I have met Stanley Aronowitz only once: when he was invited to my campus to lecture a few years ago. After exchanging the customary pleasantries, we settled into a discussion that struck me at the time as remarkable—not because of my contributions to our exchange, but because of his. His contributions still seem remarkable to me, and somehow I don’t think he would mind my sharing some of them here. This singular conversation kept replaying in my head as I read two recent books: Aronowitz’s polemic *The Knowledge Factory: Dismantling the Corporate University and Creating True Higher Learning* and the anthology *Beyond the Corporate University: Culture and Pedagogy in the New Millennium*, edited by Henry Giroux and Kostas Myrsiades. That conversation explained, for me anyway, a lot about both the passion and paranoia of *The Knowledge Factory*, especially those moments when Aronowitz is either absolutely right on target or more than a little wide of the mark. It might also help in identifying at least one origin of the strong politics of both books and, more broadly, in charting the trajectories of several recent critiques of higher education in America.

Aronowitz visited Indiana a few years after he and Giroux had published *Postmodern Education* (1991), and at the time I was using—still do—a chapter from his book *Roll Over Beethoven* to introduce the history of British Cultural Studies to my students. We talked a bit about these books before he asked me about my work. I mentioned a symposium I was planning on modern Irish drama, and almost immediately a smile, large and warm, broke across his face. The phrase “Irish drama” had triggered vivid memories of nights in the theater and, in particular, the plays of Sean O’Casey. He revisited productions he had enjoyed, which
was impressive since those he recalled in such detail were some thirty years or more in the past. I shouldn’t have been surprised, though at the time I was, to learn that the plays for which he held a special fondness were not those in the so-called “Dublin Trilogy” for which O’Casey is best known today (The Shadow of a Gunman, Juno and the Paycock, and The Plough and the Stars), but the experimental labor plays, The Star Turns Red and Red Roses for Me. Both of these later works depict young working men poised to go on strike with their unions, and the protagonists of both dramas eventually forfeit their lives for the cause of improving the conditions of their exploited comrades. In Red Roses for Me, for example, after a police antagonist of the labor movement sneers at young Ayamonn Breydon’s sacrifice for the cause with, “It wasn’t a very noble thing to die for a single shilling” (a shilling raise had become the final impasse in negotiations between Dublin’s railway workers and their stingy “bosses”), Breydon’s sweetheart quickly responds, “Maybe he saw the shilling in th’ shape of a new world” (3: 225). And so he did, a world of justice and beauty where the faces of workers and their wives are no longer traversed by “seams of poverty” or marked by “dumb resignation,” the visible effects of a wretched existence that O’Casey specifies in his stage directions.

Well before the twenty-two-year-old hero of Red Roses for Me can express his unwavering loyalty to his fellow workers, the play’s exposition underscores his passion—like Aronowitz’s—for learning. A kind of Gramscian organic intellectual, Breydon lacks formal education and works as a railwayman, yet he aspires to be a painter, reads Shakespeare with avidity, and quotes Ruskin as if it were scripture. In the play’s opening scene, his mother, somewhat flummoxed by her son’s eclectic pursuits of “Sketchin’, readin’, makin’ songs, an learnin’ Shakespeare,” asks, “Why don’t you stick at one thing, an’ leave the others alone?” He answers in the only way a person with a passion for learning can: “They are all lovely, and my life needs them all” (3:132). Moreover, his “need” for them underlies his almost missionary proclamation not only to help his fellow workers earn a more livable wage, but also to convert them into bardolaters. The men are “afraid” of Shakespeare. He tells his mother, “Before I’m done, I’ll have him drinking in th’ pubs with them!” (3. 131). Workers need, in other words, both better wages and more Shakespeare in their lives; O’Casey’s hero is committed to both projects.

So is Aronowitz. In his “Preface” to The Knowledge Factory, Aronowitz, well past his twenty-second birthday, exudes a similarly youthful enthusiasm for “higher learning” in his life, for like O’Casey’s
young transport worker, he has "always loved learning new things." Indeed, he expresses this passion about as bluntly as it can be stated: "Nothing gives me more pleasure than to discover some idea that knocks me on my rear end" (ix). But perhaps the most salient comparison between O'Casey's youthful laborer and the spry academic is that both of them cultivated this love affair in unconventional ways. Like O'Casey himself, his young Dubliner was an autodidact forced to scrape together what shillings and pence he could to buy books. And the course of Aronowitz's education, as his highly autobiographical preface outlines, hardly ran smoothly either. As a teenager, he attended the Jefferson School of Social Science, and at age sixteen he enrolled in the Marxist Institute, studying everything from Plato to Marx and Hegel. He barely qualified for admission to Brooklyn College, which fortunately for him charged no tuition because his family couldn't—or, perhaps, wouldn't—pay it. But he didn't stay there long, taking a fifteen-year hiatus from higher education to become, among other things, a factory worker and union activist. Disillusioned by the "devolution" of the union movement and harboring an interest in teaching, Aronowitz later returned to Brooklyn College where, again, he didn't stay long. His explanation? "I simply lacked the motives to tolerate boredom for four years of the program . . ." (xiv). Drawing on his experiences in the labor movement, he began to place essays in various periodicals; and in 1967 he presented his GRE scores, a portfolio of his writing, and a résumé to the graduate dean at the New School. He was admitted there and, for a time, thrived on the classes he took and the ambience of the radical Free University of New York, where he both taught and breathed in the air of sixties' radicalism. Intellectual life at the New School, however, soon grew stale, so once again Aronowitz left (or fled) an institution of so-called "higher education," hoping to find an atmosphere of higher learning elsewhere. This turned out to be the Union Graduate School, where Aronowitz never took classes but studied with faculty, wrote, and eventually received his degree in 1975.

This very personal background informs not only Aronowitz's passion for his subject, but also his argument in The Knowledge Factory. Writing from what he characterizes as the "liminal space" of never being an "insider" who has "completed a course of study in an institution of post-secondary education," but by virtue of his long teaching career hardly an "outsider," he inveighs against several directions higher education has taken (xvii). Against a historical background dominated by the rapid growth of "higher education" (now, over fifteen million students
attend post-secondary institutions compared to one and a half million on the eve of World War II), Aronowitz bemoans the lack of "higher learning" at America's colleges and universities. Instead, higher education has been reduced to a hollow rite of passage for seekers of that ever-elusive prize known as a "good job." These days, the most significant function of a bachelor's degree, Aronowitz observes, is to give students "the credential with which to enter the market on somewhat more favorable terms than early school leavers" (29). Institutions of higher education, moreover, also play an important societal role in providing a habitus for students who otherwise would enter a job market with little or no room for them. Aronowitz makes the cogent observation that mid-1990s' self-congratulation in America over the low unemployment rate compared to that of many European countries failed to acknowledge the ten million Americans of working age who were counted as full-time students and an additional five million part-time students. And the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics makes no distinction, he contends, between part-time and full-time employees. The statistical chicanery enabled by such a conflation should be apparent to every part-time faculty member across the country working for inadequate wages and nonexistent benefits. So, "thanks, in part, to higher education, jobless statistics in America are lower than any other major advanced industrial society except Japan" (28). The disappearance of good jobs in the U.S., especially in "knowledge factories" now dependent on ruthlessly exploited part-time laborers, dismays Aronowitz, and he dissects the problem at considerable length.

But this is not his major grievance with today's knowledge factories, nor would it have been that of the organic intellectuals in O'Casey's plays. The real problems include the "vocationalization" of higher education and the incipient classism it perpetuates. For Aronowitz, "vocationalization" means several distinct but related institutional phenomena. One is the increasing corporate investment in academic units of the university; another is the transformation of humanities and social sciences departments (save, perhaps, for departments of economics) into "service" units teaching "basic reading and writing" courses rather than those in "literature, history, and philosophy" (107). (I'll return to this potentially controversial point in a moment.) In Aronowitz's view as outlined in the closing chapter of The Knowledge Factory, this tendency also explains curricular changes that, in the long run, will serve neither students' best interests as workers or learners, nor those of universities:
Despite apparent short-term gains [fund raising successes, corporate investment] for some universities and colleges, vocationalization is the wrong way to go. Notwithstanding their anxiety about the future, students are ill-served by educational regimes that tailor their learning to a rapidly changing workplace whose technological shifts belie the assumptions driving many specialist curricula.... For it is only when the learner loves literature, enjoys puzzling out the meaning of art works and those of philosophy, is intrigued by social and cultural theory, or becomes an indefatigable researcher that she acquires intellectual habits that are the precondition of future learning. (161)

Even on the less-reflective terrain of workday practice, vocationalization—which too often privileges students' acquaintance with technology that will be rendered obsolete before they complete their degrees—is not a good idea. Reading, critical thinking, and, yes, immersion in the classics of Western culture will serve students and their future employers far better in the long run.

On this point, Aronowitz, although he declines to name particular ideologues, recognizes that he is veering close to the arch-conservatism of the likes of John Ellis in Literature Lost and Dinesh D’Souza in Illiberal Education, and he quickly distinguishes his position from theirs. Ellis, for instance, indicts “literature professors” for both their “political correctness” and their penchant for theoretical fads, both of which have induced them to commit “mass acts of foolishness” in the name of political resistance or “daring” (211). As a result, “Madonna can be studied instead of Shakespeare” (221), although Ellis presents no catalogue copy or other evidence to corroborate this allegation. Aronowitz, conversely, does not “assume the superiority of the conventional over the alternative or oppositional canon,” though he does seem confident that such an unproblematic binary exists (169). More seriously, he believes that vocationalization will ultimately mean that “working-class students in third-tier schools” will be denied the experience of cultural texts of any kind, Madonna or Shakespeare. Here, classism and the “mission differentiation” of institutions inflect his argument in a significant way: acquaintance with “the jewels of Western culture,” he contends, will be made available only “to students attending elite institutions” (169).

Here is also where both Aronowitz's long experience of higher education in New York and, frankly, a certain paranoia begin to weaken his case. I mention New York specifically because in the spring of 2000 I spoke at the Conference on Academic Freedom sponsored by the SUNY
Faculty Senate and heard a number of horror stories about the erosion of higher learning in the state. One faculty leader from SUNY at Binghamton, for instance, described local resistance to the threatened imposition of a core curriculum on all SUNY campuses by Governor George Pataki’s Politburo of cronies and corporate executives. Another topic of much discussion involved the ongoing struggle to protect academic freedom for faculty and students in the SUNY system, as the political fallout caused by such conferences as the one on “revolting behavior” (held at SUNY at New Paltz in 1997) threatened this freedom. Censured by Chancellor John Ryan for holding an event that foregrounded the frank discussion and representation of women’s sexuality, president of the New Paltz campus Roger Bowen observed, “When politics intrude in the affairs of the academy, truth is the first casualty” (Storey and Benjamin 8). It is thus hard to disagree with Aronowitz’s claim that public universities in New York “have received a clear signal” from the “governor and state legislature that the moment of mass public education is over” (63).

There is plenty to worry about in the state of New York, from the usurpation of faculty power by political hacks to ideologically motivated attacks on intellectual freedom. But this ruthless “differentiation of mission” may not necessarily be a national phenomenon, and when Aronowitz widens the ambit of his critique, a number of gaffes and dubious assertions begin to gum up the machinery of his argument. Some of these mistakes are minor and amusing. Aronowitz, for example, twice refers to conditions at large public institutions, apparently forgetting that in 1990 Penn State became a Big Ten school. He praises graduate student unions at Michigan, Iowa, Illinois, and Indiana, when in fact there is no union at Indiana and, in fact, graduate student employees at Illinois walked out just this past fall as a preliminary step in a direction that may end up with the formation of one. And he consistently refers to Yale’s Graduate Employee Student Organization (GESO) as the GAA.

But these factual errors constitute minor distractions in the rush to much larger, and more problematic, assertions. Do “major” schools “routinely” grant tenure to able or outstanding researchers who are also “abysmal” teachers (51)? Are junior faculty across the country “rarely” afforded the opportunity to “share with senior colleagues any new ideas they may have developed” (78)? Is graduate school aptly captured by the metaphor of a “boot camp” (118)? Can graduate education, given what we know about both human subjectivity and the valorization of knowledge
within interpretive communities, ever lead to the “formation of an autonomous self capable of finding its own voice” (144)? Other pronouncements do even clearer damage to the argument of *The Knowledge Factory*. One of these Aronowitz labels an “obvious example” of the diminution of intellectual life at the knowledge factory: “At a time when the teaching of literature has all but disappeared from the undergraduate curriculum in many four year colleges, graduate English departments remain reluctant to offer a stream of courses that will prepare students to teach composition or to work as the language faculty in a vocational cluster.” Worse, many high-ranked programs “belittle ‘composition studies’ but students know that there is where the jobs are” (146). He’s certainly right about the latter point. At this past MLA convention, David Laurence of the MLA released data on the *Job Information List* that show the continuing robust demand for teachers of writing and professional communication. But are many four-year colleges dropping all their courses in literature, as Aronowitz claims? My experiences as a dissertation director, department chair, and the coauthor of a large introductory literature textbook to be published later this year indicate otherwise. In fact, a significant number of doctoral students in literary fields are getting interviews and job offers at schools large and small; indeed, over five-hundred entry-level assistant professorships in literature were advertised in the October, 2001 *Job Information List*. And my textbook publisher has assembled review panels of faculty from all over the country, from large and small schools alike, from four-year institutions and community colleges. They’re still teaching literature, in other words. They are still selecting books for course adoptions and, if I’m lucky, perhaps they will select mine—or, better yet, maybe they will hire one of my former or present students as colleagues.

The argument of *The Knowledge Factory*, therefore—however admirably impassioned in denouncing the myriad influences of corporate America on the academy and however acute in its criticism of “higher education”—is weakened by several dubious claims. Indeed, in Indiana the process of “mission differentiation” that Aronowitz deplores is being shifted into a kind of reverse gear. That is, Indiana University at Bloomington, at present, is being required to be *more like* its less-celebrated sister campuses rather than increasingly different from them. Such volatile topics as the ease of transfer credit from community colleges and urban branches into the Bloomington campus, hence the increased emphasis on consistency between syllabi and requirements, have proved controversial. The fear is thus *not* that working-class
students will be denied entrance into the Eden of Western culture, but that everyone will be molded into whatever “product” the Higher Education Commission wants to manufacture. Here, vocationalization will produce what might be termed postmodern homogeneity at the “Knowledge Factory” with eight front doors, rather than a remarking of class boundaries and the instauration of elitist privilege at the state’s “flagship” campus.

Solutions or effective responses to all of these developments are not easy to formulate. The corporatization of universities and the vocationalization of higher learning are occurring on so many fronts that, not surprisingly, Aronowitz is not finally able to dismantle the “knowledge factory” as his subtitle promises. Of course, the focus on technical education in undergraduate curricula should not be “exclusively oriented to the practices and technologies of existing jobs” (171). Certainly we should be more conscious of class differences and the curricula of “third-tier institutions” (assuming we can identify them) in an attempt to ensure the broader learning of all post-secondary students. This means that all curricula involve much more than a regimen of rote “skills acquisition” classes. Aronowitz is right about many other things as well: we must modify graduate education, abolish admissions criteria that unfairly discriminate against students in inner city schools with less opportunity to enroll in AP and other advanced courses, and in general rethink the migration of corporate “logic” to the academy. Most important, as he asserts in the closing pages of The Knowledge Factory, we should do all we can to turn students into versions of O’Casey’s organic intellectuals, helping them become “autodidacts” like Ayamonn Breydon—and Aronowitz himself.

How do we do this? In large part, through a revised pedagogy, what Aronowitz regards as the “main innovation” of his model (189). Yet, it is an innovation described in minimal detail in The Knowledge Factory, and its features are familiar enough: courses that encourage “open” discussion of topics not passive lecturing, challenge the instructor’s authority, and facilitate the formation of study groups. More controversial, and politically schizophrenic, is the clear implication to reintroduce students to some of the classics O’Casey’s autodidacts enjoyed at the same time as instructors shatter traditional disciplinary understandings of these cultural texts, perhaps through team teaching. Here, curricula and learning meet economics. That is, on this point he echoes a desideratum announced by my dean in a recently drafted “enhancement” document, yet neither the dean nor Aronowitz has figured out who will pay for all this
team teaching. Once someone does, I'll be pleased to make such assignments to my faculty.

When it comes to explaining how a resistant pedagogy might be implemented at the corporate university, several of the sixteen contributors to Henry Giroux and Kostas Myrsiades' anthology Beyond the Corporate University: Culture and Pedagogy in the New Millennium delineate far more intriguing and politically specific possibilities than Aronowitz can muster. The volume begins with four essays (by Jeffrey Williams, Giroux, Roger Simon, and Peter Baker) that in various ways investigate the trends Aronowitz deplores. Williams' reading of the film The Nutty Professor, the version starring Jerry Lewis in 1963 and the remake with Eddie Murphy in 1996, is revelatory of what he sees as the "franchising" of the university. In the former, after blowing up his laboratory, Lewis is admonished by his dean for conducting "personal experiments" in a university facility; in the latter, Murphy's Professor Klump labors away at developing a "techno-miraculous" Slim Fast product. "In other words," Williams observes, "the current Nutty Professor assumes without blinking the new commercial profit rationale for research" (19). And, if corporatization refashions faculty as entrepreneurs or, worse, as the research and development wing of particular companies, students are reinvented as "consumers"—or "customers," as Syracuse University chancellor Kenneth Shaw recommends in an appendix to his "how to" book for university administrators, The Successful President. Shaw, reviled by some who work at Syracuse for his strong-armed tactics during a labor strike in 1998, offers the mantra of "listening to the customer" as a new paradigm for administering universities, and he feebly notes that this doesn't mean "the customer is always right" (110). (This last disclaimer is not so reassuring as it sounds, because during the strike Shaw's notions of what comprised a liveable wage for full-time employees and what academic freedom might mean for faculty sympathetic to the strikers' demands were nearly always wrong.)

Giroux and Simon are concerned, finally, with more political repercussions of the corporatizing of the university. In "Vocationalizing Higher Education: Schooling and the Politics of Corporate Culture," Giroux calls for progressive educators to identify "the range of non-commercial relations that can be used to mediate between higher education and the business world." His justifiable concern, like Aronowitz's, is that in the present climate higher education's mission to educate critically aware students is being sacrificed; we must find ways for
students “to inhabit non-commodified public spheres that expand the possibilities for knowledge-power relations that are not exclusively instrumental and market driven” (42). More broadly, Simon questions the prevalent marketing strategy of universities to represent themselves as contemplative oases where students and faculty alike actually think. “What does it mean,” he asks, “to claim that the university is a place to think?” (46). Following Bill Readings and Jean-François Lyotard before him, Simon reminds us that thinking is never merely an isolated or “theoretical” matter, but something that occurs in institutions “within and against which” teaching takes place (47). What kinds of thinking are encouraged and facilitated at the institution at which you teach?

Most important, Beyond the Corporate University includes valuable essays on pedagogical and curricular strategies by Lynn Worsham, Ronald Strickland, Jody Norton, Barbara Foley, Amitava Kumar, and others that in one way or another take off from where Aronowitz’s argument ends: with classroom practice, the formulation of a resistant pedagogy, and “higher learning.” Kumar, whose anthology Class Issues: Pedagogy, Cultural Studies, and the Public Sphere contributes significantly to the discussion of these and related topics, makes an extremely persuasive case for teaching postcolonial literature in the context of the global economy within which such literature is created and read. That is, if humanities departments are continually being asked to strengthen the relationship between their curricula and “the world of work,” as my dean terms it, then the course Kumar describes in his essay “World Bank Literature 101” responds to the mandate with one important caveat: it launches a sharp critique of that world and its employment practices. So, along with assigning Manthia Diawara’s critical memoir In Search of Africa or Arundhati Roy’s The God of Small Things, Kumar has screened Barbara Wolf’s 1997 documentary about adjunct faculty Degrees of Shame, discussed Andrew Ross’ No Sweat: Fashion, Free Trade, and the Rights of Garment Workers, and required students to consider business agreements signed between multinational corporations and universities. The result is a thoughtful cultural studies class and a compelling thesis about reading postcolonial literature: “Novels are not consumed in a world separate from the world of commodities” (224). The global “world of work” thus becomes as much an object of study as the literary or other cultural artifact.

Finally, Ronald Strickland’s “Curriculum Mortis: A Manifesto for Structural Change”—a manifesto, ironically enough, influenced by cur-
ricular reform in the English department at Syracuse when scholars like Bill Readings taught there and shortly before Kenneth Shaw arrived on the scene—addresses one of the most significant projects most English departments will undertake: developing the kinds of "institutional structures and practices necessary for engaging the challenge to democratic education posed by the technical-vocational mission of the academy" (74). From where I sit, he's absolutely right. The "presence of technical and vocational programs . . . and the presence of such courses within English departments, should be seen as opportunities" for progressive faculty to challenge "corporate-sector values and practices that characterize these programs" (77). Admittedly, my department has made only the slightest investment in such courses and the faculty trained to teach them, but all of that appears to be changing. On a search committee in professional communication as I write this essay, I have repeatedly found myself wondering what candidates knew about cultural theory, literature, and rhetorical theory—anything but professional communication—because, frankly, my ignorance of the field prevents me from formulating more specialized questions. At one point, Strickland mentions the "formidable obstacles" to a critical engagement between teachers of literature and teachers who offer more technical-vocational or service courses. He also quite reasonably emphasizes the imperative for mutual respect among faculty with such varying interests. But how much can faculty respect something of which they are profoundly ignorant? In my experience at large PhD-granting departments, faculty respect often runs in only one direction: toward the hegemony of literature. Of course, this isn't the case at Purdue, Pittsburgh, Texas, South Florida, Penn State, Texas Tech, and other leading writing programs. But when any particularly obstreperous colleagues want to know what candidates in professional writing know about literature, I have on occasion asked what they know about professional writing.

Such a question, I have found, saves both time and the need for Advil at the end of the day. But until we can engage vocationalization critically, as Strickland suggests and as Kumar implies, higher learning will be sacrificed to instrumentalism—and universities will be little more than the knowledge factories in which Stanley Aronowitz is so genuinely disappointed.

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Whole Lotta Resistin’ Goin’ On

Michael Blitz

I enjoyed reading both Joe Hardin’s Opening Spaces: Critical Pedagogy and Resistance Theory in Composition and Andrea Greenbaum’s Insurrections: Approaches to Resistance in Composition Studies. Both volumes wrestle visibly with the idea of resistance—even with the term itself—in ways that can enrich our thinking and teaching about composition. Hardin and all of the authors of the essays collected in Greenbaum’s book prompt us to examine resistance in ways that can better prepare us for the experiences we and our students have in our composition classes. After reading both books, after rereading Composition and Resistance to recall things those authors had said, and after being reminded by Alan...