

## Globalizing the Humanities:

### "Voice of the Shuttle: Web Page for Humanities Research"

As emblemized by the name of the latest release of Netscape's browser (Navigator 3.0, "Atlas"), we have come to believe that information technology is a titan: it carries the globe. Or to invoke a post-classical mythology, both "Navigator" and Microsoft's "Internet Explorer" recall the Magellans, Cooks, and others who first globalized the Western imagination. Whether or not the Internet will ever fully reach the third world or inner city, in short, it is at least in imagination truly a World Wide Web.

And yet the *Voice of the Shuttle: Web Page for Humanities Research*\* leads off by insisting on its geographical and occupational specificity--on its localism.

As in the case of all WWW pages, of course, its URL from the first testifies mutely to local provenance--in this instance: "the Humanitas server at the Santa Barbara campus of the U. California system in the ".edu" sector of the U. S." (where "U. S." appears by default in the lack of such further descriptors as ".uk," ".au," or ".jp"). And equally implicit, the very notion of "home page" argues that the information highway is not just about wanderlust but also heimat. In addition, however, VoS insists explicitly on its geographical or occupational zone:

--it advertises a pair of mirror sites calling attention to the U.S. location of the original;

--it reserves the top spot in its listings for "Featured Works" by UCSB faculty and

graduate students (the full text of which can be accessed only from UCSB);

---

\* <http://humanitas.ucsb.edu>

--and, subtending the whole, it declares in its subtitle that it is specifically a "humanities" resource, and a strictly higher-academic "research" one at that.

Thousands of similar markers then follow suit throughout by insisting on the geographical and professional provenance of links. Where possible, for example, link descriptions refer to the institutional site of both the content-author and (where different) HTML-author--e.g., "Brad Menpes (U. Warwick), 'Ideology and Responsibility: Derrida, Barthes, and a Question of Method' (*Work in Progress*, Warwick U.)." Much of the work involved in collecting links for VoS, indeed, stems from searching out such information--even to the point of sending e-mail messages asking "who and where are you?"

Of course, VoS is not unique in this regard among pages originating in professional academic communities. But it is somewhat stricter than most on this point and so foregrounds what I take to be the essential puzzle for current academic online computing (and, more generally, for the academy at large in the information age). Given the fact that academe clearly embraces the global potential of the new information technologies, why does the knowledge it puts online remain so fiercely local at so many levels--geographical, occupational, institutional? In the case of VoS, most basically, why sequester the "humanities" (a potentially universal knowledge-base if there ever was one) to the "academic" at all? Why not instead let the humanities break out onto the world stage with the fanfare, for example, of "universal" Shakespeare in Harold Bloom's polemically anti-academic and anti-professional bestseller, The Western Canon (whose own global status may be represented by the fact that I bought my copy from an airport newsrack)?<sup>1</sup> Reacting against the imputedly narrow politics of recent academic literary studies, Bloom asserts, "If we could conceive of a universal canon, multicultural and

multivalent, its one essential book [would be] Shakespeare, who is acted and read everywhere, in every language and circumstance."<sup>2</sup>

Or again--to put Bloom's notion of a "universal canon" online--why not follow the precedent of the most massively successful of all general-knowledge sites originating in the academy: Yahoo!\*? When this excellent resource begun by two Stanford University graduate students went commercial, "Stanford Yahoo" (as it used to be known) became simply "Yahoo!" Geographical and sector locality disappeared into the global imperative.

In short, why not comply with the increasingly dominant paradigm of knowledge that is the real idea behind universal canons that just also happen to be mass-audience canons: ".com." Particularly relevant is the leading edge of contemporary commercial thought as it has been celebrated in such influential business bestsellers of the late 80s and 90s as Robert Tomasko's Downsizing, Joseph H. Boyett and Henry P. Conn's Workplace 2000, Michael Hammer and James Champy's Reengineering the Corporation, William H. Davidow and Michael S. Malone's The Virtual Corporation, Peter Senge's The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization, Don Tapscott's The Digital Economy, Tom Peters' Liberation Management, Jon R. Katzenbach and Douglas K. Smith's The Wisdom of Teams, and Peter Drucker's Post-Capitalist Society.<sup>3</sup> The fundamental axiom of the "new corporatism," as it might be called, is that the postindustrial and multinational enterprises destined to inherit the earth in the year 2000 will above all be knowledge structures. Unlike smokestack-era firms, that is, they will no longer consist in materials, inventory, processes, departments, and people so much as in pure information. Or more accurately (since matter and people must still be involved), they will

---

\* <http://www.yahoo.com>

be managed as if they were structures of pure information. In the downsized and reengineered firm, everyone and everything will jump with the quick-turnaround responsiveness, flexibility, and (ultimately) eraseability of bits. Only so will "knowledge work" be "smart" and the corporation--in Senge's famed phrase--thus a "learning organization." A learning organization, Senge says, is where "new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning to learn together."<sup>4</sup>

And a corollary: since the new corporations are designed from the ground up to compete on the multinational scene, the knowledge they embody will by definition be global. Thus while localism may be the tactic of the new knowledge (according to the dogma by which decision power must devolve from headquarters to decentralized work teams), globalism is the strategy: local teams "here" should work smart in exactly the manner of local, smart teams in "Japan, Inc." (even to the extent that Japanese words are applied to Western business methods).

So the puzzle clarifies: in an era when governors and administrators have been forcing major higher-education systems to "downsize"; when the "Continuous Quality Improvement" movement in higher education wishes to apply corporate means directly to academic ends (envisioning "teams" of faculty members, for example);<sup>5</sup> when business writers appropriate the rhetoric of academic pomp and circumstance ("expansive patterns of thinking . . . collective aspiration . . . learning to learn together"); and when, as Tapscott sums up in the title to one of his sections, "Learning is Shifting Away from the Formal Schools and Universities"<sup>6</sup>--in short, in the era when corporations and bombs are smart but colleges are duds, it is hard to miss the fact that the new global paradigm of knowledge is putting tremendous pressure on traditional scholarly/critical knowledge. If the academic humanities are to be "relevant to," let alone "competitive

with," the major corporate knowledge producers of our age (especially the great software-telecom-journalism-entertainment conglomerates), wouldn't it be better to repackage its quaint notion of "general education" as global, mass-audience knowledge? Academic knowledge bases might then be assimilated, for example, to the design of such Web pages as Miramax Films's "Restoration: Politics,"\* where research blends indiscriminately with commercial entertainment (background links about the period accompany clips from the movie with Sam Neill as Charles II) even as localism merges indiscernibly into globalism (the URL shows that this page for a U. S. film corporation is based, of all places, in Germany).

Otherwise, wouldn't the humanities just grow ever more hermetic, pedantic, and, in a word (recalling the opposite of "Yahoo" in Swift's tale), Houyhnhnm? In Gulliver's Travels, the island-race of the Houyhnhnms are paragons of enlightenment. Yet ultimately they show themselves to be small-minded when they cast off Gulliver simply because in their infinite wisdom they cannot conceive of the irrational, larger world from which the strange Yahoo surfed in.<sup>7</sup>

In both its practice and philosophy, VoS is my attempt to answer such questions. What is the place of the humanities in the era of global knowledge?

## I. Practice

I began VoS in late 1994 as a purely local knowledge resource. While working on The Future Literary--my book-in-progress on the evolving relation between the "well read" and the

---

\* <http://www.obs-europa.de/obs/english/films/mx/rest/pol.htm> Miramax also has a "Restoration: Medicine" page along the same lines.

"well informed"--I had for some time been systematically studying the Internet. This research spilled over into the creation of courses, a Web-authoring collective,\* and a how-to manual titled The Ultrabasic Guide to the Internet for Humanities Users at UCSB--all inspired by the fact that, like the self-aware computer at the end of William Gibson's Neuromancer, I felt rather lonely online.<sup>8</sup> There was a big wired universe out there, but my local intellectual community (like most humanities communities at the time) had barely discovered e-mail. To seduce this proximate community onto the Internet, therefore, I set out in my courses and manual to present the main skills needed to explore the Internet specifically from the viewpoint of the humanities user or, as I called such a user, the technological "savage."\*\* Typically, I began with housekeeping skills (Unix commands, downloading and uploading, etc.) and then proceeded through the various aspects of the Internet from FTP and telnet through Gopher and WWW.

Very soon, however, it became clear that I would do best to concentrate on the one aspect of the Internet that seemed custom-made for the technical savage or, as it were, Yahoo. This was the Web, of course, which by now had proved both its general appeal and its ability to subsume other components of the net. My agenda thus simplified: I standardized on the Web as the route to the world beyond e-mail, and I sought to make visible to my fellow humanists enough compelling academic content that they would be motivated to explore on their own.

---

\* The UCSB "Many Wolves," which consisted of myself, graduate students, and undergraduates. See the collective's home page: <http://humanitas.ucsb.edu/projects/pack/pack.html>

\*\* From the Preface to the manual: "Since the author is an English professor and not a computer specialist, there is bound to be some technical advice here that a maestro would consider inexact, incomplete, inefficient, or worse. To apply Claude Lévi-Strauss's concept: this is a 'bricoleur's' guide to the Internet, not an 'engineer's.' It is for all those who approach the computer [in Lévi-Strauss's phrase] with a 'savage mind.' "

It was to supply this content that I started VoS in December 1994 as a UCSB-only site--necessarily campus-only, indeed, since the Humanitas server at that time did not yet have a Web daemon allowing it to serve up files globally.<sup>9</sup> I gathered and organized links of interest to humanists (working mainly in the Lynx text-only browser for sheer speed).<sup>10</sup> I solicited work from UCSB people for my "Featured Works" section (rotating among the departments so that I could lure fresh newcomers onto the Web to read the work of their colleagues or mentors). And all this was accompanied by a constant production of e-mail "press releases" about important new sites, new UCSB essays, and so on, together with oft-repeated how-to instructions for beginners.

When on March 21, 1995, the Humanitas server acquired a Web daemon, VoS went global. From this point on, the personality of the page had to be adjusted to expand the relevance of page descriptions, announcements, instructions, etc., originally addressed to the local scholarly community. But such adjustments were more in the way of adding further layers of local perspective than of undifferentiated globalism. VoS now addressed the UCSB community plus concentric rings of wider, yet still specialized, user communities. Or to adopt a better image: the Web became from my viewpoint an archipelago of distinct islands of users, each forming an ad hoc local community.

Due to my literary background, of course, the community that gathered around my literature pages (sending me correspondence, making suggestions, etc.) was fullest and deepest. But from the start, my Art, Religious Studies, and several other pages also acquired palpably distinct user communities. A similar archipelago effect applies to the geography of users. Most repeat visitors hail from the U. S., Canada, and the U. K., but increasingly there are sizable minorities from Italy, Australia, New Zealand, Japan, Mexico, and several other countries (plus a

constant stream of first-time visitors from all over). The fact that such globalism is differential rather than homogenous is suggested by events after a VoS mirror site went up in Italy.\*

Suddenly I began receiving e-mail from Italian users accompanied by suggestions of academic Web sites originating in Italy. It was clear that an entire, discrete orbit had been added to my user base. And in terms of sector- and age-groups, too, the usage base has been similarly differential. As might be expected, most visitors derive from higher-education institutions. But many also come from the K-12 educational community and add a distinct flavor of their own (suggesting teacher-oriented or student-written sites, sending me innocently pushy letters in the mode of "Dear Sir, I have a book report due tomorrow . . . Can you tell me who are the major characters in Moby Dick?"). Even the surprisingly large number of "general population" users (from the .com, .gov, .org, and .mil domains as well as America Online, Prodigy, Compuserve, Netcom. etc.) seem paradoxically "local" in personality. I mean by this that I often receive feedback from such users in a "voice" that is distinctively self-conscious about its placement relative to academe. For example, when a user fooled by the "shuttle" in my title wrote to say that "as a working engineer I wouldn't normally have stumbled onto your site, but I just had to see what NASA had to say about the humanities"; or, again, when a correspondent begins a letter, "I'm just an AOL'er, but I have an literature site that may interest your readers"; the persona being expressed is a highly "situated" version of the general population.

Only occasionally do usage spikes generated by the mention of VoS in some mass-circulation newspaper, magazine, or Web-site (as occurred at various times when the Los Angeles Times, New York Times, and USA Today cited the page) create an apparently

---

\* [http://www.vol.it/mirror/humanitas/humanitas\\_home.html](http://www.vol.it/mirror/humanitas/humanitas_home.html)

undifferentiated global response. For instance, when the CNN Website mentioned my VoS-related essay titled, "Should We Link to the Unabomber? An Essay on Practical Web Ethics," over 3,000 visitors stopped by each day.\*

At the time of this writing (June 1996), VoS has grown to some 70 sub-pages covering 23-30 discrete disciplines (depending on how one counts them). The total size of the site is about 3 Mb of links plus another 1 Mb in images and other matter. Usage during the past academic year averaged from 800 to 1000 unique visiting machines per weekday, dropping back to 600-700 during the summer. (The number of users per individual machine is unknown.)

This leaves one further topic to be discussed under the rubric of practice, which I save for last because it provides a segue to the philosophy of the page. The topic is organization.

If (loosely) VoS may be compared to a library catalogue, then the matter of organization may be broached by asking the interesting question: what is the page actually cataloging? It now seems to me that there are three, interrelated answers to this question:

First, VoS simply catalogs the humanities as currently organized in the modern research academy. The emphasis here is on organization for "research." VoS thus breaks down knowledge first by disciplinary field (e.g., classical studies, history, literature) and then, within particular fields, by categories that map the internal shape of the discipline (so far as I can discern them). Since the most common distinction of humanistic fields from other branches of learning is their historicity (literature departments, for example, teach the history of literature), it is above all periodization that organizes individual fields (e.g., the English literature page proceeds systematically from the medieval period through the Renaissance, eighteenth century, Romantics,

---

\* <http://humanitas.ucsb.edu/liu/whyuna.htm>

and so on). But such other categorizing schemas as nationality (e.g., British versus American literature), primary versus secondary work, texts versus course syllabi, etc., add to the grid to reproduce the basic arrangement of professional humanities research. In its very form, then, VoS declares its essential content. The form says, "this mode of organizing material by field, historical period, professional activity, etc., is what research-level knowledge in the humanities means."

But, secondly, VoS catalogs not just the static organization of humanistic knowledges in the research academy but also the in-process reorganization of that knowledge. This means, above all, that VoS is "interdisciplinary." I have written at length elsewhere on interdisciplinarity in the academy.<sup>11</sup> Here I will simply restate both my agreement and eventual disagreement with Stanley Fish's trenchant indictment of the vogue in his 1989 essay, "Being Interdisciplinary is So Very Hard to Do."<sup>12</sup> On the one hand, Fish is right that enthusiasts of interdisciplinarity are only fooling themselves if they believe they can ever really think their way out of the disciplinary frame of knowledge in the academy (one ends up either colonizing other disciplines within one's own discipline or, as in such cases as "Theory," institutes a new meta-discipline). But on the other hand, I have argued, just because disciplinary knowledge is epistemologically unavoidable in the institutional setting does not mean that the impulse to go interdisciplinary is insignificant or cannot have real ameliorative effects. Most importantly, it may be added here, even if disciplinary knowledge is a necessity of the modern professional academy there is also the further matter of how this very necessity is being repositioned by the interdisciplinary movement relative to the powerful case for "interdisciplinary teams" in the new corporatism (an issue I will return to below).

For the moment, however, it is enough just to point out that the some of the most interesting places in VoS are those where the knowledge grid seems to break down. Thus, for example, I allow for "topic" sections on some pages (e.g., "censorship studies," "corporeal theory" on the Literary Theory page) to register research "problems" that are currently active in multiple disciplinary and historical fields. So, too, I blur the humanities at its outer edges to register elements of the sciences and social sciences. There is a page on "Science, Technology, and Culture," for example, because technology has become a humanities problem through the mediation of such interdisciplinary catch-all movements as "cultural studies." And aside from all such blurrings of the disciplinary grid, of course, the very fact that VoS places the traditional humanities all together on the same menu--making it easy for the literature user, for example, to satisfy an idle itch of curiosity about art just by lifting one finger--is insidiously interdisciplinary. Since the early years of my own career when I taught in both the Yale English department and interdisciplinary British Studies Program (housed in the Yale British Art Center), I have been troubled by how few scholars actually make it across the street, say, from the English Dept. to the art museum. Whatever else, the Web at least removes the street.

Finally, VoS also catalogs humanistic research as it is in the process of creating new disciplines specific to the information age. I am thus keenly active in collecting links for such pages as "Cyberculture" and "Technology of Writing," where scholarship no longer simply shovels print-ware onto the net but instead invents ad hoc fields in which to think about, with, or against the new media in the light of technical innovations driven by and large by the corporate and mass sectors (as in the case of "multimedia"). As I had occasion to say recently in the announcements section of the "New" page on VoS, the fact that such fields as "cyberculture" now

de facto exist "does not mean that traditional print- or library-paradigms of knowledge are extinct (far from it), but that new schemas have evolved for positioning scholarly knowledge-paradigms relative to the great global 'information' paradigms of contemporary society." What "Cyberculture" or "Technology of Writing" ultimately track, in other words, is not technical development in itself but scholarly meditation on the changing relation between old and new media, old and new knowledge worlds. An especially good example is the section on "History of Language Technology" on the "Technology of Writing" page, where links to online resources on the historical instruments and media of reading/writing (e.g., the "Classic Typewriter" page\*) allow us to re-see literacy as specifically a predecessor "technology."

These thoughts on disciplines, interdisciplinarity, and new disciplines prepare me now explain the fundamental philosophy of the page.

## II. Philosophy

Where do the academic humanities fit in a world where the dominant model of knowledge has become corporate, mass-oriented, and global? An adequate answer, I believe, must avoid two equally facile responses.

One would be for academics automatically to dismiss the relevance of the new corporatism as philistine or worse. Corporatism, after all, is rather easy to hate in academe--even as, or because, higher education increasingly converges with the corporate model at every level from downsized structure to intellectual standardization upon what Jean-Francois Lyotard's The

---

\* <http://xavier.xu.edu:8000/~pol/typewriters.html>

Postmodern Condition called "performative" knowledge (and Bill Readings' more recent, posthumous The University in Ruins terms "excellent" knowledge).<sup>13</sup>

Yet in all honesty--as we might learn from Readings's chapters on the early university--the modern research academy cannot be understood except in a long view of history in which it becomes clear that academe from the first arose in partnership with a global theory of civilization ("enlightenment") that was as much economic and political as it was philosophical. Why is it unthinkable, then, that the academy's current conduct of knowledge has something deeply, if ambivalently, to do with the new corporatism? For considered precisely in this long view, it is equally clear that the new corporatism itself is essentially a whole, successor theory of civilization. Where the Enlightenment had imagined civilization to be the progress of Reason; and where more skeptical moderns such as Freud, Weber, or Foucault then renamed it, respectively, as Repression, Instrumental-Rationality, and Power/Knowledge; now the new corporatism retheorizes civilization as combined enlightenment and repression: "knowledge work." In the civilization of knowledge workers, ignorance ebbs around the world and we receive--like a revelation in code--"smartness" in our very equipment and way of life. What more important problem could there be for the contemporary academy, therefore, than to reposition itself in conscious collaboration, criticism, or both relative to our dominant contemporary theory of civilization? Before there was Sun, Intel, Lucent, and the other standard bearers of the new corporate enlightenment, after all, lux and veritas were academic mottoes.

Just as facile, however, would be the opposite response (common among both academics and non-academics) of heaping scorn on professional scholars for being "merely academic" in relation to the forces that now rule the world. One common form of this complaint, for instance,

is that professional academics have deposed the "public intellectuals" who once knew how to talk to the world in order to indulge in ever more arcane knowledges as well as ever more specialized politics ("political correctness"). From this point of view, the reason that academic sites such as VoS guard their local or professional provenance must be simply to conserve "professionalism" in its most protectionist and (politically and otherwise) self-interested sense. Attributing a site to "Alan Liu, UCSB," for example, conserves the whole "culture of critical discourse" (as Alvin Gouldner describes it in his The Future of Intellectuals and the Rise of the New Class) that distinguishes modern knowledge-work as the self-owned authority of a professional class.<sup>14</sup> "Alan Liu, UCSB," in other words, plugs into a mode of knowledge-production that is at once autonomy (the claim to self-critical knowledge-creation, -publication, and -review that has always been the professions' way of distinguishing themselves from authority- or patron-driven social mechanisms) and elitism (in Pierre Bourdieu's sociological idiom: "cultural capital").<sup>15</sup>

Yet even if this were all that is involved, it might still be asserted that the labels "professional" and "specialist" open rather more issues than they close. As Bruce Robbins has argued in Secular Vocations: Intellectuals, Professionalism, Culture, the ethics and sociology of professional intellectualism run deep, and should never be dismissed out of hand as "mere" professionalism or intellectualism.<sup>16</sup> Colorless, small-minded, and self-interested the professional may seem as he or she submits Shakespeare, Van Gogh, political discourse, or even a dam somewhere to professional disciplinary analysis. But (recurring to the problem of "civilization") it might also be hypothesized that modernity as we know it could not have arisen except on the backs of such knowledge workers who used the authority of their profession to tell old-style patrons, governors, and owners, "no, this is not how you build a dam"--a stance toward

traditional authority, as Gouldner points out, that still reverberates with political force in some non-Western states where it is the engineers who are the social progressives.<sup>17</sup>

How, then, to solve the puzzle of the relation between academic and new-corporatist knowledge-structures so as not to dismiss either too easily? In the course of creating and maintaining VoS, I have learned what I believe may be the beginnings of an answer. The answer will at first glance seem paradoxical. It is that the academic humanities can adapt to the global information world only by growing ever more rigorously professional, specialized, narrow, and--in a word--local. Their localism will be their globalism.

The explanation of this answer comes in both a weak and strong version. The weaker case may be initiated by quoting the AOL'er who e-mailed me in September 1995 to say:

Boy, are we astounded. This is clearly what the Infobahn was invented for--if you pardon a dangling participle. Keep up the good work; it makes me happy to pay taxes!

In a season when my university system had suffered perennial, recession-driven cutbacks accompanied by seemingly constant anti-intellectual vituperation from state politicians, political appointees, and others who presumed to speak for the "taxpayer," this letter from an actual taxpayer came like a breath of fresh air. As might be symbolized here in the momentary deference to academic grammar (the self-conscious apology for a dangling participle), the letter seemed to me to represent a point of view from which higher-education knowledge may be valued by the world as such even though (in the very way it spoke) it might not sort with the now dominant global knowledges. That is, what this and many other positive responses from "general population" users of VoS indicate is that it is not at all clear that in the global information age all

knowledge need converge on the corporate-driven model. Rather, there is commonly perceived value in the specific difference of academic knowledge, in what it offers that mass-oriented, commercial knowledge does not.

But though such feedback (which far exceeds the inevitable, sometimes crude anti-intellectual responses) is gratifying, it must be admitted that the above line of argument is ultimately a rather weak justification of the higher academy in the information age. After all, while on this rationale academic knowledge may be valuable for its putative "difference" from corporate-produced knowledge, the mode of its difference is the "same." I mean by this that on this model the academic humanities could be likened to just any other producer striving to create a "different" car or TV show that would give it competitive market share. And, in fact, the argument is weaker still because the number of hits on a page like VoS relative to those on the great corporate sites shows that at best academic difference is a "niche" product. So long as academe attempts to play alongside the great corporate knowledge-structures on the same playing field of "global competition," in short, it is destined to escape obsolescence only by becoming marginal. Indeed, "obsolescence" is a particularly crucial issue in this context given the "end of history" thesis implied by so many of the corporatist predictions of "workplace 2000." In an era where only the future counts and all history is relegated to the junkyard that Evan Watkins has called "throwaway" culture,<sup>18</sup> it is the precisely the historicity or anti-obsolescence practiced by the academic humanities that puts them in danger of becoming obsolete. The alternative, it would seem, is the niche-market strategy of becoming a "heritage" industry akin to those discussed by David Morley and Kevin Roberts in their Spaces of Identity: Global Media,

Electronic Landscapes, and Cultural Boundaries.<sup>19</sup> The historicity in which the academic humanities specialize, in other words, would make a great theme park.

I will conclude, therefore, by positing a somewhat stronger version of my argument that brings to bear my previous discussion of disciplines, interdisciplinarity, and new disciplines. For it has occurred to me during the many, many hours spent reorganizing and reclassifying VoS that the whole point of the academic rage for the "interdisciplinary"--straddling as it does the established and emergent, historically-old and millennial-new, disciplines--is to provide a uniquely academic imagination of global knowledge, an imagination about how disparate and distributed knowledges produced by traditionally unrelated teams of researchers might fit together in a way that does not so much compete with neo-corporatism on the same ground of "global competition" as reflect, allegorize, and reinterpret that ground. Fundamentally, that is, the intense, contemporary hunger of literary critics, art historians, social historians, anthropologists, and many others for interdisciplinary knowledge tells a story about the grand global adventure of knowledge in our time. Or rather, it performs that story (in the way that tongueless Philomela allowed the "voice of the shuttle" to perform her tale of boundless cruelty).\* As epitomized in such new types of programs as women's studies, minority studies, or cultural studies, in other words, academics increasingly perform as "teams" whose cross-woven interdisciplinary expertise mime the work of the most advanced, "high performance" corporate teams. But the huge difference is that whereas the new corporations practice interdisciplinary knowledge for the purpose of creating products intended to drive other products into obsolescence (along with their

---

\* The following page contains quotations that explain the mythological allusion behind the phrase, "voice of the shuttle": [shuttle/the\\_myth.html](http://shuttle/the_myth.html)

affiliated populations and regions, whether Japan, Europe, or the Third World), the academic allegory of global knowledge intends to ameliorate the boundlessly cruel paradigm of "global competition" so as to accommodate a collaborative conservation of the obsolescent cultures, languages, artifacts, ideas, and peoples that would otherwise be doomed to go voiceless into history. After all, such is ultimately what the shared saga of the "Other" or "otherness" in so many recent academic fields has been about: not self-sufficient political correctness but (and this makes a palpable difference in how the politics of the academy should be perceived) political correctness posed as an alternative to the otherwise unexamined life-regimes of which the new "corporate correctness" of downsizing-for-global-competition is chief.

In sum, and here I shift into a subjunctive mood, it is to be hoped that humanistic knowledge is valuable precisely in the talent that allows it to compete with the very notion of global competition. The talent of the humanities, the tale it has to weave, is historical knowledge. Historical knowledge is not just a heritage industry but the fundamental perception--as good for building a car as for anything else--that there is always more than one kind of knowledge embedded in the "advance of knowledge," and that therefore the measure of a civilization is how well it incorporates the difference of its knowledges so as to produce the kind of true "wealth" that classical civilizations once synonymized with the common "weal" or collective "well-being."

Views this abstract, of course, will not be apparent in any detail to users of VoS. I will be content if just some of these views come through in intuitive form: as a sense to be gathered in scrolling down the pages of VoS that the academic humanities--precisely in their professional

and specialized organization--contain their own rich, dynamic, evolving vision of global knowledge.

## NOTES

1. Harold Bloom, The Western Canon: The Books and School of the Ages (New York: Riverhead, 1994). The anti-academic and -professional stance of the book is explicit: "The esprit de corps of professionalism, so curiously dear to many high priests of the anticanonizers, is of no interest whatsoever to me, and I would repudiate any 'uninterrupted historical continuity' with the Western academy" (p. 22).
2. Ibid., pp. 36-37.
3. Robert M. Tomasko, Downsizing: Reshaping the Corporation for the Future, rev. ed. (New York: American Management Assoc., 1990); Joseph H. Boyett and Henry P. Conn, Workplace 2000: The Revolution Reshaping American Business (New York: Plume / Penguin, 1992); Michael Hammer and James Champy, Reengineering the Corporation: A Manifesto for Business Revolution (New York: HarperBusiness, 1993); William H. Davidow and Michael S. Malone, The Virtual Corporation: Structuring and Revitalizing the Corporation for the 21st Century (New York: HarperBusiness, 1992); Peter Senge, The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization (New York: Doubleday, 1990); Don Tapscott, The Digital Economy: Promise and Peril in the Age of Networked Intelligence (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1996); Tom Peters, Liberation Management: Necessary Disorganization for the Nanosecond Nineties (New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1992); Jon R. Katzenbach and Douglas K. Smith, The Wisdom of Teams: Creating the High-Performance Organization (New York: HarperBusiness, 1994); Peter F. Drucker, Post-Capitalist Society (New York: HarperBusiness, 1993).

The discussion of the new corporatism in this article draws upon materials in my book-in-progress on The Future Literary.
4. Senge, from the jacket description of his book. Cf., Davidow and Malone: "Everything, is about learning," "the virtual corporation is a learning entity" (pp. 194, 195).
5. See the online discussion list of the movement, which has a Web archive at <http://rrpubs.com/heproc/coll/library/cqi.shtml>
6. Tapscott, pp. 199-200.
7. This truncated reading of the end of this book of Gullivers Travels, of course, does not do justice to the full complexity of Swift's irony.
8. I refer to the discovery of the artificial intelligence (once called Wintermute) of other machine intelligences in the galaxy. Before him, he says, "there was nobody to know, nobody to answer" (William Gibson, Neuromancer [New York: Ace Books, 1984], p. 270).
9. A Web "daemon," or httpd server, is the program on a server that receives requests for HTML (Hypertext Markup Language) files and serves them.

10. Note on Technical Method: currently I work on computers both at home and in my office, and in both the Lynx and Netscape environments (with HotMetal Pro 3.0 for most HTML-authoring). I average two hours a day collecting links, maintaining pages, and responding to VoS-related e-mail. Links are collected in a Lynx bookmark file (Lynx offers the convenience of quick, direct editing of HTML on the server) before then, after two or three weeks' accumulation, being further edited and uploaded to the VoS "New" page (from which they then trickle at intervals to the regular pages). Until a recent temporary grant from the UCSB Interdisciplinary Humanities Center allowed me to recruit two graduate students to help with link collection and technical work, VoS has been a solo endeavor.

11. Alan Liu, "Die interdisziplinäre Kriegsmaschine" (German abridged version of "The Interdisciplinary War Machine," not yet published in English), Texte zur Kunst, No. 12 (Nov. 1993): 127-37.

12. Stanley Fish, "Being Interdisciplinary is so Very Hard to Do," Profession (1989): 15-22.

13. Jean-François Lyotard, The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1984); Readings, Bill, The University in Ruins (forthcoming from Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1996)

14. Alvin W. Gouldner, The Future of Intellectuals and the Rise of the New Class: A Frame of Reference, Theses, Conjectures, Arguments, and an Historical Perspective on the Role of Intellectuals and Intelligentsia in the International Class Contest of the Modern Era (New York: Seabury, 1979)

15. Bourdieu, Pierre, Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1984)

16. Robbins, Bruce, ed., Intellectuals: Aesthetics, Politics, Academics (Minneapolis: Univ. Minnesota Press, 1990)

17. Gouldner (p. 49).

18. Watkins, Evan, Throwaways: Work Culture and Consumer Education (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford Univ. Press, 1993)

19. Morley, David, and Kevin Robins, Spaces of Identity: Global Media, Electronic Landscapes and Cultural Boundaries (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 118-21