

# Mad hatters, jackbooted managers, and the massification of higher education

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“At campuses across the country, jackbooted managers have trod all over faculty rights for a decade” – Cary Nelson<sup>i</sup>

A relatively recent defector to the Dark Side (read university administration), I am still trying to take the critique of my kind at face value. I succumb to the philosopher’s naïve impulse to convince my critics just how wrong they are. Nelson<sup>ii</sup>, Donoghue<sup>iii</sup>, and Washburn<sup>iv</sup> are my target converts, helpfully provided by the editors of this journal. The books are different in scope and genre. Donoghue’s is a thoughtful analysis with empirical evidence; Washburn’s is a collection of journalistic exposés, and Nelson’s is a sprawling manifesto. A critique of the corporatization and commercialization of higher education is the one theme that unites them, and on which I chose to focus. The commercialization is what makes the managers to trod all over faculty rights.

The three books take different paths to critique commercialism. Nelson is offering his perspective as the president of AAUP, intimately involved in culture wars surrounding the academia. He begins with theoretical and historical treatises on academic freedom, shared governance, and tenure. It is a great read for new faculty members, many of whom know little about the origins and the intent of the three institutions. For example, he points out that the academic freedom is recognition of specialized knowledge faculty members have. It is a part of a bargain: the freedom is granted by the public in exchange for professors promising to uphold public interest. Nelson explores issues of management, faculty and graduate employee unionization, political correctness, offers his insights on AAUP presidency, and the future of the organization. His anti-capitalist rhetoric is set against the backdrop of struggles for academic freedom and tenure rights. It is a labor-centered argument.

Donoghue is a humanities professor, and his take is very different. He is pondering the history and the future of humanities in the academia. His account of gradual demise of classics is illuminating and poignant: “if we wish to glimpse the likely fate of the entire liberal arts in the twenty-first century, we need to look no further than the history of classics in the twentieth.”<sup>v</sup> He also considers the erosion of tenure, the raise of part-time teaching, and the threatening tendencies of corporate universities. Donoghue explores the very old hostility of the corporate world towards humanities in particular and the higher education in general. He is much less interested in the cultural wars, and more in the conflict between the corporate world and the academia. He is actually suggesting the corporate world has already won the battle, and the academia is already quite corporate. Donoghue laments the era of the corporate university and interprets the title of his book *The Last Professors* quite literally.

Washburn tells several stories illustrating the “foul wind” of commercialism that has blown over our universities. She is concerned with the increasing involvement of universities into commercial activities through patent deals, corporate-sponsored research, and entrepreneurial ventures. She believes that

non-profit and non-commercial status of universities was actually a better deal for the public than the modern corporate university. Her stories were written for different occasions, and do not create a unified narrative. It presents a wealth of information on things going wrong when universities involve themselves in commercial activities.

Something terrible is happening to universities, on that all three agree.

### **But what is happening?**

When the masses get something the elites have, it always comes in a different form. Some say it becomes adulterated and bastardized; others say it becomes democratized and more accessible. A simple example would be the difference between handcrafted hats, shoes and belt buckles to mass produced hats, machined shoes and stamped out belt buckles. The elites do not like the change, because the new cheap things dilute the power of these objects to be used as signifiers of status. It is understandable, but let us remember that hatters, shoemakers, and belt bucklers usually don't like the change either. Over the centuries, industrialization has wiped out enormous swaths of cultural capital – the craftsmen's knowledge and skills, their culture, their social status and often their very beings. Elites tend to find other status symbols; they will wear the original, branded hats, which may or may not be necessarily hand-made, but communicate status. However, the economics of the industry is altered irreversibly; it takes much less labor and simpler kind of labor to create a hat. The hatters first get mad, but then they are gone, absorbed by the sea of industrial workers. Only a few manage to refashion themselves as artists whose productive activities almost entirely shift from the utilitarian to the symbolic.

The story repeats itself again and again in different regions and various industries. Is it a good one? – not for a hatter, but it is for the consuming masses who can now sport decent looking cheap hats. The same story unfolds in education, just starting to affect its higher echelons. Is the ending going to be the same? Yes if you are with me in thinking that democratization of knowledge and knowledge-based economy are here to stay. Therefore, my suggestion for the hatters of today – professors – is this: do not get mad, but help orchestrate an orderly transition to higher education for the masses. Most professors will become the cognitive proletariat of the new industry; some will refashion themselves as artist and boutique craftsmen, while still others will join me in the growing ranks of mid-level managers. And if this sounds harsh, it is only because of the bias one may have against the word "proletariat." Most professors are politically in solidarity with working class, and happy to march together for its causes, as long as they do not have to be a part of it. However proletarians can have wonderful lives and careers, fully compatible with academic freedom, decent wages, and pursuit of scholarly interest.

The difference between craftsmen and proletarians is not in wages, and not even so much in the nature of their labor. It is in the control over the means of production and the level of productivity. The two are connected for craftsmen who own their tools and control production have limits to how productive they become. Craftsmen cannot make a good use of division of labor or invest in expensive technology. To give the masses quality higher education, we need to become more productive by embracing information technology, division of labor and quality controls. A similar argument can be made about

the research function of the university, with a difference that it is already almost there. The knowledge production in hard and some social sciences already resembles a true modern industry. But this paper is more about the teaching function of the university, which is quite medieval.

The transition will not happen without resistance, and all three books are parts of it. What follows is not about what happens in education; it is about what happens around education.

## The economics of discourse

The anti-capitalist rhetoric itself is a capital generator. The discourse is a way of making money, and disinterestedness is always self-interested. Let us imagine a meeting of a Board of Trustees at some public college, which considers budget cuts imposed by a state government. A fervent speech against commercialization and in defense of liberal arts may be convincing enough to save the Slavic Studies department from the budgetary axe. Multiply five annual salaries by five years. With benefits, support services, and facility maintenance it will be close to three million dollars. Not bad for a five minute speech! It is definitely worth writing a book to help with making these speeches all over the country.

Discourse is not just a means of extending power; it actually is a means of production, a value-generating tool. Let me illustrate this with examples taken from the three books:

1. Washburn cites Kirp: "A century ago, liberal arts colleges were a dominant force in American higher education... Now these schools educate fewer than 4 percent of all undergraduates, and they are at risk of becoming an endangered species." <sup>vi</sup> To swing a trustee's opinion, the quote would need a substantial and acceptable context built ahead of time. Otherwise a trustee may think, "Oh, great, finally! The liberal arts are going away!" One needs to cultivate a positive feeling about the "liberal arts" as something noble, and deserving of protection. One also needs to feel troubled enough by the "endangered species" analogy to activate a protector instinct.
2. Donoghue writes about for-profit universities: "Since the students are openly considered to be customers, their evaluation of instructors carries far more weight than at traditional universities."<sup>vii</sup> This quote requires an assumption that calling students "consumers" is self-evidently sinful to such a degree that "openly" acts as a booster to the derogatory comparison. Without a pre-existing sense of outrage, the meaning of "openly" would simply not be clear.
3. "The rise of a separate class of career administrators," – urges Nelson, - "and the substantial increase in their sheer numbers has helped fuel the belief that faculty are not full partners in the educational enterprise, but rather resources to be controlled and managed."<sup>viii</sup> Someone else could have used an entirely different set of connotations in essentially the same message: "University administration finally started to become a real profession, requiring a set of specialized skills and knowledge distinct from those of faculty members. The development encouraged faculty members to delegate more authority to administrators." Which of the two versions is a case of Newspeak depends on the semiotic resources tapped to make sense. But both require specific fields of interconnected meanings to exist.

I will first borrow Voloshinov theory of discourse to explain how meaning is produced:

An utterance constructs itself between two socially organized individuals, and if no actual interlocutor is present, he is implied as a “typical” representative of the social group to which the speaker belongs. Any discourse is oriented to an interlocutor, to who he is.<sup>ix</sup>

A situation and an audience compel inner speech to actualize into a specific outward expression, which is immediately included in an unuttered living context; the expression is completed in the context by acts, deeds, or by verbal replies of other participants of the utterance. A completed question, an exclamation, a request or an order – those are the most typical units of real-life utterances. All of them (especially an order or a request) require an extra-verbal completion, and perhaps an extra-verbal origin. In such little life-genres, the very type of completion is determined by friction of discourse against the extra-verbal environment, and by friction of one’s discourse against other people’s discourse.<sup>x</sup>

What Voloshinov is saying is quite simple: words do not have meaning without what he calls genres or ideologies, without some systems of meaning produced in previous discourses and practices. I prefer to call these “semiotic fields,” a softly defined but helpful term. Utterances “rub against” these fields to acquire traction of meaning in a concrete speech act. A semiotic field is not necessarily a theory, or a coherent worldview, but rather, an echo of many previous utterances evoked by each subsequent utterance. Semiotic fields are not identical to discourse, because non-verbal practices and actions generate meaning, too. It is, however, the meaning-making capacity of practices and actions that become a part of the semiotic field. While speech can be an action, an action is often also a form of discourse; it is in this capacity that actions become a part of the semiotic production. I will then use discourse and semiotic field somewhat interchangeably for stylistic reasons.

I will take Voloshinov’s theory one step further, and claim that discourse – the actual act of speaking and writing – is a means of production in the most basic economic sense. Utterances have economic value because they can cause significant money to be allocated, spent, or withheld as we saw from the Board of Trustee example. To do so, the semiotic fields need to be generated first.

Producing the desired effect on the trustees is roughly equivalent to selling expensive commodity to the public. A successful sale depends on what is essentially similar to the same elements at play in marketing: production of a certain semiotic field through continuous discourse. Just like marketing, it is a probabilistic rather than a deterministic enterprise. In other words, the field which one implicitly uses to make a point is competing against other fields, for example that of efficiency and public accountability. It is not a simple matter of quantitatively saturating the public semiotic space, both quantity and quality matter. However, just like with marketing, it is still a case of value production and value exchange. Production of advertisement involves labor, and it adds to both use-value and to the exchange value of commodity or service it helps to sell.

Discourses can also be likened to a power grid. Every lecture, every chat and every email produce a tiny bit of the semiotic field, a tiny pressure to submit to certain interpretations of utterances. People’s small decisions have the same ability. Ultimately, the energy is used in another place to influence economic decisions, large and small. Our trustees may decide to keep the Slavic Studies department from

dismantling, or a potential student may decide to declare the Russian major: these are instances of converting the discourse into material goods, or acts of exchange.

However, unlike hats, semiotic fields are not proportionally depleted by each use. Discourse is a different kind of commodity. Those who make decisions in accordance with a particular semiotic field, also contribute to it, and, in a sense, acquire a stake in its success. Users become shareholders by buying into the discourse. The student who has declared Russian as a major has every interest in talking up the value of modern languages every chance she gets; so do her family and friends. The trustees that just saved the department have an interest in justifying their decision, and therefore will contribute to perpetuation of this particular discourse.

Like in some other markets (the real estate or the art markets), an act of consumption is also an act of investment. Because all competing semiotic fields are ultimately subject to the liquidity test, bubbles are likely to arise. Discourse is a means of production that has a speculative aspect. Use still *ultimately* depletes the value, because at some point, there will be money for the Russian department, regardless of how much we talk it up. Just like with real estate: as long as there are buyers who hope to resell, the exchange value goes up. But actual use of the physical houses depletes their use-value; it does not, on its own, increase their use-value. Living in the house for a few years without improving it, should, in theory, reduce its price. It does not happen only because of the speculative aspect of the real estate market. So instead of simply getting a little bit cheaper every year, houses' exchange value increases, until the bubble bursts and suddenly there is a catastrophic decline.

With the Russian major, it is different in the sense that getting a higher education in any major creates significant use value for the student. She will finish with valuable skills, which are unlikely to be used teaching Russian somewhere, but still can be used in many jobs, civic engagements, and to enrich her life. But, in one important sense, it is the same: you can save Russian department, and add a Portuguese department, and then expand the Central Asia institute, and establish a center for Tibetan studies. But all of these use the same or very similar semiotic resources, rooted in valuing liberal arts in general, and modern languages in particular. In other words, it will be harder to use the same rhetoric in the next Board meeting and still harder in one after that.

All discourse generation ultimately comes against the cash-value comparison. Can it be converted into budgets, jobs, public subsidies, higher salaries, congressional seats? Can previous discourse and actions generate further actions? Does a particular talk still *work*? Some people may sense that a field is over-invested, and decide to invest their discursive activities, their identities and whole lives into a competing field. Witness the emergence of fringe movements, conspiracy theories, and myriad of subcultures from Second Life to new cults and religions. Discursive bubbles can burst suddenly and irreversibly, or they can deflate cyclically. But it would be very difficult to argue that they do not exist. Just watch any election campaign to see how certain perfectly good words just refuse to *work* anymore. How about *stimulus*? *No Child Left Behind*? *Healthcare reform*? The values collapse; all the labor invested into them is wiped out. This only illustrates that there was actual value in them before, and it was generated and exchanged for money.

Next, I will both use and disagree with Bourdieu to show that all semiotic fields need to deny their connection to the money economy. Bourdieu develops his theory of the gift exchange to show that in the gift economy, there is the collective suppression of the truth, the denial that gifts are merely exchanges of equal value. It is achieved by both putting a time gap between the mutual gift giving, and by concealing the market price of gifts.<sup>xi</sup> However, let us press further and ask – what is the denial of the “structural truth”? He seems to believe that the “structural truth” of the value exchange just exists objectively, and the suppression of it is a form of collective self-deception. However the utilitarian exchange of values is as deeply mediated by discourse as the symbolic gift exchange.

Bourdieu uncritically accepts Marx’s believe that in a market economy, exchange value is determined by some objective measure, namely the input of labor. He sets the gift exchange against the background of the objective market exchange of values. But that ignores the fact that any act of valuation in any economy is a product of discourse. To deem something as more or less valuable requires investment of material labor, but also an investment of semiotic resources, that is discourse. As far as we can see, human desires are shaped by discourse. What Bourdieu calls the collective suppression of truth, is just a particular case of discourse generation. It is no more of a suppression of truth than any other set of discourses that significantly determines the value of each product. A discourse about faulty Toyota brakes, with discourse of achievements and failures of Japanese management, and discourse on the peculiarities of Japanese corporate cultures – all of this significantly affected exchange value of Toyota shares, as well as the exchange value of actual vehicles the company produces. It is fundamentally the same mechanism as talking value into an object as Bourdieu’s gift economy.

The act of exchange cannot be conceived outside of the discourse of the exchange. It is literally an exchange of words, a handshake, a contract signing, an exchange of golden or silver disks, or brightly colored pieces of paper or computer messages. The determination of exchange value is done in the process of discursive engagement, and cannot be abstracted from it.

Perhaps another example will help to explain what I mean. Malinowski’s description of the Kula trade<sup>xii</sup> shows how objects acquire value because of the stories associated with them. Malinowski, like Bourdieu, uses this to show the difference between regular utilitarian trade and the non-market highly symbolic exchanges. However, he fails to notice that what could be considered the normal utilitarian exchange, also has a significant discursive component attached to the value of the product. To categorize a certain item as mundane, utilitarian, and not worthy of the Kula trade, is to tell a story about it.

An iPad is just as infused with stories as the Kula object from Malinowski’s accounts. It is very difficult to reduce the exchange value of an iPad to the actual material labor expenditures, no matter how creatively the latter are interpreted. An iPad is a discourse, a semiotic field of interconnected texts, images, actions, and other symbols, - some painstakingly created by the corporation, most generated by the users/investors.

No exchange is possible if discourse about the value of exchanged objects starts anew every time. Just imagine Trobrianders engaging into a long discussion about why yams and pigs should be exchanged as

utilitarian goods, but necklaces of a certain kind are cool enough for Kula. The semiotic field is just a set of previously articulated attitudes and beliefs. Its economic value lies in being implicit, and not challenged at the very act of exchange. Each utterance *is* an advertisement; it urges both the speaker and the listener to produce more utterances of the same kind, rather than to purchase any material goods or services. In this sense, semiotic fields are sharply different than ordinary advertisement. There has to be a series of intermediaries, and the conversion into money must be suppressed and ignored. The semiotic fields provide reasons for value judgments justifying material decisions, but when they become too closely associated with material interest, they no longer can be used as beliefs. Therefore the veil separating discursive fields from material economy is an important part of the larger economy.

Anti-capitalistic discourse is just as much a part of the capitalist economy as neoliberal rhetoric. The critics of commercialization tend to be quintessentially conservative, as Washburn concedes.<sup>xiii</sup> Preserving the status quo (or return to the golden age of Academia) have very tangible material benefits to the people vested in the status quo. Industrial countries spend 6-8% of their GDP on education; the industry moves trillions of dollars annually. All the labor invested by thousands of people into defining various parts of this vast system has very significant economic consequences. Arguing against commercialization is lobbying for funds. And because all higher education – private and public – is heavily subsidized by federal government loans, it is mostly lobbying for public money. The books I have read, and many others are attempts to boost a particular semiotic field, which summarily has a significant economic value. Just because the intent of the discourse is anti-capitalistic, does not mean it is content and consequences are selfless or void of economic significance.

## The paucity of solutions

A semiotic field has both the reproductive and innovative component, both contributing to value generation. It is likely that an imbalance in favor of reproductive one at the expense of innovative one creates the speculative bubbles described above. I am sorry to report that the three books in question all suffer from the said imbalance. Judging from the quantity and quality of new ideas, the semiotic field they represent does not work very well.

The semiotic field of anti-commercialism is running out of steam, because the public is not buying. In the struggle of meanings, competing fields are not simply tautologically opposed to each other. Their ultimate arbiter is the real economy. While meanings are boundless, material resources are scarce. Public finance crises are not simply semiotic constructions. Regulators produced a tremendous demand for alternative discourses on education – not because the talk of efficiency, and critiques of tenure and political bias are somehow more intrinsically powerful than the anti-corporate discourse. It is the other way around; the scarcity of resources makes discourse of efficiency more valuable. The overproduced and undervalued semiotic field gradually appears to become the mad hatters' ramblings.

Let us see what the authors were able to produce. Frank Donoghue, by far the most thoughtful of the three, ends his book with a whimper. He writes for and about humanities professors. To survive, his colleagues are advised to challenge the assumption that more professional training (as opposed to the liberal arts curriculum) will lead to better job prospects.<sup>xiv</sup> He seems to want to sell to the public the

liberal model on the basis of it being is as useless as professional preparation. My hats are just as terrible as the other hats, so buy more of them! The argument is not likely to work.

His second piece of advice is more sensible, but hardly ground-shaking. He wants the professorate to learn how the university works, and to become more engaged. This seems a little inadequate in the face of powerful tendencies he documented so well: “the hyperprofessionalization of academic careers, the rapid erosion of tenure, the rise of for-profit higher education, and the prestige race.”<sup>xv</sup> Learn how the institutions work – for what? To allow professors navigate the bureaucratic mazes more efficiently? But to what purpose? – It is far from clear.

Cary Nelson calls for unionization of faculty, strengthening the AAUP, and civil disobedience to university managers. How any of this is going to stop the defunding of public colleges, and the race to the bottom with for-profit universities is not obvious. He writes several chapters about the need to protect jobs, struggle against at will dismissals, and against corporate rhetoric of efficiency. He calls for solidarity with adjuncts, graduate students and staff. Then in the last chapter, he describes his personal journey as the President of AAUP, which largely consisted of firing a significant part of the organization’s staff, achieving financial stability and efficiency of operations. He demanded clear and transparent budgets, fiscal analysis of each project, and sound purchasing decisions. The irony of this story is that mad hatters make perfectly normal jackbooted managers, when put in the same position.

Jennifer Washburn also writes an obligatory last chapter with an earnest attempt to answer the what’s-to-be-done question. Because she focuses heavily on links between private industry and universities, especially on the ill effects of the Bayh-Dole Act, her solutions are narrower. She proposes an independent third party licensing agency for university-generated patentable research, and amending the aforementioned Act to ensure the widest possible use of research findings and a more active role for the major public funding agencies. While I find all three suggestions reasonable, they seem to be in conflict with the rest of the book. She tells many stories about problems brought by the commercialization of universities, which is described no less than “a foul wind,”<sup>xvi</sup> but then proposes to tweak the way commercialization works rather than the wholesale rejection of the commercialization. Either the wind is not so foul, or there does not seem to be a sweeter smelling wind blowing in the opposite direction.

The paucity of solutions is not a consequence of the authors’ ineptitude; this is not the intention of my critique. All three are gifted writers and the books are worth reading. I am simply pointing out to the weakening semiotic field, which expressly manifests itself in refusing to engage with the big questions, and to see the big shifts. Higher education is changing because it moves to become a mass institution, and ceases to be an elite institution. We cannot ignore the shift or pretend it should not affect universities. Our discursive energy should kick into high gear trying to solve the numerous problems that arise from the massification of higher education. The strategy of simply pointing out those problems as evidence for reversing the shift is counter-productive.

## The economics of massification

The simple truth is that the masses want and/or need higher education. Blue collar jobs are disappearing, to be replaced by either service or cognitive labor jobs; applicants for both tend to need education beyond high school. The only way to provide education to most people is to reduce cost without decline in quality. This was attempted by government regulation through accreditation, and by allowing free competition.<sup>xvii</sup> Neither of the two attempts has been particularly successful, because quality indicators have been so elusive.

Accreditation is still largely based on inputs, not on outcomes. Universities are unique in their approach to advertising. Just imagine a car commercial: We produce our car with twice as much work than the competitors. But that is exactly what universities are saying in their pursuit of meaningless ratings. The low professor to student ratio is sold as a proxy for quality. However, there is no evidence whatsoever that the low ratio is linked to better learning. In fact, universities advertise their inefficiency as a virtue. The same can be said about almost every other traditional indicator of quality considered in accreditation: we do not know for sure if they make any difference. Regulation sort of worked for a few elite universities, but it cannot work for mass higher education.

Deregulation is not working either. The dramatic expansion of competition has led to the emergence of the for-profit universities and commercial/online ventures of traditional schools. The trend is extensively documented by Donoghue, and less so by the other two authors. It is indeed the case of the Lemon Law: free competition among firms of which the quality is not certain, will always cause lemons to win.<sup>xviii</sup> The rational choice does not work when there is no basis for rational choice. The Federal Government had to intervene into accreditation of the diploma mills, but it has yet to offer a more permanent solution. We simply lack a reliable way of measuring quality, other than seat time, also known as the credit hour system. While it is a terrible measure, nothing better yet exists.

Ultimately, governments should do what they do best: set up and regulate efficient markets. But to do that, they need ideas, actual theoretical constructs for how such markets can work. Little can be done until some objective ways of measuring quality of higher education are developed. Right now, people have to rely on the ratings sham which has no defensible rationale and no reliable data sources. But a change needed is not simply a matter of developing good objective tests measuring student growth. Rather, it is a matter of producing a new discursive field, which will re-orient consumer value judgments in such a way that makes non-prestige comparisons among universities possible. Such a task would be best accomplished from within, if the profession had the foresight to put at least a small portion of its intellectual resources to it. That would be a great and productive alternative to despairing over the inevitable like Donoghue, exposing side effects like Washburn, or fighting unwinnable rearguard battles like Nelson.

In addition to measuring quality and setting up a fair competition, universities need to do what most other industries have been able to do: take advantage of sophisticated division of labor and information technology. Most college teaching is mediocre not just because future professors are not taught how to teach. It is mediocre and inefficient because we tend to construct every syllabus, and every lecture from scratch, ignoring what is already developed. Content organization, content delivery, evaluation of

student performance and management of student learning activities - those are all specialized and very different skills which can be performed by different people better and more efficiently than by one. Why cannot we record the best lectures rather than deliver in person mediocre ones? Students should be able to teach themselves to a greater degree, with proper computerized assessments and guidance; that would reduce labor costs.

One of the natural limits of schooling has to do with undifferentiated teaching. Inordinate resources are wasted because we teach people what they already know, or teach them something so difficult, it goes over their heads. One teacher for many students is basically the idea of school. It allowed most of human population to concentrate on production, while teachers take over dealing with the young. However, this solution created a problem – teachers have always had trouble differentiating instruction to the various needs and rates of progression. The problem did not exist when every parent taught his and her child everything there was to know. Just recently, we seem to be able to address the differentiation problem with first primitive artificial teachers. Netflix knows who I am, what I like and dislike, who my friends are, and what they like, and can guess - quite accurately - what movies I might like. Google knows what I don't know, and what I am interested in. However, when I enter a classroom, no one knows my name, or my friends, or what I know and don't know, and what kind of learning would work best for me, my strengths and weaknesses, words and concepts I already know and don't know yet, skills I have and skills I lack. Google, in contrast, learns with every use of its software. A similar algorithm used in learning could revolutionize education. Learning from how I learn best, and what I already know, it can provide me with challenging and stimulating learning experiences in fraction of time I spent in dreadful lectures and busywork assignments.

Neither the division of labor, nor the use of information technology inherently conflict with the notions of academic freedom. If we learned to share resources and specialize, there would be many people with similar positions and preferences. Specialization also helps against the shift to the less skilled part-time instructors. If you are a medieval history professor, but also an expert on, for example, teaching seminars, and can coach junior faculty, you would be less likely to be replaced by three adjunct lecturers in medieval history. Moreover, communication technology can allow us to build one great national or regional program in medieval studies, with ten universities each contributing the best specialist in a relatively narrow area. You would not have to be the jack of all trades, and only teach your very best area. Sharing students could help with low-enrolled and therefore perpetually threatened programs. Sharing resources is a better solution for very small and endangered fields than the perpetual fights against budget cuts. I am, for example, a dean who is sympathetic to the field of philosophy of education. I would be in a much better position to include philosophy of education to our doctoral program, if only I could count on a steady stream of quality online courses in that field. I would also need a way to pay distance philosophers of education for serving on doctoral committees advising graduate students. But I definitely cannot hire a full time philosopher of education in the foreseeable future. The irony is – our demand is unmet, while the field is losing jobs and importance.

### **The next big challenge**

We will have to make higher education less expensive, but still reasonably good. However, I would be amiss not giving a fair warning about the step after the next step. There is one consequence of

massification that stands out as unique to education, and in its importance it overshadows anything else we have discussed before. Frankly, I do not yet know how to solve it. It is not due for perhaps decades, but we cannot ignore it. K-12 education is struggling to address it, and educational reformers remain stubbornly blind to it for reasons similar to those described in this essay.

When an institution like high school stops being exclusionary, it often loses the only enforcement mechanism it had before, that is, exclusion. Once you start educating the masses, you cannot plausibly kick anyone out for not complying with the institutional rules, or not working hard enough. Massification of education tends to diminish motivation to learn, because it reduces the relative positional advantage of education. This threat has not yet reached the walls of most four-year universities, but when it does, it will become all-important. How do you keep students engaged and active without any means of enforcement? You can sell them the promise of better economic opportunity, but it loses its credibility with the advance of massification. You can make your teaching more interesting and relevant. A great idea, it has its own limits<sup>xix</sup>. Or you can pay them to go to college, which is fairly expensive. But until an adequate solution is found, higher education by necessity will hover just at the threshold of becoming a mass institution, never actually crossing the line. This puts limits on the development of the knowledge economy, which can be overcome to some degree by stealing educated people from other countries. Unfortunately, no country will accept our undereducated underclass in exchange for their Ph.D.s, so this venture seems of to be of questionable promise.

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To preserve a semiotic field, its participants should cross its boundaries, and transgress its limitations. Enough was said about the sad fate of universities crumbling under the weight of commercialism. Let us think about what we have to offer, not hundred years ago, but today.

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<sup>i</sup> Cary Nelson, *No university is an Island: Saving academic freedom*. NY and London: NYU Press, 2010, 127.

<sup>ii</sup> Cary Nelson, *No university is an Island: Saving academic freedom*. NY and London: NYU Press, 2010, 127.

<sup>iii</sup> Frank Donoghue, *The Last Professors: The Corporate University and the Fate of the Humanities*, Fordham University Press, 2008

<sup>iv</sup> Jennifer Washburn, *University, Inc.: The Corporate Corruption of Higher Education*, Basic Books, 2006.

<sup>v</sup> Donoghue, 85.

<sup>vi</sup> Kirp, Shakespeare, Einstein, 53. Cited in Washburn, 217.

<sup>vii</sup> Donoghue, 98.

<sup>viii</sup> Nelson, 56

<sup>ix</sup> Ведь высказывание строится между двумя социально организованными людьми, и если реального собеседника нет, то он предполагается в лице, так сказать, нормального представителя той социальной группы, к которой принадлежит говорящий. Слово ориентировано на собеседника, ориентировано на то, кто этот собеседник. Volochinov, *Marxism and the philosophy of language*, Leningrad: Priboy, 1930, 87.

<sup>x</sup> Ситуация и аудитория заставляют внутреннюю речь актуализоваться в определенное внешнее выражение, которое непосредственно включено в невысказанный жизненный контекст, восполняется в нем действием, поступком или словесным ответом других участников высказывания. Законченный вопрос, восклицание, приказание, просьба — вот типичнейшие целые жизненных высказываний. Все они (особенно такие, как приказание, просьба) требуют внесловесного дополнения, да и внесловесного начала. Самый тип завершения этих маленьких жизненных жанров определяется трением слова о внесловесную среду и трением слова о чужое слово (других людей). Voloshinov, 99-100.

<sup>xi</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Practical Reason*, Stanford, CA: Stanford Univ. Press, 1998, 92-98.

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<sup>xii</sup> Bronislaw Malinowski. *Argonauts of the western Pacific; an account of native enterprise and adventure in the archipelagoes of Melanesian New Guinea*, London: G. Routledge, 1922

<sup>xiii</sup> Washburn, 218.

<sup>xiv</sup> Donoghue, 135-136.

<sup>xv</sup> Donoghue, 138.

<sup>xvi</sup> Washburn, ix.

<sup>xvii</sup> In the U.S., the Federal Government does not directly regulate accreditation, but it holds the power to recognize the regional accrediting bodies.

<sup>xviii</sup> George A. Akerlof, "The Market for "Lemons": Quality Uncertainty and the Market Mechanism," *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 84/3, (1970), 488-500.

<sup>xix</sup> Alexander M. Sidorkin, "John Dewey: A case of educational utopianism," *Philosophy of Education 2009*, Urbana, IL: Philosophy of Education Society, 2009: 191-199.