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“A True Bond of Unity”: Popular Education And The Foundation Of the Discipline of English Literature in England

In this paper, I would like to discuss certain aspects of the rise of English studies in relation to the general development of education in 19th and early 20th C England. While Chris Baldick and others have recently drawn attention to the rise of English studies in England, the study of English literature has become so fully integrated into the modern education system that it is easy to forget that neither the discipline of English literature nor the education system itself has a long history. A hundred years ago English professors were few and far between, and those few might have been reluctant to admit it. The discipline was developed first mainly as a subject for the lower classes, few of whom were considered capable, through lack of time, energy, breeding or intelligence, of mastering a “higher” but more rigorous classical education. It was also deemed acceptable for another excluded segment of the population: women. For them the recondite study of the classics or Anglo-Saxon seemed inappropriate, and they were considered unsuitable for the “masculine” disciplines of mathematics or science. For those groups traditionally accustomed to education, the study of English seemed doubly redundant: anyone growing up in a “good” family was expected to absorb the English literary tradition almost by osmosis; and unlike the classics, English literature was after all written in English and could therefore be understood by anyone who took the time to read it. English literature as an educational discipline emerged rapidly, however, and soon became not only legitimate but the centerpiece of the whole edifice of liberal education; it was transformed from a negligible part of the system, looked on with disdain by academics, to the cornerstone of the humanities.

Neither the content nor the structural principles of the study of English literature is a given, static fact. The term “literature” itself is not a stable category but is the product of social and historical factors. The discipline was moulded by its context, by its institutional frame-

work; since a major concern underlying the social and educational crises surrounding its formation was a search for an orthodox principle of authority and control, it was to this end that the study of English literature was directed.

“Wherever we turn in 19th Century thought,” Frye writes,

we meet some version of a ‘drunken boat’ construct, where the values of humanity, intelligence, or cultural and social tradition keep tossing precariously in a sort of Noah’s ark on top of a menacing and potentially destructive force. (157)

In the 19th century, writes Hobsbawm, “The city was like a volcano to whose rumblings the rich and powerful listened with fear, and whose eruption they dreaded” (86-87). The rumblings of the volcano grew by turns louder and quieter; the eruption seemed now imminent, now unlikely, but the fear was persistent. “For all its solid and imposing strength, Victorian society . . . was shot through, from top to bottom, with the dread of some wild outbreak of the masses that would overthrow the established order and confiscate private property” (54-55). One observer remarked that “Our civilization seems nothing but a thin film or crust lying over a volcanic pit,” and he wondered “whether some day the pit would not break up through it and destroy us all” (58).

Sir James Kay-Shuttleworth was England’s chief school inspector in the middle of the century. Matthew Arnold worked under him for many years and writes of him with admiration (v.2, 212-14). In 1839, he described the political situation in terms that, in fact, closely anticipate Arnold:

the critical events of this very hour are full of warning, that the ignorance—nay the barbarism—of large portions of our fellow countrymen, can no longer be neglected, if we are not prepared to substitute a military tyranny or anarchy for the moral subjection which has hitherto been the only safeguard of England. At this hour military force alone retains in subjugation great masses of the operative population, beneath whose outrages, if not thus restrained, the wealth and institutions of society would fall. (228)

Education was seen, by many, as the panacea that could bring some cohesiveness to a society that seemed to have lost its bearings. A search thus began for a new hegemonic formula, a new tradition and authority, and institutionalized education increasingly became the means by which it was to be communicated.

Hegemony may be characterized, in Gramsci’s words, as “a combination of force and consent which form variable equilibria, without force ever prevailing too much over consent” (80). The problem of the assumption and maintenance of power is thus inextricably connected

to the production of consent, which is itself linked intricately to the cultural institutions of a society. It is important to emphasize the internalization of hegemony as a “lived relation,” a mode of experience and appropriation of reality, so that “notions such as ‘human nature’ effectively discount the possibility of change and ‘naturalize’ the social order” (Hall, 49-50). Gramsci writes that “Every relationship of hegemony is necessarily an educational one” (30), and perhaps the corollary is true as well: relationships of education are often hegemonic, positing a particular conception of the world as normal.

A related concept is the idea of *doxa* developed by Pierre Bourdieu: “that which is taken for granted” so that “the established cosmological and political order is perceived not as arbitrary, i.e. as one possible order among others, but as a self-evident and natural order which goes without saying and therefore goes unquestioned” (166).

The drawing of the line between the field of opinion, of that which is explicitly questioned, and the field of *doxa* . . . is itself a fundamental objective at stake in that form of class struggle which is the struggle for the imposition of the dominant systems of classification.

In relatively stable societies, the field of *doxa* can remain static, but

when the dominated have the material and symbolic means of rejecting the definition of the real that is imposed on them . . . it . . . becomes necessary to undertake the work of conscious systematization and express rationalization which marks the passage from *doxa* to orthodoxy. (169)

In the late 1700s, a number of assumptions about social relations began to slip from the field of *doxa*, and it began to be accepted that one of the ways to effect control without using the “strong arm of power” was education. Adam Smith, in *The Wealth of Nations* (1776), was one of the first to formulate what later became a common position: “the labourers can be convinced that their true interests are bound up with the accumulation of capital . . . even though this development appears to be detrimental to their interests” (Simon 1960, 140). Similarly, Malthus looks to an education promoting “peace and quietness, to weaken the effect of inflammatory writings and to prevent an unreasonable and ill-directed opposition to the constituted authorities” (Simon 1960, 146).

There was, as well, a great deal of discussion within the working classes themselves about the need for education — but with a different orientation. Ex-Chartist William Lovett declared that

the floodgates of knowledge, which the tyrants of the world have raised to stem its torrent, are being broken down. We have tasted its refreshing stream; the mist of ignorance and delusion is past; we *perceive* the in-

justice practised on us, and *feel* the slavery from which we have *not yet power to free ourselves*. Our emancipation, however, will depend on the extent of this knowledge among the working classes of all countries, on its salutary effects in causing us to perceive *our real position in society*. (Vincent, 174-75)

The established attitude of the period, however, is expressed by Richard Whately, Archbishop of Dublin, who, in a discussion of Bacon's essay on the benefits of study, provides this example:

There is nothing more general among uneducated people than a disposition to socialism, and yet nothing more injurious to their own welfare All motives for the acquisition of skill, and for superior industry, would be removed. Now, it is but a *little* knowledge of political economy that is needed for the removal of this error; but that little is highly useful. (447)

Considering that this was written within a decade of the Great Famine that was allowed to devastate the Irish population, causing more than a million deaths, Whately's assurance is remarkable.

Stuart Humphries, in his study of working class resistance to the imposition of compulsory education, states that

The state schooling system was conceived as potentially the most powerful instrument with which to inculcate . . . values and attitudes that were thought necessary for the reproduction and reinvigoration of an industrial capitalist society. It was not designed to impart literacy, skills and knowledge as ends in themselves . . . It made the pupil more amenable to a socialization process, through which his or her character and future lifestyle might be shaped. (31)

Many school children of the period, when visited by the benefactors of the school, reputedly had to rise to their feet and chant: "God bless the squire and his relations/ And keep us in our proper stations" (McLaren, 6).

Historian Richard Johnson points out that since the problem was seen as a result not of the social structure, but of a misunderstanding of it, the solution was not sought in social reform but in the "authoritative direction of sentiment through education"; what amounted at that time to an obsession with education "is best understood as a concern about authority, about the assertion (or the re-assertion) of control" (107). And, as Gramsci argues, in the modern state

The school as a positive educative function, and the court as a repressive and negative educative function, are the most important State activities in . . . the political and cultural hegemony of the ruling classes. (258)

Henry Mosely, a school inspector colleague of Matthew Arnold, reported that in the course of his duties he had discovered "much quick-

ness of mind" in the general population, but unfortunately "there was hardly a principle of religion, morals, society, trade, commerce, government, which I did not hear perverted." He concludes that he has "found the hopes of all enlightened men to rest, as the great hope of staying to some degree this flood of evil, upon education . . . in despair of any other solution" (Johnson 106, 96). The point here is not to elaborate a conspiracy theory to account for the changes in education or to suggest that mass education in general was either unnecessary or completely harmful. While the sincerity of the educationists "is not in doubt," as Johnson points out, "One might say that the imperative of control shaped the argument" (116).

In the essay "Democracy," an introduction to a government report on popular education, Matthew Arnold appears in his institutional role as state school inspector. Arnold praises the aristocracy for its historic role in the formation of the nation, for their "grand style" which is "the chief virtue of a healthy and uncorrupted aristocracy" (v.2, 5-6). He sees the 18th century aristocracy as a "rare and striking" synthesis of "lofty spirit, commanding character, exquisite culture . . . and great dignity". This "flowering time" (v.2, 14) is over and the aristocracy, which seems to be "losing its hold on the rudder of government, its power to give public affairs its own bias and direction, is losing also that influence on the spirit and character of the people which it long exercised" (v.2, 15). Obviously, the historic alteration in the pattern of social relations demands to be offset by some alteration in the methods of influencing the spirit and character of the people. With "the decline of the aristocratical element, which in some sort supplied an ideal to ennoble the spirit of the nation and to keep it together," Arnold argues, "there will be no other element present to perform this service. This is of itself a calamity" (v.2, 25). Without an adequate state education system to foster the necessary orthodox attitudes, Arnold, like Kay-Shuttleworth, believed that "society is in danger of falling into anarchy" (v.2, 26).

In this essay, Arnold introduces a strong recommendation in favour of the establishment by the state of a general system of education promoting "an ideal of high reason and right feeling, representing its best self, commanding general respect, and forming . . . a true bond of unity" (v.2, 19). This "true bond of unity" which Arnold has located is precisely the panacea that educators had been searching for, promising the kind of doxic harmony he ascribes to the 18th century. And, he argues, education may satisfy the widespread demand for social equality without affecting the social hierarchy. Citing Burke, Arnold remarks that "It is by the humanity of their manners that men are made equal . . . a community having humane manners is a community of

equals, and in such a community great social inequalities have really no meaning." Thus, for Arnold, "the instinct of perfection" (v.8, 289, 290-91) in mankind in no way throws into question material circumstances.

Arnold's vision of social harmony echoes the theories of many early educationists, and in a slightly altered version it is the basis of the class attitudes of the inhabitants of Huxley's *Brave New World*. It constitutes a desire for a retreat from heterodoxy through orthodoxy to doxa, a move which is essentially utopian. Social harmony is then ensured, "owing to the quasi-perfect fit between the objective structures and the internalized structures" (Bourdieu, 166), between the individual's sense of possibility and the objective limits imposed. Arnold's vision of the utopian future hovers between a doxic uniformity of opinion and a strictly enforced orthodoxy. It is a future

which is not manifold, and vulgar, and unstable, and contentious, and ever-varying, but one, and noble, and secure, and peaceful and the same for all mankind, — with what aversion shall we not *then* regard anarchy, with what firmness shall we not check it. (v.5, 224)

As John Gross observes, for Arnold "Utopia is not only going to be a better world than the one we know today, it is going to be much better policed" (52).

When *Culture and Anarchy* first began to appear it was titled "Anarchy and Authority" (v.5, 410-11). It was written in response to the Hyde Park riots, which occurred as an expression of the frustration felt by many toward the restrictive franchise laws. Railings were knocked down and flower-beds trampled. Arnold witnessed some of the disturbance; as Raymond Williams comments, "the Hyde Park railings were down, and it was not Arnold's best self which rose at the sight of them" (133). In a passage omitted from some later editions he quotes with approval his father's remarks concerning a similar struggle for political justice — Chartism. "As for rioting, the old roman way of dealing with that is always the right one; flog the rank and file and fling the ring-leaders from the Tarpeian Rock!" "And," he adds, "this opinion we can never forsake" (v.5, 526,223). In view of the actual damage incurred, the rhetorical violence of Arnold's response is suggestive of his revulsion at even a symbolic breach of a social order that should not be open to question, but should remain in the field of doxa, the unquestionable.

The rhetorical force with which Arnold posits a central authority restricting dissent is frequently disturbing. In "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time," he quotes Joubert, who maintains that "Force and right are the governors of this world; force till right is

ready. *Force till right is ready. And,*" he reiterates, "till right is ready, force, the existing order of things is justified" (v.3,225). Until a particular "frame of mind" is created, until right is ready, the existing relations of power, under the guise of the best self of the nation, are not only endorsed, but those in power are encouraged to resort to the military repression of dissent. The specific make-up of this "frame of mind" is, typically, never clearly defined, nor does Arnold indicate when "right reason" might be ready — but the orthodox thrust of these arguments is once again clear. To foster this "frame of mind," Arnold calls on culture: "Now, then, is the moment for culture to be of service, culture which in making reason and the will of God prevail, believes in perfection, is the study and pursuit of perfection" (v.5, 93).

Because culture "seeks to do away with classes" (v.5, 113), it, like the state, provides Arnold with the disinterested and transcendent authority he needs "to make right reason act on individual reason, . . . all our search for authority has that as its end and aim" (v.5, 159). Throughout his discussion, the nature of "right reason" or of the "will of God" appears self-evident, beyond any need of justification or definition. Resting on this appeal to doxa, culture becomes, through the medium of education, the lever with which to raise the minds of the nation out of the heterodoxy which had increasingly come to pose a threat to the social order. How, Pamela McCallum asks, does this harmonizing principle operate "in relation to real socio-historical conditions? At this point Arnold's theory remains alarmingly abstract" (34). It is possible that to pose such a question seriously would lead to a fundamental questioning of 19th century capitalist power relations that was literally unthinkable for Arnold, and it is precisely his refusal of this question that permits him to project a class society which maintains its rigid social hierarchy yet is harmonized by culture. As Baldick points out, "Under any sustained cross-examination his disinterestedness breaks down" (24). Culture may, in some sense, "do away with classes"; but only to the extent that the realities of worldly power are by definition excluded from consideration.

The most important facet of culture for Arnold, and for the ensuing educational system, was literature: a term which at that time suggested various kinds of "polite learning" including history, theology, and philosophy. Prose fiction, today so central, was in the 19th century struggling for respectability. For Arnold, as for most of his contemporaries, the highest form of literature was unquestionably poetry, and the claim he made for it was large: "In poetry, as a criticism of life . . . the spirit of our race will find . . . as other helps fail, its consolation and stay" (v.9, 163).

But not all poetry is "capable of fulfilling such high destinies" (v.9, 162). Since doxic authority was once vested in the hierarchies of church and aristocracy, it is only to the highest points in a hierarchical structure of literature that society can turn. "For in poetry the distinction between excellent and inferior, sound and unsound or only half-sound, true and untrue or only half-true is of paramount importance . . . because of the high destinies of poetry" (v.9, 162-63). The same centripetal logic, the same appeal to central, hierarchical authority that animates his social and political writings, is apparent in Arnold's literary theory and practical criticism as well. The idea of objective excellence or greatness is the principle of hierarchical organization he uses to constitute the authority of poetry, and it is a principle that is frequently reiterated:

the criticism of life will be of power in proportion as the poetry conveying it is excellent rather than inferior The best poetry is what we want; the best poetry will be found to have a power of forming, sustaining, and delighting us, as nothing else can. (v.9, 163)

A kind of homology thus exists in Arnold's thought between the structure of literature and the structure of society. Bourdieu has argued that

Practical taxonomies, which are a transformed, misrecognizable form of the real divisions of the social order, contribute to the reproduction of that order by producing objectively orchestrated practices adjusted to those divisions. (163)

Having placed literature in this crucial position, it then becomes extremely important to organize the canon, an established authoritative body of works representative of the very highest quality. In literature, the emphasis on "discovering what poetry belongs to the class of the truly excellent" (v.9, 168) leads Arnold to attempt to rank various authors. As Patrick Parrinder comments, Arnold "constructs a . . . literary hierarchy, and is . . . preoccupied with assigning authors to their rightful places within that hierarchy" (124). This elaboration of a pantheon to house the great authors is of course not entirely Arnold's invention; but because of his vision of the function of literature, it takes on a new importance.

The use of touchstones can, he argues, provide the objective gold standard which sounds the value of other poetry. The touchstones themselves are passages in the grand style, a term used in "Democracy" to describe the lifestyles of 18th century aristocrats. This grand style, an inseparable combination of morality and aesthetics, constitutes a high point in the literary hierarchy of style. At the other extreme, voice-

ing a fear that is heard more and more frequently toward the turn of the century, Arnold considers a future in which "we are to see multitudes of a common sort of reader, and masses of a common sort of literature." He has faith, however, that "Currency and supremacy are insured to literature "by the instinct of self-preservation in humanity" (v.9, 88). The optimism here is a result of the fact that the grand style is available to all classes. Arnold writes:

The complaining millions of men/ Darken in labour and pain — what they want is something to *animate* and *ennoble* them . . . I believe a feeling of this kind is the basis of my nature — and of my poetics. (Connell, 35)

The urgency of the search for the disinterested gold standard of critical judgment is the result of an imperative that is at once literary, religious and political: the construction of a transcendent doxic authority. For Arnold, "the really blessed thing is to like what right reason ordains, and to follow her authority." If we can do this, "We have got a much wanted principle, a principle of authority, to counteract the tendency to anarchy which seems to be threatening us" (v.5, 123). To be of use, culture must make itself felt in the world. The moment "culture is considered not merely as the endeavor to *see* and *learn* the will of God, but as the endeavor, also, to make it prevail, the moral, social and beneficent character of culture becomes manifest" (v.5, 93). This endeavor will be carried out by "men of culture," "the true apostles of equality" (v.5, 113).

Baldick argues that "The crucial term 'Culture' itself is often used by Arnold as a translation of the German *Bildung*, usually rendered as 'education' or 'training'." (33) The idea of literary apostles of equality thus offered an attractive possibility to educationists trying to contain the social heresy of the period, more attractive indeed than earlier proposals for an orthodox curriculum based on 'sound economic principles' which socialists and union organizers were only too happy to dispute. Arnold, in a sense, reverses Plato; he brings the poets back from their exile and enlists them in the service of the state, but only under the closest scrutiny. After Arnold, a movement grew rapidly in support of the teaching of English literature, and within forty years of his death English had become the central representative of culture in that system.

The most important single contribution to the debate concerning the institutionalization of English literature was *The Teaching of English in England*, known more commonly as the Newbolt Report. Issued in 1921, it was the report of a government-appointed committee charged with examining all aspects of English in education. By the

1920s the tenuous balance of social forces was threatened to the extent that the occasional recourse to military repression on which Arnold so confidently relied was no longer a secure option. Even prior to the war,

the class issues in education were being more sharply raised than ever before . . . the Labour movement was beginning to see, almost as clearly as the Chartist movement had once done, the link between education and political and economic emancipation. (Simon 1965, 295)

A new resolve was formed during the difficult war years, "that after the war things would be different, social evils and injustices abolished, and a brave new world emerge from the years of frustration, horror and mass slaughter" (345). After the war, nevertheless, the system based on the discriminatory 1870 Education Act and solidified by the Cross Commission (1885) remained essentially intact. Even the mild reforms of the 1918 Education Act concerning the restriction of child labour and the broader provision of educational opportunity were passed only with the addition of an amendment which postponed for seven years the implementation of the central reforms. Labour education specialist R. H. Tawney wrote:

There are classes who are ends and classes who are means — upon that grand original distinction the community is invited to base its educational system. The aim of education is to reflect, to defend, and to perpetuate the division of mankind into masters and servants . . . How generous a heritage into which to welcome the children of men who fell in the war in the illusion that in their humble way, they were servants of freedom. (51)

Against this background then, the Newbolt Commission was given a broad scope, and in the introduction to the report the problem of British education in general is discussed. The inadequate position of English in the curriculum is seen as the inevitable result of "a more far-reaching failure, — the failure to conceive the full meaning and possibilities of national education as a whole"(4).

Our position may be compared to that of an architect called in to advise upon what can be done with a stone which the builders have hitherto rejected. We find that the stone is invaluable; but also that the arch is too faulty to admit it. We propose . . . rebuilding the arch and using our stone as the keystone of the whole. (5)

The crisis in education is explained as a consequence of economic inequality in a country whose system effectively prohibits the education of the different social classes together. Since it is not possible "to educate the children of rich and poor side by side in the same schools," there is, unfortunately, "no source of unity to be found"(6). This situation, it is felt,

has widened the mental distance between classes in England. Matthew Arnold . . . claimed that "culture unites classes." He might have added that a system of education which disunites classes cannot be held worthy of the name of a national culture. (6)

The report thus broaches many of the fundamental issues. In search of a common educational ground, however, it deals with one aspect of the curriculum rather than questioning a structure geared deliberately to separating the classes and reproducing the class structure. According to the report provision was made, at that time, for only about six percent of children to advance into secondary schooling (57). The elementary and secondary systems were not simply different levels, but fundamentally separate institutions. The child who entered most elementary schools at the age of five, finished school and went to work at age ten. It is worth noting, in this regard, that the Newbolt Report was not the most significant educational document produced by the government in 1921: in the same year the Geddes Committee, appointed by Lloyd George, recommended that the education budget be cut by more than a third, reducing elementary education by a year (Simon 1974, 37). The Newbolt Commission, typically, chose not to consider mere social questions in its search for cultural unity.

If there were any common fundamental idea of education, any great common divisions of the curriculum, which would stand out in such a way as to obliterate, or even to soften the lines of separation between the young of different classes, we might hope to find more easily the way to bridge the social chasms that divide us. (6)

The Commission concludes that "what we are looking for now is not merely a means of education . . . but the true starting-point and foundation from which all the rest must spring. For this special purpose there is but one material" (14). Not surprisingly, that material is English, although it is admitted that only a hundred years earlier, a student "who spent much time reading English literature, especially poems, plays or novels, was generally thought to be following the road of the Idle Apprentice" (198). An education based at all levels on the study of English will, it is claimed, exercise a unifying tendency by providing a common cultural ground on which the different classes can meet. English can thus work to dispel the "misunderstandings" that are responsible for the deep divisions within English society (21-22). The population can then become "united by a common interest in life at its best, and by the perpetual reminder that through all social differences human nature and its strongest affections are fundamentally the same" (23). The teaching of English literature "would have an important social effect by counteracting the influences which

tend to bitterness and disintegration. Many of the differences between the lot of one class and another are of little importance”(25). Thus the declared overall function of the discipline would be to eliminate heterodox questioning.

Considering the Commission’s attitude toward class and their zeal for mystifying socio-economic relations, it is not surprising to find that in the course of their research their ideas encountered some resistance in working-class areas of the country. It is reported “that the working classes, especially those belonging to the organized labour movements, were antagonistic to, and contemptuous of, literature . . . as an attempt ‘to sidetrack the working-class movement’ ” (252). The Commission, on the other hand, sees this alienation as a dangerous development,

because it points to a morbid condition of the body politic which if not taken in hand may be followed by lamentable consequences . . . The nation of which a considerable portion rejects this means of grace, and despises this great spiritual influence, must assuredly be heading to disaster. (252-53)

The report contains an almost evangelical call for “ambassadors of poetry” to spread to “every important capital of industrialism” to “Make the people feel that their own poor life is ever so beautiful and poetical” (259-60). With this appeal, reminiscent of Arnold’s call for “apostles of poetry,” it thus becomes the burden of English literature as an academic discipline to provide a common ground of culture and belief on which all classes may meet with a sense of the beauty of all the stations in society, a ground which opens up when questions of social and economic power are ruled out. Through a particular and highly specific appropriation of literature it is presumed possible to forge a common bond of unity which leaves the massive social problems literally out of the question.

Hannah More was one of the pioneers of popular education in England. In the 1790s, the end of the period idealized by Arnold, she would address a short speech to her students each year on picnic day summing up her educational philosophy:

You were placed in this spot by Almighty direction. The very ground you walk upon points out your daily labour. Excel in that, and an honest hogler is as good in the eyes of the Almighty as an honest squire; therefore we wish to recommend you to do your duty in that state of life where God has placed and called you. Every disposition to rebel against the higher powers would prove how little you are changed in your hearts, after all that has been done for you; and remember that rebellion against rulers first brought on the troubles in France. (Sturt, 13)

In spite of the prevalence of attitudes such as this, there is no perfect correspondence between what the early educationists proposed and what was created in terms of the objective structures of the education system, between their visions of orthodoxy and the somewhat heterodox reality they continued to confront. But as Baldick argues, "The title of 'criticism' was usurped by a literary discourse whose entire attitude was at heart uncritical" (234).

Yet in another sense, literary discourse has always remained "critical," and that has been its function. The discipline of criticism was established in a period of social and educational crisis, and a crisis in criticism has haunted the discipline since its inception. The words "crisis" and "criticism" derive from the Greek word for "decision." From the Greek for "choosing," very close to "deciding," we take the word "heresy." The choosing and deciding that is the function of the critic is part of the institutional activity whereby society regulates the boundary between the fields of doxa and opinion, orthodoxy and heresy, the thinkable and the unthinkable. The crisis in criticism has thus, since the beginning of the discipline, reflected institutional decisions about which questions can be decided and in what terms the answers should be formulated, which questions can even be asked, and which questions must remain unformulated at any given "critical" moment in history.

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