Prelude

Hands Off Our *Jouissance*
The Collaborative Risk of a Shared Disorganization

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Do we really mean to take shelter from our *jouissance* in the order of utility, to become “a branch of the service of goods,” in the mistaken hope that the “human sciences” will be rewarded for doing so?

L.O. Aranye Fradenburg, “Group Time, Catastrophe, Periodicity”

As for what motivated me, it is quite simple . . . . It was curiosity—the only kind of curiosity, in any case, that is worth acting upon with a degree of obstinacy: not the curiosity that seeks to assimilate what it is proper for one to know, but that which enables one to get free of oneself. After all, what would be the value of the passion for knowledge if it resulted only in a certain amount of knowledgeableness and not, in one way or another and to the extent possible, in the knower’s straying afield of
himself? There are times in life when the question of knowing if one can think differently than one thinks, and perceive differently than one sees, is absolutely necessary if one is to go on looking and reflecting at all . . . [W]hat is philosophy today . . . if it is not the critical work that thought brings to bear on itself? In what does it consist, if not in the endeavor to know how and to what extent it might be possible to think differently, instead of legitimating what is already known?

Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*

We are beings who can neither live nor die without artful signification.

L.O. Aranye Fradenburg, “The Liberal Arts of Psychoanalysis”

I sit in one of the dives / On Fifty-second Street / Uncertain and afraid

In 1981, Michel Foucault gave an interview in the French gay press, *Le gai pied* (he had mistakenly believed his identity would be cloaked, but the interview concluded with “Merci, Michel Foucault”), in which he freely sketched out what he saw as homosexuality’s “historic occasion to reopen affective and relational virtualities, not so much through the intrinsic qualities of the homosexual, but due to the biases against the position he occupies; in a certain sense, diagonal lines that he can trace in the social fabric permit him to make these virtualities visible” (Foucault 1996a, 311). More important, Foucault believed, than the questions of “who am I?” and “what is the secret of my desire?” would be to ask, “What relations, through homosexuality, can be established, invented, multiplied, and modulated?” (Foucault 1996a, 308). It is important to note that, for Foucault, the possibly utopic potential of homosexuality would be available to anyone, gay or straight or whatever, who might experiment with new “affective intensities,” new friendships, and new modes of living that could “yield intense
relations not resembling those that are institutionalized” (Foucault 1996a, 310).

It was at this same time, and following from his ongoing work on the history of sexuality (but with what can be described as a significant, and often overlooked, detour within that work),¹ that Foucault became interested in rehabilitating ascesis, and ascetics, as a practice of the care of the self:

the work that one performs on oneself in order to transform oneself or make the self appear which, happily, one never attains. Can that be our problem today? We’ve rid ourselves of asceticism. Yet it’s up to us to advance into a homosexual ascesis that would make us work on ourselves and invent—I do not say discover—a manner of being that is still improbable. (Foucault 1996a, 309–310)²

Foucault was at pains in many of his lectures to distinguish care of the self from knowledge of the self (i.e., the Delphic dictum: “know thyself”), partly because he did not believe in an ascetic praxis in which the ultimate aim was to “discover” and perhaps also regulate, surpass, and even renounce a self that was always already there (a preoccupation of later Christian culture, to be sure); rather, ascesis would name a set of practices or daily exercises (as in late classical Stoicism) aimed at what David Halperin

¹ See, for example, Davidson (1994), Deleuze (1986), and Tuhkanen (2005/06).
² In 1981, when Foucault gave this interview, he had already embarked on a series of lectures that he would continue (until his untimely and tragic death in 1984) at the Collège de France, the University of Vermont, UC-Berkeley, New York University, and other sites on the hermeneutics of the subject, technologies of the self, care of the self, and freedom; see Martin at al. (1988), Foucault (1996b), Foucault (1999), Foucault (2001), and Foucault (2005).
has described as a continual process of becoming-queer: “an identity without an essence, not a given condition but a horizon of possibility, an opportunity for self-transformation, a queer potential” (Halperin 1995, 79). One never arrives at the self, but instead, continuously works upon processes of self-transformation. This is, importantly, an aesthetic project, an “art of living,” a “style of life,” a tekhnē aimed at producing a self-always-becoming as a “beautiful and good work” (Foucault 2005, 424).

This work upon the self that one “happily never attains,” which is also a concern for and care of the self, has something to do with freedom as well—a term not often associated with Foucault’s thought, especially by those who oversimplify his entire ouevre as being only about the ways in which various structures and techniques of power produce knowledge and individuals, with apparently no escape route out of the power-knowledge nexus. And yet much of Foucault’s late writings were precisely concerned with “the definition of practices of freedom” and ethics as “the conscious practice of freedom” (Foucault 1996b, 433, 434)—with freedom here to be distinguished from the idea of liberation (the setting free of selves that have supposedly always been there and were simply repressed, in hiding, etc.). For Foucault, freedom was “the ontological condition of ethics” and ethics is “the form that freedom takes when it is informed by reflection” (Foucault 1996b, 435).³ And what this also means is that, for Foucault (as well as the late classical writers, such as Epictetus, Seneca, and Marcus Aurelius, whom he was reading at the time), ethics is a practice (an ascetics, or set of exercises) of freedom that revolves around the fundamental imperative: “Take care of yourself.” One of the tragedies, I would argue, of social and cultural life in the

³ It is important to note here that, for Foucault, as for the ancient Greek writers he was studying, an ethos named modes of being and behavior—of living—as opposed to naming some sort of prescriptive morality.
present (and of gay life, more narrowly), is that we have never really taken up, collectively, Foucault’s call to work on ourselves in order to invent improbable manners of being, new modes and styles of living, polymorphous affective intensities, and new relational virtualities and friendships. Instead, as Joshua Glenn has written,

[e]verything today encourages us to see the dark side, the folly, the impossibility, not just of utopia but of an anti-anti-utopian social order where we’d have a project in common besides selling our commodified labor, intellectual or otherwise. Everything encourages us to think we face a choice between detached houses in a row, where we cook our dinners in private, or else the gulag. . . . Sure, the company of misfits would make you feel bad sometimes; but it also feels bad to have nothing to look forward to but marriage, work and TV. (Glenn 2009)

Some of us have devoted much of our lives to cultivating new relational modes and the company of misfits (an agonistic yet joyful venture, to be sure, in which we exult in the exquisite difficulties of becoming-with-others), but when I re-read Foucault’s 1981 interview, as I often do, I mourn that, as Adam Phillips has written, we have “not had the courage of [our] narcissism”—we have not found “a version of narcissism that is preservative at once of survival and pleasure,” which “would be to have the courage of one’s wish for more life rather than less” (Phillips 2008, 98).

A CCURATE SCHOLARSHIP / CAN UNEARTH THE WHOLE OF FENCE / FROM LUTHER UNTIL NOW / THAT HAS DRIVEN A CULTURE MAD

It can be argued that the entire oeuvre of Aranye Fradenburg has been concerned with this sort of courage for
“more life rather than less” (with all of its attendant risks, its sufferings as well as its joys), and with the sort of queer work that Foucault called for—this “techne” or disciplining of the self as a “beautiful and good work”—and moreover, with this care of the self, and thus her work, “composed of eros and dust,” has served as a sort of lighthouse for Auden’s “affirming flame.” This work (this career) culminates now in Staying Alive, a book that can be described in précis as an elegant and erudite defense of the humanities (and more largely, of the public university, with all of its ruly and unruly knowledge disciplines) as the very site par excellence of the practices of the care of the self, and of other selves (for Fradenburg, as literary-historical scholar and psychoanalyst, attends more than Foucault ever did to the arts of intersubjectivity and therapeutic care that contribute to a more general eudaimonia, or flourishing). This is to speak, as Fradenburg does here and elsewhere, of the university as reservoir and generator of styles of living and selves (and groups) as works of art and desiring-assemblages (ever contingent packs and multiplicities, always on the move, and creating “breakflows out of which desire” continuously pours forth), without which, our lives (intellectual and personal, and who can tell the difference sometimes?) would be vastly impoverished.

Indeed, there has been no voice within premodern studies more insistent on the subject of the ways in which disciplinarity, desire, enjoyment, work, groupification, and care of the self intersect in always risky (and even melancholy), yet necessary and productive fashion, and with the ways in which aesthetics, signifying, intersubjectivity (intimate and ex-

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4 From W.H. Auden, “September 1, 1939”: “Defenseless under the night / Our world in stupor lies; / Yet, dotted everywhere, / Ironic points of light / Flash out wherever the Just /Exchange their messages: / May I, composed like them / Of Eros and of dust, / Beleaguered by the same / Negation and despair, / Show an affirming flame” (Auden 1979, 95–97).

5 Deleuze and Guattari 1983, 37.
timate), and self- and world-building are importantly enmeshed. Fradenburg’s work has never been just about medieval studies, although it may appear as such to some—rather, it has always concerned itself with living and enduring, with creaturely attachments to meaning-making as a form of thriving and flourishing, as well as with the ways in which institutional and disciplinary life (university life) are bound up with desires that are “unaccountable” and “always on the move” (Fradenburg 2002b, 64), despite all of the attempts of the university’s managerial technocrats (and methodologically uptight scholars) to say otherwise. Fradenburg insists that we can never fully know ourselves (personally or institutionally), and therefore unknowing becomes an important component of what we do in here. In this sense, Fradenburg’s entire body of work fleshes out what Geoffrey Bennington has claimed (by way of Derrida) is the primary work of the University—that it has “a responsibility to foster events of thought that cannot fail to unsettle the University in its Idea of itself” (Bennington 2010, 28; see also Derrida 2002). Indeed, the future (our personal futures, our group futures, our institutional futures) is not really possible without not knowing for sure, and as Fradenburg argues further,

To be able to anticipate, plan, project a future or into a future, we have to not know for sure, because we have to suspend judgment even while exercising it, knowing that we don’t know (everything). Ethics—and ultimately psychoanalysis—emerges from a willing of this suspension, a paradoxical knowing of non-knowing. (Fradenburg 2009, 96; my emphasis)

Fradenburg’s work is, pace Bennington, an “event of thought” that draws important attention to “the contingency and changefulness of living” (Fradenburg 2011a, 596), and outside of premodern studies, her thinking and
writing sits alongside the work of theorists such as Lauren Berlant whose work pays important attention to “the emotional time of being-with, time where it is possible to value floundering around with others whose attention-paying to what’s happening is generous and makes liveliness possible as a good, not a threat” (Berlant 2011, 85–86).

Refusing to jettison loose and fuzzy pleasures in favor of a supposedly austerely rigorous disciplinarity (where one opts for supposedly objective truths over subjective, or increasingly, intersubjective feelings and pleasures) and vice versa, Fradenburg has insisted in her work, over and over again, that enjoyment and disciplinarity have a critical relationship, one that we who are situated within the university decouple at our peril. As she wrote in her book *Sacrifice Your Love: Psychoanalysis, Historicism, Chaucer*,

Discipline does not teach us the identity of pleasure with the good; rather, it drags desire out into the open, pours gasoline on it, and sets it on fire, which is why it so easily becomes desire’s object as well as its means. (Fradenburg 2002b, 7)

For Fradenburg, the “passional and technical coincide in the register of our jouissance,” and most importantly, discipline “enhances jouissance; it multiples and extends its

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6 I would note here, too, as an aside, that Fradenburg’s more recent focus on the ways in which scientific method and the humanistic arts of interpretation, as she writes in this volume, “actually enhance one another (in practical as well as theoretical ways),” admirably takes up Abraham Maslow’s call in the 1960s for “rehumanizing (and trans-humanizing) science” and for biology to “shake itself loose from a pure physical-chemical reductiveness” (Maslow 1966, ii). Indeed, what *Staying Alive* demonstrates is that, more recently, the sciences themselves, such as neuroscience, are “now establishing, however (at times) unintentionally, the importance of artistic and humanist training to mental functioning.”
possibilities, its potential for the remaking of identities” (Fradenburg 2002b, 252, 7). Put another way, desire and the sorts of passions and compulsions that lead to certain intensely ecstatic experiences are integral to the work of the academy, which often does not admit the importance of (disorganized) subjective life to its “proper objects” of study. I use the term “disorganized” here purposefully, and have lifted it from Lauren Berlant’s essay “Starved” (cited above), where Berlant writes that what we are “starved” for right now (in social life) is not necessarily sex or romantic intimacy, but something like sex, or like affect—in short, “the collaborative risk of a shared disorganization” (Berlant 2011, 86). We might reflect, too, that the university is one important form of social life—it is not just a place where we study, think, and develop knowledge apart from our “real lives.” The university is a form of life, a habitus, and we live (and desire and agonize) there with others. As Donna Beth Ellard writes in this volume, the university can sometimes “feel as inaccessible as a luxury estate in Montecito,” yet Fradenburg’s work here in this volume “offers theory and praxis for staying alive, personally and professionally, by encouraging living practices that double as reading practices.”

Within the setting of the university, with its disciplines that often jostle against and compete with each other for ever-dwindling resources, and within specific disciplines themselves, where different groups of scholars often square off against each other over methodological and other divides,

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7 In Sacrifice Your Love, Fradenburg defines jouissance (an almost unbearable intensity that is also a transgressive excess of pleasure) this way: “Jouissance is the point at which pleasure and pain crisscross, when there are no more objects, and the only thing left for desire to desire is the unknowable beyond of insensibility. With the loss of its objects, the I also loses its self-presence—or, at least, the vulnerability of its self-presence becomes felt experience. Pleasure protects us from jouissance by delivering as much jouissance as the I can bear and still be there to bear it” (Fradenburg 2002b, 18).
Fradenburg’s thinking becomes vitally important for seeing how

[group] desire makes what we call knowledge. *There is no other kind of knowledge than this; this is what knowledge is and we make it.* It is neither illusory nor objective; it is an artifact, carefully crafted, tested, debated, within groups, between groups, over time, and across cultures. (Fradenburg 2002b, 10; her emphasis)

Because of the ways in which Fradenburg has always insisted on the productive (if also agonistic) enmeshment of desire and discipline, I catch in her writings an echo with Jonathan Lear’s argument, in “Eros and Unknowing” (a beautiful reading of Plato’s *Symposium*), that we should not, in our intellectual life, “leave the human realm behind,” but should

get deeper into it—its smells, feels, textures, and the imaginary feelings we give to them. Whatever ‘higher’ or ‘deeper’ meanings there may be, they do not transcend human life, but lie immanent in it. The body, its drives, and the bodily expression of mind all lend vitality to ‘higher’ mental functions and to social life. It is to this particular subjectivity with which we are pregnant; and it is from this that we give birth in beauty. (Lear 1998, 166)

As Fradenburg herself has more recently argued, “The embodied, and therefore affective, nature of cognition is not a figment of the psychoanalytic imagination, but is asserted everywhere in contemporary neuroscience.” As to beauty, and its importance, “[a]esthetic form is a spell-binding (or not) attempt to transmit and circulate affect, without which not much happens at all” (Fradenburg 2010, 66). Further, aesthetic experience “is grounded in, indeed is the ground of, ‘attachment,’ and we do not be-
come ‘human’ without it” (Fradenburg 2010, 67).

In addition to demonstrating, throughout her work, the ways in which knowledge is shaped by the continual (and risky) dance between enjoyment (affect, feeling, and drive) and discipline (the rigors and constraints of study and work), especially with relation to the work of the signifier and signification (the primary matter of the humanities, but also of the biological sciences), Fradenburg’s work has also everywhere affirmed (perhaps in a lighter mood) the importance of play, over necessity, as the mother of invention (see, for example, Fradenburg 2011a, 597), where “[p]lay is about signifying and therefore about becoming,” and becoming “in turn is about process, in particular about processes of transformation of states of mind and body” (Fradenburg 2011b, 57). Further,

Interpretation and relationality depend on one another because all relationships are unending processes of interpretation and expression, listening and signifying. In turn, sentience assists relationality: we can’t thrive and probably can’t survive without minds open to possibility, capable of sensing and interpreting the tiniest shifts in, e.g., pitch and tone. (Fradenburg 2011a, 602)

Ultimately, “[p]lasticity, stylistics, enrichment are not embellishments of living process but are inherent in it” (Fradenburg 2011b, 45), and thus the humanities play an important role in helping us to develop certain arts of living and aliveness that not only allow us to want more

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8 As Fradenburg puts it in Sacrifice Your Love, “our jouissance extends itself by means of the signifier’s power to (re)distribute life and death” (Fradenburg 2002b, 63). And in “Living Chaucer” she reminds us that, “scientific signifiers have the same wayward intersubjective, intertextual, intergenerational lives as do ‘literary’ signifiers” (Fradenburg 2011b, 47).
rather than less life, but also help us to develop a repertoire for what Sara Ahmed has called “the politics of the hap,” which is “about opening up possibilities for being in other ways, of being perhaps,” and about working “toward a world in which things can happen in alternative ways” (Ahmed 2010, 222; my emphasis). This is a critically important project in an era where neoliberal capital turns our dreams and other forms of resistance into commodities in the space of a nanosecond, and where our every move is surveyed, digitized, and sold as data to whoever wants to purchase the information necessary to plot our moves in advance of our arrival at desires we no longer own. Should the university not be, on some level, a haven for resistance to such techno-capture of every aspect of our lives? Will success (and happiness) only be measured by the dollars we pile up and the gadgets for distraction we accumulate, or shall we wish, rather, for a laboratory-imaginairium in which one’s life (and all of knowledge) undergoes processes of invention and re-invention (without end) in the company of like-minded seekers who value surprise and unsettlement over certain answers? Such is one image, for me, of an ideal university, and while few would argue that the university today is not broken in some sense (it is not ideal, in other words, in Fradenburg’s or anyone else’s terms), as Michael Snediker writes in this volume, Fradenburg’s emphasis on “our swerving attention to the fuzzy world we’re making takes some sting out of this being the case.”

It is important to note here as well that, for Fradenburg, the university—and the humanities, more particularly—is a shared, intersubjective project, and the signifier (for example, poetry) has played no little part in a form of sociability (and even companionability) that is critical for self-transformation and progressive social change: “symbols enable living process” and what “enables us to risk change is the feeling that we are understood and (there-
fore) accompanied” (Fradenburg 2011b, 45, 60). As Fradenburg has argued in many places, play and shared attention are so important to so many species, including humans, that they may even be an end in themselves, and this is something the humanities and sciences have in common that they do not always readily acknowledge or see. As Ruth Evans explains about Fradenburg’s method in this volume, “[i]t’s not a choice between a scientific explanation on the one hand and a semiotic one on the other; we need both.” We might call this sort of play and shared ludic attention learning, or the university: the endless (playful, but also at times, sorrowful) processes we must commit ourselves to, with their open-ended and poetic and rowdy mutliplicity of perspectives, and their cultivation of the non-utilitarian arts of life, which may have more to do with personal and social well-being than we have previously imagined. Or, as Daniel Remein writes in this volume, “Many artifacts indeed do represent, or mimic, or encode—but some ornaments just decorate, an appointment for which they are no less needful in the physical wonder of sentience.” For these, and many other reasons, Fradenburg’s work has long hailed us to a cross-temporal pedagogical-artistic project that asks us, not just to innovate our scholarship accordingly, but to reclaim the humanities itself as the site of desire and knowledge, of care and attachment, of new relational modes, and thus, of love itself. Put another way, her work creates a space similar to the meeting-places of the cities of ancient philosophy, such as the banquet hall in Plato’s

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9 It should be noted here as well that the longest possible historical perspectives upon processes of signification (such as those crafted by Fradenburg in her work as a premodernist) are critical, for as she has also written, “Signifiers are remarkably mutable, but they can also be very persistent—and persistent does not mean timeless. Signifiers enable repetitions, revivals, and resurgences; they mark the spot where things have gone missing, hence where we begin to look for them (again)” (Fradenburg 2009, 89).
Symposium, which “are the sites of a metaphysical sociability sympathetic to the beneficent madness of love” (Bersani 2008, 81).

Defenceless under the night / Our world in stupor lies; / Yet, dotted everywhere, / Ironic points of light flash out

The three terms most richly productive (and ubiquitous) in Fradenburg’s work of the past fifteen or so years—even as she has moved from a focus on literary narrative and poetics (especially Chaucer) and on “discontinuist” histories (national, courtly, aesthetic, sexual, queer, psychoanalytic, and so on) to what I would call a more public intellectual mode of writing about the arts more broadly, under the aegis of various neuro-cognitive, biological, anthropological, and psychoanalytic discourses and practices¹⁰—are probably (and as elaborated above) desire, discipline, and jouissance (with various associated terms never far behind, such as love, enjoyment, wonder, beauty, excess, sublimity, feeling, sentience, affect, violence, pain, anxiety, loss, separation, suffering, trauma, and

¹⁰ Although it has to be noted here that Fradenburg’s longstanding romance and companionship with Chaucer never ends, and as she wrote in her recent essay “Beauty and Boredom in the Legend of Good Women,” much of her work has been concerned with seeing more clearly the tragic side of Chaucer’s work, while also attending to its therapeutic comedy (Fradenburg 2010, 74; see also Fradenburg 1999). This resonates with Fradenburg’s own writings which, although resolutely insistent on the necessity of enjoyment, feeling, pleasure, and aliveness (on, frankly, refusing to let go of our desires or to have them “disciplined” away by various Others, to stop moving—which is to say, to stop living), are also everywhere suffused with the notice and marks of melancholic longing, “angsting,” the various endangerments of vulnerability, and the spectres of loss, mourning, and death. Her work thus possesses a dark and complex beauty that (thankfully) does not lend itself to easy calculations. See, especially, in this vein, Fradenburg (2009).
death, among others), which in turn are always related to “techniques of living” (Fradenburg 2002b, 4, 9). In essence, no matter which text of hers we might be reading, Fradenburg seems to be always talking about something she says more explicitly in “Group Time: Catastrophe, Periodicity, Survival,” where she wrote that “enjoyment is the matrix of knowledge, and knowledge is not diminished thereby.” Further, “Interpretation and explanation are activities central to libidinal structuration and vice versa. . . . We thereby reclaim our technical work [the humanities, for example] as the work of desire, and desire as that which makes the world” (Fradenburg 2002a, 232).

There is probably no better introduction than the lines cited above to the current work you are now holding in your hands (or viewing on a retina or liquid display screen), which joins a growing body of work on the state(s) of the University, best described as critical self-reflections and public intellectual polemics on the state(s) of higher education by those who know it very well from firsthand experience, either as tenured professors, college administrators, adjunct instructors, or graduate students and members of the ever-growing academic precariat.  

11 In this respect, I see real affinities and important (heretofore un-noted) linkages between Fradenburg’s thinking and that of Jane Bennett in her book The Enchantment of Modern Life (2001), especially with regard to Bennett’s argument in that work that the will to social justice is “sustained by periodic bouts of being enamored with existence.” Further, “[a]ffective fascination with a world thought to be worthy of it may help to ward off the existential resentment that plagues mortals, that is, the sense of victimization that recurrently descends upon the tragic (or absurd or incomplete) beings called human.” Ultimately, for Bennett, “one of the tasks proper to ethics is to enjoy the world” (Bennett 2001, 12, 13).

12 Aaron Bady springs most notably to mind in this latter category—see his collected writings at his zunguzungu blog at The New Inquiry: http://thenewinquiry.com/blogs/zunguzungu/—although it
(occasionally critiques of the university also come from think tanks and policy institutes, mainstream journalism, cultural criticism, and the like). These reflections can be narrow-mindedly conservative—Allan Bloom’s *The Closing of the American Mind* (1987) and Dinesh D’Souza’s *Illiberal Education* (1991) spring to mind, as does David Horwitz’s *The Professors: The 101 Most Dangerous Academics in America* (2006)—or they can be more progressively liberal, such as Marc Bousquet’s *How the University Works* (2008), which addresses labor inequities in higher education; Derek Bok’s *Universities in the Marketplace* (2003), which outlines the commercialization of the university and its disciplines; Christopher Newfield’s *Unmaking the Public University* (2011), which shows how unequal access to higher education for Americans is a result of conservative campaigns to thwart the university’s democratizing functions; and Benjamin Ginsberg’s *The Fall of the Faculty* (2011), which demonstrates the detriments to higher education that have been caused by the rise of “all-administrative” universities, just to name some of the more notable examples of the past ten or so years.¹³

The most compelling and philosophically provocative work in this vein up until now, for me, has been Bill Readings’ *The University in Ruins* (published two years after Readings’ untimely death in 1994), partly because it offers a vision of a university-to-come (or an always un-

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¹³ And in the vein of horrifically depressing accounts of the dismantling of public higher education, by way of the UK system, especially in terms of access, quality of instruction, and research funding, see McGettigan (2013), and for the implications of what is happening in the UK for US system, see Newfield’s (2013) review of McGettigan’s book.
realized-yet-possible institution) that I feel I can believe in and work on behalf of, and with which Fradenburg’s current work has no little solidarity. In his book, Readings argued that, partly due to certain processes of transnational globalization, whereby “the rule of the cash nexus” has replaced “the notion of national identity as a determinant in all aspects of social life,” the University (capitalized to indicate its historical status as an idealized institution) has become a “transnational bureaucratic corporation” and “the centrality of the traditional humanistic disciplines to the life of the University is no longer assured” (Readings 1996, 3). Because “the grand narrative of the University, centered on the production of a liberal, reasoning subject, is no longer available to us,” it is “no longer the case that we can conceive the University within the historical horizon of its self-realization” (Readings 1996, 9, 5). Readings prefers the term “post-historical” over “postmodern” for the contemporary University, “in order to insist on the sense that the institution has outlived itself, is now a survivor of the era in which it defined itself in terms of the project of the historical development, affirmation, and inculcation of national culture” (Readings 1996, 6; his emphasis). Ultimately, the University is “a ruined institution, one that lost its historical raison d’etre,” but which nevertheless “opens up a space in which it is possible to think the notion of community otherwise, without recourse to notions of unity, consensus, and communication” (Readings 1996, 19, 20; his emphasis). This is a space, moreover, where the University “becomes one site among others where the question of being-together is raised, raised with an urgency that proceeds from the absence of the institutional forms (such as the nation-state), which have historically served to mask that question” (Readings 1996, 20).

Indeed, the University, however “ruined,” must strive, in Readings’ view, toward building a “community that is not made up of subjects but singularities”: this community would not be “organic in that its members do not share
an immanent identity to be revealed,” and it would not be “directed toward the production of a universal subject of history, to the cultural realization of an essential human nature” (Readings 1996, 185). Rather, this would be a community “of dissensus that presupposes nothing in common,” and that “would seek to make its heteronomy, its differences, more complex” (Readings 1996, 190). In this scenario, the post-historical University would be “where thought takes place beside thought, where thinking is a shared process without identity or unity”—this is ultimately “a dissensual process; it belongs to dialogism rather than to dialogue,” and instead of a new interdisciplinary space that would reunify the increasingly fragmented disciplines, there would be a “shifting disciplinary structure that holds open the question of whether and how thoughts fit together” (Readings 1996, 192).

Readings’ thinking accords well with Derrida’s in his essay “The University Without Condition,” where Derrida argued for a “new humanities” and “unconditional university” that would “remain an ultimate place of critical resistance—and more than critical—to all the powers of dogmatic and unjust appropriation” (Derrida 2002, 204). This unconditional university, further, would provide harbor for “the principal right to say everything, even if it be under the heading of fiction and the experimentation of knowledge, and the right to say it publicly, to publish it” (Derrida 2002, 205). The humanities would have a privileged place in this unconditional university, because the very principle of unconditionality “has an originary and privileged place of presentation, of manifestation, of safekeeping in the Humanities. It has there its space of discussion and reelaboration as well” (Derrida 2002, 207).

Although Readings’ argument in The University in Ruins has been subject to carefully considered counter-critique,14 it remains today, I would argue, a powerful

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14 See, for example, LaCapra (1998), where he argues that the
spur to thought and action for those of us working within or on behalf of the public university who are concerned with the future of humanistic teaching and scholarship, and with the increasing numbers of persons who are being treated as the “bare life” of the academy—our non-tenure-track instructors, for example, but also our students. These are also the lives for which we must “take care.” While Readings gave us a highly trenchant critique of the ways in which the American university has become a transnational bureaucratic-managerial corporation, thus disrupting and weakening the role of traditional humanistic disciplines (and we might pause to consider how prescient he was), more importantly, he also suggested ways in which this situation might (perversely? positively?) open new (heterotopic and post-historical) spaces “in which it is possible to think the notion of community otherwise”: this community would not be “organic in that its members do not share an immanent identity to be revealed,” and it would not be “directed toward the production of a universal subject of history, to the cultural realization of an essential human nature” (Readings 1996, 185). One might argue (and I will) that Readings’ ultimate hope for the University as a space in which the question of “being-together” and disciplinarity itself would be permanently en-

contemporary American academy is not as much a “transnational bureaucratic corporation” as it “is based on a systematic, schizoid division between a market model and a model of corporate solidarity and collegial responsibility” (LaCapra 1998, 32). Further, LaCapra argues that Readings’ insistence on the fact that “the older ideals of culture, Bildung, the liberal subject-citizen, and the nation-state are no longer relevant” in the contemporary academy belies the fact, in LaCapra’s view, that these things were always phantasms or idealizations, “made to cover a much more complex and changing constellation of forces that varied with nation, region, and group” (LaCapra 1998, 38, 39). LaCapra also wonders, “with respect to the present,” if “culture, ideology, and the nation-state are as evacuated or obsolete as Readings believes” (39). See also Royle (1999) and LaCapra (1999).
tangled and left purposefully open and unsettled, and where we would work to make our heteronomic differences more complex, has never really been put into serious practice. It would be too open-ended, of course, too experimental, risky, and perhaps, non-practical (and really messy in terms of administration), and yet, nothing strikes me as so necessary. Happily, Fradenburg’s new work takes up the mantle of Readings’ hope and extends it with important new research and reflection on the importance of the humanities’ role in the arts of intersubjectivity so critical for making anything happen at all, and for a vision of the university as a shared (if dissensual) enterprise.

A lot has happened since Readings’ book was published—his critique certainly appears dead-accurate and the “ruinous” situation he sketched, especially in terms of the university’s corporate-managerial structure and the concomitant assaults on the humanities, has intensified. And since the financial crises of 2008 onward, the idea (long-valued) that the university should be an important public (and publicly-funded) concern, especially for its vital role in securing various forms of social egalitarianism and a broad-based meritocracy for the greatest numbers of persons possible (not to mention, in order to enhance cognitive and technical innovations of all varieties, for the pure advancement of knowledge and practices of making, regardless of cost-based outcomes), no longer appears to be either viable or what might be termed a common concern. All across the country, states are slashing university budgets and expecting institutions of higher education to figure out more and more ways to pay for themselves, and to be “profitable,” whatever that might mean—MOOCs, or Massive Open Online Courses, are one prominent and lamentable outcome of this type of thinking (see, for example, Bady 2013a). This may be an oversimplification (because I can’t do justice in this Prelude to all of the myriad examples in Fradenburg’s book, which itself supplies plenty), but let’s just say that the foregoing state of affairs has led to all sorts of jockeying
within the university today to both winnow down and/or eliminate disciplines that appear non-utilitarian or to dress up traditionally philosophical disciplines (such as literary studies) in more utilitarian and applications-based clothing. In addition, protocols of oversight and accountability have intensified to the point of leaving faculty little time and room to actually do the work they were hired to do: teach and research and mentor, and direct and innovate their own curricula and disciplinary collaborations. Most harmful of all, and in direct proportion to the budget-slashing maneuvers of state legislatures (and the dearth of progressive federal amelioration of such), tuition and student debt levels are at unsustainably crippling levels, and the ranks of tenure-track faculty have shrunk to something around thirty percent of all teaching positions (see, for example, June 2012 and Editors 2012).

The university system in the state of California, where Fradenburg works as a professor of English, clinical psychoanalyst, and educational activist, has represented an important battleground in this current situation, partly because the state’s economic woes have been so severe since 2008 (and more importantly, because of Governor Jerry Brown’s and former UC President Mark Yudof’s dismantling of the UC Master Plan, whereby all eligible California citizens had been entitled to a place within the University of California, regardless of means), but also because the state has long been internationally admired for its public research institutions (their quality and also their broad access) and also has a long and enduring history of faculty and student activism on behalf of the notion of a free, open, democratic, and public university. Fradenburg


16 See, for recent examples, Bady (2013b), Michael Meranze and Christopher Newfield’s blog Remaking the University (http://
burg herself has long been an outspoken activist on behalf of the public humanities (and against administrative malfeasance in all of its guises), but she has been extremely busy since 2008 helping to organize and lead critical and activist interventions within the UC system: she founded the group ‘Saving UCSB’ and organized a faculty walkout at UC-Santa Barbara in 2009, and among many other activities too numerous to mention here, she is a tireless letter writer and public speaker on behalf of academic freedom, the value of the humanities, and the importance of open access to public higher education.

Thus we are fortunate that Fradenburg has decided to devote an entire monograph, *Staying Alive*, to an insightful and laser-like diagnosis of the various neoliberal and technocratic forces currently assailing and undermining the public university, and to a fierce polemic on behalf of the humanities as the critical site for fostering forms of artfulness critical to the future of the keeping open of the question of our “being-together,” both within the institution and outside of it. And she has generously decided to publish it with an open-access and para-academic press (punctum books), because she agrees (thankfully) that work within the humanities, and especially public intellectual work, needs to have the widest purchase possible upon the public commons and should not be kept locked behind corporatized and other paywalls. And in the spirit of collaboration that we at punctum and the BABEL Working Group certainly hold dear, she has crafted the book to include companion “fugue” essays by myself (this Prelude), Donna Beth Ellard, Ruth Evans, Julie Orleman-ski, Daniel C. Remein, and Michael D. Snediker, so that

uotherescue.blogspot.com/), Robert Samuels’s blog Changing Universities (http://changinguniversities.blogspot.com/), and California Scholars for Academic Freedom (http://cascholars4academicfreedom.wordpress.com/), just to cite a few examples of UC’s robust student and faculty advocacy and activism on behalf of the public university.
the book is part-scholarly monograph, part-poetic-activist desiring-assemblage. The four chapters by Fradenburg can be read as a complete book (or “monograph”), and they can be read individually as stand-alone, broadsheet-style polemics. Each “fugue” chapter can be read in tandem with the chapter by Fradenburg to which it responds—a work in “two voices,” as it were—or as a “flight” that “chases” after Fradenburg’s thought, or as a well-lit “connecting passage” between the small yet expansive “rooms” (the “stanzas”) of her thought (all associated meanings of “fugue,” in music and beyond). Similar to what Deleuze and Guattari said about their work together, “Since each of us was several, there was already quite a crowd. . . . We have been aided, inspired, multiplied” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 3, 4). Again, this book is “an assemblage. It has nothing to do with ideology. There is no ideology and never has been” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 5). Rather, this is a (loving) labor of becoming-world.

Ultimately, and as outlined in detail above, Staying Alive—as a labor of public intellectual advocacy for the humanities, and the public university more largely—does not represent a departure for Fradenburg’s oeuvre, for she has always been concerned with defining and valuing the work (and importantly, the jouissance) of the liberal arts against the “order[s] of utility.” To briefly revisit her book Sacrifice Your Love, in the Epilogue to that work, Fradenburg discussed the importance of resisting, from within the humanities, the “utilitarian rhetorics that sustain the jouissance of capitalism,” and she urged us to take up the question of the jouissance of the academy, rather than assuming it is our task to discipline jouissance out of the academy. For one thing, we cannot discipline jouissance out of the academy, because discipline is always permeated with enjoyment. So why give ground on our enjoyment? (Fradenburg 2002b, 247)
Why, indeed? In fact, in her more recent forays into cognitive studies, animal behavioral research, neuroscience, evolutionary biology, biosemiotics, and the like (all of which disciplines inform the arguments of this book, along with psychoanalysis and literary-historical analysis, and cultural critique), Fradenburg has amassed an incredible body of scientific and other evidence for why we should not only not “give ground” on this enjoyment (with all of its positive and negative implications—i.e., enjoyment is a messy affair but no less necessary for life as a result), but also for the ways in which living itself is an art and the humanities provide the deepest reservoir of the non-utilitarian, excessive, ornamental artfulness so necessary, not just for surviving, but for thriving in this world. Contrary to recent polemics that simply urge the humanities to become more scientistic or technology-focused, to demonstrate their utility or even trophy their uselessness, Staying Alive does something remarkably different: it argues for the humanism of a new scientific paradigm based on complexity theory and holistic and ecological approaches to knowledge-making. It urges us to take the further step of realizing not only that we can promote and enhance neuroplastic connectivity and social-emotional cognition, but also that the humanities have always already been doing so. In this sense, Fradenburg’s work and thought exemplifies what Michael O’Rourke has called a queerly “roguish relationality” that is open to “an infinite series of [disciplinary] encounters,” which is also an opening to futurity (O’Rourke 2006, 36).

As Fradenburg writes in this volume, “Nature always exceeds itself in its expressivity”—which is to say artfulness is necessary for adaptation and innovation, for forging rich and varied relationships with other minds, bodies and things, and thus, again, for thriving—whether in the boardroom or the art gallery, the biology lab or the recording studio, the alley or the playground, the book or the dream. Bringing together psychoanalysis, science, aesthetics, and premodern literature (from Virgil to Cha-
ucer to Shakespeare), Fradenburg offers a bracing polemic against the technocrats of higher education and a vibrant new vision for the humanities as both living art and new life science. For me, especially, the book matters so profoundly, because—even if not overtly—it takes up and further exemplifies the necessity of Bill Readings’ vision of the university as a critical site for play, for non-utilitarian experimentation, for keeping knowledge unsettled, where, in Readings’ words (again), “thinking is a shared process without identity or unity.” And it further exemplifies the case for the critical value of the type(s) of intersubjectivity crafted through artful processes of signification that I really believe are the only route out of the greed, selfishness, fear of the Other, and violence that currently grips our world. And thus Fradenburg’s work also shares with Leo Bersani a deep and abiding investment in the question of whether the work of art might be able to “deploy signs of the subject in the world that are not signs of interpretation or of an object-destroying jouissance, signs of . . . correspondences of forms within a universal solidarity of being” (Bersani 2010, 142).

What this book also demonstrates—along with the important body of work known as “university studies” that this book now joins—is that those of us who work within the humanities must commit some of our most valuable resources (primarily, our always-encroached-upon time, and some part of our inner emotional lives) to academic activism, whether through letter writing, blog polemics, organized protests and strikes, collectivist agitation and intervention, mutual aid initiatives, and books such as these. We cannot just bide our time within the university, hoping things will get better, or even assuming they will (“all storms pass” is what many people seem to believe). The powers-that-be always want you to be patient and wait for things they never intend to give you (Martin Luther King Jr.’s “Letter From Birmingham Jail” never ceases to be instructive on this point). As long as we have shelter of any kind, and are willing to make room in that
shelter for those more vulnerable than we are, there is no reason to wait. Do we want to know what kind of university we want? Let us simply enunciate our institutional and disciplinary desires, as this book does, and in make-shift shelters. We are in Lear’s company now, and we have to seize hold of the university—as an institution, but also as a public trust—as our concern, and we must be willing to fight for that concern. As Julie Orlemanski writes in her contribution to this volume,

Academic-activist writings not only deliver dispatches from the numerous battlegrounds of higher education. They also call upon those who care to read them—those who might defend the institutional homes of speculation, imagination, and historical understanding. These writings are the communiques that circulate within the “army of lovers” and also pass beyond them, to unpresupposed outposts and new readers. . . . mobilizing reflections about learning in the present.


In some sense, this book constructs what Hakim Bey called a “temporary autonomous zone”: a site where some of us might gather (as authors and readers, friends and strangers, teachers and students, lovers and fighters) to practice our work as rogue agents in search of new means for the development of a certain institutional amour fou and “clockless however,” a “politics of dream, urgent as the blueness of the sky” (Bey 1985). The fact of the matter is—whether we inhabit student desks, tenure lines, adjunct positions, or post-/never-graduate, somewhere-other-than-here positions—now might be the time to take a bit more seriously the development of new and alternative
spaces (both within and without the university) for learning, for inquiry, and for knowledge-culture production. It turns out (and didn't we already know this?) that the future actually has to be constructed, and let's remind ourselves that this is the work of the present, and we need to enlarge our scope of collaboration beyond our specific institutions (if we have institutional homes), beyond our disciplines, beyond our so-called position and rank (faculty vs. adjunct, professor vs. student, etc.), and beyond the University proper. The real University should comprise everyone who wants to be a part of it, whether or not they have an official position or desk. And it will be in this work—the present-ing of the future, the future-ing of the present—that we will manifest ourselves. For this volume of Fradenburg's is also a collective manifesto, and it is to manifesting ourselves (making ourselves more present to each other, which is to also say, more responsible to each other) in some sort of collective endeavor that works on behalf of the future without laying any possessive claims upon it, that we might craft new spaces for the University-at-large, which is also a University that wanders, that is never just somewhere, dwelling in the partitive—of a particular place—but rather, seeks to be everywhere, always on the move, pandemic, uncontainable, and yes, precarious, always at risk, while always being present/between us (manifest). At the same time, we insist on perversely-hopefully laying claim to specific institutions and subject areas—the University of California, or premodern studies, for example—as collocations of objects and trajectories of thought that we desire to hold close to us, while also placing them in certain perpetual tensions with everything else (even ourselves).

Manifestos can be hackneyed, and even dangerous, especially when they assume a ground-clearing maneuver (i.e., whatever exists now must be destroyed to make way for the new), but I think we increasingly need them, because they help us to outline our commitments and desires in a writerly action that presences those commit-
ments and desires. That is Step 1. Step 2 would be doing something about it, and here again Fradenburg’s career, as scholar, public intellectual, and activist, is exemplary. In the manifesto (albeit, the manifesto that does not desire the violence of erasing the past or the Other), we express in an always-fleeting yet still phenomenologically palpable present a radical form of desire that seeks an alteration of the status quo, and while the manifesto often looks silly and hyperbolic and always unaware of the demise of its (vain?) hopes in the future (the retrospective-melancholic view), there is something sincere about it. It presents a radical opening to (or window upon) the risk of a fragile yet necessary honesty. We could do worse than to be honest with each other. We could do worse than to actually want things that we haven’t been told in advance to want. This is also a matter of contributing to the political imaginary that some believe is withering away (see, for example, Srnicek and Williams 2013 and Wark 2013). This volume is an important contribution, I want to argue, to the political imaginary.

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Is it possible that “heterotopia” might be one term (or route) by which to rethink the space of the university as both “closed” and productively “open” to alternative knowledge practices, inventive lives, and new relational modes that would allow us to take care—of ourselves, of others, and of this fragile institution we call a university, that has no little relation to the world? For Foucault, who coined the term, a heterotopia (which might be a psychiatric hospital, a cemetery, a mirror, a theater, a colony, a museum, a brothel, a library, a garden, and I will say, a university) “is capable of juxtaposing in a single real space several spaces, several sites that are themselves incompatible,” and thus opens onto “heterochrony” (Foucault 1986, 25, 26). Further, heterotopias “always presuppose a system of opening and closing that both isolates them,” but also “makes
them penetrable” (Foucault 1986, 26). The university seems an apt example in Foucault’s schema, for it both exists apart (in some important respects) from the nations, provinces, and cities within which it resides, as a sort of independent “colony,” and also comprises within itself separate spheres, or little other worlds—departments, schools, disciplines, and the like. In addition, because of its geographical placement, often either directly within urban centers or adjacent to them, and also its public functions, the university is somewhat permeable to the Outside, while also performing certain gatekeeping functions (these are lamentable, I might add). It is both set apart, comprising its own miniature heteroverses, and also woven into the fabric of the polis, which it reflects, like a cracked mirror.

Perhaps, like Foucault’s favorite example of a heterotopia, the ship—even the pirate ship—the university might be reconceptualized as “a floating piece of space, a place without a place, that exists by itself, that is closed in on itself and at the same time is given over to the infinity of the sea and that, from port to port, from tack to tack, from brothel to brothel” goes in search of “the most precious treasures”—in short, the university as “the greatest reserve of the imagination,” the heterotopia par excellence, without which, as Fradenburg demonstrates here in this volume, “dreams dry up, espionage takes the place of adventure, and the police take the place of pirates” (Foucault 1986, 27). In which case, let us set sail.

London and Washington, DC

REFERENCES


