



THE HARD WAY TO ENLIGHTENMENT

DRAMATIZATION OF A LECTURE ON “THE ACADEMY AND THE CORPORATE PUBLIC” – IN TWO PARTS –

PART I – THE ACADEMY

Research, bohemia and self-organization

As part of my ongoing research project, “The Academy and the Corporate Public”, I want to talk about the relationship between the academy (as a discursive field in the fine arts) and the public sphere in the midst of a seismic shift induced by the corporate world economy.

I believe that this shift goes hand-in-hand with a different function for the arts, a different conception of the role of the artist in society and a different quality of education and research.

What part do institutional research, self-organization and bohemia play in these developments?

On the situation in Germany:

The fall of 2009 brought widespread protests and squatting of universities by students, starting at the Art Academy in Vienna and moving on to other countries in Europe and even the US.

The occupations were triggered by the Bologna Process that institutionalized the

commodification of education, a failure on all possible levels.

* Firstly, the implementation of BA/MA modules and credit points marks a break with the Humboldt tradition, of which Germany has always been so proud. This tradition grasped “Bildung” as a holistic project intended to enable the autonomous individual to engage in a process of self-formation in regard to his/her being human.

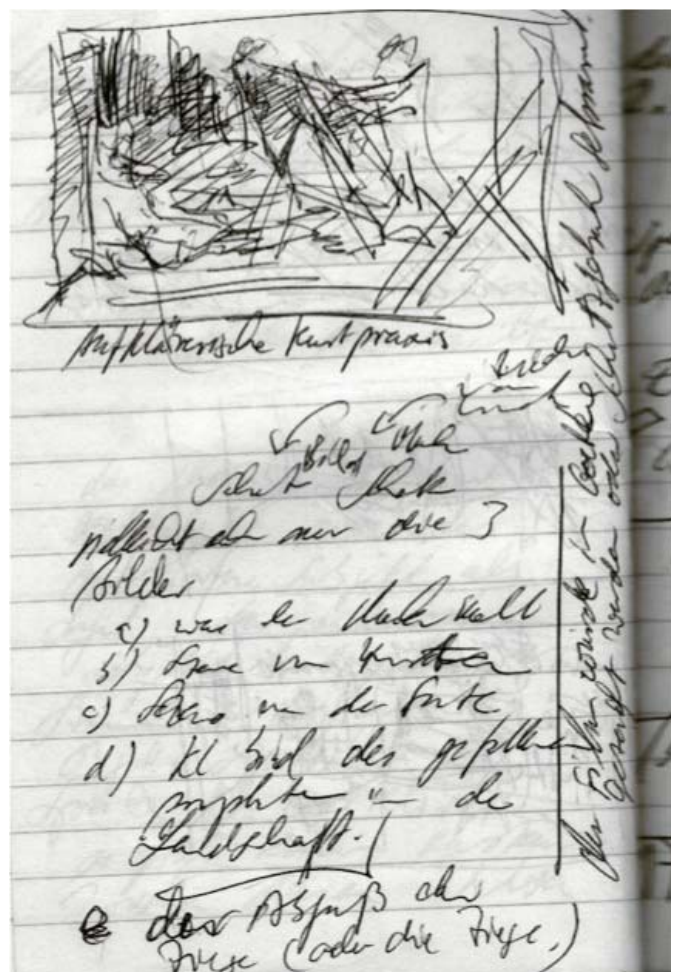
But now, this concept of education has succumbed to technocratic training, and students realize that solely commercial factors define the structure and teaching at universities. This comes as no surprise as Bertelsmann, one of the most powerful media corporations, was the instigator of the Bologna Process.

* Secondly, student fees have been introduced. Whereas previously students were able to study for free, they are now charged about 450 euros per semester, which may well herald the conversion of universities into profit-making organizations. I see this as a first step towards the privatization of education.

* And thirdly, democratic forms of decision-making within the institutions, the Autonomy of Higher Education, have been replaced by corporate business structures that give external members of the freshly installed supervisory boards (university council) unreasonable influence over the universities. For example, managers from such large corporations as Siemens, BMW and Roland Berger (himself!) have been appointed as board members at the university in Munich.

The devastating effects of neoliberal politics on the arts, the educational institutions and society as a whole have become more and more visible over the years. In light of the global financial crash, people seem to feel that the corporate infiltration into all public sectors, especially universities, has gone too far.

Our educational institutions are in ruins, are failed hegemonic projects: patriarchy, neo-liberalism and civic society. Research could be seen as a tool for exploring the possibilities that lie under the rubble.

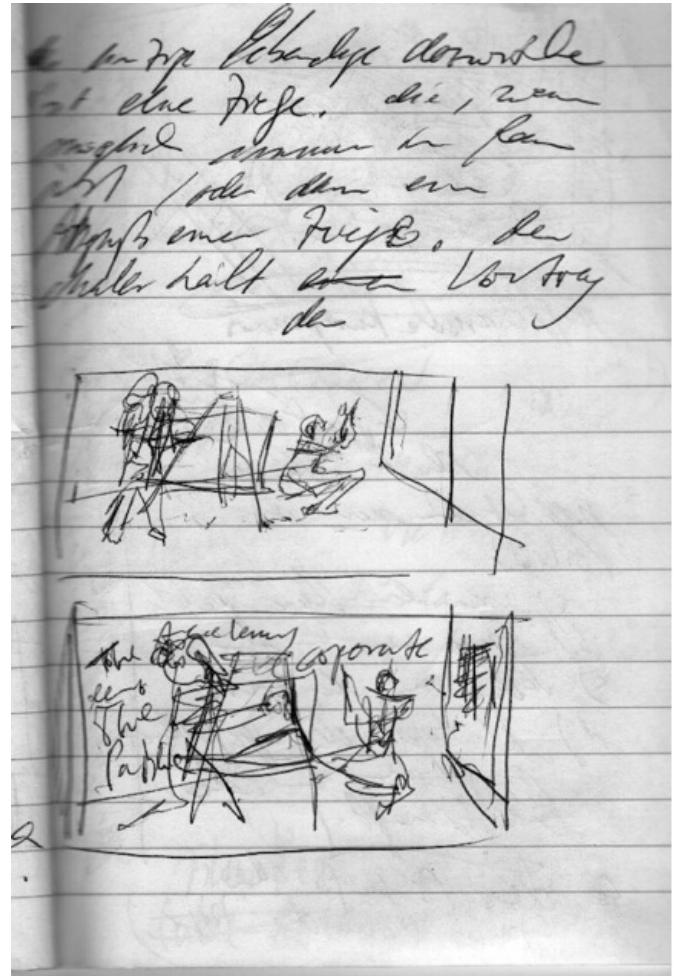


PROBLEMS AND ADVANTAGES OF RESEARCH

But where and how to talk about research? I think we have to be extremely careful to avoid promoting and perpetuating the contemporary hype of research, thus totally emptying this already inflationary term.

> *Some problems with research*

- * Research has become a mere justification of (artistic) projects.
- * It is now the case that every project has to be packaged as “research” to even have the prospect of perhaps being funded.
- * A specific jargon, a research-funding-application lingo, has polluted all research projects right from the beginning.
- * Research has become an obligation in a curricular master plan.
- * Students and teachers are obliged to conduct research.
- * Research prescribed from above has to be evaluated.
- * Thus, success and evaluation criteria for students and institutions have to be developed. But how can we measure the success of research? Through a credit point system? Through exams and external evaluation?
- * The research projects are assessed and rated; the universities themselves are evaluated, ranked and placed in competition to each other. To this end, there are external firms and rating agencies.
- * External evaluation can easily turn into a surveillance and control program.



- * What is called “excellence”, then, results from streamlining and control.
- * The exertion of control starts from the moment of the decision as to which research projects will be funded and which not, meaning that specific projects may have no chance because they could be seen as too critical or otherwise unwanted by the ruling ideology. This may be called preemptive censorship.
- * Usually only projects that can promise a profit receive funding, so the application already promises a profit.
- * The predictability of profit and results runs counter to an open-ended process of research.

- * Worst of all, none of these measures are much fun for the researchers involved.
- * They prevent joyful teaching and learning and run counter to enthusiastic experimentation.
- * Research in such an environment can only be depressing; gone is “la gaya scienza”.

> ***Advantages ...***

On the other hand, research could have many advantages to offer.

- * Research is opaque and mysterious – meaning dangerous! – like a journey into unknown territory.
- * Research is an open-outcome process, a final result can neither be predicted nor promised. Strategies and methods of research are often determined from moment to moment, or by previous experiments, or frequently improvised, meaning they are not as controllable as many financial backers would wish.

Heinz von Foerster, the cybernetics guy, for example, applied for funding for research projects that he had already undertaken and for which he already had a result. Foerster used the funding for other projects instead, a brave step into the unknown.

- * Research, as I see it, has to work against its own limitations.
- * But it must equally seek to reflect on the external restrictions (variables of the environment, blind spots and control mechanisms) in regard to the research results so as to get rid of them if possible.

- * Research can therefore also use unusual methods of resistance: strike, obstruction and protest are not only conceivable; they must be regarded as experiments that can lead to new and informative insights.

> ***On the necessity of research in the fine arts***

In the field of fine arts, we find today a widespread, anything-goes attitude – an arbitrariness that renders everything equally valid and, consequently, equally boring. Everything seems to be allowed as long as it generates desirable new commodities.

In such a situation, the art world, like the fashion industry, needs seasonal hypes to make one thing more desirable than the other. Knowledge gained from such proceedings can only be seen as highly questionable, the market mechanisms often appear more interesting than “innovations” in art.

Against art in its function as a mere outfitter for the prevailing market ideology, I propose artistic research as an epistemological tool, a path to insight, knowledge and cognition, as a device to open the world, as a theater to reflect on the role of art as art, as a painting that may even entertain us.

TYPES OF RESEARCH

In the following I want to make myself the object of study in the examination of three processes: self-empowerment, self-organization and research. I suggest three categories of research:

pubescent, bohemian and institutional research.

These categories, however, should not be understood as binding concepts; they instead arise from an interpretation of my own development as an artist (and researcher) in retrospect.

> *Pubescent research*

Starting from my student days in the late 1970s I can see research phenomena or methods that could be called pubescent.



Such strategies were used by the punk movement, or more generally, anytime the world seemed pre-defined, pre-determined or inaccessible.

From the earliest days, parents, school and the media have been telling us how to see, designate and interpret the world, meaning that youths often have the impression that there are no possibilities of subjective and individual appropriation in the pre-fabricated world. There are no voids or free spaces, everything is concreted over with definitions.

One can therefore understand that each young generation seeks to reinvent itself in the hopelessness surrounding them. But how can that work? At times it helps to use the sense of powerlessness as a lever: You don't have a chance but use it!

How can one transform a weakness into strength? Pubescent strategies seek possibilities to negate the given definitions, to challenge and deride the power (of definition).

* How can limits be fathomed, provoked and transgressed?

* It is not necessary to know what you want. It is necessary to know what you do not want. Ignorance can become strategic: I know that I know nothing!

* Appropriate the means of production! In the late 1970s, in the arts, painting was the most prominent culturally charged discipline and could readily be hijacked. Painting could be used against painting. Paint was dirt-cheap, and paintings were quickly done, if there was the necessary amount of disrespect.

* The code could be used against the code:
Ugly is beautiful!

All these strategies were processes of self-empowerment, self-education and identity-formation. The refusal to believe in the old order brought changes in the status of the previously powerless.

These processes can be seen as experimental research. For obvious reasons, I call this “pubescent research” and specific elements of it are present already in childhood, e.g., when a toddler crawls on the kitchen floor and drags pots and pans from the shelf to bang them around. The child’s mother might put the pots back in place, but five minutes later the scene repeats, and it goes on and on until the mother, totally enervated, orders the child to stop it.

This early phase of experimental research turns against regulations and probes the limits of power systems; it tries the world against all odds.

This is the research model pretty much preferred in German art academies. Most artists follow it their whole lives; it gives us the image of the artist as the genius dilettante, pubescent, anti-authoritarian and singular, extremely subjective, extremely individualistic and in some ways naïve.

For that reason pubescent research cannot really be called research in the strict sense, for there is no reflection, hardly any evaluation, no consciousness on the part of the researcher and no reflection on this role.

> *Bohemian research*

Friesenwall 120 was a project space in Cologne in the early 1990s where I collaborated with the artists Josef Strau, Nils Norman, Kiron Khosla and Merlin Carpenter.

Right from the beginning we found two options to be particularly unattractive: to become a gallerist or to become a producers’ gallery. The latter is a gallery run and financed by artists who want to show their own work and that of some friends. In our eyes, this attitude shows less self-organization but instead, in its desire to participate in the commodified art circuit, self-help.

To take other paths, we had to reject the normative quality of these formats and examine how they define art objects, commodities and their reception. Being located in a semi-public situation, the project set out to experiment with the possibilities of the space itself, and the chance to create and encourage a situation of exchange and participation in experiments.

The space became a meeting point or hang-out, which means that there was a community growing around the space and its activities as long as the community determined and sustained it. This mutual constitution can be grasped both as self-legitimization and as processes of education, formation and growth.

The space also functioned as an archive that documented and triggered some of its activities.

We found other people and initiatives that were working in a similar, self-organized way, including fanzines, and spaces in Vienna, Hamburg and Berlin, and artists that were working on establishing an electronic network, which was called “The Thing”.

In line with Fohrmann/Schüttpelz, I call these activities “bohemian research”.

- * Because they are located in a bohemian context.
- * The people involved find each other by elective affinities; they share similar problems, but bring along a variety of knowledge and cultural backgrounds. So that the mutual attraction can lead to an increasingly differentiated discourse, the participants must be sufficiently different yet similar enough.
- * This can lead to productive collective work that I call “research”.

* This work is self-commissioned and to a large extent determined by the dynamism of the group itself.

* It is usually about investigating problems at hand, arising from the daily practice of life. It is researching life by living it.

Almost every 20th-century avant-garde group (the Surrealists, Situationists, Kommune 1, etc.) practiced such collective methods.

In this research, there are critical tools for self-observation and analysis (e.g., keeping archives, logs and diaries), planning strategies and methods for staging experiments. There are processes and criteria of evaluation that may well lead to more experiments. Here we find the awareness necessary for research.



This period of bohemian research was the

experience from which I learned the most; it became my academy, my art education! Self-organization, as I see it, is mainly an activity of self-formation and education; it is a possibility of “making academy”. And that led me to enquire further about the academy and its history:

> ***Institutional research, excursus:***

Regarding the development of the academy and the university we have to distinguish between different methods of knowledge production and education.

The development of the university can be seen as three phases:

- * In the scholastic phase, primarily Christian dogmas were legitimized and interpreted.
- * In the university shaped by Humboldt, research was meant to lead to a process of individual self-formation. Here, research, teaching and learning should go hand in hand. Working in groups became particularly important through the introduction of the seminar, as a form of non-hierarchical mutual exchange.
- * Today, this model is undergoing a radical change due to the introduction of the Bologna Process, and for the phase we find ourselves in, the description is still being formed.
- ** Can we say that the university is an open system inviting people to create communities around knowledge production?
- ** Or is it more of a closed system, with access restrictions to education and research in order to gain profits from this scarcity?
- ** Or is the university becoming a service provider: effective job training inside a knowledge corporation?

Right from its beginning, the academy engendered different ways of learning.

* The academy in its historical sense was nothing more than a little forest, where Plato and his students would ‘hang out’ and talk to each other.

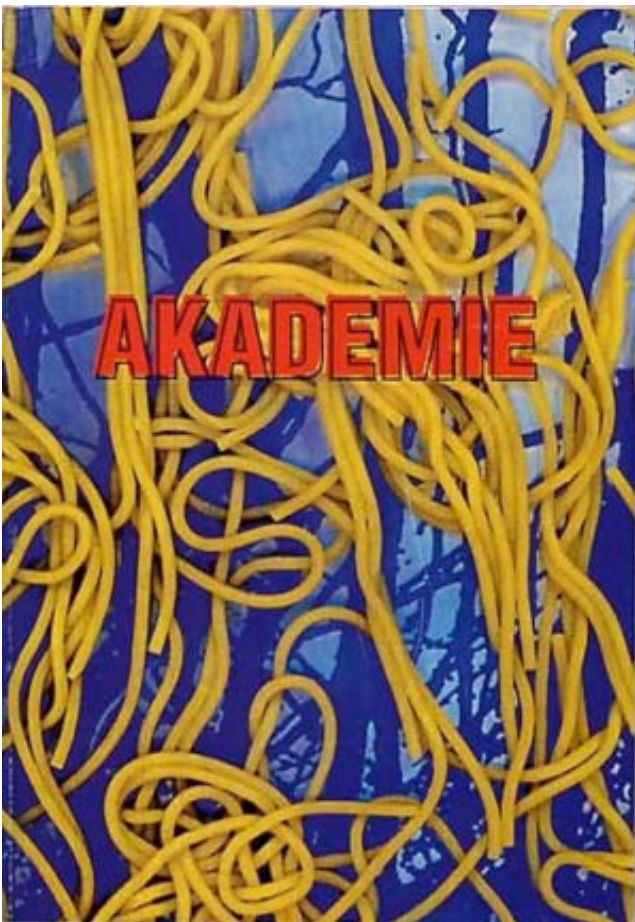
* In the wake of a Plato revival during the Renaissance, this form of convivial teaching and learning was rediscovered. The academy in its second phase became a collection of “learned societies of amateurs and dilettantes”. The meetings can be imagined as loose and informal gatherings, limited in time, improvised in space. And they attempted to get rid of the old and ossified institutions of the guild system. When eventually they succeeded in doing so, the self-organized “learned societies of amateurs and dilettantes” created educational institutions to promote their own young talents, which they called “academies” after Plato.

* Only a hundred years later the institutionalized academy of the absolutist king came with prescribed artistic rules and regulations, with curricular structures and point systems.

Probably a familiar picture: the absolutist academy finds its technocratic revenant in the Bologna Process. Not so very differently from the way it works today, the absolutist academy supplied the court with seasonal styles and delivered aesthetic know-how for product designs to make goods more attractive for the (foreign) markets.

- * Against this technocratic and utilitarian education, artists of the Romantic period pitched a return to the idea of the medieval workshop, where the master has the monopoly of education of the apprentices.

Conversely, the romantic, autopoietic genius cannot teach another how to become a genius; that is why, until today, the academy has had no method of teaching or any idea of research. Learning at the academy happens by copying the style and habits of the genius/master. It is therefore merely a place of “Romantic” reproduction.



In contrast, I see the academy

- * as a temporary, improvised and self-organized context of communication.
- * academy is not an institution, but an activity. At issue is “making academy”!

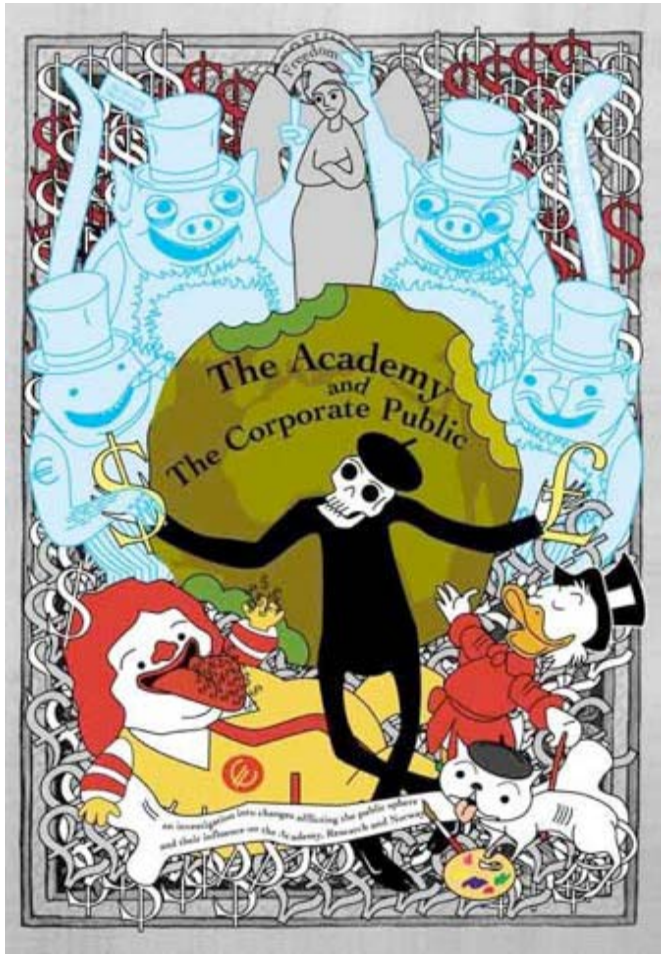
It is a form of, if possible, non-hierarchical exchange with persons with similar interests, a process of self-empowerment.

> Institutional research, in the arts:

After editing a book on these ideas of the extra-institutional academy and promoting it as a kind of barefooted prophet, I became a professor at the academy in Bergen, Norway, pondering what happens to these institutions if everyone can “make academy” him- or herself? What are the institutions good for?

At the same time, the “Kunsthøgskolen i Bergen” was given an opulent government grant and the teachers were encouraged to think up research projects. Halina Dusin Woyseth was recommended to me as a research advisor. She was to explain how research should be structured within a university context:

- * We usually start with a problem, she began. (I admitted that I had plenty of problems.)
- * Then we start looking into who has already worked on the problem, and how, and what the results were? (That appeared logical to me.)
- * But this process of investigation is not research; it is only a necessary first step, an inquiry. This inquiry can only compile knowledge that already exists, while research is a process of approximating something that does not yet exist. (Interesting! Because at that time many artists



were undertaking these kind of inquiries, often just showing their investigated matter – that can obviously not be called research!?)

- * The next step in research is to find and determine a specific view of the problem, a specific idea about where and how to approach it. This is called *status questionis*, or, the “subject matter that has to be questioned”. (Aha, so the problem is specified based on the state of inquiries).
- * Further, the methods to be employed should originate from the researcher’s field of expertise. (Obviously an artist would then use artistic methods!)
- * Interdisciplinarity as such is not the better approach. It makes sense only when one’s own discipline has become too nar-

row. (To this end, there have to be disciplines and the associated expertise in the first place.)

- * The most important element of research is experimentation! Experiments are necessary to find out if the procedure for approaching the problem works out, and also how the nature of the problem might change through experimentation. Probably ninety percent of all experiments will fail – no worries! – this is inevitable, otherwise the process would not be called “experiment”. (That makes me happy!)
- * The reflection on the research process and the evaluation of the experiments are extremely important for the progress of the research project. Only then can the next experiment be launched. There will probably be a sequence of experiments and evaluations that takes the researcher on a journey into the unknown. (But who is evaluating this progress of the experiments?)
- * Of course, it is first of all the researchers themselves, the team, then a small peer group of experts, then the institutions and the institutionalized critics. There is a concentric growth in evaluation mechanisms, critique and public perception.
- * Exhibitions, manifestos, critical reviews, leaflets, books, websites, and posters may be seen as a part of the experiments and they might help to amplify the public effect of research.

After I was introduced to this concept of institutional and university research, I had to admit to my surprise that I could apply everything I had just heard to the genesis of art in general and my own artistic practice in particular.

PART II – THE ACADEMY AND THE CORPORATE PUBLIC

The research project that I started in Bergen was to look into how the idea of the public sphere changed through globalization, privatization and corporatization and what effect this has had on the art field.

The notion until now of a national public sphere, in which, ideally, a public debate takes place, is falling apart. Today we have to speak of several public spheres fragmented along subcultural, ethnic, gender- and class-related lines, which can overlap, merge, or fall into conflict with each other.

But what do these fragments have in common? In my eyes they are all markets or being targeted as new markets.

I call this overarching public sphere a “corporate public”. It is directly dependent on a corporate economy (and eventually conflicting with it?). Is the market the on-

ly common arena in which an overarching public sphere emerges? And what would that mean for the arts?

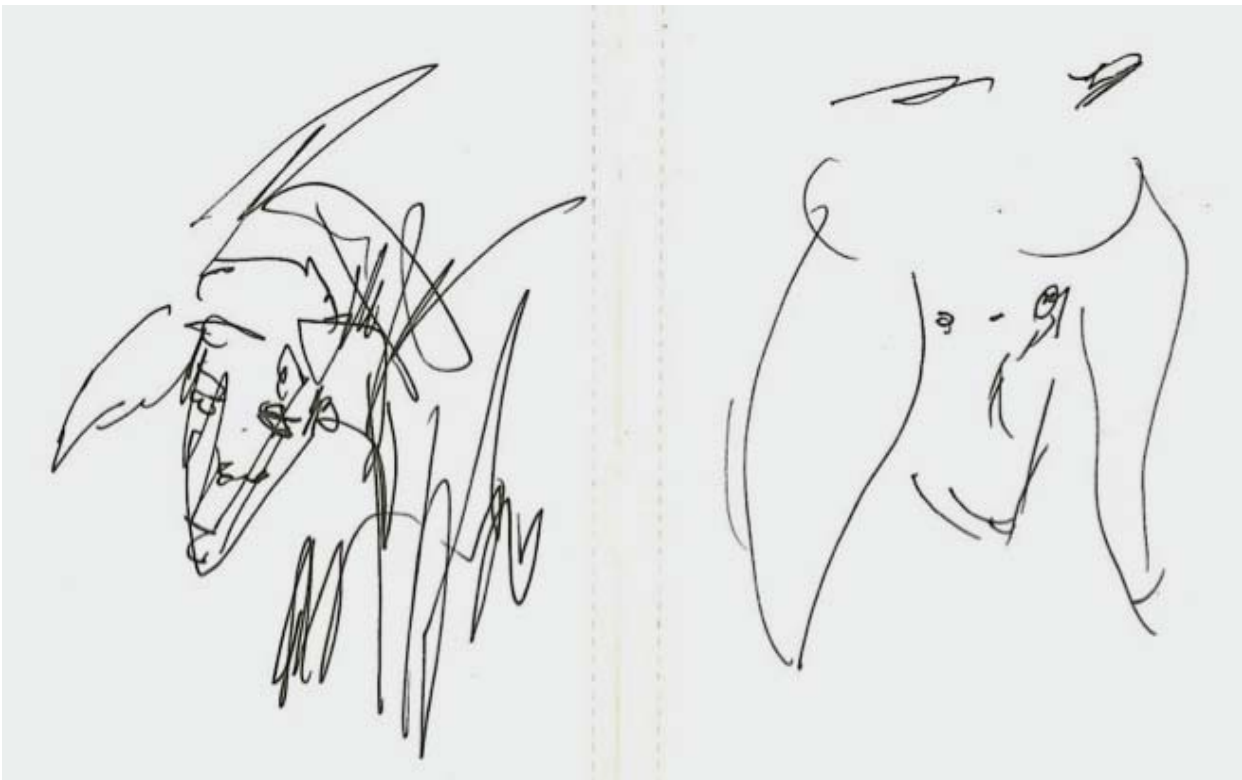
Contemporary dystopias: sponsoring, branding, CSR

So how did the public sphere become a corporate one? What was the genesis of the corporate public? Call me as a witness!

In the 1980s we had SPONSORING:

Here corporations still play a relatively passive role as art supporters, as alleged selfless Maecenas. Research demonstrates that sponsorship is more effective than conventional forms of advertising due to the directness with which it is able to address a target group.

As company logos (and egos) grow larger, state and municipal promotion budgets shrink. Public financial backers are apparently happy to relinquish their responsi-



lities and decision-making power to private corporations. As state funding is reduced, dependency upon corporate sponsorship increases. That's problematic!

Because the commitment of sponsors is only dependent on image-based vanities or economic calculus decisions on projects to be funded are one-sided and arbitrary. There is usually no democratic legitimization, no long-term financial security. Because everything depends on the goodwill of the sponsors, funding constantly remains precarious, thus allowing the sponsor to exert more control and influence over the sponsored projects.

Next, in the 1990s, came BRANDING:

Instead of promoting themselves by supporting the avant-garde through sponsorship, many corporations now strive to become the avant-garde themselves! Artistic methods and emancipative strategies of subcultural groups are often co-opted for marketing strategies. Companies have supported and studied artists long enough in order to act like artists and, through artistic definition, create value from the most cheaply manufactured products. The brand name functions like a signature; it ennobles the product.

We speak of CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY (CSR) ...

when private companies engage in social facilities and take responsibility for public institutions. Around the turn of the millennium, corporations began to play the 'good Samaritan', posing as guarantors in the field of social care: McDonald's runs a children's hospital, Shell acts as the savior of the environment, Berlin University Library is renamed The Volkswagen Universitätsbibliothek, and Siemens cares about the future of the art academies. A familiar picture!

But what can explain our profound paralysis, that we continue to stare in stupor at the corporate takeover that happens right in front of us?

Corporate Education

When corporations set out to conquer up-bringing, education and training,

- * they did so not only to target universities as new markets for their products.
- * they did so not only to profit directly from educational processes,
- * but their ultimate aim was to use the teaching and structures of universities to implant the "new spirit of capitalism" in the next generations.

EDUCATION AS A SERVICE INDUSTRY:

- * Forget about education! Universities are becoming service providers of purely formal knowledge. The connection of teaching and research in the sense of Humboldt is dissolved. Teaching becomes a service, research is outsourced to the corporations.
- * Students become so-called human capital, the production of which already yields profits. As consumers of services, the users are asked to pay.
- * They become assets, shaped and made productive via corporate education. These assets have to learn general flexibility and availability, they have to learn to activate, praise and sell their social and formal knowledge.



- * They must also learn to grasp this existence as *conditio sine qua non* and identify with the institutions that promote it.

Establishing new structures

Instead of being a place for self-formation, for dispute and critical analysis, the university becomes an instrument for generating a new ideology. And this process, propagating a totalization of the market, is itself already a profitable market.

The existing structures are oriented accordingly:

- * The BA (Bachelor of Arts) is a basic qualification in order to give flexible ‘high achievers’ a future in the job industry. With a relatively low and broad admission level, it is relatively affordable.
- * The MA (Master of Arts) qualifies ‘those with a vocation’ for their profession. However, there is limited access, thus only for those who can afford it. Only about 40-60 % of BA students should be able to ascend to the elite. And here, it is no wonder, is the actual profit margin.

- * LLL (Lifelong Learning) is a hot new market. Knowledge has to be updated constantly, and in the competition on the job market, certificates proving these updates are required. It means that one is supposed to stay chained to the provision of knowledge throughout one’s professional life. The updates can cost quite a bit, for the customers of the service usually have a job and can afford it.

We are witnessing the implementation of a comprehensive life concept of knowledge provision that must be paid for. From the cradle to the grave one must enhance one’s capital value, establish it, keep it permanently alive, market and revitalize it.

Universities become corporations

The former ‘knowledge factory’ (a 1970s expression) has transformed itself in the new economy. Universities are becoming corporate enterprises, operating globally in their own right. They are tapping into new markets all over the world, establishing networks and subsidiaries, asserting their knowledge brands.

That’s why they are closely intertwined with business consultants (e.g., McKinsey, Roland Berger, Ernst & Young) and undergo the usual structural adjustments: business reengineering, franchising, branding, merging, outsourcing...

Questions: With whom will the corporate university forge research alliances? Who will own the resulting patents? Who will be allowed to disseminate the newly gained knowledge? Who will be allowed to access it?

A new totality is reproduced

As we have seen, the logic of neoliberal business became the ruling principle for universities – like everywhere else. The same happened in the last few years in other areas of society. Above the heads of democratically elected governments and their legal systems, supranational corporations have installed agreements and organizations (WTO, GATT and recently GATS) that allow them to occupy all markets and public services.

This goes as far as to privatize most basic supplies (air, water, energy, housing, media, healthcare, hospitals, nursing homes). If we assume that we (still) live in a democratically organized polity, then the privatizations amount to an expropriation of social property.

A few years ago it seemed that the corporate takeover of functions that had been traditionally the privilege of the state was a matter of image making and branding: State power becomes corporate power! But meanwhile corporations have penetrated the social fabric much deeper than the state could ever do: Now corporations have become a constituting element of all of us!

We consume corporate constantly! We eat, drink, love corporate, we see, act and feel corporate...

Besides the fact that the supranational corporations already own all recipes, patents and copyrights, the takeover of reproduction, i.e., educational institutions, means that this “new spirit of capitalism” will engender the generations to come. Similar to altering the genetic code, a new ideology is reproducing itself. The structures have been programmed accordingly; reverting seems impossible.

I already find myself in a new totality – but that sounds paranoid. I know that I don’t know.

Knowledge society – open source, open access

Knowledge is a very unique resource. Andre Gorz writes:

- * Knowledge is not an ordinary commodity.
- * Knowledge increases miraculously when shared with others.
- * The more knowledge one uses, the more knowledge one produces.
- * Its dissemination increases its effectiveness.

* Its money equivalent cannot be defined.

* Its privatization reduces it and contradicts its essence.

Precisely in times of resources becoming scarce, the miraculous knowledge stuff comes at the right time. It increases when it's used! There is a never-ending supply of knowledge! Its value cannot be measured!? What would be a patent on $1+1=2$ or the price of Einstein's formulas?

In order to make a profit from knowledge according to capitalist logic, access to knowledge would have to be limited and restricted. One would have to pay for a basic provision of knowledge, additional knowledge would cost more, for it qualifies one more! Research would have to take place in closed circles, the expertise would have to be protected by patents, copyright, etc.

Allegedly, knowledge is the oil of the 21st century and we are witnessing the fights for knowledge distribution and privatization. Seizing the universities, patenting even living beings, the extension of copyright to all fields of knowledge production, are privatization strategies in order to profit from scarcity.

This goes hand-in-hand with the surveillance of all human communication channels, where knowledge is also produced and shared: Internet, TV, telephone, print media, and public space.

CONCLUSION

Finally, artists and researchers, students and teachers, where do you stand?

Are we the new court artists? Are we complicit in the new capitalistic rule because we accompany its triumphant procession around the globe?

I think research is never neutral or solely concerned with its own matter. Research has to deal with the contradictions in the world. And it may succeed in changing them through insights and findings, through experiments and struggles!

That is why research in institutions is necessary, but very limited by the institutional logic. I therefore have to call bohemian to arms!

Bohemian research assumes a new and major role as the last refuge for the unrestricted production of knowledge.

Bohemian research is self-organized – we recall:

* It arises from existential conditions and is self-driven.

* It invests itself in the examination of the most pressing problems.

* It is a crystallization point for critical thought, the last place of political dissent and analysis outside general social control.

While the conflicts are growing more acute, we will continue to live in the ruins of patriarchy and neoliberalism. To shake off its strictures takes perseverance.

- * How can we lay down solid foundations upon which we can construct sustainable knowledge together with others and make it accessible to all?
- * How is this knowledge different from an elitist and technocratic, self-acclaimed “knowledge society” that installs its private claims on the backs of those many billions who still do the dirty work?
- * What we need is research that leads to fundamental social change.
- * Symbolic gestures are very important, the attention and the significance that art and science have in society must be used! But this is not enough!
- * Research has to get out of the safe institutions and onto the street. It has to take sides and protect its most important resource – knowledge – against privatization: no patents, no copyright and no access restrictions!

We have to fight against increasing privatization and create commons, learn how to share, for in order to grow, knowledge must be made accessible to all.

There is so much to do, and research has never been as necessary as it is today!

This may be a long way around but it’s a whole new game, it costs a lot of effort, but promises a whole lot of fun!

Let’s go! Now!

2010 Stephan Dillemath

