

Chapter 3

Higher Education and the Politics of Need



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The Thesis: A Structure of Feeling

How might we think this present of the COVID19 pandemic and of what we might conclude will happen in/to higher education? The pandemic is of a somewhat universally shared present, of course, but like all presents, this one is not in any way settled, and what we can know now about what will happen in higher education after it, or even during it, cannot in any definitive sense be said to be certain. Yet, we *feel* certain something is happening now or will happen after. Does accepting the reality of uncertainty of any ongoing present foreclose positing hypotheses?

In *Marxism and Literature*, Raymond Williams noted how quick we are in our analyses of society to reduce what is currently happening to fixed and completed forms, essentially relegating the present to the past, and because of this, the past takes precedence over and against what is the active, ongoing, living present.¹ We must try to understand whatever present we're experiencing, of course, but to avoid the pitfalls of creating fixed forms for what is currently under formation, Williams suggests the need for cultural hypotheses that account for changes in "structures of feeling," or the changes in meanings and values as actually lived and felt. What we should look for are "characteristic elements of impulse, restraint, and tone; specifically affective elements of consciousness and relationships; not feeling against

¹Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1977): 128–135, 128.

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thought, but thought as felt and feeling as thought.”² All such cultural hypotheses, it must be stressed, must always come back to the living present for confirmation.

It is with such a view in mind that I say that there seems in societies (at least Western ones), as the start of possible emerging social formations, and even before COVID19, some changes in structures of feeling, or evidence of continuing expressions of concern, fear, and perhaps even antagonism, about the vast amounts of resources, economic and political, going to higher education, while economic inequities and new fascisms continue to rise worldwide. It is hard to say that these expressions reflect a new social consciousness or configuration of power, but they seem to reflect changes in feelings about higher education, which generally was accepted as important for addressing social inequality or political instability. In this paper, therefore, I will posit this cultural hypothesis: The incompatible arguments over expenditures in higher education are less important for themselves than for what they suggest are possible destabilizations of older dominant formations and dogmas associated with political economy, such as neoliberalism. Because the arguments about expenditures might point to emerging social relations, we might take this opportunity to propose new understandings of higher education. Thus, I propose in this paper that we should avoid thinking of higher education in terms of needs, and instead see it in terms of excess wealth, which can only be spent needlessly.

This cultural hypothesis about excess wealth is greatly informed by the work of Georges Bataille, who offers in *The Accursed Share* a perspective on political economy that requires us to repose questions about higher education.³ Bataille proposes audaciously that political problems result from luxury, not necessity. In other words, political problems are ones of consumption, or, that is, they arise from the way societies spend their wealth. Given this understanding, I will make four major arguments, each making up a section of the paper. First, attending to the problems of the economy should raise questions about the expenditure of excess wealth, not utility. Second, competing claims about higher education appear to, but do not actually, deal with utility. Third, higher education should not be understood as a need, but as a luxury that must be spent uselessly; instead of diminishing its value, this understanding should allow us more freedom with which to think about educational problems. Last, in proposing an understanding of higher education as “useless,” I hope to offer the possibility of a view of a sovereignty from utility, a freedom that sees the pervasiveness of, but also fragilities within, capitalism.

Excess and Utility: A General Economy

Let me say here a bit more about excess and utility. Bataille provides a perspective on political economy that offers solutions to political problems in accordance with conventional principles of social science, but he also proposes audaciously that the

²Ibid., 132.

³Georges Bataille, *The Accursed Share: An Essay on General Economy, Volume I*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Zone Books, 1988).

problem of political economy can be posed like this: The “sexual act is in time what the tiger is in space.”⁴ For Bataille, there is no growth but a luxurious squandering of energy (physical or political) in every form. The tiger represents the immense power of consumption of life. In the general effervescence of life, the tiger is a point of extreme incandescence, as is the sexual act, which is the occasion for a sudden and frantic squandering of energy resources, carried in a moment to the limit of possibility (i.e., it is in time what the tiger is in space). Thus, for Bataille, thinking about political economy “should run counter to ordinary calculations,” and, thus, “it is not necessity but its contrary, ‘luxury,’ that presents living matter and mankind with their fundamental problems.”⁵ The problems of political economy, in other words, are actually ones of consumption of wealth.

In using the term “consumption,” Bataille was not accepting traditional economic theories of utility and production. Conventional economics (especially neo-classical economics, which predominates globally) defines consumption as relating to needs (or wants) and thus in terms of production and utility.⁶ Indeed, conventional economics sees all social phenomena in terms of utility. It ostensibly analyzes rational choice of scarce means or resources in relation to alternative uses (i.e., needs and wants).⁷ Commodities satisfy human wants and are thus sources of wealth, Karl Marx told us, and their utility is determined by both their use value (to the laborer) or exchange value (to the capitalist).⁸ Commodities are understood to be determined by their utility (necessity or pleasure), and thus the problem of modern economics has become understanding how consumers gain the maximum utility of commodities, given incomes and prices.⁹ To the extent that the satisfaction of needs and the requisite income needed to attain satisfaction are in equilibrium, we have economic stability. Given this understanding, John Maynard Keynes could then say that it is natural for human beings to “increase their consumption as their income increases, but not by as much as the increase in their income.”¹⁰ Thus, we are now presented with the problem of accumulation. Human nature for conventional economics dictates that human beings will consume what they need to subsist and save the surplus for a variety of needs and wants.

⁴Ibid., 12 (emphasis in original).

⁵Ibid. (emphasis in original).

⁶See generally, Louis Althusser and Étienne Balibar, *Reading Capital*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: Verso, 2006, c. 1968), 165.

⁷See Milan Zafirovski, “Classical and Neoclassical Conceptions of Rationality: Findings of an Exploratory Study,” *The Journal of Socio-Economics*, Vol. 37, no. 2 (2008): 789–820, 790.

⁸Karl Marx, *Capital, Volume I: A Critical Analysis of Capitalist Production*, ed. Frederick Engels, trans. Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling (New York: International Publishers, 1967, c. 1861), 35–6.

⁹See E. K. Hunt and Howard J. Sherman, *Economics: And Introduction to Traditional and Radical Views*, 4th ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1981), 102–3.

¹⁰John Maynard Keynes, *The General Theory of Employment, Interest, and Money* (New York: Prometheus Books, 1997, c. 1936), 96–7.

The logic of such economic thinking is one of a restricted economy. Bataille distinguishes a restricted from a general economy. A restricted economy is what we conventionally understand as *the* economy, one with isolatable operations (e.g., the production of automobiles or individual preferences). Concerns in a restricted economy include, among other things, welfare, goods (or the public good?), happiness, productivity, profitability, prices, and markets.¹¹ Bataille refers to the logic of such an economy as “classical utility,” which is concerned with acquisition (production) and conservation (savings).¹² Under a general economy, however, phenomena cannot be easily isolatable; a general economy accounts for all economic and political energy on the surface of the earth.¹³ For Bataille, human activity is not entirely reducible to production and conservation; there is also unproductive expenditures having no ends in themselves.¹⁴ Attending to a general economy exposes, for example, the existence of tragedy, evil, abandon, sacrifice, destruction of wealth, unproductive expenditure, profitless exchange, the ritualistic, the sacred, perverse sexualities, and symbolic activities.¹⁵

Bataille, therefore, radically redefined consumption as the expenditure of wealth (seen from the view of a general economy), an expenditure that is non-recuperable, one that can only be wasted. All surplus energy, political and otherwise, must be wasted. Bataille views political economy as part of the total movement of energy on the earth. On the surface of the globe, energy is always in excess. Once the earth uses up the energy it needs for subsistence, it must expel the excess, and it often does so explosively. Similarly, beyond our immediate ends, our activity pursues the useless and infinite fulfillment of the universe. But surplus energy must be spent, and this expenditure constitutes the true measure of political existence, that is, societies are defined by how they spend wealth. Do they conserve at the expense of suffering? Do they privilege abstract future generations at the expense of historically present ones? Yet, it is production and accumulation that is privileged in capitalist societies; consumption has no meaning if it does not produce anything. Today, precedence is given to energy acquisition over energy expenditure; “glory is given to the sphere of utility.”¹⁶

For Bataille, the fact of useless expenditure of wealth remains hidden to us because of the pervasiveness of the logic of utility promoted by capitalist practices. For example, within capitalist economy, the construction of a church is a needless consumption of labor (i.e., it is wasteful), as it has no utility that can be

¹¹ See Grahame F. Thompson, “Where Goes Economics and Economics?” *Economy and Society*, Vol. 26, no. 4 (1997): 599–610, 606.

¹² Georges Bataille, *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927–1939*, ed. and trans. Allan Stoekl (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 116.

¹³ Bataille, *The Accursed Share, Vol. I*, 20.

¹⁴ Bataille, *Visions of Excess*, 118.

¹⁵ Thompson, “Where Goes Economics,” 606.

¹⁶ Bataille, *The Accursed Share, Vol. I*, 29.

commodified (it addresses itself strictly to intimate feeling).¹⁷ Similarly, I would say, the humanities, or even any science, physical or social, that is not premised on promoting economic growth, might thus also be deemed wasteful under capitalistic logic. Yet these kinds of consumption might entail what Bataille calls a “destruction of utility,” because they cannot be understood under its terms.¹⁸

While aspects of higher education are commodities that have utility for labor markets (e.g., business degrees, intellectual property), other parts clearly do not (e.g., friendships, protests, vandalism, academic freedom, most dissertations, alcoholic binge drinking, sexual liaisons between students, etc.). These other parts of higher education thus are not utilitarian in a direct sense; they may actually “destroy utility” to the extent that they are not easily reducible to its terms but direct themselves to intimate feeling, thought, or the useless expenditure of surplus energy. Yet, our reification of political constructions, reinforced by a discourse of utility that maintains them, prevent us from seeing that all but the satisfaction of physical needs results from the compulsion to expend excess wealth.

It is the discourse of utility, defining all phenomena in terms of a restricted economy, that masks the fact that surplus wealth must be spent needlessly. It thus generates anxiety, but only in terms of itself. It is certainly the case that for particular individuals, institutions, or nation-states, problems of satisfying needs arise, and the search for solutions brings about anxiety. In terms of a general economy—as opposed to the restricted one of, say, an individual, institution, or nation-state—when anxiety is allowed to pose problems, what is masked is the fact that it is the expenditure of wealth that generates most political problems. Any aspect of higher education, for example, can only present itself as a problem after our basic requirements of subsistence are met. Higher education as such, as a need, is without question a higher-order need, following Abraham Maslow’s logic, which we can only perceive and reflect on after our basic needs of survival have been satisfied.¹⁹ Higher education problems, therefore, can only arise from surplus. But, again, this possibility will be obscured by the pervasive anxiety generated by the discourse of utility.

Bataille states that the crucial analysis of political economy requires circumscription of the opposition of two political methods:

[That] of fear and the anxious search for a solution, combining the pursuit of freedom with imperatives that are most opposed to freedom; and that of freedom of mind, which issues from the global resources of life, a freedom for which, instantly, everything is resolved, *everything* is rich—in other words, everything that is commensurate with the universe. I insist on the fact that, to freedom of mind, the search for a solution is an exuberance, a superfluity; this gives it an incomparable force. To solve political problems becomes diffi-

¹⁷Ibid., 132. Though, Bataille may be working with a contradiction here, since he stated earlier that Protestantism, especially its Calvinist strain, supported capitalist interests by promoting doctrines about hard work and individual initiative (see pp. 122–27). So, the construction of churches promoting such doctrines may indeed be deemed productive consumption under capitalist logic, if we are to recognize the need of any capitalist interest to reproduce itself.

¹⁸Ibid., 132.

¹⁹Abraham H. Maslow, “A Theory of Human Motivation,” *Psychology Review*, Vol. 50, no. 4 (1943): 370–96.

cult for those who allow anxiety alone to pose them. It is necessary for anxiety to pose them. But their solution demands at a certain point the removal of this anxiety.²⁰

There has been much anxiety over the financing of higher education, when seen from the viewpoint of particular individuals, institutions of higher education, or nation states, that is, when viewed from the perspective of a restrictive economy. It seems that public funding for higher education worldwide has decreased in proportion, if not in real dollars, and government officials increasingly tie such funding to job-related and other commercial activities. Colleges and universities have sought private sources of funding to replace lost revenues, and they have also attempted to shift the costs of education to the student and their families by increasing tuition and fees. At the same time that costs are being shifted to the student, national governments are demanding that institutions of higher education produce highly educated and skilled workforces in order to ensure future economic growth. All this generates anxiety only because we are taught to view higher education under a logic of utility.

The entire point of this paper, however, is to encourage us to reconsider arguments about the utility of higher education and to refrain from viewing it in terms of a restricted economy. We should avoid getting trapped in arguments about whether any claim about higher education is correct and instead direct our attention to the mechanisms of power that inundate us with such claims and that reinforce themselves by requiring their deployment in the first place. This is why I will refrain in this paper from engaging critically with other works claiming any purpose for higher education.²¹ A discourse of utility ultimately requires one to think of and thus justify higher education as furthering particular needs at the expense of a freedom of mind to think outside conventional logic. My hope is to encourage readers to think about higher education, not just in terms of its necessity in a restricted economy but also as something that is, no matter the purpose conjured up for it, a luxury in a general economy.

²⁰Ibid., 13–14, emphasis in original.

²¹I cite here just a small sample of such (more or less) competing philosophies of higher education, ones that collectively form a genre with a long history. See Ronald Barnett, *The Ecological University: A Feasible Utopia* (London: Routledge, 2017); Robert Maynard Hutchins, *The Higher Learning in America* (London: Routledge, 1995, c. 1936); Immanuel Kant, *The Conflict of the Faculties*, trans. Mary J. Gregor (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1979, c. 1798); Simon Marginson and Mark Considine, *The Enterprise University: Power, Governance, and Reinvention in Australia* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000); John Henry Newman, *The Idea of the University* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1982, c. 1852); Ronald Nisbit, *The Degradation of the Academic Dogma: The University in America 1945–1970* (New York: Basic Books, 1971); Thorstein Veblen, *The Higher Learning in America* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1993, c. 1918); Jennifer Washburn, *University, Inc.: The Corporate Corruption of Higher Education* (New York: Basic Books, 2005).

No Future: The “Need” for Higher Education

Higher education is conventionally understood as necessary for achieving some political goal. For example, according to a 2017 report sponsored by the World Bank, higher education for all nations is “instrumental in fostering growth, reducing poverty and boosting shared prosperity. A highly-skilled workforce, with a solid post-secondary education, is a prerequisite for innovation and growth: well-educated people are more employable, earn higher wages, and cope with economic shocks better.”²² This logic is one premised on an instrumentalist notion of utility (but, actually, is there another kind?) and is pervasive worldwide, though not unquestioned by those believing that higher education serves other purposes, such as enlightening minds, or ensuring democratic citizenship, or promoting social capital for elites, or socializing students into conventional notions of familyhood, or other progressive or conservative claims. But it seems probable to me that the economic depression experts say is resulting from the current pandemic will likely not expose to policy-makers the need to question the logic of spending resources on higher education—economic, political, psychic—but will reinforce the presuppositions of World Bank’s report: more resources for higher education.

Interestingly, after the pandemic is deemed to be over by our world’s leaders, there will also likely be calls for cutbacks to higher education. Indeed, some universities in the United States are already instituting furloughs and other cutbacks.²³ The economic depression experts attribute to the pandemic will lead to a redeployment of claims about the value of higher education, which of its functions should become priorities and subject to more investment, and, where deemed wasteful, which of its functions should be eliminated or curtailed.²⁴ These concerns over the financing of higher education, like that of the World Bank’s report, require colleges and universities to prove their value to governments in economic ways. That is, they are required to demonstrate using quantitative measures how much revenues for the economy they generate through their graduates, public service, and research (i.e., their “return on investment”). Critics seem concerned public higher education will further succumb to markets and be driven by the pecuniary interests of corporations and paying

²² See World Bank, *Higher Education* (October 5, 2017), <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/tertiaryeducation> (Retrieved April 26, 2020).

²³ KGUN 9 On Your Side, “UArizona Announces Pay Cuts, Furloughs for all Faculty, Staff,” April 17, 2020, <https://www.kgun9.com/news/coronavirus/uarizona-announces-pay-cuts-furloughs-for-all-faculty-staff> (Retrieved April 26, 2020). It is important to note here that the University of Arizona has an endowment worth over \$1 Billion (US).

²⁴ For just a couple, though perhaps contradictory examples, of waste arguments, see Bryan Caplan, *The Case Against Education: Why the Education System Is a Waste of Time and Money* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2018); Mark R. Reiff, “How to Pay for Public Education,” *Theory and Research in Education*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (2014): 4–52.

“consumers” rather than the supposedly more altruistic interests of a general public.²⁵

There will be debates about all this. These debates, however, will all be subtended by a discourse of utility, which requires such debates in order to reinforce its axiomatic logic. There will likely also be contestations of such logic in the form of nonutilitarian arguments or even varying levels of social unrest, contestations that suggest that the general acceptance of utilitarian logic is destabilizing. For the actual evidence does not support claims that education alleviates social inequity and political unrest. Social inequality and political unrest are rising worldwide even though there has been great investment in, say, higher education, which ostensibly alleviates such inequality and unrest by increasing national prosperity and thus individuals’ incomes.²⁶

The veracity of arguments about higher education and equality and political stability is thus very much in question. And yet these arguments persist. Veracity, therefore, cannot be the framework by which we can engage such arguments. Is our inability to see this contradiction between the arguments about the value of higher education and the social realities they purport to address the result of an ideology justifying the interests of the well-resourced classes? Ideology as a cause, however, seems to me yet too formed a conclusion, in the sense Raymond Williams warned about. We must think in terms of structures of feelings, but what exactly can we say about this contradiction? How might we reread these arguments about higher education? What do we *feel* is happening?

Capitalism and neoliberalism will insist on utility, of course. Yet, as I indicated before, there seems an increasing lack of consensus in these debates about the value of higher education. But we should avoid dealing with them on their own terms. These debates, when viewed with less anxiety, actually direct us to something beyond themselves. What structures of feeling might be reflected in these debates about the value of higher education? Are new social forms emerging, ones suggesting neoliberalism’s dominance might be waning? What I can say with more certainty is that any unsettledness here means that we need not be tied to utility, that we can think beyond it. Thus, I have been suggesting in this paper one possible way out of utility: Let us think of higher education as, in the end, useless and even wasteful.

The economic language that conventionally structures the current debates (and likely any future ones) about the value of higher education will be difficult to avoid, decipher, or even recognize, but it is important to consider this: We should see this language as commanding us to see education only as intelligible in terms of utility and necessity, thus restricting our ability to see it as otherwise. How might we refuse

²⁵ See generally, Sheila Slaughter and Gary Rhoades, *Academic Capitalism and the New Economy: Markets, State, and Higher Education* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004).

²⁶ This logic is likely supported by the (previously?) universally accepted platitude that education produces human capital. See Gary Becker, *Human Capital: A Theoretical and Empirical Analysis with Special Reference to Education*, third ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993), xxi. For an opposing argument, see John Marsh, *Class Dismissed: Why We Cannot Teach or Learn Out of Inequality* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2011).

such a command and argue *in favor of* unnecessary or wastefulness? In what ways might we experience less anxiety, and more freedom of mind, by seeing higher education as needless and wasteful? What aspects of higher education might we recognize, and what possibilities might emerge, if we think of higher education as only surplus energy, as an exuberance, or as an *excess* that can only be wasted? To think of higher education as a necessity is only to succumb to an anxiety generated by a discourse of utility that ultimately constrains thought and justifies social inequality. The concern with utility only makes us subservient to the imperatives of capitalist production, which may be unavoidable in the extended present in which we have trapped ourselves but no longer need to accept blindly.

The discourse of utility structures higher education, as it does all else that it captures, in terms of necessity, but it masks the fact that from the viewpoint of the overall wealth in the world higher education is an exuberance, an understanding that should allow us more freedom with which to think about problems in higher education. Releasing ourselves from a discourse of utility allows us a freedom of mind, as Bataille calls it, an exuberance that is most free from the anxiety over political problems. To be always anxious about problems obscures seeing all of higher education as really only possible because of excess wealth, which actually generates its major problems.

Thinking this way, for example, might allow us to see that in the state I live in, Florida, the very fact of surplus wealth is what permits the creativity necessary to establish and manipulate its performance-funding model that governs the 11 universities in the State University System.²⁷ When the state has less money, it tends toward uncreative and tired austerity policies, often times cutting off a percentage of each university's budget to make ends meet;²⁸ when it does have money, it tends toward playing funding games, pitting universities against each other for extra funds. Institutions of higher education similarly behave when they have surplus funds. For example, very few universities generate revenues from commercially

²⁷ Briefly, the Florida performance-funding model works by requiring the Board of Governors to withhold a proportion of each institution's budget that cumulatively equals the amount of new money allocated by the legislature for this purpose, thus creating an overall pot of performance funding. Currently, the universities are given up to 10 points for performance on each of 10 metrics (e.g., graduating students in 4 years, percentage of students with high entrance-exam scores, employment rates of graduates, etc.). The points are awarded either for meeting certain standards of "excellence" for each metric or for significantly improving performance from the previous year on each metric. The universities are then ranked, and those having at least 55 points get back their share of performance funding, and those in the top of the rankings receive extra funds. See Florida Board of Governors, *Board of Governors Performance Funding Model Overview*, November 2019, <https://www.flbog.edu/wp-content/uploads/Overview-Doc-Performance-Funding-10-Metric-Model-Condensed-Version-1.pdf> (Retrieved September 1, 2020).

²⁸ For example, Florida's Governor, Ron DeSantis, has recently informed the state's universities to withhold spending (the same proportion across the board) because of budget shortfalls resulting from the pandemic. See Orlando Sentinel, "DeSantis' Plans to Rework State's \$93.2B Budget Could Violate Constitution," June 17, 2020, <https://www.orlandosentinel.com/politics/os-ne-coronavirus-florida-budget-desantis-20200617-uzmnoisitmjhbnlt3slmt2f5d7q-story.html> (Retrieved September 1, 2020).

sponsored research, despite large investments in it.²⁹ Few universities and few faculty members incur any penalties when their “ventures” fail to yield profits or even when they cost their universities large amounts of money.³⁰ Much of these expenditures are thus wasted (in terms of the purported goals of generating new revenues), though “waste” is rarely a term that gets used for such kinds of expenditures.

Indeed, a freedom of mind would recognize that such “waste” ultimately may be the point of institutional spending in the first place, at least in the United States. F. King Alexander’s findings of almost 20 years ago still ring true to those who are critically minded. He explains that since the 1980s, a new set of market incentives and dynamics accelerated the pressure on universities to acquire greater wealth in order to generate more fiscal capacity.³¹ In this environment, the primary objective of many universities is “prestige maximization,” in which academic and financial standards are defined by their relative status and ranking with other institutions. The goal is to outspend other institutions, especially for top faculty. This inflates educational expenditures to the highest common denominator, thus creating what Alexander calls an “expenditure cold war” among institutions of higher education, now judged not by any intrinsic worth of any particular goal but only in relation to other institutions.³² In the United States, prestige maximization means spending money to recruit “high-achieving” students, hire and maintain highly productive research faculty, seek external funding for research, develop fund-raising capacities, pay the salaries of the coaches of lucrative college sports, mine faculty and students for intellectual property, develop fields of study deemed prestigious, and so on. On the issue of prestigious fields of study, for example, a former president of my university, Modesto Maidique, in trying to get faculty support for the creation of an expensive medical school said to my college’s assembly in 2006 that for our university not to have a medical school is “like going to a formal party in shorts.” Conversely, in October 2011, the *Herald-Tribune* out of Sarasota, Florida, reported that then Florida Governor Rick Scott said that he wanted to shift money away from some degree programs at the state’s universities to increase support for science and technology fields. He is quoted in the paper as saying, “If I’m going to take money from a citizen to put into education then I’m going to take that money to create jobs. So I want that money to go to degrees where people can get jobs in this state. Is it a vital interest of the state to have more anthropologists? I don’t think so.”³³ Scott’s

²⁹ See Eyal Press and Jennifer Washburn, “The Kept University,” *Atlantic Monthly* (March 2000): 39–54. Despite being 20 years old, this is still one of the best exposés of this kind of waste.

³⁰ Gary Rhoades and Sheila Slaughter, “Academic Capitalism, Managed Professionals, and Supply-Side Higher Education,” *Social Text*, 15, no. 2 (1997): 9–38, 15.

³¹ Alexander does not say, but of the market incentives and dynamics he speaks of we can point to policies associated with the new public management movements that gained authority in the political regimes of Margaret Thatcher in the UK and Ronald Reagan in the United States.

³² See F. King Alexander, “The Silent Crisis: The Relative Fiscal Capacity of Public Universities to Compete for Faculty,” *The Review of Higher Education*, 24, no. 2 (2001): 112–129, 117–18.

³³ Zac Anderson, “Rick Scott Wants to Shift University Funding Away From Some Degrees,” *Herald-Tribune* (October 10, 2011). <http://politics.heraldtribune.com/2011/10/10/rick-scott-wants-to-shift-university-funding-away-from-some-majors/> (Retrieved April 29, 2018).

beliefs led to the performance-funding model in my state, which has exponentially increased spending by the universities to ensure better performance as defined by the model.

Institutions of higher education in the United States (and likely all over the world) must spend revenues in the hopes of generating *more* revenues than they need for subsistence or even to meet the needs of, say, a particular activity such as teaching. The goal is to outspend others. Prestige maximization is nothing more than competition, which can only be done by spending more money, that is, money that many administrators of these institutions say do not have when economic downturns present the possibility of budget cuts. The most prestigious universities compete very well in this “expenditure cold war,” but many other institutions cannot compete effectively—unless, of course, they shift budget priorities in order to accumulate more wealth, which, paradoxically, they then must turn around and spend to be seen as prestigious. To ascend the ladder of prestige and status in any national educational context, institutions of higher education must acquire and expend vast amounts of resources, much of which will be wasted, that is, yield no useful return as defined by conventional economics.³⁴ There can never be enough accumulation because there can never be enough spending.

I say all this only to expose surplus and excess in higher education, as actual institutional survival (as opposed to the survival of the images to which administrators aspire) does not depend on that kind of spending. Such spending is wasteful, when understood in terms of generating profits, but not so under the axiomatic logic of utility, which is concerned not necessarily with yielding returns on investments but on spending for the sake of acquisition. So, it is logical to spend for the purposes of accumulation, even if there actually is little that is accumulated. The goal of acquisition is what makes such wasteful actions rational.

Yet, all this is masked by a discourse of need, one which wrests time, defining the future in terms of the present. If Raymond Williams’ point that in our social analyses we are compelled to relegate the present to the past can be read as constituting an erasure of the present, we can read the focus on the future in debates about higher education as a foreclosure of the present. There is a rarely questioned belief, which is much more than a simple platitude, that higher education represents an investment in an individual’s or a nation’s future.³⁵ This belief in such a future suggests that the solution to the problem of investing in higher education requires us to *accumulate* and *save*, not spend wastefully, that is, for purposes other than accumulation. All the while students are paying more and more for higher education with little

³⁴ Shelia Slaughter and Gary Rhoades have pointed out better than anyone else, in my opinion, the vast amount of wasted resources institutions spend on technology transfer and academic capitalism; see *Academic Capitalism and the New Economy*.

³⁵ See, for example, Michelle Asha Cooper, “Investing in Education and Equity: Our Nation’s Best Future,” *Diversity & Democracy*, Vol. 13, no. 3 (Fall 2010), <https://www.aacu.org/publications-research/periodicals/investing-education-and-equity-our-nations-best-future-0> (Retrieved April 26, 2020).

guarantees of employment, and some are denied entry altogether, thus relegating them to a life of economic inequality (if we are to believe the conventional logic of the value of higher education).

This future-oriented view thus assumes a higher education that can only be *necessary* as defined by the discourse of utility, which assumes—inappropriately, as we will see—that the entire point of human existence is to accumulate resources rather than to spend them (even when, paradoxically, one is spending more than one has in order to accumulate). The future-oriented spending on higher education for the sake of accumulation does have a destructive effect in the present, rising global poverty, being just one of them. It may be, then, that perhaps Lee Edelman is correct, that “political self-destruction inheres in the only act that counts as one: the act of resisting enslavement to the future in the name of having a life.”³⁶ Perhaps. What I can say more confidently is that we must see the future as a discursive effect of capitalism. Freedom from the discourse of utility entails rejecting the idea of the future, and to situate the practices justified in its name as squarely and oppressively in the living present.

The Politics of Needs: A Wasteful Higher Education

In order to understand what I mean by “rejecting the future,” one must see political economy, as Bataille explains, not in terms of production, as conventional economics would have it, but in terms of consumption (i.e., the expenditure of wealth). From the viewpoint of general economy, Bataille argues, we can only spend wealth, only squander our profits. If part of wealth is to be wasted anyway, it is possible, even logical, Bataille suggests, to surrender commodities without return.³⁷ But everything in capitalist societies works to hide this fact: That the point of wealth is to give it away. At some point, the acquisition of wealth leads to surplus, and we will reach a point where what matters is not to produce and accumulate but to spend. There can be anguish about this only from the viewpoint of the particular, or from a restricted economy, one which is opposed to the general viewpoint based on the exuberance of life. The understanding and use of wealth, which is always in surplus, are the determining elements of a society. Wealth changes meanings according to the advantages expected from its possession. In a capitalist society the advantage that matters most is the possibility of investing. This society prefers an increase of wealth to its immediate use.³⁸

Again, from the viewpoint of general economy, we can only spend wealth, only squander our profits. To allow us to see the inevitability of squandering wealth,

³⁶ Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 30.

³⁷ Bataille, *The Accursed Share, Vol. I*, 25.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 118–19.

Bataille argues, the loss of wealth from nonproductive expenditure must be as great as possible for it to take on its true meaning.³⁹ Loss of energy, political and otherwise, is a fact of existence. We can either spend luxuriously (e.g., on the arts or any activity directed to intimate feeling) or violently (e.g., war), and this expenditure, or, rather, this choice, is what Bataille calls the “accursed share.” Poverty, for example, has never had a strong enough moral hold to subordinate conservation to expenditure, that is, to require that the choice be made to spend profusely to alleviate poverty as opposed to conserving wealth (even when it can be proven that spending to fix poverty raises the standard of living for everyone, thus promoting economic stability). So, the poorer classes have been excluded from much of the wealth accumulated by those with financial resources and thus from the political processes that might change this. This means that the poor classes can have no other form of power than the revolutionary destruction of the classes.⁴⁰

War and political violence—of the kind, for example, that the increasingly global Black Lives Matter movements protest against—are the dangers born of unfettered production of capital; they are the most violent expenditure of surplus wealth.⁴¹ In capitalist societies, Bataille argues, energy is always at its boiling point. He argues, for example, that the immense wealth of the United States, its excessive production and unfettered accumulation, leads to war, unless that excess is redirected and spent otherwise. Given all the wars engaged in by the United States since World War II, and also given the vast amount of resources spent on, and the violence generated by, its countless faceless-enemy wars, such as that on terrorism, drugs, and crime (but no resources, ironically, on, say, eliminating gun violence), Bataille’s arguments seem rather prophetic. The United States’ commitment of excess wealth to military maneuvers, within its borders and abroad, will not lead to peace (or safety), as its political leaders argue, but will only make war, and political violence against its own citizens, inevitable. It will move toward peace only, Bataille argues, if it assigns a large share of its wealth to raising the global standard of living, to economic and political activity, to giving its surplus wealth an outlet other than war.⁴²

Spending lavishly on higher education, without concern for utility, could provide such an outlet. Globally, however, higher education is characterized by a crisis/scarcity discourse reflecting anxiety over problems created after our political institutions, and their individuals, have satisfied the needs they require for subsistence. The need to expend energy (including money) in higher education to promote economic growth, democratic dispositions, and so forth arises from the fact of luxury; the problems these needs create are ones of surplus wealth.

The promotion of any nation’s dominance in the “global marketplace” through education, a discourse particularly prevalent in the United States, is not actually

³⁹ Bataille, *Visions of Excess*, 118.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 120–1.

⁴¹ The militarization of police forces provides an example of how much surplus wealth goes into ensuring political violence.

⁴² Bataille, *The Accursed Share Vol. I*, 187.

something without which one would die; it is a discourse which masks the fact that it promotes capitalist interests and justifies their consequences. Expansion of higher education is a luxury for rapidly growing economies, or those that want to appear that way, which provide resources for it to ensure technological dominance in an increasingly, we are told repeatedly, competitive global information economy. The fallacy of this view of higher education is well accepted by critical theorists. But any purpose attributed to higher education, even by critical theorists, similarly masks what is at stake. The “need” to spend resources on higher education to “solve social problems,” “promote economic growth,” “teach critical thinking,” “ensure democracy,” or whatever, arises from the very fact of luxury; any problems it generates are ones resulting from the expenditure of surplus wealth.

Yet, the rhetoric of crisis, I fear, will be predominant once the current pandemic is deemed to be over by health and political experts. Let me be clear here: The fear I have is not that we will be told a bunch of lies about economic suffering—indeed, as I have been arguing, we should not privilege a framework of truth/lies—but that the rhetoric of crisis will justify more acquisition and conservation of wealth for the already rich and austerity and cutbacks for everyone else. Higher education will be posited as necessary for future economic stability over and perhaps against other needs, such as public health and better wages. The rhetorical positioning of higher education as a need, however, will foreclose questions about exuberance. My argument here, I must stress, is intended neither as being against the funding of higher education to allow students to enter the workplace, nor that saving is illogical. Helping students matters, of course, and not all surplus should be spent; some surplus must be reserved for growth. But such goals can only be pragmatic and thus only lead to provisional solutions in a restricted economy. In the end, in a general economy, surplus must be spent, and we can do so only luxuriously or violently.

It is the discourse of need that frames our fundamental problems, and it generates anxiety over solutions because it privileges accumulation and conservation. So, as Nancy Fraser illustrates, political struggles over needs is always political struggle over the power to define the needs.⁴³ This discourse of need can serve both right and left politics, even though each kind of politics promotes policies and practices that have different effects on people’s lives, and each furthers (or counters) the aims of capitalism in different ways. For example, some right-leaning political projects use the discourse of needs to promote austerity practices that entrench social stratification in societies and across societies, all in the name of accumulation and conservation; the left-leaning projects counter such right-leaning ones by advocating for more welfare policies and social justice. But each must be questioned for how it positions need and what such positioning allows and forecloses in the ways we feel about the expenditure of wealth.

When we succumb to the logic of utility, to repeat this important point, we fail to see the fact that higher education is only really an expenditure of surplus wealth and, as all surplus, must be spent wastefully. It is, Bataille argues, only to the

⁴³Nancy Fraser, “Talking About Needs,” *Ethics*, 99 (1989): 291–313, 292–6.

particular living being that the problem of necessity presents itself. Thought about in this way, higher education, when seen from the viewpoint of particular living beings—for example, those who attend college, those who fund higher education—appears necessary, and the thinking about expenditures seems always at a crisis point.

Seen from the viewpoint of general economy, however, education (higher or otherwise) can only be the result of luxury and too much wealth, one that ultimately must be squandered and for no purpose. Our only recourse is to attempt to prevent that squandering from becoming violent. In other words, the energy we spend on education must be lost without purpose, and this inevitability prevents educational expenditures, in the end, from being “useful.” But this loss should not be understood in terms of utility; it should be understood only as more or less *acceptable*. That is, loss is inevitable; we can only deem it a matter of “acceptable loss,” preferable to another that we regard as unacceptable. The real problem for us with regard to educational expenditures, then, is one of acceptability, not utility.⁴⁴

The only solution to educational problems, Bataille would propose, I think, is to spend lavishly and wastefully on education in order to bring down political pressure to below the boiling point. This is not an argument for the wasteful spending related to, say, prestige maximization, since that spending is paradoxically at its root *useful*, that is, for the purposes of acquiring more wealth. And arguments by scholars like Slaughter and Rhoades pointing to such waste are also embedded in a logic of utility, for these arguments also put forth a better use for those resources. The solution to the problems of higher education is not to spend so as to be useful but to spend luxuriously and without return.

The idea of useless expenditure, however, can only appear *impossible* to us. The discourse of utility prevents us from seeing an excess of resources over needs (i.e., real needs, such that society would perish without satisfying them). Utility, however, has become the historical, political, and economic basis for social reality, conditioning almost all knowledge and truth claims.⁴⁵ It is hard to think in terms of noneconomic logic, given the extent to which economics has colonized the social sciences.⁴⁶ We cannot see political problems as resulting from surplus wealth, Bataille argues, because this is masked by a misconception that *humanity* means working and living without enjoying the fruits of one’s labor.⁴⁷ Conventional

⁴⁴ Bataille, *The Accursed Share Vol. I*, 31.

⁴⁵ See William Pawlett, “Utility and Excess: The Radical Sociology of Bataille and Baudrillard,” *Economy and Society*, Vol. 26, no. 1 (1997): 92–125, 95.

⁴⁶ See Ben Fine, “A Question of Economics: Is It Colonizing the Social Sciences?” *Economy and Society*, Vol. 28, no. 3 (1999): 403–425, 404. See also Introduction to *The Philosophy of Economics: An Anthology*, third ed., ed. Daniel Hausman (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 2–3. For my argument about how higher education produces the very economists who “economize” the social world, see Benjamin Baez, “An Economy of Higher Education,” in Joseph Devitis, ed., *Contemporary Colleges and Universities: A Reader* (New York: Peter Lang, 2013), pp. 307–321.

⁴⁷ According to Pawlett, even Marx presupposed such a theory. See Pawlett, “Utility and Excess,” 93–4.

economics enforces the logic that the true measure of human productivity is to increase the economy of labor and that there can be no growth or progress without doing this.⁴⁸

This much Marx saw in capitalism. He explained that labor entails for the one who labors two kinds of consumption: one required of the means of production, which the capitalist consumes (productive consumption), and one that occurs when laborers use wages to satisfy their needs (individual consumption). In the former, the laborers belong to the capitalist, but in the latter, they belong to themselves.⁴⁹ To the extent, however, that both kinds of consumption for Marx are related to production, as consumed labor by capitalists and as what labor allows one to consume via wages, capitalism reduces everything to a *thing*, a commodity; it requires in essence a surrendering to *things*.⁵⁰ As Bataille stated, the efficacious activity of the human being makes him or her a tool, which only produces; the human being becomes a *thing* like a tool, and so he or she becomes a product. The tool's meaning is giving by the future, by what the tool will produce, that is, by the future utilization of the product.⁵¹ And acquisition is the point of it all.

The modern state for Bataille is a society of acquisition, not a society of consumption (i.e., the expenditure of wealth). Education writ large, therefore, represents acquisition—of knowledge, of skills, of wealth, of things, and of people even, as the World Bank report I quoted earlier suggests. And when education furthers utility like this, it teaches us that we need to acquire *things*, things to which we then surrender, and so useful education can only credential us as *things*. In a society of acquisition, education can only be *useful* if it leads to acquisition. Education is thus not an end in itself but only a means to acquisition. Its purpose, therefore, is to ensure servility to utility. In this world of servility, higher education must teach us that to be fully human we must be useful, that is, we must produce.

Bataille proposes, conversely, that *sovereignty* is the freedom from usefulness and necessity.⁵² We have to make consumption, he argues, the sovereign principle of activity. Sovereignty, for Bataille, is not to be confused with political entities or individual supremacy. It is the principle of “life beyond utility;” it begins when “necessities ensured, the possibility of life opens up without limit.”⁵³ The “sovereign moment” thus arrives when nothing matters but that moment, when we can enjoy present time with nothing else in view but present time.⁵⁴ We may not be able

⁴⁸ See Lyndon H. LaRouche, Jr., *So, You Wish to Learn All About Economics? A Text on Elementary Mathematical Economics* (New York: New Benjamin Franklin House, 1984), 23. See also, Louis O. Kelso and Mortimer J. Adler, *The New Capitalists: A Proposal to Free Economic Growth from the Slavery of Savings* (New York: Random House, 1961), 2–3.

⁴⁹ Marx, *Capital*, 571.

⁵⁰ Bataille, *The Accursed Share, Vol. I*, 57.

⁵¹ Georges Bataille, *The Accursed Share: An Essay on General Economy, Volumes II & III*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Zone Books, 1991), 218.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 197.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 198.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 199.

to eliminate useful work, but we cannot be reduced to it without eliminating ourselves. The only happiness is spending luxuriously and selfishly. The reader may quip here that selfishness is what capitalism requires and that it is selfishness that had led to, say, environmental degradation. Yet, that kind of capitalist selfishness is driven by the unfettered accumulation of wealth, and it only proves the senseless destructive effects of too much wealth.

It is the most profitless, nonproductive expenditures about which I am referring, the ones about which we are the most passionate, and political stability may require that we channel resources toward these expenditures.⁵⁵ The anxiety generated by a concern for others—the nation, even our children—draws us into servitude, because it forces us to acquire things to save for the future, and thus it reduces us to *things*. We cannot attain sovereignty, Bataille suggests, if we plan for the future. We experience freedom only when we live for the sovereign moment. The discourse of utility prevents us from knowing this about ourselves: that giving in to freedom is to be placed under the sign of the sovereign moment. Thus, only those aspects of educational institutions which serve no useful purpose, which can come only from a sudden expenditure of energy, may move us toward sovereignty: thought, play, laughter, tears, gossiping, dance, affection, arguing, fighting, unrest, and so on.

Yet, again, our very language gets in the way of appreciating the kind of sovereignty to which Bataille refers, since it is a language of utility.⁵⁶ Indeed, even in making my argument about freedom, our language forces me to position it as some kind of need, though I am trying not to do so. The language of necessity, of crisis, of usefulness, and of the future, in both conservative and progressive discourses on the value of education, can only be a barrier to rethinking higher education. Our language implies the necessity of ends, in relation to which it defines the means, but it cannot isolate an end and say of it, positively, that it is of no use.⁵⁷ The sovereign moment is foreign to the language of utility; we are constantly drawn back to usefulness, to necessity.

It is the idea of *need*, therefore, that may be the most significant hegemonic concept for capitalism. The definition of products and individuals as *useful* and as responding to individual or social *needs* is

the most accomplished, most internalized expression of abstract economic exchange; it is its subjective closure... [The] truth of capital culminates in this ‘evidence’ of man as a producer of value. Such is the twist by which exchange value retrospectively originates and logically terminates in use value.⁵⁸

All this is to say that understandings of higher education should, at least at some point, eschew concerns with the materiality of something that can be called a “need” and instead attend to the ways any educational need is framed, what imperatives are privileged, how individuals made are governable, and how all this is countered (or

⁵⁵ Pawlett, “Utility and Excess,” 101–2.

⁵⁶ Bataille, *The Accursed Share Vol. II & III*, 294–295.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 315.

⁵⁸ Jean Baudrillard, *The Mirror of Production*, trans. Mark Poster (New York: Telos Press, 1975), 25.

might be, if one releases oneself from abstract exchanges). When one claims an imperative need to solve a problem in higher education, one should reflect on whether the anxiety generated by such imperative prevents one from understanding that the problem might be one of excess wealth, which has to be spent, hopefully not violently but certainly purposelessly.

So, hopefully, I can reposit more clearly the structure of feeling with which I began. Something is happening that the contestations over higher education, as well as what appears to be increasing social unrest, are suggesting. We are perhaps now seeing neoliberal's logic demise. Globally, we are seeing clearly and thus contesting the brutal practices justified by such logic. And, therefore, arguments about the necessity of higher education, when framed in a logic of need, might actually be providing the hegemonic basis for such practices. The time may be right to question the need for higher education, or anything actually.

Sovereignty in Higher Education: A Conclusion of Sorts

In all honesty, I am not sure if Bataille is correct in his central assessment of modern societies, but I am intrigued by the avenues of thought his work presents for me and, I hope, for the reader. I believe that all you can ask of a text, and thus even of higher education writ large, is that it opens up new lines of (unproductive) thought. Bataille avoids what conventional economists do, which, ironically, would make his work useless to them. But because economists play a dominant (hopefully waning) role in how we can think about higher education, I too want to avoid what they say in order to see what they actually do in saying what they say. Economists force us to understand education as a necessity, and even when they argue it is not necessary, they prevent us from seeing it as a luxury that we are compelled to spend without return.

As we experience the present of the pandemic, we must attend to possible structures of feeling, or to “social experiences in solution.”⁵⁹ Prior to the pandemic, there seemed already a sense that our lives and our worldviews were amiss, manifesting itself in unrests of all sorts, of which the competing debates over the value of higher education are but very small examples. Among other phenomena, we are experiencing anger over growing economic inequality, concerns over the rise (or re-rise) of right-wing political movements—and the mini-fascisms they engender—within nation-states, challenges to the increasingly exclusionary nature of higher education as politicians promoted ideas about universal access, anxieties over the rapidly rising costs of higher education, and all the anti-capitalist protests throughout the world that are associated with all these phenomena. All of this reflects more or less explicit misgivings, fears, and antagonisms over what I think is “capitalism’s axiomatic,” as Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari call it. The capitalist axiomatic erases

⁵⁹Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 133–4.

every other logic (e.g., that of the nation-state, of familial and other social identities, etc.) and converts everything that it can into what is calculable (mostly in terms of money). While capitalism attempts always to repel its own limits, it nevertheless unleashes resistances that it cannot capture, that is, those it cannot subject to its axiomatic or does not see as dangerous enough to try until it is too late (e.g., antisocial affective engagements that are initially seen as mental illnesses).⁶⁰

Bataille's ideas might allow us a moment of freedom from capture by this axiomatic, I think—a sovereign moment. What might this look like? Bataille's ideas of political economy might allow us, following Doreen Massey, to *spatialize* the economy, higher education, or even needs, in order to see them as a product of historically verifiable interrelations, ones with winners and losers, ones with oppressions, for sure, but also ones with plural exchanges, ruptures, and excesses.⁶¹ Spatializing higher education, for example, might allow us to attend to those affective and intimate experiences, those micro-operations and interrelations, that expose the existences of walls (physical and metaphorical) and other discursive barriers that require us to think of utility as inevitable. Bataille would propose, if perhaps not a spatializing, a “heterology,” or thought that is opposed to any homogenous representation of the world—any axiomatic, I would add.⁶² This is akin, I think, to Deleuze and Guattari's moment of “becoming imperceptible,” or when we can perceive something at a “molecular level,” that is, as made up of numerous micro-operations and interconnections, with no imposition of a unifying framework to impede such perception.⁶³

Such spatializing, heterology, or becoming imperceptible would allow us to reevaluate critiques leveled at institutions of higher education in the debates over financing. We would see as an example of capitalism's axiomatic any critique that asserts that higher education spending is inefficient, wasteful, and so forth. Any such claim should be critiqued for its promotion of capitalist interests, but waste should not be viewed under a logic of utility and necessity. Spending wastefully is what must happen. Such spending can only be deemed acceptable or unacceptable in a general economy attending to the abundance of wealth. We might thus defend wasteful spending because it is wasteful. Such a defense “destroys utility” and exposes capitalism's fissures. Bataille informs us that only wasteful spending—expenditure without return—permits the introduction of disruption in a world governed by utility.

But, what other spatializing, heterology, or becoming imperceptible can allow us to do more than just critique capitalism and expose its fault lines? What does it mean to live and work in higher education once we accept it as really only an

⁶⁰ See, generally, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane (London: Penguin Books, 2009, c. 1972), 247–50; Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987, c. 1980), 461–73.

⁶¹ Doreen Massey, *For Space* (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2005), 9.

⁶² See Bataille, *Visions of Excess*, 97.

⁶³ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 279–83.

exuberance and ourselves as professors as only effects of such excess? Bill Readings would say that working in higher education would relate to *Thought*, “which belongs to an economy of waste than to a restricted economy of calculation.”⁶⁴ He posits Thought against the university of excellence. Following Readings, Gary Rolfe seems to justify our existence by arguing that Thought would be invisible, subversive, and virtual, neither inside nor outside, but alongside the university of excellence.⁶⁵ Perhaps.

What seems more certain to me are the possibilities permitted by having any “visions of excess,” as Bataille might say, whatever they may be, that seek to get us beyond utility, that get us to sovereign moments. We need not justify ourselves then, for the expenditure of wealth in nonproductive activities is necessary to bring pressure down below the boiling point. These visions in themselves would be luxurious expenditures, utterly without meaning under a capitalist axiomatic. They are useless for the university of excellence or to a restricted economy of education. But that uselessness may, at the limits of possibility, destroy utility and allow us a sovereign moment, qualifying in capitalist time as a moment, which may be all we really have to experience something like freedom.

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⁶⁴ Bill Readings, *The University in Ruins* (Cambridge, U.S: Harvard University Press, 1996), 175.

⁶⁵ Gary Rolfe, *The University in Dissent: Scholarship in the Corporate University* (London: Routledge, 2013), 36.

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