

Chapter Title: Toward an Educational Dystopia? Liquid Evil, TINA, and Post-academic University

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Book Title: Academia in Crisis

Book Subtitle: The Rise and Risk of Neoliberal Education in Europe

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Published by: Brill. (2019)

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1163/j.ctv2gjwvmw.5>

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Toward an Educational Dystopia? Liquid Evil, TINA, and Post-academic University

Leonidas Donskis

Abstract

This chapter was written in the spring of 2016 and discussed during one of our last meetings as a group with a drive to produce our book 'on academia'. Leonidas Donskis received comments to this chapter, but did not manage to digest these. We left the chapter as it was, with some minor editorial changes. Actually, thinking about educational dystopia is our common project, exactly to help raise discussion about what can be termed the post-academic university. *Towards an Educational Dystopia?* is thus a root piece for this book.¹

Keywords

academic cultures – identity – history – TINA – neoliberalism – power

1 Bound to Choose between Two Educational Philosophies?

Within European academic tradition, universities have always been associated not only with the increase of scientific knowledge and scholarly enterprise in general but also with cultivation of the soul and virtue. University culture embraced all forms of life and tendencies of thought characteristic of a given historical epoch. For instance, universities sustained and supported aristocratic culture. Earning the degree of doctor of philosophy was nearly the same as becoming part of the nobility. At the same time, universities were instrumental in the process of gradual democratisation of social life – for nobody was able to be a scholar by birth. It was a matter of achievement, rather than ascription.

¹ We, the other editors, decided to insert this abstract as explanation and acknowledgement – we cannot compose an abstract for Leonidas Donskis, only attempt to bring his legacy further.

Suffice it to recall that the rector, in medieval universities, was elected a scholar whom his² or her peers regarded as the most deserving and learned.

Therefore, one part of an academic's identity has always been linked to accommodation of tradition, whereas another part represented the idea of achieving and accomplishing something that comes from your conscious endeavour. The latter tendency obviously anticipates the modern world where the logic of identity lies in self-cultivation and self-discovery, instead of the once-and-for-all established identity. This is to say that European universities attempted to preserve what we would describe now as the canon, yet they were bound to question and change European legacy from time to time. The interplay of tradition and modernity, or the canon and its reinterpretation, has always been at the core of university life.

However, some pivotal modern ideas did not emerge at the universities. Instead, they came from alternative sources and movements. At this point, it suffices to recall the Renaissance with its idea of *studia humanitatis*. The medieval model of scholarship and university education, with its focus on in-depth knowledge, specialisation, and separation of the faculties of the soul and competences, would never have allowed anything like *studia humanitatis*. The idea that we can reconcile natural sciences to arts, allowing the latter to become the core of education, is an inescapable part of humanist education, which was the outcome of *studia humanitatis*. The idea that an enlightened individual can cross the boundaries of disciplines encompassing poetry, philosophy, fine arts, and natural sciences, was the first step in what we now call cross- and inter-disciplinary scholarship. In its initial and original form, the idea of *studia humanitatis* dates back to Cicero who, as Alan Jacobs reminds us, 'in his *Pro Archia*, refers to the *studia humanitatis ac litteratum*: humane and literary studies' (Jacobs, 2015, p. 66).

The idea of liberal/humanist education emerged in Renaissance Europe opposing the scholastic/conventional university model of education. Yet it was accepted later. Most importantly, Renaissance scholars, from Coluccio Salutati to other great Florentine humanists and Neo-Platonists, stressed the critical importance of humanist education and its relation to civic virtue and patriotism. The paradox is that one of the most important traits of modern education – civic virtue and leadership – emerged in a setting, which was more of an anti-university model of learning. On the other side, we could mention the Enlightenment with its salon culture and ideas of the republic of letters, toleration, and civil loyalty, which has little, if anything at all, to do with university

2 We acknowledge the 'he' here as potentially sexist language. However, in those medieval universities, women were not openly present as scholars, as far as we know.

culture of that time. Yet these things became crucial for European modernity, although they did not originate in the academic world.

What was crucial for the Renaissance was the idea that the human world was a perfect testimony of nearly divine powers of human creativity and, therefore, was able to establish a symbolic partnership between God Himself and the human being (this idea belongs to Comte Giovanni Pico della Mirandola). This paved the way not only for the humanities as the realm of human self-fulfilment but also for Giambattista Vico's assumption that human sciences were more important than natural sciences, since only the almighty God was able to know the world that He created. Once philology in the sense of Vico was the human world par excellence, it required the further step towards recognition of the autonomy of the human world.

Renaissance scholarship would have been unthinkable without the union of literature and philosophy, form and content, beautiful language and wisdom, strict logic and graceful metaphor, theorising and joking, *philosophia perennis* and comedy. The concept of the carnival of the language can be applied to Thomas More's *Utopia*, Erasmus's *Encomium Moriae* (Praise of Folly), and to the whole linguistic and poetic universe of Renaissance scholars.

Putting aside the stylistic and literary devices characteristic of Renaissance *studia humanitatis* and philosophical writings, we have to remember that non-affiliated or independent scholarship was also the phenomenon of the Renaissance. The type of an independent and traveling philosopher who is not affiliated to any university yet remains quite influential – the type that embraces René Descartes, Benedict Spinoza, Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz, John Locke, and Voltaire, to mention just a few – is too obvious to need emphasis. The same applies to the circle and the society – new organisations that became quite prominent outside the academic world.

Although the educational and political ideas of the Renaissance became part of European academic tradition, the aforementioned medieval model was still there. The tensions between medieval/specialised and Renaissance/Liberal Arts education are still quite strong, so we would deceive ourselves by asserting that they are just a trace of the past. It is difficult to say which of these models prevails now – maybe we could more or less safely state that a sort of fragile equilibrium has been reached. Yet the propensity to think that a scholar has no real existence beyond their college or university is most telling and betrays the conviction that we have no real existence beyond our institutions, which is a hundred per cent medieval idea.

To sum it up, civil society and civic virtue are difficult to sustain and cultivate without liberal arts education. Historically speaking, civil-mindedness and the spirit of liberality greatly benefited from the tensions between universities

and their rivals, such as humanist circles, societies, philosophical salons, and coffeehouses. Therefore, the strength and the flexibility of universities lay in their ability to internalise what they had long denied and what once was in strong opposition to them.

The Renaissance was the epoch of utopias. Yet utopia, in the way that humanity knew it for centuries, is dead now. This signifies the arrival of what Zygmunt Bauman calls liquid modernity as opposed to solid modernity. Utopia got privatised, becoming merely a dream of the middle classes. Privatisation of utopia means the new condition under which no society is deemed to be good and just: only individual life stories can be success stories. As such, they tend to become our new utopian dreams in a utopia-free, or dystopia-ridden, world.

We live in a world without alternatives. TINA, the acronym for There Is No Alternative (first forged by Margaret Thatcher, and then wittily redefined and reinterpreted by Zygmunt Bauman), allows a point of departure when dealing with this uniquely new and unprecedented phenomenon – namely one's ultimate belief in social determinism and market-based fatalism, the major difference before earlier decades and our time being the fact that, whereas Sigmund Freud's dictum informed us that biology is destiny, our dictum could be that economy is destiny.

Hence, the transformation of evil from solid, equipped with black-and-white social optic and Manichean divides, into liquid evil with its Don Juan-like powers of seduction, lies, manipulations, and abandonment. Most importantly, liquid modernity and liquid evil would be unthinkable without the world without alternatives.

2 Liquid Evil and Living with TINA

As mentioned, we live in a world without alternatives. It's a world that propounds a single reality and a world that labels as lunatics – or eccentrics in the best case – all those who believe that everything has an alternative, including even the very best models of governance and the most profound ideas (not to mention business and engineering projects). The world has probably never been so inundated with fatalistic and deterministic beliefs as it is today; alongside serious analyses, as if from a horn of plenty, flow prophecies and projections of looming crises, dangers, downward spirals, and the end of the world. In this widespread atmosphere of fear and fatalism, the conviction arises that there are no alternatives to contemporary political logic and to the tyranny of economy or to attitudes toward science and technology and the relationship between nature and humanity. Not by any stretch is optimism the foolish

exultation that we are here in this place and that our surroundings are warm, fuzzy, and comfortable; rather, it is the belief that evil is transitory and does not vanquish humaneness (or only briefly when it does). Furthermore, optimism means a belief that hope and alternatives do indeed always exist. The conviction that a pessimist is an all-round loftier and nobler being than an optimist is not simply a relic of the modern, Romantic sensibility and worldview – it is something greater.

This profound juncture goes all the way back to the monumental conflict between Christianity and Manichaeism – after Augustine (who, by the way, defeated his inner Manichaean and became one of the Fathers of the Catholic Church). Christians held evil to be a state of errant or insufficient goodness that could be overcome, while Manichaeans held good and evil to be parallel but irreconcilable realities. Optimism is, above all, a Christian construction – it's based on the faith that good can overcome evil and that unexplored possibilities and alternatives can always be found. But we live in an age of pessimism. The twentieth century was excellent proof evil was alive and well, and this has reinforced the positions of modern Manichaeans. They saw a world that could be temporarily abandoned by God but not by Satan.

One question, though, remains unanswered: How meaningful is Manichaeism today? Disbelief that God is all-powerful, and that He is Love, is something that might have been greatly reinforced in the wake of the many atrocities of the twentieth century. Mikhail Bulgakov's enduring work, *The Master and Margarita*, is imbued with a Manichaean spirit – the novel makes numerous mentions of the concepts of 'Light' and 'Dark' developed by the Persian prophet and eponymous architect of this belief system. The interpretation of evil in this great twentieth-century East European novel is one that asserts the self-sufficiency of evil. This interpretation of Christianity is close to that of Ernest Renan in his *Life of Jesus*, a study with which Bulgakov was quite familiar.

Even Czeslaw Milosz considered himself something of a closet Manichaean. After his encounters with the incomprehensible evils of the twentieth century – which arose in a world no less rational and humanist than our own that had created world-leading cultures (such as in Russia and Germany) – Milosz came to see evil as an independent and self-sufficient reality or, at least, as a dimension that is not in any tangible sense affected by progress or modern forms of sensibility. He noted that French philosopher Simone Weil was also a closet Manichaean; she conferred a millenarian meaning on the phrase 'Thy Kingdom Come' in The Lord's Prayer. There's a good reason why Milosz taught a course on Manichaeism at the University of California, Berkeley. By his own admission, in his book *Milosz's ABC's*, he situated the opening act twentieth

century evil in the story of Bulgaria's Bogomils and the martyrdom of the Cathars in Verona and other Italian cities. All of the great East Europeans were Manichaeans to some degree – from Russia's Bulgakov through to George Orwell (who was an East European by choice).

Meanwhile, we live in an era of fear, negativity, and bad news. There's no market for good news because no one is interested in it. (Although a fun and adventure-filled apocalyptic story is something quite different.) It is this that gives rise to the wholesale sewing of panic and the industry of fear – 'breaking news' that relies on commentaries with large discrepancies and wherein the commentators often contradict themselves. Although some of these are occasionally insightful and well-reasoned, most are hysterical and defeatist.

What does the concept of liquid evil signify? How can it be best understood in our times of mutually exclusive qualities and characteristics that a number of phenomena bear? I would argue that liquid evil, contrary to what we could term solid evil – the latter being based on white-and-black social optic and the resilience of evil easily identifiable in our social and political reality – assumes the appearance of good and love. More than that, it parades as a seemingly neutral and impartial acceleration of life – the unprecedented speed of life and social change implying the loss of memory and moral amnesia; in addition, liquid evil walks in disguise as the absence and the impossibility of alternatives. A citizen becomes a consumer, and the dominant value of neutrality hides the fact of disengagement.

Individual helplessness and forsakenness coupled with the state's denial and refusal of its responsibility for education and culture, goes along with the heavenly marriage of neoliberalism and state bureaucracy both of them insisting on the individual's responsibility not only for their life and choices in a free-choice-free world, but for the state of global affairs as well.

George Orwell clearly saw that the new forms of evil tend to walk in the guise of good and love. Thou shalt love Big Brother. To the contrary of the predecessors of Oceania's Party, Jacobins, Bolsheviks, and Nazis alike, no martyrdom is allowed. Your life will go unnoticed, and nobody will know anything about your existence. Or you will be swiftly and silently reformed to force you to assume and adopt the vocabulary that you had long denied passionately and consistently. Evil is not obvious and self-evident anymore. Low intensity political oppression and human rights violations as well as low intensity military conflicts obfuscate and obliterate the dividing line between war and peace. War is peace, and peace is war. Neither good news nor bad news remain unambivalent and clear nowadays: even if there is no war or any other calamity going on, it becomes impossible to discuss it without scaremongering and the fear industry. Good news is no news. Bad news is the news by definition.

Therefore, by liquidity of evil, I assume that we live in a deterministic, pessimistic, fatalistic, fear-and-panic-ridden society, which still tends to cherish its time-honoured, albeit out of date and misleading, liberal-democratic credentials. The absence of dreams, alternatives and utopias is exactly what I would take as a significant aspect of the liquidity of evil. Two ideas of Ernst Bloch and Karl Mannheim proved prophetic: whereas Bloch regretted that modernity lost the warm and humane spirit of a utopian dream, Mannheim strongly felt that utopias were effectively translated into political ideologies, thus stripping them of alternative visions and thus confining them to the principle of reality, instead of imagination. The liquidity of evil signifies the divorce of the principle of imagination and the principle of reality, the final say being conferred for the latter.

The seductive powers of evil are coupled here with disengagement. For centuries, as we know, the very symbol and embodiment of evil was the Devil, whether making his appearance as Mephistopheles in the legend of Faust ranging from medieval tales to Christopher Marlowe's *The Tragical History of the Life and Death of Doctor Faustus* and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *Faust*, or as Woland in Mikhail Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita*. This was the old news, though. The old 'good' Devil represented solid evil with its symbolic logic of the quest for human souls and active engagement in human and earthly matters. He simply pursued his goal trying to reverse and delegitimize the established social and moral order.

This is to say that solid evil was a sort of amorally committed and actively engaged evil with a solemn promise of social justice and equality at the end of the time of the world. Liquid evil, on the contrary, comes up with the rationale of seduction and disengagement. Whereas Prometheus and Satan, according to Vytautas Kavolis, an American sociologist of culture and civilisation analyst of Lithuanian background, as we will see soon, were the two protagonists of subversion, uprising, and revolution, the heroes of liquid evil attempt to strip humanity of its dreams, alternative projects and powers of dissent. In doing so, they act as protagonists of counterrevolution, obedience, and submission. The logic of solid evil was to win the soul and to conquer the world by imposing the new rules of the game; yet the logic of liquid evil is to seduce and retreat, changing its appearances all the time. 'Seduce and disengage' – this is the very motto of the Proteus-like hero both of liquid modernity and of liquid evil. I know what is to be done, yet I refuse to engage leaving my object or seduced victim to her or his own devices – that's the name of the game. From now on, one's sinking in the ocean will be called freedom.

In his analysis of the emergence of the symbols of the rebellion/subversion of the established order, Vytautas Kavolis traced the symbolic designs of evil,

understood as interpretive frameworks within which we seek the answers to the questions raised by our time, interpreting ourselves and the world around us. In his analysis of the emergence of the symbols of the rebellion/subversion of the established order, Kavolis traced the symbolic designs of evil understood as interpretive frameworks within which we seek the answers to the questions raised by our time, interpreting ourselves and the world around us.

Prometheus and Satan are taken here as core mythological figures and symbolic designs to reveal the concepts of evil that dominated the moral imaginations of pre-Christian and Christian thinkers and writers. Whereas Prometheus manifests himself as a trickster hero whose challenge to Zeus rests not only on his natural enmity to the Olympic gods but also on his compassion for humanity as well, Satan appears in the Bible as the one who subverts the universal order established by God and, therefore, bears full responsibility for all manifestations of evil that result from this subversion.

Kavolis' work in cultural psychology provides a subtle and penetrating analysis of the models of evil as paradigms of secular morality and of the models of rebellion as contrasting modes of cultural logic. In doing so, he offers his insights into the emergence of the myth of Prometheus and that of Satan. Prometheus emerges in Kavolis's theory of the rise of modernity as a metaphor of technological progress/technologically efficient civilisation combined with a kind of sympathetic understanding of, and compassion for, the urges and sufferings of humankind. Satan is interpreted as a metaphor of the destruction of legitimate power and of the subversion of the predominant social and moral order.

In this manner, Kavolis developed some of his most provocative and perceptive hints as to how to analyse the symbolic logic of Marxism and all major social or political revolutions – aspects of which are at some points Promethean and at others Satanic. Each modernity – for Kavolis spoke of numerous and multiple 'modernities', each of them as ancient as civilisation itself – or civilisation-shaping movement, if pushed to the limit, can betray its Promethean and/or Satanic beginnings (Kavolis, 1977, pp. 331–344; Kavolis, 1984, pp. 17–35; Kavolis, 1985, pp. 189–211; Kavolis, 1993).

A valuable implication for literary theory and critique, this standpoint underlined Kavolis's insights into Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick* and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. With sound reason Kavolis noted that even the title of Shelley's novel, *Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus*, was deeply misleading – the obviously Satanic character, Frankenstein, who challenged the Creator of the Universe and of the human being, was misrepresented there as a sort of modern Prometheus.

Our freedom today becomes localised in the sphere of sheer consumption and self-renewal. Control, surveillance, dispositional asymmetry of power

parading as freedom of choice, fear industry, and privacy exposure games make up a complex combination of the sociocultural condition that we metaphorically call here TINA and liquid evil. Promise to allow and foster freedom, equality, justice, reason, pursuit of happiness, human rights, powers of individuality and association, social mobility, and living without borders to all humanity, and then disappear suddenly, leaving individuals in their countless identity games, mistaken for freedom, while also reminding them that it is up to them to solve the world's problems without relying much on institutions, fellowship, and engagement – this is the liquid evil's tried and true strategy.

This is why I assume that the real symbol of liquid evil is a kind of Big Mr Anonymous (whom we will discuss more explicitly soon), or a collective Don Juan. Don Juan, in Zygmunt Bauman's eyes, is modernity's real hero. Don Juan is the face of modernity whose power lies in constant and incessant change. At the same time, his is the power of self-concealment and retreat for the sake of an asymmetry of power. Solid modernity was about the conquest of territories and their utilisation for the sake of the state of any other power structure. Liquid modernity is about a hide-and-seek power game, be it a military strike followed by retreat or any other destabilising action. Therefore, liquid evil, in terms of military campaigns, tends to disrupt economy and life in certain territories or societies by bringing there as much chaos, fear, uncertainty, unsafety, and insecurity as possible, instead of assuming responsibility and burden for remaking or transforming them. At this point, terrorism appears as a pure expression of liquid evil. Imperialism is about solid power games, yet terrorism is always about the liquidity of evil – even its sinister logic of speaking up in favour of society coupled with disdain for a concrete society that is sacrificed for individualised power games should not deceive us.

The seducer, who retreats by leaving the void, disenchantment, or death, is a hero of liquid evil. The existential Don Juan comes to establish the asymmetry of power whose very essence lies in being able to observe the other without being seen himself. 'Chi son'io tu non saprai' (Who I am you do not know) – these words from Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's opera *Don Giovanni*, written by the librettist Lorenzo Da Ponte (who had Don Juan getting intimate with two thousand women) reveal the crux of the modern manipulator's asymmetry. You do not see me because I will withdraw and leave you when it will no longer be safe for me to stay with you and reveal too much of myself and my hidden suffering or weakness. Who I am you will never know, although I will find out everything about you. Yet there is an illusion left to the objects of obscure desire that they would get as much attention and self-revelation as they could possibly need. An anonymous internet comment delivering toxic lies, mortally wounding, hurting, and brutally insulting us, that is, individuals with our first

and last names, is nearly a perfect expression of the liquidity of evil that operates on the ground and is deeply entrenched in our mundane practices. Who I am you do not know.

3 Rational Impersonalism and the Culture of Determinism

A curious philosophical book, disguised as an innocent fable and published at the beginning of the eighteenth century, may throw new light on the mixed logic of modernity. The book is Bernard Mandeville's *Fable of Bees: Private Vices, Publick Benefits* (two successive editions in 1714 and 1723). Originating in 1705 as a sixpenny satire in verse, titled *The Grumbling Hive; or, Knaves Turn'd Honest*, later it developed into a book by the addition of 'Remarks' and other pieces. A witty and subtle attack against three vices, Fraud, Luxury, and Pride, the poem offered a strong argument, presenting a hive as a mirror of human society. Like society, the hive lives in corruption and prosperity. Yet it feels nostalgia for virtue and keeps praying to recover it. When the prayer is granted, everything changes overnight beyond recognition: There is no more vice, but activity and prosperity disappear. What replaces activity and prosperity are sloth, poverty, and boredom. Last but not least, all this happens in a considerably reduced population.

The essence of what I would define as Mandeville's paradox is that individual vice in universalistic morality can turn into a public benefit, whereas individual virtue does not necessarily increase the well-being of society. Once society can benefit from our pursuit of our own interest, we cannot lightly dismiss private vices. Mandeville achieves something similar to Machiavelli's effect: No one single truth exists in social reality, and every coin has two sides as far as human interaction and social life is concerned. Nothing personal lurks behind the predominant social and moral order, and nobody can be blamed in person for the shortcomings and imperfections of our life. Our jealousy and greed just happen to coincide with other individual's wishes and desires.

Public benefits result from private vices just as common good comes from our realism, sober-mindedness, and imperfection. Like Machiavelli, Mandeville deprives us of One Single Truth in social and political life. Nothing is certain and obvious here. A greedy but laborious fool can be more useful for society than an idle sage – here we can clearly hear the early voice of modernity with its ambivalence, scepticism, and relativism.

What can be found behind the fictional paraphernalia of Mandeville's *Fable of Bees* is Pierre Bayle's *Dictionnaire historique et critique*. Mandeville's scepticism, antirationalism, relativism, along with a strong emphasis on psychology

and sensualism, relates him to French theoretical and intellectual influences, Bayle and Pierre Gassendi. Incidentally, Adam Smith knew this fable through Francis Hutcheson. The following winged expression of Smith's has really much in common with the intrinsic logic of Mandeville's paradox: 'It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest' (for more on this, see Donskis, 2009).

Here we can hear the birth-cry of 'rational impersonalism', as Ken Jowitt would have it (see Jowitt, 1993). Impersonalism, ambiguity, and ambivalence, coupled with what Max Weber once described as 'the iron cage', are those intrinsic forces that make modernity and capitalism in particular so deplorable and hateful in the eyes of those who want to restore what has been irreversibly lost by our modern world – namely the predictability, clarity, visibility, stability, and certainty of social reality; safety and security; political passions and social upheavals; emotional intimacy; human fellowship; a sense of community.

Yet this is all but one side of the coin. The celebration of rational impersonalism and our private vices turned into public benefits reflected an uncritical and unreflective attitude of a post-Communist society. The fable of bees by Mandeville seems to have been nearly a perfect narrative for a transitory period in a society where economic and moral individualism was long suppressed and then released with no ability to counterbalance the portrayal both of self and the world around oneself in black and white. A gradual destruction of the public domain, without which democratic politics become impossible, was not on the minds and lips of those who celebrated the free market and the invisible hand as just another term for democracy.

These are all the incarnations of fatalistic beliefs in the infallibility of the inevitable decline. In fact, here we hear the voice of the culture of determinism, as Vytautas Kavolis once had christened this phenomenon. He suggested that this phenomenon is deeply rooted in a modern system of moralisation, which he termed the culture of determinism. Kavolis puts it thus (Kavolis, 1993, p. 48):

A modern amoral culture, in the sense that it tends to eliminate the notion of individual moral responsibility without taking collective responsibility seriously, is the *culture of determinism*. In this culture it is assumed that individuals are shaped and moved by biological or social forces in all essentials beyond the control, or even the possibility of major choices, of individuals affected by them. The four major intellectual foci of this culture are the theory that 'biology (or racial inheritance) is destiny', the belief that the human being is and should be nothing but a utility-calculating, pleasure-maximising machine; the conviction that

the individual is, in currently existing societies, only a victim of the 'oppressive', 'impoverished', 'devitalising', or 'traditionally constricted' social conditions of his or her existence (without the ability to become an agent of his fate and assume responsibility for her actions); and the notion that he can be helped out of such conditions solely by the 'guidance of experts' who have a 'rational social policy' at their disposal, in the determination of which those who are to be helped participate merely as instruments of the experts.

Kavolis's concept of a modern amoral culture sheds new light on why victimised groups or societies relate to the ruling elites as patients to diagnosing and curing specialists. At the same time, it allows us an essential comprehensive point of entry: we can understand why and how victimised culture manifests itself as the culture of destiny and determinism – in contrast to the culture of freedom and choice. This concept reveals the links between all kinds of deterministic theories, especially in the social sciences. Kavolis starts by quoting Sigmund Freud's dictum, 'Biology is destiny', and then goes on to show other modes of discourse that speak out in favour of inexorable laws of racial inheritance, history, milieu, societal life, social organisation, and so forth. A modern amoral culture denying individual responsibility and moral choice, or the culture of determinism in Kavolis's parlance, is a system of moralisation disseminated in the modern moral imagination.

Hence, we can identify what might be called natural innocence and victimisation. According to this attitude, people cannot in principle control biological or social forces. On the contrary, particular individuals and even entire societies are shaped and moved by those forces. Since the world is controlled and dominated by powerful groups, clandestine international organisations, or secret agencies and their elusive experts, individuals cannot assume moral responsibility for their actions. Nor can they influence or change the state of affairs. Such an attitude is characteristic of marginalised and victimised groups, but it is equally characteristic of the kind of consciousness shaped by anti-liberal and anti-democratic regimes.

In fact, several foci intersect and meet here: the culture of determinism is clearly on the tip of iceberg when dealing with what might be termed the clash of the culture of choice and the culture of destiny, both deeply embedded in the mind-sets, the political and moral rhetoric and practices of Eastern and Central European elites. It is hardly accidental that the intellectual and moral heroes of Eastern Europe in the late 1980s and the early 1990s were Karl R. Popper and his talented, though deeply unconventional, disciple George Soros: both were preaching the open society – the one with no monopoly of truth,

and also devoid of any determinism-and-fatalism-ridden perception of reality. I would also add to this congregation of Eastern and Central European heroes of transformation the iconoclastic and sceptical gift of Ernest Gellner, and the profoundly democratic lessons of Ralf Dahrendorf drawn from the transformation and also from the new disenchantment of the world in the Weberian sense, which Dahrendorf articulated in his epistolical dialogue with an imagined Polish gentleman, *Reflections on the Revolution in Europe*, modelled as a concept after Edmund Burke's classical – and profoundly conservative – reactions to the French Revolution.

Popper's polemical oeuvre *The Open Society and its Enemies* became a must-read in the 1980s, and quite understandably so. It was against everything we were taught to believe in: the idea that there must be the centre of gravity and the predictable logic in every segment of life; the idea of inexorable laws of history and social development; the conviction that great thinkers are all-natural born democrats and confessed liberals nearly by definition. Popper destroyed this set of clichés and naïve assumptions as a house of cards. Moreover, another study on the unquestionable value of the unpredictability and spontaneity of human life and societal existence, *The Poverty of Historicism*, appeared as a direct confrontation with Karl Marx (and what else we needed in the 1980s, one would think). Yet in addition to Marx, the gallery of thinkers dethroned by Popper included Oswald Spengler, Arnold J. Toynbee, and other heroes of the cyclic interpretation of history and culture. In those days, we firmly believed that there *was* an alternative, there *should* and there *must* be one, no matter what is happening to us.

How ironic, then, that at the beginning of the twenty-first century, we find ourselves in the world of TINA disguised as a world of rational choice, profit-enhancing, and pleasure-maximising forces of the free market. Eastern and Central Europe – with a special role conferred to the Baltics – became the long and winding road from the TINA of Marxism-Leninism to the TINA of Neoliberalism.

4 Death of Privacy and the Cult of Self-Exposure

In this age of our painful quest for attention and of our obsessive self-discovery and compulsive self-exposure, we constantly need a new promise and a repeatedly reinforced illusion that you, a Plain Jane or a Simple Simon, can gain world attention too. Not just stars and world leaders but you, an ordinary mortal, can be important to someone because of the way you look or act or live or because of what you have or do or desire or because of what you find funny or

worth showing or talking about – in short, things all too human and easy to understand. We have begun acting like emigrants even when we no longer set foot outside our own house or home town: thirsting for companionship and authentic human ties we think this, when it happens, is a short-lived miracle that will end soon; therefore, we must intensify this experience, for we don't know when it will come our way again.

Simply put, our freedom today becomes localised in the sphere of consumption and self-renewal but it has lost any connection with the most important thing: believing that you can change something in the world. This belief was shared by all the great prophets, theoreticians, ideologues, and writers of modernity. Today all the great utopias are dead. We are living in a period of dreary novels of warning and dystopias, though even the latter quickly turn into objects of easy, uncomplicated consumption. The sense of determinism and fatalism, strengthened not only by our failure to understand why and how economic systems fail and why we are beset by social crises but also by our total dependence on far-away markets and currency fluctuations in distant lands, fosters the illusion that we as individuals are able to change things only by spontaneous reactions, acts of benevolence and compassion, kind words, and intense communication. All that is left seems to build down to technical instruments and more intense human relations. During outbreaks of the plague in Europe, the logic of carnivals, mass feasting, and even orgies was predominant as well.

Technology and social networks have become new forms of control and separation. You see everyone; they all expose themselves, register, and take part, fine: you only need to figure out how to keep everyone in a scheme in which there are no possibilities of hiding something from the controlling structures of the state. Privacy is dying in front of our very eyes. It simply no longer exists – not only because there no longer are any messages unread and uncontrolled by outsiders nor things that, as classical literature testifies, a human being had the right and even duty to take with himself to the grave. What has disappeared is simply what used to be rightly called a secret – it has become either a good traded over the counter, an object of exchange, a password to momentary and short-lived success, or else a weakness showing you have something to hide, thus enabling blackmail and the exertion of pressure to rob you of your last vestiges of dignity and independence. People no longer have secrets in the old, honourable sense and don't even understand what that could possibly mean.

People gladly publicise their intimate life in exchange for momentarily having the spotlight turned on themselves: such feasts of exhibitionism are possible only in an age of unsteady, twittering connections and of unprecedented alienation. Some of those who expose themselves on Facebook are

like those whose blogs resemble burps and belches in which they, full of narcissism, heave up their crises and frustrations; others are merely temporarily overcoming their feelings of isolation and insecurity. In this sense Facebook was indeed a brilliant and timely invention, after all. Just when social separation and isolation became unendurable, when it was no longer bearable to watch bad television and to read the sadomasochistic press, Facebook came into the world.

But with it also came possibilities of mortal danger and fatal evil. For Facebook embodies, as you might say, the essence of the DIY phenomenon: do it yourself. Take off your clothes, show us your secrets – do it yourself, of your own free will, and be happy while doing it. DIY. Strip for me, babe.

What has happened to our privacy? This question is being addressed nowadays with ever-increasing frequency. Of American society and its privacy crisis, Sarah E. Igo writes (Igo, 2015, p. 18):

Certainly, if recent popular titles are to be trusted – *The End of Privacy*, *The Unwanted Gaze*, *The Naked Crowd*, *No Place to Hide* (two different books!), *Privacy in Peril*, *The Road to Big Brother*, *One Nation under Surveillance*, and perhaps the creepiest entrant, *I Know Who You Are and I Saw What You Did* – we Americans are in the midst of an unparalleled privacy crisis. On one side are the Snowden revelations, Google Glass, drones, smart refrigerators, and commercial algorithms that seem to know us better than we know ourselves. On the other is the individual quest for self-exposure in an ever-expanding universe of social media: Here, it is not the state or corporations that seem to imperil privacy but, rather, willing exhibitionists, eager to dispense with the concept altogether as they share intimate details of their personal lives with strangers.

There was a time when secret services and the political police worked hard to extract secrets and to get people to open up the details of their private and even intimately personal lives. Today these intelligence services should feel simultaneously exhilarated and unneeded: what should they do in a situation where everyone is telling everything about their own business themselves? But even if people don't disclose what they're doing, whom they dislike, and how they got rich, they still willingly reveal who they communicate with and who they know. And it's impossible not to participate in that structure. If you leave it, you lose your sense of past and present, you sever contact with your classmates and your colleagues, you don't pay your dues, and you get separated from your community. In virtual reality and in Facebook what vanishes is a fundamental aspect of real freedom: self-determination and a free choice of

association rather than being sucked into a friendship simply because technology does not allow you to lead a civilised life otherwise.

But what does this say about our society? We are led to disturbing conclusions about human freedom no less than to an unwanted but warranted recognition that all of humanity is indeed becoming a nation that, though displaced and humiliated, is liked and hallowed: a Facebook nation. In the contemporary world, manipulation by political advertisement is not only capable of creating people's needs and their criteria of happiness, but also capable of fabricating the heroes of our time and controlling the imagination of the masses through successful biographies. These abilities make one pause for thought about a 'velvet' totalitarianism – a controlled form of manipulating consciousness and imagination that is cloaked as liberal democracy, which allows the enslavement and control of even the critics.

What remains deeply underneath is increasing social control and mass surveillance, which reveals what happened to politics outpaced by technology. Whether we like it or not, technology does not ask us if we desire it. Once you can use it, you must do so. The refusal relegates you to the margins of society left without being able to pay your dues as a tenant or to participate in a public debate. The state, which does not use mass surveillance, becomes unable to justify its excessive use of secret services and spying techniques. Curiously, this tendency goes hand in hand with the spread and explosive proliferation of the forms of self-display and confessional culture in general, whether in popular or even in highbrow culture.

With sound reason, then, Sarah E. Igo concludes (Igo, 2015, p. 28):

What if confessional culture is simply an avenue for turning the surveillance society inside out? One commentator writes that 'our physical bodies are being shadowed by an increasingly comprehensive "data body"; a body of data, moreover, that 'does not just follow but precedes the individual being measured and classified' ... If this is the case, continuous visibility on one's own terms (whether through ACT UP, reality television, or Facebook) begins to look like a strategy – if not an unproblematic one – of autonomy, a public way of maintaining control over one's private identity. A culture of self-display may, in this way, be an obscure legacy of the 1970s, the outgrowth of identity politics and new media formats, but also a half-century's reckoning with data banks and bureaucratic surveillance.

Therefore, technology will not allow you to remain on the side-lines. *I can* transmutes into *I must*. I can, therefore I must. No dilemmas permitted. We live in a reality of possibilities, not one of dilemmas. This is something akin

to the ethics of WikiLeaks, where there is no morality left. It is obligatory to spy and to leak, though it's unclear for what reason and to what end. It works in both ways: for and against the state, yet it never assumes responsibility for a truly anguished individual. It's something that has to be done just because it's technologically feasible. There's a moral vacuum here created by a technology that has overtaken politics. The problem for such a consciousness is not the form or legitimacy of power but its quantity. For evil (by the way, secretly adored) is where there is more financial and political power. If this is so, we deal a blow to ethics, since technology comes to fill the gaps left by politics and public morality: once you are connected, you are absolved and relieved. The media is the message, and living online becomes an answer to the dilemmas of our modern existence.

A total abolition of privacy leading to manipulation with human secrets and abuses of their intimacy, which appears as a nightmarish vision of the future in such dystopias as Yevgeny Zamyatin's *We* and George Orwell's *1984*, was foreseen, anticipated, and wittily depicted in early modern European literature. As mentioned in our *Moral Blindness* (2013), suffice it to recall Luis Vélez de Guevara's *El Diablo cojuelo* (*The Devil on the Crutches*, or *The Limping Devil*), a seventeenth-century text where the devil has the power to reveal the insides of the houses, or a variation of this theme in Alain-René Le Sage's novel under that same title in French, *Le diable boiteux*. The astonishing fact remains, though, that what early modern writers took as a devilish force aimed to deprive human beings of their privacy and secrets has now become inseparable from the reality shows and other actions of wilful and joyful self-exposure in our self-revealing age.

Two of the manifestations of the new evil: insensitivity to human suffering, and the desire to colonise privacy by taking away a person's secret, the something that should never be talked about and made public. The global use of others' biographies, intimacies, lives and experiences is a symptom of insensitivity and meaninglessness.

5 Big Mr Anonymous

As mentioned, the net society is the fear-ridden society. It becomes a perfect place for the entire fear industry and organised scaremongering. It highlights and exposes the rise of technocracy disguised as democracy. At the same time, the net society and its public domain nourish and nurture such indispensable constituent parts of technocracy as value neutrality and instrumentalism in all their manifestations. In this culture of constant fear, scaremongering, reform,

and incessant change, shallowness becomes an asset rather than a liability. In fact, the culture of fear and is the culture of shallowness, and vice versa. Yet shallowness is 'miscalled' here as adaptability and flexibility (just like 'simple truth miscall'd simplicity' in William Shakespeare's 66th sonnet). This results in shallow institutional practices, countless and meaningless strategy games, and empty rhetoric. Vocabularies become separated from concepts, and end up as senseless language games and sets of hollow terms behind hollow concepts.

I had once asked the Russian writer Andrei Bitov to comment on the phenomenon of the superfluous human being in Russian literature. In a literary seminar that was taking place in Sweden's Visby he was speaking about Alexander Pushkin, who not only used this concept but elucidated the phenomenon itself as well in his novel-in-verse, *Eugene Onegin*. Be that as it may, prior to this work and Mikhail Lermontov's *A Hero of Our Time*, the first to call attention to the superfluous human being in Russia was Alexander Herzen, who immediately after the crushing of the Decembrist Revolt realised that there were people in Russia who would never find a place in politics or even society. They were in the wrong historical period and the wrong part of the world. Something or somebody made a mistake here: maybe it was God or history perhaps, or was it fate? Perhaps they had to be sacrificed in the name of a brighter future, as in a Greek tragedy. Bitov told me, without any agitation, that everything might be simpler still: there are, to tell the truth, situations, epochs, and societies, in which human beings are just redundant.

It strikes me that our epoch, too, can do perfectly well without human beings. We just don't need each other for any social plenitude, for human fulfilment. *Pars pro toto* is enough. We need parts instead of the whole. During elections, we need some votes; in a situation requiring the lowering of production costs, we need cheap labour; in order to create a safe, trustworthy, and business-friendly environment we need what's called solidarity (in other words, renouncing protest and not defending one's rights, instead choosing emigration or degradation). In some cases, an anonymous mass is precisely what fills the bill: it is intensely desired and eagerly sought after by vote-hunting politicians who before every election day remember emigrants as an indispensable part of their electorate while electronic voting (that we are about to, but haven't yet adopted) is going on. In other cases, this mass is what politicians try to run away from because they understand perfectly well that the problems causing people to leave everything behind in their homeland and move abroad are not capable of being solved in economically weak countries no longer separated by borders from economically stronger ones.

Ratings are impossible without an anonymous mass of spectators and voters; that's why we love the aforementioned Big Mr Anonymous for as long as

he legitimises us with his faceless, soulless loyalty. We cannot do without this mass if we are politicians, television producers, stars, or anyone else claiming the right to be publicly known with a recognisable face and name. But as soon as this mass stops legitimising us and turns to us, not in gestures of recognition and thus of repeatedly recreating us, but in demanding from us that we take notice of their individual names and faces as they step out of this anonymous mass and thereby take on personal features of human pain, drama, and tragedy, then we begin to wish and wash this mass away. Why? It's because we almost instinctively realise that its problems – the problems of the individual souls making up this mass – are insoluble in a world in which everything they seek has been promised to them but without their having been told when and at what cost all this will be available to them. In their own country? At home? Why no, no way.

Where are the great promises of modernity to be found? Mobility, freedom of movement, and the freedom of choice – weren't these promised to them? And wasn't one of the promises a world without borders as well? But such a world wouldn't be conducive for small, economically and politically infirm countries to gain strength. In such a world, powerful states would get stronger and weak ones would get weaker still. Wasn't it promised to us that we'd be able freely to cross any European border?

I'll put the situation in the words of a character in Marius Ivaškevičius's play *Expulsion* as staged by Oskaras Koršunovas. Eglė, the (anti)protagonist, says that crossing the border will be easy but there's one thing you'll have to leave behind, one thing you won't be able to take with you: your self-worth. When did this change happen: before the expulsion or after it? And what kind of expulsion are we talking about here? Is it a self-expulsion in the sense of *let's get out of here*? Or is it an expelling in the sense of *let's get rid of it* – a deliberate jettisoning of something that painfully testifies to your own or the system's faults? Moreover, will you be allowed to be yourself? Or will you have to transform yourself into a monkey, a pitiful socio-political parakeet parroting the accent, vocabulary, manners, tone, timbre, and body movements of upper-class people?

The collective actor in the drama of expulsion is Big Mr Anonymous. By the latter name I have in mind the whole anonymity-enabling system that consists of operators and those operated upon; of repressive organs and their victims trying to survive. The direct actors, who first of all possess nicknames and only then have first and last names, constitute our Lithuanian *precariat*. This is globalisation's new lower class in place of Karl Marx's proletariat: they are the precariously, unsafely situated people living in a zone of ever-present danger and risk. Nothing is guaranteed to them, they can't be certain about anything; their sense of security has been taken away from them forever. At the same

time, Big Mr Anonymous, as was suggested earlier, may well be understood as a system of seduction equipped with the power to withdraw from our sense of responsibility for our neighbours, ourselves, and the world around us, and from our sensitivity as well. Nothing personal, just business...

Yes, they can attain some prosperity, but only through a kind of social suicide by becoming part of the great Nothing in a foreign country. This *precariat* embodies and serves the global network of anonymous persons and organisations, a network that starts with statistics and ends with a really existing variety that is held to be sufficient proof of the fact that society allows the impregnable existence of shocking social contrasts and inequalities. These will be liberally explained away by cultural differences and their right to exist in dignity, to be as they are and to be left alone, without imposing sensitivities and interpretations that are foreign to them, or even giving them any political or economic power. Thus, you become part of the work force, with the right to imitate the right local accents and the consumption patterns of the jet-set classes, but without the right to your own authentic historical-political narrative and your own cultural ways of interpreting yourself.

6 Postscript: Zombie Concepts and Shallow Universities

In our book of dialogues, *Moral Blindness* (2013), Zygmunt Bauman and I have discussed a disturbing phenomenon, which I would describe as a post-academic university. An awkward amalgam of medieval academic ritual, specialisation, a blatant and blunt denial of the role of the humanities in modern society, managerialism and shallowness allows a perfect scene for such a post-academic university, the playground for enormous pressures, the latter coming from technocratic forces disguised as the genuine voices of liberty and democracy – first and foremost, the market-oriented forms of determinism and fatalism with no room left for the principle of alternative, including critical thought and self-questioning.

The sole mission and *raison d'être* of the post-academic university seems to lie in its overt shallowness, flexibility, submissiveness to the managerial elites, and also in adaptability to the calls and assignments coming from the markets and the political elites. Hollow words, empty rhetoric, and countless strategy games appear as the quintessence of this sort of tyranny of shallowness best embodied in the post-academic university. It is a strategy without a strategy, as the latter becomes merely a language game. The Wittgensteinian idea of language games was applied by Gianni Vattimo to describe technocracy walking in disguise as democracy, or present politics without politics, both reduced to

a series of language games. As Zygmunt Bauman would have it, present strategies without strategies, or politics without politics, are tantamount to ethics without morality.

'Outside the Church there is no salvation' (*extra ecclesiam nulla salus*) – this expression is ascribed to Saint Cyprian of Carthage, a bishop of the third century. We have a modern equivalent of this sort of civilizational logic, though, since ours is a corporate and quasi-medieval world where individuals do not have their existence outside of an institution which frames and moulds them. The Academia is the New Church nowadays. This is why the role of dissent, secular heterodoxy, and alternative in this world is far more problematic and complex than it may seem at the first sight.

The post-academic university becomes a place to practice shallowness disguised as flexibility and adaptability. Lecturing becomes merchandise, and so does academic performance as such. The unholy alliance of state bureaucracy and neoliberal practices – deregulation, dissemination, and privatisation coupled with bureaucratic control – results in the academic community becoming a tiny and insignificant minority in what we call nowadays the academia. Enormous economic and political pressure coming from the university management and the state establishment makes academic and intellectual freedom vulnerable and fragile. In some cases, there is an obvious backlash – especially in Eastern and Central Europe where nobody spoke about students as workforce for more than twenty years. Strangely enough, the propensity to assess universities as suppliers of workforce is getting increasingly stronger now. In the 1990s, Kavolis warned his Lithuanian fellow academics and state officials about the grave dangers and devastating consequences of the cult of pure specialists, which he noticed in Lithuania at that time.

This propensity goes hand in hand with marginalisation of academics, scholars and students in terms of their autonomy and their involvement in the debates about the future of their respective universities. Whereas in nineteenth-century Russia Alexander Herzen and Alexander Pushkin wrote about the superfluous human being, we may well call faculty in present universities if not superfluous, then at least not decisive and central when it comes to the visions and articulations of academic life and the future of universities. The 'publish or perish' imperative having been replaced with the 'publish and perish' one, it is evident that permanent uncertainty, unsafety, and insecurity becomes one of the *conditions sine qua non* of academia. Therefore, endless and never-ending reforms of the academic system and universities allows the state bureaucracy and university management to keep scholars in suspense without their being able to participate in the symbolic construction of reality otherwise than through their subordination and subjugation to that system.

Ulrich Beck and Zygmunt Bauman wrote about zombie concepts – concepts that capture and describe non-existent things, or phenomena that do not exist nowadays anymore (see Bauman & Donskis, 2013). Hollow words, empty phrases, and shallow rhetoric – all these signify the arrival of the state of affairs when words and their frames of meaning bid farewell to one another. They simply part leaving no trace. The concepts of university autonomy and academic freedom are dangerously approaching the point of no return when they will be on the way to becoming zombie concepts – the enormous pressure put on the academia by the unholy alliance of local and international ideologues of neoliberalism, libertarian preachers of free-market fundamentalism, and political technocrats will sooner or later nullify the remnants of the time-honoured autonomy and independence of universities.

High schools, colleges, and universities are increasingly being confined to a playground for culture wars; yet things are even worse with various sorts of pilot projects of management and business administration being tested and tried out in universities with the sole reason of exclusion of corporate relations-free and independent academics from the public domain where they serve as nay-sayers and social critics. Therefore, such terms as responsibility and academic ethics become obsolete and superfluous, since they can barely shed any light on zombie concepts and reality they are bound to represent – for how can you represent the domain from which you are excluded by anonymous and irresponsible agencies of power structure that aim to manage, control, and reform you without your consent and even without consulting academic community? What is any sort of never-ending academic reform if not exercise of power using the news about it as a mere *fait accompli*? Policy makers do their utmost to reform universities without bothering themselves with the reform of the political system itself or politics at large; therefore, the longer you keep reforming the academia, the more insecure and unsafe academics become, which means that the imposed from above and vertical reform diminishes their powers of social criticism.

In addition to the explosive proliferation of zombie concepts, present-day universities have fallen prey to privatisation of utopia as a blueprint for a viable moral order and as a dream of a good and just society. For a long time, we knew utopia as a framework for a symbolic design within which we could explain ourselves and the world around us, allowing room for value and dream. Yet since utopia bowed out to the dream of a good and just society becoming a personal success story re-enacted by every single celebrity and their accounts of success and Cinderella-like miracle of social metamorphosis, this has dealt a painful blow to all visionaries of university life.

For how can we return to the university as a place of reconciliation of fact/truth and value, expertise and intimacy, verification and trust, free individual and critical community in a world which increasingly declares and takes pride in its value neutrality/ethical detachment euphemistically termed efficiency, adaptability, and flexibility? Here, again, we are in the realm of shallowness miscalled the ability to change, adapt, and be flexible. Bad news for the academia that still nurtures the dream of bridging the past, the present, and the future, thus confronting value neutrality, instrumentalism, and ethical detachment whose social effects have already proved disastrous for the modern world.

To have a plausible political-historical narrative nowadays means to have viable politics, rather than policies masquerading as politics. Politics becomes impossible without a good story in the form of a convincing plot or an inspiring vision. The same applies to good literature. When we fail a method in our scholarship, or when a method fails us, we switch to a story – this sounds much in tune with Umberto Eco. Where scholarly language fails, fiction comes as a way out of the predicament with an interpretation of the world around us.

The funny thing is that politics does not work without our stories. This is to say that modern politics needs the humanities much more than politicians suspect. Without travel accounts, humour, laughter, warning, and moralising, political concepts tend to become empty. With sound reason, therefore, Karl Marx once wittily noted that he learned much more about the nineteenth century's political and economic life from Honoré de Balzac's novels than from all economists of that time put together.

This is the reason why Shakespeare was far and away the most profound political thinker of Renaissance Europe. Niccolò Machiavelli's works *Florentine Stories* and *Discourses on Livy* tell us much about his literary vocation and also about the talent of a storyteller – no less than exuberant comedies penned by Machiavelli, such as *The Mandragola*.

Do we tell each other European stories nowadays to enhance our powers of interpretation and association, and to reveal one another's experiences, traumas, dreams, visions, and fears? We don't, alas. Instead, we have confined the entire European project merely to its economic and technical aspects. Stories lay the foundation for Giovanni Boccaccio's masterpiece *Decameron*; nothing other than stories about human suffering, whatever their blood and creed, made Voltaire's philosophical tales, such as *Candide, ou l'Optimisme* (Candide, or Optimism), truly European stories.

This reference as well as the human reality behind it crossed my mind almost immediately when I started teaching the course on politics and literature at the University of Bologna. The reason was quite simple: I had the entire

fabric of Europe in my class, as the course was given within the East European studies program with the participation of students from Western, Central, and Eastern Europe, including non-EU countries such as Albania, Croatia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Russia, Serbia, and Ukraine.

We easily surpassed and crossed the boundaries of an academic performance and discussion, for it was human exchanges on the newly discovered and shocking moral blindness of classmates or neighbours, human dramas of high treason, moral treachery, disappointment, cowardice, cruelty, and loss of sensitivity. How can we miss the point talking past and present to each other or listening to someone else's drama that it was Dante who coined the phrase 'the cult of cruelty', and the English writer Rex Warner who forged the phrase 'the cult of power' – political idioms that we use constantly without being aware of the fact that they are not straight out of the vocabulary of today?

Suffice it to recall that the real founding fathers of Europe, Renaissance humanists Thomas More and Erasmus of Rotterdam made friends in Paris jointly translating Lucian from Greek into Latin, and also connecting their friend, German painter Hans Holbein the Younger, to the royal court of the king of England, Henry VIII. Whereas the great Flemish painter Quentin Matsys saved for history the face of their friend in Antwerp, Peter Giles, Hans Holbein the Younger immortalised the faces of his benefactor Thomas More and Erasmus of Rotterdam.

Yet the bad news is that politics has colonised culture nowadays, and this has gone unnoticed, albeit under our noses. This is not to say that culture is politically exploited and vulgarised for long- or short-term political ends and objectives. In a democratic political setting, culture is separated from politics. An instrumentalist approach to culture immediately betrays either technocratic disdain for the world of arts and letters or poorly concealed hostility to human worth and liberty. However, in our brave new world, the problem lies elsewhere.

We don't need the humanities anymore as a primary driving force behind our political and moral sensibilities. Instead, politicians try to keep the academia as unsafe, uncertain, and insecure as possible – by reshaping, or 'reforming' it, into a branch of the corporate world. By and large, this idea of the necessity to politically rationalise, change, reshape, refurbish, and renovate the academia is a simulacrum, in Jean Baudrillard's terms. It conceals the fact that the political class and our bad policies are exactly what desperately need that change and reform. Yet power speaks: if I don't change you, you will come to change me.

We stopped telling moving stories to each other. Instead, we nourish ourselves and the world around us with conspiracy theories (which are always

about the big and powerful, instead of the small and humane), sensationalist stuff, and crime or horror stories. In doing so, we are at peril of stepping away from our innermost European sensibilities, one of which has always been and continues to be the legitimacy of opposing narratives, attitudes, and memories. Human beings are incomplete without one another.

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