

would have diminished the significance of the existing libraries, each with its own tradition and status. Such a development was opposed by politicians and librarians. There are no signs that this situation will change within the foreseeable future.

The actual situation after the unification of Germany in 1990 is treated in the last chapters, and this last part of the book can be read as the question: Does Germany need a national library? There is no doubt that in former times library work would have been more effective if there had been a national library in the conventional sense. After unification, many leading librarians, as well as others in Germany, were of the opinion that work must go on, rather than wasting time and effort with building up entirely new structures. Olson addresses this question in a general and sensible way when he explains the difficulties in finding agreement on names for the unified libraries. (It is worth mentioning that the unification of the Deutsche Buecherei in Leipzig and the Deutsche Bibliothek in Frankfurt is called Die Deutsche Bibliothek or "The Deutsche Bibliothek." It is doubtful whether anyone not familiar with the German language, in which a preceding article beginning with an uppercase letter indicates a proper name as distinguished from an article beginning with a lowercase letter, will wonder why it is printed "the Deutsche Bibliothek" on the cover page and "The Deutsche Bibliothek" in the CIP entry. In fact, these are two different libraries, but one of them is the virtual unification and includes the other.)

By way of conclusion, Olson asks: "What is the fate of German libraries after unification? To what extent will librarians bridge conflicting ideological beliefs? Answering these questions will be essential for subsequent histories of the German national library system." This reviewer is not convinced of his

answer. In that librarians are members of the society and therefore have social and political responsibility, this assumption may be correct. But once more, it needs to be emphasized that this is not the time for discussing and realizing visions that go beyond technical improvement.

Optimistically speaking, one can say that the improved technical means make it more practical to distribute the duties of a national library to the shoulders of its many partners. An important lesson learned from Olson's discussion of a German national library is that there must be a well-organized library system that fulfills all the duties of a national library for the benefit of all its patrons.

The purpose of creating a virtual national library goes beyond satisfying the desire for national prestige. German librarianship has been, and in large part still is, isolated in the international setting. But globalization will change this situation. Whether intended by the author or not, this reviewer thinks that this book will be a valuable contribution for further development of supranational virtual libraries (e.g., the project GABRIEL for European libraries). In this sense, this book can be regarded as a work not only about a special subject of library history, but also one that has implications for today and for the future.—*Winfried Goedert, Fachhochschule Koeln, Koeln, Germany*

Readings, Bill. *The University in Ruins.* Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard Univ. Pr., 1996. 238p. \$29.95. ISBN 0-674-2952-7. LC 95-47290.

The chief business of the American people is, in President Coolidge's memorable formulation, most certainly business; and we have known at least since Veblen's *Higher Education in America* (1918) that a university's business, too, is chiefly business. Rhetoric about personal development, intellectual commu-

nity, informed citizenship, and spiritual growth notwithstanding, public policy for higher education in this peculiarly businesslike country has operated for some time now—and at all levels—to satisfy the needs of capital. As Center and Left histories, institutional mission statements, budgetary reliance on corporations, and the relentless commodification of magazines' ranking charts all attest, corporate sensibilities are effectively headquartering ivory towers and redecorating ivy-covered halls in marketer's neon.

Readings's (1960–1994, professor of comparative literature, University of Montreal) work is a theoretical account of the transformation of the modern University [author's capitalization] by corporatism and particularly by the managerial discourses of capital's globalization. He situates his analysis on the (post-) Marxist Left and in the postmodernism (a term he dislikes applying to the University) of Derrida, Foucault, and Lyotard, while his focus on the sociopolitical projects conducted through literature departments over the last century echoes such writers as Chris Baldick, W. B. Carnochan, Franklin Court, Terry Eagleton, Gerald Graff, and Richard Ohmann.

Its many dimensions and theoretical allegiances inhibit packing Readings's argument into the summary form required of a review. Accepting, however, the risk that an outline may mystify more than it elucidates, a summary would begin with the "ruins" of the title, ruins that have to do not with deferred maintenance but, rather, with what postmodernism regards as the failure in our time of the Enlightenment's modernist project of human emancipation and progress through reason. The University, like the nation-state an institution of this failed modernity, is now in a "posthistorical" stage, for the history that defined its social function is over. Now an anachronism, the University needs

to rethink itself in a world of ruins, a world in which unity, coherence, and community are no longer possible, ruins that can neither be rebuilt nor serve to found a new project. Accepting this ruined state, Readings looks for a "way out of [the] impasse between militant radicalism and cynical despair" that confronts the contemporary Left by developing an "institutional pragmatism." This pragmatic stance affords the possibility of continuing resistance to the dehumanizing commodification, closure, accounting mentality, and social inequities of capitalist discourse without recourse to a "romantic nostalgia" for the failed Enlightenment project or a hope, one might add, for revolution.

Before he elaborates this pragmatism in his final chapters, Readings reviews how the University achieved its modern, rationalist design with Kant and its social/political role with such German idealists as Humboldt, whose University of Berlin modeled the articulation of the University to the nation-state as the site of the state's production of a national (cultural) identity. He shows further how this "culture," the cultivation of an individual to embody the unitary nation, also serves to create a hero for the progressivist narrative of the University's project of liberal Enlightenment. In our time, it is this "University of Culture," of community, that has been replaced by the "University of Excellence," of consumerism. This change reflects those by which the nation-state's role as the primary locus of capital's reproduction has been assumed by the global corporation and a nationalized culture's role in identity formation assumed by an internationalized "cash nexus."

Readings's account is unflinchingly insightful and provocative even when not unflinchingly convincing. To postmodernists such as Readings, everything is discourse, and for all their ap-

peal to the discourses of everyday life their scholarship often creates the impression of a world drifted away from that life into a never-never land where only words/texts exist, where a simply inexorable discursive power emanates from nowhere to compose the every day of decision and behavior into a narrative rich in events but with no author, no characters, and no plot other than the repeated implisions of Derridean aporias. In short, it leaves the reader with the sense that the world it describes could only exist in the mind of a theorist who lives by reading.

With the likes of Habermas, therefore, one wonders whether the only conclusion to be drawn from the evidence of history is that modernity and its University are finished, the Enlightenment project dead, and our world reduced to postmodern ruination. In spite of Readings's disclaimers about his study's scope and emphases, one wonders whether he posits a unity, "the University," that does not tend dangerously to conflate "the University" with the myriad particularities of "higher education," particularities of purpose, founding auspices, and history that in their variety potentiate possibilities for resistance to the deadening discourse of "excellence." One also wonders whether his reliance on the discourses of bottom-line sloganeering, official pronouncements, management tracts, and magazine reports does not, likewise dangerously, ignore the motives, practices, and histories that inform student and faculty life.

For all his small hopes and apocalyptic exhaustion, Readings is never less than stimulating. His critique of, and program for, the University are not only vastly superior to the diatribes of the raucously nostalgic Right, with whose position his postmodernist, Leftist stance so vividly contrasts, but are more challenging than those of liberal reformists, whose thinking fails to en-

gage the radically altered circumstances of the (post)modern world. Those unfamiliar with the arguments of and around postmodernism, especially as they inform the recent trajectory of Marxism, may find Readings tough going; but the clarity, energy, and wit of the writing will reward effort with passing observations on the academic world, a penetrating critique of cultural studies, an analysis of ambitious scope, and a jolt of strangeness as he dissects the corporatist discourse of excellence, which so many of us administrators take to be the way the world works.—*Robert Kieft, Haverford College, Haverford, Pennsylvania*

Soley, Lawrence C. *Leasing the Ivory Tower: The Corporate Takeover of Academia.* Boston: South End Pr., 1995. 204p. \$40 cloth. ISBN 0-89608-504-X. \$13 paper. ISBN 0-89608-503-1. LC 94-39872.

Librarians have lately begun to debate the merits of corporate funding of libraries—witness the brouhaha two years back over materials developed in a joint ALA-McDonalds venture to promote family reading that were imprinted with the "golden arches." Many librarians opposed having this sort of "indirect" advertising for the fast-food giant imposed on their libraries and literacy programs. Recently, public protests caused a stir over San Francisco Public Library's decision to name library departments in its new facility after corporate donors, and a growing focus of concern within the profession is ALA's willingness to tack Ameritech's name to convention programs (the joke going around now is that ALA might soon be regarded as the acronym for the Ameritech Library Association). Lawrence Soley's book, *Leasing the Ivory Tower*, provides ample evidence from the world of academia that corporate funding seldom, if ever, comes with "no strings attached." The book lends strong support to those librarians who urge us to take a critical