

As Long as They Call It University

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Abstract: The author considers the pointlessness of choosing between historical models of university. Instead, he proposes to find what is happening to knowledge today and whether this is relevant for higher education. Obviously, the internet and modern communication technologies affect the character of knowledge and attitudes towards it. The decline of the nation-state means a change of the principal partner and client of science. Now it is the individual customer who determines user-friendly content and form of knowledge. University bureaucracy does its best to satisfy his desires. It is this bureaucracy, not scholars-professors, who embody university now. Current trends in knowledge and university are similar in Russia and in the West (the Bologna reform as a realization of the managerial turn), despite the high degree of corruption and plagiarism in the former.

But maybe the river simply never existed? Maybe.
Then how was it called? River it was called.

Sasha Sokolov. *A School For Fools*

UNIVERSITY has always transcended the social average. Certainly this is not an exclusive privilege of the university. School does the same in its own way, although in a lesser extent: no wonder that in the Russian language school education is called *average* (*srednee*). So does politics, and art, and literature, and war, and love, and tourism... University—as all of the above—cherishes a certain dream. This dream is doomed to remain unfulfilled within the concrete walls of any university—even if it is the most vamped, advanced, quotable, “liked” by its alumni or effective university. All, without exception, university projects were determined by the various visions of this ideal—from the Bologna of the 11th century to the Bologna of the 21st century. To insert university into the logic of material and social circumstances, even the most “inevitable,” will never be a satisfactory solution. For it would put into question the very objective to transcend the social reality.

However, university is also immanent to a whole process. Economical, political and—less perceptible—epistemic and even moral changes affect its evolution. University is a child of society and nothing social, alas, is alien to it. Society dreams (or, more often, remembers that it dreamt) university, but the dream always bears the imprint of the dreamer. There is a lot of pertinence in the current critical debates on university, triggered by the project of higher education reform. But the criticism often does not go beyond an assurance in the speaker’s best intentions, whereas suggestions generally have the disadvantage of leaving unanswered the questions of political and economical will capable to realize them.

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The current condition of the Russian university can be understood only by distinguishing and then reconciling the two relatively independent series of events: 1) the collapse of the Soviet system, including education; 2) the neoliberal twist with the Bologna reform as its epiphenomenon.

The decline of the Soviet epoch demanded changes of all its institutions and attributes. This demand was, first of all, ideological, whilst the change could also be of a ritually-incantatory nature, as, for instance, the tardy renaming of the militia into the police. The renaming of thousands of colleges and technical schools into universities and academies in the 90s had serious consequences. These renamings were encouraged by the absence of control and the regionalization of state political will. Catastrophic inflation happened, seemingly, as a collateral harm. Headmasters became nomothets: this will be called so, because “I was the first to think it up.” However, this nomothetic practice implicitly testified to the high prestige of science: it seems that while old educational institutions pass by the name of university, the prestige of the brass plate should not be doubted. But the very recent titles *innovative* or *scientific and research* university is characteristic of the fact that *simply* university does not inspire former respect.

The late Soviet system of education was the product of the Cold War and the rivalry of systems. To a certain extent, nothing if not mathematics and natural sciences benefited from this situation. All the rest suffered heavy losses caused by repressions, isolation, censorship, ideological yoke, selection politics under party control etc. Many scholars and teachers tried to oppose to all that their ethos of devotion, abjuration and asceticism. But, if one does not take into account some disciplines, educational institutions and a few people in each of them, all the rest deserve not even a whit of the nostalgia expressed today towards the Soviet system of education.

In the sphere of higher education, the neoliberal wave in the West, encouraged by the demise of communism, was crowned with the so-called Bologna reform, conceived in the same 90s and introduced at the turn of the century. It became an example of typical “Brussels” decision making: vertically from top downward, without discussion with persons interested or competent in education, at the ministerial level, chaotically, short-sightedly, and irresponsibly. Today, it can be considered substantially completed, and not only in Europe but to a certain degree in Russia. I still [Maiatsky 2009a; Maiatsky 2009b: 100–108] regard it as contradictory and pernicious and consider it illusory that the European university did not suffer from it. The damage caused by the Bologna reform is deep and not perceptible on the surface. The assessment of results has reduced all the complex process of conveyance, absorption, understanding and criticism of knowledge to the pure accumulation of points. It had fatal consequences for students’ and teachers’ spirit. The positing of academic mobility as an end in itself, without any reflection on why exactly the mobility is good for study, misled all the goal-setting of educational pro-

cess.¹ Finally, the reformatting of the whole of educational and scientific process under the aegis of “excellence” has dangerously narrowed the gap between the worlds of university and business, heralding the victory of the managerial spirit over the spirit of research and study.

It can be argued where the damage from Bologna turned out to be worse, in Russia or in Europe. The Western university is undermined not so much by the very reform but by the tendency that the latter embodies; but fortunately the inertia of centuries of tradition is great. Such a solid tradition does not exist in Russia. Most Russian educational institutions emerge from the exploitation of the Soviet (and the echoes of pre-Soviet) heritage, the scientific and technological decline and the imitation of what is easy to imitate (which is exactly the case of the Bologna reform). But, strange as it may seem—and the Ministry of Education and Science can be proud of it—Russia and the West share, with all colossal differences in degree, a lot of problems. In that sense the tendency is conjectured correctly. Both in Russia and Europe there is an evident split into officials and academics in the body of university, along with the increasingly disadvantages for the latter. Here as well as there we see the same triumph of managerial logic presented as the culmination of progress, the same dictate of numbers (ratings, points, or grades-credits and ‘publish-or-perish’ indexes) over sense, quality control over the very quality, image over reality.

Education is not only included in the totality of the *oikos* and bears its features, but also is affected by the direct influence of external factors. In the West the prolongation of the educational cycle is conditioned by unemployment, in Russia—by the army service and the will to escape it. Of course, in many countries one speaks about university (and even more so about school) with despair. It is no wonder that in Russia this sphere (alongside the system of justice and public health service) inclines to an apocalyptic tone. The discussion about education in Russia is also burdened by the fact that the trust in power has reached such astounding abysses that any legislative initiative is perceived as a next stratagem in the war against its own people who is used to expect more and more tricky and whimsical discrimination from above.

In this respect, Russia makes its own odd contribution to the reality of education. It is ridiculous to catch academics and students in the act of plagiarism when it emerges that the sovereign and the guarantor (long before he became the sovereign and the guarantor) shared with the peo-

1. It seems to me an aberrance that at their recent conference the provosts of German universities discussed as a serious problem the fact that the hopes for greater mobility were not justified.

ple of science the hardships of research and the joy of discoveries—in the dissertations of colleagues. It is ridiculous to catch an assistant NN in bribery or the sale of term papers if the whole system is built on corruption, not only the system of higher education but the system *as a whole* in the foundation of which, as serious social scientists argue, lay, lies and will (=must?) lie the *kickback economy*. If the post-Bologna Western student has on their mind and tongue only grades and points, then the post-Soviet thinks and speaks money. It is no less ridiculous when the Western cases of plagiarism and corruption make the Russian news feeds and bring the long-hoped-for relief: over there is “*just the same.*” It is known, but preferred not to be taken into account, that “there” such facts cause scandal and, usually, cost its actors their political and other careers, whereas here they are perceived as inevitable, and—in comparison with other vices and plagues—innocent evil. And why necessarily evil? Does not the fact of acquisition of academic degrees by many representatives of the “elite” testify, although in a somewhat extravagant form, to the high reputation of science?

The ardour with which the reform is discussed signifies that the expectations from the investments in education are not only irreconcilable with the budgetary ones, but that education is endowed with compensatory functions: what does not work in other spheres can be counterbalanced with this one. Here, civic awareness, insulted and reviled daily, meets with the utopian reckoning to “start with education,” formerly so popular in alternative Soviet pedagogy: let us create “pure” zones of the future in order to change the world of tomorrow by the formation of new people today. However, the sphere of education has lost at present the last illusions of relative protection from a hostile environment and itself teaches its wards the lessons of injustice and corruption.

The catching-up development has accustomed, it seems, civil society to look out for the models to emulate in the past and the far. The history of higher education, as well as education in general, is extremely interesting and undoubtedly an instructive fabric for examination, but nothing emanates from it directly, as from historical knowledge in general, and here historical examples cannot prove anything. University models used to vary significantly and were constantly subject to changes, perceived negatively by some agents,—there, however, the lesson ends. From it follows neither what kind of model one should adhere to, nor where the political, economical and other will, that is necessary for the construction and reconstruction of the educational system, can be found. Moreover, such construction implies decades of enduring and consistent politics, which is considered an unattainable luxury not only in the permanently-catastrophic “here” (in Russia, where nobody ventures to forecast for

a year or two), but also in the hectic “there” (in the West, where new reform should be initiated before the next elections).

There is no “primordial origin” of university to which any modern university must return. There is not even any proto-university. Sorbonne? Bologna? Why not the Moroccan Fes? or Constantinople? And there is no single “idea of university” by which any university in the past was supposedly inspired, and to which any modern university must amount to. What if Humboldt, Dewey, Newman, Kant or Comte created such and such national educational institution—what does it have to do with *us*? Here, on our Rhodes, this knowledge won’t help us to jump higher than we can.

In this, I will allow myself to disagree with the position of Allan Bloom that was shared, it appears, by Bill Readings, the author of the sharply critical book *The University in Ruins*: “University has ceased to be Humboldtian, which means that it has ceased to be, as a matter of fact, university” [Readings 2010: 93]. To define the essence of university as Humboldtian seems to me well-meant but arbitrary. If I am indignant to some events of university life and consider them contradictory to the core (concept, spirit...) of university, then it testifies only to the fact that I was brought up on different notions of university. Among the people who are concerned with its mission, there are enough of both those who believe that it is necessary to return to one or another model, and those who, on the contrary, believe that “time compels” to certain radical changes. Besides, the watershed between them, both in Russia and the West, does not coincide at all with the division into the right and the left. Often, the right act not as conservatives but the bearers of “progress,” whereas the left urge the return to the former condition and/or retain its positive sides. Whether university must or can remain as it was—the question cannot be posed in such a way. University is that social institution by means of which society dreams of an alternative. Regrets about a *former* university are only dreams—about the lost ideal of knowledge and its *future* revival. It occurs, rather, that there are several borders of dissociation: advocates of a strong state against liberals, idealists against pragmatists, nostalgists against futurists, egalitarists against meritocrats.²

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As for the present, the debates on education are characterized by too much of an instantaneous reaction (to the Bologna reform, to the legislation of higher education reform etc) and little understanding of the metamorphoses that happened with knowledge in its regard to man,

2. In France this last axis is defined as jacobins against pédagogistes.

production, consumption and society in general. The classical forms of knowledge, that distinguished themselves in Modern science, originated from the postulates of the infinite divine and natural (*Deus sive Natura*) contractor, the mastering-appropriation-conquest of which was the source of justification of man's godlike nature, whereas for the sovereign it proved the divine afflation of its power. Science turned nature to man, but only with its most *favourable* sides, the ones that allowed to heat and to illuminate one's dwelling etc, but for science it was the mere *implementation* of fundamental knowledge, practically a side effect of the disclosure of natural objective laws and "the discovery of mysteries." The conquest of nature was realized by methods similar to the conquest of the territories of geopolitical rivals and colonies.

The dependence of this model of knowledge on forms of production contemporary to it is evident. The same dependency exists today, only now the tendency of the very production in relation to the world has changed. It is expressed in the growing predominance of tertiary industries (the tertiary economy sector³). Whereas the fraction of high technology is declining in the added value of the so-called "high-value-added goods" (*articles à haute valeur ajoutée*), the fraction of promotion, design, delivery (and so forth even to the extent of a smile) is growing.

The particularity of tertiary activity is that—apart from the juridical, medical and informative—no services are knowledge-intensive: neither financial, nor household, nor municipal, nor transport, nor tourist... They require nondescriptible (and ineducable, that is, it is difficult to create a pedagogical strategy that would produce admittedly better results than a spontaneous existential process) competences: communication skills and wordly sagacity (skills of judgement). Of course, for as long as there are people who believe that some specific faculties are capable of nurturing these skills, it is hence "handy" for us to work with such clientele. But one cannot, in all sincerity, insist that university gives them knowledge, as in the past. Rather, it deceives them, indulges their ignorance, plays on their fears and trust in easy money.⁴ But this "deception" turns against university when those very people become the main consumers of university knowledge.

Now more than ever, university science needs to find the methods of and arguments for financing of fundamental researches. On the hori-

3. Some also distinguish a quaternary, knowledge-based one, others consider this distinction superfluous.
4. In this respect, traditional university joins the ranks of the sellers of air, speculating on the former symbolic capital of science under the most incredible plates.

zation of geopolitics this mechanism of financing was relatively well-adjusted, but it is not yet clear how to justify it under the conditions of a globalized economy. The machine of traditional war required much more cognitive investments than even the machine of antiterrorism protection. The state is privatized and there is no one to appeal to. On the one hand, the moral authority and social prestige of knowledge, whilst on the other hand, the state as the main patron in need of legitimization have both collapsed. The state more and more assumes a grotesquely-sham character. With the withdrawal of industry from under the national banners (the reasons and mechanism of this process in Russia and in the West are different, but the result is similar), the need for high qualification has also departed: it is considered normal that scientific and technological education follow the places of implementation.

Today, the partner (discourser, customer) of university is no longer a national state, ambitious and aggressive. Today, it is an individual that is already feebly connected with the fatherland, yet is feebly connected with the cosmopolitan ethos *a la* Kant. He is a consumer and an egoist. For him, “common activity” is a trick, a con-art, similar to former ideologies. But he also cannot “love his own business:” what does it mean, as a matter of fact, his own? His professional and human trajectory has become unpredictable.

Today, university experiences the pressure of the consumer, unprecedented in history, it becomes itself consumer-friendly. The consumer not only wants to consume a product but to suggest to the manufacturer how the product should look, choose the colour of wallpaper, the exact specifications and lining of a car, the structure of faculties and curriculum.

About a century ago, Husserl analysed the fact of sciences’ implementation into the living world according to Galileo’s standard. Today this fact is trivial to us, but the very science shows us its gadget side to a much greater degree, user-friendliness or simply usability. A whole number of new university disciplines emerged on the direct order of the consumer. Of course, historical university was also heterogeneous: the faculties of theology, law and medicine appealed to absolutely diverse legitimations: to God, Law and Nature accordingly. But to what, if not the imperative of our era,⁵ appeals “public relations” (and other “marketings”), in the field of which it is possible to become a bachelor, a master,

5. As it is said on the website of one respectable educational institution: “The department of public relations was created in the July of [such and such] year. Its birth was predestined by life itself.” Then the cognitive image of a hero of our time is outlined: a PR-specialist “not only must know the theory [?] well, but also write releases, create websites, draw mock-up models, project stage decisions, work with all types of office equipment, show understanding of cars, cos-

a candidate and a doctor of philosophy, remains unclear. It is only apparent that the only preoccupation of someone who chooses that faculty is *not* to change one's way of thinking and understanding of life. But is she/he guilty if university—or what is for the moment known under its name—sanctifies such a possibility by its own authority? There is no problem in the addition of new faculties per se (and the history of university is comprised of nothing else but these additions), but in the present context of orientation towards the market, the addition risks turning out a substitution (where there is *something* to substitute): “there is no demand for Sanskrit, whereas there is for marketing”—becomes the only argument. It is not surprising then that the equalization of the most difficult fields of knowledge with more than dubious and vague disciplines under the same roof results in prospective students choosing in favour of the most precocious specialities, the mastering of which formerly took (their ancestors) a few months in a merchant college.

The decline of the state coincided with the redistribution of educational tasks. It is evident that today not university, as the historical companion of the national state, but the media functions as the main educator and the “great Consoler.” In the world built by contemporary media, the role of knowledge is fairly modest, and is not included in the formula of success. A hero of our time may have gone to university, but he did not necessarily finish it. On the other hand, he likes to take risks and has faith in his star. One would think that the TV programmes, built on the principle of panel games and quizzes, would appeal to the cognitive consciousness of viewers. However, the debate on truth is practically reduced here to guessing, whereas the heuristics is reduced to hazard. The Internet, of course, is not so univocal. Whilst for some it is a colossal support (which includes scientists in the most varied fields of knowledge), for others it has become *equivalent* to knowledge, with all the expected distorting effects.

Before our eyes, the very *homo academicus* is changing. The loss of prestige had to have an impact on his self-esteem. Before our eyes, such remnants of the old-regime as vocation, devotion and mission are evaporating from the scientific existential orientation. His features will soon be erased like... well, indeed like a face traced on the riparian sand. We have already achieved the point where the *homo academicus* has only one leg in university, while the other is in business, media or politics. Work at university (as well as any work in one place in general) has ceased to be perceived as a life choice and has become a period in life, or

metics, fashion, cookery, fishing gear, clocks, odours and many others. While in addition [sic!] he must possess encyclopedic knowledge.”

an option, contemporaneous with others. The modern *homo academicus* dwells in university but does not construct it anymore. We can, perhaps, rejoice in the end of university bonzes, but the basis of university is no longer comprised of (replaceable and fluid) scientific and pedagogic staff, but of permanent managers at different levels for whom, in essence, it makes no difference whether to direct a university or a travel agency. “In medicine, it is not necessary to know how to cure, what is important is to make the right administrative decisions,”—this eloquent opinion of executives, recently quoted by a chief superintendent of a department at one of the hospitals has, alas, a universal use.

It is not surprising that it also disorients lecturers-scientists, for the criteria and imperatives of science and administration do not at all necessarily coincide. The bureaucratic machine not only requires constant, fastidious and often nonsensical accountancy procedure, evaluation and self-evaluation,⁶ but self-improves: changes criteria, diversifies forms etc. It is impossible for any lecturer-researcher, this constant object of administrative mistrust, to keep up with the constant process of new form creation. For this reason, the predominant mode of filling in of various reports and projects becomes the employment of already submitted and successfully accepted documents (the more homotypic they are, the easier it is for an official). Is it any wonder then that some “researchers” confuse the situations where copy-paste is not only tolerated but welcomed, with those situations where this method is considered plagiarism?⁷

University reached heights in that era when cognition (of God, freedom, oneself) was considered the main sense-giving mechanism of life and history. Some memory of this epoch still lingers on but it becomes more and more obscure, overgrown with legends and transforms into myth. That was an epoch of knowledge deficit about the world and culture, and to the fulfilment of which the best energies and years were dedicated. The current younger and future generations cannot comprehend these worries. Mankind’s need for knowledge can be considered satisfied.

6. This tendency was smartly and ironically called test drive by an American researcher [Ronell 2005].

7. A similar opinion, but in relation to dissertations, was recently expressed on Alexander Filippov’s Facebook (status from 7.02.2013): “While fighting for the quality of dissertations, the Higher Attestation Commission produced a great many hard, burdensome rules and over-rode advice completely. Being afraid that it will come to no good, the advice went, one would think, the most reliable way. Dissertators were being implicitly compelled to use, as a sample for filling out serious documentation, works that were already defended and passed all expert investigations,” which puts dissertators in a potentially vulnerable situation, precisely from the point of view of plagiarism.

In practice, much knowledge revealed lots of sorrow. The main problem has become the oversupply of information and the main concern—protection from it. The Bologna student calculation, aimed at not working one's fingers to the bone and not over-attending lectures and seminars, embodies this tendency perfectly, so to say, at the lower level.

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In society's actual attitude towards knowledge at least three processes can be pointed out: 1) the construction of ignorance, 2) the production of doubt, 3) the strife for credence. Each of them, of course, deserves a separate discussion;⁸ let us restrict ourselves here to brief characteristics.

1. The liquidation of illiteracy has attained its aims. In spite of the prolongation of school education's duration, the percentage of students who did not gain even basic skills by senior classes is high. Notably, it also applies to a number of European universities. The labour market has ceased to stimulate learning and education. Early (and fast) professionalization, the inflation of diplomas,⁹ high unemployment among professionals, the outspread of the phenomena of "over-qualification," the banalization of *education*, the escalation of the struggle for the "rights of the child" against compulsion to the "acquisition of knowledge," the labour market's preference for flexibility to the detriment of knowledge/experience—all these phenomena, one way or another, illustrate what sociologists and psychologists call the *social construction of ignorance*.
2. Certain kinds of knowledge are fraught with danger for certain sectors of the national economy. In such a way, knowledge about the risks of atomic energetics menaces its development (and investments into it). Knowledge about the role of the human factor in the alterations of climate and environment threatens the industry by additional expenditures on ecology. The consumer's knowledge about the harm of tobacco and alcohol can do direct economical damage to these economic sectors of economy. It is difficult to control (not to speak of suppressing) the generation and assimilation of such data under the conditions of mass literacy and the network-based distribution of information. Instead, one can remind the consumer that they have a right to critical as-

8. *Logos* is going to address these themes in the near future.—*Editor's note*.

9. Statistical data and sociological studies show that almost every school graduate can enter some university, see [Shishkin 2004: 380].

sersion, to freedom from the acceptance of any convincing arguments. The consumer proves themselves to be a heritor of classical and modern-age skeptics in the resistance to arguments and information. Such a strategy, speculating on the Cartesian doubt, tickles the ear of the consumer, endowing him with critical faculty towards science. If it is impossible to forbid knowledge, then, in the very least, it is possible to compel to doubt it.

3. The parallel loss of ground by the state and science compel (Western) politicians to talk about how important it is to “regain the trust” (of citizens, voters, consumers et cetera). The recent scandals in the pharmaceutical and food industries put into question the credibility of corporate and state control. All the attempts to withstand the tendency by means of multiplying expert investigation and experts lead to a rather antipathic repercussion: trust in the institution of experts (which is itself subject to expert investigation and so on indefinitely) recedes. The legitimization of expert knowledge is undermined by the media and network-based production of opinion, by that very *doxa* which was loftily denied by philosophy and science and which now itself becomes the judge of knowledge, increasingly disavowing itself.

And—frankly and *entre nous*—is the specific proportion of boon-follies, coming from under the pen and mouths of university scientists (here, I deflect attention away from so-called hard sciences) much lower than that fraction of blog-follies that is inevitably—but without footnotes, links to itself and its pretensions, ambitions and other demonstrations of will to power—generated by the “web republic?”

One way or another, a growing portion of knowledge is acquired outside university. It was known long ago about the role of networking in science. Not only historians, but also physicists derived a huge portion of knowledge and operational data from smokerooms and the couloirs. Today the web has become such a mega-smokeroom. The consequences of these shifts for cognitive behaviour are colossal and are already repeatedly described (chronophagia, distracted attention...). One trait is rarely spoken about: erudition itself has become suspicious, and soon will also become disgraced. Wikipedia (and other similar projects) have become the genuine prosthesis of the “living memory,” and to show off one’s prosthesis is not an innocent gesture.

The connection of knowledge with employment has changed. Not so long ago—in Russia as well as in Europe—the matriculation certificate guaranteed job placement. Today higher education not only does not guarantee it, but does not even try to promise it. The Bologna re-

form proposed a truly absurd solution of this problem: the reduction of study term and early professionalization (inasmuch as an erenow bachelor gets a diploma, providing the formal grounds for entering the market labour). However, it is obvious that a bachelor does not have a bigger chance for recruitment after 3–4 years of education than had a former alumnus after five. Moreover, the necessity in constant retraining must have enhanced the need in fundamental skills, which cannot be acquired in fast coaching. But market (at least in the service sector) becomes quite indifferent to this component: here, the tendency towards the creation of artificial fluidity is evident. The young are uninformed of their rights, one should not pay them for the length of service, they suffer less from diseases and do not yet have children, it is easier to drive them out so far as they themselves desire to try out new fields. Their ignorance and inexperience add to their labour a touching tinge of amiable inaptitude that can appeal to a client, especially a young one (and presumably just as “fluid” at his own work place). An increasingly greater number of young people start working, not waiting for a diploma that consequently has ceased to be a necessary condition for employment in the eyes of many employers. That is to say, the diploma does not guarantee job placement, whereas its absence does not hinder it.

Is the influence of this new attitude to knowledge palpable inside university? Undoubtedly. The contractual system (in the West), of course, largely favours the dynamization of research and teaching, and is on the whole capable of raising the level of both. But the clipping of careers changes the attitude, not only to “one’s own” department, but to one’s profession in general. The chronopolitics of university has changed radically. In recent years the majority of modern universities (here and there) go through such a turbulent reconstruction, that only a rare student manages to start and finish their higher education within an unchanged institutional frame. The same acceleration is observable also in science. Today there is no department that will be tolerant (as it used to happen) to some scientist stewing over one book or one problem for 25 years (hail to multi-tasking!), as it won’t be tolerant to the fact that a researcher can arrive at the refutation of the primordial hypothesis or to another negative result. It is difficult not to see the impact of the media in this shift, the blogosphere dictates—for the better or worse—the rhythm, tempo, style, modes of argumentation and the legitimization of utterance.

University has never been the only place for the production of knowledge. Has it remained a *privileged* place? The fall in the prestige of knowledge comes only into seeming contradiction with the growing demand for higher education. It is predetermined by parental inertia: parents grew up in the preceding epoch and still perceive knowledge as a

key to success. But they also consider it their duty to catch up with modernity: it is they who first torture their child with “manual dexterity,” that must permit the development of the little genius, so that one and a half decades later they can send him to study some fashionable pseudo-speciality. By no means is the demand for higher education warmed up by research romanticism, curiosity or the desire “to be of service to society,” but fears for children and the desire to save oneself from the uncertainties of the modern world by way of investing in human (in essence: children’s) capital asset.

Well, university is ready to render this service. For its part, it leaves no stone unturned in order to seem exactly what consumers want it to be: successful, prestigious, rating-based. It is ready to produce its own rating. It is ready to forget its yesterday self. But insofar as it has not yet invented a new self, it simply denies the old self and remains a firm, rendering services, claiming to be an *expensive* firm, rendering services. In this regard, university not only undergoes changes (which always took place), but, in a determinate and very essential sense, ends. It is and remains university only for as long as it is called such, but even its very name risks losing any attention-value and any meaning.

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