

A Virtual University, envisioned by Hans Magnus Enzensberger

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»I remember us thinking:
Tomorrow things will be better, and if not
tomorrow, then the day after. O.K. —
perhaps not much better really,
but different, anyway. Yes, everything
was going to be quite different.
A marvelous feeling. Oh, I remember it.«
*Enzensberger, Hans Magnus (1980): The Sink-
ing of the Titanic. A Poem, Boston: Houghton
Mifflin, p. 8*

1.

In 1920 Charles Sanders Peirce set up a definition of the word »virtual«.¹ According to the entry in *The Dictionary of Philosophy and Psychology*, a virtual X has the »efficiency (virtus) of an X« but is not the X itself.² Peirce defined the notion as follows: »(1) A virtual X (where X is a common noun) is something, not an X, which has the efficiency (virtus) of an X. This is the proper meaning of the word«.³ He draws a distinction between a virtual X and X proper by directing the attention to »efficiency«, i.e. to functions and performance, force and effects. From a pragmatic point of view, a virtual X is almost, nearly, or practically like the X but different in its essence or nature. Peirce's definition brackets materiality and media, which might lend the X

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- 1 Cf. Steinle, Friedrich (2024): »How to Conceive Virtual Entities. Peirce's Proposal«, in: *Perspectives on Science* 32:3, pp. 269–277, here pp. 271–274.
 - 2 Peirce, Charles Sanders (1920): »Virtual«, in: James Mark Baldwin (ed.): *Dictionary of Philosophy and Psychology*. Vol. II, new edition, with corrections, New York: Macmillan, pp. 763–764, here p. 763.
 - 3 Ibid.

proper and its virtual variety its efficiency. In this respect, it is close to a basic common understanding of virtual entities: »we mean the thing in some way, not in its real form but rather in a sort of substitute reality, typically on a display, and in most cases just for the eyes and perhaps the ears.«⁴ Although Peirce's definition seems to be plausible, it becomes questionable when applied to entities where it is dubious what the efficiency of an X, despite its ontological deficiency, consists of at all. Any application of Peirce's definition to »university«—which is the purpose of my contribution to this volume—has to leave open how this definition should be related to the *definiendum* that is considered mostly an organization, but also an institution.

In 1979 philosopher Jean-François Lyotard presented to »the Conseil des Universités of the government of Quebec at the request of its president« a »report on knowledge«. His working hypothesis was that since the rise of computerized societies »the status of knowledge is altered.«⁵ This transformation had taken place in the institutions of research and teaching, especially the universities. Since the time digitization had taken command on the production, distribution, organization of knowledge, universities were informed by the state of computer technologies. The role and function of digitization as the impellent factor that has captured both knowledge and the university cannot be underestimated. The more the digitization of higher learning is progressing, the more often universities are attributed as »virtual«.

Against this background, such perspectives gain a peculiar interest which do not collate a virtual university's functions, performance, outcome, and effects to a university proper which, for its part, would be then considered the regular kind of university. On the one hand, new ideas of such a virtual university seem to linger in pre-forms of the real, having to be located in a field that is characterized by notions such as fiction, utopia, project, plan, or model. On the other hand, since the 1960s new ideas of this kind emerged in pedagogy and didactics with Open Universities and distant learning formats, especially in TV programs. In the wake of 1968, all over Europe fresh ideas for universities were articulated with respect to new places of location, formats of education, and media of teaching and lecturing.⁶

4 Steinle: How to Conceive Virtual Entities, p. 269.

5 Lyotard, Jean-François (1984): The Postmodern Condition. A Report on knowledge, Translated from the French by Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi. Foreword by Fredric Jameson, Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, p. 3, see also p. 67.

6 Cf. Weizsäcker, Ernst Ulrich von/Dohmen, Günther/Jüchter, Heinz Theodor (1970): Baukasten gegen Systemzwänge. Der Weizsäcker-Hochschulplan, München: Piper.

2.

German poet Hans Magnus Enzensberger (1929–2022) acted as a public intellectual who shaped both the literary and the political discourse since the 1960s. He was a node in an international network of left-wing authors, journalists, artists, editors, publishers, and opinion leaders. In 1972 he delivered the essay »Remarks Concerning the New York Universitas Project«⁷ as his contribution to a symposium on the future of the university, which took place in New York City at the Museum of Modern Art that same year. The concept of »virtuality« or the notion of »virtual university« was not used in his essay, although the »Remarks« can be inserted in histories of digitization and higher education and be related to preforms of a virtual university. In the 1970s the educational sector tested advanced media and communication technologies.⁸ Enzensberger's essay was thus contemporaneous with forerunners to a development in pedagogy and didactics who used new technologies and computers. The beginnings of a new idea, however, often lead to a situation that cannot be clearly overlooked by its actors. It is a typical feature of new beginnings that one sees their contours only in retrospect: »The essence of a thing never appears at the outset, but in the middle, in the course of its development, when its strength is assured.«⁹ Enzensberger did not lament the decline of the university or the corruption of its ideal but, rather, took advantage of the unforeseen effects that accompany the introduction of new technologies. He used the literary genre of the essay for articulating his idea and pointing out to a certain openness of the ongoing process of what he had called the industrialization of mind, which in 1962 had not yet reached its full deployment.

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- 7 Enzensberger, Hans Magnus (2006): »Remarks Concerning the New York Universitas Project«, in: Emilio Ambasz (ed.): *The Universitas Project. Solutions for a Post-Technological Society*. Conceived and directed by Emilio Ambasz, New York: The Museum of Modern Art, pp. 105–110. In the following Enzensberger's essay will be cited with the abbreviation »E« and page number(s) in brackets. Cf. also Scott, Felicity D. (2004): »On the »Counter-Design« of Institutions. Emilia Ambasz's Universitas Symposium at MoMA«, in: Grey Room 14, pp. 46–77; Holt, Matthew (2018): »The Black Book. Emilio Ambasz's University of Design«, in: Pieter E. Vermaas/ Stéphane Vial (eds.): *Advancements in the Philosophy of Design*, Cham: Springer, pp. 523–548.
 - 8 Cf. Holert, Tom/Haus der Kulturen der Welt (Berlin) (eds.) (2020): *Bildungsschock. Lernen, Politik und Architektur in den 1960er und 1970er Jahren*, Berlin: De Gruyter; Brachliotis, Georg (2022): »Classroom without Walls. Von Teachings Machines zu Learning Machines«, in: *Arch+Zeitschrift für Architektur und Urbanismus* 55:249, pp. 164–173.
 - 9 Deleuze, Gilles (1986): *Cinema 1. The Movement-Image*, Translated by Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam, Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, p. 3. Cf. Deleuze, Gilles (1989): *Cinema 2. The Time-Image*, Translated by Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta, Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, p. 43.

»Up to now it [the mind industry; A.S.] has not managed to seize control of its most essential sphere, education. The industrialization of instruction, on all levels, has barely begun. While we still indulge in controversies over curricula, school systems, college and university reforms, and shortages in the teaching professions, technological systems are being perfected which will make nonsense of all the adjustments we are now considering. The language laboratory and the closed-circuit TV are only the forerunners of a fully industrialized educational system that will make use of increasingly centralized programming and of recent advances in the study of learning. In that process, education will become a mass medium, the most powerful of all, and a billion-dollar business.«¹⁰

Despite Enzensberger's apprehension that business will take over higher education, he holds on to his idea that higher education could be revolutionized by implementing both the new technological infrastructure and new organizational principles at university.

This article does not intend to evaluate Enzensberger's methodological optimism but to turn the attention to the literary text by making a detour which, by a first step, will outline the guiding principle and peculiarity of the university as a place and institution as related to Wilhelm von Humboldt. Humboldt characterized both the sciences and the humanities in an abstract way, by a guiding principle that will be connected to an idea expressed by philosopher Gilles Deleuze who emphasized »becoming« as a component in the concept of virtuality. By a second step, the chapter traces down how the very idea of becoming as the defining principle of both the sciences and the humanities was used for directing the planning of a university. By a third step, the article will present Enzensberger's »Remarks«. Finally, a closer look will be taken at the literary genre that he proposes as the vehicle for envisioning a virtual university.

3.

In the draft of his exposé »On the inner and outer organization of the higher institutions of learning in Berlin«, written in 1809 or 1810 and published posthumously, Wilhelm von Humboldt claimed that »the principles ruling their [the institutions]';

10 Enzensberger, Hans Magnus (1982): »The Industrialization of Mind«, in: Reinhold Grimm/ Bruce Armstrong (eds.): Hans Magnus Enzensberger. Critical Essays, New York: Continuum, pp. 3–14, here p. 6. The original German essay was published as »Bewußtseins-Industrie« in 1962; the English version was translated by Enzensberger himself and first published in 1972. Cf. Enzensberger, Hans Magnus (1964): »Bewußtseins-Industrie (1962)«, in: id. (1964): Hans Magnus Enzensberger. Einzelheiten I: Bewußtseins-Industrie, Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, pp. 7–17.

A.S.] administration are isolation and freedom«. ¹¹ He characterized the peculiarity of higher institutions of learning in contrast to elementary and secondary schools, in that the latter »take as their subject only the completed and agreed upon results of knowledge and teach these.« ¹² The institutions of higher education, in contrast, are also performing science and humanities. »It is a further characteristic of higher institutions of learning that they treat all knowledge as a not yet wholly solved problem and are therefore never done with investigation and research. This in contrast to the schools, which take as their subject only the completed and agreed upon results of knowledge and teach these.« ¹³ Due to this peculiarity, as Humboldt explains, one can see easily »that in the inner organization of higher institutions of learning everything depends on the preservation of the principle that knowledge is to be regarded as something not wholly found and never wholly findable, but as something ever to be searched out.« ¹⁴ Thus, in addition to the prevalent principles of solitude and freedom that will guide the university as an actor, Humboldt specified as the basic idea of knowledge that it is in the making:

»As soon as one stops searching for knowledge, or if one imagines that it need not be creatively sought in the depths of the human spirit but can be assembled extensively by collecting and classifying facts, everything is irrevocably and forever lost, lost for learning which soon vanishes so far out of the picture that it even leaves language behind like an empty pod, and lost for the state as well.« ¹⁵

The history of the reception of Humboldt's idea of the university, which began in the 20th century ¹⁶, has rightly so nourished the suspicion that the pathos attached to

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- 11 Humboldt, Wilhelm von (1963): »On the relative merits of higher institutions of learning«, in: Humanist without Portfolio. An Anthology of the Writings of Wilhelm von Humboldt, Translated from the German with an Introduction by Marianne Cowan, Detroit: Wayne State University Press, pp. 132–140, here p. 132. The title of the German original is: Humboldt, Wilhelm von (1903): »Über die innere und äussere Organisation der höheren wissenschaftlichen Anstalten in Berlin.«, in: Königlich Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften (ed.): Wilhelm von Humboldts Gesammelte Schriften, Band X. Zweite Abteilung. Politische Denkschriften I, Berlin: B. Behr's Verlag, pp. 250–260, here p. 251. As »vorwaltende Prinzipien« Humboldt named »Einsamkeit« and »Freiheit«.
 - 12 Humboldt: On the relative merits, p. 251 (»die Schule es nur mit fertigen und abgemachten Kenntnissen zu thun hat und lernt«).
 - 13 Ibid., p. 132.
 - 14 Ibid., p. 134.
 - 15 Humboldt: On the relative merits, p. 134
 - 16 Paletschek, Sylvia (2002): »Die Erfindung der Humboldtschen Universität. Die Konstruktion der deutschen Universitätsidee in der ersten Hälfte des 20. Jahrhunderts«, in: Historische Anthropologie 10, pp. 183–205.

concepts such as solitude and freedom now sounds hollow: they have become »ubiquitous as buzzwords« and »at the same time have long since been largely worn out«¹⁷. A re-reading of Humboldt is therefore promising, insofar as it does not belong to the genre of »the idea of the university literature«¹⁸ which is endlessly lamenting on the corruption of an ideal. Humboldt's ideal is rather grounded in a principle that governs science itself.

»Humboldt does indeed declare that science obeys its own rules, that the scientific institution ›lives and continually renews itself on its own, with no constraint or determined goal whatsoever.‹ But he adds that the University should orient its constituent element, science, to ›the spiritual and moral training of the nation.‹ How can this *Bildung*-effect result from the disinterested pursuit of learning? Are not the State, the nation, the whole of humanity indifferent to knowledge for its own sake? What interests them, as Humboldt admits, is not learning, but ›character and action.‹«¹⁹

Humboldt's idea of science in the making and knowledge as a task that will never be completed can also lay the foundation for a virtual university. This requires a conceptualization of the virtual that defines it not only as a variety of the possible emerging from digitalization. Rather, the virtual should be understood as a reality in its own right that awaits its ongoing actualization. However, this actualization is not the realization of something that has already existed for a long time in an identical but immaterial pre-form. Instead, it is the peculiarity of such an actualization that it breaks with similarity. Thus, the updating of a virtual university is sometimes no longer recognizable as a university at a first glance, insofar as it leads the institution into a region of dissimilarity. Actualization and virtualization are neither opposing concepts nor reversible processes. As little as virtuality can be adequately defined by its supposed counter-concept of reality or by its actualization, it is ultimately impossible to foresee what effects will be produced by that actualization. In other words, virtuality is a privileged place of becoming. In this respect, it is essentially related to Humboldt's understanding of science.

Pierce insisted on not confusing the modes of the virtual and the possible. ›Virtual« has been seriously confounded with ›potential«, which is almost its opposite. For, the potential *X* is of the nature of *X* but without actual efficiency. A virtual velocity is something not being a velocity but a displacement; but equivalent to a ve-

17 Strohschneider, Peter (2017): Arbeit am Status. Philologien im Spannungsfeld von Wissenschaft und Gesellschaft, Göttingen: Vienna University Press, V&R unipress, p. 17. Translation by the author.

18 Collini, Stefan (2017): Speaking of Universities, London/New York: Verso, p. 72.

19 Lyotard: The Postmodern Condition, p. 32.

locity by the formula »what is gained in velocity is lost in power.«²⁰ The pinch of this definition is to draw a distinction between virtuality and the possible regarding »efficiency« without considering material, media, and processes that provide a virtual X with its efficiency.

Gilles Deleuze distinguishes between the virtual and the possible by examining the passages from the possible to reality and from the virtual to reality. He does not take into account the different functions, performances, effects of the different modes but differentiates between two types of passages into the real: »The possible is opposed to the real; the process undergone by the possible is therefore a »realization«. By contrast, the virtual is not opposed to the real; it possesses a full reality by itself. The process it undergoes is that of actualization.«²¹ In a more spontaneous way of thinking the distinction between the possible and the virtual is far more easily conceived. One finds the feature of existence that will be added to a possible X in order to transform it into the real X:

»Every time we pose the question in terms of possible and real, we are forced to conceive of existence as a brute eruption, a pure act or leap which always occurs behind our backs and is subject to a law of all or nothing. What difference can there be between the existent and the non-existent if the non-existent is already possible, already included in the concept and having as the characteristics that the concept confers upon it as a possibility?«²²

The formation of concepts plays into the hands of a common sense understanding of what virtuality might be. According to widespread assumptions on the role and function of the formation of concepts, concepts are allegedly congruent and concordant to reality: »Existence is *the same* as but outside the concept. Existence is therefore supposed to occur in space and time, but these are understood as indifferent milieu instead of the production of existence occurring in a characteristic space and time.«²³ The distinction between the possible and the virtual cannot be separated from the ways in which concepts are related to reality at all. Therefore, definitions should not conceive the virtual as a mode of the possible. The possible has its own form of identity in the concept; the virtual, however, is a »multiplicity«²⁴ which cannot be reduced to a concept but should, instead, be conceived as an idea. The idea is neither restricted in the same way as the concept is to premises, assumptions, and conditions, nor is the idea limited as the concept is to correspondence. An idea does

20 Peirce: Virtual, p. 763.

21 Deleuze, Gilles (1994): Difference and Repetition, Translated by Paul Patton, New York: Columbia University Press, p. 211.

22 Ibid.

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid., p. 203.

not recuperate terminological clarity. The concept does designate the same referent in its areas of application, especially in fictions and possible worlds which seem to be analogous to the real »while the real is supposed to resemble the possible«²⁵. The formation of concepts plays a crucial role in the investigation of the virtual. Concepts shape both the basic understanding of the ontology of a virtual X and the passage from the possible to the real X. »That is why it is difficult to understand what existence adds to the concept when all it does is double like with like.«²⁶ The actualization of a virtual X is not the realization of what already exists in an identical but immaterial preform, but it is rather the characterizing feature of the actualization that defies the likeness. One cannot define the virtual in relation to its alleged antonym reality. Rather, it is unpredictable which effects will come along with the actualization of a virtual X. The virtual is first and foremost the place for *the making of*. How could one envision, under the guiding principle of *the making of*, a convergence of the sciences and the humanities with the virtual in the university?

4.

In 1965 the Minister for Regional Planning, House Building and Public Construction of the Federal State of North Rhine-Westphalia (»Minister für Landesplanung, Wohnungsbau und öffentliche Arbeiten des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen«) published an overall plan for the »University of Bochum«. The Minister explained the general idea that had been serving as a guide to the location where the university buildings were to be erected as follows:

»To begin with, it seems to be remarkable and almost incomprehensible that in this urban landscape, inhabited by 5.7 million people, no place of academic learning could be found. The four state universities are located beyond the mining region: in Bonn, in Cologne, and Munster the three full universities, and in Aachen the technical university (in Dusseldorf a medical university). The rationale is to be looked for, on the one hand, in the classical German idea of a university that, besides the freedom of science and humanities, requires the unity and loneliness of education and research, on the other hand, they have to be looked for in the development and the previous structure of the mining region.«²⁷

25 Ibid., p. 212.

26 Ibid., p. 212.

27 Der Minister für Landesplanung, Wohnungsbau und öffentliche Arbeiten des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen (ed.) (1965): Die Universität Bochum. Gesamtplanung, Stuttgart/Bern: Karl Krämer, p. 5. Translation by the author. In the following this publication will be cited with the abbreviation »Bo« and page number(s) in brackets.

Planning at the ministry had developed an »idea for the construction in Bochum« that both allowed for the »necessity of sociological integration of the university« (Bo 11)²⁸ and met the demands that are founded in Humboldt's ideal of higher education (Bo 11): »Unity of Education of Research, freedom of teaching and research, community of scholars and students (*magistrorum et scholarium*) and solitude for doing science and humanities.« (Bo 11) Although the demands, deriving from the idea of construction, appeared »contradictory (for example, the demands of integration and solitude)«, the »design of the buildings« was deduced from »the founding principles« of the new university (Bo 11).

It was questionable whether the university had a specific form of construction which is adapted to its tasks and whether one could speak of a unique construction design for the University of Bochum (Bo 11). Yet, answers were found by the universities in Britain and the US. The idea of the university did not allow for inferring an idea of construction: »The university is a legal form and a form of organization—as such it was founded in the 12th century. There is no special building design for the university. The design of the buildings for the colleges originated from the requirements of the *universitas magistrorum et scholarium*, while facilities [or infrastructures; A.S.] of the city were used as lecture halls.« (Bo 11–12) The university »impregnates the city—it is all but »univer-city« and not a building of its own or a sealed construction, respectively«. (Bo 12) The colleges took their own shape in their own areas of the town. The requirements of scholarly representation within the city finally enforced a representation with ostentation and a monumental form of expression, which were restricted by functional limitation: »The type of construction is limited to the main building.« (Bo 12) The university expanded into the town, the suburbia or beyond the city in its own locality. This evolution has especially defined the British universities with integrated colleges. This other type of university has produced the specific form of the campus. The campus cannot so much be defined by its location in town or its relation to the city but, rather, by the idea of the academic village.²⁹

The planning for the university of Bochum recognized the campus university (Bo 13) as the only form that could be followed (Bo 13). The tension between the demand of solitude—the university had to be detached from the pragmatism that governs its surroundings (Bo 13)—and the integration into a lively and social milieu had to be released by opening up the campus: »The campus has to be open to its environment.«

28 »[D.] h. Attraktivität, Anreiz, um die der Hochschulbildung bisher fernstehenden Bevölkerungskreise anzusprechen, leichte Erreichbarkeit mit öffentlichen und individuellen Verkehrsmitteln und vor allem Wohnungen für mindestens 30% der Studenten unmittelbar bei der Hochschule und in den Haushalten der Revierbevölkerung.« (Bo 11) About the situation of higher education in Germany during that period cf. Georg Picht, Georg (1964): Die deutsche Bildungskatastrophe. Analyse und Dokumentation, Olten/Freiburg i.Br.: Walter.

29 Turner, Paul Venable (1984): Campus. An American Planning Tradition, London/Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, p. 3 (Preface: »The American Campus as an »Academical Village«).

(Bo 13)³⁰ Other than the Anglo-Saxon form of the campus, which is a widely ramified city where every faculty is a small university of its own and which is arranged around a sub-center, the plans for Bochum tried to realize their main goal by the design of the buildings. On a campus that is like a decentralized city one cannot recognize—or only with difficulties—how the faculties are interrelated, therefore the unity of the sciences and humanities, interdisciplinarity will not be accomplished. The text about the plans for the campus in Bochum concluded: »The faculties have to close ranks, in order to meet the demands that were highlighted as the main objective—i.e. cooperation—in Bochum«. (Bo 13) The first conclusion concerned the design of the campus: »The decentralized University-City has to become a central, urban and dense university« (Bo 13).³¹

The second conclusion concerned the form of the buildings: »Bochum tries to go one step beyond and to materialize the idea of interdisciplinary cooperation and of the unity of the sciences under one roof—all in a single building.« (Bo 15) The »design of the building in Bochum« (Bo 15) should meet both the demands of cooperation and the solitude of the sciences and the humanities, and it should contribute to sociological integration. The overall planning of the university of Bochum aimed at implementing the principle of solitude, lay grounds for the principle of freedom through the opening up of the campus, and take into account the making of sciences and humanities based on an infrastructure that supported cooperation and interdisciplinarity.

5.

Hans Magnus Enzensberger envisioned his idea of a virtual university in »Remarks Concerning the New York Universitas Project«. The essay was his contribution to the *International Symposium* which took place in New York on January 8th and 9th in 1972. The head of the Department for Architecture and Design at MoMa, Emilio Ambasz, was in charge of the *Universitas Project*. In 2006 the proceedings of the symposium, with contributions by Octavia Paz, Jean Baudrillard, Umberto Eco, Anatol Rapaport, Stuart Hampshire, Hannah Arendt, Thomas A. Sebeok and others, were published.

30 In the 21st century universities seem to question the campus as a place that seeks to realize its goal of integration through its openness. At Anglo-American universities in particular, the definition of the campus as a place that is open to its environment and has a relationship to other places in the city has been overlaid by other aspects. Cf. Catlin, Samuel P. (2014): »The Campus Does Not Exist. How campus war is made«, in: Parapraxis 4. Online: <https://www.pa.raprxismagazine.com/articles/the-campus-does-not-exist> (last access 16.09.2024).

31 The Ministry refers to the Illinois Institute of Technology in Chicago, planned by Mies van der Rohe. (Bo 13)

Enzensberger sent his essay, which was translated by Wieland Schulz-Keil and Barbara A. Becker, to New York but did not participate in the symposium, due to his protest against the United States' war in Vietnam.

Ambasz's invitation to the symposium came with a *Project Working Paper* and a questionnaire in the broadest sense: »The Universitas Project is aimed specifically at establishing a new type of University concerned with the evaluation and design of our man-made milieu. The issues involved and the implications are immense. It is necessary, therefore, to define the field of the problem before addressing ourselves to the specific aspects.«³² Enzensberger's »Remarks« begin with »Theoretical Premises« that underline the political dimension of a new university. He does not discuss whether the new university will be a profit or non-profit institution and where funding will come from. Instead, he states, as the starting point of his essay: »The founding of a university is a political act.« (E 105) The examples that demonstrate the political dimension of such new foundations are derived from Europe: »This statement can be verified by considering the history of numerous institutions of higher learning founded since World War II (e.g., Nanterre in France; Bochum, Bremen, Constance, and Ulm Academy of Design in Germany; Essex in England; Trömsö in Norway; etc.).« (E 105) It has to be expected, Enzensberger straightens out, that »already, the constitution of such a university will bring about vehement conflicts« (E 105), that it will settle a dispute especially »between necessary means and desirable goals« (E 105).

It was the design department at MoMa that hosted the symposium, but Enzensberger sees the obligation of the new university to the concept of design as »deeply ambiguous«: »On the one hand, this concept belongs to the commodity aesthetics, which serves no other purpose than to maximize profits.« (E 106) On the other hand, theories and practices of design that were not meant for maximizing profits were lacking. Ideas are always weaker than capitalism. Enzensberger cites an anonymous maxim: »If an idea collides with an interest, the idea always comes out looking ridiculous.« (E 107) The *Project Working Paper*, which provided the invitation to the symposium, disregarded »categories of domination, social power, and material interest« (E 106). Without a »correct working theory of society« (E 107), however, any project for the new founding of a university will be questionable. With respect to this situation, practical proposals have to be favored that show what a new university could perform in its service for society: »in its own institutional form, the Universitas has to anticipate the proposals it offers to society as a whole as far as possible. That is, it must be assured that not only the results, which Universitas will publish, but also its very existence, can be used as an effective example.« (E 107)

32 Ambasz, Emilio (2006): »Institutions for a Post-Technological Society. The Universitas Project. Project Working Paper«, in: id (ed.): *The Universitas Project. Solutions for a Post-Technological Society*, New York: The Museum of Modern Art, pp. 17–48, here p. 19.

How to connect an idea directly with structures is a directing consideration in the *Project Working Paper* that aims at the organizational division of the institution: »Obviously, departmental divisions are unsuitable for this university, a point which the Project Working Paper has made unmistakably clear.« (E 107) There is a list to be completed with organizational aspects that have to be surveyed: »the faculty hierarchy, the differentiation according to academic rank, the setting up of curricula, the system of examinations, the collecting of credits, the uses of quizzes, multiple-choice test, etc., to check learned material, and the role of sports on campus.« (E 107) Not least the publication as the elementary as well as the fundamental act in the sciences and the humanities has to be questioned and should be replaced by social commitment. The argument about what kind of organizational structure would be suitable for the new foundation has to be replaced by experimenting with the abolition of privileges.

Enzensberger brings in specific proposals for the organization of the new university. »The university should not have a central administration building«. (E 108) The administration should no longer follow the principle of the delegation of agency: »All administrative functions should be reduced to an absolute minimum and should be performed by people whom they afflict.« (E 108–109) Administration will be replaced by academic self-government that has to be performed by both academic staff and students. In this respect, the records management can be limited because the actors are deciding themselves. »It is superfluous to make and keep records of every procedure.« (E 109) Neither will the university to come have spacious offices nor is there any necessity for controlling the actors. That is to say, Enzensberger questions the traditional idea of the campus.

Instead of a campus with its usual infrastructure, he proposes »to build new kinds of apartment houses, to be used by teachers and students alike, and equipped with all services and communication devices possible today.« (E 109) Advantages will come to the fore with flexible appointments and meetings. »Principally, meetings for instruction purposes should take place in a private, informal atmosphere (>at home<) and at times chosen freely, not fixed by a central administration.« (E 109) On the other hand, the traffic will be relieved: »The overcoming of physical distances and, with it, traffic problems, can so be avoided to a large extent.« (E 109) Eventually, Enzensberger is presenting his fantasy about the facilities: »Each of these buildings has to be equipped with all of the following means of communication: videophone, real-time computer consoles, video recording and cameras, closed circuit TV, and telephone xerography (that is, access to the library via telephone).« (E 109) The investment costs will be higher than for other newly founded universities. But the investment is justified by the university's benefits: »the productivity of the university, its diversity, and its openness would all be higher«. (E 109) The technical infrastructure will allow for new ways of interaction or, for example, new ways of accessing libraries and archives: »This allows discussions between groups at very different locations via

conference lines, and common use of a central library (books, newspapers, circulars, sound and picture archives).« (E 109)

Enzensberger doubts that tenure is beneficial for the quality of teaching: »the contracts reached with members of the faculty must only cover short terms, so as not to create a permanent pensionable teaching staff (>tenure<).« (E 108) Long-term contracts are blocking innovations in education. The quality of teaching and education cannot be deduced from the academic qualification of the staff. The cutback of privileges of the faculty has to be accompanied with reinforcing the student's position: »The Universitas Project should provide the students with extensive participatory rights in the governing bodies of the university, to a degree as yet uncommon in American institutes of higher learning.« (E 108)

Particularly the new infrastructure will transform the institution of higher learning into a university in progress or university in the making: »A university founded on the basis of this proposal would be quasi-uncontrollable; it is possible to predict neither the results of such a university nor the rules that such a university would develop for itself. Whoever considers this unpredictability a disadvantage will fight against the founding from the beginning. Whoever considers it an advantage—and that refers particularly to teachers and students—will be willing to fight for such a university. The Universitas Project will be controversial, or else it will not be.« (E 110)

6.

Michel Foucault was invited to the symposium but did neither contribute a paper nor attend the *Universitas Project* as a debater. The philosopher asked the organizers of the symposium what they expected from his contribution—and rejected the invitation. Felicity Scott cites his query in her reconstruction of the *Universitas Project*:

»From the beginning, Ambasz's interdisciplinary dialogue caused confusion as participants were faced with the irreconcilable nature of competing discourses. [Michel] Foucault registered a sense of mistaken identity regarding the very nature of Ambasz's request in a letter of [31st] August 1971. After noting his interest in the Universitas project, Foucault continued: »I must confess that I don't really understand which kind of paper I am supposed to write as a contribution to this project.—Do you expect very large and philosophical considerations about design and science, nature and man-made milieu, values and technology, etc.? In this case, I am ashamed to say that I am not in [the] mood to write anything about those abstract and difficult problems.« Foucault proposed, instead, send-

ing research about ›social repressors‹ in our ›manmade milieu,‹ (police, justice, etc.).«³³

In contrast to Foucault's query, Enzensberger accepted the invitation to the symposium but turned his contribution into a protest. For this purpose, he used the literary genre of the essay, drifting away from the indecisiveness that was inherent in the interdisciplinary approach of the *Universitas Project*. His »Remarks« do not belong to any special discourse, such as pedagogy, didactics, architecture, or sociology, but they follow the rules governing the literary genre of the essay, as distinguished from scientific and philosophical papers. The literary genre of the essay has the advantage that it does not belong to any specific kind of discourse. It was (or, maybe, still is) prerogative of literature that it has autonomy and is not limited by the rules of other specific discourses. One might also say that the essay could move easily from one discourse to another within the framework of the literary genre. Philosopher Theodor W. Adorno argued that the essay as a genre »takes presentation more seriously than do modes of proceeding that separate method and object and are indifferent to the presentation of their objectified contents. The manner of expression is to salvage the precision sacrificed when definition is omitted, without betraying the subject matter to the arbitrariness of conceptual meanings decreed once and for all.«³⁴ The essay's »own conceptual organization« can compensate for a deficiency in scientific rigor, while the literary form opens up to the author's experience which is mediated by the rhetoric, literary devices and performative strategies of the literary text: »the essay proceeds, so to speak, methodically unmethodically.«³⁵

Enzensberger's idea takes shape in a situation when computers, fax, and telecommunication were already in use, video cameras and recorders were about to become affordable for non-professionals: The new university has to be »equipped with all services and communication devices possible today«. At the heart of the idea, however, were not the devices but their interplay that he considered to bring unforeseen possibilities. Even if the idea made its way to become real, it could not be anticipated where one would arrive. If Enzensberger's idea of a new university was characterized by computer, tele-communication technology and video equipment, it lacked any detailed plan of how the interaction on the campus would take place. Enzensberger's remarks, however, should not be considered shortcomings but, rather, a stimulus to open up towards new and unexpected opportunities. In

33 Scott, On the ›Counter-Design‹ of Institutions, p. 62.

34 Adorno, Theodor W. (2019): »The Essay as Form«, in: Rolf Tiedemann (ed.): Notes to Literature. Adorno, Theodor W., Translated from the German by Shierry Weber Nicholsen. Introduction by Paul A. Kottman, New York: Columbia University Press, pp. 34–48, here p. 37.

35 Adorno: The Essay as Form, p. 38.

retrospect, one could extrapolate his idea from the literary genre of its articulation, compare it to the history of universities in Western Societies and measure it against the principle of reality. It would be easy to demonstrate that most of the elements of the new university he mentioned (video, fax machines, computers, self-administration, decoupling of research and teaching, a mandate for students), in one way or another, here and there, with less or more efficiency, have since been implemented at universities. One could compare his idea with the passages on the possible making its way to become real in the planning of universities. The Ruhr University of Bochum, for example, was derived from Humboldt's ideal that guided an idea of construction that was specified in a construction plan which eventually resulted in the infrastructure of a campus and its buildings. Here, the idea defined something possible that guided the planning step by step and directed the passage to the real. The nexus between the idea and its realization was tight with every step. Enzensberger considered also architecture and infrastructure—as constituted through the apartments—but was not interested in details of practical suggestions. The idea seemed to be self-explaining, and it seemed as if the passage to the real could at the most be hindered by political »conflicts« or lacking »resources«.

It would be futile to make Enzensberger responsible for the blind spots of his idea, which by now are all too obvious. The regime of control implemented by digitization seems far more effective than the effects of liberation and resistance at the virtual university. In retrospect, it seems that the criteria for the evaluation of Enzensberger's idea can be found in the planning of new universities in the 1970s, but the writing mode is neglected. The literary genre of the essay seems to be merely accidental to his idea. Nevertheless, the intense use of rhetorical tropes and figures, literary procedures and performative strategies is remarkable. By a paratextual act, Enzensberger called into question the nature of the entire project. The essay itself took up the paratextual action in its first sentence, when it stated: »The founding of an university is a political act.« (105) Enzensberger the author, so to speak, was still accountable for his contribution, although his idea was put in limbo. In the state of virtuality it remained undetermined how the idea was to be actualized. In any case, it was not the absent author at the symposium who gave his idea a specific direction or concretization by answering questions by other participants and providing further information. The instance that takes the floor in the »Remarks« cannot or will not provide an explanation of how these elements interact, although the elements are named. Instead, the ellipse becomes the figuration of the idea of a virtual university. Even if a general ordering scheme can be deciphered in the course of the presentation, the presentation itself leaves it with an exemplary and incomplete list of elements which does not describe the interactions between communication technologies, architectural infrastructure and administrative organization, stimulating instead the reader's imagination. Enzensberger's idea did not descend to the locality of the campus and the materiality of infrastructures but rose to a life form or way of

life. It was not about something possible on its way to become real but about the actualization of an idea. However, after its passage to the reality that gives it existence, this idea has neither achieved its goal nor has it been exhausted.

The very last remark of Enzensberger's essay emphasizes that the implementation of his idea will evade control by the new university: »it is possible to predict neither the results of such a university nor the rules that such a university would develop for itself«. (E 110). The horizon of the essay is not the university whose proceedings and functions are already familiar. The optimism that such a new university will produce unforeseen knowledge is grounded in the omission of conditions, limitations, and restrictions that govern the modern research university. It is rather difficult to conceive of the absence, lack of or even non-existence of conditions and factors. The prospect of the university as a way of living seemed to be liberating and stimulating. Enzensberger's idea of a virtual university derived from the principle of science and humanities that can be defined, according to Wilhelm von Humboldt, as something becoming.

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