

## Will the Real Howard Roark Please Stand Up?

Marc Bousquet

*Bousquet is Assistant Professor of English at the University of Louisville and founding editor of*

***Workplace: A Journal for Academic Labor.***

Aronowitz, Stanley. 2000. *The Knowledge Factory: Dismantling the Corporate University and Creating True Higher Learning*. Boston: Beacon. \$26.00 hc. 217 pp.

Caughie, Pamela L. 1999. *Passing & Pedagogy: The Dynamics of Responsibility*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press. \$42.50 hc. \$18.50 sc. xii + 286 pp.

Heilman, Robert Bechtold. 1999. *The Professor and the Profession*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press. \$39.95 hc. viii + 358 pp.

Woodring, Carl. 1999. *Literature: An Embattled Profession*. New York: Columbia University Press. \$29.50 hc. xv + 220 pp.

I first decided to write this essay late last spring when I opened the pages of *The Nation* and read that Stanley Aronowitz had become Ayn Rand, according to Berkeley education professor David L. Kirp. In a review of *The Knowledge Factory* widely republished on the world-wide web, Kirp

claims that Aronowitz deplores mass higher education and looks to install himself as a kind of Napoleon of the curriculum, ultimately seeking the revival of “faculty hegemony over academic life” and other “wonderfully old-fashioned stuff.” Kirp caps this portrait of a would-be great dictator over the student body by equating his subject with the proto-fascist hero of Rand’s *The Fountainhead*.

This is a surprising account of a book that offers a sustained critique of the vocationalized curriculum of the corporate university (what it calls the system of “higher training” ensuring that “students be job-ready upon graduation,” a “mad race toward occupational education” that produces a sharply reduced horizon for the vast majority of working students) (15-37; 158-160). Essayistic and frequently personal, *The Knowledge Factory* springs from the working-class experience and commitments of its author, a distinguished socialist scholar, long-term labor activist and radical educator. Which is to say that it takes a real effort to associate the project with Rand’s contempt for working humanity.

Ignoring six chapters of persistent analysis, Kirp focuses on a single portion at the end of *The Knowledge Factory*, one which addresses a hypothetical question. Throughout the book, Aronowitz’s particular target is the notion of “mission differentiation” legitimating the increasing practice of providing different yet fully technical educations for different classes, so that anything resembling learning has been structurally re-imagined as the special literacy of elites (and even there it can frequently signify “status, not learning”). Chapter by chapter, Aronowitz provides trenchant descriptions of the effective de-massification of college opportunity through vocationalization, the ascent of policy intellectuals during the general social mobilization of the cold war, the aggressive debasement of the material conditions of academic work, and illuminating discussions of the partnership between student movements and faculty unionism. Kirp, however, grapples primarily with the very end of the book, chapter seven, section five, a closing meditation that responds to a pretty difficult question: “If learning, rather than training and political and ideological socialization, were to become the mission of American higher education, what would it look like?” (124).

Aronowitz’s thoughts regarding what universal access to higher learning might look like are grounded in his own experience of worker education, adult literacy (the book is dedicated to his mother, who received her BA magna cum laude at the age of seventy-four), and the left-Leavisism of Raymond Williams. Observing that academic planners observe a policy of vocationalism and neglect toward “working class students in third-tier schools,” Aronowitz suggests one way in which the notion of a general right to an authentic higher education might be furthered is through a larger

encounter with “four key knowledge domains, at least in the first two years: history, literature, science and philosophy” (169.177).

So in this section we learn that Aronowitz thinks all kinds of people would be better off if they had the chance to experience Franz Fanon together with Shakespeare, and if we all agreed that college educations ought to be more about that sort of thing than learning to write advertising copy. In any event, it is on the basis of this short section at the end of the book (interestingly re-described as “the centerpiece”), that Kirp writes: “In his desire to prescribe what students should learn, Aronowitz is just like scores of professors, Howard Roarks of the academy, each harboring a vision of intellectual utopia.”

By “just like scores of professors,” most readers will have to suppose that Aronowitz resembles professors emeritus Robert Heilman and Carl Woodring, who have essayed a few modest proposals regarding the ways that the future student might enjoy some of the pleasures and privileges of their own lived experience with “great books.” One of the architects of an arduous core curriculum at Columbia, Woodring, for instance, offers a series of opinions that have come to be associated with the likes of Allan Bloom and Roger Kimball, against theory and politics in the classroom, and evoking the humanities as a sacrament, firing up the rhetorical incense and intoning that we must allow “literature once more to have its way with the public, permit literature to work its cure.”

If you favor this sort of thing, you might imagine Woodring’s last line delivered by John Gielgud; if you don’t, you probably thought of Vincent Price or James Mason.

But is Aronowitz “just like” this? And if he isn’t, why would Kirp cast him in these invidious terms, as the Great Satan of the curriculum, a Darth Vader of student self-determination?

No doubt Kirp is just trying to make a place in the conversation for his own forthcoming book on money and the university (“There is surely a place for the market in academic life, but the market needs to be kept in its place . . .”). But the peculiar thing is that Kirp chooses to distinguish himself from Aronowitz on bogus grounds that make the social-movement socialist seem like a right-wing nutcase. Are we really supposed to get the idea that Kirp, who serves as a featured lecturer for *University Business* seminars, is the real radical in this conversation?

There are plenty of genuine differences between Kirp’s position and Aronowitz for Kirp to have focussed on. He might very interestingly have asked Aronowitz to respond more directly to Bill Reading’s bleak suggestion that the University, like the nation-state, is no longer worth struggling for (“the University should no longer be thought of as a tool that the left will

be able to use for purposes other than those of the capitalist state”[41]). As a policy intellectual, he might have contested Aronowitz’s narrative of the cold-war ascent of the policy sciences. Or he might reasonably have chosen to differ with Aronowitz’s critique of multiculturalism’s failure to remain oppositional during the process of disciplinarization (127-144). Though I for one am fairly sympathetic to the key argument in this section, regarding the consequences of the fact that intellectuals of the new social movements “have abandoned the point of view of the totality” (134), there are worthy counter-arguments to be made, and it would be fair to say that multiculturalism and standpoint theory deserve a more elaborate critique than they get in *The Knowledge Factory*. Of course this would force the reviewer to acknowledge that what Aronowitz attempts, re-articulating movement theory to thinking the totality, is perhaps the most vexed and fascinating question of the moment. In fact—while not focussed on curricular issues—new books by Žizek and Negri (with Michael Hardt) both brilliantly essay this project.

It is genuinely difficult to imagine that anyone reviewing *The Knowledge Factory* would fail to make an effort to relate it to its author’s many previous contributions on the questions of diversity, literacy, and student agency—as in *Postmodern Education*, where he and Henry Giroux systematically encourage the revival of a “student power” over the curriculum, in which before the Reaganite war on youth “students won both the right to initiate new courses and greater voice in educational governance, and they spurred the formation of black, Latino, and women’s studies” (10).

The interesting question about Aronowitz’s new book is whether it contradicts this earlier stance: does the emphasis upon “four key knowledge domains” really represent an attack on youth and the new social movements, a partnership with Roger Kimball and Denis Donoghue, and a return to what David Riesman somewhat erroneously described as faculty hegemony, as Kirp contends?

The answer is no, of course not. What Aronowitz actually describes is a rollback of administrative control and technical education, and a partnership producing “faculty–student dominance in governance” of the campus, leading to a curriculum that in its ideal form is “one rolling seminar” [164-172;189]. One of the key misreadings that Kirp promotes is the idea that Aronowitz seeks “[the revival of an updated] Great Books curriculum,” a prescriptive and reverential “sequence of required courses.” Kirp writes as if there is a melodramatic struggle between the cultural production of the core (the forces of evil) and the cultural production of the periphery (the forces of good), a fantasy that generates the claim that Aronowitz has defected from the periphery to the core. Perhaps all of this explains why Kirp tries to represent his own

centrism as radicalism: he can only wear a white hat if he rides (toward the center, always toward the center!) from a posture of the periphery.

It is just this melodramatic ideology of a culture-struggle between core and periphery that Aronowitz contests. As one of the two or three leading cultural-studies and movement theorists in the country, he with this book wants to argue that a victory for the general education of the population does not consist in either the periphery or the core subordinating the other, but instead the dissemination of the capacity to continuously theorize the relations of core and periphery. This continuous retheorization takes the curricular form of an "encounter between canonical works and works of subordinate cultures" (169), a critical and constantly renegotiated process between students and teachers.

So: far from opposing student curricular power, Aronowitz is one of the few advocates seeking to develop the conditions of its possibility. For me, the most enduring virtue of Aronowitz's work in this book and elsewhere is his on-the-ground materialism, his continuous insistence that we see the sort of "student choices" for vocational learning of the past twenty years or so in the context of the accelerating exploitation of youth as contingent labor in high school and college, and in the context of the near-total eradication for people under 35 of the sort of dignified work with benefits, security and due process that used to be called a "job." Aronowitz convincingly and consistently argues that real student choices will flow out of "freedom from the obligation to work after school and the psychological freedom whose presupposition is some form of economic security" (167).

Aronowitz's suggestions regarding the civic consequences of a more just distribution of leisure and income are echoed in the best parts of Robert Heilman's collection of scattered essays, *The Professor and The Profession*. While much of the book addresses Heilman's long interest in melodrama and mass culture, it also features a handful of interesting pieces displaying a commonsensical materialism regarding academic work, written in deft, charming prose aimed at the literate citizen. One essay defends adequate pay for teachers; another debunks the great teacher myth; the best of them all defends the practice of sabbatical leaves on the grounds that *everyone* who works should have them. Observing that "the university has empirically established the advantages of the sabbatical principle," Heilman claims that the likely consequence of a greater distribution of paid freedom from work would produce a more literate, cheerful, and civic-minded society. He imagines that most citizens would opt to spend a large portion of their sabbatical years in service: as in the academy, he feels, "the very length of the sabbatical might increase the likelihood of its being partly used instead of totally misused" (340-341).

Like Heilman's book, Carl Woodring's *Literature: An Embattled Profession* is full of the "wonderfully old-fashioned stuff" that Kirp means to condemn, including paranoid views regarding the putative depredations of theory, multiculturalism, and feminism, leaving literary studies in the position of "a besieged baronial mansion." These idealist accounts are, of course, absurd—at best they can be read symptomatically, as the obverse of the idealist pseudo-politics that ignores the workplace realities of academic life, especially the near-universal experience of contingent labor. Interestingly, Woodring's theory-bashing opinions are schizophrenically welded to a frequently useful materialist account of the eroding institutional structure of the humanities, especially where it is devoted to exploring the general debasement of the working conditions of the humanities faculty and parafaculty. Insofar as Woodring defends tenure, deplors the use of part-time faculty, and is particularly concerned to halt the administrative cancer that has created what Randy Martin best describes as the "managed university," it can be hoped that the book will do some good with its readership.

Pamela Caughie is well aware of the sentiments of Woodring's conservative readership. She describes her book as a "strategic and pragmatic intervention" into a contemporary scene that Woodring's readers have perhaps long feared as a kind of doomsday scenario: "identity politics in academic discourse; the institutionalization of a multicultural curriculum and a cultural studies paradigm, politics of postmodern theories and the hegemony of Theory itself; and the aims of what some call critical pedagogy and what some call advocacy teaching" with the result that "politics and values have come to displace truth and knowledge as the goals of literary pedagogy" (2, 105). Writing to reassure those readers and also to strengthen the claims of this new academic hegemony, Caughie enjoys common ground with Woodring more often than one might expect.

In particular, they share a desire for cultural encounters to shape citizenship, though Caughie's quest for what she interchangeably describes as an "ethics" and a "politics" is complicated by the death of the subject. The textual practices that Caughie advocates are very different from the textual practices advocated by the older scholar, but both are working hard to describe the ways in which specifically textual practices can have a substantial social effectivity. Woodring suggests an MLA conference exclusively on the topic of what literature teachers have in common; Caughie urges that humanities teachers "stop fighting with the media and scapegoating one another," and that the reasons for the multicultural struggle over the humanities be made more transparent ("clear, urgent, and nonthreatening") to the public. To this end, she is willing to make the compromises of pedagogy when it comes to theory: explaining her choice of the term "passing" to describe the dynam-

ics of her constructivist ethics, she writes “‘Passing’ is colloquial, ‘performativity’ is jargon” (5). In her view, the payoff of this position is the chance of moving pedagogy out of the classroom and into the world. Pedagogy is her name for initiating what she calls a “dynamics of responsibility” wherein a subject-which-is-not-one answers the double bind of situational complexity with the not-quite-volitional double play of passing. While for Caughie the passages of the player are not exactly acts of volition (because of the “inevitable slippage between the volitional and the performative subject”), she nonetheless expects that the subject-which-is-not-one “take responsibility for the performative consequences” of the performance, even acts of which, we now recognize, she is not (fully) the agent. What I really liked about this book is its tenacious refusal to let go of a hard question: the subject is dead, Caughie says, but nobody’s leaving until someone pays his tab. In her very best moments, Caughie is like Žizek and Negri in trying to articulate multiculturalism to some other ethos than the self-congratulatory banality of liberal tolerance.

What both succeeds and fails in Caughie’s generally accomplished and frequently compelling effort rotates around her attempt to have everything (theory, pedagogy, subjectivity, the curriculum) two ways. Some theory is good; other theory is jargon. When Caughie wants to talk to the public, clarity is a virtue; but when Jane Gallop turns to simple (yet legally and institutionally vigorous) concepts like volitional subjectivity and innocence to defend herself, Caughie complains that “Gallop elides the messiness of the case.” Caughie insists, as above, on a “non-threatening” pedagogy; at the same time she wants to remain “risky.” Students, for instance, will risk “feelings of guilt and shame as we urge them to examine the cultural production of knowledge by deconstructing race, interrogating whiteness, exposing heterosexism,” should “suspend their desire for mastery,” and risk “their notions of themselves as discrete, rational individuals.” On the whole, Caughie’s notion of responsibility turns around simultaneously having and relinquishing notions of subjectivity and volition: sometimes I found that I could only understand the subject of her pedagogy as a kind of updated and subculturally-responsive existentialist, elaborated in Sartrean passages such as this one:

As I define it in Chapter 1, all passing is marked by the double bind that opens up a discrepancy between what one professes to be and how one is actually positioned in a society, institution, discourse, or classroom. Thus, the double bind cannot be resolved, theoretically or morally, by finding the right position but must be confronted performatively as well, through a performative practice that seeks to enact rather than endorse certain positions. (Caughie 1999, 105)

In the end, Caughie's decision to deploy the figure of "ethics" as a portmanteau for political action is telling: on the one hand, as above, she insists on a field of action and positivity appropriate to politics. On the other, her pedagogy seems most effective in the field of negative action ("avoiding complicity") more traditionally associated with the liberal subject who seeks simply to hold the right opinions with respect to such "issues" as racism, sexism, and gender bias.

One of the bricks in Caughie's wall is the failure to recognize that not everyone's political problems can be understood as ethical problems. Though enormously influenced by cultural studies and other materialist scholarship (sometimes citing even Mas'ud Zavarzadeh and Donald Morton), Caughie shies away from the issues of the base that Aronowitz directly confronts. While Aronowitz on his part would benefit from a more generous acknowledgement of the commitment and accomplishments of multiculturalism, the diverse groups of persons with whom Aronowitz is primarily concerned can't be helpfully understood as in an ethical bind: the student—typically a woman and a caregiver, frequently an immigrant or first-generation university learner—who works forty or fifty hours a week while spending nine years in pursuit of the baccalaureate, the nontenurable parafaculty teaching eight sections for twenty-four thousand dollars with no health insurance and a state law interfering with the right to organize, the graduate student whose receipt of a doctoral degree signifies the end (and not the beginning) of a long teaching career. And these persons—for whom a politics and not an ethics is required—are by any measure the vast majority of persons teaching and learning in higher education.

Caughie's approach to the politics of pedagogy would be made much clearer, more urgent, and less threatening by the addition of a discussion of who teaches and under what conditions: what are the consequences for students that diverse literatures are generally experienced in lower-division composition classes and surveys, now almost universally taught by parafaculty whose course texts are chosen by boss multiculturalists? What is the role of multiculturalism's ethical imperative in assisting administrations to squeeze yet more surplus value from their mostly white, mostly female, mostly nontenurable humanities teaching staff? How many sports stadiums have two-thousand-dollar-a-course diversity workers built? Under what circumstances is it ethical for compositionists and general-education administrators to hire non-Ph.D. holders to "pass" as members of the professoriate? None of this is to diminish the importance of literacy work and the multicultural curriculum. Far from it: like Aronowitz, I think it's so important that we should stop trying to do it with managed labor and start doing it with persons we're prepared to acknowledge as colleagues. To cast the question in Caughie's frame,



why isn't it an ethical responsibility of us all to ensure that writing work and diversity work is also *faculty work*, education work important enough to be done by persons who actually profess, who enjoy active research lives, access to due process, and the academic freedom to take the kind of risks that Caughie would like? A related problem—of working youth and caregivers without the time to meet course requirements and are thus forced to “pass” as students, as persons who've read and encountered the course material—is likewise, as Aronowitz observes, a matter of the base.

Do teachers have an ethical responsibility to do the political work of creating material conditions that would enable intellectual life for their students and colleagues? Perhaps Caughie will in future helpfully argue that they do. In any event, we are awfully fortunate to have Stanley Aronowitz to remind us that it is certainly a political urgency of the highest order.

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