Criticism and Cultural Knowledge

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Abstract In the 1990s, the humanities have been under relentless political and economic pressure. Internal self-criticism finds all too eager agreement from those who would like not to refine but to undermine the interpretive disciplines. This article claims that the only viable long-term response is the rapid and intensive development of the concept of cultural knowledge as the outcome of humanistic study. It also suggests several ways that this might be done: (1) by defending and expanding historicization, which has been a central target of the culture wars; (2) by explaining the value of nonscientific method, starting by avoiding the genuine methodological weaknesses of synecdochic sampling, dependence on noted authorities, encrypted ethics, confused (as opposed to complex) causality, and others; and (3) by elaborating methods of democratic governance among the disciplines, which would involve such measures as cross-disciplinary literacy, greater financial control for faculty, and direct contact between unrelated disciplines. Without these kinds of changes, higher education in general and cultural study in particular will not soon emerge from the Cold War.

These four scholars—Lee E. Heller, David R. Shumway, Michael A. Bernstein, and Dennis Bryson—all offer astute criticisms (in this issue) of the cultural and social fields they discuss. They also make generally accurate claims about how specific forces in American culture and society have shaped these fields. But I am less sure about the cumulative effect of their studies. Given their very strong criticisms of these various fields, what kinds of reforms would actually improve qualitative cultural analysis?

Each piece traces important features of a major social or cultural

Poetics Today 19:3 (Fall 1998).

discipline to the historical context and social attitudes in which it developed. Lee Heller writes that American Studies has been in the hands of a nationalism that drove its practitioners past the same landmarks of European influence again and again, detouring around those representing native American, African American, Asian American, and Latino American traditions. David Shumway also claims that nationalism has shaped the humanities in the United States, and that the professional demand of "scholarly disinterestedness" has masked imperialist and racist assumptions. Michael Bernstein makes a parallel point about U.S. economics. "Far from being a product of dispassionate inquiry," he writes, "some of the major advances in modern economic theory . . . were the result of a . . . mutual interaction with the wartime concerns of government and the national security agenda of the Cold War years." And Dennis Bryson suggests that a major foundation leader, Lawrence K. Frank, helped push American social science during the 1920s and 1930s toward a sweeping preoccupation with social control.

Together, these essays criticize established disciplines in the human sciences with valuable intensity. As I read them, though, I was sorry that the *improved* function of the disciplines they critique was not of more central concern. There have been periods when these fields seemed to offer something indispensable to society. The historian Paul S. Boyer (1985: 166) describes one such period—the two or three years between World War II and the Cold War that followed:

> Lewis Paul Todd was a young instructor at a Connecticut teachers' college when he heard the news of Hiroshima. Within hours, he began an impassioned essay published a few weeks later in a journal for high-school social-studies teachers. The news of August 6, he wrote, had made vividly apparent the chasm "between man's ability to solve the problems of the physical universe and his utter inability to solve social problems." The imperative response, Todd continued, must be to match the unleashing of atomic energy with "a revolution of equal force in the world of human relations." In an age of atomic bombs every other activity must be subordinated to "the job of *social engineering*."

The tone of social control is unmistakable, but so is the sense that social knowledge has a life-and-death urgency. John Dewey, Talcott Parsons, and a parade of academic luminaries, national politicians, and concerned citizens expressed identical sentiments. Boyer (ibid.: 169–70) continues: "'Ignorance of the science of humanity will lead us inevitably to our destruction,' declared Commerce Secretary Henry A. Wallace. 'Our great problems . . . are not the problems of the natural sciences,' added the Princeton physicist Henry D. Smyth. 'They are the problems of the social sciences, and of politics and of ethics, if you like.'" And in 1946, William

Ogburn called for "governmental funding of Manhattan Project proportions": "'For every subsidized piece of research in natural science there should be corresponding financial aids to research in social science'" (ibid.).

The essays by Bernstein, Bryson, Heller, and Shumway appear during a very different moment in the history of knowledge. Society expects little from the social sciences and likes them even less. It is worse still for the cultural fields. They were not on anybody's funding list in 1946, and they are only on hit lists now. The absence of external encouragement for cultural fields is matched by an absence of internal momentum and resolve. These four essays, then, arrive during a turbulent and uncertain passage in these fields' history, and their effects will be shaped by at least three features of the current debate.

The first is the perennial interest in *interdisciplinarity*. While it is true that interdisciplinarity never escapes the disciplines (Fish 1994), it is also true that the disciplines are constructed through interdisciplinarity. Even a venerable discipline, under examination, becomes internally interdisciplinary through the inevitable detection of competing factions that draw inspiration from different external disciplines—some economics draws on mathematics, for example, and others on organizational sociology. One of the fields under discussion, American Studies, is interdisciplinary by deliberate, long-term intent, having been developed to cover literature, politics, sociology, social history, art history, science history, education, law, and philosophy, among other fields. Each of these distinct disciplines can be broken down into separate internal components. Something similar has happened in the behavioral sciences, Dennis Bryson tells us, for their interest in social control grew directly out of an interdisciplinary effort among separate but overlapping fields. And of course any conclusions we can draw about American society and culture from this group of four articles will be interdisciplinary, as they collectively refer at least to humanistic American Studies, social psychology, and economics. Any disciplinary changes envisioned by these articles will develop through the inevitable interaction among disciplines rather than through the artificial isolation of one.

The second shaping factor is the trend that would not die: the culture wars and their kindred, the science wars. In the United States, public culture in the 1990s has brought us an unrelenting barrage of these polemics —the categorical dismissals of liberal or left-wing ideas as "politically correct," the dim-witted boasts of being politically *in*correct, the inflated controversies around the idea of racial integration known as multiculturalism, the obtuse displays of horror regarding the old Nixonian brainchild of affirmative action. Obviously all this was not regressive enough, and so

then came the sequence of books and conferences that denounced features of the cultural study of science that had been staples in the philosophy of science for thirty years, and which culminated in 1996 with the ghastly fracas surrounding Alan D. Sokal's "parody" of "postmodern science" published in *Social Text*. (I use the term "cultural study" to refer generically to all fields that study various aspects of "culture," broadly conceived; the term includes but goes well beyond the practices known as "cultural studies.")

All of these episodes express the many shapes of a single scandal. We could call it, most broadly, *historicization*. The basic idea is that the content of a discipline can be traced in some proportion to the social and cultural context in which it was produced. Though some get upset when they hear this called "relativism" or "constructivism" or other names, the abstract principle of contextualization is widely accepted. Before 1990, conventional wisdom had absorbed Thomas Kuhn's (1970) once shocking claim that the explanation of "scientific progress" "must, in the final analysis, be psychological or sociological. It must, that is, be a description of a value system, an ideology, together with an analysis of the institutions through which that system is transmitted and enforced." Before 1990, every interested party seemed to know that titles like "Logic of Discovery or Psychology of Research?" and *Farewell to Reason* referred to complex philosophical works and not to op-ed pieces written by theoretically minded English professors (Kuhn 1970; Feyerabend 1987, respectively). Now, however, some media figure will kick up a cloud of dust whenever one scholar puts affirmative action plans in the context of American racism, or another points out "the relationship of applied research and technology to military force" (Ross 1996b). These four articles employ the strategies of historicization that have been under constant fire in the culture-science wars.

The third shaping factor is the relentless downsizing of the culturally based disciplines. This is obvious on the federal level—the National Endowment for the Humanities has been financially stabilized in a shriveled condition, and the microscopic National Endowment for the Arts was at one point in 1997 marked for extinction by the House of Representatives. Some decentralized, long-term movements are even more significant. Most universities now employ nonpermanent faculty at twice the rate of 1970, and a huge proportion of the increase in "temporary" work has occurred in popular but cut-rate majors in the arts and humanities.

In English, many jobs in literature are being replaced by jobs in composition, which in 1996–97 comprised about a third of the Modern Language Association's job listings. "Comp" is an important and intellectually dynamic field that nonetheless is regarded by most university personnel as a

service provider rather than a subject of research. As such, it is a bellwether for humanistic fields. Schools save money by treating personnel as "in-person servers," like nurses and teachers, who are tied to local customers, persistently supervised, and paid less (Reich 1991: 176). In contrast, schools spend money by treating personnel as full-fledged knowledge workers, like electrical engineers or geneticists, who require expensive equipment, are recognized by national or international funding organizations, have real job mobility, and must be paid well. Institutions therefore have financial incentives to shift unprofitable fields out of expensive research and into "cost-effective" services, allowing even small humanities budgets to be frozen or partially recycled into more lucrative fields.

The humanities are especially ripe for this shifting to full-time service. Its research has always seemed like a hobby to outsiders, a form of self-cultivation that is good though optional for young people, odd if not irrelevant for adults, and sure to generate opinion and acrimony instead of genuine knowledge.

In short, the climate is such that these four essays' criticisms of humanistic fields—and of the developmental humanism of social scientists like Lawrence K. Frank—may be met with alarmingly general agreement.

So here is the predicament in the late 1990s. The humanities cannot retreat into traditional disciplinary authority. The 1980s convergence of prominent methodological rigor ("theory") and the social mission of preserving Western civilization was accidental and cannot be repeated. Yet "interdisciplinarity" cannot in itself define the intellectual or social purposes of cultural study. The culture-science wars have seriously damaged cultural study's credibility. People not involved in cultural study are tempted to shrug their shoulders and say, "First it came out that new cultural studies are relativist, ideological, and divisive to boot. Though you can't use rational methods or govern yourselves, you now want to govern science. Well, screw you—and your uppity field, too!" This is certainly not a happy foundation for disciplinary growth. To the contrary, it feeds rather than inhibits downsizing; specifically, it diminishes the stature of growth-minded cultural scholars who have supported newer areas of the human sciences, and who are often criticized for having sponsored ideas that provoked the wrath of the powers that be and that allegedly caused the punishment not just of the firstborn males but of the entire humanist village.

I see only one long-term solution—neither disciplinarity nor interdisciplinarity, neither imitations of science nor humanistic humility, but the rapid and intensive development of the idea of *cultural knowledge*. I mean by this the idea that the humanities do real research and produce real knowledge, forms of knowledge about culture with their own internal

laws. Versions of this have appeared before, as in the calls for a Manhattan Project for the social sciences I mentioned above. Parallel developments are well under way outside of academia, where, for example, business corporations have been studying culture as a form of cooperative and flexible governance for almost twenty years. Universities are still among the most socially sophisticated institutions in society, but academic humanists have *not* aggressively sought to make cultural knowledge central to the purposes and governance of their own institutions. Nor have they done better in making them seem central to society at large.

Although it does not do full justice to the arguments of these four articles, I have responded to them largely according to whether they help make cultural disciplines seem like potentially major players on an interdisciplinary terrain. Several basic ingredients of a strong notion of cultural knowledge can be inferred from them.

1. Retain Historicization

Retaining historicization means continuing to extend, refine, and develop it. Historicization is the driving axiom of these four essays and of the many other valuable analyses of knowledge that tie knowledge to "human interests" and truth to power. The links between these elements vary from case to case, but these essays succeed in making historicization revealing and important.

2. Show Culture's Nonscientific Status as a Strength Rather than a Weakness

We need to be much more insistent and eloquent about showing culture's nonscientific status as a strength rather than a weakness. Cultural knowledge rests on the study of consciousness in individual as well as collective forms. It is especially good at doing both at once—at studying the intersection of subjectivity as it is formed and affected by group relations. Cultural knowledge is a "qualitative" and narrative understanding, and on this point it should expound and demonstrate. Its enormous strength lies in the complexity and richness of its particularity and in the subtlety of generalizations drawn from these. Its brilliance emerges from its detection of vague and yet determinate forces, of shadowy effects missed by aggregate data, of suffering left unmeasured, of imaginations of things not seen (Gordon 1997). Cultural knowledge is antireductive—it grasps and then keeps multiple variables and numerous interconnected factors in perpetual motion. Cultural method is as it is because it has had to adapt to complexity on a

scale that is only beginning to be imagined by many areas in the natural sciences. It combines interior experience and intersubjectivity and large institutions and social forces and emotional trajectories because they are always interwoven. Cultural study links the physical world to the world of emotional and aesthetic states. It imagines sociological and artistic forces side by side; it can link coal miner, labor leader, and classical musician, just as they are linked in the same actual person (I am thinking here of a remarkable film about British coal miner-musicians called *Brassed Off* [directed by Mark Herman, 1997]). Cultural study imagines the conjunction of factors that would allow us to rule ourselves with the things we love.

In practice, however, cultural study often makes nonscientific method seem like a flawed and unformed version of the scientific. These four articles illustrate portions of this tendency, and do so in connection with their own strengths and intelligence—by this I mean that this tendency cannot be isolated as the mistakes of mediocre practitioners, which these writers are not. I itemize some questionable aspects of nonscientific method.

Synecdochic Sampling

Cultural study moves more readily than other fields from part to whole. It often beams in like an electron microscope on a particular text or person, identifies a pattern or structure there, and generalizes that structure onto a much larger unit. For example, David Shumway performs a careful reading of William Ellery Channing's 1830 statement about national literature and uses it to define a "major" national literature; he also notes that Channing's conception shows that nationalism is compatible with imperialism. By most standards of our field, these claims are well made, but what about those standards themselves? How do we know that we can say something about national literature or American nationalism on the basis of one essay by Channing, who is much better known for his religious thought? The same goes for Dennis Bryson's case study of Lawrence K. Frank. How typical were Frank's views about the proper outcome of social science? Cultural study has "sampling" issues that resemble those in the natural and social sciences, but which it handles differently. Unless these differences are confronted directly, sampling in cultural study can look like error rather than insight.

Citing Authorities

Cultural study tends to cite major thinkers or important specialists for both substance and shorthand. Lee Heller's essay offers a very useful survey of ideas about the relation between nationalism and literature that

constructs most of its paragraphs around citations of other critics. I think her call to move American Studies toward an antiassimilationist practice is extremely important. Yet the essay itself does not so much directly examine its own referent—the discourse of national culture—as it comments on other people's commentary about it. Scientific method continues to build its intellectual and social prestige on the superiority of experimentally based empiricism to the citation of authorities, on which it has always claimed prescientific knowledge had foundered. This contrast of course falsifies the way that scientific disciplines actually work and develop—reputation and convention do indeed play major regulative roles. But exposing another field's dependence on authority is no substitute for more clarity about our own.

Encrypted Ethics

Paul Feyerabend spent his philosophical career trying to redefine science as "one tradition among many," but he sometimes expressed even more suspicion of the pretensions of the social sciences. Some have claimed, he wrote, "that social analysis is a difficult matter and that it needs a severely theoretical discourse to succeed. I reply that a theoretical discourse makes sense in the natural sciences where abstract terms are summaries of readily available results but that theoretical statements about social affairs often lack content and become either nonsensical or trivially false when the content is provided" (Feyerabend 1987: 279). Feyerabend exaggerates, but his is a common view that can be translated into a more accurate claim: cultural study often uses terminology that encrypts evaluations rather than spelling them out.

Take Bryson's analysis of Lawrence Frank. Bryson describes Frank's project as one of "social control" and the "management and pacification of social life," which involves the internalization of norms and the "discipline of children" to bring about "a biotechnocratic utopia," making it "an episode" in what Michel Foucault describes as the "production of biopower." What critical evaluations are embedded in these terms? That an antidemocratic elitism sought to control society from above? If so, then Bryson's reader would conclude that the essay criticizes a sorry distortion of the behavioral sciences' policy agenda. The reader could infer this from Bryson's comment about these concepts' "highly dubious implications" and his claim that Frank's social engineering translated major political issues like class conflict and poverty into personal failures. But the reader might also like some of Frank's statements—as when he declares that, "To intelligence, organized knowledge, applied as social engineering, we must look for salvation." The reader might then conclude that Frank is really a

"democratic social engineer"—to borrow a term from William Graebner (1987)—who believes in enhancing harmony and cooperation in a troubled society, that these are values that make democracy possible, that children are always being socialized anyway, that all feasible utopias will require the application of "intelligence" and even engineering, and that Bryson's piece is best read as a chapter in the history of (inevitably many-sided) ideas. It would be easier to decide which reading the author supports if the relevant meanings of terms such as "social control" had been made explicit, or if their meanings had been posed as open questions.[1] Such open discussion of the term's political complexity would seem less like sneaky politics, less like the ambiguity that many onlookers identify as the ideology mongering of cultural study.

Uncertain Causality

Cultural study tends to make links through association, likeness, and parallel rather than through a demonstrated causal connection. There is often good reason for this: cultural causality is too complicated for the handful of causal variables that may suffice in other disciplines. The key to culture's power is the density of its structural, multivariable, reciprocal forms of influence. Thus it is appropriate, for example, that Bernstein is so clear about the structural and reciprocal nature of the ties between "modern economic theory" and "the wartime concerns of government and the national security agenda of the Cold War years."

But describing these ties is not so easy. Bernstein invokes different kinds of forces and agencies—the Allied victory in World War II lending great prestige to things American, the American Economics Association's distribution of the *American Economic Review* to damaged libraries abroad, a strong American economy's ideological validation of American economics, the increasing influence of mathematical analysis in the profession, American foreign policy's quest for economic hegemony in strategic areas abroad, and so on—and concludes with appropriate nuance: "It is possible to construe the American economics profession as an agent of, as complicit with, the Cold War ideology of postwar America, and at the same time to view the profession (if not its individual members) as in some sense a victim of the Cold War as well." This is exactly the kind of complex picture at which cultural analysis excels. And yet the causal links among various elements remain uncertain. The specific roles of the economics profession—or of a faction—do not clearly emerge from the backdrop of Cold War politics. This interesting discussion leaves the impression that

1. On the multivalence of "social control," see Ross 1991.

cultural analysis feels little obligation to specify causal sources and impacts.

Discrediting Disciplines

At some point, criticisms of a field get serious enough to make onlookers think, "Why not junk the whole project? These people can't do anything right anyway." I am not entirely sure whether these four critics feel that way about the fields they analyze or not. Since so many onlookers already assume a humanistic field like American Studies is a forum for idle malcontents, this air of uncertainty is unfortunate. I regret it especially around my own discipline of American Studies, which already harbors more antiassimilationist and antinationalist sentiment than nearly any other field I know. American Studies has also been more hospitable to women, people of color, noncanonical literature, and "critical theory" than nearly any other field, faint compliment though this may be. Heller and Shumway acknowledge such facts but do not integrate them into their analysis. Demystification leads to discrediting unless it explicitly leads to something else, to a particular reform such as the antiassimilationist research that Heller mentions.

The same holds for economics. What comes after we recognize that American economics has sponsored the global distribution of a market model that grossly simplifies economic behavior, systematically favors capital over labor, and intensifies poverty for the majority? Can economics be reformed by replacing its mathematical superego with institutional and social context, or should market models be systematically critiqued with mathematical arguments?

Unless blindness is shown to be mixed with insight, and insights past and future are specified, one of two things happens. Either a relatively low-status field will seem ridiculous and its members dupes, or a high-status field will make its critics seem like dupes. Either way, everyone gets more defensive and paranoid, learning curves collapse, and cross-disciplinary discussion turns into a free-for-all where the biggest losers are the fields that have the least "science" to flaunt.

In short, it is crucial that cultural fields not imitate or simulate scientific method but insist instead that their techniques and subjects require methods with an integrity of their own. Scientism has both sidetracked social and cultural research (as Bernstein and Bryson both note) and wrongly ratified science as the rightful supervisor of all knowledge. But rejecting piggybacking on science—as all these essays do—means that cultural study needs to take all methodological steps on its own, which involves better articulation of distinctively nonscientific answers to the method-

ological questions that cultural study shares with other fields. Cultural research will be free to do what it does best only when it has its own rich answers to these common questions.

3. Apply Methods of Democratic Governance among the Disciplines

Other fields' questions about how cultural study works must be answered, but cultural study also needs to have enough power to get those answers accepted. How can *nonscientific* knowledge take its rightful place in the governance of relations among all the fields? How can cultural study graduate from its designated junior status? How would this equal stature overcome the "two cultures" divide and the other polarities that have been damaging art as well as social, cultural, and scientific studies—polarities such as academic versus public knowledge, quantitative versus qualitative, popular versus expert control?

One answer is that science will always dominate and these polarities will always persist. It seems clear that technology and quantitative knowledge have greater power than culture in striking proportion to their greater power to propel capitalist development. It is almost as clear that the humanities received their boost in the 1980s when William J. Bennett, Lynne Cheney, and other publicists of the Reagan revolution thought these fields could serve as the cultural flank of a plutocratic front, a kind of book club auxiliary to the reconcentration of capital. When the humanities turned out to sponsor multiculturalism and cultural criticism, they were promptly dumped. Stepping down from chairing the National Endowment for the Humanities, Cheney then campaigned to eradicate it. This example suggests why all but traditionalistic cultural study will always be on trial, and yet it also shows that cultural study is taken more seriously than it often takes itself.

The science wars are a case in point. Books such as Paul R. Gross and Norman Levitt's *Higher Superstition* (1994) responded to recent science studies' successful efforts to examine not only the epistemology but the management of science. Kuhn had not claimed that scientists' cultural and social positions actually changed the *content* of scientific discovery.[2] And he said nothing to suggest that the direction of science should be influenced by specialists in culture and society. Kuhn's first wave of science studies ended without bridging the gap between the two cultures of science and society, science and art. This first wave may have seen culture as

2. See, for example, Steve Fuller's perceptive work on the Kuhnian compromise, especially Fuller 1996: 33.

an unavoidable constituent of scientific discovery, but the interpretation of culture's effects was left in the hands of scientists.

The second wave of science studies wanted to change this. It saw culture as a source of pervasive bias in scientific outcomes and a ground for the input of nonscientists, who, after all, understood culture, psychology, and politics as well as scientists did. Gazing on feminist critiques of science's culture and goals, scholarly analysis of military influence on the development of physics, or the whole range of social activism that has targeted particular technologies (nuclear power, AIDS research, etc.), scientists pictured cultural critics hanging out a sign that says, "under new management."

Critics may fuss about relativist attacks on scientific rationality, but they become vehement about the question of who will rule the quantitative fields. Scientists turn hostile when they see nonscientists seeking to manage their research. Nonscientists return the favor when they think scientists reject ordinary democratic oversight. The culture wars and the science wars had the same core issue: whether the question be multiculturalism or nuclear engineering, cultural study was identified with attacks on traditional forms of management in universities and society alike (Newfield 1993).

All this says to me that cultural study will strengthen its position only by figuring out better ways for academic disciplines to govern themselves collaboratively. Our current system resembles first-contact narratives—mutual ignorance among alien cultures occasionally interrupted by uncomprehending exchange.[3] The culture and science wars bear the mark of the current academy: specific criticisms and categorical invalidations get jumbled together, sometimes in the minds of their targets, somewhat less often in the actual arguments.[4] It will be very hard to develop relationships across the divisions of the humanities and the social and natural sciences given an embedded science supremacism, unequal economic status, and long histories of separatist feeling. And it will be impossible if we do not have the ability to take criticism, negotiate different methods, discuss diverse goals, and make only precise attacks.

We need a sweeping refederation of the disciplines on every side of the science divide. Since I have not heard many people talking about this, I do not think the formulations are far along. But a few elements seem to me to be part of any likely resolution.

3. On "patterned isolation," see Graff 1992: 130–35; Veysey 1965: 337–38.
4. For good overviews see Harding 1996; Ross 1996a; Winner 1996.

Open-Book Financial Policy

Unless existing inequalities can be measured and discussed, any faculty-staff conversation will be ignorant, manipulated, and ignored.

Faculty-Staff Détente

Nonteaching staff harbor their own perspectives on the institution as well as generally greater and more detailed knowledge of how it works. The faculty's political weakness owes much to its inability to work with staff on institutional issues. This particular tradition, if it continues, will hamper any positive institutional change.

Cross-divisional Literacy

It is hard for engineers to sit at the table and discuss their work with their colleagues from the literature department if the latter exhibit nothing but clinical cases of math anxiety. It is equally hard for literary scholars to hear engineers say that their majors should take literature courses if they like political squabbling. Mapping a multidimensional strategy for getting the more powerful technical fields to learn from the weaker cultural ones is beyond my present scope. But it is clear that the current isolation hurts everybody. If humanists fail to persuade their own people to read budgets and criticize financial assumptions, they will retain the minimal influence that they have right now. If engineers cannot convince their own people to read social and cultural analysis, they will inflict distorted development on society as a whole. The whole situation is alarming. On the one hand, humanities professors cannot offer cogent economic critiques of the *un*inevitable austerity policies that have now squeezed out a large portion of an entire generation of younger scholars. On the other, technical fields rarely show even polite interest in social and cultural issues intrinsic to their research, to say nothing of support for the nonscientists who analyze them. I am thus quite worried about the gap between quantitative and qualitative thinking; indeed, imbalances of power and mutual incomprehension seem to be getting worse.

Things would be better if faculty could achieve the level of an educated lay person in at least one field on the other side of the qual-quant divide. Maybe someday I will see an engineering friend in the library reading that quarter's *Poetics Today* as I sit down with another juicy issue of the *American Economic Review*. This crossing is particularly urgent between the humanities and social sciences, which exhibit bizarre incompetence about the different techniques with which they examine such common topics as racial inequality. These various kinds of crossing would make talking quite

a bit easier. And they would also make every field's research much better informed.

Routed Wannabes

Every culture-based field hatches practitioners who are constantly playing "more scientific than thou." We must neither shun nor bow to them, but analyze them with merciless rigor. Half the time, these science wannabes are not offering solid methodological critique but merely displaying their nose for the dominant males, who are usually scientists. Their main effect is to turn their particular version of empiricism or objectivism into a professional gatekeeper and to make cultural factors seem secondary. No discipline can develop properly from a position of inferiority. This is as true of cultural fields as of any other. But inferiority is the inevitable outcome for cultural fields whose internal debates are controlled by members who do not simply criticize particular methods and outcomes (which is vital) but who categorically reject the ambiguity and complexity of nonpositivist qualitative research. Cultural scholars who play that role must therefore be resisted.

Open-Book Power Balances

It is one thing to devise brilliant arguments. It is another to get a hearing from powerful disciplines that do not have to listen. Fields that are currently on top might see no reason to enter into discussions with weaker ones. What could we get out of it, they might ask, other than a loss of money and power? Their questions need specific answers. In the meantime, cultural fields should point out their power to avoid discussions of resources and collaborations and use the university's communicative ethic to bring them to the table.

Direct Interdepartmental Negotiation

Departments encounter each other mostly in administrative contexts—in competition for money in deans' offices, in chairs' councils, and so on. Attempts at direct intellectual exchange are rare and ridiculous without serious advance preparation on all sides. Meaningful progress on relations between chemistry and history or Spanish and geography will require unchaperoned encounters in which the agenda is set by the participants and where the usual administrative norms are suspended. Academics are completely used to putting fundamentally competing claims and differing aims—those between rather than within departments—into the hands of their supervisors. Given this legacy, direct negotiations will at first seem wasteful and strange. But they must be pursued. Real discussions will also

need to be backed by decision-making authority, or participation will be fitful and distracted. Such discussion will need to avoid impairing another field's internal governance with calls for external control. If collaboration does not allow for autonomy, then it will not (and should not) happen.

From mutual critique to collaborative governance, governance that continues and surpasses critique—that is where I would like the work of these essays to lead. I do not know exactly how this will happen. I do know that without these kinds of changes, the American university will never fully emerge from the Cold War. With these changes, though, we just might begin to build the Manhattan Project for social and cultural study that the Cold War broke off in the ground.

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