

The Searing of the University

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In Africa, when an old man dies, it is like a library burning.

(Amadou Hampâté Bâ)¹

The jarring use of ‘searing’ in my title derives from the Jephcott translation of an essay written by Walter Benjamin in 1931, titled ‘Little History of Photography’, where he writes:

No matter how artful the photographer, no matter how carefully posed his subject, the beholder [of the photograph] feels an irresistible urge to search such a picture for the tiny spark of contingency, of the here and now, with which reality has (so to speak) seared the subject, to find the inconspicuous spot where in the immediacy of that long-forgotten moment the future nests so eloquently that we, looking back, may rediscover it.²

The German verb is *glühen*. It might more immediately suggest glow, but either way, what Benjamin is stressing is the aptness of the fusion of speed and heat that ‘foodie’ carnivores now typically associate with the preparation of meat or fish. The photograph, on this account, is precisely that surface of human meat that hits the flash of the camera and is thus marked by its encounter with the real. The spark of contingency, rekindled in the act of reception, is what Roland Barthes sought to reword as *punctum*, and as generative as this insight is, it is not the fish I wish immediately to fry.³

Indeed, since my more immediate topic is ‘austerity’, let me attempt to justify this point of departure. Teasing apart the etymological sedimentation of the word, one discovers the following series: severe, stern, harsh, bitter, rough, withered, dry and yes, through Old English, sear (a scar produced by burning). Quickly, and this is a point these remarks will work to secure: austerity is a burning (of the) subject.

Others, of course, for example my colleague at Leeds, Griselda Pollock, have deployed austerity as a way to think about the current conjunction of the university, but I am not convinced that it has been grasped as the properly burning question

1 See, e.g., <http://www.ascleiden.nl/content/webdossiers/amadou-hampate-ba> (accessed 9 October 2017).

2 Walter Benjamin, ‘Little History of Photography’ in Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland and Gary Smith, eds., *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Volume 2: Part 2, 1931–1934* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999[1931]), 510.

3 The theoretical encounter between Benjamin and Barthes, alas only a one-way street, has been studied with considerable care by Jeanine Ferguson, ‘Developing Clichés: Walter Benjamin and Roland Barthes at the Limits of Photographic Theory’ (PhD thesis, University of Minnesota, 1997), pp. 179–191 in particular.

I take it to be.⁴ To alight upon *this* question I will propose that we need to think a bit more directly about the economics of austerity, especially as it has emerged as an instrument of fiscal policy, and from that vantage point begin thinking about its intricate and varied articulation with the university. I do not mean to suggest that economics is a non-metaphorical discourse and that austerity there has some more explicitly literal force. On the contrary, if, following a certain strain in Pollock, one notes that economics, especially in its scientific and mathematical incarnations, has long been struggling with the incalculable – what John Ruskin, in a text that inspired Mohandas Gandhi to translate it into Gujarati, once called ‘social affections’ – then we can certainly propose that economics has been at war with, if not metaphor, then certainly with figures of speech deemed less than dry, and that austerity is marked by vicissitudes of this conflict.⁵

According to figures like Mark Blyth and Suzanne Konzelmann, austerity assumes the role it now plays in fiscal policy debate in and around the largely British struggle to sort how to manage the massive debt produced by the ‘Great War’.⁶ The problem centred immediately around the role of the state in addressing the crisis, and among the fiscal instruments that emerged were those of the Keynesian stimulus (the notion that the state might assume debt, through welfare and public works programmes, in order, paradoxically, to service debt), and the Hayekian imposition of austerity measures (that is, the shrinkage of the state, including its social role, but also therefore its cost). John Keynes was not averse to austerity, but he famously sought to apply it to the so-called top rather than the bottom of the business cycle. That is, austerity might usefully be deployed to slow down an economy that might otherwise succumb to other risks, notably inflation. Dan Graeber has recently reminded us that debt has been around for a very long time (5 000 years), and that part of its longevity has to do with its ability to take on the symbolic property of antibiotic-resistant bacteria whereby the means of managing debt, including, famously, gift giving, all only make debt more endemic and tenacious. Indeed, the present moment in the planetary unfolding of capital is one in which debt is thought to be permanent and structural, almost as if the problem is not the cost of the state, but of the economy itself.⁷

If in the context of these inevitably superficial observations one recalls that many contemporary incarnations of the university are indeed of the state or public variety, then it is not hard to see why the state has been withdrawing its financial support

4 See Griselda Pollock, ‘Saying No!: Profligacy versus Austerity, or Metaphor against Model in Justifying the Arts and Humanities in the Contemporary University’, *Journal of European Popular Culture*, 3(1) (2012), 87–104.

5 Ruskin’s ‘Unto this Last’ first appeared as a series of four long essays in *Cornhill Magazine* in 1860. Gandhi’s ‘Sarvodaya’, his Gujarati translation of Ruskin’s essay, has been translated back into English by Valji Govindji Desai and is available online (see, e.g., <http://www.mkgandhi.org/ebks/untothislast.pdf>). Although it is not discussed in Ajay Skaria’s *Unconditional Equality: Gandhi’s Religion of Resistance* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), Skaria frames the significance of Gandhi’s use of Gujarati with a theoretical sophistication that might usefully be brought to bear on the Ruskin translation.

6 Mark Blyth, *Austerity: The History of a Dangerous Idea* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013); Suzanne Konzelmann, ‘The Political Economy of Austerity’, *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, 38(4) (2014), 701–741.

7 Among the most powerful theoretical treatments of the present are Maurizio Lazzarato’s *The Making of the Indebted Man: An Essay on the Neoliberal Condition*, translated by Joshua D. Jordan (Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e), 2012) and *Governing by Debt*, translated by Joshua D. Jordan (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2015). See, in particular, his chapter on the American university in the latter. Both texts are available in the Semiotext(e) ‘Interventions’ series.

from them as part of an effort to lower the cost of maintaining itself, an effort touted as giving expression to the moral goals of balancing budgets, living within one's means and not begging the lives of our children. As properly ascetic ideals, and Friedrich Nietzsche in *The Genealogy of Morality* characterised all morals as ascetic ideals,⁸ one senses how easily these economically tethered notions become concepts and categories at work throughout the university. Before concluding it will be important to consider whether with slight adjustment we might not see the current incarnation of ascetic ideals – that is, harsh ideals – as austere ideals, accounting, I should think, for the easy conflation between fiscal discipline or responsibility and morality. Nietzsche's point in *The Genealogy* about the more than merely philological equation of debt and shame (*Schuld* in German) becomes interesting in this context.⁹

That said, to savour more fully the implications of searing the university, more of Blyth's genealogy of austerity deserves to be introduced. I am thinking specifically of his lengthy discussion of what he calls the intellectual 'history of a dangerous idea',¹⁰ a discussion in which he traces how austerity emerges in the thinking of figures like Adam Smith and David Hume, but perhaps foundationally in John Locke's account of property. To be frank, what interests me here is less the matter of who comes first, than the matter of how austerity belongs to what Qadri Ismail invites us to recognise as the 'culture' of Eurocentrism.¹¹

How then does Blyth read Locke? In the pages devoted to him in his study, Blyth zeroes in on the well-known chapter on property in the second of the *Two Treatises on Government*.¹² Rehearsing Locke's argument about property arising when an individual invests his labour in the act of transforming nature into something of use, Blyth notes that as long as this appropriation leads neither to spoilage/waste nor to deprivation, Locke deems it both rational and just. Because, as Blyth reminds us, nature contains the common from which property is subtracted by virtue of God's will, the unequal accumulation of property is, in effect, divinely, that is, transcendently, sanctioned. With the introduction of currency by which property can be accumulated without the risk of either spoilage or depletion, a market arises that both regularises and normalises the unequal accumulation of property and wealth. When Locke then turns to conceive the state and the role of government, he tries to balance the divinely sanctioned drive to accumulate property, a drive a liberal and thus truly rational state must not interfere in, with the political demand that some sort of state exist in order to protect the activity of accumulation. What emerges, according to Blyth, is liberalism's image of a minimalist state, one whose cost must be kept as low as possible so as not to require excessive taxation and the thus immoral, or certainly un-Christian, drain on private property. This, for Blyth, is what justifies his

8 Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality: A Polemic*, translated by Douglas Smith (New York: Oxford University Press, 1887[1999]).

9 For the analysis of *Schuld*, see Keith Ansell-Pearson, ed., *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche, Vol. 8 (Beyond Good and Evil/On the Genealogy of Morality)*, translated by Adrian Del Caro (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2014), 251.

10 Mark Blyth, *Austerity: The History of a Dangerous Idea* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

11 See Ismail's paper in this issue of *Kronos*.

12 John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, edited by Ian Shapiro (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003).

characterisation of the *Two Treatises* as the urtext of austerity economics: although we can neither live with nor without the state, ‘no one wants to pay for it.’¹³

What Blyth ignores is the status throughout the chapter on property of America. Locke shows his hand on the matter when late in the chapter he writes: ‘Thus in the beginning all the world was America.’¹⁴ What justifies this otherwise twisted anticipation of Mormonism is Locke’s persistent appeal to a nature left to spoil due to the absence of individuals keen to transform it into objects of use. *This* is America; nature left to rot. In Locke’s description of it as ‘uncultivated’, Ismail hears not only the racism of his erasure of the indigenous peoples of the Americas, but the Eurocentrism of his contrast between nature and society, where ‘cultivation’ as a stand-in for the human and thus society is set opposite a Hobbesian war of all against all, that is, a nature that God calls upon humans to domesticate and share, however unequally. Enrique Dussel, in his ‘Beyond Eurocentrism: The World System and the Limits of Modernity’,¹⁵ has proposed that the allusions to gold and silver that then populate Locke’s text – he insists that ‘Americans’ understood only their rarity not their value – are signs of the very geopolitical dynamic that enabled the displacement of Asia by Europe and thus, at a crudely material level, the rise of the Europe whose ‘travelling theory’ was and is Eurocentrism. Locke’s entire embrace of the English bourgeoisie and its confrontation with the monarchic state is thus legible as an allegory about the destiny of Europe on the global stage. Put fancifully, Locke produces, as a critique of feudal oligarchy, the notion that when an agent of the Conquest planted a flag on a Caribbean beach he was thereby transforming that beach into the property of some distant European court by virtue of revealing its latent utility in flagstaff holding and boat anchoring.

My point is not to chide Blyth for his oversight. Instead, what feels more urgent is a thinking that seeks to grasp where the logics of austerity and Eurocentrism converge. That austerity, especially as a concept that travelled out of a theory of property into what Michel Foucault would call a ‘mode of governmentality’, a concept indelibly marked by the thinking of nature in Locke’s account of property, has imported into governmentality an assumption about its subjects. What has been imported is precisely a way of thinking the space of the state as a biopolitical regime that ties the constitutive inequality of property distribution to what David Harvey might call a relational space in which the state’s founding supports are rendered invisible and unthinkable as a matter of principle.¹⁶ Put differently, property, as we know it, comes from the America that was, in the beginning, everywhere, but in the form of a labouring that did not, indeed could not, produce property.

13 Blyth, *Austerity*, 106.

14 Locke, *Two Treatises*, 121.

15 Enrique Dussel, ‘Beyond Eurocentrism: The World System and the Limits of Modernity’ in Fredric Jameson and Masao Miyoshi, eds., *The Cultures of Globalization* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998), 3–31.

16 As the undisputed inheritor of Henri Lefebvre’s legacy as Marxism’s theorist of space, David Harvey has been thinking with trenchant tenacity about the distinctly political character of space since the seventies. See *Social Justice and the City* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973) for his account of ‘relational space’.

Worthy of stress here is that the constitutive inequality that animates the doctrine of austerity has a rigorous enabling profile, a constituent element of which is a displacement whereby the uneven distribution of property becomes unthinkable and thus unalterable because it presumes a relation to property that, for lack of a better word, represses any *other* relation to property, and notably a relation to property in which the logic of the gift, as opposed to that of the commodity, is at play. With regard to the former, debt is constitutive not contingent. Giving is always indebting; it takes away the possibility of not returning, however inadequately. To pass again over Ismail's powerful reading, but now specifically where he has turned his attention to so-called Native Americans, what he teases out of the reported speech of one O'waxalagalis, the ethnographically framed interlocutor of Franz Boas, is the proposition that a god who predates the European monarchy – specifically, the 'Queen'¹⁷ – gave to the Kwagu'l its cultural practices, practices that include felling trees in order to thereby convert them into property. Astutely, Ismail reads this as a form of ethnographic projection, and while I agree, I also wish to stress that in this attribution of cultural relativism to the *subjects* of ethnographic reason, what also appears is 'the bigger fish' of another relation to property, a relation that if pushed beyond the limits of theology, invites us to think what austerity – precisely insofar as it conceptually nestles within the Lockean account of property – both differs from and defers. God as a non-sentient gift giver is a placeholder for much that Eurocentrism, and capitalism and the politics of austerity know without knowing. If this god lacks any more substance than the function of placeholder, this is because, however powerful its messianic charge, that charge derives its force from the frame of intelligibility within which its function functions. Put differently, god is the wrong word for what monotheisms (including Buddhism) cannot designate in any other way.

Setting aside what Blyth blithely passes over – driven as he is by an economism he, of all people, should be more suspicious of – I wish to bring this reading of the link between austerity and property to bear more immediately on the motif of the 'university of austerity' and our animating question: what is the university for? Although 'austerity' is not her immediate theme, Wendy Brown in *Undoing the Demos* reminds us that there is more to the oft-repeated charge of 'privatisation' than meets the ear.¹⁸ It is not that she is in deep disagreement with those who bemoan this pet obsession of neoliberalism, but if she frames her approach to privatisation by following Foucault's linking of neoliberalism and biopolitics, it is in order to flush bigger game, namely, the way privatisation *presupposes* the imposition of a logic of calculability, of measure, that in rendering all social activity commensurable authorises an accounting of whether privatisation has or can take place. As Blyth has made clear, privatisation is also a way of putting in general circulation a concept of property (as in 'private property') fundamental to austerity. If Brown's project invokes 'stealth', it is because calculation has been weaponised using the principle of this technology: it confuses those subject to its effects.

17 Qadri Ismail, *Culture and Eurocentrism* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016), 149.

18 Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution* (New York: Zone Books, 2015).

Seen from within a critique of political economy, that is, from within Marxism (a tradition with which Brown is in persistent, if tense, dialogue), the logic of calculability is to be understood as an element, perhaps even a decisive element, in the process of what is called subsumption. In the Appendix that concludes *Capital* volume one, Karl Marx contrasts what he calls formal and real subsumption and he does so in order to think the historical difference between an emergent capitalism that sought to reform pre-existing socioeconomic practices, and fully developed capitalism within which virtually all socioeconomic practices really *are* part of capitalism.¹⁹ Although Marx tended to frame the matter in narrowly Eurocentric terms (consider his discussion of colonialism that immediately precedes the Appendix), the recent kerfuffle stirred by Vivek Chibber's *Postcolonial Theory and the Specter of Capital*²⁰ largely hung on whether the subaltern historians drew the right conclusions from the global real subsumption of the non-West by capitalist market relations and its attendant political culture, especially as that culture expressed itself in human rights. Be that as it may, if there is a point to framing the logic of calculability within the theory of subsumption, it is that what this logic allows us to see is the fine grain of subsumption as it rolls out in the vanishing present. Intriguing here, and I'll not have time to develop this, is the fact that in this fine grain one glimpses a moment of subsumption that is neither formal nor real, since what might be said to be at stake here is a *future* of socioeconomic practices that always risk eluding capitalism and that must be made subject to a pre-emptive subsumption, captured in advance – the whole fantasy of *Minority Report*²¹ and other such films in which real pre-emption of a future thought to be dangerous is speculated. Although I will defer a more sustained treatment of it here, this is part of the tenacious problem of realising the post (both the when and the where) of apartheid. To riff on Jacques Derrida's formulation,²² global capital sustains, however unsustainably, the conditions under which 'latest' can be routinely substituted for 'last' in the title 'Apartheid, Racism's Last Word'.

As Brown and others have made clear, what facilitates the fanning out of neoliberalism is not, at least not typically, its brute and vulgar insistence upon withdrawing public funds from public institutions – in effect, privatising them – but the pharmacological, as Bernard Stiegler might say, preparation for this withdrawal.²³ Crucial here is the establishment of the *need* for privatisation as a way to account for, thus measure and calculate, the values that gauge its merits. This vicious loop secures an interesting function for the state, a state that can then commit its resources to measuring fastidiously how to withdraw its resources from costly public enterprises in the name of paying down debt, freeing future generations, in short, to lowering the

19 This discussion unfolds between pages 1019 and 1038 of Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Volume 1*, translated by Ben Fowkes (Vintage Books, 1977).

20 Vivek Chibber, *Postcolonial Theory and the Specter of Capital* (London: Verso, 2013).

21 Directed by Steven Spielberg and released in October 2002.

22 Jacques Derrida, trans. Peggy Kamuf, 'Racism's Last Word', *Critical Inquiry*, 12(1) (1985), 290–299.

23 At least since the appearance of the *Technics and Time* series, Stiegler has been elaborating the logic of the pharmakon (presented by Derrida in his 'Plato's Pharmacy' in *Dissemination*, translated by Barbara Johnson [Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1981]), especially as a way to think the encounter between technics and arche-writing in Derrida. See in particular Stiegler's sustained meditation on paleontology in *Technics and Time, 1: The Fault of Epimetheus*, translated by Richard Beardsworth and George Collins (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998).

cost of a state that property owners do not wish to pay for even as they utterly depend on its services. Here the familiar call for ‘securitisation’ sounds out, as the state shifts its attention to managing the crises of a tenacious and broad emiseration of the population rather than paying for the public programmes that might address misery, in effect building walls rather than bridges. If this is what neoliberalism does, Donald Trump’s coiffure is an emblem of *how* miraculously it does it.

But let’s not get carried away. The appeal to subsumption, whether formal or real, always risks losing sight of the biopolitical insight that the state took form out of a swarm of practices that predated it, practices that seem economic only from a belated perspective that has succumbed to the logic of calculability, in other words, to economism whether of the Left or the Right. This is where I think Blyth misses something important about the complicity that exists between the forms of knowledge – as Ismail would put it, the *episteme* – he trusts in and the problem he is deploying this knowledge to both comprehend and criticise. Moreover, and similar precautions are called for, when attempting to think the place and effect of austerity in education, a point made during the Dean’s Lecture I gave here in 2011 is worth repeating, namely, that for Marx the labour of the teacher is largely unproductive. This means noting, even stressing, that the logic of calculability must take hold of it differently, but also – and this is the important point – the proper grip, as it were, is one that declares education to be radically incalculable and therefore inexcusably expensive unless it is turned to outcomes of the sort that can be measured in terms of job placement, that is, integration within the neoliberal regime. The notion that the value of scholarship is to be found in a citation index rather than in the force of the ideas it sets in motion is a fairly direct way of getting at this point.

Those committed to thinking in terms of biopolitics, especially those influenced by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, Paolo Virno and Maurizio Lazzarato,²⁴ are also those who tend to reword the distinction between productive and unproductive labour in terms of material versus immaterial labour, arguing that global capitalism has entered a new configuration. It is a configuration in which the service sectors of the economy have become the leading engines of its development. In this account the university has come to be *for* the purpose of both serving students – we no longer educate them, we serve them (indeed, at Leeds we ‘satisfy’ them) – and driving those students into a debt that can only be serviced through a job whose availability is conditioned by its relation to the service sector, that is, the growth area of the global economy. The FeesMustFall movement has correctly diagnosed the urgency of its political tactics, even as it has not consistently thought through the broad theoretical scope of its strategic objectives. Access is more than admissions. About which more later.

Here it becomes crucial to emphasise that apart from the biopolitical legitimation of sustained attention to so-called immaterial labour, what Foucault’s discussion

24 Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (New York: Penguin, 2004); Maurizio Lazzarato, ‘Immaterial Labor’ in Michael Hardt and Paolo Virno, eds., *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2010); Paolo Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude*, translated by Isabella Bertolotti, James Cascaito and Andrea Casson (New York: Semiotext(e), 2004).

also foregrounds is the important convergence between neoliberalism as a mode of governmentality, and the work of subjectivation, or as I typically put it, the subjection of human agency. In ‘The Birth of Biopolitics’ lectures from which Brown has drawn her inspiration, the concept that Foucault mobilises under the broad if unthematized heading of subjection, is that of *homo oeconomicus* (economic man).²⁵ In order to extend economic reason and its calculus over institutional practices as diverse as ‘marriage, the education of children and criminality’ it became necessary to generate a figure of the bearer of this calculus that traverses and thus articulates these practices. This figure is that of economic man, a way of thinking the subject as one who ‘responds’ to modifications in its environment. As Foucault specifies, this figure is someone who ‘accepts reality’.²⁶ In elaborating the social formation within which this subject finds its footing, he traces the genealogy of the concept of ‘civil society’, a concept which in the hands of Adam Ferguson designates what arises with civilisation itself, thereby contrasting both civil society and economic man to the savage both must defer, that is, exclude while thinking against.²⁷ As with Locke, the locus of savagery for Ferguson is to be found in the Americas and what is distinctive about this locus is that it grounds the enabling difference with economic man and does so by building the concept of civil society on a void. This is like what Sigmund Freud later called the fetish where a difference is recast as a nothing.²⁸ A certain postcoloniality here repeats as something that limns the very core of economic man.

Against Foucault and the concept of economic man his discussion of neoliberal biopolitics puts in play, Brown sets the concept of *homo politicus* (political man), a figure meant to embody the struggle for democracy (*demos* and *kratos*) that she sees both as targeted by neoliberalism, and, consequently, as the form of subjection required to respond to and ultimately repudiate the world sustained through the reproduction of economic man. In her account, political man is what Foucault cannot think because he has no serious interest in democracy. While it may be true that Foucault spills little ink on the concept of democracy, one should not forget that the entire course on ‘The Birth of Biopolitics’ builds to the formulation: ‘It seems to me that here [in the rough play between different arts of governing] politics is born.’²⁹ Of course, on this basis alone one cannot exculpate Foucault, but considering that here the ‘birth’ heralded (if set aside) in the title of the course is both used and mentioned, one might want to explore the possibility that Foucault is here situating what Brown wants to set opposite to economic man *within* neoliberalism and the mode of subjection it deploys, namely, *homo politicus*. As such, political man inherits all of the

25 Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978–1979*, edited by Arnold Davidson, translated by Graham Burchell (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

26 *Ibid.*, 269.

27 Adam Ferguson, *An Essay on the History of Civil Society* (London: Transaction Publishers, 1995).

28 Freud’s discussion of fetishism, relevant here, occurs in the second essay, ‘Infantile Sexuality’, of his study *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (available online at <https://www.sigmundfreud.net/three-essays-on-the-theory-of-sexuality-pdf-ebook.jsp>; accessed 9 October 2017). Like the fetish itself, the concept has taken on a life of its own. Many, notably Slavoj Žižek, have pondered the tie between this discussion and Marx’s concept of the ‘fetishism of commodities’ that appears in *Capital* volume one, a concept Freud wrote as if unaware of. See Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 1989), 11–53.

29 Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 313.

fraught theoretical and practical baggage I have invoked through the term ‘postcoloniality’, a term that marks both the tenacity of the postcolony and its uneven globality. It is as much a where, as a when.

The hesitation this introduces in our strategic thinking is one that might be extended to the putative aim of such thinking: the university. Brown very much proceeds on the assumption that the university has fallen under threat from neoliberalism, and quite apart from the matter of what precisely constitutes this threat, there is the matter of whether it marks a difference of degree or of kind. Has, in effect, an event befallen the university from its outside? To elaborate the point, and to bring it directly into contact with the founding assumptions at work in my reading, it is worth recalling the way Bill Readings in the still influential *The University in Ruins* produces the distinction grounding his own account of the change Brown is both diagnosing and critiquing.³⁰ For Readings, the crucial matter has to do with the difference between the university of culture (specifically, *Bildungs*) and the university of excellence. Although his thinking of the latter as radically ‘dereferentialized’³¹ and thus empty has been challenged (Sam Weber), it seems also pertinent to stress that if plotted along the lines traced in Ismail’s *Culture and Eurocentrism*,³² there is little worth redeeming in what the drive to excellence has put under heavy manners.³³ Even if we acknowledge that the intellectual project of the German university, and the notion that the state would invest in the twin governing principles of the freedom to teach and the freedom to learn are decisive developments, one cannot treat the structure brought into being under the heading of *Bildungs* as a structure unmarked by the intellectual and political heritage within which ‘culture’ could be meaningfully contrasted not only – as Norbert Elias has shown – with the aristocratic notion of ‘civilization’, but with the fraught notions of society and nature.³⁴ Others have stressed that Readings has overreached in his application of the German model to the Americas (Dominick LaCapra), but the question is not primarily an administrative one. It has to do with what the university is understood to be for, and when Brown links political man with the notion that the university ought to be cultivating the knowledge necessary for ‘citizens’ (or whomever) to participate in a robust democracy, she is implicitly accepting Readings’ account of what is at stake in the rise of the university of excellence, and *mutatis mutandis*, its ‘German’ orientation.³⁵

But to repose Archie Bunker’s stunning query: ‘What’s the difference?’ To further tease out the implications of this argument and begin bending this back around to the concept of austerity and the terms of confrontation with it, the matter of governance

30 Bill Readings, *The University in Ruins* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997).

31 *Ibid.*, 17.

32 Ismail, *Culture and Eurocentrism*.

33 Weber’s powerful and subtle engagement with Readings, someone with whom he shares certain fundamental assumptions, appears in ‘The Future of the University’ in Terry Smith, ed., *Ideas of the University* (Sydney: Research Institute for the Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Sydney, 1996).

34 See ‘Part One: The Sociogenesis of the Difference between *Kultur* and *Zivilization*’ in Elias’ multi-volume study *The Civilizing Process, Vol. 1: The History of Manners* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1969). Edmund Jephcott’s English translation appeared in 1978. Although Elias restricts his historical attention to the work of class in the production of this conceptual difference, his insights rhyme with those keen to situate class within a logic of empire.

35 See Dominick LaCapra, ‘The University in Ruins?’ *Critical Inquiry*, 25(1) (1998), 32–55.

calls out for attention, especially because it is in the modality of a depoliticised politics that the difficulties faced by Brown become clearest.³⁶

Governance, notably faculty governance as a modality of what Foucault, Brown and Antoinette Rouvroy³⁷ (despite her trenchant caveats) call ‘governmentality’, is understood – at least in the North American context – to give expression to ‘academic freedom’, both as a set of principles, but, just as importantly, as the institutional means by which to articulate and defend them. In the policy documents that set out the codes of professional conduct in many universities, academic freedom is insistently coupled with responsibility, and coupled in a way that invites reflection if for no other reason than that ‘responsibility’ introduces a certain autoimmune disorder within the practices of faculty governance. One is free to teach and to learn, but responsibly.

Again, in the North American context, ‘academic freedom’ has long been understood to fall within the remit of the extramural and transnational professional body of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP). As Matthew Finkin and Robert Post remind us in *For the Common Good*,³⁸ the AAUP emerged out of the early exertions of Arthur Lovejoy and Edwin Seligman. Along with Seligman, the founding membership of the organisation included two other economists: Richard Ely and Frank Fetter. The presence of Fetter, an epigone of the Austrian School and Friedrich Hayek in particular, might well imply that neoliberalism was represented in the very founding in the AAUP, but more urgent, I would argue, is the fact that the philosopher *hegemon* of the group, Arthur Lovejoy, spilled much ink attempting to bring the concept of ‘freedom’ in academic freedom into alignment with anti-communism. Although he makes no overt appeal to Hayek’s infamous *The Road to Serfdom*³⁹ in which the concept of economic planning is described as having an irrevocable relation to feudalism and thus to anti-democratic backwardness, his argument asserts that if one believes in communism, one does not believe in freedom. After laying out what he characterises as the ‘philosophy of academic freedom’, this is the way Lovejoy puts the matter in ‘Communism versus Academic Freedom’:

It is, then, first of all, to safeguard academic freedom that members of the Communist Party should be excluded from university teaching positions. They are allies of the most threatening enemy of that freedom now existing in the world; and, even though at present they have no prospect of suppressing it in America, they cannot be depended upon to carry on their professional activity in a free institution by the method and spirit of the scientific investigator. If they are consistent and devoted party members,

36 The discussion of academic freedom and responsibility that follows first appeared in the online publication of the American Association of University Professors, *The Journal of Academic Freedom*, 6 (2015), and followed from a panel organised by the Modern Language Association on the topic of academic freedom. There, as here, its aim is to draw attention to the risks of arguing, and ultimately protesting, on terms set by others.

37 Antoinette Rouvroy, ‘The End(s) of Critique: Data-Behaviourism versus Due-Process’ in Mireille Hildebrandt and Ekatarina de Vries, eds., *Privacy, Due Process and the Computational Turn* (New York: Routledge, 2012).

38 Matthew W. Finkin and Robert C. Post, *For the Common Good: Principles of American Academic Freedom* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009).

39 Friedrich A. Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom* (London: Routledge, 1944).

the conclusions they express will conform to the shifting dictates of the party line—which is to say that they will not be conclusions resulting from the free pursuit of knowledge, uninfluenced by extraneous pressures and irrelevant motives.⁴⁰

Lest one object that this post-dates the founding of the AAUP, it must be pointed out that the definition of academic freedom that Lovejoy sets to work in this piece is literally lifted from his 1920 article in *The Nation* on the same topic. In short, it is not a precipitate of the Cold War. It is a principled formulation that seeks to make sense of the intellectual implications of the Russian Revolution, one deeply influenced by debates within the leadership of the AAUP over the critique of capitalist economics embodied in the revolution.

To further clarify this while bringing into focus the theme of responsibility, I turn, briefly, to Hayek's chapter 'Responsibility and Freedom' in *The Constitution of Liberty*. Here is how Hayek yokes together the two titular concepts.

Liberty not only means that the individual has both the opportunity and the burden of choice; it also means that he must bear the consequences of his actions and will receive praise or blame for them. Liberty and responsibility are inseparable. A free society will not function or maintain itself unless its members regard it as a right that each individual occupy the position that results from his action and accept it as due to his own action.⁴¹

Later in this chapter, which includes a compulsory diatribe against modernity and its impact on the social context in which the consequences of one's actions might or might not be discerned, Hayek explicitly justifies socioeconomic inequality (remember Locke here) by proposing that those who decry such inequalities have simply failed to grasp the fact that in freely choosing to avoid taking responsibility for their (in)actions, they have condemned themselves to social deprivation and misery. Although in the final chapter, 'Why I Am Not a Conservative', Hayek continues to grope toward the neoliberal moniker, it is clear that his construal of the coercive relation between freedom and responsibility (if you want to be free, you had better assume responsibility for your actions) is neoliberal to the core. One might even say that Hayek contradicts himself in both insisting that freedom is about being free of constraints on one's actions, while stressing that responsibility is tied to freedom in constraining individuals to act so as to secure the freedom to do so. Moreover, like Lovejoy, Hayek abjures what he calls socialism because it complicates the relation between freedom and responsibility by preaching that 'every child has a natural right, as citizen, not merely to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, but to that position in the social scale to which his talents entitle him'.⁴²

40 Arthur O. Lovejoy, 'Communism versus Academic Freedom', *American Scholar*, 18(3) (1949), 335.

41 Friedrich A. Hayek, 'Responsibility and Freedom' in *The Constitution of Liberty* (London: Routledge, 2006), 71.

42 *Ibid.*, 82.

Against such a view, and in the name of a more robust account of responsibility, one might be drawn to a less illiberal account of responsibility, such as is to be found in Jean-Paul Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* (1943), notably the section of part four simply titled 'Freedom and Responsibility'. However, what both links and separates Hayek and Sartre stands out clearly in the following passage from the Hazel Barnes translation.

The essential consequence of our earlier remarks is that man being condemned to be free carries the weight of the whole world on his shoulders; he is responsible for the world and for himself as a way of being. We are taking the word 'responsibility' in its ordinary sense as 'consciousness (of) being the incontestable author of an event or of an object.' In this sense the responsibility of the for-itself is overwhelming since he is the one by whom it happens that *there* is a world; since he is also the one who makes himself be, then whatever may be the situation in which he finds himself, the for-itself must wholly assume this situation with its peculiar coefficient of adversity, even though it be insupportable...It is therefore senseless to think of complaining since nothing foreign has decided what we feel, what we live, or what we are.⁴³

What Sartre and Hayek share is their insistence upon the essential tie between freedom and the individual. Little semantic daylight separates either the individual 'burden' of choice, and a *pour-soi* condemned to be free, or the individual member of a society who accepts the consequences of his/her actions, and a subject who is the incontestable author of his or her acts. Georg Lukács' well-known disagreement with existentialism might well have stressed this perplexing tie between phenomenological ontology and proto-neoliberalism, but it did not.⁴⁴ We, of course, are compelled to entertain this very perplexity, even as we must acknowledge the ontological character of what differentiates their views. Among the various outcomes of entertaining this perplexity lies, of course, the disturbing proposition that the freedom thought to be secured by faculty governance – and presumably in the name of political man – is precisely the freedom that has exposed it and the university to the ravages of neoliberalism.

In the sardonic analysis of property in *The German Ideology* – perhaps the first text acknowledged to have been read and criticised from the animal's point of view – Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels illuminate, via their critique of Antoine Destutt de Tracy, the short step between individual and identity. 'Nature has endowed man with an inevitable and inalienable property, property in the form of his own individuality.'⁴⁵

43 Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*, translated by Hazel Estella Barnes (New York: The Philosophical Library, 1959), 553–554 (emphasis in original).

44 Georg Lukács, 'Existentialism' in Epifanio San Juan Jr., ed., *Marxism and Human Liberation* (New York: Delta Books, 1973), 243–266.

45 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1998), 245.

Rendered audible here, especially as Marx and Engels underscore the resonance between *propriété* and *proper*, is the explicit evocation of property that, if read back through my earlier discussion of Locke, clarifies the subterranean level at which the startling alignment of existentialism and neoliberalism is secured: one's own properties are precisely properties, that is, unequally distributed results of one's self exertions on a world thought to be empty not simply of others, but of other relations to property. If, as I have argued following Blyth, the logic of austerity gets its primordial traction from Locke's account of property, then I think we are prompted to consider that austerity is always already at work in the agency of freedom when that agency is confused with the modality of subjectivation we grasp through the term 'identity'. Despite its superficiality (he never quite gets to the belonging of violence), Amin Maalouf's discussion of the matter is quite pertinent here.⁴⁶

Two final observations about *Undoing the Demos*. First, it seems important to supplement Brown's trenchant insistence on the micro practices of neoliberalism (the broad introduction of performance metrics that both rationalise and necessitate privatisation), with the observation that if this is indeed an effort to subject thought to both formal and real subsumption, then the bearer of thought cannot be treated as a mere contingency, as a by-product of subsumption. Put differently, the nature of the tie between political man and identity is crucial to grasping the real workings of the metrics of privatisation, Rouvroy's algorithmic hesitations notwithstanding. Second, the effort to grasp this tie necessarily draws attention to the historical challenge of actually differentiating between the present of neoliberalisation and the past of what Readings has called the university of culture. Important is not the matter of setting the historical record straight, whatever that might mean, but of understanding that political man – as a member of a re-emergent *demos* – was *already* a problem, especially from the theoretical standpoint we might call the critique of Eurocentrism.

To conclude, I will wind back around to my opening and the motif of searing but, as it were, from the other side. Having redrawn the historical boundary between the structure of the university and its contemporary predicament, it seems fitting to recall that when universities first began to form in what was emerging as Europe, they largely resulted from the demands of students – people insisting that they be instructed – often in law – by an acknowledged master, and these arrangements in the Latin-speaking world were called *Studium Generale*. Although universities now insist upon dating themselves (Bologna in 1088; Paris in 1123), even historians acknowledge that their origins are impossibly obscure. What seems, in numerous accounts, to have been enabling was the agitation of those wishing to have the freedom to learn, suggesting plainly enough that student protest is *endemic* to the very structure and concept of the university. Although this might imply that the university is founded in power politics, if this freedom articulates through identity with responsibility, then

46 See Amin Maalouf, *In the Name of Identity: Violence and the Need to Belong*, translated by Barbara Bray (New York: Arcade Publishing, 2001). This is a study, however pertinent, that would have benefited from attending more carefully to Derrida's early critique of his mentor, Levinas, in 'Violence and Metaphysics: An Essay on the Thought of Emmanuel Levinas' in *Writing and Difference*, translated by Alan Bass (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1978).

surely the question arises: what is the responsible way to protest the institution whose self-serving account of freedom frames the very question of responsibility? How – and this is a question I direct to the ears of our comrades in the South African student movements – how do we *effectively* strike a blow against the university of austerity? Of course, in invoking the *Studium Generale*, I intended to reawaken a set of questions I think first put before us by Patricia Hayes when she asked us to think about whether we understood much about what Barthes meant by his contrast between the *punctum* and the *studium*. Indeed, my opening discussion of searing was very much formed in the shade cast by her remarks. At this point, I hope it is clear that if searing is a way to repeat austerity differently, then in a sense the punctal intervention by which the individual burns herself in the heated encounter with the *Studium Generale* must be understood – precisely to the extent that it is done in the name of an identity declared to be as yet unrecognised by the *Studium* – not as a challenge to the logic of austerity, but as its real extension into the discourse and practice of protest. In this, petrol-bombing archives or instructional space is indeed the responsible way to challenge the university of austerity, *but this is the problem*. What is required is a risking of this form of responsibility.

If FeesMustFall, and they must, it is in order to facilitate access to the contemporary embodiment of the *Studium Generale*. This harks back to the archaic demand to learn, a *Forschungstrieb* as Freud had the gall to call it.⁴⁷ But learn or research precisely what and why? Here it is vital that we distinguish two parsings of the query, ‘What is the university for?’ If ‘for’ is glossed as ‘function’, then this query must be understood to be asking after the *function* of the university. Demanding access to the university must also then be understood to be a demand to serve or at the very least acknowledge the function set for the university by the state. If that function is defined as facilitating one’s integration into the circuits of neoliberal governmentality, then it is also clear that all the university can be for, that is, stand for, under these circumstances is the subordination of learning to training. Here, and I am not the first to make the point, one might point out that the university is providing the corporate and professional world with a service it ought to be enabling the state to pay for.

But what of those who wish to learn rather than train? In effect, what of those who wish to become incalculable, immeasurable? What of those who believe that the university ought to serve a function other than that of socioeconomic integration – that it ought to stand *for* something else? Apart from this distinction between purpose and position, such queries presuppose the *existence* of the university, and, as Jacques Lacan noted about ‘free association’, it is not free – in other words, however low fees become, the cost of higher education remains *someone’s* burden.⁴⁸ In effect,

47 As with the earlier invocation of fetishism, the ‘research drive’ (*nota bene*, drive, not instinct) is formulated by Freud in ‘Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality’ in *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume 7 (1901–1905)*, translated from the German under the general editorship of James Strachey (London: Vintage, 2001), 194.

48 The matter is raised in Lacan’s early essay, ‘The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis’ in *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*, translated by Bruce Fink (New York: W.W. Norton, 2007), 207. His invocation there of indentured servitude illuminates in a flash why Lacan mattered to the young Félix Guattari and other clinicians at La Borde.

the struggle against the university of austerity ought to recognise itself as a political struggle over the state apparatus, a struggle one of whose tasks is that of reconstructing from what Derrida calls 'the cinders' a public sector capable of making sustained, legitimate demands on a national budget.⁴⁹ The archipelago of centres, institutes and think tanks strewn across the face of the earth can only with utmost circumspection advance its presumed, highly privatised model in the current climate.

But let us turn the screw even tighter. If the university itself is an institution about which thoughtful people might have serious theoretical and political reservations, and if austerity has brought even the most spectacular and aggressive forms of protest into accord with its logic, then how, to invoke Theodor Adorno's famous quip, are we to hate it properly?⁵⁰ How are we to risk its freedoms and responsibilities without folding the one austere into the other?

Doubtless, 'hate' is too strong a word. To avoid using it, I will urge that we draw inspiration from Freud's commentary in *The Interpretation of Dreams* on the dream of the burning child, a dream organised around the sentence, 'father, can't you see that I am burning'.⁵¹ Crucial to Freud's reading, and I will insist on the word, is the vigorous shifting between several senses of 'burning', some more figural than others. To move quickly, the verb *brennen* designates in the dream a fire caused by a candle, but also a fever raging out of control. Spoken by a son to a neglectful father it is also a request for love; it is an expression of desire. Dreamed by a father *about* the neglected son, it is the acknowledgement of an Oedipal recursion coursing through their relation. Rivalry. Because the fire in the dream serves to awaken the dreamer, the burning takes place precisely on the bridge between sleep and waking life, in effect at the limits of the subject. Taken together, what emerges from this shifting is what, following David Wills,⁵² we might call the trembling, or as I prefer, the rattling, of a structure. Another word for this might be 'deconstruction', where what is at stake is precisely the strategic task of *occupying* a structure, but in order to 'hate' it properly, that is, immanently. Outside in, inside out. All those of us either inside this structure, the university, or wishing to enter it, must ask ourselves, how and where does this relation fall? I am thus urging us to entertain the political difference between adding fuel to a fire and risking responsibility, not by pretending that austerity has reached its limit in bombing it with our identities, but by working to pose what deserve to be called burning questions. May I propose that the question of austerity ought properly to fall near the head of any agenda we might draw up from here, and that it fall in that part of the agenda designated 'for action'.

49 Jacques Derrida, *Cinders*, translated by Ned Lukacher (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1991). See in particular page 67, where Derrida – at the time embroiled in the national struggle over the role of philosophy in the French high school curriculum – brings the figural heat of the 'cinder' to bear on the university.

50 Although it invites comparison with the dubious virtue of self-loathing, well known throughout the academic world, Adorno's proposition that only an internalised tradition can be hated properly appears in aphorism 32 in *Minima Moralia: Reflections from a Damaged Life*, translated by E.F.N. Jephcott (London: Verso, 2006).

51 Freud discusses this unsettling dream – an early instance of the puzzle unravelled and unravelled in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* – in the chapter titled 'The Psychology of the Dream Process' in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume 5 (1900–1901)*, translated from the German under the general editorship of James Strachey (London: Vintage, 2001), 509–511.

52 Public lecture at Derrida Today 2015 conference, unpublished.