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Mass Online Education: Dialectic of Enlightenment 2.0

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In the 1930s, Walter Benjamin celebrated the mass culture made possible by technological reproducibility — cinema in particular — on the grounds that lay expertise and distraction empower and liberate proletarian spectators.¹ Responding to the contrary during their extended written correspondence, Theodor W. Adorno argued that popular entertainments are more regressive than progressive, because they obscure the cause underlying the need for distraction: worker exploitation.² Today, the continuing development of socio-technological systems involving the broadcasting of automations, such as online pedagogical environments, ought to stimulate a revival of the culture industry polemic, beginning where Adorno and Benjamin left off.³ The argument partakes of a dialectic in which the democratization of culture through technological mediation is harnessed ideologically to capitalist processes of producer and consumer exploitation. Since many of the beliefs and practices associated with online education are modeled directly upon those observed in “new” media usage during leisure time, the culture industry problematic has become newly and somewhat differently relevant: for instance, not only are many forms of online education broadcast on a massive scale that attracts and depends upon corporate interests, but they also reflect arguably popular design principles, and the content is often generated by users themselves.

Formal online education, with its ambiguously material apparatuses based on social media designs (and the often-overlooked fine print bundled into their usage), seems to offer solutions to fiscal and social challenges.⁴ For students, it poses a viable alternative to — and is often perceived as an improvement over — prohibitively expensive tuitions and campus living. For institutions, it may reduce costs to a significant degree. While it is frequently assumed that the quality of online education compares poorly with conventional schooling, the broadest and most troubling potential consequences are often overlooked. In the process of virtualization, the formerly public responsibility of ensuring access to education is easily belayed from public institutions to private individuals and their families while corporate entities

profit by mediating the process. Costly consumer electronics and home Internet service provide the bulk of the necessary infrastructure and, to a significant extent, can even replace classrooms and facilitate the obsolescence of embodied instructors. In addition, interaction in virtual classrooms is typically supported by the use of corporate, rather than non-profit, browsers and interactive media, thereby producing easy and ubiquitous targets for direct and indirect monetization schemes.⁵ Large-scale, radical digital restructuring is frequently justified by rhetoric that reveals a widespread need for more complex and reflexive understanding of the historical trajectories of technological development, the enlightenment humanist tradition, and socioeconomic inequality.

The current expansion of online education intersects with the tension between the societal benefit of improved access to higher education as opposed to the dangerous precariousness of instructional labor and the privatization of what has commonly been seen as a public sphere. As such, it reveals the continuing dynamism of the “dialectic of enlightenment” Adorno theorized in the 1940s with Max Horkheimer, in large part as a response to Benjamin’s distraction theory. Writing that “power and knowledge are synonymous,” Adorno and Horkheimer traced the ruinous growth and eventual primacy of domination within the (not entirely contemptible) development of Western civilization’s liberal concept of social progress through the widespread cultivation of individual reason, an unexpectedly wayward process resulting ultimately in the domination of nature, including humanity’s own: “[r]uthless toward itself, the Enlightenment has eradicated the last remnant of its own self-awareness.”⁶ Due to insufficient critical reflection, demythologization had resulted in a blindness associated with myth and fetish, hypostatized in products of the culture industry.⁷ Where Benjamin found the enrichment of the “lay expert” in immersion in sound cinema, Adorno saw commodification leading to the “withering of imagination and spontaneity” already increasingly crippled by the “objective” composition of cultural goods: “[t]hey are so constructed that their adequate comprehension requires a quick, observant, knowledgeable cast of mind but positively debar[s] the spectator from thinking, if he is not to miss the fleeting facts.”⁸ In discussions of online education, as elsewhere, arguments over the supposed authenticity or inauthenticity of “mere” representations are sometimes erroneously conflated with this much more sophisticated, valid, and important insight regarding the rationalization to the profit motive that normalizes variety and detail into a streamlined, prepackaged unit. The latter should be of central concern in academic circles.

Writing in the late 1960s, Adorno argued that, despite the influence of the culture industry over all social reproduction, education and the Western tradition of enlightenment could “still manage a little something” against the ascent of barbarism, which in his day as in ours frequently took the shape of racism and genocide.⁹ If this remains true, academic workers — including the tenured professoriat — must not delay in resisting the possibility of widespread intensification of inequity by

technological means in our sector, and that must do so without denying the value of new technological affordances. At the same time, a dialectical understanding of the term “enlightenment” must be maintained, one that resists bourgeois, imperialist, and essentializing impulses. Those with strong formations in historical materialism and in leftist critique could make pivotal contributions in this endeavor, and not only at the postsecondary level.¹⁰ To this end, in this essay it is argued that exploring the tensions between Adorno and Benjamin’s Marxist media theories adds depth and clarity to considerations of technological determinism, mediation, and political economy, providing a comprehensive critical lens through which to observe contemporary developments in technological mediation. In addition, an Adornian-Benjaminian framework is justified geographically. Adorno wrote his numerous works on communications and media during his years in the United States as a researcher at the Princeton Radio Research Project and as one of many European exiles residing in Hollywood. His work, deeply informed by his close relationship with Benjamin, thus offers an ideal starting point for critiquing infrastructure and industrialized culture in the United States.¹¹

Dialectical Materialism and Technologically Mediated Culture

Writing that “power and knowledge are synonymous,” Horkheimer and Adorno traced the insidious growth and eventual centrality of violent domination within the development of Western civilization’s liberal concept of enlightenment or social progress through reason. Benjamin, too, pursued these themes in the years leading up to the war: “[t]here is no document of culture which is not at the same time a document of barbarism,” he wrote in the definitive statement of historical materialism entitled “Eduard Fuchs, Collector and Historian.”¹² Enlightenment, Horkheimer and Adorno argued, had resulted in a disastrous subordination of nature and, consequently, of humanity’s role within in it: “Enlightenment, understood in the widest sense as the advance of thought, has always aimed at liberating human beings from fear and installing them as masters. Yet the wholly enlightened earth is radiant with triumphant calamity.”¹³ Foremost in their concern was industrialist fascism, the combination of capitalism with right-wing nationalist ethnocentrism, whereas today the devastating effects of high-tech finance and climate change, as well as other forms of environmental devastation, are among the highest priorities for critical thought. Horkheimer and Adorno insisted that, due to insufficient critical reflection, demythologization had resulted paradoxically in the blindness of myth and fetish, hypostatized in products of the culture industry.¹⁴ Where Benjamin hoped for the perceptual evolution and enrichment of the “lay expert” in immersion in sound cinema, Adorno and Horkheimer saw standardized commodification that would lead to the “withering of imagination and spontaneity,” as well as to a dulling effect on the human sensorium which cleared the way for barbarism, the decline of civilization.¹⁵

Much of the productive dissonance pervading Adorno’s and Benjamin’s

mutual interest in media and perception develops out of the interrelated issues of technological determinism and the social significance of mass culture, and is therefore deeply germane to mass online education. Conventionally, argumentation over the accelerating technological transformation higher education has undergone continuously since the early 1990s is characterized by narrowly deterministic and otherwise non-dialectical perspectives. They occur in a variety of forms, in most cases tending toward one of two poles. The first of these extremities is an optimistic conceptualization of technological progress as smoothly linear and inevitable, characteristic of the teleological narratives of various currents found throughout the history of dialectical materialism and peculiar to contemporary neoliberal rhetoric, as well.¹⁶ Both Benjamin and Adorno resisted the attraction of this more sanguine pole, without veering toward its opposite by denying technology's social value. Both criticized the determinist element of Marx's vision, which Adorno later summarized in 1968 as the expectation that "the primacy of the forces of production would inevitably arrive and necessarily explode the relations of production," citing the threat of atomic warfare and increasingly pernicious social inequality as examples to the contrary.¹⁷ At the same time, both respected the prognostic capability of Marxist theory in determining the range and degree of revolutionary potential under particular circumstances. Adorno felt that the most auspicious moment had passed with little chance of returning, whereas Benjamin retained, or at least expressed, a greater sense of hope for a redemptive future.¹⁸ The other major determinist tendency is toward a pessimistic belief that technological development leads — inevitably — to harm. Counterexamples to this expectation are abundant, though it is difficult to argue against the contention that technological change tends toward the dystopian when fueled by profit-seeking or by military expansion — as in modernity it typically has been.

Adorno's understanding of the relation of society and technology is too complex to be associated with either of these polar extremes, though he has been criticized, famously, for his pessimistic outlook.¹⁹ Adorno emphasized throughout his life that technological development depends largely upon capitalist relations of production, the entrenchment of which had intensified during his lifetime despite improved conditions among many in the working classes of the wealthiest regions.²⁰ Benjamin, whose life ended before the end of the war, assigned much greater autonomy to technology. Like Marx, Benjamin viewed technological development positively as facilitating humanity's eventual liberation from capitalist oppression.²¹ However, his critique, rather than reflecting what would later come to be called "vulgar" Marxism, in many ways presaged positions associated with postmodernism and poststructuralism. Benjamin celebrated the mass culture made possible by technological reproducibility — cinema in particular — on the grounds that lay expertise and distracted consumption, as opposed to erudite bourgeois contemplation, contributed to the empowerment and liberation of proletarian spectators.²² Responding to the

contrary during their extended written correspondence, Adorno argued that popular entertainments, standardized and commodified by the culture industry, were more regressive than progressive, because they obscured the cause underlying the need for distraction: worker exploitation.²³ Elsewhere, Adorno further insisted that leisure-time pursuits in general, including hobbies and recreation, also tended toward the exploitation of worker-consumers, though indirectly by extracting value from labor time camouflaged as free time.²⁴ The revolutionary potential Benjamin located in technologically mediated mass culture was, in Adorno's view, unfortunately and unavoidably embedded in the "second nature" projected and consolidated by the culture industry.²⁵

Neither does Benjamin's perspective tend toward a polar extreme. The dialectical complexity of his stance is most clearly articulated in the second version of Benjamin's essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility," written in late 1935 and early 1936, which remained unpublished during his lifetime. Considered by many including Benjamin to be the definitive version, though it is not the one most widely read, it contains nineteen fragments (there are fewer in the more widely read third version, which remains a locus classicus of film theory), each clarifying a significant theoretical point regarding the ongoing historical development of media technology.²⁶ In the opening paragraphs Benjamin emphasizes the "prognostic value," as opposed to dogmatic veracity, of the tendential "laws" Marx applied in predicting a deepening exploitation of the working classes in conjunction with the development of circumstances necessary for capitalism's self-destruction.²⁷ While both Benjamin and Adorno used these principles to navigate between optimistic and pessimistic determinisms, they were by no means in agreement on the political significance of mass mediation.

Benjamin described material history as structured by the relation between economic base and cultural superstructure and, crucially, as discernible in changes in the technological mediation of perception:

Since the transformation of the superstructure proceeds far more slowly than that of the base, it has taken more than half a century for the change in the conditions of production to be manifested in all areas of culture. How this process has affected culture can only now be assessed, and these assessments must meet certain prognostic requirements.²⁸

Therefore, rather than prescribing avant-garde artistic practices, as many critics among his generation did, Benjamin sought to elucidate the historical linkage of art with the development of means of production, particularly media technology.²⁹ The primary political value he saw in defining these tendencies in artistic production lay in analyzing the processes by which the conventional aesthetic notions of "creativity and genius, eternal value and mystery" — in other words, aura — could be activated

and manipulated by fascist tendencies or, alternatively, neutralized by revolutionary practices.³⁰ Therefore, influenced in part by Dadaism, Benjamin's purpose was also to interject into art theory new concepts "completely useless for the purposes of fascism" and meanwhile "useful for the formulation of revolutionary demands in the politics of art."³¹

Though mindful of the dangers presented by powerful modern media technology — in the context of fascism, for instance, which sought to mobilize the masses through an aestheticization of politics without altering existing property relations — Benjamin remained focused on technology's ability to alleviate repression and foment revolutionary social processes.³² With respect to the revolutionary potential of mass mediation, rather than interpreting content Benjamin underscored the complex relation between media and perception, which he argued that earlier scholars were ill-equipped to account for due to the stage of technological development in which they worked.³³ He ascribed this general lag in critical apperception to a delay in super-structural changes, such as innovations in technological mediation, relative to transformations of the economic base.³⁴ Benjamin experienced his own moment as one in which, due to technological development, it had become possible to apprehend the social implications of mid-nineteenth-century European cultural production to an unprecedented extent, and in doing so suggested predictions of his own building upon those of Marx. Benjamin focused his prognostications on the revolutionary potential of technologically mediated changes in perception.

Adorno's works on media were far less hopeful, and after the war (and Benjamin's death) he concentrated increasingly on literary and musicological subjects. In 1968, years after returning to Europe, Adorno published "Is Marx Obsolete?" in response to sociological debates regarding the continuing relevance of the concept of capitalism in the wake of accelerating technological development, rearticulating his lifelong non-deterministic pessimism and the Marxist elements of its basis. Many of the hypothetical socioeconomic tendencies Marx formulated had indeed, Adorno explained, been realized historically — though often in contradictory forms, while some had not. A few had, as Adorno put it, "come spectacularly true." Thus, he argued, both the concept of capitalism and the need for its continued critique remained.³⁵ In the late 1960s, however, many sociologists claimed — as many do now in the digital age — that totalizing industrial expansion had obviated the notion of capitalism itself, making "the very concept of capitalism, the difference between capitalist and non-capitalist states, and the very critique of capitalism redundant."³⁶ To this, Adorno conceded that, in industrialized regions, whether capitalist or communist, the affordances of technological progress had partially negated the separation of society into antagonistic classes of capital and labor and that it had even lessened some of the suffering of the working classes.³⁷ However, he denied that late capitalism represented a substantive break with industrial production, claiming instead that industrial processes remained the models upon which all other behaviors, including

less-physically-tangible forms of labor, were based.³⁸ In other words, in his view the relations of production retained fundamentally capitalist configurations revolving around the ever-expanding generation and extraction of profit.

Equally committed to a Marxist view of history, Benjamin nevertheless found hope in the same mass culture that Adorno identified with ideological standardization and later with consumerist complacency. While Adorno saw the sameness generated by the culture industry as fundamentally regressive, Benjamin located the revolutionary potential of mass culture in precisely this repetitive, even monotonous character. According to Benjamin, the phenomenon of distraction first found its political value in cinema, primarily in the form of background listening and viewing, though also in the pattern of a continuous stream of varying shock effects that repeatedly “jolt the viewer, taking on a tactile quality.”³⁹ Distracted consumption empowered the mass audience because the artwork was absorbed by the spectator, whereas in the case of auratic contemplation an opposite process dominated, in which the viewer was absorbed into the artwork. Distracted perception was casual, tactile, and optical, and also determined mainly by habit rather than through focused scrutiny. It prepared the masses for new tasks and modes of perception necessary to their mobilization. Film, particularly due to its shock effects, was a “training ground” for revolutionary apperception.⁴⁰

One of the most important similarities between the two theorists was their mutual emphasis on the political economies of mass reproduction of inscriptions, though the commonalities between them do not extend much further into the details of their arguments. Tracing the historical development of reproducibility from the woodcut through the sound film, Benjamin noted a qualitative change induced by the mass replication made possible by industrialization.⁴¹ Cinema, he stressed, was a crucial object of study because it was the first artistic medium in which the principle of mass reproduction was wholly inherent, due mainly to the great costs involved in film production (a process which was further challenged by a continuous series of economic crises and war) and also to film’s capacity for endless editing, as distinguished from such media as painting and sculpture.⁴² Furthermore, Benjamin argued that aura — the prestigious, authoritative, and therefore socially distancing sense of authenticity suffusing traditional objects of aesthetic contemplation — was anathema to technological reproduction.⁴³ Since technological reproduction can include changes to the formerly lofty and unattainable work of art in addition to replicating and relocating it, the traditional value of the eternal “here and now” of the one-of-a-kind masterwork is subverted, rendered accessible, repeatable, and ephemeral.⁴⁴ The effect of auratic bourgeois art, which originated in cult, religion, and ritual magic, was first attenuated by the indexical, evidentiary qualities of photography (“which emerged at the same time as socialism”) and then finally erased, Benjamin proposed, in cinematic works designed for reproducibility.⁴⁵ Benjamin extrapolated a social and political significance from the “withering” of the unique

auratic experience in favor of a “mass existence” that far exceeded the field of art.⁴⁶ The processes of replication, and the reduction of physical and cultural distances accompanying them, corresponded to a revolutionary duality: the “shattering of tradition which is the reverse side of the present crisis and renewal of humanity.” Thus, Benjamin hailed cinema as the most significant catalyst of social change in the early twentieth century.⁴⁷

Adorno, however, remained unconvinced, arguing that the auratic haze was replaced by a “technological veil” that was equally fetishistic. This veil, to which Adorno referred frequently in the decades following his first formulation of the concept with Horkheimer in the early 1940s, designated the substitution of nature by a second, technologically mediated world that, in presenting an illusory social unity, precluded the imagination of alternatives to capitalism: “[t]he totality of the processes of mediation — in fact, of the exchange principle — produces a second deceptive immediacy. It allows one to attempt to forget what is divisive and antagonistic when it lies before one’s very eyes, or to repress it from our consciousness.”⁴⁸ Thus, while Adorno shared Benjamin’s aversion to bourgeois culture, he and Horkheimer nevertheless consistently argued that the Enlightenment tradition, including its high estimation of master artworks, was worth salvaging through critique. However, he and Horkheimer were far from confident that enlightenment would, indeed, change course: “[i]f Enlightenment does not assimilate reflection on this regressive moment, it seals its own fate.”⁴⁹ Thus, while Adorno and Benjamin shared a critique of capitalism and a vision of a communist future, they could not agree on near- or middle-term cultural strategy.

Whereas Adorno warned that the most powerful agent of this second nature was mass culture, Benjamin was far from distressed by the culture industry’s artificiality. Benjamin situated cinema within a dialectic of mimesis in the history of images in which each work of art embodied a volatile polar tension between its “cult” value and its “exhibition” value. The former corresponded to conventional auratic art based on a “first” or prior technology of “semblance,” as opposed to the latter correlating to mass reproduced culture — perhaps counterintuitively, since reproduction evokes repetition rather than difference — a “second” technology of “play.”⁵⁰ Benjamin described the second technology as “wholly provisional” or impermanent and functioning — again, unexpectedly given the positivist connotations scientific method is frequently accorded in critical theory of the period — “by means of experiments and endlessly varied test procedures” as well as by the differentiation of humanity from nature. That is, the second technology was defined by the dynamic license of play instead of by the static rigor of imitation.⁵¹ If art, and by extension all mediation, involves both seriousness and play in varying compositions, the loss of auratic semblance results in an expansion of “space for play” [*Spielraum*], which in Benjamin’s early twentieth-century experience was widest in cinema due to its particularity as a medium constituted by dynamic temporality and montage technique.⁵² In addition,

the scale and mechanization of cinema's mass reproduction constituted a quantitative difference from previous forms, and this led into a qualitative metamorphosis of the social function of art and thereby to new modes of distracted apperception.⁵³

In Benjamin's theory, cinematic liberation took a variety of other forms as well. In an extended riff upon the polysemy of the term "reproduction," he placed social reproduction explicitly in parallel with technological reproduction so that mass reproduction represented reproduction of the masses.⁵⁴ In a variety of ways, the performance of the film actor, unlike that of the stage actor, was analogous to the daily rhythms and contours of the industrial production process and therefore to modern life in general. For instance, acting in a film studio under the gaze of a team of directors and producers resembled the experience of undergoing stringent evaluation by a panel of expert judges.⁵⁵ Furthermore, the actor performing before a camera was, in a sense, being measured by and against mechanical equipment, evoking a parallel with the standardization characteristic of industrial production processes.⁵⁶ In addition, the actor was alienated, from his labor and from himself, insofar as the continuity of his performance, and hence the coherence of his own experience, was first fragmented into multiple takes which were then edited and rearranged in sequence, and then it was divided and dispersed through mass replication and distribution.⁵⁷ In a different sense as well, to survive the performance was "to preserve one's humanity in the face of the apparatus," despite the loss of personal aura or self-presence, and in this way to triumph over the dehumanization of industrialization by redefining humanity, far more important than succeeding in playing a role convincingly.⁵⁸ Moreover, in a manner analogous with democratic representation, the actor's consciousness of the mass audience, like a politician's awareness of her constituency, assigned a large measure of control over the production process to its spectators.⁵⁹ Benjamin portrayed the proletarian film audience heroically as a society of experts on popular culture. In addition, film journalism and the use of non-actors in narrative cinema radically multiplied the number of individuals represented onscreen, undermining traditional distinctions between artist and public.⁶⁰ Cinematic self-estrangement thus acquired a useful and revolutionary valence, though as Benjamin notes, one that would not assume its full political advantage until it was uncoupled from film capital.⁶¹

While Benjamin celebrated the development of mass media as progressive, Adorno identified it as posing serious impediments to enlightenment. Adorno's principal contention rested upon the potential influence of technological reproduction on revolutionary class consciousness, which he felt Benjamin had hyperbolized. Describing the mercurial boundary between the proletariat and the petit bourgeoisie, Benjamin invoked a figure-and-ground relation: "the same class struggle which loosens the compact mass of the proletariat compresses that of the petty bourgeoisie."⁶² Benjamin concluded the lengthy footnote on this topic by reinforcing two observations: first, that the petit bourgeois mass can transform into an affiliation of proletarian cadres under appropriate conditions, and second,

that the proliferation of fascism relies upon the petit bourgeois mass, inferring that control of the conditions shaping the petit bourgeois mass may prove to be of pivotal political importance — and not only for the left. Benjamin used the term “mass” in a highly specific way: the mass of the petty bourgeoisie was the conventional subject of mass psychology — a mere mass determined by emotional reaction, as opposed to a conscious class.⁶³ Consciously or otherwise, fascism was adept in using the forces of mass media to pressurize and mobilize the compact mass. Benjamin identified a clear distinction between two basic forms of massification differentiated by degrees of class consciousness: while the “loosened” masses of proletarian cadres held great potential for revolutionary “innervation,” a desirable form of unification among individuals, the petit bourgeoisie tended toward a harder, more compact or dense and reactionary texture of massification with a fascist orientation. The loosely amalgamated solidarity of the proletarian cadres followed a “collective ratio” or reasoning, balancing individuation with infra-subjectivity, which Benjamin described as the “most enlightened form of class consciousness,” specifying that it was based on action, the performance of specific tasks, apparently opposing it to consciousness defined solely by thought or discourse.⁶⁴ Later, though Adorno maintained that the historical possibility of achieving revolutionary class consciousness on a mass scale had passed, he nevertheless insisted that the

undiminished persistence of suffering, fear, and menace necessitates that the thought that cannot be realized should not be discarded. After having missed its opportunity, philosophy must come to know, without any mitigation, why the world — which would be paradise here and now — can become hell itself tomorrow.⁶⁵

Of course, Adorno and Benjamin’s conceptual landscape was revolutionary in scale, whereas the focus of the remainder of this essay will be on the potential influence online education may have in pedagogy in the higher education political economy, a vital engine of social reproduction closely linked with potential sites of mass revolt but only very indirectly capable of igniting insurgency. Just as unionism is only one of many — very complex — possible steps toward resolving socioeconomic inequality, so is the virtualization of education merely one of many topics requiring analysis in the context of organizing resistance in the academic workplace.

However, this Adornoean-Benjaminian interpretation suggests a number of provocative questions, eliciting appropriate depth and detail, each deserving of more attention than there is space for here: does the freedom of composition offered by today’s digital media provide more room for play, for semblance, or for more of both? What proportions are desirable? Which pedagogical elements could or should be repeated, and which allowed or encouraged to differ? Is there reason to retain some sense of tradition, heritage, canon, or merit? Might new enlightenment traditions be

developed? How important is the medium in determining apperception? With what political consequences? In the context of massification, what is the significance of online education's potentially global scale? Might the current onslaught of digitalized documentation, testing, and standardization be welcomed as, ultimately, a process of anti-capitalist liberation, as Benjamin envisioned in the case of cinema? How precisely might these apparently unstoppable procedures reinforce a beneficial relationship between labor and technology more than capital? What would empowering distraction look like in an academic setting? Is it anathema to an institutional context? Does it already exist? If so, to what extent is it market-driven? Is pedagogy itself an auratic cultural form? Can it be rendered as popular or populist? Which historical particulars make it possible to decide between the non-deterministic pessimism and optimism of Adorno and Benjamin in a given context? Perhaps a brief series of events at a particular institution can begin to indicate the framework's usefulness.

Incident at San José State

Traditionally, distance-learning facilitated through various media technologies has offered an alternative degree route only pursued by a small percentage of college and university students, a less-fortunate subset of a relatively privileged group.⁶⁶ Until recently, most distance learners were designated as non-traditional (usually older) vocational students often burdened with disabilities, childcare responsibilities, work schedules, or remote rural residence. As the Internet became increasingly integrated into a wide variety of procedures and practices at colleges and universities during the 1990s, accredited distance learning nevertheless remained a relatively minor concern in mainstream higher education. Despite the increased access made possible by the naturalization of a wide variety of online procedures and practices during the 1990s, credit-bearing online courses remained auxiliary.⁶⁷

The emergence of widely available high-speed Internet and Web 2.0 technology in the early 2000s permitted a stronger degree of immersive mediated interactivity. In light of that development and the recent economic depression, a keen interest in online education as a mainstream option for college and university students has emerged. Many decision makers appear to view "e-learning" as the salvation and future of higher education (and of the global eminence of the North American academic system) and opposition to this mentality has been vociferous. The conversation continues to involve coalitions of high-level administrators and other select decision-makers from various institutions, and its defining characteristics remain stable: pressing demands for action, technologically deterministic optimism combined with ambiguity regarding the appropriate paths to follow, and an unwillingness to enact legislation on the matter.⁶⁸ Dissenting voices have appeared in large numbers of news and editorial items, especially in academic-related, but non-peer-reviewed, periodicals. Technological innovation and real economic changes have combined with these various attitudes to continue shaping online education,

pointing toward a new organizational form of unprecedented scale and centralization, the increasingly simulated and automated interactivity of the Massive Open Online Course or MOOC.⁶⁹ MOOCs have garnered particularly impassioned discussion and serious media attention since their first appearance in 2010.⁷⁰ At first, they were offered on a non-credit-bearing, experimental basis. Soon, however, MOOCs could be completed for credit at a small number of institutions, and higher education decision-makers seemed hopeful that the discovery of a viable business model allowing for the charging of tuitions was imminent.⁷¹

In June of 2012, the perceived stakes of online education achieved notoriety. President Sullivan of the University of Virginia was forced to resign for not responding as desired to apocalyptic rhetoric from members of the board of trustees regarding the supposed urgency of instantiating an extensive online education program at the university. During the following weeks, board members resigned, the campus community — students, faculty, alumni, and staff — demonstrated, the governor considered expelling the entire board, and finally Sullivan was reinstated.⁷² Email messages leaked to student and professional journalists indicate that leading board members had been trading editorials from right-wing corporate news publications in which online education, specifically in its MOOC manifestation, was presented as the sole solution to university budget crises, precisely because of the savings in labor costs presented by inexpensive automation technology.⁷³

Since then, a few institutions and programs on the cusp of launching or expanding online offerings have become sites of contestation. In Spring 2013, for instance, faculty at Amherst College passed a resolution against joining edX, a nonprofit MOOC provider affiliated with Harvard and MIT, though they emphasized that they were not opposed to the presence of online education among their institution's course offerings in general. They indicated that they were uneasy about the massive format and required more time before deciding upon such an important influence on the institution's future. Two weeks later, a council representing the undergraduate faculty at Duke University voted against joining a consortium of ten institutions that would offer credit-bearing online courses provided by 2U, a for-profit company utilizing an interactive, real-time format for small class sizes rather than a MOOC design.⁷⁴ In both cases, faculty governance bodies cited the same reasons for intervening in existing contracts about which they had been consulted. The nature of the online education in question was quite different in either case, however, suggesting that it was the technological reproducibility of pedagogy itself that was truly at issue. Otherwise, faculty throughout the United States have remained relatively circumspect, aside from notorious resistance among California State University faculty to contracts with MOOC providers, apparently intended to begin “flipping” classrooms as a prelude to obviating the role of professors.⁷⁵

In May 2013, members of the philosophy faculty at San José State University, an historically public institution, organized a department-wide refusal to pilot an

online course featuring celebrity Harvard professor Michael Sandel lecturing on the theme of justice.⁷⁶ They published their rationale in an open letter requesting Sandel's "solidarity" but otherwise avoiding identifiably leftist rhetoric and only reluctantly raising the vital issue of labor displacement. They convincingly argued that the impersonal, standardized form of the edX course offered little to no pedagogical improvement over traditional teaching methods. In doing so, they refuted edX President Anant Agarwal's repeated public assertions that traditional lecture-and-notetaking pedagogy had been rendered obsolete, ostensibly because contemporary students learn best by means of the same media practices they engage in during their free time as consumers and producers of user-generated content online.⁷⁷ The SJSU faculty countered this naïve techno-optimism with a determinism of their own, though a pessimistic one contending that, despite the fine quality of Sandel's pedagogy, the format of the edX course transmits a hollowing out of Enlightenment humanism by distributing technologically mediated and reproduced — in other words, automated — pedagogy. In doing so, they explained, edX perpetuates and deepens the inequities of an already-stratified higher education system, thus serving to intensify class disparity rather than attenuate it, the latter being central to the traditional mission of public higher education in the United States. In this way, they argued, the democratic values of public higher education in the United States risk subversion.⁷⁸

Recognizing Sandel's decisive position as a public figure in the chain of production, the SJSU philosophy faculty addressed their critique to him rather than to edX management, in the form of an open letter. At issue was the popular technique blending of pre-fabricated online material into traditional face-to-face courses via a contract with edX. Seeing no purpose or benefit to mandating the use of pre-recorded material, even though authored by an acclaimed intellectual, the faculty contended that the ultimate aim of the university administration was to use online course materials to replace teaching labor, of which there was no shortage. They argued that attempting to solve long-term financial problems quickly in this way would nevertheless undermine the "quality of education" at their institution as well as exacerbate other "social justice" issues. The philosophers of SJSU justified their position by defending the value of specialized scholarship for pedagogy and the efficacy of conventional teaching methods, and by criticizing the principle of standardization.

The SJSU faculty performed a spectacularly nuanced critique of the lessons about social justice students would learn, not from the explicit content of Sandel's lectures and others like it, but rather from traces of the material's non-local, non-universal site of production — in other words, from its technological mode of delivery and its socioeconomic consequences. Arguing that minorities are less underrepresented among the faculty and student body of SJSU than they are at Harvard, the authors of the open letter imply that racial privilege and bias are reinforced by materials

produced there to be broadcast elsewhere. Next, the link between racial and class privilege is brought to the fore, as they express their fears that contracts between outside course providers and public universities attended primarily by students of more modest means, which are typically based at the most elite institutions, would catalyze the stratification of an allegedly homogeneous higher education system into two classes of contrasting quality. Here, the rhetoric becomes more colloquial, as if daring readers to take issue with working-class belonging:

one, well-funded colleges and universities in which privileged students get their own real professor; and the other, financially stressed private and public universities in which students watch a bunch of video-taped lectures and interact, if indeed any interaction is available on their home campuses, with a professor that this model of education has turned into a glorified teaching assistant. [...] Teaching justice through an educational model that is spearheading the creation of two social classes in academia thus amounts to a cruel joke.⁷⁹

If the broader issue of socioeconomic stratification (class) was held for a time at arm's length via projection onto the university system itself, the authors insulated themselves in this way only until the denouement of the argument.

On the socioeconomic significance of technological mediation, the philosophy faculty of SJSU exhibited a justified, non-deterministic pessimism in pointing out the direction in which contracting with outside course vendors would lead. They prefaced their warning with an acknowledgment that technology may indeed be used auspiciously — when automated materials are both developed by the teaching professors themselves and complemented with ample opportunity for interaction with students. Otherwise, the tendency is for technology to lower the quality of pedagogy, which is why they denied the advantage of licensing pre-packaged material. Furthermore, they argued that localized faculty control over design and content (what Marxists will recognize as the means of production) is essential to keeping curriculum current based on faculty research and experience, as well as direct interaction with diverse students. For this reason, massive broadcasting projects were also rejected as unacceptable. Addressing the context of financial emergencies (perceived or real), the SJSU philosophers diagnosed the importance of historical context and timing in deciding whether to concentrate upon a sense of possibility or a pessimistic stance: outside contracts can easily be used as the first stage of restructuring an institution or system in general and — finally addressing the labor issue directly — can therefore promote maximal virtualization of instruction in the long term and is furthermore a difficult decision to reverse. Again at this point, the tenor shifted toward the vernacular as the SJSU philosophers' letter culminated in denouncing the salient motive behind academic outsourcing as financial, rather than

pedagogical, as had been maintained by administrators and by representatives of edX: “[i]t is time to stop masking the real issue of MOOCs and blended courses behind empty rhetoric about a new generation and a new world.”⁸⁰ Gesturing to the lack of faculty oversight involved in the edX agreement, the authors of the open letter also gave pride of place to pedagogy in their argument, unsurprisingly emphasizing the necessity of the high-quality commodity they labor in the institutional production process over the value of their own labor-time.⁸¹

Sandel responded that his goal in providing free lectures online was a broadly demotic one, too — namely, to provide free lessons in ethics to the global public — and that he was dismayed by the exploitative potential that had surfaced.⁸² In answer to the SJSU faculty’s call to action, Harvard professors from various disciplines united to confront their institution’s administration, demanding the opportunity to negotiate an ethical framework for governing Harvard’s involvement in online education.⁸³ Their attempt marks the beginning of what could and should become a substantial movement among college and university instructors elsewhere, especially since the SJSU incident resulted in increased faculty oversight and expanded critical insight into the technology tycoon “venture philanthropy” that has underwritten many online education “enterprises.” As education becomes increasingly digitalized, concerns must compete for attention with excitement over possibilities for expanded access and with enjoyment in exploring new tools and practices, not to mention naïve optimism for technological “progress.” The inevitability of change is mistaken for improvement. Education, both technologically mediated and face-to-face, is often treated unquestioningly as a beneficial process with the potential to alleviate poverty and redistribute resources. In the meantime, consensus emphasizing marketization and efficiency is rarely challenged. Recently, President Obama’s advisors have directed him to allow market forces to decide the future of online education in the United States.⁸⁴ As the SJSU philosophers rightly pointed out, this amounts to a Faustian bargain in which industry is permitted to demand “ready-made employees” with one hand while opposing proportionate taxation for public education and government services in general with the other. Meanwhile, privatization corrodes the public from within.

The philosophy faculty’s open letter is an outstanding specimen of collaborative writing that indicates a level of workplace solidarity that, sadly, has become remarkable. It, and other documents like it such as FemTechNet’s White Paper, could even be described as an indication of the pivotal role of the petit bourgeoisie, or at least of the tenured professoriat, perhaps the only group both able and likely to prevent the crass virtualization of the higher education system. In each case, the attempt to appeal to broad, if professional and liberal, audiences on a provocative, radicalizing political level is effective.⁸⁵ These compositions are compelling manifestoes and should be utilized as such across disciplines, even if the defense of elite liberal arts humanism as a labor market and the invocation of undefined placeholders like “social

justice” and “democracy” ring hollow to all but the most highly educated and fortunate fraction of a percentile. Their primary importance is in providing encouraging signs of politicization among the scholars most capable of expressing it convincingly, those who have maintained contact with critical theory in both its poststructuralist and Marxist traditions under the shadow of neoliberalism.

The SJSU philosophy faculty’s intervention suggests that Adorno’s relatively grim perspective is the most relevant to urgent circumstances. Once pressing issues are addressed, it becomes possible to focus on the neo-humanizing potential of Benjaminian play. Meanwhile, from the point of view of labor, the vast majority of people who do not benefit from increasing socioeconomic stratification, “a compelling urge toward new social opportunities is being clandestinely exploited in the interests of a property-owning minority.”⁸⁶ The perspective achieved by tracing the constellation of tensions Benjamin and Adorno lived almost a century ago suggests that assuming a high probability for the most exploitative outcomes is not deterministic but rather the best strategy for avoiding negative, even catastrophic, outcomes.

If the profit motive defined by the theory of surplus value remains the strongest social dynamic, especially as it is underwritten by the complacency of privilege and the rhetoric of crisis, it is also true that the unpredictable, indeterminate potential Benjamin described as play persists in its social influence as well. Thus, a synthesis of both Adorno’s and Benjamin’s positions on technologically mediated culture provides something like a comprehensive view. Online education, for example, presents both possibilities in dialectical tension with one another, though it seems likely that, without critical reflection, the gambles of the powerful will lead to more extensively reified consciousness, massification without innervation. What is needed for the responsible development and implementation of educational social technologies is critical subjectivity. At the same time, if enlightenment can only be sustained by moving education online, placing it on “life-support,” as it were, doing so in a critically reflective manner may provide an opportunity to avoid throwing the “baby out with the bathwater,” to borrow the cliché that Adorno used so effectively in *Minima Moralia*.⁸⁷ The awareness with which online education is cultivated could prove decisive in determining the future of higher education.

Notes

1. Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility," *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility and Other Writings on Media*, ed. Michael W. Jennings, Brigit Doherty, and Thomas Y. Levin; trans. Edmund Jephcott and Harry Zohn (Cambridge: Belknap, 2008) 19-55. Benjamin's essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility" exists in multiple versions. Unless stated otherwise, all references are to the second version, now widely considered the Urtext. The first version, Benjamin's handwritten draft, is unpublished. The third version was the first to be published (in *Illuminations*). For a full explanation of the differences among versions, see Miriam Bratu Hansen's "Room for Play: Benjamin's Gamble with Cinema," *October* 109 (2004) 3-45.
2. Theodor W. Adorno and Walter Benjamin, *The Complete Correspondence 1928-1940*, ed. H. Lonitz., trans. N. Walker (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1999) 130-31, and Theodor W. Adorno, *Essays on Music*, ed. Richard Leppert (Berkeley: U California P, 2002) 349.
3. Recordings, animation, and software programming are all automations.
4. *Inside Higher Ed* (<<http://www.insidehighered.com/>>) and *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (<<http://chronicle.com>>) contain hundreds of editorials regarding the potential harm and benefit of online higher education from the standpoints of various stakeholders. An online panel of four humanities professors (Ian Bogost, Cathy Davidson, Al Filreis, and Ray Schroeder) published by the *Los Angeles Review of Books* provides a concise overview of many of the most salient arguments from a professional academic perspective (<<http://lareviewofbooks.org/essay/moocs-and-the-future-of-the-humanities-a-roundtable-part-1>>). *The New York Times* education page contains dozens of articles representing many viewpoints, as well (<<http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/subjects/e/elearning/>>). For students the central issue tends to be access, whereas for institutions it is finances, and for instructors the most salient questions are those of pedagogy and labor, as has been the case in general since the earliest emergence of online education (see, for example, "Will the Future of Online Education be User-Friendly?" by Tama Leaver in *Fibreculture* 2 (2003) <<http://two.fibreculturejournal.org/webct-will-the-future-of-online-education-be-user-friendly/>>). What is new is the intensified rate of privatization incentivized by neoliberalism and justified by the global economic crisis in the current atmosphere of austerity. Many, like Cathy Davidson, prefer to emphasize the potential for new beginnings and explorations (<<http://www.hybridpedagogy.com/journal/10-things-learned-from-making-a-meta-mooc/>>). For a critique of online education in general, see "The Choices Report" produced by the University Committee on Planning and Budget Systemwide Academic Senate of the University of California, particularly 29-31 (University Committee on Planning and Budget, "The Choices Report," Systemwide Academic Senate, University of California [March 2010] <<http://senate.universityofcalifornia.edu/reports/ucpb.choices.pdf>>). What is certain is that online education is growing quickly: see Alexandria Walton Radford, "Learning at a Distance: Undergraduate Enrollment in Distance Education Courses and Degree Programs," U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (October 2011) <<http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2012/2012154.pdf>>, and I. Elaine Allen and Jeff Seaman, *Grade Change: Tracking Online Education in the United States*, Sloan Consortium (Boston: Babson Survey Research Group and Quahog Research Group [2014]) <<http://www.onlinelearningsurvey>

- com/reports/gradechange.pdf>.
5. National Media Consortium (NMC), "Agile Approaches to Change," *The Horizon Report: 2014 Higher Education Edition* <<http://www.nmc.org/pdf/2014-nmc-horizon-report-he-EN.pdf>>. For a provocative discussion of social media user agreements, see Jamie Skye Bianco's 2009 article "Social Networking and Cloud Computing: Precarious Affordances of the Prosumer," *Women's Studies Quarterly* 37 (1-2) 303-12. Numerous theorists have described exploitation and indirect value extraction online, particularly in the context of user-generated content on social media. *Digital Labor: The Internet as Playground and Factory* (London: Routledge, 2012), edited by Trebor Scholz, contains significant essays on the subject from the past twenty years by Tiziana Terranova, Lisa Nakamura, McKenzie Wark, Jodi Dean, and many others. Another useful example is Aleena Chia's 2012 article "Welcome to Me-Mart: The Politics of User-Generated Content in Personal Blogs" *American Behavioral Scientist* 56 (5) 421-38. The journal *tripleC: Communication, Capitalism, and Critique* has recently (in the past few years) published dozens of articles on critical political economy of media and communications, including Christian Fuchs' influential work on "Google Capitalism" (10.1: 42-48).
 6. Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2002) 2.
 7. Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic* 11.
 8. *Dialectic* 100.
 9. Theodor W. Adorno, "Education after Auschwitz," *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords*, trans. Henry W. Pickford (New York: Columbia UP, 2005) 204.
 10. As is well known, many of the same problems appearing in higher education already plague the K-12 system, including the defunding of public schools combined with privatization of services and vilification of instructors organized in unions.
 11. For more on Adorno's years in the United States and his work on media and communications, see David Jenemann's *Adorno in America* (Minneapolis: U Minnesota P, 2007), as well as Richard Leppert's introduction in *Adorno's Essays on Music*. Adorno has remained largely unrecognized as a media scholar for several reasons, including his emphasis on high aesthetics. The availability of significant texts has been an obstacle. *Current of Music*, for example, was not published in any form until 2006. However, as Jenemann writes, "[t]o dismiss Adorno as politically and socially detached is also to misunderstand how thoroughly he immersed himself in America's myriad forms of entertainment and communication. Despite Adorno's genuine horror at many elements of the culture industry, during his stay in the United States he nonetheless dedicated himself to its study from top to bottom, learning the principles of broadcasting, production, and transmission as well as the economic and technological conditions under which mass-culture texts were consumed" (xvii).
 12. Walter Benjamin, "Eduard Fuchs, Collector and Historian," *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility and Other Writings on Media*, ed. Michael W. Jennings, Brigit Doherty, and Thomas Y. Levin; Trans. Edmund Jephcott and Harry Zohn (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2008) 124.
 13. Benjamin, "Eduard Fuchs" 1.
 14. "Eduard Fuchs" 11.
 15. "Eduard Fuchs" 34, and *Dialectic* 100.

16. It should be noted, however, that the rhetorical power of optimistic teleology has been pivotal strategically for the left, particularly during periods of persecution. In Benjamin's theory of history, he explicitly rejects linear and incremental progressive models, yet he also explores a secular messianism (see his essays "On the Concept of History" and especially "Eduard Fuchs").
17. Theodor W. Adorno, "Is Marx Obsolete?" trans. Nicolas Slater. *Diogenes* 16 (1968) 9.
18. These differences correspond to opposing orientations to the loss of autonomous subjectivity. In the "Dedication" of *Minima Moralia* to Horkheimer, for instance, Adorno writes of "the old subject, now historically condemned, which is still for-itself, but no longer in-itself. The subject still feels sure of its autonomy, but the nullity demonstrated to subjects by the concentration camp is already overtaking the form of subjectivity itself" (Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections on a Damaged Life*, trans. E. F. N. Jephcott [London: Verso, 2005] 16).
19. ...which remained relatively stable from the 1930s through the end of his life in 1969 as did many central components of his theoretical apparatus.
20. Adorno, "Marx" 4.
21. Benjamin, "Work of Art" 19.
22. "Work of Art" 39, 54, 56-57.
23. Adorno and Benjamin, *Correspondence* 130-31, and Leppert, "Introduction" 349. The chapter in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* entitled "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception" responds to Benjamin's essay point by point. See, for instance, 100 on the topic of distraction.
24. See Karl Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, trans. Ben Fowkes (Moscow: Progress, 1965) Chapter 25.
25. *Dialectic* 99.
26. The main elements of Benjamin's argument are present in both the second and third versions of the "Work of Art" essay: the technological reproduction of art in mass culture, immanent to the media of photography and film (and, a contemporary scholar might add, augmented geometrically in digital media), had reorganized modern art and sense perception by erasing the aesthetic power of the original artwork and thus giving birth to the distracted expertise of the industrial masses (4). However, the most detailed discussion of massification and class consciousness is found in the second version, which is why it is given preference in this analysis.
27. Benjamin, "Work of Art" 19.
28. *ibid.*
29. *ibid.*
30. "Work of Art" 19-20.
31. "Work of Art" 20, 38-39.
32. "Work of Art" 38, 41.
33. "Work of Art" 23.
34. "Work of Art" 23, 28. Althusser and others would challenge the conceptual validity of the base-superstructure relation. Benjamin's use of it was far from "vulgar," as is evident.
35. "Marx" 4.
36. "Marx" 1. Examples include sociologists George Ritzer and Nathan Jurgenson, whose notion of online "prosumption" is derived from the popular "futurist" Alvin Toffler's work.
37. "Marx" 8-9, 12.

38. "Marx" 4.
39. "Work of Art" 39.
40. "Work of Art" 40-41.
41. "Work of Art" 20-21, 39.
42. "Work of Art" 20-21, 28, 44n9.
43. "Work of Art" 21-22, 43.
44. "Work of Art" 21-23.
45. "Work of Art" 24, 27.
46. "Work of Art" 22, 25.
47. "Work of Art" 22.
48. "Marx" 15.
49. *Dialectic* vi-xvii.
50. "Work of Art" 25-26, 48-49n23.
51. "Work of Art" 26.
52. "Work of Art" 26, 48-49n23.
53. "Work of Art" 25-26.
54. "Work of Art" 34, 54n36.
55. "Work of Art" 30, 31.
56. "Work of Art" 30.
57. "Work of Art" 30-32, 35.
58. "Work of Art" 31.
59. "Work of Art" 33, 49n24.
60. "Work of Art" 33-34, 36.
61. "Work of Art" 32, 33.
62. "Work of Art" 50-51n25.
63. "Work of Art" 50.
64. "Work of Art" 51n25.
65. Theodor W. Adorno, "Why Still Philosophy?" *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords*, trans. Henry W. Pickford (New York: Columbia UP, 2005) 14.
66. Alexandria Walton Radford, "Learning at a Distance: Undergraduate Enrollment in Distance Education Courses and Degree Programs," U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (October 2011) <<http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2012/2012154.pdf>>.
67. Radford, "Learning."
68. National Commission on Higher Education Attainment, "An Open Letter to College and University Leaders: College Completion Must Be Our Priority," Washington, D.C.: American Council on Education (2013) <<http://www.acenet.edu/news-room/Documents/An-Open-Letter-to-College-and-University-Leaders.pdf>>.
69. However, at the time of this article's composition, 2013 had in some circles been designated the "year of backlash" in response to 2012 having been dubbed the "year of the MOOC" (Peter Stokes and Sean Gallagher, "The Year of the Backlash," *Inside Higher Ed* [13 December 2013] <<https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2013/12/13/have-moocs-hurt-public-perception-online-education->

- essay>).
70. Marc Parry, "Online, Bigger Classes May Be Better Classes: Experimenters Say Diversity Means Richness," *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (29 August 2010) <<http://chronicle.com/article/Open-Teaching-When-the/124170/>>.
 71. I. Elaine Allen and Jeff Seaman, *Changing Course: Ten Years of Tracking Online Education in the United States*. Sloan Consortium. (Boston: Babson Survey Research Group and Quahog Research Group, 2013) <<http://www.onlinelearningsurvey.com/reports/changingcourse.pdf>>, and Steve Kolowich, "Angered by MOOC Deals, San José State Faculty Senate Considers Rebuff." *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. (18 November 2013) <<http://chronicle.com/article/Angered-by-MOOC-Deals-San/143137/>>.
 72. Kevin Kiley, "Rebuilding Mr. Jefferson's University," *Insider Higher Ed* (27 June 2012) <<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2012/06/27/uva-board-reinstates-president-sullivan-and-prepares-strategic-planning-effort>>.
 73. Scott Jaschik, "The E-mail Trail at UVa." *Inside Higher Ed* (20 June 2012) <<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2012/06/20/e-mails-show-uva-board-wanted-big-online-push>>.
 74. Steve Kolowich, "Duke U.'s Undergraduate Faculty Derails Plan for Online Courses for Credit," *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (30 April 2013) <<http://chronicle.com/article/Duke-US-Undergraduate/138895/>>.
 75. National Commission on Higher Education Attainment, "Open Letter." For discussion and article archives on the subject of online education in the California system, see Christopher Newfield's and Michael Meranze's blog, "Remaking the University": <<http://utotherescue.blogspot.com>>.
 76. The term "public institution" has been complicated in the United States and has become more so, which is why the modifier "historically" is added in order to designate the historical formation of a school designed for general education and supported through taxation and governmental land grants. In general, tuitions have never been free, and nor have admissions been truly "open." Admissions are increasingly competitive, and at many institutions tuitions have risen exponentially in recent years; therefore the term "general" may no longer apply. Moreover, many historically public institutions are rapidly becoming privatized through corporate management of various services.
 77. Department of Philosophy, San José State University, "An Open Letter to Professor Michael Sandel from the Philosophy Department at San José State U.," *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (2 May 2013) <<http://chronicle.com/article/The-Document-Open-Letter-From/138937/>>.
 78. Harvard was the first incorporation established in what would later become the United States, and it piloted the first program for soliciting "permanent funds" (funds for reinvesting) early in the twentieth century and has continued to do so on an expanding scale (See Bruce Kimball and Benjamin Ashby Johnson, "The Inception of the Meaning and Significance of Endowment in American Higher Education, 1890-1930," *Teachers College Record* 114.10 [2012] < <http://www.tcrecord.org/library/abstract.asp?contentid=16669>>, and "The Beginning of 'Free Money' Ideology in American Universities: Charles W. Eliot at Harvard, 1869-1909," *History of Education Quarterly* 52.2 [2012] 224).
 79. Department of Philosophy, "Open Letter."

80. "Open Letter." For a variety of perspectives on the recent status of the California system of higher education and on the potential role of online education in its future, see *Representations* 116 (2011) and the "Choices Report" generated by the University Committee on Planning and Budget Systemwide Academic Senate of the University of California.
81. It is important not to make too much of this from a philosophical standpoint, given that the faculty's union representation may have helped to shape the parameters, at least, of their argument.
82. Michael Sandel, "Michael Sandel Responds," *The Chronicle of Higher Education* 2 (2 May 2013) <<http://chronicle.com/article/Michael-Sandel-Responds/139021/>>.
83. "Letter from 58 Professors to Smith Addressing edX," *The Harvard Crimson* (23 May 2013) <<http://www.thecrimson.com/article/2013/5/23/edX-professors-letter-text/>>.
84. President's Council of Advisors on Science and Technology (December 2013) <http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/microsites/ostp/PCAST/pcast_edit_dec-2013.pdf>.
85. FemTechNet White Paper Committee, "Transforming Higher Education with Distributed Open Collaborative Courses (DOCCs): Feminist Pedagogies and Networked Learning," *FemTechNet Commons* (30 September 2013) <www.femtechnet.org>.
86. Benjamin, "Work of Art" 34. For Adorno's thoughts on education and political economy, see the essays in *Critical Models* entitled "Education after Auschwitz" (191-204) and "Taboos on the Teaching Vocation" (177-90). With Horkheimer, Adorno mentions close relationships among rationalization, mass culture, and education several times (*Dialectic* xvii, 23, 135, 161-63). In every case, he reserves only a very slight measure of hope — more of a wish than a hope — that Western civilization may surpass its own limitations.
87. Adorno, *Minima Moralia* 43.