manor of execution in “The Penal Colony” is carved into the body, suffered upon the body, unreadable words etched into flesh, so that the law must be *felt* in its very illegibility. It must *be*

¹⁹ Alas, my copy reads “to be perused closely” (Kafka, 1992, p. 29); here I use Lyotard’s citation because it suggests that this aporia invokes studying, *to act without knowing*.

studied. Lyotard infers, “the law needs the body, its own dwelling upon the body, as well as the body’s resistance to it, in order to inscribe itself, that is, to execute itself” (1991b, p. 185). This necessary opposition, this inescapable otherness between the body and the law, is the site of an ethical demand and where thought can begin, from this suffering. As Emine Sarikartal (2019) notes, Lyotard’s use of *infans* connotes two meanings: the infant who cannot speak I discussed above, but also a secondary judicial meaning, an innocent unable to exercise rights under Roman law.

The affective dimensions of infancy can also be found in “The Affect-Phrase”, where Lyotard (2006) explores whether affect, the feeling of either pleasure or pain, can be a phrase within his philosophy of the differend.—As summarized in Chapter Three, Lyotard’s (1988) philosophy of the differend is comprised of phrases, which are the smallest unit of being. Anything that is a phrase and is more or less situated in a genre according to rules of usage.—He concludes that affect *is* a phrase, it is merely an unarticulated phrase. What is of importance here is how the affect-phrase is phrased. Again in the philosophy of the differend, a phrase is presented in a universe when a sense is accorded to a referent by an addressor to an addressee (1988). But if an affect-phrase, a feeling²⁰ of pleasure or pain, is inarticulate, how can it be said to be addressed by these axes of presentation? Who addresses what to whom if the phrase is not articulate? The affect-phrase confounds these axes of presentation. As it is only the feeling of pleasure or pain, it cannot have a referent; affect is nothing beyond itself yet it can be the referent of an articulated phrase. Once articulated, the affect-phrase is no longer the affect in itself. But how is the affect-phrase addressed? To ask the question is not in keeping with affect; “the affect-phrase is not addressed to somebody. The capacity to feel pleasure and pain, affectivity, *aesthèsis*, is independent of its possible articulation” (p. 109). Affect *is* without being any *thing* in particular; in fact it is making of affect a referent, rendering it to situation, speaking it, that affect is no longer felt. But why does this matter? What does this have to do with the infantile body, or with Kafka?

The intersection of body and discourse, of *phônè* and *logos*²¹, comes in the closing of “The Affect-phrase”: “Childhood, like Adam, does not know that it is naked. And inasmuch as the *logos*

²⁰ It should be noted that when I use the term “feeling” I do not mean it in its everyday understanding as an emotion, such as sadness or anger. This would be too much steeped into an individual’s narrative. By “feeling,” I refer to the sensory capacity to feel things, which in Lyotard’s writings in “The Affect Phrase” (2006) is only given along the spectrum of pleasure and pain.

²¹ In “The Affect-phrase,” Lyotard adopts Aristotle’s distinction in *De Anima* (1907) between the animal voice, *phônè*, and the rational voice of humans, *logos*. Lyotard uses these terms to distinguish the affective infancy of the body in

conceals *phôné* (covers or dresses it) rather than either suppressing or domesticating it, this shameless innocence can always arise in the course of articulated phrases, in an impromptu manner” (p. 110). This is the inverse of what is presented in “Prescription”, where law (of discourse, of reason) executes itself on the body as a violent demand, against which the body is defenseless, inscribed without the ability to understand or decipher it. In “The Affect-phrase” it is the opposite way round; the infantile body, its very sensibility, its openness to feeling, this inarticulate pleasure/pain erupts and unsettles discourse, which has already claimed and named the body as a referent. The body, born into a world of names and referents before it can know or speak those phrases, and discourse, undressed by what it cannot speak. The body is a site of infancy, for it is within and without the world of phrases, its initial *in-fans* remains.

I say, without irony, that for Lyotard, what he speaks of with infancy is nothing less than and nothing more than our souls. In *Anima Minima*, he states, “sensation is also the affection that ‘the subject’—one should say: the body/thought, which I shall call *anima*—feels on the occasion of a sensible event” (1997, p. 242). The distinction between soul and subject here is important and is a theme that reoccurs in Lyotard’s thought. For example, in “Sensus Communis,” (1991c) the text that invoked the study that began this drifting, Lyotard speaks of the aesthetic feeling as that which discombobulates the *I*’s mastery, knowledge, and will: “Substance can’t make itself into subject. It is essential to the subject to misrecognize itself as substance” (p. 22). There is the sense in Lyotard’s writing’s that the subject, the *I*, is always trying to catch up to the *anima*, to make the stuff of itself subject to its knowledge, to a concept, which would be to call it infancy in the first place! But what is essential is this, “The *anima* exists only as affected. Sensation, whether likable or detestable, also announces to the *anima* that it would not even be, that is would remain inanimate, had nothing affected it” (1997, p. 242).

Indebted

Infancy is doubly marked by debt. In the above, Lyotard has made clear that were it not for what affects it, the *anima* would not *be*. Lyotard repeats the theme in “The Survivor”; “It is the

the *phôné*, which is made a referent by the *logos*. The differend between the two, their inability to be translated, render the affect-phrase inarticulate. It should be noted that in addition to Aristotle, Freud’s (1914) notion of the human infant’s egoless polymorphous perversity also aids Lyotard’s conceptualization of the human infant’s predicament, born into a world of language, made a referent of discourse before the child can speak.

enigma of there being a relation with what has no relation; that is, in knowing that it is born and dies, the soul (aptly named) bears witness to the fact that there is not only what is (what it is) but the other of what is" (1991b, p. 148). In order *not* to consign what is (what animates the anima) to nihilism, to what we owe ourselves and all thought, it is then a question of bearing witness; Lyotard says "I understand childhood [infancy] here as obedience to a debt" (p. 149, this English translation uses the term "childhood" instead of infancy). It is not only the feeling of debt itself but acting out of this state of impoverishment, acting without knowing; at the end of "Sensus Communis" Lyotard makes an injunction on the task of arts, letters, and thought; "It is the task of literatures and arts, the task of what is called writing, to reinscribe it according to its miserable state, without filling it full, and without getting rid of it" (1991c, p. 24). The *it* here is the infantile affect and this is a call that Lyotard makes in many of his writings on philosophy and aesthetics.

Infancy, as such, is to be found in arts and letters. Bear in mind that *Lectures d'enfance* translates to *readings* in infancy. In "Retour" or the English translation, "Return upon the Return," on Joyce's *Ulysses* (1991b, 1999), Lyotard uses the analogy of sexual difference to consider the initiatory force of ontological difference.—The ontological meaning of which I shall focus upon more in the following.—This initiatory event of difference is irredeemable, unreturnable. It is that which language can only skirt around, "And is it not writing that attempts, desperately, to formulate an answer to this remainder to which the soul is held hostage?" (p. 204). What has been incited affectively, so experienced in infancy incites a debt one attempts to pay off through the act of writing in itself. For Lyotard, the "polymorphous or metamorphous prose" (p. 197) of Joyce is an "anti-aesthetic work" (p. 198). It attempts to put in writing, or rather allow the classical aesthetics of writing to be confounded by what language cannot speak: "Through this breach, one begins to perceive a non-world, a desert where a voice calls out in peremptory fashion, saying nothing more than, 'Listen'" (p. 198).—Likewise, in Kafka's (1992) story "The Penal Colony" on which Lyotard meditates in "Prescription" (1999) what is inscribed on the body is the command "Be just!", endowing infancy with a certain ethical dimension (which I will consider more in the following chapter).—Writing will always be trying to *write off this debt*, what cannot be put into words what must be felt, its inarticulateness making an uncomfortable home in discourse.

Indeterminate

Thus far what has been called infancy in Lyotard's work has been spoken of affectively and as an intractable site in language that incites a debt. How to work off this debt is another question that Lyotardian infancy poses. In "Survivor" (1999), which is a commentary on Arendt's natality, Lyotard suggests that the faculty of judgement comes forth this state of infancy. This is done in comparison to Arendt's natality, which for Lyotard is far too humanist and anthropological a reading of Kantian reflective judgement. Indeed Arendt (1978) suggests that aesthetic taste, because it cannot be proven and only argued is the grounding for political life and action. Lyotard distances himself from this "abusively sociologizing reading of Kant's *sensus communis*" (1991c, p. 162). The debt inscribed in infancy, is for Lyotard, a call for judgment. As demonstrated in Chapter Four, and below, for Lyotard the indeterminacy of aesthetic judgement (from that feeling of infancy) is "judged without criterion" (p. 162). There is no final word on infancy, there is no recourse to knowledge, it can only be guided by the *as if*.

To Savor Being

I have considered *infans* as the indeterminate, the ineffable, the affective tumult at what is beyond the closure of knowledge and language. So what *is* it? The question betrays the problem that must be considered before moving along: it is a question of being, of ontology. Lyotard's oeuvre is not often ascribed to the subcategories of philosophy divided into "ism"s or "ology"s, exempting of course the false moniker "postmodernism". Yet, this infantile figure that haunts the trajectory of Lyotard's writing career, bleeds into quiet questions of ontology—being and not being. Lyotard edges upon these questions softly, indirectly, and playfully, hardly stating that it is ontology in which he is engaged. However faintly it is inscribed in Lyotard's writing, there is an underlying ontology. It is perhaps more correctly called a *cherishing of being*. I will consider these ontological themes in Lyotard's works from *The Differend* to "Survivor" and the intersection with infancy. This will inform my intervention into liberal arts education, the liberal art of studenthood, contra the figures of the learner and the studier.

While most secondary literature on *The Differend* concerns itself with irresolvable conflicts induced by the linking of phrases, there is first the *phrase* in Lyotard's philosophy of the differend.

What a phrase is in Lyotard's philosophy of phrases demonstrates the undertone of ontology on this work. To summarize again, in the philosophy of the differend there are phrases that must be linked together within a phrase universe, from addressor to addressee, a sense afforded to a referent (Lyotard, 1998). But what is a phrase? It is not only a linguistic unit, but the smallest, most indubitable unit of being. This is slyly done in *The Differend*, no grand proclamations of ontology, but an almost blithe reference to Descartes: "It does not result from the phrase, *I doubt*, that I am, merely that there has been a phrase" (p. 59, §94). For Lyotard, it is that the phrase of doubt happens that signifies that *there is*. It is doubt that there is, that in itself, signifies that there is not nothing. Doubt is a phrase. All that is is a phrase:

Here are some phrases... It's daybreak; Give me the lighter; Was she there?; They fought till their last round of ammunition; May he escape the heavy weather!; Is the phrase/There is a phrase/denotative?; $ax^2 + bx + c = 0$; Ouch!; But I just wanted to... ; Perhaps you thought that I...?; There is a phrase; This is not a phrase; Here are some phrases. (1988, p. 69, §109)

Phrases are not only sentences of language but physical occurrences as well; as mentioned above, Lyotard (2006) expands phrases to the affect-phrase, occurrences of feeling that are inarticulate. It is crucial to note that in the above, Lyotard does not provide a definition of a phrase, but phrases. That is because it is the indubitability that *there is a phrase*.

What is difficult to disentangle is the phrase presentation and the presentation of the presented phrase. The phrase in itself is its own presentation: "It should be said by way of simplification that a phrase presents what it is about, the case, *ta pragmata*, which is its referent; what is signified about the case, the sense, *der Sinn*; that to which or addressed to which this is signified about the case, the addressee that 'through' which or in the name of which this is signified about the case, the addressor" (1988, p. 14, §25). But also, "The presentation entailed by a phrase-case it not presented in the universe that this phrase presents (but it may be marked in the phrase, for example by *There is*). It is not situated. But another phrase-case can present it in another universe and thereby situate it" (1988, p. 71, §116). Does the phrase present itself? Or must it rely on another phrase to be presented? Yes and yes.

A phrase can and does present itself. It relies on another phrase to situate it "The presentation of a phrase allows itself to be determined by genres only if it is situated in the universe of another phrase, that is, as a presented presentation. That is why genres of presentation, if there are any, are presentable only as genres of situation" (p. 71, §117). The phrase presents itself, it is

raw. The presentation of that presented phrase endows its sense in a genre of phrasing. It is in the situation of the phrase, where its presentation is lost, because what is experienced in the situating of the phrase is only the referent of the phrase, and not the presentation itself. To disentangle this further, Lyotard interrupts his discussion on phrasing by the first “Notice” on Kant in *The Differend*; the notice begins with a reference to paragraphs §115, 117 whereby Lyotard suggests that the presentation of a phrase can fall prey to “metaphysical illusion” (p. 61) by making of a presentation a situating of the phrase. Kant’s *Darstellung* is a situating of a phrase, *not* a phrase’s presentation as Lyotard glosses it, and as such falls into the trappings of the subject who tries to “deal with” (p. 61) the presentation of the phrase. For Lyotard, Kant’s *Darstellung* is a situation of a phrase because it “is the conjunction of two phrases from differend regimens” (p. 64). Indeed Kant’s *Darstellung* (1987) is the linchpin of imagination and/or intuition and rational ideas through an aesthetic idea. What is the problem with this for Lyotard? Lyotard continually points out that presentation is not presented *to a subject*. Kant’s *Darstellung* is the linkage of phrases by a subject, comparing feeling with a rule of reason. For Lyotard Kant’s *Darstellung* is such a situating of a phrase; “The question of the *There is*, momentarily evoked on the occasion of the sensible given, is quickly forgotten for the question of what there is” (1988, p. 65).

What does this mean or matter ontologically speaking? As Rodolphe Gasché (2001) astutely notes, in Lyotard’s discussion of presentation in *The Differend* is the first mention of the sublime. As Gasché comments on Lyotard’s synthesis of presentation, it is the occurrence of the phrase that is sublime, wherein “a fundamental indeterminacy comes to light” (p. 118). And this circles back on what to do (or what cannot be done) with “the question of what there is” after the feeling that “*There is*”. Again there is the presentation of the phrase, which is indubitable, and then the presentation of the presentation which is its situation. This is dubitable.—Gasché, I think, puts too much emphasis on the secondary or following phrase. As Gasché notes that Lyotard points out, the presentation of a phrase, begs for another phrase. Lyotard states “For there to be no phrase is impossible, for there to be *And a phrase* is necessary. It is necessary to make linkage. This is not an obligation... but a necessity. To link is necessary but how to link is not” (1988, p. 66, §102). Gasché takes from this that the necessity of the *And a phrase* is without doubt; Gasché states “‘*And a phrase*’ is thus the ‘ultimate’ that escapes universal doubt” (2001, p. 119). I wish to qualify this statement a bit more. Lyotard also states “One phrase calls forth another, whichever it may be. It is this, the passage, time and the phrase (the time in the phrase, the phrase in time) that survives

the test of doubt. Neither the sense of a phrase nor its reality are indubitable. Its sense, because it is suspended to a link with another phrase which will explain it.” (1988, p. 66, §101). Again, that doubt happens cannot be doubted. The necessity for another phrase, which is the situating of the presentation of the phrase, inscribing it with a sense or as a referent of reality are *full of doubt* as Lyotard says “neither” are “indubitable”. So they are dubious. But doubt after all, is phrase, which cannot be doubted: *Doubt is doubt is doubt is doubt. But what is doubt? Doubting the is of the is. Feeling that there is not, could be not.*—It is an unassuming ontology. But it is one. Lyotard states: “Being would be a case, an occurrence, the ‘fact’ that is happens to ‘fall,’... Not Being, but one being, one time” (1988, p. 70, §113). The phrase is *a being*. The *And a phrase*, also is but incites doubt as a situation of the presentation. There is no one way to link phrases together.

As Gasché notes, the presentation of the phrase, which is full of feeling, is where “the notion of the sublime enters the ontological problematic” (2001, p. 112) in Lyotard’s philosophy of the phrase.—So Kant enters the stage yet again. It is the aesthetic of the sublime, out of which Kant attempts to make a situating of the phrase: the ideas of Reason can tame the sublime feeling that there is something which is incomprehensible (1987). But as Lyotard studies Kant, it is the “manner” by which Kant makes “manifest” the reflective judgement of the sublime in the critique that interests him (1994, p. 8).—But what does this (sublime) feeling of doubt of the *There is* in the *And there is* have anything to say ontologically? Lyotard says “For *And a phrase* to be necessary signifies that the absence of a phrase (a silence, etc.) or the absence of linkage ... are also phrases. What distinguishes these particular phrases from other? Equivocality, feeling” (1988, p. 68, §105). *Feeling is a phrase*. It is an affect-phrase. But what is felt in this feeling this is? Of course, the answer to this question, provoked in this anticipatory feeling, is its situating, its sense given to a referent. This linking together, this stitching in a chain of phrases, this taming of feeling is nothing more and nothing less than “the abyss of Not-Being which opens between phrase” (p. 66, §99). As Gasché summarizes this necessity to link, to string a case of being with another case of being, for which there are no rules, there is the terror that *there might not be*; “The possibility of nonoccurrence, that the phrase may not have happened, is structurally implied by the presentation-event” (2001, p. 121). Nothing always haunts the *There is*. I think that Gasché is correct in suggesting that Lyotard’s sublime is steeped in ontology. I merely wish to further flesh this out, and in doing so, *infancy* must return.

In the essay “Survivor”, as mentioned above in relation to indebtedness and indeterminacy. Lyotard invokes the sublime but also the beautiful to encapsulate what might be *more than* a mere survivor: “With the beautiful, it is pure happiness, the miracle of promise; but the sublime, it is its impossibility, the imminent threat of non-being. The beautiful is an event of birth; the sublime, one of death” (1999, p. 155).—Recall, that in Part II: As If, I demonstrated that it is not *only* the sublime in which Lyotard finds what defies “concept and will” (Lyotard, 1991c), but also the beautiful, for it too is a feeling (one that is pleasurable), an affect-phrase, a phrase-case which *is*.—Betwixt birth and death, but twice in relation to non-being, is how Lyotard begins this essay on what survives; “The word *survivor* implies that an entity that is dead or ought to be is still alive” (p. 144). But what is Lyotard talking about, what survives? It is not a person. But what is, a phrase. What must it survive? The trappings of metaphysical illusions—Recall that in the above the situating of a presentation, such as Kant’s *Darstellung*, wherein the presentation of a phrase is made a referent of another phrase in order to situate it within a genre of phrasing (to capture it in reason, concepts or ideas) is to fall prey to “metaphysical illusion” (1998, p. 61)—of which Lyotard ascribes to Hegel, Husserl, and Kant (1999, p. 145-146). What connects the philosophies signified by these proper names for Lyotard? A philosophy of the subject, which is made out of a lack of trust, or even a lack of faith, in the being that is being-there in the phrase itself. How does the *what is* (affect-phrase, phrase-case) get lost in these philosophies of the subject, how is it made to be twice in relation to non-being?—Recall again that each phrase necessitates the *And a phrase*, thus opening to the abyss of non-being. *What is not* is always the shadow in the water for *what is*.—But as Lyotard glosses these philosophies of the subject, *what is* is twice related to what is not. On Hegel, Lyotard finds in phenomenology of the subject a sublation of the instant, all moments must be phrased as a past moment by the subject. In Husserl, the consciousness likewise must present a phrase presentation as lost; Lyotard on this wonders “whether something is not forgotten in this turning back on the no longer... a remainder that does not remain” (1999, p. 145). This, Lyotard qualifies as making of being an “as yet being” (1999, p. 145), which is not to trust its being. In Kant, much like in *Darstellung*, the unwieldy aesthetic feeling resists Kant’s attempt to universalize. In sum, for Lyotard, this all equates to a lack of trust in the presentation of the phrase, “beginning is reckoned, through melancholia, as an illusion. What comes to life... is already doomed... The inversion of appearances can give rise to metaphysics” (1999, p. 146). By trying “not to betray presence” (1999, p. 147), in presenting every being as already lost or *as yet being*

whether through the phenomenology of the spirit, of consciousness, or a “desolate” (1999, p. 145) epistemology, thought (metaphysics, situating a phrase) betrays being. It does not trust the phrase-case and its sign in affective silence.

This brings us to what Lyotard is trying to do with the titular survivor, to impugn Western thought’s “keeping watch over the perpetual retreat of true being” (1999, p. 147). By demonstrating the lack of faith in being-there, Lyotard aims to “invert the stress on disappearance” (1999, p. 147). How not to give into melancholy? It is in the *is* itself, which before its presented presentation, which is without articulation, affective and a site of indeterminacy and indebtedness: *infancy!* Lyotard offers that the way to relieve what is only a survivor under the philosophy of the subject, to allow what is to be what it is: “this thinking about life as enigma of beginning is acceptable only if it is a matter of a scruple, but neither of remission nor of any challenge. The scruple of an *as if*” (1999, p. 148).—Recall in Part II, the analogous clause of *as if* that closed Study Trace No. 1, that concluded, not with a concept, but the humble question “What is left but to study?”.—It is infancy, for Lyotard, that is a reprieve from Western’s melancholic treatment of the being-there as what is already lost, and must be made presentable by cognition, will, consciousness. This indubitable unit of being, what is born before it is only a survivor Lyotard inscribes at an affective level: a “singular ontological savor (that taste)” (1999, p. 146).—That Lyotard is discussing Kant’s epistemology here and describes the phrase-case as *taste* is not insignificant. For it is this unwieldy affectivity and its reflection that Lyotard hears a differend in Kant’s attempt to tame aesthetic taste with an Idea of reason.—It is only in *infancy* that being can be savored. While this savoring necessitates another phrase, the *And a phrase* (which is full of doubt), it can only be savored as it is in feeling and without knowing. Infancy, in debt to being and what is other to it, which is non-being, suffering the Law (of language, of discourse) because it cannot be articulated within it. It necessitates a cherishing that there is, even if it is undecipherable, illegible, unable to be known, it can at least be felt. Difference is what incites thought. Already there is a problem, a transgression must occur in cherishing. We, endowed with logos, are terrible keepers. *And a phrase* must follow *a phrase*, how to bridge over the non-being that casts its shadow over every phrase? Without betraying it? Cast aside concerns for fidelity, but for an *as if* that cherishes what is. This is the uneducational paradigm of the student; hope is not to found for the future but in the present.

This exposition seems to have veered considerably from the remit of this chapter, which is to speak of studenthood ontologically and epistemologically against and as distinct from the learner and the studier in the remit of liberal arts. The tides of studenthood, their gravitational pull, come from that indebtedness to the infantile, that affective savor of being, up and against what is but is not yet anything.

Studenthood

In Lyotard's writings of infancy I find a figure that escapes the trappings of learning, whether that be the superficial performativity of the neoliberal learner or the teleological erasure of the student in narratives of liberal learning. This other educational space I call *studenthood*.— A riff on the erroneous English translation of *l'enfance* as childhood, for the simple reason that *studency* would be strange on the Anglophone tongue.— Studenthood is a state of not knowing, working from this state of not knowing, that does not culminate in knowing. It is to dwell in the realm of aesthetic judgement, guided only by an *as if*. First, however, I will look to two examples of studenthood, two real and one from literature. This is not to illustrate the concept, but rather to dramatize studenthood, its mode of thinking, reading, writing, and reflective judgement.

I return now to Study Trace No. 2 above, which interrupted the discussion on the learner versus the studier with little explanation. It is an essay on an essay, or at least a fictitious account of an essay. Here, I would like to reflect upon what is studious in Pierre Menard's endeavors. What underscores the entire absurd project, wherein Menard cannot but fail in transforming his hazy notion of the *Quixote* into the *Quixote*, is working from a state of not knowing, that does not culminate in knowing. Why are Pierre Menard's endeavors thwarted by their very endeavoring? He attempts to, but finds he is unable to, write the *Quixote* itself *without making it a referent of his essay*. What is this but the ontological precondition for thinking, writing, reading, all practice of art in Lyotard's infancy? Again, the phrase escapes all doubt, it is the necessary *And a phrase* that incites doubt, making the phrase a referent of a genre of discourse. Recall that Menard sought to write "the *Quixote* itself" (Borges, 2000, p. 68). What is this but the inability to render the *itself* of the phrase, of the *a being*, to the written word? As Geoffrey Bennington (2000) traces Lyotard's notion of infancy through his oeuvre, Lyotard shifts from trying to pinpoint *difference itself*, to *what is itself* in Lyotard's writing on infancy; "This work opens the difficult prospect of an

untranslatable attention to *le même même*, the same same, the same itself, the itself, the same, even, the itself, even, the even, even and so on” (p. 90). Infancy, as Bennington puts it, asks the question of how the immanent can survive its exclusion from and within the realm of discourse. This is the open wound from whence discourse operates, the affective sense that there is and attempting to testify to the itself, the phrase case, a unit of being. The indeterminate that cannot be rendered into discourse, what is inscribed in language without being language and can only be studied. Menard, in his absurd task is coming upon the paradox of studenthood, its endeavoring is its undoing.

Christopher Fynsk (2007) was and is a student of Lyotard’s in both senses. After Lyotard’s death in 1998, Fynsk writes about the ironies of making a legacy out of Lyotard’s many writings; the notion in itself betrays Lyotard’s attempts not to make a systematic philosophical work. In this eulogy of sorts, Fynsk writes intimately of his relationship to Lyotard as his student: “Jean-François’s legacy is indistinguishable from his presence: that playful, seductive, mocking, brilliant, sophistic, always engaging, always loving presence” (p. 46). Fynsk also writes as someone who has spent a great deal of time studying Lyotard’s texts. To remember Lyotard’s *infancy*, Fynsk reflects on an assignment Lyotard gave him: to translate the text of “Prescription,” (1991b) the essay on Kafka’s (1992) short story “In the Penal Colony” I reference at the start of this chapter. Fynsk recollects the encounter:

I don’t know what prompted it but I know that it ended with the following words to me: ‘I sense this infancy is very strong in you.’ A scene from childhood, one might say; it marked me with an affect that was at once apprehension and infantile pride. But I hardly knew what to do with it... I simply did not grasp what it might mean that he had prescribed for me an essay on infancy, not even a month’s habitation with that text. (p. 46)

The irony undercutting this task that Lyotard set is that Fynsk had consciously avoided that particular collection of essays and that theme in Lyotard’s writing. While Fynsk gives a very thorough overview of infancy in Lyotard’s thought, here I merely want to emphasize what in Fynsk’s experience might be called a studenthood. He states of this exercise, “I had to *do* before understanding” (p. 48). And it was precisely this manner of doing before knowing, before understanding, not even having recourse to an anticipated outcome or end, that makes the task a studious one. Fynsk describes how the task of doing without knowing changed the encounter between he and Lyotard, him and Lyotard’s writing:

And I would come to understand, belatedly, that if his ‘translate this’ was binding in its pedagogical force, it also had a freeing intent. Ultimately it meant: ‘Translate

this infancy from your own. Bring it to writing.’ The assignment would fully emerge only after its goal had been realized. (p. 47)

Here Fynsk demonstrates the precarious place of studenthood in education, which is particularly telling in the last line of the above. Note that Fynsk does not use the future anterior in the last sentence, but the past perfect in the phrase: “had been realized”. He is only able to situate, comment on it because it has passed, but first was acting without knowing. There are two dueling forces here, the first infantile and the second, that tries to render it to understanding, or to learning. The past perfect differs from the future anterior, but both render infancy/studenthood to learning/understanding. While Fynsk states that the task began in a state of infancy, of not knowing, and insists that the task of writing is to “Bring it [infancy] to writing”, this is transgressed in its realization. Studenthood persists as a paradox in education, what motivates and upends it, while education is what does away with the force of infancy, one has been educated when the confusion of infancy has been alleviated.

I sense something similar in Lyotard’s own studies, but with his trademark humor. I have stated before the import of the Kantian *Third Critique* for Lyotard’s writing on the differend, for infantile affect, but thus far this has been too much steeped in analysis. It must be remembered, that as Fynsk puts it, “Jean-François understood himself to be writing *from* an infancy and *to* an infancy” (p. 48). This we can hear from Lyotard himself in a rare autobiographical note in the text “Presence”(2012) (in these rare autobiographical notes, Lyotard seems to ever be cycling, in the following quote the bicyclist is himself). Lyotard speaks of his own studies of Kant:

Now if the bicyclist spends months, years on the third *Critique* with tiresome determination, is it not, among other reasons to make sure that in this final text, form is indeed no different than the schema—a pre-intelligible organization of the given—but that, contrary to schema, it frees itself from cognitive destination; that is so to speak, inexhaustible in a concept—‘inexponible’—and that it thus acquires, or should acquire, in the logic of Kant’s thought, a variety, scope, and quality that belong to the inconceivable? According to him, does Kant himself not oppose the productive power of the imagination of forms to its reproductive power, subjected to the cognitive functions, which exhausts itself in the constitution of schemata by preparing the sensory for the categories?

And so here comes our blue that states that no, that between the productive and reproductive one still does not reach art’s true difference, that one must look for it beyond forms? That these are still nothing more than forms of representation, when, in arts, one is dealing with presence—with or without forms? (p. 151)

What is studious in the above? What might be called a writing from and to infancy? Lyotard teases himself, shows his endeavors to be undone. It is how it is posed, not necessarily what is says, for the above says nothing. Any sense to be made is thwarted by the prose itself. The entirety of the above passage is posed as a question, and a question in the negation, *is it not?* The only thing that is expressed is a feeling of doubt, of an inability to state what is at stake. There is also a burst of infancy in the first line of the second paragraph, “here comes our blue”, a presence, a being, an affect-phrase, that only poses more questions. The writing reaches its own limit to write what it attempts to write.

What makes this passage all the more compelling is that it undoubtedly refers to his work in *Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime* (1994), which is a record of years of lecture notes on Kant’s third *Critique*. In the preface of this book, Lyotard warns “This is not a book but a collection of lessons” (non-paginated). What is enclosed is then the actual lectures he gave his students. I must confess that this particular collection of Lyotard’s writing/lectures impossible to make sense from. My own copy is dog-eared, filled with post-it notes, pencil markings, and every time I revisit it, it’s as if I must see it for the first time again. That is because does not say anything in particular; it is the trace of an act of study. Lyotard dedicates the book as “an awkward homage, and a farewell to this strange ‘profession’: one ‘teaches philosophy’ only by learning how to philosophize. Just as it is, I dedicate this collection to the students who for years have endured its working and reworking” (non-paginated). That Lyotard teases himself or this years-long study that he still can only speak of indeterminately is writing from and to infancy. Writing and reading have come to their limit and the only response is good humor and a continuous rewriting and rereading.

Who or what the neoliberal and liberal learner ought to be or do is always already decided. The performer of skill, the producer of outputs or the bearer of a cultural heritage, the executor of a rational will. Determinable through assessment, through the externalization of skill or knowledge that can be judged in accordance to ready-made criteria. The learner is such that the learner achieves whatever telos has been preordained by the stakes of the (neo)liberal educational project. The studier is entirely invested in education.

Studenthood however is entirely indeterminate, wholly uneducational, completely apedagogical. Studenthood is in the cracks and the fault lines of this thesis. In the differend between the analysis and the study trace. The differend between *hic et nunc*, and that *hic et nunc* rendered to a no longer. The differend between what is immanent and what it is for once it has

been degreased, tidied, sanitized. Studenthood defies liberal and neoliberal education. They must have it in order for education to have taken place. Studenthood is in what fails, but fails hopefully.

CHAPTER SIX

AFFECTIVE TESTIMONIALS

Studenthood, presented in the preceding chapter, is an (un)educational state altogether different from that of the learner and the studier. Rooted in Lyotard's writings on and of infancy, I have gestured toward this (un)educational state of acting without knowing and not coming to know. This is a state that persists; it cannot be educated out. Yet, this is the reason for education, to have done away with this ineffable, unknowledgeable state or in less transcendent accounts to at least render it meaningful, immanently educational. This is the *raison d'être* of liberal education; as discussed in Part I, liberal education seeks to efface this state. Progressivist accounts of liberal education, are invested in leading the student out of darkness and into the light of freedom and knowledge. The neoliberal iteration of liberal education is toward the development of the skills and transferable knowledge for leadership in global economy. A conservative account of liberal education is to endow the student with their cultural inheritance.—Again, by progressive and conservative here I do not invoke the political leanings, but rather describe these narrative orientations surrounding liberal education.—These disparate narrations converge in their attempts to efface the student; reliant on the logic of learning, not knowing is replaced with ever and increasing knowing of what is already known. Studenthood, however, varies from the figure of the studier in that studenthood is the state incited by an inability to know. This varies from accounts of the studier in educational scholarship, wherein knowing is experienced as not knowing, a neither/nor space of potential for knowledge (Lewis, 2013). This iteration of study is the experience of something that is in principle knowable. Studenthood, however, is incited by what is *not knowable*.

Even then, why study? Why even begin the unending task? What incites it? —To ask these questions bely already assumed stakes. The first, “Why study?”, belies a need for justification. There must be reason to justify the means, study. The second question, “Why even begin the

unending task?”, implies that *someone* might choose the task. These questions are *scholarly questions*, questions that, when answered, efface studenthood. To answer these questions with a justification is to step outside studenthood. To hear the echo of that silence by which study cannot justify itself, and to laugh, that is study. To define it as such is not to study, but to know what study is. As is the paradox of this thesis, which attempts to be *of study* and *from studenthood*, it is compelled by the stakes of a thesis to sometimes be *about studenthood and its study*, it transgresses study making it an object of discourse.

Some observations from the above verbal meander: hear, silence, echo, laugh, incitement. What are these but the themes of infancy? Infantile in that there is something affective, bodily to it: hearing, laughing. Infantile in that there is something that is without speech: a silence that echoes. Infantile in that it owes itself to something else: it is indebted. There are an awful lot of is's here, signifying that we are still within ontological stakes. To reiterate the preceding chapter, in Lyotard's philosophy of the phrase, the phrase is *a being*. That which is is a presentation. To know what it is, is to situate it, which is no longer the phrase. The phrase which is is only encounterable in infancy: affectively, indebtedly, indeterminately. To study is to act without knowing and so is to write in infancy. If the student is the other to education, here I shall consider the phenomenological and temporal ramifications of study, of affective testimony, to suggest that studying as such confounds temporal projects of education. But first, to drift from analysis, the demands of a thesis, an act of study:

STUDY TRACE NO. 3

The punctuationless, syntaxless, unpaginated, formless, quasi-poetic-quasi-prose fragments of writings titled “To Burdened Writing,” or the more sonorous French, “À l'écrit bâti”, is the most extreme experiment you will have ever read in the body of work called Lyotard. You find it in *Misère de la Philosophie*, the leaves of the book open to these pages and your eye is taken by the expanse of white. Nothing on the page, except a square of text in the center, but mostly the page is engulfed in absence. It says nothing to you. You can hardly make the French out. You misread the title; “Weighted Words”. There is no sense to be had from these pages. You cannot even take a note on it. It was a glimmer, a dalliance, a half-remembered and hazy afternoon's reading. And yet, a child's feet, a pregnant belly, sea foam, and *infans* flicker on the retina of your mind when you delve back into “Survivor”.

You get ahold of the English version. Your cheeks flush at the correct translation, *to burdened writing*. *Kerplunk*. A smoothed stone refuses to skip and plunks itself in the water. It is little help. The English makes it come off clumsy. Still, it says nothing. You wonder if it is actually not very good. You read it much too biographically. You already know the scandal in Lyotard's

life.²² You note that it is comprised of fragments of sentences, phrases in the English sense, in paragraphs that are not paragraphs (what was already obvious in the French). You read Stephen Barker's essay on it. It suddenly makes too much sense.²³ The analysis is too steeped in *The Postmodern Condition* for your taste.

You collect fractals, splinters, pieces of driftwood from it:

This child
 goes
 from one foot
 to the other
 He doesn't know
 what he carries
 Devoted
 to the peace
 of being
 and re-being
 You must imagine
 your conception
 the defeat
 of understanding
And the child
 Philosophy limits itself
 to the forms
 of words
 literature is bound to the law
As if
 too early to write

²² Dolores Lyotard (2013) confesses that the text found in "À l'écrit bâti" is actually a love letter to her. She is his widow, but also once his mistress. And the images of the child and the pregnant belly become suddenly rooted in fact, in reality. Yet there is also in it allusions to themes of Lyotard's that trace the entirety of the oeuvre: infancy the failings and therefore the possibilities in thought, in letters, in arts, in resisting "critique", the totalization of all into a system.

²³ Stephen Barker (2013), the text's translator, scribe, and sense-maker offers a reading of the text in "The Weight of Writing: Lyotard's Anti-Aesthetic in "À l'écrit bâti". He calls it an anti-aesthetic, notes that it was Lyotard's contribution to *Écrire* and classifies it as part of the late Lyotardian works, after his drift from phenomenology, psychoanalysis, and libidinal political economy. It is the very non-thing of the text "À l'écrit bâti", made nothing by the fracturing of the phrases (or rather sentences if you take the correct English translation of the French *phrase* as Barker astutely points out) in both their syntactic nonsense and their visual fragmentation on the page that for Barker ruins any conceptual sense to be made from the text. This hinge between discourse and figure, phrase and affect, sense and nonsense, Barker traces through the Lyotardian oeuvre, from *Discourse, Figure, to The Postmodern Condition, to The Differend*, and in other essays and experimental texts. (But is it the result of a life's work? Of one man dedicated to this liminal space, this irreconcilable and resistant being. Or is it very much the other way around?). Anyway, for Barker "À l'écrit bâti," being a text without sense in either visual or syntactic form, allows differends to bloom, rejects a totalizing narrative, for petits récits that do not even occupy a sentence. It is thus "after" (p. 67) the Kantian sublime; that is, for Barker, Lyotard rejects the Kantian notion, that the imagination fails but reason triumphs in the sublime. The sublime is for Lyotard paradox itself, unrepresentability itself; Barker puts it thusly, "For the Lyotardian sublime, words are the presentation of the unrepresentable, mundane marvels. They do not 'need' the mind" (p. 67). "À l'écrit bâti" is then the sublime itself, inviting the landslide of phrases for its not presenting anything at all. Barker's says "There is *nothing beautiful* about it" (p. 68). But what of the child who runs through it?

to interpretations of all kinds, and in relation to which the dissymmetry is and will be absolute” (Lyotard and Levinas, 2020, para. 14²⁵). The other, in Lyotard’s philosophy of the phrase is the silent phrase, that which can only be encountered affectively and in infancy. This has many ramifications for the affective testimonial of study. Here I consider the extent to which acting without knowing is an obligation and what that means phenomenologically and temporally.

Obligation: Incited to study

How Lyotard transcribes Levinas’s ethics of the other into his own philosophy of phrasing reveals the paradox of obligation in Lyotard’s thought: to understand obligation as pure call, as purely obligated, is then *to understand it* which is no longer to be obligated. It is a shift from affective infancy to its culmination in knowledge. The lines of *The Differend* (1988) leading up to its passage on Levinas poses the rupture of ethics in a phenomenology of the subject. For Lyotard, obligation occurs at the point of addressee in the phrasing universe. This is how Lyotard approaches Levinas’ ethics of the other; he asks “Can we transcribe this?” (p. 110) into phrases:

It is the scandal of an I displaced onto the you instance. The I turned you tries to repossess itself through the understanding of what dispossesses it. Another phrase is formed, in which the I returns in the addressor’s situation, in order to legitimate or reject—it doesn’t matter which—the scandal of the other’s phrase and of its own dispossession. The new phrase is always possible, like an inevitable temptation. But it cannot annul the event, it can only tame and master it, thereby disregarding the transcendence of the other. (p. 110-111)

What comes after obligation, after the sheer call and the dispossession of one’s freedom, is the ontological disfiguration of the ethical phrase. It is no longer itself. But what *is* the phrase of obligation firstly as itself? It “is an event of *feeling*” (p. 110, emphasis added). This is precisely where Lyotard introduces the immanence of affect in matters of the differend, though it is not until later works that this is fully asserted, namely in “The Affect-Phrase” (2006). Returning to the conversation between Lyotard and Levinas, Lyotard poses infancy as this affective destabilization in the ethical call of the other: “childhood would instead be the ‘moment’ of the fissure, the trace of the call” (2020, para. 2). Levinas rejects this, but for Lyotard it is from infancy’s edifying confusion in the ethical phrase that responsibility and culpability are derived. The paradox is this:

²⁵ Due to library closures in the pandemic, I here cite from a copy provided by the editor K. Bamford. In lieu of page numbers I provide numbered paragraphs to locate direct citations.

to be obligated and *not* to tame it. To be addressed alone and to understand obligation as such is not to be obligated and to characterize obligation as pure call, which discombobulates the subject, is also to adhere to “nostalgia for the self” (p. 110). This is a differend between being obligated (in infancy) and knowing it as obligation (as a knowing subject).

In the preceding chapter, I considered the ontology of phrases in Lyotard’s philosophy of the phrase. What *is* is encountered feelingly, but does Lyotard’s translation of Levinas’ ethics in phrases imply that being is an ethical obligation? And can it be said to be a differend? As Lyotard suggests in the Dossier of *The Differend*, “The title of this book suggests (through the generic value of the definite article) that a universal rule of judgement between heterogenous genres is lacking in general” (1988, p. xi). The differend persists. From this, two observations: *being* is not encountered in anything but affective infancy and that *the differend*, as distinguished from a differend, is in general between the *There is* and *What there is*. Studenthood then is the state of not knowing *What there is*, but feeling *That there is* down to the affective, indebtedness, and indeterminacy of infancy. Again the question at stake here is “What *incites* study from this state?”. This question, unstudious as it is, is a question of whether or not the occurrence, in its differend between the *There is* and the *What there is*, is an ethical call. And if so, what in study makes it so? And what might this mean for the stakes of study?

To consider the affective testimonial of studenthood’s study, I must revisit the subtle ontology Lyotard presents in *The Differend* (1988). In doing so I shall consider the ambiguities in Lyotard’s writing on whether or not the occurrence, the phrase which is, constitutes an obligation. For if studenthood, its trembling affect, is a state that alerts nothing more than the fact that *There is, afterall*, is the student then obligated to study, in order to testify to that state? Is it a case of obligation, as in ethics, or is it an aesthetics *as if* it were ethics? To repeat, in Lyotard’s philosophy of the phrase in *The Differend*, a phrase is presented. A phrase can be linguistic, or it can be material, all things that are are a phrase. It is the smallest, most indubitable unit of being: a being. It is indubitable because to doubt *is*. There is a *There is* even in the question *Is there?*. The question of situating the *There is*, so that it can be known, understood, so that it can be known for what it is, is no longer in fidelity to that being.

I turn to Jacob Rogozinski’s (1991) reading of Lyotard’s *The Differend* who considers the ontology of the phrase in *The Differend* and how, if at all, the *presence*, or presentation of the phrase can be presented. In doing so, Rogozinski ponders and performs the very stakes of the

differend: “Does the ontology of phrases allow for the expression of wrong? Does it allow for the insertion of the ultimate ethical requirement into the act of writing?” (p. 110). That is, for Rogozinski, the differend, the phrase which cannot be presented without transgressing it, presents two different categories of wrong. The first is ontological, to phrase or present that unrepresentable phrase is to ontologically disfigure it; what Rogozinski calls the ontological wrong, with a pagan remedy. In *The Differend* Lyotard describes the obligation of the differend

human beings who thought they could use language as an instrument of communication learn through the feeling of pain which accompanies silence (and of pleasure which accompanies the invention of the new idiom), that they are summoned by language... to recognize that what remains to be phrased exceeds what they can presently phrase, and that they must be allowed to institute idioms which do not yet exist (§23, p. 13).

This is the common understanding of the philosophy of the differend, the petit récit, the voices of the multiple. A wrong is rendered right when it is phrased anew, a new way of telling the story is formed. But what interests Rogozinski (1991) is a wrong deeper than this ontological disfigurement in a new idiom, it is the ethical wrong that “strikes a blow at the *power to phrase*” (p. 112) in the ethical imperative of *The Differend*, to say what is not sayable. It is this second wrong that Rogozinski terms the differend of *The Differend*, that “One must try to say what cannot be said” (p. 111). The risk of wrong, annihilation comes at the level of *And a phrase*, the presentation of the phrase’s presentation, as delineated in the previous chapter. For Rogozinski, Lyotard’s insistence that each phrase necessitates another phrase, is actually not the case, because the differend presents a case wherein there is no second phrase to say *What there is* in the *Is There?*. The differend incites a wrong because following what cannot be phrased *is nothing*. Yet to do justice to what cannot be said, one must attempt to state it. Rogozinski astutely follows these competing theses of *The Differend*: that it is possible to phrase the differend, that it is not possible to the phrase the differend. He concludes that Lyotard’s philosophy of phrasing is then not a question of necessity, *One must phrase*, but contingency, an *ought*. It is that the differend ought to be phrased, even if doing so is a necessary failure. As Hent de Vries (2006) has characterized Lyotard’s ethics of the differend, which he characterizes as a Christian Paganism: “There is, according to Lyotard, an obligation vis-à-vis the otherness of any single phrase, for any single occurrence, that Levinas would be reluctant to acknowledge” (p. 89). This would be to make of being an obligation in the differend of *The Differend*.

The chapter “Obligation” of *The Differend* (1988), which is the book’s most explicit treatment of ethics, begins with Abraham’s dilemma of being asked to sacrifice his only son to the Lord. Lyotard defines the call as such: “The question is to know whether, when one hears something that might resemble a call, one is held to be held by it. One can resist it or answer it, but it will first have to be received as a call” (§163, p. 107). This call is a phrase as pure address; ethical obligation can only occur on the plane of the addressee, as the receiver of the call. Lyotard interrupts his discussion of Abraham’s dilemma with the question, is occurrence also obligation? He puts it thusly:

Isn’t the *Is it happening?* (Nos. 131, 132, 172) then a kind of call emanating from a phrase in abeyance? Doesn’t it require an opening or availability to the occurrence in its strangeness? Doesn’t it require an opening or availability to the occurrence in its strangeness?... Isn’t it the phrase, rather that calls from afar upon Being, upon the occurrence? (§173, p. 115)

The occurrence of the silent phrase does in itself seem like an obligation. It appears that Rogozinski and de Vries are right to assert that presence summons an ought for phrasing the phrased phrase of obligation, which would be to situate it, to comment upon it, to transgress it.

Lyotard, however, quickly complicates this conclusion, this commentary upon the phrase. Lyotard rejects any straightforward assumptions that the phrase is a call upon a *you*. To know that it is “presence” (the being-there) that obligates linkages to fracture, is then no longer obligation. Obligation obligates without sense or justification. To presume it is to know the Lord who calls, is not to receive a call, as Lyotard states, “The blindness is in putting yourself in the place of the other, in saying *I* in his or her place, in neutralizing his or her transcendence” (§169, p. 109). In responding to the presence of the phrase as an ethical call to fracture the linking to the next phrase, is no longer in the remits of ethics. To know that being calls on us to phrase it, is to longer be obligated. A confused, barefooted paganism, undercuts the ontology of phrasing. Lyotard wryly reminds us:

But you are nothing but its advent (whether addressee or addressor of referent or sense even, or several of these instances together) in the universe presented by the phrase that happens. It wasn’t waiting for you. You come when it arrives. The occurrence is not the Lord. The pagans know this and laugh over this edifying confusion. (§173, p. 116)

To confuse that which is in the *There is* as an ethical call is to purport to make oneself the addressee of Being.—Despite the fact that nonbeing looms in every being, and that one is nothing but the phrase’s advent, so *not nothing*, only advent.—How different from Heidegger, who in “What is

metaphysics?” (1998) says that in asking “How is it with the nothing?” one surpasses all beings in their totality, for nothing is the negation of all these things. To ask the question is to be a teeny, perfect, bulbous spider bobbing over the undulations of being-and-not-being, held by her own mighty string over all things and nothing. But the question of nothing is for Heidegger, posed in the affect of anxiety: *What are you worried about? Oh, nothing. Nothing at all.* The nothing asserts itself in the feeling of a generalized anxiety. How relieved the spider is that she can transcend all things with her own silken steel, to be reminded of her being by surpassing all beings’ being in the nothing! It is always useful to remember that Heidegger was a Nazi and so embraced the annihilation of beings.—Lyotard, in what is a rightfully pious turn, asserts that it is within *each and every shimmering bit of being* that nothing from whence it comes and returns looms. There still is, despite the very real threat of the is not and this has little to do with us. Indeed to take oneself as the addressee of the call of being, is to confuse what it is that obligation is. And it is to miss the lesson of this edifying confusion: *That there is with or without you.* That it is not addressed to you.

The stakes of the ineffable phrase are not oughtness, but refuting nihilism. For this I must do some intertextual digging and revisit the ontological stakes Lyotard (1999) writes in “The Survivor”: the nothing that looms behind each and every unit of being is nihilism in its many guises: an unwillingness to trust the *There is* in the *Is There?* In this essay, Lyotard ponders what it is for a being to *survive*. A being that is merely a survivor, of its entropy into non-being, is twice related with its own being through its relation to its not being: “in relation with the enigma in which the entity comes to its being as entity and then leaves this being” (p. 144). This is nihilism’s ontology for Lyotard, where nothing *is*, everything that is only persists as an *absence*: “Shunning all entities while remaining melancholic and keeping watch over the perpetual retreat of true being appears to be the way for thought not to betray presence” (p. 147). The logic of nihilism is self-defeating, wanting so badly to *really* grasp the present (the phrase, the occurrence) it lets it slip through its fingers. For Lyotard, philosophies annihilate when they resign what *is* to the “inversion of appearances” (p. 146). Nihilism puts the emphasis on what is in the *Is it happening?*, over the *There is* in the *Is there?* The reason I return to this text in a discussion of the ethical stakes of the ontology of the phrase is because, with the differend, with infancy, and with affect Lyotard is suggesting that we “invert the stress on disappearance” (p. 147).—Liberal education’s entire *raison d’être* *is* the disappearance of the student.

The lesson of “The Survivor”, as Lyotard puts it, is “the refutation of nihilism [which] consists solely in this humble question: If the truth is that there is truly nothing, how is it that there appears to be something?” (p. 147). The stakes of the differend are to impugn nihilism; to testify that truly, *There is*, despite the threat of death and nothingness in each and every tenuous phrase. While Rogozinski (1991) fails to explicate that the ethical wrong of the differend is the wrong of nihilism against being, he does rightly point out the following lines of *The Differend*: “what is portentous does not come from the negative, but from the *Ereignis*. For it could be that there were no ‘second’ phrase. The impossible, nothingness would be possible. What is portentous is that it is not so” (§130, p. 79). Rogozinski’s translator, Catherine Körner, offers a better translation of the last line: “The marvel is that it is not so” (p. 114). It is the silent phrase in itself, the *There is* that signifies that there could not be, but still there is. The problem is the commentary upon it, to take oneself as the addressee of it. But if we ought to testify to the fact that there is in its edifying confusion, how ought we to do that without taking ourselves to be the addressee of Being, that was waiting for us to phrase it?

This will need a pay-off, for the argument at hand. The academy frowns upon tangents that do not cohere to the building of a thesis. It is not enough to get lost in rereading and rewriting, it must be made useful for the argument. The author must show keen refinement of an idea substantiated with the literature. If the above speaks of the paradoxical ethics of the phrase, what does this have to do with the ethics of education, of study? The ethics of studenthood and study are other than education. Study is in the paradox of the presented phrases; how to phrase what cannot be phrased and yet compels us to phrase it? Hence the need for continual rewriting, what comes back is this absolute ethical call that exceeds knowledge but still exerts itself as a being even if only felt in absence. The liberal art of study is the testimony in face of the ethical call to eschew nihilism.

Feeling without Phenomenology

Obligation can only occur on the plane of addressee, and not of addressor. This is Lyotard’s translation of Levinas’ ethics of the other into his own philosophy of phrasing, questioning the very possibility of phrasing the ethical. In calling the ethical phrase “non-phenomenal” (Lyotard and Levinas, 2020, para. 14), Lyotard inserts infancy as the tide between ontology and ethics. To

find this thread, we must consider the incongruent congruencies between Lyotard and Levinas' ethical and ontological thought. For Levinas, ontology effaces alterity in that it attempts to understand it as being: "The relation with Being that is enacted as ontology consists in neutralizing the existent in order to comprehend or grasp it... it is the reduction of the other to the same" (1991, p. 46). For what is other to be encountered as other, it can only be encountered ethically, without the understand of ontology; Levinas suggests, in "Is Ontology Fundamental?" "Not only because, besides curiosity, knowledge of the other also demands sympathy or love, ways of being that are different from impassive contemplation, but also because, in our relation to the other, the latter does not affect us by means of a concept" (1998, p. 5). Levinas's rebuke of ontology, that is attempts to understand what it cannot understand, seems akin to Lyotard's refutation of nihilism in situating a phrase, to ascertain what is to what it is not, or to its no-longer-being. Lyotard, however, is interested in the fallible testimony that might occur; when it is not a question of understanding this other, but allowing it to rupture and disrupt understanding, knowledge. Hence why for Lyotard, the sight, sound, affective presence of the other is received in infancy: "childhood [infancy] would instead be the 'moment' of the fissure, the trace of the call... this relationship should not be seen chronologically, but rather as a perpetual tension" (Lyotard and Levinas, 2002, para. 2). This is the non-phenomenology between the obligation in itself and receiving and working off that obligation. It is the hyphen of ethico-ontology out of which Lyotard writes. But how to write what cannot be written? How to testify what will be transgressed in the testimonial? And how to testify without the closures of the subject? How to testify in the state of fissure?—Studiously.

As Lyotard discusses the ethics of the other in the Levinas Notice in *The Differend* (1998), his commentary centers on the impossibility of commentary upon ethics, upon an obligation. If obligation occurs as pure address, as pure call, it cannot even be thought of phenomenologically: "Such is the universe of the ethical phrase: an I stripped of the illusion of being the addressor of phrases, grabbed hold of upon the addressee instance, incomprehensibly" (p. 111). It is scandalous for the subject, who is no longer the subject but "subject to an experience" (p. 113). Still to speak of it is to transgress it. Properly understood, the address of obligation, signified in itself as an affective phrase, can no longer be phenomenology. There is no longer an *I* through which experiences, phenomena create "reality by effectuating their temporal synthesis" (§71, p.45). Writing and speaking in the aftermath of obligation is then a question of *dispossession*. But then

how even to write without the I? Can infancy be written? Lyotard ponders some methods of writing as such. Firstly, he asks “How can one write in the second-person? The second person can only be described in the third person. One writes: *the you*” (p. 113). This would narrate this dispossessed writing by *You*, which is to occupy another space. This is not quite right. Lyotard dismisses this as mastery, it is rather the question: “Perhaps writing ought to be understood, or rather presented, otherwise. Instead of being the description of an experience, conducted by an I in quest of self-knowledge, perhaps Levinas’s writing is the testimony of the fracture... of writing to the other, under his or her law” (p. 113). Here, Lyotard grapples with the impossibility to write, or to phrase the ethical phrase of obligation.

If, in being obligated, one is no longer oneself but entirely dispossessed by the phrase that calls, it cannot even be considered to be phenomenological. There is no *I* to which this experience belongs, it is no longer even an experience, but affect. This is how Lyotard can have his cake and eat it. Have is his cake in that he would like to eschew the hubris of humanism, that Being awaits humanity to phrase it (an ontology made into a metaphysics and so for Lyotard a kind of nihilism). Eat his cake in that the stakes of phrasing are ultimate, the difference between savoring that there is and denying it as lost. With what extends what we know, with that which is but is nothing yet, there is culpability and innocence in being seized by it. As Lyotard says of the affect-phrase (a phrase that dispossesses the I of its recourse to cognition and as subject of experience) in its infancy: “this shameless innocence can always arise in the course of articulated phrases, in an impromptu manner.—But then one would make it ashamed of its nakedness. The impudence of the affect would be culpable. Innocence and culpability arrive together, under the name of anxiety ” (2006, p. 110). One is obligated by a being and so no longer oneself, no longer man to whom all Being is addressed for him to phrase it.—Already the humanist projects of liberal arts education have been inverted.—And yet still obligated in the impossibility of the task to phrase what cannot be phrased, to let it be through thinking, rereading, rewriting, and so studying. This is why the scandal of obligation is *non*-phenomenal. It is the sharp inhale before the exhale, the taking in of what will only be not itself when it is let out. This is what Lyotard means when he speaks of writing *otherwise*, without authority of the author who is the conduit for whatever must make itself known in feeling.

The aesthetic and the ethical are then bound in the non-phenomenology of Lyotard’s ethico-ontology. This is what Lyotard (2012) brings to life in “Presence”, a meandering text

constituted of a dialogue between two interlocutors: “He” and “You”. As with many of Lyotard’s text, this dialogue has no winner and no loser and no fixed identities. It is unclear *who* speaks what and in a way it does not matter, but what is voiced is the impossibility of rendering *blue*. Color is outside form, outside matter. In the presence of blue, it is also receding. Here Lyotard considers *presence* and its departure in attempts to present it as a testimony to this fleeting presence: the “You” petitions, “He speaks of *taking leave*, when it was a question of presence? What is more, his exodus is a question of ethics, not aesthetics” (p. 133). The “He” responds, “What I am talking about is very small, modest, impalpable...this place is generated from a non-place, and this object, from an un-object. I say it negatively, like in theology or in ethics, but in art this ‘not-this’ touches. When the mind is touched by this, it becomes soul” (p. 135). So like ethics, like in art: what escapes, though the infantile soul, unable to do justice but compelled to, attempts to render this fleeting presence that evacuates like the tide rushing out. *It must be studied*.

Outside the Time of Clocks

This non-phenomenal ethico-ontology poses a different temporality, beyond the successive chronology of a subject. If when obligated, when compelled to act without knowing, is to be outside the closures of the subject then there is no recourse to their time. It is to be outside time. This is what Lyotard (2002) traces in “Emma: Between Philosophy and Psychoanalysis”. The titular “Emma” is the Emma of Sigmund Freud’s case study. Through Lyotard’s study of Freud’s study of Emma’s trauma and subsequent neuroses, Lyotard demonstrates the a-temporality of affect within the chronology of philosophical inquiry. Lyotard’s reading of the psychoanalysis of Emma’s trauma demonstrates that the impetus to philosophize is outside time. Emma has suffered a repressed trauma in a shop at a tender age. It was all but forgotten until she became convinced at a later age that shopkeepers were laughing at her. As an adult, this trauma is experienced affectively, the nervous complaint for which she seeks Freud’s assistance. I have presented Emma’s complaint in a chronological fashion. This, Lyotard, suggests is the temporality of philosophers, of phenomenologists, of Husserl: “Each of these images changes as actual consciousness moves along the horizontal line” (p. 30) of successive time. The affective moment, the first trauma in the shop, is made available in the second and third moments on this plane. This is to render the affective instance to knowledge. But this is not so. If Lyotard has proven anything

in his philosophic works, it is that affect is not available to the consciousness of the subject as such. It ruptures the subject, excites the soul within the mind, it is the cataclysm of being moved when one thought that one moved what was outside, inside language. So Kantian aesthetic judgement is the bridge between chronology and achronology; both the feelings of the beautiful and the sublime are sites of infancy, of feeling and because they must be judged only *afterward*, Lyotard finds a different dimension of time. He says,

these simple [feeling of the beautiful] and frustrated [feeling of the sublime] happinesses both develop, and develop themselves, in entirely specific temporalities different from those one comes to recall and differentiate between them. These temporalities owe their singularity to the purity of these aesthetic feelings, i.e., that they be removed from all cognitive or volitional interest... it would be useful to compare these temporalities of aesthetic pleasure with the persisting content and the content in amnesia (temporal stasis) that one finds in unconscious affect (2002, p. 31-32).

This is where psychoanalysis fares better, its interest being the trace of an affective absent presence. Where the philosophy of consciousness is a horizontal line, a narrations of successive events, that of psychoanalysis is a vertical one. This is how Lyotard reads Freud's psychoanalysis of Emma and the aftershocks of affect in her conscious. It is a question of working backward, toward what is remembered as forgotten: anamnesis. When Emma comes to Freud to alleviate her suffering, what has transpired is twice removed, but the adult Emma feels its effects. Lyotard labels this moment T(0). This is the now of psychoanalysis, the upward plane of the vertical axis. The psychoanalysis helps assign language to these feelings and with Emma mines for the earlier instance, T(1) of her fear of shops and their keepers. This is the first after-shock of the original event. But even then it is not available to Emma; the cause of her sufferings is unknown to her. With further help still, the psychoanalyst roots through Emma's psyche to find the original event, T(2), the moment of the trauma, the sexual assault at the hands of the shopkeeper, that little Emma could not have understood. But this originary event of affect, of being traumatized, has had reverberations on Emma, cast its shadow across this cross-section of her life, though it was not available to her consciously. The temporality of infancy is that of anamnesis, the coming back of an already absent presence. It is not the time of conscious, that strings them in a meaningful way, but of unconscious. An effect without a known cause. Peter Milne (2019) suggests that with this reading of Freud's psychoanalysis, Lyotard offers a correction to phenomenology as a consciousness through time; "Consciousness, in Lyotard's view still appears to presuppose a certainty of 'lived' time. What the temporal stasis of the affect suggests is that there may be gaps

in the unity of the living consciousness that temporalizes itself” (p. 12). However, it is not quite right to say that Lyotard’s reflection on the temporality of affect encountered in a state of infancy is a correction of phenomenology, that would assume all things are rendered to conscious, as Lyotard rebukes phenomenology in *Discourse, Figure* (2011) for rendering experienced space into thought space. Rightly understood, what Lyotard writes of is no longer phenomenological. Infancy is unconscious affect the effects of affect exceed the chronology of narrative; it is time on a vertical line of shock and aftershock in their reverberations.

Such a temporal dimension is impossible to *think* through. To think through it would be to render it to a narrative. To illuminate the vertical time of infantile affect I look now to Christian Marclay’s (2010) mesmerizing oeuvre *The Clock*. It is twenty-four hour long video comprised of carefully edited clips from film, television, and visual media that depict a certain time of day synchronized with the twenty-four hour clock. *The Clock* tells the time through snippets of visual media and forces the viewer to experience time differently. In our day to day lives, we glance at the clock from time to time. The alarm goes off at six in the morning, I hit snooze twice from slumber and it is now 6:18 am or I skip school and go to the matinee at Hyde Park Picture House at three in the afternoon and leave at 4:50pm; I have watched a film in the time has passed while I watched it. However, when one watches *The Clock*, one watches time itself, it does not pass. It is the experience of a successions of *nows*. *The Clock* makes time present, makes every moment fully present that it absent. Since the film is comprised of the seconds and minutes of multiple films, it does not compose a narrative. What occurs on the screen follows no plot, no story arch, there is no denouement, no characters. It is undecipherable, unable to be understood. There are some instances of repetition; the same film might flicker on screen a few minutes later. It is impossible to link these instances together with any sense. Watching *The Clock* makes it very easy to forget oneself. You will leave the theater much later than you meant to because it confounds the experience of time as a chronology, of something to be gained or risk being wasted. You forget yourself because *The Clock*, as one continuous *now*, is outside narration, outside the chronology of the subject. It is the vertical line of affect, of being affected within the now, being subjected to it, and all of its after effects, the inability to recall it. Such is the temporality of studenthood, that demands one to act without knowing, dispossessed from the closures of phenomenology and its narrative of time.

II. Testimonials of Study

In the above I have considered the extent to which the occurrence, the phrase, *a being*, constitutes an obligation. Lyotard's answer is *Yes and No*. To take oneself as the addressee of all being would be to confuse humanity as the caretaker of it. It is rather that in Lyotard's philosophy of the phrase and of infantile affect, being obligated is being dispossessed of one's free will and sense of self. Obligation is outside the self. The extent to which a being obligates is to untether it from nihilism; the impossible task of testifying to what is and makes itself felt through an absent present. It is not that we cannot write, cannot make arts and letters to testify, it is only that these will be faulty, will invoke further rewriting, rereading, and rethinking. That ethics and aesthetics are both marked by what exceeds and so recedes from our testimony. As such, it is not right to speak of a phenomenology of study. It is rather non-phenomenal, outside the time of a narration of the self, of the subject.

Here I look back to Study Trace No. 3 that interrupted this chapter to unstudiously observe what is studious in it in light of the of the ethico-ontology in Lyotard's work. The study trace here enacts the obligation toward that which is unknowable and inarticulable. In enacting the obligation of study, the testimony in the study trace attempts not to produce a wrong through the hesitant and tentative rewriting that only leaves traces of an absent presence.—This is not the endeavor of the (neo)liberal learner who endeavors to make a clear and transparent subject where in the indeterminate is determined.— The above is a trace of study, of acting without knowing, is an attempt to read a text and write about it without the "I". To write without taking the *Is there?* as an event addressed to oneself, in need of humanity to bring it to being in the written word. It is therefore written in the second person. It fails in its attempts to flee the closures of the subject, not only because the task is absurd, but also because in its writing, an "I" wrote it as a "You," a "You" who was trying to make sense of non-sense. This is still to write in the third-person. This is precisely the impossibilities of writing the phrase of obligation that Lyotard warns against; to write the affective phrase is not to write from the instance of the *You* but to allow it be felt in its absence from the text. It is, however, in the co-present and incompatible timelines that there is a gesture of study, that recedes in the act. I will delineate this further below.

The object of study in the above is the text “À l’écrit bâti” by Lyotard (2013c). This much is clear in the above. The selection of this text for study is not justified through rational discourse in the study trace, but rather aesthetically: *the blank expanse of absence on a page drew the eye of the studier*. This is the now of study, rendered the first moment of a chronology after the fact. However, in the *trace* of study above (its written form) this moment is presented after the first sentence: “À l’écrit bâti” is the most extreme experiment you will have ever read in the body of work called Lyotard” which is written in the second person future anterior. Who can phrase such a sentence and to whom? The who whose eyes were taken by the expanse of white on a page, but only after having made sense of it through the trappings of the subject’s knowledge and narrative. And it is addressed to herself before it is herself, hence the future anterior (the learner’s temporality where something has been grasped, apprehended). The trace of study is written *after*. Yet, this first occurrence of the eye beholden returns: “a child’s feet, a pregnant belly, sea foam, and *infans* flicker on the retina of your mind when you delve back into ‘Survivor’”. A second impression of the first that reverberates in studenthood. These aftershocks are aesthetic, figures rupture the reading of another text and make themselves felt within it. The Study Trace is written from a third point in time: one which encapsulates the first affective glimmer and the second impressions of the first, but these are presented out of order. These events are relegated as secondary to the writing. This writing, even with its use of the second person and the demotion of commentary to footnotes, still encircles all three moments into one plane. Despite its attempts at dispossession, the act of writing the moment of study transgresses it. The question remains, when was the moment of being incited to study?

The eye caught by the expanse of white. The flickering of images in the retina of the mind. The affect and the aftershock of something which resists writing, only encountered affectively. This first affect and its effects create a vertical line through the text, their disparate temporalities and momentous nows embedded within a text. Inscribing these moments in the written word, making them party to a third narrative (that attempts not to be a narrative) is their necessary transgression. The student, as distinguished from the studier, cannot avoid what they would rather not do. The student, as distinguished from the learner, in doing so, does not learn or rather their learning is thwarted and perforated by what remains unlearned and unlearnable. That edifying confusion remains and confounds what is learned or learnable. There are problems in the testimony: the words that aim to enclose what is felt and they sink past what arises in affect.

The vertical access of affect is the plane of reverberation in what is known and knowable by a subject. What is critical is that this originary affect returns as not itself. The reoccurrence of the occurrence reoccurs in Lyotard's writings on affect. For instance, in "Anima Minima" Lyotard (1997) states that while affect, its sudden arrival in the momentous now, suspends the subject, suspends knowledge, it is always returning. It always has the power to come back;

The soul awakened, *existed* by the sensible does not of course know its past, in the sense that thought focuses on an object from long ago to reactualize it. But when the sensible has undergone the artistic gesture of annihilation by which its appearance is transformed into an apparition, the momentary affect it awoke instantly bears with it the value of a return. What comes back in time to come is not located in the time of clocks and consciences, and is not worth remembering. The relation must be reversed: what is to come comes forth as a coming back. (p. 249)

In studenthood, something makes itself known but only affectively (the eye caught by the expanse of white on a page) and this unseemly and inconvenient rupture is the dispossession of the subject, who had so arrogantly thought themselves so capable, must now study, an impossible task, an unending task. In allowing words to quake, in allowing forms to fracture, the student continues to feel the originary stasis in its reoccurrence as no longer itself, present as absent. It is continually returning in the text, present as its own absence, and not renderable to the time "of clocks" but of *The Clock*, a series of nows in its first affect and after-effects. It is a vertical axis that perforates the horizontal axis of liberal educational projects: from not free to free, unable to able, ignorant to knowing, uneducated to educated. Much like Menard who in endeavoring the *Quixote*, could not help but to fail in obtaining it in words as Study Trace No. 2 told the story of study.

Derek Ford (2021) offers an astute observation of Lyotard's writings on and of infancy and their bearing on education practices. On the practice of writing, Ford suggests that the infantile temporality of writing is in idiocy, or in stupor. What is idiotic or an affective stupor cannot be done away with through knowledge, through learning, which Ford characterizes as the temporality of development:

Stupor, however, is different from ignorance. Ignorance is defined by the possibility of knowing. Education views the infant child not as stupid but as ignorant, as a being that needs to develop capacities for knowledge. Ignorance is temporal and can change over time. Stupor never has an answer and doesn't even know it's being called on to respond, let alone how to respond. (p. 66)

There is then something strange in how Ford depicts infancy *as an education*, or *as a pedagogy*, “If education is infant, if it’s to and from, in, and even for stupor even as it teaches particular ideas and texts, and protocols, it can teach along the general line. But it can never be on time” (p. 67).—The phrase “the general line” here is in reference to an essay of Lyotard’s (1997) of the same name “The General Line” in *Postmodern Fables*), the distinction of the public persona and the private, cloistered life of infancy.—But it is really that infantile affect, acting in of this state, is a wormhole through the time of narration, of the public, and the subject, and so of its education. It is not that infancy educates. It is that infancy is continually ineducable. It compels study, rupturing education with its vertical axis of affect and after affects. Ford (2021) refers to the affective force of infancy as leaving its “traces” (p. 27, 30, 45, 52, 56), but this “timeless and intractable” (p. 67) is not given its own temporal dimension of *nows*, it is rather its own *educative* force. Infancy is continuously rupturing the narration of time, of development into knowledge and capability that attempt to cover it. It does so without pedagogy. To take infancy as pedagogy is to confuse oneself as the addressee of Being, a being. The testimony of study is always distending the present moment situated in a narrated series, toward knowing, toward resolution. It cannot be educational, because it is always undoing what has been educated, it always returns in the gesture of study, felt only in its absence.

Studenthood’s trajectory contra the learner and the studier

The vertical axis of time and non-phenomenology of studenthood, and its demand to act without knowing, differs plainly from that of the figure of the learner. The learner, whose object is to gain, apprehend knowledge and skill, exteriorize it for *class credit*, is subject to the horizontal axis of time. As Ford (2021) characterizes it, the child under the logic of learning is subject to *development*; they are educated out of their ignorance. Under capitalism, this chronology of the learner’s development is subjected also to the logic of exchange as Lyotard shows in the final pages of *The Differend* (1988). Here, Lyotard demonstrates that money, under credit capitalism, represents no material object, but time, “It ought, however, to be the (more or less faithful) equivalent of the time incorporated into commodities and lost in their production until they are exchanged” (p. 175, §246). Hence the emphasis on *efficiency* in late capitalism, do the most with the least amount of time. The storing up of time is implicit to the logic of credit and debt in late capital; “Money (time in other words) is then itself taken as an ‘as-if commodity.’... Here, what

is ceded by the creditor is an advance of time” (p. 176, §248). Young adults take out student loans, they are granted by their creditor *the time* it takes to do a degree, to develop out of a deficit of knowledge and skills by learning, proven by its exteriorization for assessment, they are then awarded a degree that signifies their credentials on the labor market. Their time, endowed with skills and knowledge, saves time for their employers: they can program the computers, can design the machines that all save time in production. The students then have more money (more time) to pay back the loan, with interest, that granted them the time to gain time. The temporality of the learner under credit capitalism is more than a chronology, it is exponential. Undercutting all this is the assumption that debt can always be paid off. Lyotard states: “For example, in dying, *x* will leave some incompleting cycles of exchange, that is, he or she will die before the annulation of the cessions he or she is implicated in has taken place. By insuring his or her life, a society relays his or her capacity to discharge his or her debts. One does not owe one’s life to the gods or to one’s family, but to the insurance company, that is, to exchange” (1988, p. 175, §245). The debt-credit market of learning is the exponential growth of the known; it culminates in a subjects’ mastery of themselves and the known. Implicit to the chronology of the learner is the future anterior of the learner as discussed in Chapter Five; the ends are already known and the means should be as efficient as possible. In this narration and logic of education, the *hic et nunc* of the student is meant to be rooted out through education. The student, their studenthood, can be developed out of them through learning.

As Lyotard (1988) has opined, thought, rewriting and rereading *take* time. Studenthood and its testimony of study incite a trajectory along a vertical axis of affect and its after-effects; it remains indebted to what has incited it and it can always rupture the closed chronology of the learner. Studenthood and its affective testimonial is distinguished from the educational trajectory of the studier. Here I look to Tyson Lewis’ (2013, 2016) work on the mood and rhythm of the studier and Rocha’s (2015) phenomenology of study to contrast studenthood from these other educational trajectories. This is not to refute these other educational figures, merely to distinguish studenthood and its task of study.

In Lewis’ work on study, the studier experiences (im)potentiality. Lewis gestures toward this unique educational potentiality that is beyond the logic of learning and its chronology in education. The studier is disinterested in actualization of knowledge or skill; instead they experience the potentiality to do which is to experience this or that capability *as not* capable.

Following Agamben, for Lewis this is a freedom; we are free to and free not to do whatever. As such, the studier introduces a different temporal dimension, refuting the chronology of actualization and the market of growth for the learner. It is the messianic time of study; “the messianic moment in which the future, past, and present coalesce in the now speaks to the *as not*” (p. 101). The messianic time of study for Lewis is radically now, it awaits nothing; “Such a time allows the past to break through to be retroactively redeemed in the present” (p. 100). Through this, Lewis rebukes what he calls the “as if” prophesies of educational philosophy, as exemplified in Ivan Illich’s (1970) rebukes of the schooling society. For Lewis, Illich fails to find a practice by which the immanence of the present moment can resist the logic of actualization and bureaucratization inherent to schooling. The prophetic “as if” of educational thought banks on a future where we might be freed from the current forms of nihilism in education; “there is a distinct closure of the present that must be rejected in full as a negative totality in order for this future to emerge, thus there is little room for resistance within institutionalized schools. There seems to be a gap between the present and the anticipated utopian future that Illich imaginatively creates, a gap that lacks a clear notion of creative time in the now” (p. 99). For Lewis, it is rather the “as not”, whereby the laws and closures of such system can be resisted in the now. It does not anticipate the future anterior of education, but renders time *as not time*, the potential for educational potentiality to be other than the narratives of bureaucracy, capital, or the liberal hero of humanity, but radically now through the *as not clause*. However, a closer inspection of the method of the studier in messianic time as compared to studenthood’s study will show that the former’s *as not* clause attempts to bring a past potentiality into the present and the *as if* of studenthood, far from a prophetic enunciation and vision, attempts to open a future for what is and can only be known in feeling.

Tyson Lewis (2013) utilizes the story of Bartleby the scrivener in Herman Melville’s (1856) short story, “Bartleby, The Scrivener” to characterize the manner by which study thwarts the demands of actualization, assessment, and evaluation. Bartleby is a scrivener and he is utterly useless at his job. He shows up for work but always fails to perform and complete his tasks. His only excuse for his complete indifference to his job performance is that he “prefers not to” complete tasks, answer questions, and so on. For Lewis, Bartleby passiveness and indifference is a specific resistance so negates the demands of actualization; “‘to prefer not to’ is a resistantless form of resistance, a powerless power” (p. 48). Since Bartleby is a scrivener while preferring not

to do the job of a scrivener, his passiveness introduces the *as not* clause to the present moment; “Bartleby could not work and could not leave, not because he was doing nothing but because he was *studying* and, in the moment of study, he lost his occupation and his identity as this or that kind of person with this or that set of capabilities, desires, or interests. He had nothing to say for himself, no clear project that he could possibly articulate beyond ‘preferring not to’” (p. 51). Preferring not to, however, necessarily assumes that one is *able to*. In the messianic moment of study, Bartleby restores the past moment of the freedom *not to*, in the present moment, after he is already *able to*. The messianic moment of study emerges from an educational rhythm that Lewis identifies in his ontology of study, defined by Agamben’s (1993a) whatever being, Lewis states, “Whatever as a tautological structure holds within itself both being and not being *without choosing either*” (p. 42). For all potential there is also im-potential.

Lewis uses the familiar logic of learning to show the rhythm of study. The neoliberal demands for actualization of skill and gaining of knowledge as well as liberal demands that the human subject actualize their ability to choose and take action bank upon the capacity to become *able to*. But this ability or capability is founded also upon the ability not to, to not be able to. As such infancy in the human being figures heavily into ontology of study for Lewis, “The eternal child within is thus the remnant of whatever that preserves itself in the adult” (p. 42). The “work of studying” (p. 44) suspends actualization; “In essence, studying has recursive structure where undergoing (the impotential experience of passivity) folds into undertaking (the potentiality for action)” (p. 44). It renders both to the messianic present. Yet, in Lewis’ account of the studier, there is a certain privileging of the genius or the master: “To study is precisely to bear witness to the remnant of the unfulfilled. In this sense the master is always the best studier precisely because he or she rhythmically turns back to the aporia of im-potentiality as a reserve for the freedom to be ‘rather than’” (p. 44). This suggests a *going back* in the messianic moment of studying, of returning to the (im)potential of an actualized or actualizable potential. For example, Lewis states, the rhythm of study is “an ontological *reexperiencing* [emphasis added] of our potential to be *and not to be*” (p. 58). The lesson that the studier offers the world of education, now so defined by measurement and evaluation, is not “*what to write, or how to write, but rather that we can/cannot write*” (p. 52), it is a doubling back toward that peculiar human sort of freedom to be simultaneously more and less than, to and not to do *whatever*. While for Lewis, the messianic time of study renders both future and past to the radically now, “the messianic kernel of time that

remains between the progression of linear events and the final moment of judgement... where the future folds into the present and the past explodes into the future” (p. 56). However, particularly in the act of studying under this conception, there is the emphasis on the bringing back of the originary (im)potentiality, mutilated by actualization; “Salvation redeems the past by suspending or decompleting the work of creation, which is rendered inoperative” (p. 57) through the studier preferring *not to* actualize. There is the assumption that the studier already knows or already can; in the messianic moment of studying that ordinary able to and not to, that particular human sort of freedom to be both more and less than, to do and not do whatever is restored in the gesture of study.

This differs considerably to the vertical axis of affect and its testimony in studenthood and its study as I have gestured toward in Study Trace No. 3. Underneath this is the differential trajectories of in-fancy in Lyotard and Agamben’s writings. Agamben in *Infancy and History: The Destruction of Experience* is, like Lyotard, interested in how affect, experience, and difficulties posed to the human by their own language, inspired by Aristotle’s (1907) distinction between *phôné* (animal voice) and *logos* (human language). For Agamben, human infancy is a point of *origin* in its discombobulation. I quote Agamben at length here:

Animals do not enter language, they are already inside it. Man, instead, by having an infancy, by preceding speech, splits this single language, and in order to speak, has to constitute himself as the subject of language—he has to say *I*...man’s nature is split at its source, for infancy brings it discontinuity and the difference between language and discourse... Imagine a man born already equipped with language, a man who already possessed speech... such a man would thereby at once be united with his nature... he would merge with it and would never be able to see it as an object distinct from himself. (p. 51)

For Agamben, it is the fundamental alienation of language, of the ability to speak, to voice, from what is experienced unconsciously (so destroyed in its voicing) that is the site and origin of history. But there here seems to be the privileging of a going back to this “origin”: “to experience means to re-accede to infancy as history’s transcendental place of origin” (p. 53). Or, “the human is nothing other than this very passage from pure language to discourse” (p. 56) where the truly human is in the recursive temporality, the tides folding in upon themselves, the messianic moment of study, where the past (not able to speak) is unfurled in the present (with the ability to speak).

But this doubling backwards, toward the latent impotential from whence all potential originates, would be for Lyotard much too melancholy. Indeed Tyson Lewis’s (2013) notion of study is steeped in melancholia. For Lewis this is the mood of study’s suspension in the present

moment, wherein the past (im)potential is restored in the present, this freedom as suspension is felt as loss. Lewis says, “The rhythmic sway between progression and regression, burning and being burned, produces an overall melancholic affect: relief and deliverance are phantasmal things which can only be present in their absence (in the inoperative state)” (p. 67) and “in study, there is a melancholic relief which, in the end, is an inspiration to listen to the crackling of the embers of im-potentiality that remain when all else has been destroyed” (p.67). While the notion of a presence in absence here strikes a chord with Lyotard’s writings on and of infancy, *what* is present as absence differs and as such the affective state. In Lewis’s writings on the (im)potentiality of study, the “deliverance” is a restoration, albeit in absence, of the origin of (im)potential in the present. Much like Agamben’s writing on infancy, there is a privileging of the *ability not to* that precedes every *ability to*. If both the studier and studenthood deal with a presence as absence, why is studenthood and study not marked by melancholy?

For this I return to Lyotard’s essay “The Survivor,” where Lyotard (1999) considers what makes what is as presence only a *survivor*. I quote Lyotard at length here:

This impossibility of mourning past presence (and reapplying its force, through new object, to the present self) is called melancholia. If it is not the impossibility of mourning, it is at least a stress placed on the irrevocable loss of presence, that is, on the death of what was there. And along these lines, even what is present now may be sensed as already doomed to no longer being there, becoming the object of a ‘preventative’ melancholia. Is the apparently so lively not already dead? (p. 146)

There is much to unpack here. Here, Lyotard uses the Freudian (1914) sense of melancholia, distinguished from mourning. Mourning is incited by the loss of someone or something that one loves and plunges the ego in the work of grief, whereas for Freud, “The melancholic something else besides which is lacking in mourning—an extraordinary diminution in his self-regard, an impoverishment of his ego on a grand scale... He is not of the opinion that a change has taken place in him, but extends his self-criticism back over the past; he declares that he was never any better” (p. 246). What Freud is describing is what might be diagnosed as depression under current mental health practices. But here I would like to emphasize the past-oriented nature of the melancholic condition. The melancholic patient Freud describes is tinged with remorse and regret over their past. Perhaps the melancholic grieves the loss of their already past potential to be any different. Perhaps the melancholic, in this entirely back-looking mood, grieves the destruction of this already past potential. For Lyotard, however, to consign what is to the mood of melancholia is to consign it to nihilism, “What comes to life—the instant as event, emerging from

nothingness—is already doomed to return to nothingness. The only *being-in-truth* is not here” (p. 146), but elsewhere, in the past, our only reprieve is in mourning what is already absent.

Lyotard’s refutation of melancholy in “The Survivor” (1999) comes in reference to Walter Benjamin’s (1940) “Theses on the Concept of History”, who of course figures heavily in Agamben’s thought and Tyson Lewis’ work on study. Lyotard states, “We must now observe that if, if within this problematic [of phenomenology], the life of the spirit is designated as survival, then what is stressed is absence, or that which is lost is what is preserved... It is a disaster for Walter Benjamin’s Angel, who is pushed backwards into the future by the wind of the past... The Angel sees the past only as ‘dis-astered’ present” (p. 146). This is in reference to the figure of the Angel in Benjamin’s essays on history; the Angel views the past differently than a chronological series of cause and effect, but rather the past in its density, “The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed” (§IX). Here the same remorse of the melancholic, ever glancing backwards, wanting to right the wrongs, fetter the unfettered catastrophe of the past, restore what is other than to the present. This is not to say that there are not times in which we can only look back in regret. But for Lyotard, the presence in absence poses a different question than that of the studier’s restoration a past (im)potential to the present. For Lyotard, melancholia “thinks of every birth as a death, and death as birth into truth” (p. 147). For Lyotard, the stakes are different; it is the “humble question: If the truth is that there truly is nothing, how is it that there appears to be something?” (p. 147). Of course what *is* can only be felt in infancy, can only be testified to by failing to make present what already recedes, but still one must study. The crucial difference between the studier and studenthood is this. The studier is invested in restoring or re-salvaging the entirely *human freedom* of a past (im)potentiality to the present, in the *as not* clause. Whereas in studenthood, shocked and dispossessed (so affected) by the advent of *a being* study works from the *as if* without prophesy; it is “being and acting *as if* one could nonetheless pay off the enigma of being there” (p. 149). This is not the prophetic vision of a utopian future (of an educational destination of complete freedom) but of cherishing the fact that *there is*, knowing that all attempts to do credit will fail, and trying anyway. Studenthood and its study are then neither melancholic nor asinine, but carried out in an “arrogant loyalty” (p. 149), but the *as if* clause through which it operates “blocks all righteousness” (p. 149). Neither melancholic nor asinine, but under the nervous laughter of anxiety, the student, operating to and from studenthood, testifies through the work of study to the *that there is* without making of it a *what there is*. There

is, in this, the attempt the opening to a future, but not in chronological time, only in the vertical axis of affect and after-effects.

Above, I have discussed the non-phenomenology of infancy, of being obligated to perform the task of study; for Lyotard, because affect dispossess the subject of their subjecthood, it extends beyond what might be called phenomenology, there is no subject to whom the experience can be addressed. Studenthood and study then differ from Sam Rocha's (2015) *Folk Phenomenology of study*. To summarize again Rocha is interested in the stuff of education, what it is that education is and study is an essential component of this: in his ontology of education, study is in the zone of subsistence, somewhere between everyday existence and the mystery of Being. Education would be a grand mystery on par with Being in this account; "education possesses a breadth and depth that is as expansive as the mind, consciousness, and even life itself. Many call education something 'lifelong' that verges on the eternal. Education possesses magnitude" (p. 68). Studying is then a subsistent and erotic force within that extends from this magnitude. This Rocha formulates also as an absence, "Absence is full of erotic enchantment that frustratingly leads us to desire, with or without—and many times despite—volition, will, or intention" (p. 70). For Rocha, this endows education and study with a tragic sense, nothing ever comes to fruition.

Implicit to Rocha's ontology of education and study, is the question of "Who am I?" (p. 49). He states "The eros of study mediates between the human person and the world through the particular ontological passion that calls from beyond and within" (p. 90). Rocha's use of the phrase "human person" is here, intentional; it suggests the existence of "nonhuman persons" (p. 93) and the phrase *human person* is meant to eschew the more modernist humanist assumptions of personhood. For Rocha, study is part and parcel of what it is to be a human person and this is particularly apparent in his writing on the studious forces present in both baby-talk and jazz. Here I shall show how this phenomenology of study, in its infantile babble, differs from what I have called studenthood. Rocha begins with the theme of human infancy; we are born without a language and come into language in our early years. Human infants are born with the palate for all human languages, they babble and coo. Rocha places particular emphasis on that peculiar infantile predilection to scream and screech for no reason (that can be understood by adults): "It verifies the earliest, ontological, and unconscious 'Am' of a person and mediates between that and the existential 'I am'" (p. 85). Much like Lyotard's writings on infancy, the baby voices something for the knowing *I* can render whatever has been voiced to its narrative. Rocha compares the infant

voice to that of the jazz artist, because “They are both trying to say something. Their ways of speaking, however, subsist because they do not exist: they are simultaneously preparatory and performative” (p. 84). The jazz musician is likewise beholden to the force of study because they are a *master*, “a true master of any instrument would likely describes the process as being possessed by something else, beyond the finitude of the person or the instrument, something not entirely physical nor anything too remote: an intense desire for rich, communal love” (p. 86). Rocha concludes that studying is then both a preparation and a performance; “The eros of study mediate between the human person and the world through the particular ontological passion that calls from beyond and within” (p. 90). Rocha’s study of study strikes many chords with studenthood: there is an element of being affected, exemplified in infancy, displace will and volition, and the force of study amidst being. However, in Rocha’s study of study, there is continuous invocation of the erotic or desirous force of study: “since I must be within Being to begin with and end, then, I also desire to *survive* Being. To be alive within it... This begins to sense the worldliness of Being through subsistent forces that inspire and sustain our vitality, but remain faceless and ghostly all the same” (p. 15). This leads me to read Rocha’s ontological view of Education (with a capital E, for its mysterious and ongoingness) this way: study is the desirous force for education; study is an *I want to be Educated*, even if it cannot be fully rendered as an existent thing, which endows this

I confess, I cannot go on in the present scholarly mode of writing. I think again of the eye drawn into the expanse of white on a page, that savoring of being that started this discourse. It is possible to taste with one’s eyes. For all the action of sight and seen there is also passivity. Something is felt. Something is felt in what is seen which cannot be ostensibly shown. The remembered affect, the articulated inarticulate must always be in relation to its non-being, its *no longer*. To testify to it is to have transgressed it. How it has been tamed, how it has been articulated, how this articulation has been compared and contrasted with other ideas of study. How the eyes have been shut through the burden of writing, pulled down by the weight of words. The paradoxical tensions at play in writing *of study* as a thesis that demands it be *about* study. But we needn’t despair, we laugh. Despite this looming nothing, an absolute so dark and ungraspably other, there is still *something*, and that something dispossesses, affects, incites study. I couldn’t but study. I couldn’t but fail at it. Alongside other ideas of study, all that I can say is that I did not study for *want of education*. The trace of study rails against the impossibility of its actualization.

Far from educating me, the incitement of study compels what is not educable to rupture narrative, to rupture knowledge, to rupture what it is to be educated. And yet, this is what education needs for it to be educational; it wants what cannot be tamed. Hence, here why I only leave traces of study, as distinguished from the exegesis about study. Studenthood and study here still move what it is to be moved, to write. I then can only see sense in claiming the infantile affect-phrase as a pedagogy or as an education as Derek Ford has done: “This prick is an education in our own inhumanity that disassembles our knowledge and will, suspends our being, exposing us to the matter of the world without innovating, and allowing us to inhabit the secret life” (Ford, 2021, p. 54) or that “Matter appears as a pedagogical agent on its own terms, disseizing the subject, disabling the grasping drive” (2021, p.12). As if matter, as if the silent phrase, was awaiting you to disseize you, to give you a lesson in what you have not heard, to educate you in your own infancy. When really it requires non-sense. As I have left, albeit in traces, here.

CHAPTER SEVEN

APEDAGOGY

Figure 6: Up a staircase in the Palazzo Bo of Padua University there is a humble podium: raw wooden planks scaffold a set of stairs to a plinth. It is unassuming, no great craftsmanship. This platform is downright plain compared to the treasures hidden in the university. This includes an amphitheater of intricate railings designed so narrow it would hold up a fainted person. The structure was designed to observe the dissection of dead bodies, to better understand the living. In comparison to the grandeur of Palazzo Bo, this homely podium seems out of place. You are not allowed on it, for it was once the lectern of Galileo. Elevated some four feet above the ground Galileo would profess his theories and discoveries of the heavens. But this in itself is not what makes this podium special. Students would come in scores to hear him. They had made Galileo the lectern themselves, or so I have been told, because *they wanted to see more of him*.

I. Apedagogy

“Nanterre, Here, Now”, written in 1970 (published in English 1993c), is voiced by a weary Lyotard two years after the infamous Parisian May of 1968 during which he saw and engaged in the strikes. At the start of the essay, Lyotard states that the text would have been what he presented to the teachers’ unions but he left the meeting of his “own initiative” (p. 46) because “The repression had entered the meeting” (p. 46). It takes some time to get to the crux of the issue because the text is interrupted by accounts of violence and altercations with the police on campus in the fallout of that May at the experimental university of Nanterre. But this is not the repression that Lyotard refers to in the opening lines of the text.

It is a repression of another kind and it is implicit in the university structure, its pedagogy, and even in attempts to critique it. This is a well-known theme of Lyotard’s since at least *Libidinal Economy* and more explicitly so, *The Postmodern Condition*. In sum: “The critique of capitalism and of its university in meetings, even if they take place in the teaching establishments, is

immediately digested by the system” (p. 57). There is then no crisis to speak of, the university is already implicated in the systems that its intellectuals and academics decry. It provides the certificates of knowledge and skills needed to fuel the labor market and especially critical research and publications outputs can be counted and calculated. *Repression* is implicit to the university structure and its teaching. Beyond the “intervention[s] on the spot and for the moment” (p. 58) unleashed by students and workers in May 1968, Lyotard ponders what is needed to subvert the annihilating powers of capitalism and managerialism in the university. Late in the essay, Lyotard muses “In truth, what is required is an apedagogy” (p. 58). What would it mean, educationally speaking, for there to *not* be pedagogy? There is something telling in Lyotard’s afterthoughts: “It does not propose the seizure of power, but the destruction of powers” (p. 59).

Thus far, we have spoken of the ontological, epistemic, and phenomenological aspects of what I have called studenthood: gripped by the affective inability to speak the student must act without knowing. Compelled to testify to what can only be known feelingly in reading, writing, in arts in letters. In doing so, the student must fail. The state of studenthood distends the temporal narratives of liberal education, that bank upon the future anterior of learning. Unlike the temporality of the studier, in which the studier experiences a past potentiality in the present, studenthood is experience without time, but what is now is always opening up futures.

From the early pages of this project of rewriting liberal arts, I have prioritized the student who occupies the *hic et nunc* of education, who is effaced through neoliberal, progressive, and conservative iterations of liberal education. I have made the case that educational theory and thought privileges the teacher, for they bring the learner over the arc of education’s future anterior. Even though scholarship on study and the studier privileges the teacher as a co-studier or as one who ignites study in their students. It is because of this teacher-centric position of educational thought that I have thus far avoided the intersubjective dimensions of studenthood, wanting instead to re-write liberal arts from and to the state of studenthood: which neither that of someone who will have learned nor that of someone who has learned and experiences what they have learned as not having learned it. However, if we are to take studenthood seriously, as education’s other, we must now consider how studenthood disrupts educational paradigms and relationships. This chapter will break in tone and form from the preceding in that it is prevalingly *unstudious*, whereas the preceding teetered between studious and unstudious. Why is this chapter unable to be studious? Its object, pedagogical relationships, is beyond its writing. This chapter can only be *about* such a

relationship. I will use figures of philosophical drama and historical imagination to dramatize and tease out how studenthood confounds and negates pedagogy and teacher-student paradigms. But what kind of pedagogy does studenthood confound? We need a moor from which to drift.

I want to start with Lyotard's reading of the *Symposium* (2009). It should be noted that this reading is how Lyotard begins his lecture series to philosophy students at the Sorbonne in 1964 found in the collection *Why philosophize?* (2013a). This detail is not insignificant; Lyotard himself is engaging in some sort of pedagogic activity by reciting the tale. Of course, Plato's *Symposium* interests itself in love, in Eros. It begins tidily, a gathering of conversationalists who abstain from imbibing at Agathon's house. They exchange their theories on the nature of love and, as usual, Socrates presents the winning tale. Most unusually for Socrates, his tale is borrowed from the "wise woman" (2009, p. 128) Diotima who recounted to Socrates the birth of Eros, son of Poverty and Plenty. The resulting offspring is not quite a god, nor a mere mortal, and is in a continual state of flux, of both ebb and flow in the pursuit of his love for the most beautiful thing, wisdom. Diotima states, "For wisdom is a most beautiful thing, and Love is of the beautiful; and therefore Love is also a philosopher or lover of wisdom, and being a lover of wisdom is in a mean between the wise and the ignorant" (2009, p. 133). And it is through love that men should strive toward wisdom and absolute beauty. This tale of the nature of love, in its ebb and flow, suits Socrates nicely, because he constantly touts that he really does not know anything and questions others merely to show that they too know nothing.

This tidy ending is, however, interrupted by the very drunk, beautiful, and popular Alcibiades with his "sophisticated innocence" (2013a, p. 31) as Lyotard calls it. Adorned with a crown of ivy and ribbons, Alcibiades cajoles the dinner party to imbibe with him. And in seating himself next to wise old Socrates, Socrates asks Agathon for protection from this wanton would-be lover Alcibiades: "the passion of this man has grown quite a serious matter to me... he goes wild with envy and jealousy, and not only abuses me but can hardly keep his hands off me, and at this moment he may do me some harm" (p. 153). Just why is Socrates so fearful of Alcibiades? The latter has been making advances on Socrates. This is to subvert the usual practice of Greek society, wherein an older man would take a younger as lover and protégé²⁶. At the dinner party,

²⁶ This is obviously reprehensible and I do not condone sexual relationships in education settings, whether in antiquity or now. Here, however, I merely wish to demonstrate the studenthood that Alcibiades invokes and how it interrupts Socrates' pedagogy.

however, Alcibiades makes a speech of praise for Socrates and prefaces his praise by telling Socrates that if he does not speak the truth that he must interject. Alcibiades proceeds to profess his love and passion for Socrates' words of wisdom: "For my heart leaps within me more than that of any Corybantian reveller, and my eyes rain tears when I hear them" (2009, p. 159). Alcibiades passionately wants what he thinks Socrates has. He is actually and figuratively drunk with desire for the wisdom that Socrates has: "I have known in my soul, or in my heart, or in some other part, that worst of pangs, more violent in ingenuous youth than any serpent's tooth, the pang of philosophy, which will make a man say or do anything" (2009, p. 164). Alcibiades professes in this perverted praise that he made his advances on Socrates, hoping to exchange his own physical beauty for Socrates' beauty in wisdom. But Socrates exercises great restraint, never indulging Alcibiades' advances and counters Alcibiades proposals, "But look again, sweet friend, and see whether you are not deceived in me" (p. 165). Again Socrates knows that he knows nothing, the wisdom that Alcibiades wants from him.

Lyotard calls Alcibiades' propositions a "game of desire" (p. 31) where Alcibiades, who is very beautiful after all, offers Socrates quite a deal on his very real, material beauty for Socrates' supposed beauty of wisdom, immaterial and invisible. Alcibiades' proposition is risky, that's what Socrates points out. Lyotard characterizes it thusly: "The situation is not a cash market, but a credit market in which the debtor—here, Socrates—is not sure of being creditworthy" (p. 33). In short, Alcibiades offered an exchange, his own beautiful form for Socrates' wisdom, which is love of the beautiful. This is the cash market symmetry, two equals exchanged goods of equivalent value one beauty for another. But Alcibiades, in his initial proposition is mistaken by this dynamic. He misunderstands the nature of the goods he barter for and the power dynamics between the two. What Alcibiades desires of Socrates, "Now I feel that I should be a fool to refuse you this or any other favour, and therefore I come to lay at your feet all that I have and all that my friends have, in the hope that you will assist me in the way of virtue, which I desire above all things, and in which I believe that you can help me better than any one else." (p. 165). This, of course, is a pedagogic relationship that Alcibiades desires. He wants Socrates to teach him the ways of wisdom, his own beautiful form is something he is willing to sacrifice. But Socrates prefers not to indulge Socrates, what Alcibiades wants Socrates doubts he has. Pedagogically speaking, Socrates has refused to become a teacher.

But in doing so, he gives the lesson he has always been about: that he really does not know anything, that wisdom is not something of which one take possession. Lyotard says this:

Socrates knows perfectly well that to be right all alone against all the others is not to be right but to be wrong, to be crazy. By opening up his own emptiness, his own vacancy when faced with Alcibiades' onslaught, he wants to hallow out the same emptiness in Alcibiades too; by telling his accusers that the his whole wisdom consists in knowing that he knows nothing, he wants to trigger yet further reflection.
(p. 37)

And for once I disagree with Lyotard, that in annihilating Alcibiades' logic, Socrates better asserts his own knowledge that he has no knowledge. This has much to do with Lyotard's own pedagogic intentions; he is, after all, lecturing philosophy students and has a lesson in mind. Lyotard's lesson for these students of philosophy is that the art is not in grasping, having or achieving. For the object of the philosopher's desire is absent; "that there is in demand—in Alcibiades demand, for example—more than what it demands, and this is more is a less, a nothing at all" (p. 38). Lyotard, like Socrates, wants his students to learn that there is a *lack* at the heart of it all. The lesson is, do not be seduced by the potency of wisdom's object, that object is always receding. Lyotard is in good company. Much of educational thought, its emphasis always on the teacher, is sympathetic to such a reading.

But, that is still a *lesson*. Socrates teaches, by way of refusal, that Alcibiades has it wrong. Socrates renders the desire of philosophy to a pedagogy: Alcibiades and others must learn that Socrates is not wrong about not knowing. Socrates must follow his method to its logical conclusion; this, Lyotard, says is his coup de grâce in taking the hemlock, "for if he had not disconcerted his adversary so as to better him and master him, he would not have agreed to die" (p. 37). Socrates, for all his not knowing, is hellbent on instruction. The closing of the *Symposium* is telling. After Alcibiades makes his praise of Socrates and the once sober dinner party descends into chaos, Alcibiades' passionate entry has left the door open to revelers. It is remembered that deep into the night, Socrates, who Alcibiades laments always manages to stay sober, is telling Aristophanes and Agathon that the arts of comedy and tragedy are the same; "To this they were constrained to assent, being drowsy, and not quite following the argument " (2009, p. 175). The listeners soon nod off after receiving their lesson.

I take the side of the student, Alcibiades, for he proves untamable and too wild for Socrates. He confounds the pedagogy of the great philosopher, causing Socrates to withdraw and give his philosophical services to more placid opponents. Alcibiades' proposition is much more sly and

cunning on a second view and they stem from his experience of studenthood. Let us see again what is studious in Alcibiades position. Alcibiades is aware of his own lack of knowledge, but he does not know it as Socrates does. Alcibiades *feels* it: his “heart leaps” (p. 159); he says “I have known in my soul, or in my heart, or in some other part, that worst of pangs” (p. 164); he calls his longing a “madness and passion” (p. 164). Alcibiades has been *moved* by lack of knowledge, he allows himself to be metaphorically (and really) intoxicated by what can only be known *feelingly*. He feels at once obligated and helpless, testifying to his friends and his teacher all of this. What is going on in this? I think Lyotard is sensitive to Alcibiades novel move in this pedagogic paradigm:

the best play of passion—that if it cannot get what it wants by taking, it conquers by giving itself. In fact, Alcibiades plays his game and, in his own way, he plays it well. For ultimately, Socrates is checked, he has not managed to persuade Alcibiades to accept his neutralization that he has been offering (2013a, p. 34-35)

Alcibiades pleas of passion, praise of grievance, and unrelenting desire *confounds* the pedagogic relation. Alcibiades willingness to act without knowing, that he can only experience *feelingly*, exposes what he calls “the haughty virtue of Socrates” (p. 166). Socrates can only vanquish his opponent in receding from this affective site of studenthood in order to *give Alcibiades a lesson*, for it to remain pedagogical. Socrates’ attempts to *make a lesson* by fleeing the affective site of studenthood. Alcibiades, however, remains in this state of *edifying confusion*. He exposes Socrates. This is apedagogy, wherein in pedagogy and the relation between students and teachers is confounded by studenthood.

Teachable Pedagogy

Thus far, in this section devoted to studenthood, I have contrasted this (un)educational state against the figure of the learner and of the studier. To explore the ways in which studenthood disrupts pedagogy, I will here begin with pedagogies emanating from the teacher. We will find that this includes educational thinking on study, the figure of the studier (which I distinguished from studenthood in Chapter Four). For this discussion, I will leave to one side the technocratic, managerial, and data driven notions that often guide institutional pedagogy that I considered in Part I. Instead here, I consider educational thought that expressly envisions education outside of these technocratic notions. In these educational vantage points, I still find a certain underestimation of the student, still too much emphasis on the teacher and teaching.

I begin here with the threads unraveled by Alcibiades in the *Symposium*, fruitful fodder for most educationalist, and how it is taken up by Nigel Blake, Paul Smeyers, Richard Smith, and Paul Standish (2000) in *Education in an Age of Nihilism*. The title of their conversation is telling, “On having educative relationships with pupils” (p. 179), the teacher is the pole of gravity in these relationships. The authors unabashedly speak of desirous forces that bring lovers of wisdom together at the polis. Of course, as Diotema tells Socrates, in pursuit of what is most Good, the philosopher falls in love with beautiful forms, which in turn lead one to the Good, but never fully. Wisdom always remains evasive, but love of it will guide the way. Education follows philosophy’s love; Blake and his co-authors suggest of Socrates’ unique wisdom, “His wisdom cannot be poured from one vessel to another. Truly to become Socrates’ student may therefore imply the forsaking of appearance” (p. 185) for trust in those elusive Ideals. Being a pupil of Socrates is in loving what he also loves and letting what is loved work over the site of the body. But the teacher must be handmaiden to this for the pupil:

That the body of knowledge is taught by someone to someone else and that, within this, attraction and dislike (among other things such as power) inevitable play their part is not necessarily to be deplored... The teacher is the person who captures desire and turns it into a desire for the [school] subject. It is difficult to see how this could be otherwise, how else than through love and trust for someone one would find the energy and the ‘lust’ to engage oneself in something difficult, demanding and new. (p. 199)

The student needs the teacher to ignite their passion for knowledge, wisdom, academic discipline and to direct it through the work and rigor required. The authors cannot even see another possibility, another dimension to the love triangle of education; the student must be led through love and trust to what the teacher wishes to share with them about the world, about knowledge. Anything else in pedagogical relationships remains unimaginable. A similar notion of education’s intersubjective relations between teacher and taught can be found in the authors’ earlier, *Thinking Again Education After Postmodernism* (1998), though here they consider in particular the act of *giving* a lesson. Of course, Blake and his colleagues are interested in eschewing the learning objectives and outcomes discourse so common in educational practice. I do not wish to criticize these efforts, merely the teacher-centrism through which educational visions and possibilities are imagined and this is apparent in their questions that guide their discussion, “What is given when one learns? What is the gift of teaching?” (p. 84). They complicate the straightforward notions of gift-giving in the educational and metaphorical use of the phrase. What is revealed is that teaching

is not the giving of something to the student, but of bringing the students into what is already given, and all the benefits and detriments that entails: “This points to a kind of giving without reserve and without return—the seed-pod bursts... The paradox is that, in this best kind of giving, what is given must not be recognized as a gift because recognition returns us to the circle of reciprocity” (p. 87). The cultural, linguistic, epistemic heritage gives itself because that is the ground from which education must blossom. The teacher also gives, nothing material but *herself*, as part of what is always already given. Students, by this logic, then cannot reciprocate this; it is non-exchangeable, non-refundable because the student is busy with “the initiation into a culture, [which] is a gift that cannot be refused” (p. 88). Let us look more in-depth at the pedagogical relation that is at stake here. Because the teacher teaches, and *gives*, what is already given, there is no economy to which this can be rendered, the student is hostage to lingual-cultural heritage and to the teacher. *It cannot be refused*. A change has taken place between these two pedagogic paradigms, they both however remain teacher-centric. In the former, the teacher ignites the student’s passions for something, and in the latter, the teacher brings the student into the fold of their shared world. In the former, the student cannot commit themselves to the passion without the teacher’s guidance and in the latter, the student *cannot even refuse* what the teacher teaches. But all this is a pedagogy of some kind, either the teacher must seduce the student into the rigor of educational pursuit or the student is hostage to the giving by the teacher what is already given. To echo Lyotard, *all* pedagogy participates in repression. This is not to say that educational thinking such as Blake and his colleagues is a repressive power dynamic between teacher and pupil, merely that the student is consistently underestimated in these paradigms; always a willing other, ready to be herded into passions or further inculcated into what they are already part of.

More recent work by Paul Standish (2020) redefines the teacher’s position as a conduit of a student’s passion for knowledge or wisdom and as shepherd into cultural, linguistic, and epistemic arena into the much more palatable position of *testifier*. This is still a teacher-centric notion of the stakes of pedagogy. Standish considers the many definitions of testimony to consider its import for the practice of teaching. Here, Standish considers how testimony is the intersection between knowledge and belief in the act of teaching in its most mundane and ordinary respects. Standish’s take is informed by a broad sweep of poststructuralist thinkers (inclusive of Lyotard) for whom “the disclosure of the truth already depends upon a relationship, to the one who addresses me, and this is always already ethical” (p. 331). This is truth beyond the remit of scientific proof,

beyond what can be ostensibly proven, but the truth as the ground of human conduct; it is nothing more or less than how we believe life to be. This is from whence education comes. It requires testimony. Standish puts the teacher's role this way:

The role of the teacher and the school, it might be said, is to keep safe the conversation of humankind. The teacher, as exemplar, is the one who keeps safe the truth, where the truth is not just this or that proposition but commitment to a form of inquiry, and where that form of enquiry is not to be understood only as methodology but as the substance of enquiry, filled out with familiarity with particular topics and literatures and questions, and stretches the conversation. (p. 332)

Standish immediately attempts to temper this; it is merely that the objects of pedagogy, literature, arts, academic disciplines, are always already about our very own human affairs. Teaching is constant testimony that these discourses say something about "us", no matter how lofty or mundane, inclusive of disciplines taught in trade schools and up to the humanities in more traditional tertiary institutions.

Still, the teacher directs all pedagogy. It is the teacher who bears witness to the truth embedded in the fabric of our discourses, languages, and yearnings. Standish puts it this way: "And the comments are not given to thin air: they are addressed to a person. That the other person can be approached in this way, with this thought, is crucial to what the thought is: this teaching is a celebration, a revivifying, and a testament.." (p. 355); pedagogic relationships are made over what is taught, teachers testify to what they believe, and this is addressed to their students. This is of course more palatable than the notion of the teacher as grand seducer or and adds nuance to the ways in which the teacher might induct their pupils into these ways of life, these forms of truth.

To translate this into Lyotard's philosophy of phrasing is illuminating. First is the universe of the pedagogic testimony: the addressor would be the teacher, the addressee would be their pupil, and the sense endowed to the referent would be the truth according to a genre of discourse, or an example of this discourse. What are the stakes of this universe? How might it be linked unto? And who, or what links it? For this I look to Standish's illustration of the pragmatics of his pedagogic testimony through an exchange between a teacher and a student in the film *The History Boys*, directed by Nicholas Hynter (2006). The film centers on the preparation of a select group of working-class pupils and their preparation for their Oxbridge interview in an English secondary school. One of the tutors enlisted to prepare the students is Hector, who is in earnest about the poems and the literature he reads and speaks of. Standish considers an exchange Hector has with

one of his students over a Hardy poem. Hector says to his pupil, “The best moments in reading are when you come across something, a thought, a feeling, that you’d thought special, particular to you, and here it is set down by someone else, a person you’ve never met, maybe a person long dead—and it’s, it’s as if a hand has come out and taken yours” (2006). Standish points out that in the film, as Hector speaks he couples his bodily action with his words, reaching his own hand out while he testifies to this feeling; “Hector is testifying to something that he has experienced for which there could scarcely be a proof or even anything that might constitute substantial evidence. He is testifying to something that he has found in literature and to a kind of faith in this. This is simultaneously a faith in what we can do when we talk and teach and learn” (p. 337). Bringing Hector’s pedagogic testimony back to the phrase universe, what might the stakes be? Hector, addressing his pupil, is attempting to assign a meaning to the poem they are discussing; the sense Hector is petitioning his pupil to assent to his testimony, which is in itself a form of assent, a feeling that is likewise testified to in the poem, and now between teacher and pupil. This is the truth, this is the world that we share, as it is evoked and felt in this poem, *don’t you see?*

This should sound familiar; “We could even define taste as the ability to judge something that makes our feeling in a given presentation *universally communicable* without mediation by a concept” (1987, p. 162), says Kant of the *Third Critique*. Standish’s notion of teaching as testimony undoubtedly strikes chords with Kant’s idea of a *sensus communis*. Kant’s notion of the *sensus communis*, much like Standish’s testimony, begins with *being moved* by something, which precedes a concept and can only be signified by an indeterminate concept. As Standish repeatedly points out, the teacher’s testimony is nothing that can be proved. It is from feeling that the teacher testifies and appeals to their pupil, with hopes to share in this way of life: a shared sense, the ground we must share by way of a common tongue, of being talking beasts. Implied in the teacher’s testimony, and indeed Kant’s training of the sensible with the supersensible, is the desire for assent. What is made sharable is shared in the hope that the other agrees. As Standish puts it, the teacher testifies to bring their pupil into that way of life. I do not wish to charge this vision of teaching as abusively teacher-centric or as indoctrination, or even to deny that teaching really might be like this. I merely wish to point out what has been overlooked here. Firstly, of course, the teacher’s testimony has no guarantee that it will be accepted by the student. Secondly, it overlooks the addressee instance of the student; in the example Standish used from *The History Boys*, he fails to consider the fact that Hector’s testimony was given in response to a question *posed by his student*.

The position of the student in this pedagogy remains unthought even though it is the student who *stokes* the teacher, calls upon the teacher to testify. Again, the student, half-formed thing that they are, is the animus of education, without the student the teacher would testify to no one, and would not be *teaching*. Though missing here, Standish (2014) has earlier spoken of the triangle of education: teacher, student, object; it is a matter of balance between these poles of education. Too much emphasis on any pole veers education of course: too much emphasis on the teacher occludes what ought to be learned, too much emphasis on what is to be learned dehumanizes education. Too much emphasis on the student? Standish says, “To anchor the rationale for a curriculum too much in the student would be to risk fostering a kind of narcissism. It would lose sight of the ways in which what is worth doing is often something that the student cannot yet see” (p. 261). Though Standish here undoubtedly refers to more consumerist notions of student-centeredness, I contend, ever in favor of the student, that the student, in their very state of studenthood, can invoke pedagogy and in doing so confound it.

First however, it is important to consider the ways in which students can reject what teachers testify to, what they try to induct them into. Amanda Fulford (2016) considers what it means for student to *disengage* from, or to dissent, in education. Fulford, responding to the increasing emphasis on engagement and participation in educational thought and practice, contends that refusal to engage in education is actually “an awakening of voice that is an active expression of a commitment to one’s language, community, and education” (p. 108). Fulford contends that one’s disengagement from education is no pathology, but a form of contesting the criteria of those educational practices, points of view, and ultimate aims of consensus building. Fulford states

Such an education seeks not to suppress disengagement, understood in terms of aversive thinking, but to embrace it as an expression of voice. Thought of in this way, something of a reversal is achieved. Disengagement is no longer a lack of action (or of care about an issue), but rather the opposite: the active voicing of what we will, or will not, consent to. (p. 113)

To bring this full circle, the teacher who testifies under Standish’s (2020) notion, always risks their students will dissent from that testimony. Fulford demonstrates that it is always possible that the student will refuse what is given in the teacher’s testimony. But what I find problematic in Fulford’s account is her emphasis that such refusal, such disownment is still in the remit of education, and that the student’s gesture of refusal is still part of a pedagogy. I think that this has

much to do with Fulford's emphasis on Cavellian education for *grown-ups*, when for Cavell, it is the child's questioning that exposes himself as in need of education still.

Cavell, in *The Claim of Reason* (1979), discusses the intersection of linguistic culture, philosophy, and education in light of the child. Here, I believe Cavell does mean an *actual child* in the developmental sense of the word. He speaks of the awkwardness of the "familiar stranger" (p. 124) in the child.; they are outside the intellectual and linguistic heritages we take as given, they mess things up, get it wrong. For Cavell, however, it is the impertinence of the child's questions that reveals what it is that education is and the continued need for it. The stakes of education in Cavell's philosophy is dependent on his use of Wittgenstein's forms of life to consider the nature of human convention. Cavell's notion of the shared linguistic criteria for different areas of human life in a given culture are informed by the logic of language games; Cavell likens this to the rules of mathematics, stating "to know the meaning of a word, to have the concept titled by the word, is to be able to go on with it in new contexts—ones we accept as correct for it; and you can do this without knowing, so to speak, the formula which determines the fresh occurrence, i.e., without being able to articulate the criteria in the terms applied" (p. 122). The way things are for us is then difficult to pinpoint, imbedded in series of practices and meanings. Convention is created gently, imperceptibly by what we do with words, how we carry on forms of life. It is the activity of philosophy, of education, that exposes such convention and their ability to change. And it is none other than the child that exposes this need;

But if the child, little or big, asks me: Why do we eat animals? Or Why are some people poor and others rich? or What is God? Or Why do I have to go to school? Or Do you love black people as much as white people? or Who owns the land? or Why is there anything at all? or How did God get here?, I may find my answers thin, I may feel run out of reasons without being willing to say 'This is what I do' (what I say, what I sense, what I know), and honor that. (p. 125)

The child, who is not *in* on these conventions, does not understand how to navigate them, exposes them *as convention*, reminds the grown up that the conventions, meanings, and practices by which they live their life are not what they have ever given consent too; grown-ups are "perfect slaves" (p. 121) to forms of life. Education and philosophizing are then a means to re-commit to that form of life, to find what in that genre of convention is what makes it itself. Cavell puts it this way:

It is in the name of the idea of philosophy, and against a vision that it has become false to itself, or that it has stopped thinking, that such figures as Descartes and Kant and Marx and Nietzsche and Heidegger and Wittgenstein seek to revolutionize

philosophy. It is because certain human beings crave the conservation of their art that they seek to discover how, under altered circumstances, paintings and pieces of music can still be made, and hence revolutionize their art beyond the recognition of many. (p. 121)

It is by this logic that Fulford (2016) can coopt the refusal, the disownment, the dissent of education's stakes, to be brought into the ways of life in a linguistic cultural heritage, *as in itself educational*. The emphasis here is on the individual, in finding their voice, in becoming educated can dissent the conventions into which they have been inculcated. Even the question of the familiar stranger is for the education of the grown up.—To echo Lyotard again, all pedagogy involves repression. Even your dissent from convention is your education!

What is needed is something that is *not* education, *not* pedagogy, *what remains uneducable*. It is not even needed but already in the *hic et nunc*. So here I pose the student as counter to what teacher, the grown up attempt in education, in its pedagogy, the countervailing force of *apedagogy*. I will not propose a concept or a theory of this. Instead, I merely offer a study of a story about such an apedagogy, in which a student confounds the conventions of a shared life and forces a testimony. But nothing in this story is so tidy as finding one's voice, of becoming educated, of quarreling about differences of judgement. The student in this story is the ruination of the paradigm.

The Ruinous Studenthood of Alcibiades

I have said before that it is not only the sublime, but also in the beautiful that Lyotard feels what cannot be determined, what cannot be known, what exerts its force upon language and calls one to judge without rule. Study Trace No. 1, which began the present drift from liberal education, is a study of Lyotard's "Sensus Communis" (1991c). To reiterate, in this essay, Lyotard studies Kant's "Analytic of the Beautiful" in the *Critique of Judgement*. For Kant (1987), a judgement of the beautiful is the disinterested feeling of pleasure that demands universal assent. Disinterested in that the feeling of the beautiful has nowt to do with its object. Universal in that upon the judgement of the beautiful, we often implore others that they should also feel the beautiful upon the occasion of the object. This is a thorny point for Kant that he attempts to solve with the "Antimony of Taste": judgements of taste have no determinable concept (hence why we are exterior to the realm of knowledge) but because judgments of taste and their demand for a universal

assent are where our faculties come into their own harmony, there must be an Idea (an indeterminate concept) to guide this, which in taste is what one could call the supersensible substrate of humanity. What matters, however, for Lyotard is that the feeling of the beautiful, is affective, infantile, and the site of a rupture in knowledge and cognition. The sense of beauty in “Sensus Communis” anticipates Lyotard’s writings on affect and infancy:

And since the pleasure which is the affiancing can’t be inscribed in determination, even in the determination belonging to the temporal schema, this pleasure doesn’t synthesize with itself during time, and consequently it forgets itself. It is immemorial. This is also why each pleasure in beauty is a birth. Why the community of faculties remains discrete, secret, separated from itself, not inscribing itself in synthesizable time. (1991c, p. 22)

What is the affiancing in the judgement of the beautiful? Not one of equality, but the bittersweet “rivalry” (p. 21) between faculties of imagination (aesthesis) and understanding: “There is no common ground for ‘presenting’ something and for explaining it” (p. 21). Presentation is how Lyotard invokes the ontology of the phrase in *The Differend*. It is not a question of who, or what, is born in the feeling of the beautiful, but that there *is*. As I have considered in Chapter Five, the philosophy of the phrase in Lyotard’s *The Differend* is a subtle ontology; a phrase *is* in that it is presented, but in explaining it, or situating it, the phrase is no longer what it *is*, or more accurately, *was*. In the feeling of the beautiful, when the I grasps it, puts it into the words, *This is beautiful is it not?*, risking the judgements of others, this “I” able to do that mustn’t trust its apparent unity. Lyotard says, “There is no transition here between reflection and determination, between the substratum of the faculties’ affinity and the originary synthetic unity of apperception. Substance can’t make itself into subject. It is essential to the subject to misrecognize itself as substance ” (1991c, p. 22).

This is the affliction of Alcibiades and why, in studenthood, he submits himself totally to his taste for beauty. He does not mistake himself for possessing beauty (except for the charms of his appearance!), he merely wishes to submit to it, to submit to another, Socrates. And in submitting to his taste for beauty, Alcibiades exposes Socrates, who does not submit to love for beauty, but puts closures upon it, albeit in the negative. Again, in Alcibiades’s praise of Socrates, he says, “For let me tell you; none of you know him; but I will reveal him to you; having begun, I must go on. See how fond he is of the fair? He is always with them and is always being smitten by them, and then again he knows nothing and is ignorant of all things—such is the appearance he puts on” (Plato, 2009, p. 161). Alcibiades’ accusation is confirmed: Socrates will not *yield* to

beauty, the savoring of its sting. In fact, Alcibiades describes Socrates' *unfeelingness*: his sobriety, his tolerance for hunger, for cold. All Socrates testifies to is *not knowing, being ignorant*, what Alcibiades calls his haughty virtue. To be able to profess the absence of his knowledge, is a kind of knowledge, a kind of pedagogical ruse that Socrates attempts. To achieve this, that savor of beauty must be forgotten. Socrates forgets the taste for beauty through a negative knowledge of it; this is his wisdom. This is his pedagogy and he would prefer less willful students.

In sum, even in the *Analytic of the Beautiful*, Lyotard finds the experience of affective infancy, that unsettles the known. In making it known and knowable, shared and sharable, the savor of beauty is forgotten, closed in a concept (albeit indeterminate). Alcibiades has not moved past this feeling and Socrates, in his pedagogy, has suppressed it for a negative concept, *What is beautiful is what remains unknown*, this is what makes it teachable. When faced with the force, vitality, and absolute submission of Alcibiades, Socrates retreats. What is teachable pales in comparison to what is palpable in studenthood.

II. Other than Education

Socrates, the pug-nosed paterfamilias of liberal education, is emblematic of its nihilism and its pessimism. What else but his lack of trust for the *hic et nunc* is to be found in the current practice of neoliberal education and the history of its liberal education ideal? Socrates' method of teaching is the genealogy of this educational project. He promises *nothing* in his profession: that he does not know, but he certainly knows *how* to know. Recall Socrates' lesson for Meno, who concedes that he does not know what virtue is. When Meno poses the entirely reasonable question: How does one know when one has found what they do not know? Socrates denies the paradox as poorly formulated; it is rather that the soul *was once* part of the whole and in every act of learning is a remembering of this formerly possessed good and true knowledge. He knows *how* to get to knowing, which is not *hic et nunc* but over there, in the past and in the future. He fails to be affected by anything, impervious to the present. This is the temporal and epistemic projects of liberal education, where all that is good and true, and even that which truly *is*, is presupposed to be beyond the *hic et nunc*. Hence liberal education's projects are invested either in the past, a cultural heritage, or in the future, the promised cultivated subject. The student must be effaced, the state of not

knowing is superseded in a procedural knowledge. This formulaic sense of learning is the prevailing criteria in extant systems of neoliberal education: lifelong learning, performativity, assessment, examination. Since Socrates, the genealogy of (neo)liberal education is invested in the nihilism that the here and now is meaningless, the pessimism that without Education the student shall never find their way out of the meaningless here and now.

To resist this nihilism and this pessimism in which (neo)liberal education is enmeshed, I invoke a genealogy of study engendered from Alcibiades' drunken passions. Alcibiades does not supersede his desire, his lack, he submits entirely to having been affected. He feels that he does not know and in doing so exposes the nihilism and pessimism inherent in Socrates' entirely formulaic knowledge. Alcibiades does not know how to go on. He confounds Education and pedagogy. What he endeavors is apedagogical. Alcibiades' submission to affect is the reassertion of what Education would do away with: studenthood. It is the coming back of the *hic et nunc*, that Education needs in order for it to be, not in order to efface it but to savor it in all its poverty. Alcibiades' gesture of study is no restoration of an authentic education, it is other than education. It is what is occluded in (neo)liberal educational projects. Rather than putting stock in a transcendent saving grace, studenthood is steeped in a cherishing of the present, of the *hic et nunc*. The inability to grasp it or to know it, but be affected by it is what compels the liberal art of study.

REWRITINGS

*You like what is unfinished. Nothing of what you write will be authoritative. You lend yourself willingly to this prescription: “to go there without knowing there.” You’re certain nobody can do it, least of all yourself. You know you’re doing what you’re not cut out to do.
You’re an imposter.*

—Jean-François Lyotard, “Endurance and the Profession”

This is a thesis that has tried not to be a thesis. This thesis has attempted to rewrite liberal arts education through the liberal art of study. It has, in its very form, attempted to testify to what *is hic et nunc* in the (neo)liberal educational project but is effaced for the ends of the project. It has attempted, in its form, to allow for a fissure, a fracture of the conventions of the liberal educational pursuit. It is a thesis after all. The author is subject to specific and pre-determined stakes. To convince the reader that I am in control, that I have written the thesis with all the authorial mastery that (neo)liberal education demands, I must transgress study, studenthood. Here I state explicitly how the form of the thesis invokes a differend between study and (neo)liberal education. The writing of this thesis contains three different modes of critique: the analysis and articulation of argument, a “Kantian” mode of critique, and the formal or stylistic mode of critique. Their copresence in the thesis incite the differend between educational projects and the *hic et nunc* of studenthood, its liberal art of study.

Part I Poverty of the University in this thesis is written in the mode of academic critique. Chapter One, “The Illiberal Arts”, argues that liberal arts education as practiced in the neoliberal university is *illiberal*. It utilizes “empirical” evidence: the stated missions and aims of liberal education organization and universities. These empirical observations about neoliberal university practices are used demonstrate its arguments: that student debt has predetermined the outcomes of education which is enacted through performativity and an all-consuming pedagogy. The writing in this chapter operates by negation; it demonstrates only that neoliberal educational projects are *not* liberal. It fails to affirm anything in liberal education. As such, the thesis looks to historical ideas of liberal education in Chapter Two, “The Ruination of the Liberal Arts”. It examines the history of this educational idea critically, arguing that historical iterations of liberal educational

projects suffer from a prevailing pessimism: that thinking, the student, must be for something other than itself. By considering the gamut of liberal educational ideas in the Occident, from Antiquity to the London school, this literature review still seeks to prove a negative argument. It demonstrates that these educational ideas use transcendent ends to justify the means of education and what is *hic et nunc* in education: the student. Again, this is only a negative argument; it demonstrates the failures of such narratives to defend education, rendering it only to a telos, to a transcendent account.—The analysis here is punctuated by “Figures,” most of which are textual in nature, that belie the uncanny disdain for the student or study in educational thought. These act as small stylistic critiques, puncturing argument with satire or desire.—Neither of the arguments of the first two chapters satiates the desire of the thesis, to study. The writing then turns to its last solely critical argument in Chapter Three, “Poverty of Philosophy of Education.” Disillusioned with neoliberal educational practices and historical accounts of liberal education, the analysis turns to philosophy of education to consider a means to resist the nihilism inherent to (neo)liberal education. This chapter also argues a negative: the philosophy of education is lacking in its ability to affirm what is *hic et nunc* in education. The chapter engages the academic conventions of critique in its review of the literature, both the history of the academic discipline and its engagement with Lyotard’s thought. The very form of Part I The Poverty of the University, by critiquing all possible avenues to revitalize liberal education, suggests that the logic of critique, of negation, can only annihilate what is immanent in liberal education, it fails to feel its force within it. It calls for a shift in tack.

“As If,” Part II of thesis, then begins with the first of three Study Traces. These short texts interrupt and echo in the surrounding analyses. They are, as the title suggests, trace of the liberal art of study enacted in the form of the thesis. They are written outside and within the main body of the thesis. They distend and interrupt the argument. The analysis must use them to comment upon studenthood and its study. I will not explain the content of each here so that they culminate in a commentary. I will here merely observe that the Study Traces deal with same materials and practices that sustain the arguments of academic convention generally and the materials particular to the present thesis. That is, they are traces of the practices of both reading and writing. However, they are not merely means, nor do they adhere to an aesthetic form. They rupture the form of the thesis because they enact the liberal art of study. The traces of study are the imbecilic response,

compelled from and to infancy to act without knowing, which is what animates thought, what compels liberal education but is irreducible to it.

The stakes of a thesis would not permit a collection only of Study Traces, though they are the endeavoring of what I propose in the more “Kantian” mode of critique to be found in Parts II and III in the thesis. The analysis is moved by but attempts to contain what is unleashed in the Study Traces. Part II drifts from liberal education, and thereby academic convention, to affirm what already *is* in the liberal educational project but what is effaced by it: the student, study. Thus Part III is invested in setting parameters for the educational figures that preoccupy the chapters: the learner who achieves the determined educational ends of (neo)liberal education and the studier who experiences education as not education. In contrasting these educational figures with the work of Lyotard and what I take to be his gesture of study in the ethico-ontology of infancy, I make the case for studenthood and its affective testimonial of study as a distinct (un)educational figure, state, and art of study. This is to make commentary upon what is endeavored in the Study Traces, which is to transgress what they endeavor. In the analysis themes are circled upon, the traces echo; that is the writing suffers from anamnesis. It cannot be rid of what animates its commentary. The gesture is in the entire form of the thesis: it follows academic critique to entropy and endeavors what is *hic et nunc* in the liberal art of study. The stakes of the thesis demand that this be commented upon, situated as a contribution to the field. Of course, to do so is to transgress study, to fail where thought fails to pay off its debts to the being in being there.

It is still a thesis in that the reader/examiner has been selected and is positioned as the addressee of the thesis, but the thesis itself rejects these stakes. In its rewriting of the liberal art of study, albeit in traces, the task of writing is addressed by that imbecilic force that confounds pedagogy, upends Educational projects. The question then is how to judge the present gesture of rewriting studenthood without consigning it to the determinate criteria of scholastic judgement? Rather, why not study *hic et nunc*?

“I would like to be an underground cavity full of black, cold, and still water.”

—Jean-François Lyotard, “Marie Goes to Japan”

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Forthcoming article to be published in *Philosophy and Theory of Higher Education* special issue “What is study?”. Passages of this article are used in Chapter Five.

Essaying the Essay in Response to the Question “What Is Studying?”

There is a certain performative contradiction in answering the question “What is studying?”. Studying, as distinguished from learning, is *not* the acquisition of knowledge or skill. To answer the question “What is studying?” is to know what it is that studying is, which is to no longer be in the realm of studying. To answer the question is only to talk *about* study, and to operate in the educational realm of learning, mastery, and argumentation. Studying, if it is to be distinguished from learning, is best not understood but done. Still, the aspiration to name and identify study is understandable. There is first a superficial reason: the academy is created and maintained through claiming and naming a niche within the landscape of ideas. There is, however, a second reason to name study: to testify to an educational space *other than* learning.

It is from this contradiction that I will respond to the question “What is studying?”. This response takes its form in the act of writing and as such will respond by *essaying* study. This is to transgress the conventions of academic writing (which is replete with the logic of learning): it does not argue, it does not position itself in scholarship, it will not answer the question. It enacts study in its form. Impatient readers, who might prefer the point may proceed to the conclusion, but will forgo what is studious in this response to the question. To essay the essay, the present paper will invoke study in the very prose, through the use of circuitous and paradoxical syntax. It will invoke study by the logic of its organization. First, I consider the practice of the essay in the higher education context and pedagogical theories based upon the essay. These practices and theories still consign the essay to the logic of learning and fail *to essay*. In doing so, this paper begins by stating what the studious essay is *not*, which is not to answer the question. The paper then shifts in focus to a study of a story of study: “Pierre Menard, the Author of the *Quixote*” by Jorge Luis Borges. It will conclude, however, by the performative contradiction out of which it operates by utilizing the enactment of the essay to suggest that study *is* thinking, reading, writing without knowing or learning.

The Function of the Essay in Higher Educational Practices

It is first essential to consider how the essay functions in the educational logic of learning in higher education. “Essay,” derived from the French verb *essayer*, simply means to try. In common parlance of higher learning, “essay” is not a mode of trying or enactment, but rather a means of assessment. Through this educational logic, the essay is a site to make the student’s mind, knowledge, and thought processes explicit in written form. The written piece of work is then read by a teacher or professor who uses it as a simulacrum for the student’s competence and abilities. This is evident in the grading rubrics by which students are assessed. For example, the American Association of Colleges and Universities provides a template marking rubric for “written communication” which is divided into benchmarks for students’ acquisition of the skills and competencies required for written communication. The rubric is replete with phrases such as

“successful execution”, “illustrate mastery of the subject”, “demonstrates skillful use of... relevant sources”, and “uses graceful language that skillfully communicates meaning”²⁷. This common understanding of the essay as a means of assessment renders the practice to the logic of learning, wherein a pupil gains knowledge and skill; the essay is a site to externalize it for assessment. Underneath this logic is the presumption that an essay is only a form of communication: ideas translated into printed word for the purpose of persuasion or argument. For instance, the Harvard College Writing Center advises students that “any good essay should show us a mind developing a thesis, supporting that thesis with evidence, deftly anticipating objections or counterarguments, and maintaining the momentum of discovery”²⁸. The essay, under the logic of learning, functions as a means to communicate what has been learned by a pupil so that their skill and competence can be assessed or be used to persuade.

The Pedagogy of the Essay

How the essay is practiced is not in keeping with the history of the essay. Though it is in many ways dubious to try to define the essay as a discrete literary genre, outside the term’s use in pedagogy, an “essay” is an ambiguous kind of writing; characterized more by its inability to sit neatly within any discipline or genre than to occupy one. To further consider what the essay is or could be, I look now to a canonical essayist in the Occident: Montaigne. Though it should be noted that Montaigne’s *Essays* cannot represent the entire history of the essay and this is by no means an exhaustive dive into Montaigne’s oeuvre, I demonstrate how the essay, even without assessment, is rendered to the logic of learning by educational thought. Firstly, what distinguishes Montaigne’s *Essays* from the pedagogic understanding above is an obvious one. Montaigne did not write his essays to be assessed. The essays ramble and wander, are simultaneously sardonic and sincere. They contain contradictions and Montaigne’s own second-guesses. For example in “Of Pedantry” Montaigne admonishes an impoverished learning more occupied with regurgitation than understanding, and in essaying also scolds himself:

... so our pedants go picking knowledge here and there, out of books, and hold it at tongue’s end, only to spit it out and distribute it abroad. And here I cannot but smile to think how I have paid myself in showing the foppery of this kind of learning, who myself am so manifest an example; for, do I not the same thing throughout this whole composition? I go here and there, culling out of several books the sentences that best please me, not to keep them (for I have no memory to retain them in), but to transplant them into this; where, to say the truth, they are no more mine than in their first places.²⁹

And Montaigne is not wrong, the essay is interrupted with tangential quotations. My point is not to criticize Montaigne, but rather to demonstrate the unfurling, tentative, and playful manner of writing. It can hardly be said that these writings are intended to posit concepts, theories, to educate, or to assess Montaigne’s writing abilities. As Paul Heilker³⁰ observes, the seemingly tangential nature of Montaigne’s essays belie a serious commitment to a form of skeptical discovery in thought that transgressed scholastic convention in the sixteenth century. In essaying, Montaigne enacted a different kind of thinking. Here, however, I demonstrate pedagogical visions based on the practice of the essay still tether it to the logic of learning or fail in themselves to essay.

²⁷ Association of American Colleges and Universities, *Written Communication*, 2.

²⁸ Duffin, “Overview of the academic essay,” 1.

²⁹ Montaigne, *Essays*, 175.

³⁰ Heilker, *The Essay*.

Duck-Joo Kwak has criticized the use of the essay for assessment and posits the essay as a site of student expression, opening the essay to “possibilities of learning, thinking, and being”³¹. For Kwak, writing an essay is a chance for the student to open up a time and space beyond “brutal everydayness”³² to pursue those loftier and unanswerable questions about the human condition. Kwak’s own questions about why we fail to live up to our own ideals serve as impetus to carve out a different pedagogy of the essay than one of assessment. It is a nice touch that Kwak performs the yearning envisioned in this new pedagogy of the essay, however Kwak still posits a concept about essaying. The essay in this pedagogic vision is where the essayist pursues those “great existential or metaphysical questions”³³ on the occasion of cultural artefacts in literature, arts and letters. This, however, is to assign the essay a purpose; it is merely a form, or an occasion to pursue those more lofty unanswerable questions of life. This, however, is not study, or a studious essay, which need not be or be for anything other than itself.

On similar lines, Kevin Williams and Patrick Williams find in Montaigne’s essays “lessons from a master”³⁴. From their reading of the *Essays* Williams and Williams posit an educational aim of “personalization” and “decentering”³⁵: learning should be deep, personally apprehended and digested, and visible in an individual’s conduct. An important component of this learning process that Williams and Williams glean from the *Essays* is the ability to look outside one’s cultural perspective. This, the authors suggest, necessitates a pedagogy of conversation, wherein pupils should become accustomed to taking any and all sides of an argument, and especially the argument counter to their own cultural background, in order to endeavor for truth, no matter which side it comes from. Again my aim here is not to critique this particular pedagogy—it seems rather a good one!—but instead to question the making of a pedagogical theory from the *essay*, with more emphasis on their *content* than *the fact that they were written*.

One writes an essay *to learn* or *learns from* an essay under such a logic. The emphasis is still on the gaining or apprehending of some educational good, and often for changing the conduct of the one who writes. But if studying is to be distinguished from learning, essaying must be divorced from such ends. This is not to say that learning might not happen in essaying, but the purpose of essaying, if it is to be studious, is not to learn. All of this is to speak of essaying, not *to essay*. Likewise, in the present paper, the performative contradiction at stake in naming and defining what it is that studying is, would only be to *speak of study*, which is not *to study*. As such, the studious essay, if it is not to be spoken of or conceptualized, can only be enacted without knowing what it is that it is or what it is for.

Essaying the Essay

Here, I shall essay—try in writing—an essay in response to the question “What is studying?”. It is because I do not know what it is that studying is that I must essay. Or as the above has demonstrated, I only know what it is that a studious essay *is not*. I must write from a state of not knowing. Subsuming argument with analogy and concept with a dramatization³⁶, I look to a literary figure of this paradoxical and impossible impulse to write without knowing what it is to write. This is the short story by Jorge Luis Borges “Pierre Menard Author of the Quixote”, ripe for

³¹ Kwak, “Practising Philosophy”, 63.

³² *Ibid*, 63.

³³ *Ibid*, 75.

³⁴ Williams and Williams, “Lessons From a Master”, 253.

³⁵ *Ibid*, 256.

³⁶ I thank my interlocutor in preparing this essay for the Special Issue for this insightful suggestion.

the plucking due to Borges' use of the word essay as a verb and not a noun. In the story an unnamed narrator documents the 20th century "Symbolist from Nîmes"³⁷ Pierre Menard's attempts to write the *Quixote* itself. Menard endeavors not to write a contemporary *Quixote*, but an iteration without reference to the prose of Cervantes' *Quixote*. Menard entertains and then dismisses learning the Spanish of antiquity in order to write it because "the undertaking was impossible from the very beginning and of all the impossible ways of carrying it out, this was the least interesting"³⁸.

Menard selects as his method for this impossible task two rules that cancel each other out: the first "to essay variations of a formal or psychological type"³⁹; the second "to sacrifice these variations to the 'original' text and reason out this annihilation in an irrefutable manner"⁴⁰. The former rule forces Menard to write his *Quixote* not from his authorship, but from the psychology of its characters. This must of course be cancelled out by the secondary rule, which is fidelity to the original text. Menard cannot but fail in this endeavor. As such, in Menard's practice of essaying the *Quixote*, what he writes must be undone by the act of writing it, because what is written is not the original *Quixote*. Menard's project is in itself a performative contradiction. These contradictory rules are also indicative of a deeper problem with the practice; Menard observes, "it is not in vain that three hundred years have gone by, filled with exceedingly complex events. Among them, to mention only one, is the *Quixote* itself"⁴¹. Menard is attempting to compose a book that already exists; it is a writing that is unable to bring its object into being through written word, because it is an event that has already passed. Any attempt to compose the *Quixote* itself is not the *Quixote* itself, but the failure bring the task to fruition.

Nothing then is produced by Menard. Not only because the task is impossible but also because Menard destroys any evidence of his labors. The narrator states that Menard would make a "merry bonfire"⁴² of his notebooks even though "He multiplied draft upon draft, revised tenaciously and tore up thousands of manuscript pages"⁴³. Menard wishes to eschew all authorship of his endeavor. As the narrator explains, Menard "decided to anticipate the vanity awaiting all man's efforts"⁴⁴ and thwarted any notions of his mastery over written word. It is an *invisible* work, in sharp contrast to the story's beginning which is a bibliography of the "*visible* work of Menard"⁴⁵ which are his published writings. Thus, Menard's essaying is no exteriorization of his mind or ability, but something else entirely.

Even if it were a visible work, is Menard's project simply an act of plagiarism, the cardinal sin of any university or educational institution? Menard is after all endeavoring to write a book, word for word, that already exists. Given the infamy of the *Quixote*, this would be a rather poor attempt at plagiarism and a brazenly obvious copy. However, that is not Menard's method; he does not transcribe the text but seeks to write it itself without reference to it, which is not possible. Most importantly, Menard actively denies any claim to authorship over his attempts by destroying their traces. The principles of Menard's endeavors—a denial of authorship, composing without copying—are at odds with the objectives of plagiarism. The plagiarist's objective is not to do the work but to be credited with it. Menard's objectives are entirely different: he endeavors without

³⁷ Borges, "Pierre Menard", 67.

³⁸ Ibid, 66.

³⁹ Ibid, 68.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 68.

⁴¹ Ibid, 68.

⁴² Ibid, 70.

⁴³ Ibid, 70.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 70.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 64.

seeking to produce anything nor to be credited with it. It is worth reflecting upon why plagiarism is so impermissible in the mechanics of teaching and learning; it is because it is the false accreditation of learning, whether knowledge or skill, to an individual. As such, Menard's attempts are very much outside the gambit of the learner's who essays in order to better understand or to personalize their knowledge or to externalize their knowledge.

But why even write it? Why would Menard partake in such an impossible task and seek not to be credited for his labors? Menard elects to essay the text precisely because he *does not know* the *Quixote*; "My general recollection of the *Quixote*, simplified by forgetfulness and indifference, can well equal the imprecise and prior image of a book not yet written"⁴⁶. It is not a literary work that he personally considers essential or knows well. In endeavoring to write the *Quixote*, he refuses the ease of writing the chapters of it he does know. He endeavors to write a written book because he does not know it and because he must write what it is, without knowing what it is that it is. It is an exercise in futility. But Menard is merely a fictitious character in a short story about an imagined effort to write a book that already exists, the nameless narrator consigns this fictitious endeavor to the immortality of the printed word. Indeed, the narrator confesses, "I often imagine that he did finish it and that I read the *Quixote*—all of it—as if Menard had conceived it"⁴⁷. The narrator describes what he understands Menard's efforts to write the *Quixote* as a "palimpsest": "through which the traces—tenuous but not indecipherable—of our friend's 'previous' writing should be translucently visible"⁴⁸. But this is only the narrator's attempts to recreate Menard's hidden labors in effort "to justify this absurdity"⁴⁹, to render the performance to a contradiction. Indeed, the narrator concludes that Menard's project "(perhaps without wanting to) has enriched, by means of a new technology the halting and rudimentary art of reading"⁵⁰. And so, in essaying, Menard was all along reading and reading so that the *Quixote* might be authored anew through the practice of essaying it, or rather *studying*.

What underscores the entire absurd project, wherein Menard cannot but fail in transforming his hazy notion of the *Quixote* into the *Quixote*, is working from a state of not knowing, that does not culminate in knowledge. It is to willingly endeavor on an endless task without taking credit and which is perhaps only not useless. In the enactment of essaying, Menard's objective to write what he did not know came to no fruition. The stakes of essaying are then not rendered to capability or capacity, obtaining an idea and putting it into words but the frustration of the endeavor. This is studious, nothing is learned, to be learned, or learnable and without ends, achievable or not. As such I offer the following observations of the studious essay: the reason for the endeavor of the studious essay is *not knowing*, which does not culminate in knowledge; and the studious essay is the enactment of practices used for learning, without learning.

A Performative Contradiction

Thus far, I have resisted answering the question "What is studying?" because answering the question is not to study. I have thus far only posited a negative concept of study by contrasting it with what it is not, learning, looking particularly at the essay. Instead of positing a positive concept of the studious essay I have attempted to enact it through a reading of the fictitious account of Menard's impossible essaying of the *Quixote*. To have essayed because I do not know, still do

⁴⁶ Ibid, 67.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 66.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 70.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 65.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 71.

not know, what studying is has left me squarely in the problematics of reading, writing, and ultimately thinking, and as such, studying. But here I will enact a performative contradiction, and it is not to make of studying a concept, but to testify that there is something other than learning in the educational practices of thinking, reading, and writing. From the onset, I have stated that I will not answer the question “What is studying?”. To answer it is to know what it is that studying is, which is not to be in the realm of study. I have only committed to *responding* to the question. Thus far, I have essayed to evoke study in the form of the response, which is essaying. This is also to impugn the logic of the question, “What is studying?” without critiquing it.

The performance is perhaps not enough. Here I contradict myself, to testify to something other than learning, other than knowing, other than even asking in educational practices. A certain force, or feeling of that force, has informed the present essay in what it attempts to essay. To divulge this force here is to perform the contradiction I anticipated at the start and veers upon illustrating, rather than dramatizing, a concept. For readers expecting some convention, I must credit what haunts the many essays of Jean-François Lyotard: *l'enfance*. Lyotard's most explicit treatment of *infancy* is in the 1991 volume of essays *Lectures d'enfance*, though I will not recite them here. I merely wish to gesture toward the force of infancy in his writings. By the phrase, *infancy*, Lyotard invokes the inability to speak and by this he does not mean a developmental stage, but a recurring force that insofar as it is thinkable, must be felt or experienced instead of posited. Lyotard demonstrates in these infantile essays that the unsaid and unsayable is carried within the said and sayable; the unknown in the known. What cannot be said or known exerts itself and unsettles settled ways of thinking. It is in writing that we can, must, or in spite of ourselves, testify to infancy, and from infancy, without it culminating in knowledge or in concepts. It is this force that Lyotard testifies to and which has evoked my attempts to enact an educational practice outside the logic of learning and knowing. Down to the very syntax here which does not invite straightforward understanding, the logic of a negative definition of study, and the dramatization of study, I have attempted to evoke what cannot be said about study.

I have attempted to enact this here, not to say what it is but merely *to study*. I will evade answering the question still, but I will emphasize what is studious in the present essay. There is first the prose itself: circuitous, dizzying, paradoxical. For example, the early lines, “Studying, as distinguished from learning, is *not* the acquisition of knowledge or skill. To answer the question ‘What is studying?’ is to know what it is that studying is, which is to no longer be in the realm of studying.” The syntax itself is alien to sense, to fixing meaning. It evades clear and precise communication, in favor of making what is studious in the form, crystalline in the meta.

The prose is organized by the gesture of the present written response to the question “What is studying?”. It takes itself seriously as a studious practice in itself: essaying. It evades critique and arguments. Beginning with the essay under the remit of learning and assessment at educational institutions, the paper merely observes that essaying as such is *not* studious. The paper then considers the history of the essay and pedagogic theories *about* the essay, which is not *to essay*. This is the crux of the performance of study here, it must be enacted and not posited, not understood, nor rendered to a pedagogic function or purpose.

Studying is then only defined in the negative, by what it is not. This essay then offers a study of a story about essaying. It only promises to “subsume argument with analogy and concept with dramatization” in order to perform a studious essay. Note that analogy and dramatization do not entail the exemplification or illustration of a concept, where a general idea is demonstrated through a particular case. This is to forgo theorizing about study, but to offer a study of study, which is not to learn, nor to culminate in knowledge. Much like Pierre Menard who essays because

he does not know, is disinterested in being an author, and is frustrated in all attempts to bring his labors to fruition, study, if it is to be studious, can only be enacted without emphasis on its ends. It is by this logic, I have impugned the question “What is studying?”. To ask the question is not to invoke study, but to induce learning about study, so that we might know its purpose, might re-evaluate the function of the university with it, and so on. If we to seek to understand study in order to open up new possibilities for education, we have already missed the opportunity to think, read, and write differently. Always in such a hurry to demonstrate that we know that we do not know, we forget to act like we do not know. We need only *study*—To say as much, is that not also to commit the same performative contradiction? We can at least laugh at our own absurd endeavors.

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