Epilogue

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This book was in the making for four years: we consistently called it *Academia in Crisis*. It became a book in process, a longer process than ever envisioned. With a *dystopic* element coming from Leonidas's debates with Zygmunt Bauman (2013; 2016), albeit with some optimism deriving from his personal quotes; and what we like to call *postalgic realism* pointing in the direction of the hope we expect to provide with this volume.

In September 2013, Zygmunt Bauman and Leonidas Donskis came to VU University in Amsterdam, to address the university's leaders: the university board, management staff, and deans. Who would have imagined how a great, though brief friendship could have evolved from that meeting? The occasion was to present their book *Moral Blindness*, especially Chapter 4 'Consuming University', which deals with system thinking and the increase in bureaucratic measures. Or in other words, the university as a 'consumerist' and market driven institution, or as 'cookie factory',¹ which is how VU staff and students called the process: a factory or institution that sells students as products and treats staff as machines, very much like Parker and Jarvey (1995), as well as Ritzer (1996) predicted, not so very long ago. Bauman and Donskis argue that '...a consumerist attitude may lubricate the wheels of the economy, [but] it sprinkles sand into the bearings of morality' (2013, p. 150). Of course, this is meant as a warning to universities that are supposed to produce 'useful' knowledge as well as the graduates who will promote and utilise it – and put it 'up for sale' as soon as new trends break. But it is also an explanation of why university staff and management remain compliant in the current fast, gripping and consumerist culture: consumerism by its very nature serves as a drug, preventing us academics from taking action via its ability to seduce us into compliance.

More specifically, cooperation between editors and authors participating in this project has emerged from ongoing discussions and exchanges since 2013, over that Bauman and Donskis' chapter in *Moral Blindness* in combination with our own experiences, thinking, and views on current 'life in academia' in various European countries. We are delighted to present our effort to put critiques, protests, and tensions in current academic life in the spotlight

1 The university as a 'cookie factory' was the ironic slogan of students and staff at VU University, Amsterdam, during their protests against new cutbacks (and 'reorganisations') starting around 2013.

via this volume. Experiences from the European countries we come from and work in are combined: Lithuania, Britain, Germany, the Netherlands, Italy, and Slovakia. Inspiring debates have taken place in each of our countries on what to think about the current state of academia and where to go from there, in some cases linked to recent university protest movements.

As we have seen, dystopia and utopia mingle in contemporary reflections on academic life, under pressure of economic developments and an increasing emphasis on the 'production' of knowledge, specific forms of 'internationalisation', and on an increase in the numbers of students, simultaneous with cut-backs, 'corporatisation', and 'commercialisation'. The tone of the contributions ranges from dystopic vistas all the way to utopian or 'postalgic' (cf. Ybema, 2004) visions of European-inspired cross-boundary options for students and scholars. However, between the university as 'accommodating tradition', on the one hand, and 'anticipating the modern world', on the other (cf. Donskis in his chapter), we encounter pleas for changes in structure, character, pace and direction of what started out as the 'Bologna Project' in the late 1990s. This might entail radical steps and initiatives to demonstrate what we have in common: an interest in engaged scholarship embodied by a Humboldtian community of learners, working in an intellectual space rather than a place where knowledge is commodified, controlled, and compressed into a rat race of 'cit-able' journal articles.²

Are we indeed facing the 'end of the university', as Donskis warned in his lecture to the rather stunned VU managerial staff in 2013? We cannot really know while in the midst of this turbulent development, in which we try to be critical, but also find ourselves complicit, since we must admit that in the recent past, we have helped build our universities in their present forms. Indeed, from a future-present perspective, in which on a daily basis we open up and close down future possibilities (Adam & Groves, 2007), we may fear for loss of content and independence, if McUniversity continues, if we do not find ways to counter disruptive measures from politicians, and, more pressing still, from the administrative and bureaucratic bodies of universities who rule by numbers, graphs, and standardised measurements rather than via academic creativity and inspiration. We have decided and discussed that it is worthwhile to look at current development in academia, at 'academia in crisis' from different perspectives: internationalisation and the European project (Stefano Bianchini and Samuel Abraham), a deeper exploration of the TINA context of

2 A quite recent experience in this regard was a well-meant wish by a close colleague to the publication of an article: ... 'congrats to this nice publication, may you receive loads of citations'...

academic life (Leonidas and Frans Kamsteeg), a temporal view on academic work (Harry Wels and Ida Sabelis), and autobiographical accounts from the UK and from NL-UK-Germany (Joost van Loon and Simon Charlesworth). Where do we go when the economic paradigm tells us that TINA rules?

The book thus reflects and builds on the 'Consuming University' chapter in Bauman and Donskis' *Moral Blindness* (2013). In absolute terms, it has taken us quite a long time – and indeed, the writing of and discussions about our chapters have not always enjoyed top priority in the daily tasks and fragmented duties of our work. But is that 'Werdegang', this development, not exactly at the heart of what has been taken from us through compliance with the TINA effect of economy first, in academia as elsewhere? What about the 'production of scholars' and journal articles in ever larger numbers, with preferably less ever money but with ever more control systems? No matter, the volume has now been completed, and we present it to the world, not just the world of academics, hopefully, but to all curious and broad-minded thinkers. And, yes, the process was sadly interrupted and delayed when Leonidas Donskis, our dear, dear friend, tragically passed away in September 2016, on his way, as always, to promote deep thinking, and to linking people together as he did with most of us. Coupled with that, Bauman passed on a couple of months later and left us without a foreword to this volume. In May 2017, we were invited to present about 'academia in crisis' during a commemoration seminar for Leonidas Donskis on the occasion of the opening of a grand new library now bearing his name in the city of Kaunas. At that point, we decided that 'an outsider' (from a European perspective) should perhaps be the perfect choice to compose the introduction to our book. Tamara Shefer, South African scholar of Lithuanian descent, turned out to be that person – a friend and cultural partner of Leonidas in so many ways.

I am afraid that, without the inspiring presence of Leonidas, we, as authors of this book, have been chasing our own tails, so to speak. We have tried, and are trying still, to do something that is neither desired nor valued by our universities... but we intended to proceed and finalise this venture anyway, despite and in-between the various measures coming from all directions, which seem to prevent us from research, academic thinking, along with intellectual well-being – if that really ever did exist. So, onwards to many readings, 'to many citations', as the new motto seems to be in academia. And perhaps then onwards to... a way out of the crisis and to finding a common cure for these dystopic vistas.

Ida Sabelis – May 2018 – two years after travelling South Africa with Leonidas and Jolanta.

References

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