

Generation Kill: Nietzschean Meditations on the University, War, Youth, and Guns

Susan Searls Giroux

Here our philosophy must begin not with wonder but
with horror . . .

—Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Future* (42)

The obsession with security on university campuses across the U.S. has come to assume varied meanings and multiple forms. In the aftermath of the September 11 terrorist attacks, the U.S. Department of Defense poured billions of dollars into university defense-related technological research and development, becoming its third largest federal funder; university presidents partnered with the Federal Bureau of Investigation in a joint task force to fight the growing global threat posed by ideological “extremists,” and new degree programs and courses in homeland security emerged, while existing curricular offerings, from Middle East studies to peace studies, came under fire for harboring alleged pro-terrorist sympathies.¹ And again, in the aftermath of the Virginia Tech massacre of April 16, 2007, the issue of campus security assumed top priority. The day after the shootings, a student movement was formed called Students for Concealed Carry on Campus (SCCC), whose mission is to secure the right to self-defense by allowing students to carry concealed weapons on campus. One year later, the movement boasts over 22,000 members on 500 campuses nationwide, numbers bolstered by a subsequent shooting rampage at Northern Illinois University in February 2008. By the spring of 2008, twelve states considered legislature to grant college students the same gun ownership rights as every other citizen.

In an interview conducted shortly after 9/11, theorist Jacques Derrida characterized the new security protocol as symptomatic of an ongoing “autoimmunity” logic; drawing on an epidemiological parallel, he elaborated on “that strange behavior where a living being, in quasi-suicidal fashion, ‘itself’ works to destroy its own protection, to immunize itself *against* its ‘own’ immunity” (qtd. in Borradori 94; emphasis in original). “What is put at risk by this *terrifying* autoimmunitary logic,” he gravely insisted, “is nothing less than the existence of the world” (qtd. in Borradori 98; emphasis in original). Since then, I’ve wondered

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about the troubling figure of societal suicide. How is it possible that a free and democratic society, precisely in the act of securing itself, or claiming to secure itself, could quicken its own demise? Where does the suicidal urge come from—is it a function of a deep, abiding illness in the collective psyche, or a fleeting impulse linked to traumatic loss, or some imagined heroism? Is this really the future we face and, if so, how do we determine our degree of risk? Do we invoke the same assessment scale used for individual suicides? Sex, for example, is a factor; males are at greater risk, but how does one determine the sex of a society—by its masculinist inclination? Evidence of depression is another sign. Does one look to dips in the stock market or consumer confidence indices? Sales of antidepressant medications? How about recent suicide attempts? Derrida describes the Cold War as a “first moment,” a “first autoimmunity” (qtd. in Borradori 94). What of recent significant trauma or loss? Without question. Capacity for rational thinking lost? So it would seem. Little or no social support? Would loss of global support work here? Going down such a list, the signs don’t look promising. Derrida suggests that what makes the impending threat so terrifying is precisely that it comes from “the to-come, from the future” (qtd. in Borradori 97). Thus it occurred to me that such a society—compelled to fight to the death, according to this auto-immunitary logic—to fight, in other words, its own future and risk its own existence, could do no better than to arm all of its children.

In what follows, we shall look more closely at this strange security obsession on university campuses. Strange even for the times, I would insist, because we tend to imagine the university to be the very institution devoted to “light and truth,” where the capacity for thinking is never suspended. “As far as I know,” Derrida notes, “nobody has ever founded a university against reason” (“The Principle” 135). We want to believe that the university’s unflinching pursuit of truth through reason is freely conducted, never rendered subordinate to the dictates of external powers, whether from the government, the military, or corporate interests. We believe, further, that its commitment to reason and knowledge guarantees its role as an institution for order and peace, never on the side of coercion, violence, or war. And we would imagine that if such pressure is exerted in so sanctified a space, in the name of security or patriotism, for example, a countervailing insistence on the priority of its freedom would surely triumph. What would the stamp of university approval mean, after all, if its free pursuit of knowledge and truth could be so compromised? And because of these unswerving commitments, it would prove an indefatigable guardian against the deadly autoimmunitary logics Derrida describes and would ensure, through its primary role in the critical education of young people, a peaceful and just future for a democratic society.

But it remains unclear that this is the case, or ever was the case. Michel Foucault has provocatively argued against this sanitized idea in “Society Must Be Defended”:

It is an idea that is probably bound up with the whole Western organization of knowledge, namely, the idea that knowledge and truth cannot not belong to the register of order and peace, that knowledge and truth can never be

found on the side of violence, disorder, and war [. . .] the important thing [. . .] about this idea that knowledge and truth cannot belong to war, and can only belong to order and peace, is that the modern State has now reimplanted it in what we might call the eighteenth century's "disciplinaryization" of knowledges. (173)

In order to give much-needed historical depth to what are all-too-frequently presentist analyses of the challenges that the university has long confronted and continues to confront in relation to truth, knowledge, violence, and war, we shall closely examine one of modernity's most influential philosophers, Friedrich Nietzsche, and his series of early lectures, "On the Future of Our Educational Institutions," which, unlike subsequent treatments of similar themes, grants singular attention to the question of youth. An unmatched theoretical contribution in this regard, we may find it necessary, in light of his analysis of the university's alleged freedoms, its commitment to youth and its futurity, to reevaluate and complicate the institution's "peaceful" pursuit of truth and knowledge as part of its broader educational mission. I will argue that there is, in fact, a deepening crisis of thought in the university, and so a crisis of academic freedom, which has tremendous implications not only for the future of the institution, but also for the sustainability of democratic futures more generally.

In January of 1872, the young Nietzsche gave five public lectures entitled "On the Future of Our Educational Institutions" to a large and distinguished audience in the Museum of the University of Basel, Switzerland. Declaring himself "too foreign" and "too little firmly rooted in local conditions," he demurred the ability to provide an astute, even credible, assessment of the specificities of the Swiss context; he was even less interested in offering grand, universal claims about education, or as he put it, "prophesying out of the whole vast horizon of civilized people of today" (13). The lectures, rather, were designed more specifically "to divine the future" of Germany's formal educational apparatus "out of the viscera of the present" (15)—critically examining each phase of the system from elementary education, or the *Volksschule*, to the trade school, or *Realschule*, to the Gymnasium, and then the University. Given such a proviso, one might wonder why his audience would be inclined to indulge a speaker who offered neither local nor general—and so seemingly unactionable—insight on educational matters. The rationale Nietzsche proposed, quite strikingly, was none other than that, given the city's "disproportionately grandiose" efforts to advance the education of its citizenry, those assembled before him had already proven themselves worthy of his council. Nietzsche claimed to avail himself of the pleasures afforded one in spiritual commune with congregants of superior wisdom "who have reflected on education and questions of education" (14). "Only before such listeners will I," he furthered, "with the greatness of the task and the shortness of the time, be able to make myself understood—if they, namely, instantly guess what could only be suggested, complete, what must be concealed, if they generally only need to be reminded, not to be instructed" (14). It was a provocation cleverly dispatched in the guise of lavish praise. Forewarned of the lecturer's willful

indirection and ambiguity—a tactic in the pitched battle against his contemporaries' obsession with the "self-evident," their utilitarian enthusiasms, and their ready confusion of instruction for education—listeners would indeed have to work to achieve a measure of clarity and insight. In the preface to the book he planned for the lectures, Nietzsche called forth a "calm reader" and a cunning one—a reader who "has still not unlearned how to think while he reads; [who] still understands how to read the secret between the lines [. . .]. He who is calm and unconcerned enough to be able to set out together on a distant way with the author whose goal will first be shown in full clarity to a much later generation" (19). No practical advice or prescriptions would be forthcoming, nothing to titillate the empirically inclined or, in his phrase, "the friends of tables."

For our purposes here, we shall reflect primarily on his rather ominous meditations concerning German higher education; for him, the fate of the university—its futurity, or its conceptual, if not quite institutional, collapse—was inextricably caught between the pretension to and the actual conditions of university autonomy and academic freedom. In doing so, we should heed his own cautious refusal to engage in abstract generalizations or fatuous instrumentalities in advance of academic interests, as well as his insistence that we take up the opportunity to think, carefully and capaciously, through the difficulty of education. Unlike Nietzsche, however, we assume an audience deeply conflicted over what constitutes the role of higher education, its freedoms and its responsibilities, in our present post-9/11 moment. As we shall see, perhaps at no other time have such themes, foundational for a democratic society, given way to greater social dissension and challenge.

Nietzsche's circumscribed approach to the topic at hand was not his only cause for concern in the forthcoming public address. Not only was he "too foreign," Nietzsche anticipated that he might also be perceived "too young" to speak to such grand imperatives. He was but twenty-seven years old at the time of this extraordinary honor, and relative to his colleagues in attendance at the lectures had little experience in the university, having accepted a chair in classical philology at Basel at the tender age of twenty-four. But perhaps this was time enough for so committed a thinker to discern the limits of academic life, or more precisely, to understand where academic life and the philosophical life part company, and like a dissimulating and disillusioned marital couple, become bitter and openly antagonistic. What began as an ambivalent relationship, a marriage of convenience entered in haste and naïveté, would eventually end in divorce before the decade's close. Well over a century prior to Bill Readings's influential eulogy for the late twentieth-century North American academy (*The University in Ruins* [1996]), Nietzsche castigated new generations of scholars who wandered self-satisfied "among [the] ruins" of the German university, citing both external and internal institutional conditions that encouraged cowardice, conformity, and subservience—habits of mind that ran counter to the production of Thought (69). Heralded as a sacrosanct establishment singularly devoted to the pursuit of truth through the practice of right reason, the university from Nietzsche's perspective proved a far more

worldly, compromised if not corrupt, enterprise. Not only was its alleged autonomy imperiled by state power and the dictates of political economy, the institution itself also nurtured intolerance for dissident argumentation, a violation of principle Nietzsche in fact experienced firsthand. The lecture series coincided with the publication of his first book, *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872), and was greeted with enthusiastic praise by intellectuals like the composer Richard Wagner. However, his peers in the academy, including Friedrich Ritschl, a scholar four years his junior who would eventually become Germany's leading philologist, as well as Nietzsche's own teacher and mentor, greeted the text with scathing criticism. Generally lesser-known in the context of his oeuvre, the young Nietzsche's contemporaneous engagement with the institutional dimensions of education—and indeed, the tragic condition of learning itself²—would nonetheless prove influential for the twentieth century's most prominent intellectuals, including Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida, who were concerned not only with the dual encroachment of the state and the economy on university independence, but also with modes of scholarly subjection lived nevertheless as academic freedom.

In evaluating the contents of Nietzsche's charges against the university and the scholars it produces, we must account simultaneously for their strangely unorthodox and elliptical form, which may or may not bear on his efforts rhetorically to finesse the question of his youth. Intentionality is inevitably a fictional crusade, but perhaps never more so than in a text like Nietzsche's, in which it is impossible to distinguish decisively the philosopher's "own" view from that of the persona he adopts in the lectures. In prudence, however, we must take further pains to attend to the complexity of the artifice through which Nietzsche delivered the 1872 lectures and be particularly wary of easy ascription of inclination, belief, or commitment to its author. To be sure, the judgment on the university is unequivocally harsh; the lectures have been referred to more precisely as Nietzsche's "anti-education manifesto," and the lectures do speak to the very impossibility of thought in the academy. And yet, at the same time, they invoke the absolute necessity of educational institutions, albeit regenerated and renewed (Allen and Axiotis 19). Condemnatory, to be sure, but their verdict is also curiously heterogeneous and generative, reminding us of their "performed" nature, their attempt to "dramatize" the questions they also explore. Some critics have suggested that it is because of Nietzsche's age and inexperience that the lectures employ such a bizarre, distancing narrative structure and rhetorical style. And indeed, in the opening remarks of his first lecture, Nietzsche acknowledges the limitations of one "ever so young" in confronting the seriousness of the themes at hand—though it also speaks to his obvious rhetorical skill and classical training in thus assuming a *topos* of modesty. Yet he quickly recovers the moment by further asserting that his audience must not discount the possibility that—as a much younger man—"he had *heard* something right about the disquieting future of our educational institutions," which he would proceed to recount for them in good measure (21; emphasis in original). Thus Nietzsche positions himself before his listeners as "an ear-witness" to a dialogue between two wise and worthy men on this important topic, who produced in turn an elaborately interwoven

and devastating critique of formal education upon which he was both fortunate enough and bold enough to eavesdrop. The contrivance enables the narrator to remove himself from what he is about to repeat, and therefore avoid responsibility in some measure for the contentious, even outrageous, assertions that will issue from his lips. At the same time, the framing mechanism that distances also draws its audience in, doubtless to the very edge of their seats, in heightened anticipation of learning about that which brought them to the lecture, and yet, so scandalous, was not meant for them to hear.

So begins the first lecture and the strange narrative transport back to an idyllic time when Nietzsche recasts himself as a much younger, carefree student taking a year off to spend in the university city of Bonn with a close friend of similar age. Nietzsche recalls a late summer day spent along the Rhine with his comrade, given over in equal measure to pistol shooting (about which, he remarks, they were quite passionate) and to solemn, philosophical reflection marking the anniversary of the friends' efforts to organize a small circle devoted to cultural production and critique. The scene of platonic romance does not remain so enchanted for long, as the two young men are abruptly interrupted in the process of loading and firing their weapons by an enraged old man and his companion who seize both violently by the arm. Having misread their target practice as a duel, the "gray old man" addresses them thus: "Here there will not be dueling! It is least permitted to you, you studying youths! Away with the pistols! Let it rest, be reconciled, shake hands! How can this be? These would be the salt of the earth, the intelligence of the future, the seed of our hopes—and these cannot for once make themselves free from the crazy catechism of honor and its principle of the justice of the fist?" (26-27). The two pistol shooters correct the old man's misimpression in curt and disrespectful tones. They have their own perspectives on dueling and have no use for his commentary, thus continuing to discharge their weapons and further enraging both the old man and his protégé. The old man, full of hatred and helplessness, looks to his companion: "What should we do? These young men are ruining me through their explosions" (28). Taking cue, the younger man castigates the two gun-toting menaces, charging them thus: "You should of course know that your exploding pleasures are in the present case a true assassination attempt against philosophy. Observe this honorable man—he is in a position to ask you not to shoot here" (28).

Ironically, the youths, once they holster their weapons, feel equally threatened in *their* capacity to philosophize by the philosopher's presence. A more mature Nietzsche recalls his anguish: "A grim feeling came over us. What is any philosophy, we thought, when it hinders being by oneself and enjoying oneself alone with a friend, when it holds us down from becoming philosophers ourselves" (29). The "gray old man" laughs outright at their concern: "How is this? You feared that a philosopher would hinder you from philosophizing? Such a thing may no doubt be found: and you have still not experienced it? Have you no experiences at the university?" (31). The older Nietzsche confides to his audience, tellingly, if not a little mischievously, "We even still had at that time the harmless belief that anyone who possessed the office and title of philosopher at

the university was also a philosopher: we were quite without experiences and badly instructed" (31). A series of oppositions is quickly established between youth and maturity, between a kind of frenetic, violent, and thoughtless activity and the calm, pristine silence of reflective consciousness, between a conceptualization of philosophical thought lived as romance and one lived as tragedy. What ensues is a brief fisticuffs over which pair is to remain on the lonely spot of land to which both parties lay special claim for that evening and the conditions and consequences of their occupying it together.

Given this "vertiginous nesting of identities" in Nietzsche's lectures, much scholarly discourse has not unwisely taken up the perplexing question of the perspective with which the audience should identify (Allen and Axiotis 22). Who are we to assume speaks for Nietzsche: The younger version of himself, or the gray philosopher, or his companion, a disillusioned young educator? And which perspective seems trustworthy, if any: A philosopher who is given to false assumptions? Our passionate pistol-shooting youths? Or are they perhaps all painted with the same ironic brushstrokes? Ultimately unfinished (seven lectures were forecast), Nietzsche felt deeply unsatisfied with the results of his labor and decided against the publication of the series, sharing them instead with close friends. For this reason, Jacques Derrida has raised doubts about the very signature of the lectures in his careful reading of them in *Otobiographies*, astutely noting Nietzsche's own eventual rejection of their contents.³ Not only are we confounded by the purposeful opacity of the narrative for which we are instructed to "read the secret between the lines," but we also remain unsure of trustworthy perspective—not least of which from the author himself.

The lectures' opening drama in turn provokes several observations and even more questions. To begin, we might note that the encounter between the two young students and the honorable philosopher and his companion may be understood not only as a distancing device, or even a gesture of feigned modesty from the philosopher not generally known for his humility, but also as a crafty rhetorical construction that enables us to think the university through specificity of a pedagogical encounter that seemingly, significantly, takes place outside its walls,⁴ and this from a variety of perspectives simultaneously: from that of its students, a disillusioned young teacher and scholar, and the mature, indeed "gray" philosopher. The "future" in the lectures' title thus signifies doubly, invoking in the abstract those conditions or counter-conditions that will shape the future of higher education, and foregrounding the question of youth who are the concrete embodiment of the promise of university—those who will not only attend the university, but also who will teach, administer, and transform the institution, upon which futurity and possibility rest. Youth are, as he phrases it, the "intelligence of the future, the seeds of our hopes" (26). Nietzsche's conception of the university to come is informed simultaneously by its corrupt tendencies already in evidence, as the old philosopher and his young protégé bear witness, as well as the realm of future possibility, in the figure of rowdy students fresh from the Gymnasium. Like all futures, that of the university is overdetermined, but hardly predetermined and much will depend on the direction

human efforts take. He has offered more than a singular perspective or an isolated moment in the inner workings of the university; he has conveyed with considerable economy a narrowed window on an entire (and entirely flawed) system of education in the very process of reproducing itself.

More profoundly, such a multiperspectival and multilayered dissection of formal educational institutions enables him to render more complexly, and by this I mean more multiply and relationally, the very notion of the freedom upon which university futurity rests—a point to which we shall return in detail. In brief, let us note here that such freedom for Nietzsche is a quite seldom occurrence. A universal right only in crude abstraction, freedom as depicted in the above scene and throughout the lectures is in fact a privilege unequally distributed among the men. To be free presupposes a condition of dependence from which one has escaped—in fact it requires such social division (Bauman, *Freedom* 9-27). Therefore, freedom is better understood as a relation, one that marks the asymmetry of social condition and implies a social difference, a distinction determined by power within the specificity of a given context (doubly marked in the encounter by the weight of institutional authority mediated by another force, the threat of violence). As a privilege bestowed by those in power, freedom circulates in the university by the grace of state powers external to it, as the rest of the lectures make tragically visible, thus challenging any pretense to university autonomy. More strikingly still, it is not at all clear what the achievement of freedom in some relative sense affords one—certainly no guarantee of being heard, let alone understood, or being effectual in the manner one desires. Insofar as we may be encouraged to attribute something approximating independence of thought to our gray philosopher, we find him isolated and ill-tempered, forced to witness in horror “the pedagogical impoverishment of the spirit of our times,” yet unable to redirect the main currents of contemporary culture that render philosophical reflection an irrelevant if not impossible endeavor—both in and outside of the university (42). The students who rebuff the philosopher’s insights about dueling may well, as the saying goes, “think and do what they like,” but here too we are asked to probe deeper: Are they in fact the true source and master of their own (rather herdlike) thoughts and actions? Given the repeated challenges to intentional, independent action, what then is his audience to make of the freedom offered in the catchphrase “academic freedom,” which Nietzsche says signals more precisely a form of enslavement: the “rough and reckless” freedom enjoyed by the “helpless barbarian,” the “slave of the day” (112-13). Though we would do well to query the logic of cultural “degeneration” that informs Nietzsche’s characterization of this pretense to intellectual independence, we shall find cause to explore the degree to which “academic freedom” may actually signal the erosion of liberty (or what Arendt would later refer to as “public freedom”) and the simultaneous retreat into the private world of individual self-assertion.

But there is yet another mystery placed before us—one I would insist is most urgent and yet strangely neglected. Less remarked upon in the scholarly assessment of the lectures is not only the rather disconcerting figure of the trigger-happy, gun-toting youths who are

central characters in the drama. In our post-Virginia Tech, post-Columbine era, in a time of permanent warfare when youth are variously seduced, cajoled, and conscripted to one side or the other of a global war on terror, this is surely a haunting image. Equally disturbing, given the presumptive focus on the peaceful, sanctified halls of higher education, is the pervasive language of war—of battles, enemies, war crimes, soldiers, military service, and most unsettling, of national, even civilizational, defense against “degeneration” in the interests of “purifying” the German spirit—in the unfolding narrative of education’s futurity. What are we to make of such incessant rhetorical stockpiling of war imagery in the text—of its proximity to the philosopher and the project of the university? What role could an institution premised on the principles of truth and reason—and through these the achievement of peace and justice taken to be the very foundation of civilization itself—possibly play in coercion and combat? How are war and violence tied to the production of knowledge and culture vouchsafed by the university? Nietzsche more than hints that modernity’s well-rehearsed commitment to reason, law, order, culture, civility, freedom, and justice depend not on the abeyance of war and violence, but on their strategic usage in its interests—and the university’s role therein. The observation offered by Nietzsche is less a critique of violence than a naturalistic description of the human inclination toward bellicosity and war. In a direct challenge to Hegel’s generous assessment of the state and its ties to education, the gray philosopher argues at length:

“[. . .] For what does one know finally of the difficulty of the task of governing human beings, i.e., to preserve upright law, order, quiet, and peace among many millions of a species in which the great majority are boundlessly egoistic, unjust, unfair, dishonest, envious, wicked, and thereby very limited and queer in the head, and thereby continually to protect the little which the state itself acquires as a possession against greedy neighbors and malicious robbers? Such a hard pressed state grasps after any ally: and indeed one such offers itself in pompous turns of phrase, if he designates it, the state, for example, as this Hegel did, as the ‘absolutely complete ethical organism’ and presents as the task of education for each to find out the place and position where he can be of most useful service to the state—who will take it as a wonder, when the state without further ado falls upon the neck of such an ally offering itself and now even with its deep barbaric voice and full of conviction calls to it: ‘Yes! You are education! You are culture!’” (78-79)

Nietzsche’s philosopher not only captures in vivid terms the rough contours of the “alliance” between the state and its educational apparatus, but also the consequences for pompous scholars who “freely” transgress its boundaries: “The state without further ado falls upon the neck of such an ally,” he warns. Further, he suggestively proposes that the project of education itself—its commitment to cultural enrichment, to cultivation, and to civilization—thus subordinated to state interests and allegiance (characterized no less as the preservation of law and order) actually creates rather than diminishes, let alone

destroys, the very conditions for violence. To be sure, the significance of Nietzsche's theoretical contribution is in exposing the violence of normative liberal institutions, even as later generations of leftist intellectuals will struggle with, and ultimately reject, the naturalistic inclinations of his political conservatism. As one of the preeminent theorists of modernity, Zygmunt Bauman, pithily explains:

Modernity legitimizes itself as a "civilizing process"—as an ongoing process of making the coarse gentle, the cruel benign, the uncouth refined. Like most legitimations, however, this one is more an advertising copy than an account of reality. At any rate, it hides as much as it reveals. And what it hides is that only through the coercion they perpetuate can the agencies of modernity keep out of bounds the coercion they swore to annihilate; that one person's civilizing process is another person's forceful incapacitation. The civilizing process is not about the uprooting, but about the *redistribution* of violence. (*Life* 141; emphasis in original)

In barbarous lands, the rules of civility do not apply, as colonial history painfully attests. But coercion and force can find approval even within modernity's well-ordered and civil spaces, Bauman elaborates, provided they are *rationaly deployed*: "In the land of civility, no coercion (ideally) comes by surprise and from unexpected quarters; it can be rationally calculated, become the 'known necessity' which one can even, following Hegel, celebrate as freedom [. . .]" (*Life* 143). In this instance, "civilized violence," or "violence rendered civil" through the "standardizing of forced restrictions or impositions" on those targeted either within or outside of society, is a function of instrumental rationality and the reifications it inevitably produces, rather than a naturalistic or transcendent principle (Goldberg, "Killing" 350). Have we not seen how the university, thus allied (strategically? coercively?), may serve as the institution par excellence for the provision of the rational calculus, the instrumentalities, the technologies, and the ideological legitimation for the violence executed by the state and its agencies—in Nazi Germany, in the French suppression of Algerian resistance, or to take a more recent example, in the Pentagon's Minerva Project, which enlists intellectuals in the fight against "Islamic" terrorism? Not only this, but as a further service, it would seem capable of transforming the threat of violence, typically prompting much fear and anxiety, into a welcome kind of security, one "celebrate[d] as freedom," no less. Indeed, as David Theo Goldberg astutely notes, "civility and civil society have been emphasized in moments where the technologies of destruction and degradation are rife," serving as not only a "counter-force to" such conditions, but also as an "ideological marker" contrasting the civilized from those denied such status or even its possibility (341). "Civil wars," he adds, "in states deeming themselves sophisticated, modern and civilized *assume the form of culture wars*" (341; emphasis added), and as we have seen over the past three decades, the university remains a key battleground. But how exactly are we to understand the boundaries of the civilized or the freedoms they secure in this sense?

In raising such questions, Nietzsche's lectures unsettle the core assumptions upon which the modern philosophy of education is founded, as established by Kant, Rousseau, Hegel, Humboldt, and others associated with the liberal humanist university. Indeed, if as David Clark has recently suggested in an illuminating study of eighteenth-century philosophy and war, Kant and the German Idealists have stood accused of extricating themselves from the violence of history "by absorbing its contingent destructiveness into a drama of thought, and by sublating revolutionary war into the mere conflict of the faculties" (140), we shall see that subsequent generations of philosophers, first Nietzsche, then Foucault and Derrida, remain committed to returning the university and its knowledge-producing and disseminating functions to the theater of war. In 1976, just over one hundred years after Nietzsche's lectures at Basel, in fact, Michel Foucault, would deliver a lecture at the Collège de France that undertook to further examine the relationship between historical knowledge and the practice of war, the disciplinarization of knowledge and the appearance of what he called the "Napoleonic university"—a university newly committed to a particular selection, disciplinarization, and homogenization of knowledges. Declaring that "knowledge is never anything more than a weapon of war," he advanced these Nietzschean themes, revealing the violence that shadows the Western organization of knowledge and its faith in the progress of reason:

[T]he genealogy of knowledge must first [. . .] outwit the problematic of the Enlightenment. It has to outwit what was at the time described (and was still described in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries) as the progress of enlightenment, the struggle of knowledge against ignorance, of reason against chimeras, of experience against prejudices, or reason against error, and so on. All this has been described as, or symbolized by, light gradually dispelling darkness, and it is this, I think, that we have to get rid of [on the contrary] when we look at the eighteenth century—we have to see, not this relationship between day and night, knowledge and ignorance, but an immense and multiple battle between knowledges in the plural—knowledges that are in conflict because of their very morphology, because they are in the possession of enemies, and because they have intrinsic power effects. (178-79)

We may find it necessary, at the end of our investigations, to modify Foucault's language, probing what seems like the inevitable weaponization of knowledge production and circulation—as he himself would later abandon efforts to theorize power in such explicitly antagonistic terms, preferring instead an agonistic definition ("The Subject and Power" 222). In our present moment, literally defined by a permanent war against terror, the seduction of what Foucault called the *Nietzschean hypothesis*—that power relations necessarily involve the hostile engagement of forces—cannot be overestimated. At the same time, we must be careful to distinguish analytically between a theory of history that elevates violence to a transcendent force in a grand homogenizing sweep and one that is nonnaturalist and contingent, that renders struggle in multiple antagonistic and

agonistic forms. In the context of the university, the challenge of assessing the appropriate “end” of education—its purpose and our responsibilities toward that “end”—only grows more difficult, as the unabashed commitment to utilitarian, “end-oriented” research becomes increasingly fused with military research that threatens the “end” of humanity. As Derrida pointedly observed:

Today, in the end-orientation of research [. . .] it is already impossible to distinguish between these two ends. It is impossible, for example, to distinguish programs that one would like to consider “worthy,” even technically profitable for humanity, from others that would be destructive. This is not new; but never before has so-called basic scientific research been so deeply committed to ends that are at the same time military ends. The very essence of the military, the limits of military technology and even the limits of the accountability of its programs are no longer definable. (“The Principle” 143)

We turn now to explore first the relationship between the university and its reputed commitments to the reasoned and autonomous advance of education and culture on one hand, and on the other, the very complexity of the notion of freedom in its modern edition, which, as we shall see, is firmly rooted in “universalistic” notions of individualism and market economy (which are nonetheless reserved for white Westerners, a freedom vouchsafed through reliance on coercion, force, and violence in its “civilizing” endeavors). And second, most crucially, we will consider what these might prophesy for youth, for a future of alternative possibilities. Yet, simultaneously, we must take up the challenge of imagining an exercise of power beyond the relentless culmination of violence that entails the possibility of freedom in resistance.

It is when the two rowdy students in Nietzsche’s lecture eventually put away their pistols and settle into a reflective mood that they catch precious bits of dialogue between the old philosopher and his companion. After a verbal lashing by his mentor, the latter is heard defending himself before the philosopher for having abandoned a teaching post. Eager to vindicate his decision, he describes at length the transformation of cultural and educational agendas according to the dictates of “the beloved national economic dogmas of the present,” which made his horrified flight essential (36):

“Here we have utility as the goal and the purpose of education, still more exactly acquisition, the highest possible winning of great amounts of money. From out of this direction education would roughly be defined as the insight, with which one keeps oneself ‘up to date,’ with which one is familiar with all ways in which money can most easily be made, with which one masters all means through which the traffic between human beings and peoples goes. The authentic task of education according to that would be to form [. . .] to the highest degree possible ‘courante’ human beings, in the manner in that one calls a coin ‘courante.’” (36-37)

The disillusioned young companion thus underscores the deeply troubled alliance between education and the national economy, an alliance that instrumentalizes education and commodifies knowledge such that it can be sold, traded, franchised, patented, and consumed. Such charges will come as no surprise to those acquainted with the educational signature of our neoliberalized present moment. In this context, a more accelerated version of the one characterized above, scholarly achievement for academics and their pupils alike is evaluated in terms of one's demonstrated superiority as a revenue-generating entity—or the promise of becoming one upon entering the labor market. As Bill Readings bemoaned in *The University in Ruins*, the professor is no longer the hero of the grand narrative of university education; that role now goes to the financially savvy administrator. Even the responsibility of conducting research is secondary to writing grants, applying for scholarships, or finding other means of hustling agencies for funding—but we shall not belabor the point. A formidable and comprehensive literature already exists and grows still from critics across the ideological spectrum, and for this reason we will not rehearse the arguments against the reduction of the university mission to one of “growing” the national economy, to borrow the unhappy phrase of one former U.S. president, or indeed the corporate “restructuring” of the university itself.⁵

Significant for our purposes is the consequence of such dramatic transformations, long in their historical unfolding, for thought itself. On this point, the philosopher's disillusioned young companion bristles: “Any education is hateful here that makes solitary, that sticks goals above money and acquisition, that wastes much time” (37). Educational tendencies that transgress the prevailing morality are consequently condemned as “‘higher egoism’ or ‘immoral [. . .] educational Epicureanism’” (37). What is desired above all else is a “speedy education,” in order to quickly become “‘a money-earning being and indeed [acquire] such a thorough education in order to be able to become a *very much* money-earning being’” (37; emphasis in original). For professors and students alike, the watchword is haste, and no more so than in the present era principally defined by speed. Academics in today's universities confront the same demands for heightened productivity that have come to define the conditions of labor more generally—in the form of teaching more and larger classes, writing grants, serving on administrative committees, filling out activity reports, attending lengthy meetings, responding to e-mail, refereeing journal articles, writing recommendations, and so on. As the disillusioned young educator of Nietzsche's narrative well noted, such frenetic nonstop activity is hardly conducive to the production of scholarly research or effective pedagogy. And conditions only deteriorate as one descends the university hierarchy—for assistant professors trying to make tenure, for the swelling ranks of adjuncts, and most devastatingly for students, the majority of whom, like no generation before, juggle schoolwork and job(s), yet still face near-insurmountable debt as a result of skyrocketing tuition, reduced financial aid, and dismantled social services.

In his most recent reflections on education, significantly titled “Hurried Life, or Liquid-Modern Challenges to Education,” Zygmunt Bauman draws on a metaphoric strikingly similar to Nietzsche's

characterization of the “up-to-date” human products of the “courante” system of education. The contemporary educational mandate, Bauman argues, is to “keep ahead of the style pack” (144). Responsive to the transition from Nietzsche’s society of producers to the new “liquid modern” society of consumers, Bauman traces the contours of a new herd mentality: “*Being* ahead is the sole trustworthy recipe for the style pack’s acceptance, while *staying* ahead is the only way to make sure the supply of respect is comfortably ample and continuous” (144; emphasis in original). The educational imperative that follows from the desire to stay ahead in consumers may be summarized in the commitment to “a life of *rapid learning—and swift forgetting*” (146; emphasis in original). Not to be confused with the ancient Greek commitment to “life-long learning,” the contemporary educational imperative does not speak the language of development or maturation; it does not invoke time-consuming commitments to thinking, planning, or acting in the long term, based on the slow, careful accumulation of knowledge, tested and retested, and improved when found wanting. Further, the contemporary educational imperative neither learns from the lessons of history, nor anticipates, let alone prepares for, future needs. The reason to hurry, he argues, “is not to acquire and collect as much as possible, but to discard and replace as much as one can” (173). Thinking, under this mandate, only gets in the way. The lessons of yesterday, after all, will not help one pull out in front of the style pack today, any more than yesterday’s fashion. Knowledge, like all commodities, now has a “use-by” date.

What kind of being does such an educational system produce—what future does it augur not only for education, but for public life more generally? Less and less likely, as Nietzsche predicted, is one who dares to think. James Miller, biographer of Michel Foucault, noted that the idea of leading a philosophical life is quite likely today to be dismissed as “misguided, immodest and self-aggrandizing” (871). The question now posed to the university is not “how to turn the institution into a haven for thought but how to think in an institution whose development tends to make thought more and more difficult, less and less necessary” (Readings 175). Of course, Nietzsche recognized in his opening comments that the philosopher’s competence ends where the future begins. His parable of the pedagogical encounter in the woods provided the vehicle for disclosing the connections and consequences of human conduct and choice in matters educational and the possible futures to which these point—for both students of the Gymnasium and the University, which is where Nietzsche focuses his sympathetic and yet uncompromisingly critical gaze in the second half of the lectures. The future of our educational institutions, he urges, will be a function of how young people negotiate the often contradictory and counterproductive modes of scholarly subjection that are championed as an achievement of individual self-assertion and self-creation, the apogee of academic freedom.

Before exploring Nietzsche’s analysis of how students fare in such compromised institutions, I would like to argue that the deepening crisis of thought—and the crisis of academic freedom to which Nietzsche and generations of intellectuals have come to refer—is part of a broader reduction or privatization of the very concept of freedom

that circulates throughout the modern period. Here, freedom and student access to it is intimately tied to aggressive individualism on one hand, and to the market economy and the glittering world of consumption on the other. This conception of freedom, it cannot be overemphasized, remained, throughout much of the modern era, a privilege even in its pretense to universal application, excluding non-whites, women, and white men who were not also property owners. As we shall see, it is toward these twin features of modern freedom that formal educational institutions arc, much to the peril of democratic public life and to themselves, as institutions devoted to the education of citizens necessary to sustain and advance public interests. The modern conceptual commitment to what Hannah Arendt called, variously, “public freedom” or liberty, as captured in the pledge for “liberty and justice for all,” came nevertheless to be realized, or lived, as autonomous individualism. Freedom in this sense precisely translates into a freedom *from* social dependence and social responsibility. The conception of freedom as the ability to govern oneself, an ideal that inflamed many revolutionary movements and ushered the West into modernity, was rather abruptly traded in for the dream of being “left alone” by government. Even as constitutional governments were burgeoning in the eighteenth century, the question of whether the end of government was to be prosperity or freedom remained a deeply unsettled issue. (And thus, the end of education, as we shall see, remains equally ambivalent.) Arendt’s attentive reading of one of the founding documents of the French Revolution, Maximilien Robespierre’s “Principles of Revolutionary Governments,” reveals the extraordinary equivocation and ambivalence about the role of government and the kind of freedom it was bound to honor and protect. She writes:

He started by defining the aim of constitutional government as the preservation of the republic which revolutionary government had founded for the purpose of establishing public freedom. Yet, no sooner had he defined the chief aim of constitutional government as the ‘preservation of public freedom’ than he turned about, as it were, and corrected himself: ‘Under constitutional rule it is almost enough to protect individuals against the abuses of public power.’ With this second sentence, power is still public and in the hands of government, but the individual has become powerless and must be protected against it. *Freedom, on the other hand, has shifted places; it resides no longer in the public realm but in private life of the citizens and so must be defended against the public and its power.* (137; emphasis added)

Freedom remains a value to be protected, but it is now a freedom dispatched to the realm of the private. Citing a similar tendency in the American context, she concludes that the “fatal passion for riches,” that particular pursuit of happiness, tended to extinguish the very impulse toward political and moral duty such that revolutionary notions of “*public* happiness and *political* freedom” disappeared altogether from the American scene (138; emphasis added). Ironically, it was the unleashing of consumer desires and market freedoms from communal obligation and authority that would come to serve

as a palliative or compensation for the loss of public freedom and community self-rule. Of course, the trade-off came at a catastrophic cost. In the contest between the self-assertive, sovereign individual and the imperatives of capital, the latter inevitably loses, as the acquisitive, imperialistic inclination of markets necessarily induces a progressive erosion of liberty and a deeper retreat into private life. With the loss of communal authority, the clash of all those individual “free” wills is mediated of necessity by new modes of regulation, coercion, and force. This social drama, however, should not be understood as merely the interplay of similarly free agents; some establish the norms of the social order that the others will be compelled to obey. “Hence the duality of modern individuality,” Bauman notes, “on the one hand, it is the natural inalienable appurtenance of every human being; on the other hand, however, it is something to be created, trained, legislated upon and enforced by authorities” entrusted to maintain the social order (*Freedom* 38). Not all individuals, as we have already noted, are found equally amenable to such refining and civilizing efforts. The modern conception of civility, as we have noted, is more than just casually inflected with racial (as well as classist and gendered) significance, and the forms of domination to which it gives legitimacy shape the entire social order, its “regimes of privileges and immunities” to invoke Achille Mbembe’s memorable phrase (30). For those who fall outside the ever-thickening walls of civil society, training in the art of autonomous individualism is less an option than strict containment of perceived antisocial or uncivil inclination. Without the threat of force, the dream of perpetual peace proves illusive in a context in which acquisitive, self-interested individuals are pitted against one another in the market game of winner-take-all. The question of security then quickly comes to the fore—both in the interests of acquiring guarantees of safety, and in the nurturing of the resentment that comes from the constraints such guarantees inevitably imply (Bauman, *Freedom* 38).

Our specific challenge is to understand how these tensions play out in the context of the university and its commitment to academic freedom, which for Nietzsche proves a similarly reductive and privatized freedom associated with the protocols of self-assertion and acquisition. How do young people—students in preuniversity and later university phases of their educational careers—negotiate the promise of autonomous individualism and at the same time the relentless imposition of norm and order in the interests of cultivating character and civility? Is it the possibility of renegade thought that renders thinking so perilous an endeavor, to be all but officially expunged from the corridors of education? As we think through this question, we must also consider which condition, in truth, creates more potential violence—the relentless instrumentalization of thought or its very absence? In place of the arduous and protracted journey to intellectual autonomy, that elusive dream of enlightenment, we have already seen how the incursions of political economy and the imperatives of a “speedy education” have undermined the conditions for, as well as the necessity of, thought and reflection. In later lectures, Nietzsche explains—or rather reveals—“what he has heard” about the consequences for thought when students are seduced by the cult of individualism. The gray

philosopher warns his companion that this most treacherous abuse of students begins in the Gymnasium. There, student preparation for university culminates in the so-called "German work," in essence, an "appeal to the individual," which takes the form of a series of assignments devoted to "personal shaping," which he characterizes as a theme that is "in and for itself unpedagogical, through which the student is prevailed upon to give a description of his own life, of his own development" (47).⁶ For the philosopher, the result of the German work proves catastrophic as "probably most all students, without their guilt, have to suffer their lives from this too-early-demanded work of the personality, from this unripe generation of thoughts." Not only do most students "suffer their lives" but its success portends the ruination of the future literary establishment: "and now often the whole later literary action of a human being appears as the sad result of that pedagogical original sin against the spirit" (47-48).

In thinking through the possible futures of education, we may well consider this moment of "pedagogical original sin" as well as its connection to what the philosopher refers to as the production of the "guilty innocent" in relation to those students who eventually enter the university system. Juxtaposed in this fashion, we notice at once a recurrent characterization of youthful innocence and exuberance that makes all the more painful the unfolding narrative about their trust and participation in an educational system that mitigates the possibility for critical thought and reflective action, thereby renouncing its very mission. Herein lies the birth of tragedy in education. On the one hand, we witness a violence done to youth (in all their audacious naïveté and vulnerability) that is represented as and indeed experienced by young people as intellectual independence, about which they understand nothing and against which they are all but helpless to resist. On the other, we also see their growing complicity with, and participation in, the forms of violence to which thoughtlessness eventually gives way, which they neither recognize nor oppose.

As a form of coercion experienced as individual choice and self-creation, Nietzsche's gray philosopher recognizes that students enjoy the German work, describing how "the staggering feeling of the required independence clothes these products with a first and foremost, but never returning, captivating magic" (48). Yet the results are nothing short of disastrous for the young person's intellectual growth and maturation:

"All audacities of nature are called forth out of their depths, all vanities, held back by no more powerful barrier, are allowed for the first time to assume a literary form: the young human being feels himself from now on as one who has become ready, as a being capable, indeed required, to speak, to converse. Those themes obligate him to deliver his vote on poets' works or to press together historical persons in the form of a character portrait or independently to present serious ethical problems, or even, with a turned around light, to illuminate his own becoming and to deliver a critical report on himself: in short, a whole world of the most reflective tasks spreads itself out before the surprised, up-till-now almost unconscious, young human being and is abandoned to his decision." (48)

The acquisition of premature independence and self-reliance virtually guarantees that students will never achieve the maturity necessary for self-reflexive, critical intellectual thought. Thus abandoned to the development of “free personality,” teachers default on their principle obligation: to teach students how to think and live in a society of other human beings, which requires the capacity for judgment, the awareness of self-limitation, the recognition of interests, and the confidence required for decision-making. The aggrandizing injunction to self-narrate hardly guarantees such insight. “To think, really to think,” as the postcolonial phenomenologist Lewis Gordon eloquently argues: “[. . .] is to engage the frightening evidence of our own conceptual limitations and to realize, in such limits, the magnitude of all that transcends us” (33). More chillingly still is the philosopher’s observation that what feels like independent assertion to the student only provides fodder for the most conventional forms of regulation and censorship. How do teachers respond to these “first original achievements”? Primarily to redress “[. . .] all excesses of form and thought, that is to everything that in this age is characteristic and individual” (48). The ironic result of which is that this first burst of “authentic independence” compelled yet also eager to express itself “all too early in time [. . .] in awkwardness, in sharpness, and grotesque features, thus precisely the individuality” is exactly what is excised, “reproved and rejected by the teacher in favor of an unoriginal average respectability” (48). The consequence for youth is neither intellectual growth nor political agency, but “self-complacency,” unripened intellectual production driven by haste and vanity, as well as “unfermented and characterless” expression (49).

In the university, we witness a similar, albeit more sophisticated, betrayal of thought with the ascendancy of scientism, historicism, and positivistic pretensions to moral neutrality. Of the penchant for historicism, Nietzsche’s gray philosopher moans, “To suppress and cripple it, to divert or to starve it, to that end all those youths of “modern times,” already resting in the lab of the “self-evident,” eagerly exert themselves: and the favorite means is to paralyze that natural philosophic drive through historical culture” (108-09). In the place of deep philosophical reflection of “eternal” problems, students in philosophy seminars are asked to ponder insular questions of the most conforming and socially irrelevant academic type: “what this or that philosopher has thought or not, whether this or that writing can justly be ascribed to him, or whether this or that kind of reading deserves priority” (109). With this “neutral dealing of philosophy,” the gray old man insists “*philosophy itself* is banished from the university” (109; emphasis in original).

As a result, “our academic “independents,”” Nietzsche’s philosopher notes with irony, are forced to live without philosophy and art—the pillars of ancient Greek *paideia*—because of the present-day university’s indifference to “such dead educational inclinations,” and for this reason they are unfit and unprepared for the intellectual demands of the university. He calls them, for this reason, the “guilty innocent” who surely are not responsible for creating such conditions, yet accommodate themselves to them, participate in them, vacillating

moodily between the same exultant illusion of academic freedom as their counterparts of the Gymnasium, yet also suffering in turn crushing self-doubt and helplessness:

“You must understand the secret language this guilty innocent uses before himself: then you would also learn to understand the inner essence of that independence that likes to be worn externally for show. None of the noble, well-equipped youths remained distant from that restless, tiresome, confounding, enervating educational necessity: for that time, in which he is apparently the single free man in a clerks’ and servants’ reality, he pays for that grandiose illusion of freedom through ever-renewing torments and doubts. He feels that he cannot lead himself, he cannot help himself: then he dives poor in hopes into the daily world and into daily work: the most trivial activity envelops him [. . .]. Suddenly he again rouses himself: he still feels the power, not waned, that enabled him to hold himself aloft. Pride and noble resolution form and grow in him. It terrifies him to sink so early into the narrow, petty moderation of a specialty [. . .].” (111)

The student’s attempt to rouse himself from his own narrowness, he notes, is “in vain.” Thus we learn how the patience for, and the eventual investment in, the “trivial activity” and the “petty moderation” of specialization already in evidence in the pedagogy of philosophy seminar begin to take hold. But even this tragic turn in intellectual interest doesn’t hold for long as the guilty innocent come to pay dearly for their grandiose illusion of freedom as they run in full flight from thought itself. Nietzsche’s philosopher continues the tragic parable:

“In an empty and disconsolate mood he sees his plans go up in smoke: his condition is abominable and undignified: he alternates between overexcited activity and melancholic enervation. Then he is tired, lazy, fearful of work, terrified in the face of everything great and hating himself. He dissects his capacities and thinks he is looking into a hollow or chaotically filled space. Then again he plunges from the heights of the dreamed self-importance into ironic skepticism [. . .]. He now seeks his consolation in hasty, incessant activity in order to hide from himself under it.” (111)

Moving between “overexcited activity” and “melancholic enervation,” between “self-importance” and “ironic skepticism,” this self-hating creature hides from himself in “hasty, incessant activity,” which in further irony is precisely what the university (necessarily complacent, we recall, in its relation to the state) encourages and rewards. Just as the teacher of the Gymnasium works to replace the initial sparks of authentic individuality with the mediocrity of respectable convention, Nietzsche’s philosopher insinuates the presence of the state in the most mundane of pedagogical encounters in the university: The teacher speaks what he wants to listening students who hear what they want, a “double independence” praised “with high glee as “academic freedom”” (106). Only, the gray old man insists, “behind both groups

at a discreet distance stands the state, with a certain taut overseer's mien, in order to remind from time to time that it is the purpose, the goal, the be-all-and-end-all of this strange speaking-and-listening procedure" (106-07). He thereby reveals how the state's proclaimed commitment to mass education, as evidenced by its surplus of educational institutions and teachers, is merely cover for its "hidden feud" with the very spirit of education (77).

To be sure, there can be little disagreement with the troubling characterization of education reduced to a means for economic advance, or for the self-aggrandizing individualism that serves capitalist interests well, but undermines the viability of democratic societies committed to the Arendtian notion of "public happiness and individual freedom." But the philosopher's concern appears not to lie with the interests of communal self-rule and participatory democracy. Rather, his purpose has been to reveal how far German education has fallen from the platonic ideal of an "empire of the intellect" (78), and how the state, arming its citizenry with the pretension of education, renders them slaves:

"Because the genuine German spirit is hated, because one fears the aristocratic nature of true education, because one wants to drive the great individuals thereby into self-imposed exile, so that one may plant and nurture pretensions to education in the many, because one seeks to run away from the narrow and hard discipline of great leaders, so that one may persuade the mass it will find the way even by itself—under the guiding star of the state!" (78)

Most disturbing is the solace Nietzsche's philosopher finds in ultranationalist and pugilistic sentiment: "[. . .] though the state thus fights [the German spirit] is nonetheless brave: it will thoroughly save itself in fighting into a purer period" and it will be "noble" and "victorious" (78). A straightforward rendering or ironic statement—of course, we don't know.

Such solace anticipates, in the end, the old philosopher's council to the specific suffering of youth, who have been thus abandoned to their own devices. The young Nietzsche and his companion may yet find an appropriate use for their weapons. "Think of the fate of the *Burschenschaft*," the gray philosopher insists, "a tragically serious and singularly instructive attempt to disperse that filmy mist [condensed over the university] and to open up the view for the future in the direction of the high cloud-walking German spirit" (114). The *Burschenschaft* was a violent, revolutionary student movement that grew out of the Wars of Liberation against Napoleon.⁷ But the philosopher nonetheless describes the actions of the youth in vividly heroic terms: "In the war the youth had carried home the unexpected worthiest prize of battle, the freedom of the fatherland [. . .]" (114). Chillingly, we note, the youth eventually brought this war to the university, where they witnessed in terror "the un-German barbarism, artfully hidden among eruditions of all kinds" among their peers who there had been "abandoned to a repulsive youthful giddiness" (115). And it is through the glories of battle that youth finally become self-consciously aware of their collective betrayal and achieve intellectual acuity and insight:

"[T]he student foresaw in what depths a true educational institution must be rooted: namely in an inner renewal and excitation of the purest moral powers. And this should be retold forever of the students to their fame. On the slaughtering field he may have learned what he could learn least of all in the sphere of 'academic freedom': that one needs great leaders, and that all education begins with obedience [. . .] Now he learned to understand Tacitus, now he grasped Kant's categorical imperative [. . .]." (117)

The violence of a thoroughly instrumentalized education based on acquisition and pedagogically induced self-aggrandizement produces beings who live in a world where others are either recast as reified objects or made to disappear altogether. The clash of interests eventually begets the revolutionary violence of students in open revolt against the state and its decadent institutions. And this comes to characterize the true lesson of academic freedom. But what Nietzsche's philosopher has described is hardly a revolution for independence as the eighteenth century has defined it for us, but rather the reseating of an aristocracy, founded on the "purest moral powers" (an absolutism ironically encouraging its own kind of anti-intellectualism), that simultaneously destroys the possibility of a viable democratic polity, as well as the necessity for thought in the interests of substantive democratic and liberatory self-rule.

Let us ponder this distinction a bit more. Interestingly, like Nietzsche, Zygmunt Bauman (in his recent essay on education cited earlier) takes the measure of the vast distance between the learning and memorizing injunctions of the ancient Greek notion of *paideia* and the contemporary university system, in which teachers and students alike are obliged to undertake an endless task of fast learning and forgetting. Whether thought is sacrificed in the name of instrumental rationalities or increased economic efficiency and speed, the upshot is tragic not from the perspective of Nietzschean intellectual aristocracy, but rather the tragedy lies in a democratic society's inability to learn from its history and failure to make the painstaking effort to confront and redress one's transgressions in the pursuit of public freedom and more just and sustainable futures. For Bauman, like Nietzsche, the consequences of this pedagogical betrayal of successive generations of students are the same—only violence and destruction. We might thus add another twist, vis-à-vis Karl von Clausewitz's obsessively quoted insistence that "war is a continuation of politics by other means" (120), by claiming that in the absence of the conditions for thought that enable politics, war is a continuation of the project of education by other means. Nor should we be surprised that in Bauman's meditation on contemporary education, the specter of armed youth, of death-dealing weapons and the language of war quickly come to the fore of his exposition, as they did in Nietzsche's. In Bauman's extended metaphor, teachers of the modern era served as the "launchers of ballistic missiles," instructing students, now morphed into weapons of mass destruction, to stay on their predetermined course for maximal momentum. Ballistic missiles were ideal for positional warfare, when targets were stationary or inert and missiles were the only elements of

the battle in motion. Once targets become mobile, once they become invisible to the gunner as is now the case in our allegedly advanced “liquid modern era,” ballistic missiles become useless or nearly so. The solution is educational, as Nietzsche would say, and doubly so: a smart, or “intelligent missile.” A smart missile, Bauman explains, is:

a missile that can change its direction in full flight, depending on changing circumstances, one that can spot immediately the target’s movements, learn from them whatever can be learned about the target’s current direction and speed—and extrapolate from the gathered information the spot in which their trajectories may cross. Such smart missiles cannot suspend, let alone finish the gathering and processing of, information as it travels—as its target may never stop moving and changing its direction and speed, and the place of encounter needs to be constantly updated and corrected. (“Hurried Life” 182)

Accordingly, the students-as-smart-missiles learn as they go, requiring the conditions of instruction to change accordingly. In the instantaneous transmission and reception of targeted information, the negation of the necessary space and time for focused and judicious thought and reflection inevitably results, Bauman asserts, in the negation of the very conditions for politics. The resultant destruction, now reconceived as the apparent end of education, achieves greater efficiency and impact:

So what [smart missile students] need to be initially supplied with is the ability to learn, and learn fast. This is obvious. What is less visible, however, though no less crucial than the skill of quick learning, is the ability to instantly forget what has been learned before [. . .]. They should not overly cherish the information they acquired a moment earlier and on no account should they develop a habit of behaving in a way that the information suggested. All information they acquire ages rapidly and, instead of providing reliable guidance, may lead astray, if it is not promptly dismissed—erased from memory. What the “brains” of the smart missiles must never forget is that the knowledge they acquire is eminently disposable, good only until further notice and of only temporary usefulness, and that the warrant of success is not to overlook the moment when that acquired knowledge is of no more use and needs to be thrown away, forgotten, and replaced. (“Hurried Life” 183)

Bauman’s metaphor serves well to underscore the breadth and scope of the violence of such evolved “educational” imperatives, as it simultaneously draws attention to the ways in which the world young people inhabit grows ever more precarious. Yet they have been afforded neither the educational resources nor the guidance of their elders that might help them imagine a future that is other than apocalyptic. As a consequence of our devastatingly misguided priorities and our negligence, we have, in short, produced smart bombs and explosive children.

As much as we may resist generalizing from the particularities of contemporary gun-toting youth such as Seung-Hui Cho or Steven Kazmierczak, or the thousands of youth transformed into ticking human time bombs for one side or another of a permanent global war on terror, there is, as Nietzsche would say, something “instructive” in remembering them as a tragic index of the insufferable conditions that most contemporary young people face and the possible futures to which they point. Whatever ambivalence we feel about the conclusion of Nietzsche’s bizarre lectures—indeed he well shared our ambivalence—he was correct in his prescient observation (which, recall, he insisted would only become clear to future generations) that our educational institutions, in their capitulation to business, to military, to state interests, have utterly abandoned their responsibilities to youth and to the future.

In 1987, the conservative critic and self-described intellectual descendent of Nietzsche, Allan Bloom, penned his (in)famous diatribe against the university, *The Closing of the American Mind*. An instant national bestseller when it appeared, it has achieved in the ensuing years the status of a much-venerated classic, shaping for over two decades common sense conceptions about the university and about young people. In the book’s conclusion, Bloom lamented that “The university now offers no distinctive visage to the young person [. . .]. There is no vision, nor is there a set of competing visions, of what an educated man is. The question has disappeared, for to pose it would be a threat to the peace” (337). Bloom’s diagnosis, however, is incorrect in both of its principle observations. First, the university rarely has a coherent *vision of the young person* to whom it should offer a conception of “the educated man.” Bloom’s book is in no small way responsible for this absence, given the brilliant success and pervasive influence of his grotesque characterization of the younger generations as illiterate, inarticulate, in the throes of Dionysian frenzy, and utterly unworthy and incapable of receiving an Enlightened university education. “Picture a thirteen-year-old boy,” he famously wrote:

sitting in the living room of his family home doing his math assignment while wearing his Walkman headphones or watching MTV. He enjoys the liberties hard won over centuries by the alliance of philosophic genius and political heroism, consecrated by the blood of martyrs; he is provided with comfort and leisure by the most productive economy ever known to mankind; science has penetrated the secrets of nature in order to provide him with the marvelous, lifelike electronic sound and image reproduction he is enjoying. And in what does progress culminate? A pubescent child whose body throbs with orgasmic rhythms; whose feelings are made articulate in hymns to the joys of onanism or the killing of parents; whose ambition is to win fame and wealth in imitating the drag-queen who makes the music. In short, life is made into a nonstop, commercially prepackaged masturbatory fantasy. (75)

Youth in this context are transformed into dangerous parasites feeding off the “genius” and “heroism” “hard won over centuries”—hardly, as Nietzsche described to his credit, the very “seeds of our hopes” and our future.

Even progressive thinkers engaged in the ongoing struggle over academic freedom in the generalized assault on the university, as Henry Giroux has long pointed out, seldom reference youth—what it means to prepare them for the future, to enable them to evaluate different futures, what their needs are in these interests, and what the university’s responsibility is in relation to student needs.⁸ When student academic freedom is occasionally invoked by the right it is typically a ruse, as in the singular perversion of David Horowitz, whose principle aim is precisely to “protect” students from thought, to abolish thought from the university altogether in the interests of turning it into what is ironically called a “think tank.”⁹ Yet a commitment to the university as a place to think “without condition,” as Derrida would say, if not in absolute freedom, and to the future of the university predicated on Thought, must begin with students and those conditions in and outside the academy that routinely undermine their critical capacities and, with this, their political agency.

However we choose to characterize youth, whatever undesirable features we assign to them are more precisely a function of the world they have inherited, as shaped by adult decision—a world marred by extreme uncertainty, instability, volatility, and war. In his comprehensive study of recent school shootings, Douglas Kellner aptly notes that today’s youth, unlike previous generations, face even more anxiety-producing and dangerous threats as a result of terrorism, war, ecological destruction, and ever-worsening political and economic realities. Their realities—myriad and diverse to be sure—are shaped in the main by the dissolution of the family, downward mobility, staggering unemployment, particularly for youth of color, growing abuse and domestic conflict, drug and alcohol abuse, poor education and dilapidated schools, and escalating criminalization and imprisonment. Such lived realities not only shape student access to education, but they impose, for those who manage the tuition, crushing time constraints, as the majority of youth must juggle one or more jobs as well as the demands their studies impose. Even upon entering the classroom, today’s students must also negotiate the changing conditions of university education that inevitably mediate their academic motivations and performance, from growing class sizes and diminishing teaching resources—including such essentials as up-to-date computing and digital technologies—to increasing inaccessibility of faculty, who face multiple new responsibilities and time demands of their own. But for this indiscretion, faculty are largely let off the hook, not because it is mostly out of their hands, but rather because the debt students almost inevitably accrue sends them searching for skills training, leaving neither the time nor interest in higher learning.

Second, the pervasive “peace” on university campuses to which Bloom refers is proving more and more chimerical, if it ever existed, as its mission, its research agendas, and its pedagogical imperatives shift more and more to military interests. As our historical reading of

Nietzsche makes evident, and the last three decades have made unbearably obvious, universities have been inundated with war talk. Bloom himself proved a most stalwart warrior in what became known on campuses across the country as “the culture wars.” As Donald Lazere brilliantly exposes on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of *The Closing of the American Mind*, beneath Bloom’s discourse of truth and light and peace is an avowed Straussian eager for battle and the destruction of enemies. But this logic of antagonism was never limited to the culture wars. As Derrida observed, the creep of militarization throughout the university has redefined “the entire field of information,” not just disciplines associated with the technosciences, but all aspects of academic research:

At the service of war, of national and international security, research programs have to encompass the entire field of information, the stockpiling of knowledge, the workings and thus also the essence of language and of all semiotic systems, translation, coding and decoding, the play of presence and absence, hermeneutics, semantics, structural and generative linguistics, pragmatics, rhetoric. I am accumulating all these disciplines in a haphazard way, on purpose, but I will end with literature, poetry and the arts, and fiction in general: the theory that has these disciplines as its objects can be just as useful in ideological warfare as it is in experimentation with variables in all-too-familiar perversions of the referential function. (143)

The consequences of advancing militarization for humanistic inquiry are already well-known, as the expertise of intellectuals who specialize in the languages and cultures of Islam, for example, are tapped by officials in the Pentagon and Department of Defense in the honing and perfecting of tactics and methods of torture.¹⁰ Under such obscene conditions, the university response “to the call of the principle of reason [. . .] to render reason,” as Derrida describes, now serves the interests of extraordinary rendition. It is enough, apparently, to know how to assemble and advance new technologies of war, how to break the enemy by whatever means necessary; we no longer need to be able to talk about them, it seems, or question them—much less be required to think about them.

Unless we confront such challenges, the logic of permanent war will surely continue to increase global fear, insecurity, and volatility, as well as the generalized anxiety, nihilism, and the suffering of youth. For Kellner, the myriad difficulties youth face erupt in violence—particularly male violence—as a result of escalating militarism, jingoistic patriotism, and extremist gun culture that are the definitive legacy of right-wing policies of the last three decades. The danger, against the backdrop of the nation’s lengthy history of civic violence, is to perceive such shifts as normative, natural, and inevitable—or worse still, to imagine that such a tragic state of affairs is not our concern.¹¹ Surely, our youth deserve a future better than the apocalyptic one now on order.

Notes

I would like to thank Henry A. Giroux and David L. Clark for their generous comments and insightful criticisms of earlier drafts of this paper. For any error or lapse of judgment, however, I take full responsibility.

¹ For one of the most comprehensive accounts of the militarization of higher education, see Giroux, *The University in Chains*.

² The Greek *paideuein*, from which we derive *paideia*, means both “to teach” and “to torment.” For an elaboration on the question of *paideia* in Nietzsche’s “On the Future of Our Educational Institutions,” see Allen and Axiotis.

³ See also Grenke 2. In several letters written later in 1872 and early 1873, Nietzsche complained to Malwida von Meysenbug that the lectures were, variously, “primitive,” a depthless “farce” of inferior invention, a promise that fails in the end to deliver: “One acquires a dry throat from these lectures and in the end nothing to drink!” (2).

⁴ I say seemingly here in due recognition of the difficulty Jacques Derrida establishes between what constitutes the “inside” and the “outside” of the university in the famed essay, “Mochlos, or The Conflict of the Faculties,” in *Eyes on the University*, in which he states:

No discourse would be rigorous here if one did not begin by defining the unity of the university system, in other words the border between its inside and its outside. Kant wishes to analyze conflicts proper to the university, those arising between the different parts of the university’s body and its power, that is, here, the faculties [. . .]. Today however—and this is a first limit to the translation of the Kantian text in our politico-epistemological space—there can be very serious competition and border conflicts between nonuniversity research centers and university faculties claiming at once to be doing research and transmitting knowledge, to be producing and reproducing knowledge [. . .]. Today, in any case, the university is what has become its margin. (93-94)

It is this sense of university marginality—a condition to which it has in part given itself over, and one which is predicated on the victory of instrumental rationalities, of scienticism, historicism, journalistic plain speak, and self-evidences—that, for Nietzsche, shape contemporary culture and mitigate the possibility of Thought.

⁵ With Henry Giroux, I have taken up such issues in *Take Back Higher Education*. For additional critical work, see as well Aronowitz, and Giroux, *The University in Chains*.

⁶ This pedagogical appeal and its popularity remain alive and well today, as the reader will no doubt recognize. For the sake of example, we might look to the 2000 decision by the Canadian Council for the Advancement of Education to award a Gold Medal to the University of Western Ontario’s “Major in Yourself” Web site campaign. Thanks to David Clark for reminding me of this event.

⁷ The first association was founded in Jena in 1815 in opposition to reactionary government policies, and many other student organizations quickly formed across German universities. After the 1819 assassination of August Kotzebue by one of the members of the *Burschenschaft*, the organization was banned, driven underground, and grew even more radical and violent. By the second half of the century, the *Burschenschaft* had become a union of highly nationalistic and anti-Semitic social clubs.

⁸ For a penetrating analysis of this absence, see Giroux, *The Abandoned Generation*.

⁹ I have elaborated on this position elsewhere. See my essay "Playing in the Dark."

¹⁰ See Giroux, *The University in Chains*, for the most comprehensive analysis of the university complicity with militarization and torture to date.

¹¹ As is the case for Stanley Fish, who insists that academics have no moral duty to educate youth to be productive and engaged citizens, thus invoking the very positivistic presumption of moral neutrality, Nietzsche castigated as a betrayal of thought. See Fish, *Save the World*, for more information.

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