

Introduction

The Two Humanities

The world leadership which has come to the United States cannot rest solely upon superior power, wealth, and technology, but must be solidly founded upon worldwide respect and admiration for the Nation's high qualities as a leader in the realm of ideas and of the spirit.

—National Foundation for the Arts and Humanities Act of 1965

This is not a happy time for the university, nor one of which we university men can be very proud. Liberal arts is a decaying rump of the university with no prof[sp]ects.

—Allan Bloom, “The Failure of the University”¹

In 1966, the 91,000 humanities graduates were already double the number of 1960 graduates. They continued to rise to almost 140,000 in 1971 and 1972. During the late 1960s, better than one in six college graduates majored in a humanistic subject—up from one in twelve in 1950 and one in ten in 1960. . . . The nadir occurred in the early 1980s: 1981–1985. After that period, humanities graduates rose to about 110,000, backtracked a bit in the mid-1990s, then surpassed the 110,000 mark by 2004.

—Roger Geiger, “Taking the Pulse of the Humanities”

There are two humanities in the United States. One is the humanities of fancy private universities, where the bourgeoisie and its favored subalterns are tutored in finishing school. I am naming this Humanities One, because it is venerable and powerful and tends to determine how the sector is discussed in public. The other is the humanities of everyday state schools, which focus more

1. The original says “projects.” I assume this was meant to read “prospects.”

on job prospects. I am calling this Humanities Two.² Humanities One dominates rhetorically. Humanities Two dominates numerically. The distinction between them, which is far from absolute but heuristically and statistically persuasive, places literature, history, and philosophy on one side and communication and media studies on the other. It is a class division in terms of faculty research as well as student background, and it corresponds to the expansion of public higher education and the way that federal funding fetishizes the two humanities away from more prized forms of knowledge. It must end.

I wrote the initial draft of this book in a little over two months after waking up on what some people call Christmas Day and thinking, “There’s a book here. It’s called *Blow Up the Humanities*.” Then I thought, “That’s cheeky.” But as with most projects, I realized that various bits of pontificating I had done over the years had contributed to this mildly epiphanic moment.

What do I know about the humanities, both One and Two? For those who think experience matters, or who like interdisciplinarity, I have taught humanities and social sciences at a variety of locales: a military-officer training institution, several big public universities, and large private secular and religious ones. I have done so as an adjunct, assistant, associate, full, and even “distinguished” professor, in four countries and two languages, and as both citizen and foreigner. I have studied and taught in long-distance mode, from Australia to Chile to Brazil, as well as participated in the face-to-face privilege of New York University and the University of California. I have taught full time in communication studies, cinema studies, American studies, Latin American and Caribbean studies, sociology, English, and women’s studies and been an adjunct in sociology, history, journalism, Australian studies, and social and political theory. I have had contracts that were not renewed in sociology and media studies.

And I have worked as a radio DJ, newsreader, sports reporter, and popular-culture commentator, in addition to jobs as a speechwriter, cleaner, merchant banker, security guard, storeman-packer, ditchdigger, waiter, forester, bureaucrat, magazine and newspaper columnist,

2. Although this division is particularly acute in the United States, it applies to other countries as well.

blogger, podcaster, journal editor, youth counselor, research assistant, suicide counselor, corporate consultant on culture, social-services trainer, and secretary. I have adjusted my portfolio, as it were, in accordance with changing economic conditions—as well as acted in ways that are far from professionally instrumental.

I also recently collected my third nationality. In the last week of 2009, I became a U.S. citizen. Along the way, I learned some things about the humanities in this country—supposedly a key entry point to citizenship. To be anointed as a gringo, I had to swear repeatedly under oath that I was not a member of the Communist Party—in fact, at the citizenship ceremony, just three weeks after my formal test of civic knowledge, I was required to assure a federal judge that I had not joined the party in the interim.

This was alongside promising that I had never sought to undermine another country's government. How odd, given that doing so has long been U.S. policy. Think of Lebanon, Indonesia, Iran, and Viet Nam in the 1950s; Japan, Laos, Brazil, the Dominican Republic, Guatemala, and Bolivia in the 1960s; or Portugal, Chile, and Jamaica in the 1970s. All these countries saw elections rigged or governments destabilized by the United States. Whatever.

To pass the civics test, I had to know U.S. geography, culture, demography, and politics. This started me thinking about the fact that many academics deride students for their lack of basic knowledge about the world. When I last taught in Australia, almost twenty years ago, my colleagues routinely lamented how ignorant the young were in contrast to others of some lost golden age. After I moved to the United States in the years immediately after the fall of European state socialism, it was fascinating to encounter Russian grad students in New York who had been schooled in the USSR and understood the infrastructure and Constitution of U.S. politics in ways that outdid anyone born or growing up here.

Educators often blame this dire situation on the media, which they set up in opposition to themselves (tacitly admitting, in the process, how poor they are as teachers by comparison with television sets and electronic games) (see, for instance, Lasch 1979: 226–28). In 1974, the professional miserabilist Allan Bloom divined that “young Americans no longer like to read, and they do not do so. There are

no fundamental books which form them, through which they see the world and educate their vision” (1974: 59). A slew of studies seeking to account for the alienation between college students and their professors places the blame for student disinterest on popular culture, especially television, which is held responsible for “prolonged immaturity” (Bauerlein 2006: B8). Britain’s Association of Teachers and Lecturers surveyed eight hundred of its members on this subject in 2009 and gleaned the following:

66 per cent said that *Big Brother* [2000–] was the programme that caused most poor behaviour among pupils, closely followed by *Little Britain* [2003–2006] at 61 per cent and *EastEnders* [1985–] at 43 per cent. Staff say these programmes led to general rudeness, such as answering back, mimicking, using retorts and TV catchphrases (mentioned by 88 per cent), and swearing or using inappropriate language (mentioned by 82 per cent). Aggressive behaviour was highlighted by 74 per cent of those surveyed, and sexually inappropriate behaviour by 43 per cent. (“Inappropriate Behavior” 2009)

Those pesky students. If only they had been reading a drug addict like Coleridge or Sartre, a philanderer (Augustine, maybe Byron?), or an anti-Semite—Pound or perhaps Gide.

In any event, my citizenship exam had a hundred test questions, available for study in advance. Any ten could be asked on the day, and I needed to get at least six correct. I had assumed that if you just offered some combination of “liberty,” “freedom,” “capitalism,” “Washington,” and “Lincoln,” you would pass. It was more complex than that. I was ignorant of things I should have known, such as the number of amendments to the Constitution (but then so was every native-born academic and professional I quizzed other than attorneys, though a drunken yanqui in a London pub guessed more accurately than most).

I also did not “know” some test answers that were lies or, at best, errors of fact. Some of this nonsense may be trivial. For example, it is not true that Dwight D. Eisenhower was Supreme Commander of Allied Forces in Europe before becoming president of the United States

(or at least, that was not his last job). He was president of Columbia University. And it is not true that Barack Obama is the full name of the forty-fourth U.S. president; it is Barack Hussein Obama II. But perhaps it doesn't matter that, just as Eisenhower must be known as a warrior rather than an education bureaucrat, doublespeak requires that "Hussein" be airbrushed from Obama's history.

Some distortions matter a great deal, however. Did you know that three countries formed the "Allies" (that could read, of course, "the United Nations") in World War II? If you thought China, Canada, or the Soviet Union were involved, you would be wrong in the eyes of the U.S. Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services. No, the war was won by Britain, the United States, and—France. So, leaving to one side the notable contribution of many other nations, there was no Battle of Stalingrad, and twenty million and counting Soviet citizens did not lose their lives in what they called the Anti-Fascist War. Those gutsy French did it.

Clearly, the humanities need to do some work to improve the test. And citizenship is just a subset of that labor. The humanities in the United States provide an intellectual switching point between what are often thought of—and occasionally described—as barbarism and civilization. In other words, they are a site for distinguishing class, religion, and nation. I want to short-circuit the switch and lay waste to the system.

That is a major task, especially as the law of the land decrees that "the humanities belong to all the people of the United States" (National Foundation on the Arts and the Humanities Act of 1965). Could my book's title be seditious under the terms of that legislation? Perhaps not: We might understand "blowing up" not just in an incendiary way but as a *ballon d'essai* in need of inflation. The title has certainly drawn some powerful reactions. A flight attendant quizzed me about my intentions after reading the table of contents over my shoulder before takeoff; a dinner guest said I was trying to do her out of a living; and a best friend and coauthor responded to my op-ed on the topic with a febrile letter to the editor that called me, in a rather Presbyterian moment, "unhelpful."

But these are propitious times for blowing up the humanities, whether by bombing or breathing, because their future is a very

public matter. The *New York Times* avows that “economic downturns have often led to decreased enrollment” in the sector, and the global financial crisis has us sprawling in its wake. Indeed, the humanities’ share of students stands at 8–12 percent of the nation’s 110,000 undergraduates. That’s less than half the figure from the 1960s and the lowest point since World War II, apart from Ronald Reagan’s recession (P. Cohen 2009).³ The Republican Party’s Study Committee announced its desire to exterminate the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) in 2011 (Skorton 2011) at the same time that the American Academy of Arts and Sciences trumpeted a new Commission on the Humanities and Social Sciences (<http://www.humanitiescommission.org>), featuring underpublished academics from fancy schools, private- and public-sector education bureaucrats, Chuck Close, and Emmylou Harris (Berrett 2011c). I am so glad I live here.

Roger Geiger’s (2009) investigation of the Academy’s Humanities Indicators Project discloses a boom in enrollments during the 1960s, along with the general expansion of higher education and limitations on women’s access to professional degrees. A few people from fancy universities thought they discerned renewed undergraduate interest in the late 1980s but were quickly proven wrong (Levine et al. 1989: 1).

Downturns in student interest align with two phenomena: prolonged recessions, such as those generated by Republican administrations from Reagan to the George Bushes; and an emerging passion for seemingly instrumental study areas such as business and government, especially in public schools designed for the proletariat and the middle class. Between 1970 and 2005, business enrollments increased by 176 percent, and communication and media studies (Humanities Two), by 616 percent. Language and literature both declined. The last decade has seen Humanities One account for approximately 8 percent of majors nationwide, with over half the students graduating from Research One schools⁴ and little liberal arts colleges (Geiger 2009; New-

3. There is some dispute over the percentages. Some sources say humanities majors accounted for about 8 percent of graduates in 2009; others say the figure is closer to 12 percent (Berrett 2011a).

4. Research One universities offer doctorates and the full range of research and teaching, and their faculty must undertake research as a basic and central part of their work.

field 2009: 273; F. Oakley 2009: 36, 38). These influences have pushed colleges and universities toward vocational interests. Even those little liberal arts colleges, which have been dying off since the 1970s in terms of both absolute numbers and proportional significance, now produce graduates mostly in vocational areas. They face “evaporating wealth, slipping educational achievements, and a political environment that is sometimes hostile to higher education” (Carlson 2011; also see Blumenstyk 2010).

The following are some pertinent shifts in national enrollment figures between 1970–1971 and 2003–2004 (Chace 2009):

- English: from 7.6 to 3.9 percent of majors
- Other languages and literatures: from 2.5 to 1.3 percent
- Philosophy and religious studies: from 0.9 to 0.7 percent
- History: from 18.5 to 10.7 percent
- Business: from 13.7 to 21.9 percent

Martha Nussbaum (2009) frets that the humanities are increasingly viewed as “useless frills” and are “rapidly losing their place in curricula, and in the minds and hearts of parents and children.” Some say today’s public intellectuals come from science rather than letters (Wright 2010). And Imre Szeman (pers. comm., 2011) is led to ask, “Why is it that we once needed a humanities, and now we seem not to?”

Not everyone connects these trends to the proletarianization of higher education and fiscal crises caused by Republican incompetence and bipartisan imperialism. A former president of Wesleyan and Emory Universities suggests the decline happened as a consequence of “the failure of English across the country to champion, with passion, the books they teach and to make a strong case to undergraduates that the knowledge of those books and the tradition in which they exist is a human good in itself.” He laments a focus on “secondary considerations (identity studies, abstruse theory, sexuality, film and popular culture)” (Chace 2009). Leaving aside the notion that books are somehow irrelevant to these latter topics, and vice versa, and neglecting this arch-bureaucrat’s Olympian claim that such aspects are “secondary,” we might legitimately inquire, as my parents did in directing me away from studying English, why students need to be

in the classroom to gain the benefit of these tomes, why English is a greater “human good” than other options, and indeed how it is a “human good.”

Then there are the voices of critique raining down from outside, effectively parodied by a president of the American Historical Association:

We’re the parasites, who don’t bring in large outside grants that help to cross-fund other departments and disciplines. We’re the pedants, who don’t produce anything that can help society solve its pressing problems. We’re the superfluous men and women, whom hard-pressed university administrators have to support even though our politicized scholarship and teaching has led to a calamitous loss of student enrollments, and neither they nor their trustees nor anyone else can quite see why they need to do so. (Grafton 2011)

And of course, in the context of very public disputes about opening up social history and comparative literature, “we” are also accused of failing the mission of uplift that supports a heritage of Western imperialism, Judeo-Christian ethics, slavery, representative democracy, and liberal capitalism.

Despite these claims, the turn away from the humanities is largely a result of economic crisis and enrollment surges in public universities. The vast growth in higher education from the 1970s has taken place among the lower middle and working classes. They enroll in state schools that are more vocational than private ones, and their supplies and demands are necessarily distant from narcissistic fantasies of small sections and ethical self-styling—worlds away from the arch arch-bureaucrat, who recalls his own salad student days as a period of “self-reflection, innocence, and a casual irresponsibility about what was coming next” (Chace 2009). This happy-go-lucky sophomoreic *jeunesse* was described eighty years ago as “a certain degree of leisure and a favored cultural status” en route to “the professions” (Wooster 1932: 373). How very jolly.

Nowadays, of course, the tradition of Western civilization, that hybrid we are meant to teach as if it were otherwise, is not looking so

good as a guide to the pursuit of life, liberty, and Facebook friends. There seems no way out of the Global North's economic crisis. Nations that grew wealthy from slavery, imperialism, war, colonialism, and capitalism are in disarray. They have quarried what they can quarry and outsourced what they can outsource. Are the humanities responding effectively to this context and associated changes to international hegemony?

I think not. Humanities scholars make grand claims about globalization, and prophets and practitioners of globalization identify culture as a core element of the process. But there is a radical disarticulation between professors, prophets, and practitioners (Davidson and Goldberg 2004: 42–43). Although culture is intimately tied to business and government, this has barely registered in the cloisters. Humanities habitués may understand the significance of culture for colonialism and imperialism, but they rarely appreciate its value to the contemporary political economy. When they do consider the latter, eyes turn and lips curl as commodity culture is contrasted with truth revealed through art or theorization (Szeman 2003). And all too often, the governing assumption is that humanities “talk need never be tested.” Semiotically resistive vanguards are hailed without attempts “to nominate an agent who can act . . . [or] identify the chink in an institutional setting or situation that makes it possible to act” (M. Morris 2008: 433). Critique from beyond the center and inside the imaginary is sovereign. Action within the symbolic is not (if you need Jacques-the-Lack to get the point). And the site for a general education is turning, seemingly ineluctably, in the direction of business schools, which are characterized in the United States by an intensely reactionary vocational politics of domination (though progressive tendencies exist even within those monuments to greed; see <http://www.criticalmanagement.org> and <http://group.aonline.org/cms>).

Samuel Weber (2009) touchingly inquires: “Do the Humanities have a future? Is there a place for the study of literature, of art, of language and of philosophy in a world progressively dominated by an economic logic of profit and loss?” Regrettably, then, we are still saddled with the shibboleth that the task of the humanities is “creative and critical thinking,” understood in opposition to “science and technology” (Humphreys 2009: 9) and cultural materialism (McCloskey

2010). If those professing the humanities continue to define the field so narrowly and forget their origins, debts, and determinations, the answer to Weber's inquiry must be a resounding "No." Can you imagine his namesake or any out of Simmel, Foucault, Luxemburg, Durkheim, Engels, Trotsky, Senghor, Martí, Freud, and Marx accepting these oppositions?

A "transnational, neoliberal policy movement" has "transform[ed] the material context and framework of values in which academic research" is conducted (M. Morris 2005: 114). By and large, U.S. humanities folks have failed to make a case for inclusion in this trend—or even to admit its existence. This differentiates us from any other country I know; such is the heroic self-aggrandizement via removal from public life that is taught in graduate school here. Outside the United States, humanities intellectuals are acknowledged for a rigor that is transparent and cross-disciplinary rather than cloistered and self-regarding. In such contexts, it is normal to apply indices of quality across the sciences, social sciences, and humanities (Council for Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences 2005). For the European Science Foundation and its affiliates, creating economic vitality via the humanities, and demonstrating the fact through quantitative methods, is normal (Parker 2008). I evaluate research proposals for humanities grants from Hong Kong, Canada, the Netherlands, the European Union, Germany, Austria, Britain, Spain, Ireland, and Australia and see this tendency in very clear relief.⁵ People running peak humanities bodies such as research institutes are now used to "requests from administrators, policy designers, publicists, and politicians to articulate not simply the 'value added' by the humanities to general economic well-being but also 'the metric' for making that determination" (Davidson and Goldberg 2004: 44). There are legitimate aspects to such accountability when they occur in democratic societies—and democracies are utilitarian by nature. Of course, it is equally true that

5. The situation of the humanities in some of these jurisdictions is far from dire, because they locate themselves inside everyday academia. So U.S. community colleges have thriving humanities enrollments, and much of the European Union sees the sector flourishing in terms of both student interest and research output (Dean Dad 2011; Committee on the National Plan for the Future of the Humanities 2009; Gillies 2010).

the way these evaluations are undertaken must always be reviewed and contested in the light of the relative autonomy researchers and teachers require from states.

Put another way, it should be uncontroversial *both* to protest a lack of autonomy *and* to seek research support. Educational and cultural leaders around the world have no difficulty explaining the significance of their institutions for public life and the requirement to be relevant to policy agendas (see, for example, Crossick et al. 2010; Dufresne 2010). We will see some of the costs and benefits of such a tendency later. I frankly find it refreshing when compared to the sorry mixture of entitlement and penury that characterizes the U.S. humanities.

U.S. humanists frequently talk about their work as if they were owed a living. That discourse derives from an extremely hidebound class, gender, and race politics, even when it is mobilized in the supposed service of progressive causes. Of course, there are historical reasons for this complex relationship between use- and exchange-value (Martin 2011). But as a consequence, ordinary people often really *hate* the humanities; or at least, they are puzzled and disappointed by them. For instance, Nicholas Dames (2011) reviewed readers' online remarks about the *New York Times's* coverage of the 2010 collegiate killings by an Alabama biology professor—which had nothing to with the humanities—and found a triumphalist loathing of tenured faculty in our sector coming up again and again.

A self-satisfied governing cant ensures that no serious attempt is mounted to broaden either the definition of the humanities in the United States or how they are funded. The payoff from relative autonomy *should* be innovative, heterodox ideas. It is not. When I traverse the country listening and speaking, sit in editorial-board meetings, am empaneled on plenaries, read grad-student proposals, or review manuscripts for publishers, I encounter far fewer radical thinkers in the fields I straddle than is the case *anywhere else*, even as I see ever-more conventional puffery from the state about the spirit and inspiration of the humanities. We isolate ourselves by withdrawing to cloisters/enclaves of dead white men and living people of color, and the government rewards us with reduced funding. Marginalized as the keepers of a flickering flame, we seek to replace it with one that is

more inclusively illuminating. We do not question the very notion of a symbolic light.

No wonder humanities journals are nativist by contrast with those in science, technology, and medicine, which have significantly higher proportions of overseas-based authors (Waltham 2010: 267). No wonder National Science Foundation (NSF) grants went from being five times the size of their NEH equivalents in 1979 to thirty-three times in 1997. Or that in 2007, the NEH received 0.5 percent of the National Institutes of Health's (NIH) budget and 3 percent of the NSF's, while in 2010, a pitiful 0.45 percent of federal research support went to the humanities. No wonder the Department of Education's policy overviews of universities essentially exclude the entire field, and Obama's 2011 State of the Union address called for increased expenditure on mathematics and science without mentioning the humanities. The 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act provided not a cent to humanities research, whereas the NSF received \$3 billion. The vast majority of governmental support for the humanities nowadays goes to museums, historical societies, regional regranting bodies, and libraries. The NEH typically allocates just 13 percent of its budget to universities, while private giving to the sector declined by 16 percent from 1992 to 2002. Research expenditure in U.S. universities in 2006 was \$8.7 billion for the sciences and \$208 million for the humanities, which are deeply dependent on universities' intramural funds—that is, tuition (Franke 2009: 13–14; Newfield 2009: 278; National Humanities Alliance 2010; Zuckerman and Ehrenberg 2009; Heitman 2011; Ellison 2009; Brinkley 2009; Yu 2008).

The conventional argument explaining this parlous situation—that the United States is a utilitarian society—simply will not fly. Given this country's economic and propagandistic reliance on culture, the humanities *are* valuable, quite apart from the fact that it is insulting and absurd to claim that other nations lack equivalently pragmatic tendencies. In Australia, an infinitely more instrumental country because it is largely undistracted by Christianity and imperialism, years of strenuous lobbying have seen the central state research body create categories supporting cultural studies and cognate fields (M. Morris 2005: 117).

Gringo humanists had better recognize the realpolitik. The toothpaste is not going back inside its erstwhile container, given the mobilization by left, right, and center of what George Yúdice (2003) calls “culture as resource.” The venerable bifurcation between art and life, aesthetics and custom, literature and anthropology, has been fatally undermined by the importance of cultural property for both commerce and governance.

Christopher Newfield, an acute observer of metatrends in the humanities as well as the broader national climate, proposes “writing the future of the humanities disciplines into the funding system” (2009: 271). Newfield acknowledges that defunding the humanities has been, in part, a reaction against their centrality to critiques of state and commercial power and vocationalism. He values such critiques but suggests we should become friendlier with economic tendencies or find ourselves their hand servants—and watch our critiques fall flat (also see Davidson and Goldberg 2004: 45; Fish 2010b).

Such critiques fall flat in another way: They stimulate contingent labor, a phenomenon explained by Antonio Negri (2007) in resignifying the Reaganite futurist Alvin Toffler’s (1983) idea of the cognitariat (also see Standing 2011). Negri uses the concept to describe people mired in casualized work who have heady educational qualifications yet live at the complex interstices of capital, education, and government. Andrew Ross explains that

higher education institutions have followed much the same trail as subcontracting in industry: first, the outsourcing of all nonacademic campus personnel, then the casualization of routine instruction, followed by the creation of a permatemps class on short-term contracts and the preservation of an ever smaller core of full-timers, who are crucial to the brand prestige of the collegiate name. Downward salary pressure and eroded job security are the inevitable upshot. (2008: 38)

Essentially, the humanities are a cheap means of mass teaching, delivering elevation of the ruling class (Humanities One) and control of the middle and working classes (Humanities Two) at low cost. This

has become a grinding tale of pain and sorrow for would-be practitioners, as those necessary tasks are taken over by other sectors.

The National Humanities Alliance (2010) describes a “jobless market” in terms of full-time employment for new Ph.D.s, with an oversupply of a thousand humanities people a year. These cognitar-ians typically engage in a self-exploitation and identity formation that are shrouded in seemingly autotelic modes of being, where joining a gentry poor dedicated to the life of the mind is fulfilling in itself (Gorz 2004). Their precarious nature has become central to the humanities. Tenure-track vacancies in language and literature remained static in the past forty years, even as undergraduate enrollment grew by 55 percent. In 2009, just 53 percent of humanities faculty were in full-time employment, and an even smaller proportion in tenurable positions. Compared with other fields, tenure-track hiring in language and literature occurred at two-thirds the occupational average (Geiger 2009: 4; Newfield 2009: 272; Deresiewicz 2011).

Even job candidates for tenurable lines in the humanities do not command, say, \$200,000 as start-up funds with which to build their research in the expectation of large grants that will help pay for university administration, as would a scientist or engineer (Brinkley 2009). Nor will they be remunerated as though they were suffering the slings and arrows of opportunity cost by not working in corporate America. If we compare salaries in language, communications, and literature to those in medicine or economics, it is clear how cheap a humanities professor is: In 2003, health academics were paid \$6,000 on average more than in 1987, during which time humanities averages declined by a thousand dollars; in 2005–2006, a business academic cost twice as much as a humanities one, compared to one and a half times as much twenty years earlier (Zuckerman and Ehrenberg 2009: 131). The relativity and flexibility are all in one direction. The alibi that economists and business professors must be paid more as part of a market loading based on opportunity costs incurred by working in universities versus corporations does not hold up. It is astonishing that the beneficiaries of these alleged comparisons with the private sector were not fired or reduced in salary with the economic crisis that began in 2007. Then again, it isn't, because the alleged market loading was never going to work like that. Nice work if you can get it:

creating the justification for increasing your salary, even as you construct the preconditions for global malaise.

Most people teaching the humanities work full time in second-tier schools with gigantic course loads, often on limited-term contracts, or they are freeway professors, traveling feverishly between teaching jobs to cobble together a living. Thousands of adjuncts each year await last-minute phone calls and messages asking them to teach large omnibus survey courses, because full-time faculty are doing their “own” work. Hiring discussions do not reference the experience of students looking for the “professor” who taught them last quarter—who did not have an office, is not back this year, and is forgotten by all concerned other than the personnel department, which has closed its files until the call goes out again for the reserve army of the professoriat to emerge from highway hell in time of need.

Clearly, there must be industrial action to counter this tendency to proletarianize working life. How might that be achieved? Democratic Party politicians, who owe so much to unions and scholars, both monetarily and intellectually, are largely ineffective defenders of labor power, while their Republican counterparts have no remorse in assaulting labor *tout court*. So we need to engage in political organizing and ideological struggle in the classroom, the corridor, and the Congress.

At the same time, we should not only be lobbying for improved working conditions. By removing our research from policy debates and applications in the name of high-minded, disembodied critique, we impoverish everything we do. The humanities needs to transcend itself to get the support it craves. Withdrawal from policy-oriented study and advocacy stimulates criticisms among the bourgeois media, politicians, bureaucrats, and corporations. They love to make fun of us for being too radical, too conservative, or too independent. I vividly recall a tired and emotional policy maker threatening to throw me off a balcony at a party when I said I worked in the humanities and social sciences. Not very nice conduct, but I suspect it happened because I was from an area renowned for its hauteur as much as its auteur.

So in answer to the question with which I began, a combination of faculty anxiety about student fitness, my citizenship experience, the

delusions of spokespeople for the sector, and the real political economy meant that I wanted to understand where the field came from and was going. Hence this little book. It may not be not great, but it says everything I know about the past, present, and future of the humanities in the United States, drawing on examples from other countries as well as our own rather dubious record.

After an examination of U.S. university history and the place of the humanities within it, I look at the publishing world, since this both indexes and solidifies that place. Having established the parlous present and future of the humanities, I then address the major alternative to business as usual, breaking down the opposition with the sciences that disables our social standing to consider the pros and cons of a comprehensive turn toward the creative industries as a focal point in search of relevance, student appeal, and federal funding. I conclude by suggesting that the two humanities must merge in order to survive and thrive.