

## **0.1 Chapter 2: work: Finding Work**

### **0.2 Finding Work**

#### **1 On Being an Unemployed Arts Graduate**

Arts graduates across the developed world complain bitterly about the difficulties they are facing finding employment. They spend long and costly years studying such subjects as history, art, philosophy, poetry and drama then they reach the jobs market, and discover that no one has any use for their distinctive skills and interests. If they're extremely lucky, they may find some kind of job, but it will almost certainly have no connection with what they studied or pay very much. A great number end up making coffee while deeply resenting against the backdrop of frothing milk and roasting beans how their years studying Foucault or Herodotus seem to have gone absolutely nowhere.

It is tempting to dismiss such moans: if someone wants to spend their time finding out about post-colonial theory, reading South American novels or deconstructing vampire films, then that's very nice as a hobby. But it's harder to see why anyone should expect to get paid for doing so. You don't get paid for going to the cinema or attending parties either.

But in truth, the extraordinary rate of unemployment or misemployment of graduates in the humanities is a sign of something grievously wrong with modern societies and their university systems. It's evidence that we have no real clue what the humanities, including culture and art, are really for. We pay them a certain amount of lip-service, we like to declare them worthy and noble and fund a few professors to dig away in their archives, but basically, as societies, we don't know what the humanities could do for us and therefore, how people trained in them should spend their days other than in preparing Frappuccinos.



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#### **1.0.0.0.1 Seemingly the only option after three years studying post-colonial theory or the poetry of Lucretius**

The problem lies squarely with the universities. If you ask these universities why young people should bother to study history or literature, they can't give a straight answer. Fearing that they cannot compete effectively against practical departments like physics or computer science, faculties in the humanities take refuge in ambiguity and silence, having carefully calculated that they retain just enough prestige to get away with leaving the reasons for their existence somewhat murky. Instead, they make their students perform a range of deeply arcane manoeuvres. For example, a BA in philosophy at the university of Oxford currently requires you to achieve familiarity with metaphysics (substance, individuation, universals) and to do a thesis on concepts of intentionality in Quine, Frege or Putnam. An equivalent degree in English literature is awarded to those who can successfully tackle *The Waste Land* on allegorical and anagogic levels and trace the influence of Seneca's dramatic theories on the development of Jacobean theatre.



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#### **1.0.0.0.2 This stuff could change your life if it was taught in the right way**

This represents a gross neglect of what the humanities are really for: they are for helping us to live and to die. The humanities are the closest things we have to a replacement for religion. They are a storehouse of vitally important knowledge about how to lead our lives: novels teach us about relationships, works of art reframe our perspectives, drama provides us with cathartic experiences, history is a catalogue of case-studies into any number of personal and political scenarios. Like the religions of old, culture is there to have a therapeutic effect on us; which is why it matters so much in a troubled world.

But in order to bring out this therapeutic effect, we need to reinvent universities. Departments like history and literature operate under superficial categories which don't throw the spotlight on the important aspects of the material they are dealing with. So in the redesigned universities of the future, there would be a Department for Relationships, an Institute of Dying and a Centre for Self-Knowledge. There would be centres of expertise on changing jobs and improving bonds with children, reconnecting with nature and facing illness.



#### **1.0.0.0.3 A future Department for Relationships, where literature would be assigned to therapeutic ends**

One would still study novels, histories, plays, psychoanalysis and paintings, but one would do so for explicitly therapeutic ends. So Anna Karenina and Madame Bovary would be assigned in a course on How to manage the tensions of marriage instead of belonging in a course on Trends in nineteenth-century fiction, just as the works of Epicurus and Seneca would appear in a course on How to Die rather than in one on Hellenistic philosophy.

One would witness a surge in demand from the population at large for the services of people trained in culture in this new way given that no one currently knows how to run a relationship, everyone is confused about bringing up kids, few of us have a clue how to manage our anxieties and death is universally terrifying.



The unemployment of arts graduates is shameful and unnecessary because culture has answers and highly useful consolations to the urgent dilemmas of real people. We just need to get these insights out, package them properly, and commercialise them adequately, so that the armies of people currently serving coffee can put their minds to proper use.

We arent creatures who need only practical things like food and drink, cement and running shoes. We also desperately crave nourishment for what we might as well, with no superficial associations, call our souls. This soul-related work should become a huge and legitimate part of the world economy, worth as many billions as the cement trade.



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#### **1.0.0.0.4 Figuring out how to end a relationship could be just as big a business**

The sooner we get clear about what culture is for, and learn to use it as it was intended to be by its creators, the sooner we'll start to view arts graduates as being no less useful than their colleagues in computer science or accountancy and the sooner they'll have other options beyond the coffee counter.