

In the age of Freedom Fries, it is worth recalling the proverbial wisdom of the French: *reculer pour mieux sauter*. As a way of thinking about the future of *Critical Inquiry* and its place in criticism, I'd like to begin with a brief recollection of its past. I've been around long enough to remember the first talk about founding a new journal here at Chicago. This was probably late 1972 or early 1973. The war was still dragging on, Spiro Agnew had gone down cursing the "left-wing media" (those were the days), but Nixon was still in the White House. The Watergate story was moving toward the phase of the public hearings that would rivet us all through much of 1973. Academics were still living in the long shadow of the events of 1968. At Chicago, you could tell that grudges about the student protests and the occupation of the administration building were still rankling both sides. They were palpable even to those who arrived as faculty or graduate students well after the events. I had spent half of the academic year 1968–69 in France and so had a sense of the aftershocks of '68 closer to its ground zero, so to speak. Neither structuralist nor poststructuralist thought was much in vogue around here then, but one was aware that heady theoretical work, not unconnected with events in Paris in the late '60s, was beginning to change how literary criticism—among other things—was conceived and practiced. There had been a *nouvelle vague* in cinema, too, and in its wake came a number of talented young directors—many of them American—who were helping to install film discourse as a lingua franca for politics, philosophy, anthropology, aesthetics, and ethics. This wave, indeed, had broken on the shores of Lake Michigan with Haskell Wexler's attempt to bring Godard and Truffaut together with Sartrean existentialism and a still incipient project in media theory to produce his fascinating documentary-fiction film about the Democratic Convention, *Medium Cool* (1969)—a film almost as much about the policing of race politics on the South Side of Chicago as it was about the policing of national media politics.

Insofar as I thought about the proposed new journal at all, or thought about it in relation to the world I have described, it just seemed to me silly, vain, and beside the point. I didn't know Shelly Sacks well, but I knew him to be a second-generation neo-Aristotelian and a theorist far more zealously committed to that line than, say, Wayne Booth, who was a co-conspirator in the enterprise. I knew Shelly Sacks, too, to be a scholar whose claim to fame was a book on Fielding framed very much within the neo-Aristotelian system. It seemed to me wildly improbable that an "interdisciplinary" journal under such leadership could make a difference to the world or anybody in it. I thought it likely to be redundant with *Modern Philology*. I thought it certain to be irrelevant to recent developments in contemporary thought and culture. When I saw that the first issue, or one of the first issues, featured a neo-Aristotelian exercise by Elder Olson—another defense, as I read it, of what the Yale critics had branded the Chicago school's fatal "fallacy of neo-classic species"—my doubts were confirmed. This was a doomed project if ever there was one.

Now if one were inclined to excuse this dramatically wrongheaded assessment, one might say that Tom Mitchell's arrival in Chicago and his quick ascendancy to the editorship of *CI* some years later made all the difference to its subsequent history. There is surely some truth in this, especially since Mitchell had strong interests in precisely those "developments in recent thought and culture" to which I alluded above. But quite apart from the fact that Sacks, Booth, and the original leadership of *CI* were responsible for the recruitment of Mitchell to their cause, there is an important respect in which, in spite of my complete failure to see it, the foundations for *Critical Inquiry's* success had been laid before he appeared on the scene. There was something latent in its strange unfashionability that gave the journal its chance. I want to describe this as a distinctive kind of attention to the disciplinary system of the cold war university. Not exactly

“theory”—at least not theory in the sense that we have come to associate it with, say, the famous Johns Hopkins symposium on structuralism in 1968. It was something more, well, Aristotelian than that, a methodological self-consciousness about critical practice that might better be described as a sense of where one is in the disciplinary scheme of things—at least in that part of the scheme that pertains to the arts, the humanities, and the interpretive social sciences.

There are features of the University of Chicago—its history and structure—that, while they pose obstacles and problems for many kinds of projects that might be undertaken here, also abetted the disciplinary self-consciousness that enabled *Critical Inquiry* to take the shape it did. But rather than speak of how the place shaped *CI*'s founding, I would like to say more about how the times did. For it is also in this same epoch that one would locate the beginning of the “humanities center” movement that has flourished in a way closely parallel to the success of *CI* over these thirty or so years. In 1973, there were scarcely any humanities centers and institutes in the United States. The genre had not been established in recognizable form. Now there are hundreds, and they are still being founded. In the mid-1990s, American humanities institutes founded their own consortium—the CHCI—with a director, executive board, and annual meetings and conferences. International membership in this consortium is on the rise, as the humanities center movement has spread around the world, and, even as I write this, new consortia are taking shape or gaining strength in Europe, Asia, and Australia.

A key connection between the rise of *Critical Inquiry* and that of the humanities center lies, I suggest, in the modern history of disciplinarity. There are many ways to tell this story, each, perhaps, with different implications for the question of what is to be done now. Michel Foucault's account, in a celebrated interview that itself dates to the mid-'70s, focuses on what he calls the emergence of the “specific intellectual,” whom Foucault distinguishes from the “universal intellectual.” The latter, understood in the Marxist tradition as the writer who speaks as the conscience and consciousness of society, is an Enlightenment type whom Foucault traces back the figure of Voltaire and forward as far as Sartre, whom he called “the last nineteenth-century intellectual.” The specific intellectual, no longer committed to the goal of the “just and true for all” nor to writing as the “sacralizing mark” of intellectual work, speaks from a particular disciplinary location within society (the asylum, the laboratory) but most often through the university. Indeed, on this account, the “university and the academic emerge...as privileged points of intersection” and thus as “politically sensitive areas.” Foucault identifies the figure of the atomic scientist, particularly Robert Oppenheimer, as the historical point of transition between the regimes of the universal and specific intellectual.

Now the prominence of, say, Muhammed al-Barradai in the debate on Iraq might itself be grounds for not dismissing Foucault's account out of hand. And the notion that intellectuals in the Age of the University operate through and not around the disciplinary system might be reinforced by any number of accounts of the history of the American research university. These, however, provide a chronology tellingly different from Foucault's, for they tend to locate the moment of transformation not in the 1940s with Oppenheimer but in the period 1870–1900, when most of the great research universities were either founded or transformed. Virtually all serious historians of higher education in America point to the emergence of the departmentalized disciplines, buttressed by national professional organizations and systematized job markets, as the defining event for the university in this period. (Thomas Bender goes so far as to suggest that, in the case of urban universities, this system was a displacement of the dominance of urban elites as the cities swelled beyond the capacity of earlier forms of order and decorum to regulate them; this is the *Gangs of New York* theory of how the academic disciplines took shape.) Where

Foucault, therefore, locates the emergence of the specific intellectual so close to his own moment in the 1970s that he seems to speak from the throes of that system, most historians of the American university would have it that by the 1970s the system was nearly a century old and, one may infer, ripe for revision.

Ironically, Foucault's own work would be an important part of that project of revision. Indeed, Foucault's work would contribute in no small part to a development closely linked to the parallel trajectories of *Critical Inquiry* and the humanities center movement in recent years. I mean the beginnings, also roughly datable to the 1970s, of a whole array of academic fields and practices that have come to be called "studies": gender studies, race studies, and cultural studies, of course, but also film studies, media studies, jazz studies, science studies, and so on—many of which have acquired their own smaller centers, committees, and programs. On this account, the system of departmental "disciplines" established in the late nineteenth century—in spite (or because) of the kind of sociological entrenchment that Andrew Abbott has identified—came to be shadowed by a whole array of new *subdisciplinary* fields that required *supradepartmental* organization (for example, humanities institutes) to enable them to develop. *Critical Inquiry's* distinctive contribution to this process stems from the initial framing of its project through the notion of *discipline* rather than *theory* and, concomitantly, from its insistence on a kind of writing that, while resolutely academic, is nonetheless intended to be intelligible, even useful, to academics in other fields. I don't know the figures, but my guess is that the readership of *Critical Inquiry* is overwhelmingly academic. My guess, too, is that, for the most part, its readers are, like its typical contributors, scholars of standing in a particular field or discipline who nonetheless have either strong interests in some other discipline or disciplines, strong interests in the way their discipline belongs to a larger scheme of disciplines, or both. Though the arguments and analyses in its pages have implications beyond the academy, *Critical Inquiry* does not itself directly speak beyond the academy. The intellectuals it publishes are specialized (if not exactly "specific" in Foucault's sense), even as they aspire to see around and work around the contours of their own disciplines.

As for the next thirty years, then, it seems to me that *Critical Inquiry* will need not only to continue to foster the birth and growth of these new "studies," not only to contribute to the array of sub- and shadow-disciplines. It will also need to become more self-conscious about the changes in the disciplinary system itself as this system is manifest, contradictorily, in intellectual constituencies (working groups, workshops, local projects, and so on) and in larger and longer term institutional structures, especially departments. We need to rearticulate the disciplinary system after three decades of "add-on" fields and programs. We need to do this not in order to cut costs or to rebind ourselves to a new regime of disciplinarity but, at least in part, to create new possibilities for interdisciplinary connection and exploration. The structure of the research university needs serious rethinking. Because the professionalized and market-driven practices of the national disciplines are so deeply entrenched, this effort must be large scale and it will not be easy, which is to say that it will require a journal of the intellectual power and prestige of *CI* even to make a start. And it will take much more than that, indeed, to make any headway.

Here, then, is a brief agenda for such an effort:

1. Work toward a more rigorous account of what a discipline is. From the perspective of the sort of Foucauldian historical epistemology with which *Critical Inquiry* is now to a degree associated, how might one produce the history not only of the disciplines but of the changing concepts of disciplinarity? How might one do this not just over the last century and a half but also in longer perspective? In spite of the relative scarcity of first-rate work on higher education

in America, some good work is now being undertaken in the history of disciplines, long and short, and it should be encouraged.

2. Work toward a better understanding of how the scheme of the disciplines might be said to compose a system. There are several relevant paradigms to choose from here, including Pierre Bourdieu's concept of the field and Niklas Luhmann's systems theory. Foucault himself made a stab at this in *Les Mots et les choses*. My sense is that the totality of the disciplines at any given time should be articulated not as a set of territories, or even as a set of parallel functions, or box of tools, but as a network of relatively autonomous practices in asymmetrical relation to each other; the disciplinary system will appear to have a different structure from the perspective of each discipline in it. Literary criticism's relations with history and musicology are not symmetrical with anthropology's or linguistics'.

3. Work toward a wider perspective of how the disciplinary system of the American research university compares and connects with other disciplinary systems around the world. Though we tend to make a strong distinction between "disciplines" and "area studies," even to the point of their being funded by different philanthropic foundations, the fact is that disciplinary systems are themselves area specific. Thanks to rapidly developing systems of student exchange and scholarly communication, the next thirty years will probably see more, not less, interaction among systems of higher education around the world. These interactions bring new opportunities for disciplinary self-awareness and might suggest ways of getting beyond some of the problems of the existing area studies paradigms.

I'm well aware that this might seem an all too academic agenda for a time, our own, that is marked by the worst foreign and domestic policy in my lifetime and by a level of public discourse about them that is impoverished beyond all imagining. Having missed my initial deadline, I actually started writing this piece on the day after Bush's forty-eight hour ultimatum to Saddam Hussein—the final signal of a failed diplomatic effort. My first attempts to draft this statement addressed everything but the academic realm. But then I remembered the origins of *Critical Inquiry* in the era of Watergate and how it made its difference by not setting out to produce a critique of that moment. So I tried to suggest how it might do so again.

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