

Excerpt: „The University of the Future”

from Mihai Spăriosu *Global intelligence and human development: toward an ecology of global learning*. MIT Press, 2004.

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3. *The University without Walls or without (Red) Brick and Mortar*

With the advent of the information age, we also see some elements of the two paradigms, the university as citadel of knowledge and the university as factory of knowledge, slowly emerging into what might conceivably become a third paradigm: the university without walls or without (red) brick and mortar. The metaphors of “citadel” and “factory” both convey the disciplinary nature of the university. In the first case, there is the aristocratic idea of knowledge as power--be it under the gentlemanly guise of a free, disinterested, and leisurely intellectual pursuit--that must remain the privilege of a few and therefore must be jealously guarded and defended from the assault and penetration of the masses--here one may think of such hoary British academic establishments as Eton, Oxford and Cambridge before World War I.

In the second case, one may develop the factory analogy by describing specific academic forms of Fordism, Taylorism, and their contemporary “neo-” and “post-” variants, as well as other bureaucratic rationalizations of intellectual labor, typical of academic mass production. One should also not forget the academic sweatshop as a source of cheap intellectual labor, mentioned in the preceding subsection. In turn, under today’s neoliberal and bureaucratic academic paradigm, a sizable part of the university, concerned particularly with the technosciences, has become a relatively cheap source of intellectual labor for the corporate world, or what one may call a “gilded sweatshop.”

A university without walls or without (red) brick and mortar, on the other hand, should metaphorically connote the removal of the disciplinary barriers that have been erected everywhere by the traditional *universitas*. But it should also connote the e-commerce vocabulary that describes selling and buying a wide range of goods through the Internet, rather than in conventional stores, built out of brick and mortar, i.e. the postmodern, electronic version of Newman’s pantehnicon or bazaar.

In the electronic information age, universities may become one of the service industries, and in many parts of the United States they are in fact already looked upon and treated as such. In the words of Robert Reich (2001), they offer “symbolic-analytical services.” As part of the service industry, universities supposedly produce and move around intellectual or immaterial commodities that belong to a so-called “cultural capital” (Pierre Bourdieu’s phrase). Thus, universities, together with the new media, are often seen as partly belonging in the information industry and partly in the entertainment industry (in the low-paying range of the latter, according to the quip of a colleague’s father). In

keeping with these e-commerce trends, there are a large number of virtual universities and professional schools that have mushroomed both in the United States and in other parts of the world and that more or less share the e-commerce philosophy. At the same time, brick-and-mortar universities equally seek to offer some of their courses and programs online and have even formed transatlantic partnerships to do so.

“University without walls” may connote, in addition to or in combination with the virtual university concept, a large number of centers or institutes of continuing education that are catering to a rapidly growing, nontraditional student population of all ages and walks of life. They seem more promising than the virtual university with respect to creating and disseminating new learning structures and methods that depart from the strictly disciplinary ones. In the case of the virtual university, for example, disciplinary courses have oftentimes been simply exported to virtual space without any modification or much regard for the knowledge content and learning potentialities of the electronic medium.

In this respect, the virtual university has duplicated and has made more efficient the older form of the “university by correspondence” that employs similar, long-distance, disciplinary learning methods, conveyed through “snail-mail.” Far from inhibiting the disciplinary instincts and habits of the brick-and-mortar university, the electronic medium has offered the latter the possibility of rapidly replicating and disseminating them in virtual space ad infinitum--a sort of Fordism and Taylorism online. Consequently, virtual universities have as yet not posed a present and clear threat to the disciplinary culture of the brick-and-mortar university, although they have moved aggressively into the education “market” and are beginning to cut into its profit margins.

On the other hand, the centers or institutes for continuing education could become the base for a different kind of academic institution, assuming they could detach themselves from the current bureaucratic power structures of the brick-and-mortar university. That they pose a real threat to the latter is witnessed by the fact that many academic departments reclaim courses in their disciplines that are taught under continuing education and clamor for full control in deciding the content of and hiring the teaching staff for these courses. These academic departments base their demands on their “legitimate concern” for the quality of instruction and content that should conform to the disciplinary standards and regulations currently in force within each discipline at a given university.

“Quality control” is the watchword of bureaucratic academia, as it has always been in our brick-and-mortar factories and stores, but it refers less to enhancing or maintaining the high quality of education (however “high quality” might be defined), than to keeping it within strictly prescribed disciplinary confines. Quality control whether in the student requirements for a degree or the faculty requirements for promotion and tenure ensures that the university remains a highly structured, regulated, and controlled, disciplinary environment.

Continuing education, through its informal learning environments, flexible teaching

schedules, cross-disciplinary and extra-curricular offerings, and nondegree course requirements and credits, as well as through its widely diverse student populations and closer proximity to the community, may eventually contribute to the reform of the university as a “halfway house of knowledge.” This metaphor preserves the disciplinary connotations of the university in the law-enforcement concept of a “halfway house,” that is, a place situated halfway between prison and home, where exconvicts or drug addicts are socially reeducated or “redeemed,” before being released back into the community.

The metaphor also preserves the connotation of e-commerce, for which a “halfway house” is a warehouse, situated halfway between the place of production and the buyer’s domicile, where commodities are stored before being shipped out to the consumer. For contemporary e-commerce, for example, Ireland is a preferred location where such halfway storage- or warehouses are built, precisely because this island is geographically situated at the crossways between Europe, Northern Africa, and North America. Thus, the university as a halfway house may equally convey a third idea, that of a node or a place of intersection in an exchange or communication network, in this case an exchange or communication network of intellectual or immaterial commodities.

Other promising nodes of intersection between the university and the outside community could be the so-called “university extensions,” which were created in the nineteenth-century North American land grant colleges in response to the practical (largely agricultural) needs of local communities. Land grant colleges came about through an act of the U.S. Congress in 1862. By this piece of legislation, each state put aside 30,000 acres of land to form a perpetual fund for the endowment and maintenance of “at least one college where the leading object shall be without excluding other scientific or classical studies, and including military tactics, to teach such branches of learning as are related to agriculture and the mechanic arts, in such manner as the legislatures of the States may respectively prescribe, in order to promote the liberal and practical education of the industrial classes in the several pursuits and professions in life.” (6)

Although this “democratization” of the traditional liberal arts college obviously has its advantages and disadvantages, originally it had the salutary effect of orienting higher education toward the needs of the community. As we can see from the text of the act, however, the needs of the community were far from being perceived entirely in practical terms, the emphasis being placed equally on both “liberal” and “practical” education. (“Military tactics,” on the other hand, is a transparent reference and concession to the needs of the Civil War that was very much on the minds of the American legislators in 1862.)

In the course of time, however, the “practical” took over the “liberal,” and *education toward* “the pursuits and professions in life” was replaced by *training for* such pursuits and professions. As Eric Ashby puts it, gradually “the idea took shape that a university should be a sort of intellectual department store offering courses in an extraordinary range of subjects, from how to dance to how to bury the dead” (Ashby 1966, p.17). Note Ashby’s commercial metaphor, borrowed from Newman, which corroborates my description of the

brick-and-mortar university. Even so, the university extension could become an important and appropriate link between the academic and the nonacademic community, once it is emancipated from the bottom line utilitarian concerns of bureaucratic academia and once academic and nonacademic information and knowledge start flowing freely both ways.

The role of the university, then, would be not only to generate new knowledge, to debate and to exchange ideas, but also to facilitate their free flow both inside and outside the academic communities throughout the world. In this sense, the university as halfway house would finally convey the idea of liminality that I have discussed in previous chapters. The paradigm of the university as “halfway house” will go beyond the other three (university as citadel, as factory, and without walls) only if it can, under the impact of globalization, transmute and transfigure their basic principles and practices into a different, global reference frame, in which cooperative, rather than competitive relationships of reciprocal causality may obtain. In other words, the university as “halfway house” will become a genuinely new paradigm only if it can fulfill its liminal vocation and become a local-global institution, oriented toward global intelligence.

On the other hand, I cannot emphasize enough that one should by no means underestimate the obdurate, well-entrenched, bureaucratic conservatism of the contemporary academic culture, nor should one extol indiscriminately any kind of globalizing trend. From the standpoint of the university and other bureaucracies, globalization is simply one more bandwagon to jump on and will essentially not change their main objective: to preserve and enhance their own power by whatever means. It is for this reason that university bureaucracies (as well as state or suprastate bureaucracies) have subscribed to the neoliberal financial, economic, and political program of globalization, with its call for the universal adoption of neoliberal business models in all domains of human activity, including education and culture.

Thus, well-meaning and in many ways useful studies such as those included in *Universities and Globalization: Critical Perspectives* (1998), edited by Jan Currie and Janice Newson, largely ignore the fact that university and state bureaucracies have been in place long before (neoliberal versions of) globalization came into vogue and will possibly survive this particular wave as well. It would be obscuring the real issues, if we linked too closely the advent of the bureaucratic university with the advent of globalization, as some contributors to the volume seem to do. (This, of course, does not mean that we should ignore the obvious amplifying feedback loops between the bureaucratic academic paradigm and certain neoliberal globalizing trends, as these contributors rightly point out.)

It may seem paradoxical that the bureaucratic university would adopt the neoliberal program, which would appear, at least at first sight, to be profoundly inimical to it, with its calls for fewer bureaucratic controls and regulations and for more entrepreneurial, laissez-faire policies. It is plain to see, however, that the university bureaucracies (as well as state bureaucracies and corporate elites in general) are applying these kinds of neoliberal policies to everyone else but themselves. The phenomenon of exemptionalism, characteristic of any power-oriented mentality, is fully operative in this reference frame as

well. Such corporate slogans as “teamwork,” “productivity,” “quality control,” “transparency,” and “accountability” are meant to function in one direction only, from top down, and not vice versa.

Furthermore, upper bureaucratic and corporate ranks have not decreased, but have steadily increased with the advent of neoliberal globalizing trends, despite repeated, well-meaning efforts of “reinventing” government. In this regard, the academic unionists’ calls for resistance against globalization (read: neoliberal versions of it) do not affect in the least the university and the state bureaucracies. In fact, they are given an extra boost, when these unionists advocate, nostalgically (and ironically), a return to previous state regulation and control of neoliberal business practices, which presumably served public, rather than private interests. In the end, however, no matter who wins out, whether it is the neoliberal or the state and suprastate control advocates, the general public will lose, and the university bureaucracies, no less than their state and corporate counterparts, will continue to grow and prosper.

Most of the contributors to *Universities and Globalization* largely fail to realize that the enemy (or angel?) they are grappling with is not outside, be it globalization, the neoliberal creed, or even the bureaucratic and corporate structures, but inside them. This enemy or angel effectively controls even their well-meaning academic labor unions that do little more, through their “resistance,” than reinforce the power structures they attempt to oppose. The authors certainly seem right to me in pointing out that neoliberal globalizing trends are neither irreversible “fate” nor the only possible paths to globalization and that, if they are not abandoned or at least substantially tempered, they will seriously inhibit human development, including its socioeconomic aspects. But I cannot believe that a lasting way of ensuring continuing human development would be to revert to older bureaucratic practices of state or suprastate control and regulation, be it in the name of the “public good.”

Nor would it be of much help--as I argued at the end of part I--to introduce throughout the world the Western model of liberal democratic society, with its allegedly universal democratic values that some of the contributors to the volume, including Janice Newson, seem to advocate. Of course, this societal model might be appropriate for certain communities--and ultimately it is up to those communities to embrace it or not (and hardly up to the Western democracies to impose it by force). But it would be much more beneficial, at least from the standpoint of an emergent ethics of global intelligence, if we could be persuaded collectively to turn away from *kratos* (power) altogether. This word is omnipresent in our vocabulary, from the Greek etymological root of “demo-cracy” to a plethora of terms describing our various forms of sociopolitical arrangements, such as aristocracy, bureaucracy, meritocracy, plutocracy, and so forth. Once we organize human relations on grounds other than power, new cultural, socioeconomic, and political forms, which may at present appear as inconceivable or utopian to our local mentalities, will undoubtedly emerge.

Janice Newson comes closer to a viable position, from the standpoint of a local-

global theory and practice oriented toward global intelligence, when she describes the unexpected side effects of the strike that her academic labor union staged against the upper administration at the University of York in Canada. While on the picket lines (which can also be regarded as a form of liminality), colleagues from various departments and “disciplines” started for the first time talking to each other. During these friendly conversations, they discovered common research and other concerns and developed an interest in working together on various “interdisciplinary” projects. It is this kind of amicable dialogue and collective desire to engage in transdisciplinary and cross-cultural research and other projects for the benefit of all communities (whether academic or nonacademic) that will eventually advance human development throughout the planet. In turn, the project of a liminal university would require going beyond both the contemporary bureaucratic paradigm and the academic unionist or “democratic” one, but also beyond the disciplinary paradigm as a whole, in all its academic and nonacademic aspects.

4. The Future Role of the University

It might be instructive to place the model of a liminal university and its local-global networks envisioned here in a comparative historical perspective and juxtapose it to the liminal model of the monastery of earlier ages, at least as imagined by mystics and visionaries, such as Gautama Buddha and his disciples in the East, or Francis of Assisi, Teresa of Avila, and Juan de la Cruz in the West. In fact, these visionaries sought to reform their traditional religious institutions by reaffirming their liminal nature. (We recall, for example, that the Buddha retreated to the Himalayas in order to meditate on questions of government and power.)

Monasteries were originally conceived and built as liminal sites located--metaphorically, but often also geographically--halfway between the desert and human habitation, as well as halfway between the City of Man and the City of God. On this liminal ground, small communities of men or women opted out of the world of power in order to live a quiet but productive life of peace, meditation, and prayer. They meant to help each other and those from outside to develop their moral and spiritual dimensions. They had also gradually built a network of such liminal sites throughout the known world and had established steady flows of communication and knowledge exchanges between them. They effectively communicated, not through the Internet, but through long and perilous voyages and pilgrimages, as well as through extensive circulation of manuscripts and edifying oral narratives.

The ancient monastery, however, soon strayed from its original mission of preparing a different world for itself and others, while still in and of this world. Instead, it simply started replicating the power structures it had supposedly left behind. Thus, its liminal vocation became obscured. Even worse, in the case of Christianity, its networks became divided and hierarchical, with one center of command and control located in papal Rome

and another, in Eastern Orthodox Constantinople. The monastery also started accumulating great material (rather than spiritual) wealth. Consequently, it often became the scene of power struggles among rival church and other dignitaries, rather than a place of contemplation and of knowledge production and exchange, to the benefit of all humanity. Repeated efforts on the part of mystics and other church reformers to reaffirm the liminal nature of the monastery and the church in general (which was equally supposed to mediate between the City of Man and the City of God) had only partial and temporary success, being eventually co-opted and recuperated by the disciplinary culture of the traditional religious hierarchies.

The history of the university, which in the beginning was, as we have seen, inextricably linked with that of the Church, can in turn be regarded as the history of an institution that has repeatedly failed its liminal vocation. That the university indeed has this vocation is obvious even from its preferred geographical sites, either halfway between town and country or in a *hortus conclusus*, sheltered from daily mundane affairs. From Plato's Academy (situated in a holy olive orchard outside Athens) to the modern North American campus (often situated in a small rural town that, not infrequently, owes its origins to the land grant college itself), the university, like the monastery, has often marked and circumscribed its own ground or field. Within the confines of this field--understood in a literal sense as well, the English word "campus" being a transliteration from Latin, meaning "field"--different ground rules are supposed to obtain from those of the outside world. Common language usage that pits the academic world against the "real" world equally points to the university's liminal vocation.

There has often been an implicit or tacit pact between the university and the rest of society that has allowed the university a degree of freedom of thought and experimentation. Such freedom is seldom granted to other fields of human endeavor, say, business or politics, and it varies according to the degree of openness or closeness of a particular community or society as a whole. In return, the university was understood to function as a neutral ground where fresh ideas, sociocultural and scientific theoretical models, and even life-styles could be safely debated and tried out before they could be introduced into society at large. This relative freedom partially explains why universities could occasionally break their pact of neutrality with the powers that be, turning into hothouses of social reform or even social revolutions.

Furthermore, the university's moral authority has also partially derived from its neutral, liminal position: the academic world, like the monastic one, has often been perceived, at least by outsiders, as a place where moral values and moral conduct are exemplary, precisely because its members are free from the constraints of the "real" world of power. Unfortunately, we have already seen how the university, no less than the monastery, has often failed to live up to its liminal vocation, merely replicating the disciplinary structures and habits that prevail outside academia.

Under the impact of globalization (understood, obviously, not as neoliberal globalizing trends, but as global awareness of the reciprocal causality of all human actions

and the enhanced sense of individual responsibility resulting from such awareness), the contemporary university will hopefully be able to reform itself and regain its liminal vocation, as well as the trust that the rest of the community has placed in it. The current global circumstance presents the university with new opportunities to activate its liminal potentialities. Worldwide socioeconomic and cultural trends in the past two decades or so have increasingly revealed that disciplinary knowledge and its institutional frameworks can less and less effectively cope with the concrete social, economical, political, cultural, technological, medical, environmental, ethical, and other problems that arise in our globalized communities. There is a growing feeling inside and outside academia that fresh or revised models of knowledge and fresh or revised research and learning strategies must be developed on the part of our academic and nonacademic communities to cope with these issues. In turn, these models can no longer be monolingual and monocultural, but must take into consideration a wide diversity of cultures and systems of values and beliefs from all over the planet.

As we have seen from my discussion of contemporary cultural theories of globalization in previous chapters and from my reference, in this chapter, to some of the essays in *Universities and Globalization*, there is no consensus as to what these models should look like. But we can at least imagine what some of their fundamental principles should (or should not) be and begin to submit them to extensive intercultural dialogue and negotiation. As a preliminary step, we should continue to reemphasize the ethical-educational function of the local-global university of the future (*pace* Newman). This function has presently taken second place to bureaucratic bottom line fiscal considerations that have virtually turned the North American and other research and “mega” universities into forms of corporate welfare and gilded intellectual sweatshops.

In this respect, it is useful to stress again, just as Newman did, the distinction between educating students *toward* the “pursuits and professions in life,” to use the language of the 1862 Land Grant College Act, and training them *for* such pursuits and professions, which should be left largely in the hands of the professional schools. This does not mean that the university should expel the professional schools or the sciences from its ranks, as Newman’s arguments occasionally implied--although even he “suffered” the establishment of science laboratories in his Catholic university in Ireland and, during his tenure as rector of that university, presided over the founding of *The Atlantis Magazine*, which promoted scientific research among his faculty. On the contrary, it would mean to reform the entire university in such a way that ethical-educational objectives, oriented toward global intelligence, would inform all of its components, not just the humanities, the environmental sciences, or any other individual academic field.

All of the metaphors I have so far employed to describe the university, whether borrowed from military and industrial architecture or from the world of commerce, hide or underplay the mutual causality relationship between education and ethics (understood as a particular system of values and beliefs that guide the thoughts, emotions, and actions of an individual or a community). This mutually causal relationship has lately become

obscured in the free market notions of cultural capital. Or perhaps ethics itself has become such an immaterial commodity with its own fluctuating market value, as we see, for example, in the civic activities of various NGOs (nongovernmental organizations) and CSOs (civil society organizations), including proenvironmental ones, which are factored in by stock market investors in the so-called social awareness stocks. Be it as it may, most of the Western critiques of contemporary academia do agree that we need to restore the ethical-educational dimension of the university. But we should go even further and reflect on what a liminal academic model should be in the light of an emergent ethics of global intelligence, which ought eventually to become the standard for all of our educational values.

We may begin by defining the main function of the local-global university of the future. This should be neither training students for a professional career, which should be a supplementary academic objective; nor should it be a disciplinary and bureaucratic enhancement of power, nor the financial bottom line, nor a gilded sweatshop for industry and commerce, which should be no academic objectives at all. Nor should it be pursuing knowledge “for its own sake,” which would ultimately lead to overweening Faustian pride. Rather, its main purpose should be to pursue cooperative learning and research in the service of human self-development. As I pointed out in the introduction, it is this kind of development that our scientific, political, academic, business, and community leaders should focus on in the new century. And, since from the standpoint of global intelligence, there are no developed or underdeveloped societies on this planet, but only developing ones, all regions of the world would be equally able and “competent” to contribute to such development. They could, for instance, be called upon to draw on their enormous cultural resources of age-old wisdom that, as we have seen throughout this study, have largely remained untapped by our current and past elites.

The very purpose and organization of education as a whole should thus be rethought, restructured, and reoriented toward global intelligence. Rethinking education in these terms will require, for example, restructuring geopolitical models based on area studies and interdisciplinary approaches in the sciences and the humanities that leave disciplinary structures largely intact. A global perspective will lead to remapping the traditional divisions of knowledge and will generally call for fresh ways of educating our younger and older generations at all levels. Indeed, it will ultimately require that learning become a lifelong process and extend well beyond formal education to all members of our local-global communities.

The university of the future can best accomplish its main objective of human self-development through liminal institutional models. The liminal university would share some of the features of the university as halfway house of knowledge, but without its disciplinary and commercial dimensions. Like its commercial and disciplinary counterpart, the liminal university would participate in a global network of communication and exchange. But, this network would be organized as a rhizomic structure. Its emblem would thus be the “roots of knowledge,” instead of the traditional, hierarchical “tree of

knowledge" (present in many esoteric, religious and nonreligious, teachings as well).

In turn, this metaphor would not relate to the origins of knowledge, which are ultimately "rootless" (because they emerge from the liminal interstices that, we recall, power-oriented mentalities conceive as nothingness), but to its mode of transmission and utilization. In this respect, the roots of knowledge should not be imagined as tentacles that reach everywhere and strangle and consume everything in their deadly embrace, somewhat in the manner of Hardt and Negri's rhizomic empire. Rather, they should be seen as free, generous, mutually nourishing and life-enhancing flows of communication and exchange. To develop the tree metaphor to its logical conclusion, society itself, which is served by the university, should be conceived as the branches of the tree. In this manner, roots, trunk, and branches engage in a symbiotic relationship of constructive amplifying feedback loops to the benefit of the entire tree, or self-organizing system.

The liminal university would not generate intellectual, or cultural, or human "capital," nor will it be part of any "service industry," even though other, nonacademic practitioners might use the knowledge it produces for such purposes. Nor would it reproduce within its framework the commercial and disciplinary relationships that obtain in the "real" world. On the contrary, it will generate and communicate, in a free and generous manner, new transdisciplinary and cross-cultural knowledge and principles of education that will be put in the service of human development.

The local-global university will work closely not only with its sister educational institutions worldwide, but also with all other nonacademic fields of endeavor, encouraging them to focus their efforts on the kinds of socioeconomic and cultural development that will in the end serve human self-development as a whole, throughout the planet. To this end, the university will create its own ethical practices that will be those of a liminal honest broker, to adopt again a commercial vocabulary, rather than those of a junior or senior business "partner." It will build cross-cultural and transdisciplinary rhizomic academic networks all over the world, through which it will educate local-global citizens in the spirit of global intelligence.

Finally, the university of the future ought to mobilize all its human resources to work together toward creating a mindset conducive to alternative ways of relating to each other in our profession and in our world communities at large. If we genuinely wish to change anything in our human and natural environment, we need to begin with ourselves. To cite Oscar Wilde's witty comment on exemptionalism (*avant la lettre*), "it is so easy to convert others," but "it is so difficult to convert oneself" (Wilde 1954, p. 986).

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