FOREWORD

**Critical Theory, Globalization, and Higher Education:
Political Economy and the Cul-de-Sac of the
Postmodernist Cultural Turn**

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The importance of this volume can be readily presented in a prefatory, summary way as signaling a reintegration of critical social theory and political economy in the study of higher education in the Americas. Although political economic approaches have come upon hard time since the heyday of the early 1980s, they remain—especially in the new forms that have emerged—more important than ever in the context of globalization. The new challenges relate especially to taking into account a new understanding of the state in the context of neoliberal globalization and the downsizing of the welfare state as well as the paradoxical effects of the cultural turn in the human sciences and its uses and abuses in political culture.

It is necessary to have some historical perspective here in recognizing that higher education has had a distinctive fate in this context. Although post-secondary education initially remained relatively autonomous relative to lower levels, it has subsequently lost control of its pact with the devil in opening itself to commercialization in the name of its public responsibility,

although most administrators in the United States in particular would be unwilling to accept this conclusion (Stein 2004). On the one hand, in accepting the principle of overt public accountability (even if hedged with caveats about protecting autonomy), public college and university institutions since the 1970s have been confronted with a never-ending demand for demonstrating “relevance” based on criteria increasingly distant from the original mandate of democratic responsibility. The co-optation of the open democratic university by the dogmas of neoliberal globalization theory and the local pressures of budgetary constraints have increasingly alienated the popular and social democratic forces that once supported making the ivory tower “more relevant.” One of the contributions of this volume is providing a variety of cases in North America and Latin America that illustrate various implications of the privatization and commercialization of higher education and its betrayal of both “the idea of the university” and its potential contribution to public life.

Yet the resulting analyses of this book also need to be situated in the broader context of the politics of higher education that have contributed to the erosion of autonomy and constrained the ability of universities to contribute to their traditional mandate as institutions. Although only rarely alluded to in this volume, the so-called cultural turn in the human sciences—most notably in the United States—has inadvertently contributed to this process as part of a cannibalistic process of self-criticism of the university as a major source of social and cultural reproduction in society, a theme still ironically echoed in Latin America in more conventional Marxist terms. Although there is an important element of truth in the charge that higher education has colluded in reproducing the dominant social order, such effects have been far outweighed by contributions to envisioning alternatives and social criticism. Alongside social and cultural movements, higher education remains a primary source of cultural and social innovation in modern societies—a contribution well recognized by its right-wing and fundamentalist enemies. Partly as a consequence of these new circumstances, however, the immense constructive opportunities for higher education represented by globalization have been increasingly subverted by the kinds of processes described by the political economic analyses presented in this book.

A central theme of this foreword is that a new alliance between critical social theory and political economy represents an important step toward clar-

ifying and dealing with the fallout from the “canon” and “science wars” in higher education. Although these issues have now been dealt with reasonably well by most institutions, the overall confrontation and lingering effects have played into the hands of the enemies of academic autonomy by calling into question the capacity of higher education to retain persuasive academic authority outside the “hard” sciences and positivist forms of social science. Postmodernist cultural critics may enounce again and again the “death” of metanarratives and the collapse of the subject-centered model of Western reason, but academic institutions remain firmly under the control of rather conventional—if now more pluralistic—conceptions of science and knowledge. At the same time, and reinforcing some of the limitations of the dominant model of science and technology, university curricula and research have increasingly opened themselves to market pressures without having taken into account necessary long-term safeguards and alternative strategies.

The cumulative failure of postmodern critiques of knowledge to have adequately addressed these issues results in a challenge for the reconciliation of critical theory and political economy in higher education. The advantage of critical theory in this context is that, unlike postmodernist critiques of knowledge, it has avoided self-contradictory relativism and retained a sense of the *reconstructive* moment of social theory based on a constructivist epistemology that views deconstructive strategies as simply a means, not an end in themselves. What critical theory calls for are new forms of cultural theory that can demystify the often invisible reproductive effects of higher education and research and yet can also suggest new strategies for renewing the autonomy of higher education based on the precarious balancing act of relating social relevance and the free pursuit of knowledge and “truth.” Only in this way can the democratic mandate of the university be preserved. Only by retaining its autonomy can higher education fulfill its responsibility to the community—and humanity—as a whole and offset the apparently “rational” efforts to subordinate knowledge to the forces of the market and its short-sighted definitions of relevance.

To make the preceding argument more convincing, I need to introduce a number of issues in somewhat greater depth: Why political economy and critical theory? How has the opening up of higher education to public relevance been corrupted? How has the opening up of universities and research to market forces become a Trojan horse for eroding intellectual autonomy?

And what are the prospects for alternative models of envisioning and organizing the mission of higher education and research?

Political Economy, Critical Theory, and Democracy

Why use political economy and critical theory as strategies for studying higher education? The term *political economy* has a confusing variety of meanings. Originally it referred to an approach to economic theory associated initially with the classical economics of Adam Smith and David Ricardo and the critique of political economy found in Marx. As used in this volume, however, political economy refers primarily to an interdisciplinary social scientific approach that studies the interaction between democratic politics and market relations. The key theoretical point of departure is the assumption that, although self-regulating market mechanisms may contribute reliably to the accumulation of profit, this process has no necessary relation to collective needs and public interests. Similarly, the left has also increasingly recognized that the use of state power per se is no guarantee of public interest. The task of a *critical political economy* is thus to provide empirical evidence and theoretical arguments for showing how, when, and with what consequences the use of market mechanisms or state power can be utilized in problematic ways to guide public policies. Although it is acknowledged that market mechanisms are inevitably a crucial aspect of the democratic openness of the kind of capitalist social formation in which we appear to be destined to live in for the foreseeable future, those unregulated, self-regulating market systems are held to represent an ongoing threat to social pluralism and the democratic claims of state policy.

It is important to have some historical perspective here in recalling the rebirth of political economy in the 1970s and early 1980s, partly as a response to the reception of neo-Marxist and critical theories. Although the use of political economy was especially important in fields such as work or mass communications that were primarily market based, it also played a rather different role in the analysis of public education, as we will see shortly. In this period the emergence of the fiscal crisis of the state created possibilities for a legitimation crisis that some suggested could provide the catalyst for a renewal of democratic politics and an opening for the left.

Instead, a fundamental reorganization of capital—often described theoretically as a post-Fordist regime of production—succeeded in coordinating a downsizing of the welfare state coupled with a neoliberal strategy of globalization that made the imperatives of international competition into the new basis of social control. By using the political rhetoric of the imperatives of structural adjustment of fiscal and monetary policies to the new low-inflation era, it became increasingly possible to undermine populist and democratic pressures from below on strictly financial and “technical” grounds. The result was a kind of economic technocracy through which human needs and democratic aspirations became marginalized in the name of economic necessity and the allocation of resources became dictated by primarily technical criteria determined by international economic institutions and the international financial community. In effect, neoliberal economics, backed up by the proliferation of rational choice theories and related research, has made the contemporary economics into the new “dismal science” through which “rationality” is reduced to an economic “realism” that formally liberates human choice at the individual level but suffocates and marginalizes social and public choice (Sen 2002).

But it is important to recall that this earlier renaissance of political economy was rather prematurely eclipsed as a major orientation in the mid 1980s, although it continued to enjoy considerable support as a minority orientation in many areas of social research, including education at the primary and secondary levels. The relative decline of political economy had both internal and external sources. From within it was often acknowledged that classical political economy suffered from an excessive structuralism that did not adequately account for agency (Apple 1981). Although this weakness could in principle be corrected within a reconstructed version of political economy understood in the form of critical theory (Morrow and Torres 1995), the shift to the focus on agency took on a life of its own, especially in the form of critical pedagogy (Giroux 1983). In any case, whereas critical (social) theory in its renewed forms was in principle based on linking political economy as an analysis of structure with a theory of resistance and agency, *in practice*—especially as postmodernist critical pedagogy—this articulation tended to break down (Slott 2002).

But these internal disputes and problems were minor compared to the external developments that marked a kind of cultural shift in the “spirit of the

times" (Zeitgeist) associated with the concept of postmodernism. Postmodernism as an academic phenomenon can be viewed as the last exhausted gasp of the otherwise important cultural and interpretive turn that marked the rise of cultural studies in the 1970s. Although cultural studies originated in close relation to critical theory, political economy, and Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony, its academic popularization in the 1980s was increasingly defined by its association with postmodernism and poststructuralism. In its most popular form, as a kind of simplistic reaction against political economy (and critical theory) as totalizing "metanarratives," postmodernist theories proclaimed a radical pluralism and voluntarism oriented toward ahistorical understandings of the local and the here and now. Theoretically, social analysis was reduced to cultural theory and was understood primarily in purely discursive terms that neglected the extratextual dimensions and material aspects of institutions and social reality. Although postmodernism as a kind of cultural movement claimed to rely on poststructuralist theories as the basis of a new, postempiricist form of subversive social theory, it appropriated poststructuralist theories in selective ways—most notably those of Michel Foucault—that often distorted their innovative insights into social and cultural reality. In the process, however, critical theory, political economy, and other dimensions of poststructuralist theory were neglected in the 1990s in the name of a hypertextual form of postmodernist cultural theory. Perhaps it is now possible to envision what can now—retrospectively—be labeled the *cul-de-sac of the postmodernist version of the cultural turn*—the dead end that signaled the point of departure for new beginnings. To be sure, there were numerous eloquent calls for a critical postmodernism or a postmodern critical theory, but they were largely marginalized by the whirlwind of academic postmodernism that marked the humanities above all in the 1990s (Agger 2002; Best and Kellner 2001). Against the excesses of postmodernism, it can be argued that critical theory without political economy retreats into a free-floating cultural space that loses contact with the historical specificity necessary for its insights as a form of social analysis and critique. Similarly, political economy without critical theory remains a structuralist methodology that cannot ground itself in a broader conception of the state, society, the subject, and cultural change.

It is in this context that it is important to stress the strategic importance of forms of political economy informed by critical theory that have more recently drawn on a selective critical appropriation of themes from the post-

modernism-poststructuralism debates (e.g., Foucault's contributions to a theory of power). The version of the debate presented here under the heading of political economy, however, presupposes a broad conception of critical theory (or critical social theory) that—despite occasional impressions—does not ground itself in a series of dogmatic claims about higher education and public policy or any naïve leftist faith in the state. What it does do is use empirically grounded theoretical arguments to justify pragmatic policy options that are attuned to regional and national variations as well as to the global context. An aspect of the general approach that links the essays of the present volume is that they represent—even if they do not explicitly theorize—a renewal of a political economy of education that has learned from these past lessons without succumbing to the wish fulfillments of the post-modernist spirit of the times. A major policy assumption is that public sector education should define the basic agenda of national policies that are responsive to global change but should not be dictated by international agencies intent on imposing a problematic model of economic development. Matters are complicated by the often misleading use of the “American model” of higher education and research (e.g., the role of private research universities) that may lead to imitating some of its most problematic aspects (e.g., academic capitalism) and ignoring its best aspects (e.g., the leadership role of major research-oriented state universities and multiple levels of entry and opportunities for upward movement).

Political Economy, Higher Education, and the Lure of “Relevance”

Against its good intentions the left contributed to the current situation by originally joining the call for public relevance, only to later see representatives of the postmodernist cultural left turn on the university itself, even if intending to use it as a bastion of radical cultural change. Although this possibility was anticipated in the New Left attacks on universities in the generation of 1968, this antipathy abated with the subsequent pluralistic opening up of scholarship in the humanities and social sciences. A more recent attack on academic authority in the name of postmodernism, however, threatens to have more enduring and problematic effects in the wake of the post-1989 generation.

Historically the relationship between political economy and higher edu-

cation has been limited because of the long-standing autonomy of colleges and universities relative to the K–12 levels of education. As well, political economic studies of primary and secondary education focused on the social and cultural reproduction of workers rather than on economic determinants of actual educational systems and policies. Because political economy as a theoretical and methodological strategy is oriented toward the interplay between state policies and market-driven institutional spheres, higher education appeared to be relatively immune—at least in North America—to political economic analysis, given its apparent autonomy. In Latin America, on the other hand, public universities never enjoyed such a period of extended expansion and relative affluence. Although modernization theories advocated the expansion and funding of public higher education in Latin America, political economic realities and state incompetence contributed to a chronic failure with respect to access, quality, and levels of research funding.

During this period of apparently endless expansion in North America, public higher education enjoyed universal support and generous funding until the emerging fiscal crisis of the state in the 1970s. In the general theory of Talcott Parson's structural functionalism, this expansion of higher education could be understood as the preordained outcome of the evolutionary differentiation of society toward a "knowledge society" (Parsons 1973). On the one hand, curriculum decisions were autonomous beyond general guidelines for accreditation based on principles of technical quality. On the other hand, financing could be understood as the outcome of either state policies in the case of public education or endowment and philanthropic activities in the case of private institutions. Even in the exceptional case of the United States, which has the largest privately based higher education sector, private colleges and universities were not typically for-profit enterprises but rather voluntary associations based on various religious or cultural goals. Most obviously, the elite private and public institutions were guided by a kind of universalistic competition for "distinction" in research and undergraduate training in the sense of the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. Such competition greatly restricted political restrictions on autonomy, and there was no significant difference between public and elite private higher education with respect to political orientations, aside from more traditional denominational religious schools in some fields. To be sure, these private colleges served to reinforce the cultural capital of the children of elites, but multicultural poli-

cies in the 1970s began to significantly widen the range of entrants and solidified to some extent meritocratic claims to equality of opportunity. In this context the notion of a political economy of higher education was similar to that of a political economy of religious institutions in that it was relatively peripheral for understanding the origins and changes of such institutions.

On the other hand, a form of political economy did come to play a significant role in the study of primary and secondary education in the 1970s in the form of structuralist or correspondence theories of educational reproduction. In the widely influential research of Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis (1976), Michael Apple (1982), and many others in various countries, it was argued that public school autonomy was illusory because of its latent function in preparing docile workers for the capitalist economy. Another line of research focused more on the fiscal crisis of research and the effect of the lack of revenues on the deterioration of public schooling, again focusing more on primary and secondary education, as for example, in the work of Carlos Alberto Torres (Morrow and Torres 1995).

Although this is not the place to recount the gradual breakdown of the public model of higher education expansion, which has taken rather different forms in the United States and Canada, it is important to stress that an important factor in the erosion of autonomy has been the corruption of the model of "public relevance" as a result of the pressures of both fiscal constraint and demands for market relevance. Although originally envisioned in terms of a balance between autonomy and broader social concerns, the cumulative result has been an exposure to a classic version of the "slippery slope" dilemma through which the ultimate outcome looks little like the intended point of departure. To the extent that many on the left became enamored with projects of immediate political relevance, however, the left contributed to this process by acquiescing to short-term appeals to political efficacy. In this earlier context the institutionalization of science and higher education policy could be viewed as a way of coordinating research for the public good. The subsequent emergence of neoliberal models of globalization, however, has provided a theoretical basis for undermining the original intentions of science and research policy by subordinating them to the rhetoric of privatization and global competitiveness. Unfortunately, appeals to a political activist conception of the public good can rarely compete with the "practical" imperatives defined by market-based agendas, thus opening the

way for private interests to dominate the space opened up by declining university autonomy.

Yet the current conjecture of cultural politics has made it extremely difficult to imagine how an effective rearticulation of the justification of the forms of autonomy is necessary for the contemporary research university. The crucial problem is recognizing that defending the principle of academic autonomy is not by itself a specifically “conservative” stance in the ideological sense but part of the liberal spirit of mind that links various ideological tendencies around the post-Enlightenment project of higher education as an institution with unique origins and responsibilities that need to be protected from within and without (Burke 2000). What might be called the *disenchantment of academic authority*—carried about in different ways by the right and cultural left—has culminated in a tragic polarization between epistemological relativism and a dominant positivism that undermines new alternatives.

*The Left, Higher Education, and the State:
Cultural Critique and the Postmodernist Cultural Turn*

The corruption of the public relevance argument in the face of fiscal constraints and neoliberal ideology was not the only setback for advocates of public higher education. The cultural politics of the 1980s contributed to a crisis of confidence in the social sciences and humanities that has raised major questions about the knowledge claims of these disciplines. However intellectually important and necessary the cultural turn in the human sciences has been, it has also unwittingly contributed—most evidently in the wake of postmodernism—to weakening the cultural basis for legitimating the autonomy of higher education and research. The great benefactor of the desecralization of the university as a cultural institution has been the increasing penetration of market forces into higher education and the reorganization of university governance around “playing the game” of academic capitalism. In this context it has become increasingly difficult to generate any public support for abstract ideas such as “academic freedom,” given that the new process is sufficiently insidious to usually avoid charges of direct political interference of a more traditional kind. In this context the market becomes the Trojan horse for undermining academic autonomy by ostensibly nonideo-

logical and noncoercive means based on the interests of the “consumers” of education and research.

Although the present discussion focuses on some of the particular effects of postmodernist cultural theory on this process, it should be noted that the critical modernist sociological theory of Pierre Bourdieu also has unwittingly contributed. Such effects are especially ironic in the case of Bourdieu because his sociology of education originated as a critique of inequality and educational reproduction and a defense of the autonomy of academic disciplines. His analysis of the role of “distinction” in higher education was intended to provide a reflexive basis for a defense of the autonomy of academic disciplines, but it has indirectly served—even on the left—to unmask and to delegitimize the “sacral” origins of the autonomy of higher education (Bourdieu 1984). So long as higher education could retain a faith in its higher mission inherited from religious institutions, partly in the name of a vision of “liberal education” and the rituals of higher education that consecrated it as a unique cultural space, it could provide a justification for seemingly “irrelevant” forms of instruction and research whose value could be demonstrated only in the long run.

The more influential and immediate sources of the undermining of academic authority, however, are closely associated with postmodernist cultural theory and related questioning of the conventional canons of Western humanities scholarship and the effects of positivism in the human sciences in general. This point should not be read as a condemnation of these tendencies per se, which on the whole—despite obvious excesses of “political correctness”—represent important and necessary forms of self-criticism and intellectual renewal. The issue is rather that of confronting the perplexing fact—the unintended consequence—that such internal disputes *have been used* by the cultural and neoliberal right as bases for undermining the intellectual authority of the resulting forms of scholarship. In particular, relativist forms of radical constructivism and militant standpoint theories of the politicization of scholarship become easy targets for those advocating a return to traditional cultural canons and the authority of a positivist social science. Given the vacuum created by the resulting polarization in the academy, neoliberal policy makers have pounced on the confusion by calling for market forces to provide the criteria for supporting and distributing social knowledge, because the academy no longer knows how to conceptualize its

demands for autonomy coherently. Indeed, if radical constructivists were right and all aspirations to autonomy are an illusion, there is little to be lost in any case.

Consequently, it is possible to direct specific criticism—at least from the perspective of critical theory—against what might be called certain postmodernist abuses of poststructuralism. Although often articulated on behalf of new forms of political subversion through cultural politics, such efforts have become increasingly self-referential islands of contestation within elite sectors of the academy. To illustrate the limitations of the postmodern hijacking of poststructuralism, the case of Michel Foucault is instructive. At least three kinds of uses of Foucault's ideas in educational theory can be identified. The first involves a kind of reductionist view of Foucault's theory of disciplines, knowledge, and the state that inadvertently plays into the hands of the right by identifying autonomous academic expertise and state power with oppression. Although Foucault's general point was that power/knowledge relations affect even the most autonomous of scientific institutions, it was far from his intention to denounce research autonomy as a fraud. A second strategy uses Foucault's ideas in a more responsible way, as a kind of corrective to the oversimplifications of both reformist liberalism and the utopian aspirations of some forms of critical theory with respect to the possibilities of educational reform (Popkewitz and Fendler 1999). A third strategy exemplified in this volume is to use Foucault as a resource for a new form of political economy in which regimes of knowledge become subordinate to market processes—a novel development and also a central theme of classical critical theory in the Frankfurt School tradition.

*The Free Market as the Ideological Trojan Horse for Eroding Autonomy:
Taking Advantage of the Desacralization of Universities*

Given the confusion generated by academic discussions of culture and knowledge, it has been easy for neoliberal policy makers to offer a “nonideological” solution to policy in higher education: *Let the market decide*. This strategy has had incremental effects in educational systems with well-established research universities (i.e., the United States and Canada), but it has had disastrous consequences in Latin America, as reflected in generally abysmal

public (and private) expenditures on research and development and higher education. In accommodating the “free market” doctrine of why “create” knowledge when it can be imported, political leaders have cynically sold out future generations of an entire region.

The great intellectual coup of neoliberal ideology (although often labeling itself as a form of social theory) was to successfully equate—at least in key segments of the popular imagination and the more powerful policy circles dominated by economists—the simplistic thesis that everything to do with the state is *bad* (inefficient, paternalistic, undemocratic, oppressive, etc.) and everything to do with unregulated markets is *good* (efficient, empowering, democratic, liberating, etc.). A certain lip service was also given to creative potentials of voluntary associations (partly because they are defined as independent of the state), despite their nonprofit altruism. Indeed, neoliberal ideology imagines off-loading state responsibilities to such voluntary associations, most notably religious ones.

This is not the place to detail the theoretical and empirical vacuity of such dogmas. More significant has been the increasing capacity of social liberal and social democratic alternatives to use new forms of social theory to rethink many of the dogmatic assumptions of the old left, most notably an uncritical reliance on the state as the all-purpose solution to social problems, the recognition of the importance of voluntary associations in civil society, and the useful social functions performed by competition, although the concept is understood more broadly than merely market-based competition. But self-reflexive critiques of “seeing like a state” should not be confused with a rejection of the crucial importance of the state for the very idea of democracy (Scott 1998).

The great significance of neoliberal attacks on the autonomy of higher education is that they use a mystifying strategy for undermining academic and scientific autonomy in the name of freedom and competition. This serves as a kind of Trojan horse that undermines academic autonomy as a means of realizing individual liberty. As a close look at the literature on scientific communities suggests, the spirit underlying scientific competition and distinction is grounded in a kind of socialism of knowledge as a cooperative enterprise. Truth cannot be patented and sold off to the highest bidders—the competitive process underlying science is quite distinct from that of private enterprise. By strangling academic autonomy, the defenders of liberty

could one day realize the worst forebodings of Herbert Marcuse's conception of a "one-dimensional society."

The ultimate enemy of the right is this very autonomy, which is not only the organizational foundation of scientific communities but also the basis of independent forms of criticism necessary for democracy itself. By letting individual, client-driven, competitive anxiety drive the organization of educational institutions, the whole basis of reasoned collective intelligence is undermined—foresight is eroded in the name of an abstract and ideological conception of individual freedom. When students become increasingly obsessed with a cost-benefit analysis of the "returns" of alternative educational strategies, it is a sign of bizarre constraints on choice. Reducing education and research to a commodity relation has the paradoxical effect of undermining individual freedom in the long run, reinforcing inequalities and distorting the allocation of talent. Not only are such overtly "rational" individual choices difficult and risky to make, given rapid change and uncertainty, they presume forms of equality of opportunity that remain formal and unrealized for marginalized groups. At the same time the erosion of the capacity of political communities to democratically monitor and regulate the protections necessary for an inclusive notion of the public good undermines the framework of equity that is the necessary foundation of authentic individual choice. Such individualism is pseudodemocratic because it does not recognize the bonds of community and civic solidarity that have made modern democracy—for all its current limitations—possible.

Political Economy, Globalization, and Critical Theory

Finally, it can be suggested that even though the chapters in this volume do not fully develop the question, they set the stage for a new articulation between critical theory and higher education research. In short, questions relating to higher education and globalization need to be informed by new forms of research that integrate critical theory, political economy, and democratic theory within the context of a global understanding of democracy and higher education. From this perspective the traditions of critical social theory represent a critique of knowledge and epistemology that calls for a more reflexive and pluralist understanding of inquiry, which entails a dialogue between the universal and the local, of the general and the particular,

not the repudiation of the knowledge claims of the social sciences and humanities in the name of antifoundationalist language games, local knowledge, or self-indulgent personal expression.

Although globalization has created new opportunities for higher education, these are viewed in completely different ways from the perspectives of the neoliberal model of globalization and the alternative modernities envisioned by various forms of critical theory oriented toward “shaping globalization” (Nederveen Pieterse 2000). In the neoliberal model higher education is ideally integrated into the system of production and accumulation in which knowledge is reduced to its economic functions and contributes to the realization of individual economic utilities. This strategy has direct ideological effects in that the cultural legacy of higher education as a form of “humanization” is marginalized as wasteful and unproductive, thus leaving it to the commercial mass media to form the postmodern consumer subject without unsettling questions from educational systems.

In contrast, political economic approaches informed by critical theory seek to defend the autonomy of public higher education, a position that can also accommodate socially conscious private institutions that encourage autonomous research. This stance does not involve a traditional elitist, ivory tower model that resists all links with society or the economy. The democratic multiversity has long recognized the importance of such responsibilities so long as they do not become a rationale for undermining the core functions of teaching and research. Indeed, in certain national contexts a critical policy stance might entail demands for increasing linkages between higher education and industry where appropriate. For example, given the highly defensive posture of Latin American universities (which has understandable historical origins in a long struggle for autonomy), the left has tended to reject all university-industry associations as a capitulation to the private interests of capital. Yet, given the realities of economic life, such connections are essential ingredients for sustaining economic growth and innovation. The crucial question is the terms of reference of such contracts (e.g., ensuring the primacy of retaining sufficient autonomy) and the limitation of private-public alliances to appropriate spheres of activity, not their endless expansion as part of an indiscriminate ideological mantra. In this connection globalization creates new opportunities for cross-national linkages between emergent but impoverished centers of scholarship and better funded and developed research traditions. However, in all spheres of knowledge—cultural,

economic, social—public institutions have a fundamental responsibility to encourage research on alternative strategies for realizing human needs and purposes—irrespective of the market demands of the moment.

Nevertheless, as those who speak of “the university in ruins” suggest, the deterioration of the “idea of the university” may have passed beyond the point of no return (Readings 1996). Even if the option of a return to some previous, somewhat idealized state can be set aside as impractical, that leaves open the question of the alternatives. A crucial problem here is that the autonomous university is an increasingly vulnerable institution and that organizing and coordinating resistance to creeping commercialization and privatization is extremely difficult to sustain. The situations in North America and Latin American are dramatically different with respect to the specific challenges and opportunities. In the relatively privileged context of the United States and Canada, it is virtually impossible to rally attention around such slowly working processes that undermine the broader mission of higher learning. As in the case of the loss of cultural legacies or some forms of environmental deterioration, sufficient numbers wake up only when it is too late. Although one can point to significant increases in faculty and graduate student unionization, it is difficult to imagine how to mobilize larger publics of support, at least without a political regime whose leadership makes this a major priority. In Latin America students and faculty are wide awake to the problems, as is evident in a long history of student strikes, culminating in the closure of the National Autonomous University of Mexico for a year in 1999. Yet such confrontations have been largely without meaningful effects, given fiscal constraints and the pressures of international banking institutions to reduce state functions and give other areas of public policy higher priority. As this book eloquently attests, however, new forms of research on higher education are emerging to confront the challenge of a *reenchantment* of academic life as a quasisacred place of independent learning dedicated—to invoke post-Enlightenment images—to a plural (but not relativistic) conception of “truth” and an inclusive sensitivity to the well-being of humanity and nature.

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