



Arts Centre, 2000, Aires Mateus Architects, Sines (Portugal) and Faculty of Architecture, 1995, Álvaro Siza, Porto (Portugal)

We are rapidly moving towards a network society, which will greatly influence the way in which the world will be organised in the future. This new reality, which mirrors that of the internet, is driven by networks, interdisciplinary connections, real and virtual meeting points and collaborations, synergies, both on a local as well as on an international (global) level.

The central questions for our educational institutions are: how can universities disseminate knowledge, educate people, conduct research, and serve the community in a network society? What are the new or alternative ways of organising, practising and conceptualising university life, both inside and outside the university?

The conference *Rethinking the University after Bologna: New Concepts and Practices beyond Tradition and the Market* organised by the University Centre Saint-Ignatius Antwerp (UCSIA) in December 2008 wanted to encourage discussion about these questions. Leaving the assessment of the Bologna process and the Lisbon strategy aside, it highlighted new concepts and practices of academic education, research and social service. The speakers all reflected on the 'idea of a university' itself.

This publication gathers the key contributions of Ronald Barnett, Jean-Claude Guédon, Jan Masschelein & Maarten Simons, Susan Robertson and Nicolas Standaert.

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Rethinking the University after Bologna

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beyond Tradition and the Market

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JAN MASSCHELEIN & MAARTEN SIMONS

The University
as a Matter of
Public Concern
Thinking about and of a World-University

**The University as a Matter of Public Concern:
Thinking about and of a World-University**

Jan Masschelein & Maarten Simons

Introduction

What are universities for? is the title of a recent report that Geoffrey Boulton and Colin Lucas wrote for the League of European Research Universities in which they question the role universities play in (and for) society (Boulton & Lucas 2008). In this report they argue that actual public policies are much too preoccupied with the immediate challenges of a world in transition and therefore tend to see universities as sources of highly specific benefits and outputs, sources of marketable commodities for their customers, be they students, business or the state. These educational policies are indeed more and more thinking in terms of direct output for customers (or financiers) and position universities in an arena where competition as such becomes the main issue. In this way, the policies are in danger of undermining the very processes that are the source of the economic and social benefits so cherished by governments around the world. To counter these tendencies universities, according to Boulton and Lucas, must articulate more clearly what they stand for, and what their true role in society is.

Taking up this challenge, we want to contrast in our contribution two ways of thinking about the role of the university. In the first view, the public role of universities is translated into functions which have to be performed with ever greater degrees of excellence implying a permanent (self-) *mobilisation* and installing a pervasive *climate of anxiety* that one cannot live up to this demand. In the second view, the public role is connected to things that are made public (transforming matters of fact or need into matters of concern) implying a *slowing down* which provokes thought and installs a *climate of attention*. In what follows we will clarify these two ways of conceiving the public role of universities. In the first section, we will elaborate briefly on the now very familiar continuous mobilisation (in response to emergencies and ever-changing needs) that characterizes the actual university environment. We will then explore, in the second section, a different view by means of a proposal for what we will call a world-university. This proposal aims precisely to disrupt this mobilisation and thus requires a different *ethos*. It can be related in an exemplary manner, as we will show in the third section, to the time and place of public lecturing.

We are aware that contrasting two views results in an oversimplification. Our aim, however, is not to arrive at facts about the complex situation the university is facing today, but to contribute in making the university itself into a matter of public concern.

*To Improve Quality and Increase Excellence as Most Important Social Aim
The (Self-) Mobilisation of the University*

The European Union has committed itself to become the most competitive knowledge society and economy in the world by 2010 (Lisbon European Council 2006). As the most important resource of Europe, so we are told, is its human capital, Europe needs to become a world leader in the production and transmission of innovative knowledge. 'Today, knowledge is and should be at the very core of economy and society. To become the most competitive economy in the world, the European Union must capitalise on the creativity of its people by strengthening the three sides of the "knowledge triangle": research, education and innovation.' (European University Association 2005: 1). That universities are obvious key players in this process was underlined by the European University Association (EUA) in a first position paper on the *Research Role of Europe's Universities* at a major conference on 'The Europe of Knowledge 2020: A Vision for University-based Research and Innovation'. There it is argued that: 'Universities advocate a Europe of knowledge, based on a strong research capacity and research-based education in universities – singly and in partnership – across the continent. European universities are active on a global scale, contributing to innovation and sustainable economic development. Competitiveness and excellence must be balanced with social cohesion and access. As "multi-actors" in the research process, through their teaching, training, research and innovation activities at regional, national and European/International level, Europe's universities have an essential role to play [...]' (European University Association 2004: 1). Hence, the basic assumption is that universities can offer a unique space, i.e. an excellent research and learning environment, in order to ensure the production and transmission of innovative knowledge.

Contemporary universities are indeed expected to be excellent learning and research environments, and networks are suggested to be the most functional organisational forms to reach these objectives. Although in contemporary policy documents reference is still being made to the university as a public institution, and in particular to the Humboldtian tradition (Commission of the European Communities 2002; Simons, Haverhals & Biesta 2007), the self-understanding of researchers, lecturers and students, as well as the *ethos* required of them, is totally different. When speaking of the modern university (*Bildungs-university*) as a public institution, reference is made to the German model that Humboldt instituted at the University of Berlin, and which was widely copied and therefore served as the leading model for the post-war expansion of tertiary education in the west (Ash 1999; Simons 2006, 2007a; Masschelein 2004). The modern university could be described as an institution which has the nation-state and its national culture as its main reference point (Readings 1996).

If one listens to the current discourses on the university it becomes clear that this idea that the university has to propagate and safeguard the progress of national culture through the integration of research, education and public service is no longer embraced. Though the university is still clearly regarded in terms of a unique space for research and education, the network university is no longer a space where the fusion between research and education is legitimised by reference to a cultural or national referent. As a result, 'what' exactly is investigated and taught as knowledge, and how it contributes to national culture and edification, matters less than the fact that it be investigated and taught 'excellently' (Readings 1996). More generally speaking, the university of excellence seeks its legitimacy in its ability to be an excellent provider of services. And services find their legitimacy not in their relation to a national culture, but in their function. A Communication of the European Commission in 2003 articulated this shift in self-understanding of the role of universities very clearly when claiming that universities are only functional for the knowledge society insofar as they combine three activities: the production of knowledge (research), the transmission of knowledge (education) and the additional training and regional development (public service) (Communication 2003). It is important to notice that this understanding of the university in terms of functions and functionality, no longer allows one to ask the question of the meaning of the university for society by referring to an idea (of humanity, or nation, or culture) that transcends society. However, the shift towards excellence does not mean that the 'multi-functional university' no longer has a point of orientation. The new point of orientation is excellence, i.e. the university strives for excellence in each of its functions: excellent research, excellent education and excellent service. In order to clarify what is exactly at stake in the university of excellence, it is important to focus in more detail on how the notion of excellence is used today, as well as on how it is related to another concept that seems to provide orientation in the academic environment today, namely quality.

For the university in a competitive environment there is no such thing as a fixed norm to decide on what good research, good education and good service actually are. What is at stake is the ongoing search for quality, the notion of quality having no fixed referent. The point of departure instead is that the knowledge society has some functions and that some organisations receive the financial resources to 'take up' these functions. The judgement to offer accreditation is based upon indicators of quality, i.e. indicators that allow one to judge whether something is functional for the knowledge society and whereby this functionality could be operationalised in many different ways. It is crucial to notice that from this perspective everything could be chosen as an indication of quality as long as there is a consensus that it represents an income for society. This way of thinking about the university and her public role implies

that the university submits itself to (or is being submitted to) a kind of 'permanent quality tribunal'. The tribunal judges everything that is being done at the university and whether it meets the needs and demands, that is, whether the university 'responds' to the environment, and thus whether it judges itself (and others) according to the laws of entrepreneurship and competition. In view of this orientation towards quality, policy makers and scholars all over the world stress the necessity for universities and their staff to start looking at teaching and research as a service, to become responsive, and to develop a capacity to change in order to be able to face ever-changing needs. Exactly this submission to a quality tribunal (and the orientation to 'what is needed') is the condition in which the strange, hollow concept of excellence can receive the importance and appeal it has today.

Excellence refers to the fact that a university is performing a function (or a bunch of functions) better than other organisations. The orientation towards quality and the implied obsession with excellence therefore is linked up with the 'dictates of comparison and optimisation'; on ongoing comparison in view of an ongoing optimisation (Simons & Masschelein 2006; Bröckling 2002). These dictates clearly do not only apply to the relation between universities, but to the organisation of each university as well. The development of 'poles of excellence' with regard to research, and the competition between faculties and research centres, is an example of the application of these dictates. In sum, the excellent university is a university that, given a set of indicators for quality, performs better than other institutions. As a consequence, for a university willing to remain excellent or to become excellent it is of strategic importance to optimise each of its functions based on ongoing comparison. Excellent universities therefore, will evaluate themselves on a permanent basis (before other organisations will evaluate them).

In this context rankings, output measurements, quality comparisons and effectiveness research have become the most important policy instruments and technologies with which to steer universities (at European, national, and regional levels, as well as at a local level, and within the university) and to orient them towards quality and excellence. As stated by the Flemish Minister for Education: to improve quality and increase excellence is *the* most important societal aim of the university (Vandenbroucke 2006). And in view of the fact that quality is being increasingly measured on the basis of various kinds of rankings and quality comparisons (i.e. on the basis of output) the message to the academic world is clear: compare yourself, be better than the others, increase your performance, i.e. increase the output through more efficient use of the means, or optimize the input-output ratio (Lyotard 1979). This is all that matters in the age of excellence as well: more performance in research, but also in teaching and even in offering equal opportunities. So make sure you are

better than the others. Excellent universities are not actually waiting for these rankings; they create their own rankings and seek opportunities to benchmark themselves everywhere.

It is important to keep in mind that these rankings, quality comparisons and output measurements actively organise the university landscape as a competitive environment. Contrary to what is often assumed, these instruments are not neutral instruments of assessment measuring outputs; instead they spread a (totalising) net of constant comparison over higher education through which universities (and their staff) are re-positioned at the level of perpetual competition and struggle. In this condition of competition there is but one imperative: see that you rise, or rise faster than others. How can you do this? How can you live up to the virtue of ongoing 'competitive self-improvement'? (Haahr 2004) You can do this by developing an entrepreneurial *ethos* and through permanently assessing yourself on the basis of the indicators in terms of weaknesses and strengths. Confronted with the dictate of permanent improvement through permanent comparison, universities and their staff are faced with the dictate of pro-active self-adaptation and permanent self-mobilisation. It becomes an academic duty to look for opportunities ('niches') to produce something of excellence, and hence, to produce something that is functional or that meets certain needs. The unique space of the university today is a space that permanently and relentlessly *mobilises* researchers, lecturers, and students. They are all asked to mobilise their intellectual (human) capital in an environment in which it is precisely the interruption or disruption of movement and of permanent re-positioning (for example by institutional or disciplinarian limits) that is experienced as a threat for survival of oneself as researcher, research unit, department, or university. What does this leave in the way of motivation if not pure and blind anxiety, or fear of standing still, or even worse, going down (in the rankings)? What seems to guide the search for excellence is fear; fear of low rankings, wrong perceptions, negative assessments. As Boulton and Lucas stated 'as league table follows league table they are pored over obsessively for signs of progress or decline' (Boulton & Lucas 2008: 7). This obsession is accompanied by an obsession with change and renewal, without clear reason, except for the 'empty' notion of excellence.

So, from our brief sketch it becomes clear that, despite its emptiness, excellence did change the academic world at all levels – including the disposition of academics. Faced with these changes, we want to introduce a proposal which, as we hope to clarify, offers a different view for the public role of universities. Our proposal displaces the way of conceiving of the public role of the university: instead of looking at the functions of the university (and discussing whether they are private or public) we want to regard the university in terms of the particular space it calls into being (throughout its research, teaching and service). This

space can be called 'the world' or the place and time where things are made public. Instead of the university of excellence, and inspired by Isabelle Stengers' 'cosmopolitical proposal' (Stengers 2005) we, therefore, propose the idea of a world-university.

The Proposal for a World-University: Slowing Down and Making Things Public

Our proposal for a world-university is not so much aimed at solving problems (in the performance of functions), or responding to emergencies (translated in terms of competition and in going up or down the scale of all kinds of rankings and classifications), but at invoking a slightly different awareness of these emergencies, at slowing down and making things (such as the university itself) into an issue of thought, that is to say, a matter of public concern (Simons & Masschelein 2009). As we will see, it is precisely this 'slowing down' that can call the world into being.

A world-university, then, and to formulate it correctly from the outset, is a university which is neither oriented towards a national culture or universal reason (as was the modern university), nor towards quality and excellence (as our actual universities), but it is a university which is concerned with the world, i.e. with 'things', with 'affairs' that are public, that call a public into existence: the *res publica*. As Heidegger reminds us ' [...] the Old High German word 'thing' means a gathering, and specifically a gathering to deliberate on a matter under discussion, a contested matter. In consequence, the Old German words 'thing' and 'ding' become the names for an affair or matter of pertinence. They denote anything that in any way bears upon men, concerns them, and that accordingly is a matter for discourse [...]. The Romans called a matter for discourse 'res'. [...] 'Res publica' means, not the state, but that which, known to everyone, concerns everybody and is therefore deliberated in public [...]' (Heidegger 1951: 174–175).

Taking into account Heidegger's etymological clarification a world-university can, therefore, be described as a particular space constituting a public by gathering around matters of concern. Or to put it differently: a world-university is an architecture or habitat where the environment is transformed into a world or where objects (i.e. 'matters of fact' or 'matters of need') are transformed into 'things' (i.e. 'matters of concern') (Latour & Weidel 2005; Simons & Masschelein 2009b). This transformation happens when the consensual way in which situations and issues are presented (and dealt with) and the way in which needs, demands and emergencies mobilise our reasoning and acting are disrupted. Only at that moment can these issues become public issues or affairs, things made public. This means that they will make us think, that they obtain the power to make us think. A world-university would then be a place of thought, although for sure it is but one place, not the only one, albeit a particular one. One could say also that this transformation happens when thought is provoked

because our normal, common reasoning and acting is slowed down. The world university comes into existence when our reasoning and acting are slowed down by hearing the question 'Consider that we might be mistaken' or 'what are we busy doing?' and when this question is not immediately answered and thus closed off. According to Stengers, precisely this insistent question can be given the name of the world (or cosmos) (Stengers 2005: 996).

Hearing this question, so she writes, is hearing the idiot (and therefore also in itself probably an idiotic thing to do) as sketched by Deleuze and Dostojevski. 'In the ancient Greek sense, an idiot was someone who did not speak the Greek language and was therefore cut off from the civilised community [...]. But Deleuze's idiot, [...] is the one who always slows the others down, who resists the consensual way in which the situation is presented and in which emergencies mobilise thought or action. This is not because the presentation would be false or because emergencies are believed to be lies, but because, "there is something more important". Don't ask him why; the idiot will neither reply nor discuss the issue. The idiot is a presence or, as Whitehead would have put it, produces an interstice. There is no point in asking him, "what is more important?" for he does not know. But his role is not to produce abysmal perplexity, not to create the famous Hegelian night when every cow is black. We know that knowledge exists, but the idiot demands that we slow down, that we don't consider ourselves authorised to believe that we possess the meaning of what we know (Stengers 2005: 994–995)'.

The world-university is, therefore, not a university, which would be oriented towards a cosmos as a good, united and common world. This, for example, is still the case in Habermas' reformulation of the 'idea of the university' as a community of teachers and students who share the subjection to the tribunal of communicative rationality and the disposition of rational agreement (Habermas 1986), thereby constituting an exemplary practice or model for the organisation of a true public space or common world and putting the university in a position of moral superiority with respect to the rest of society. The proposal for a world-university is precisely a proposal to slow down the construction of a common world, to create a space (one amongst others) for hesitation regarding what it means to say 'good' and to define what is 'common'. The proposal offers neither the definition nor the description of a good and common world, nor does it contain procedures to arrive at such a definition or such a world. The term world itself refers to what is unknown or to multiple worlds. The proposal does not want to deny the emergencies associated with our actual practices in all kinds of fields that seem to demand urgent solutions and responses and to ask for definitions of the good life, but it wants to pay attention, nonetheless, to the idiotic murmuring that there is perhaps 'something more important'.

Therefore a world-university is not operating in the name of such a (future) common world (e.g. eternal peace or communicative rationality). Its inhabitants (researchers, professors) are no representatives in this sense: they are not speaking 'in the name of [...]', and thus cannot say: '[...] and therefore [...]'. They are not addressing students or the public as those who are in need of guidance or orientation, e.g. in need of the light of reason. They are not experts saying: these are the facts, this is the case (and cause) '[...] and therefore [...]'. At the world-university this '[...] and therefore [...]' is precisely *suspended*. In this sense one could say that the world, this idiotic murmur of 'things', this appearance of matters of concern, is an operator of equalisation (and not of equivalence, because that would again imply a common measure and thus inter-changeability of positions – which is precisely what happens when we use rankings, for example). It operates equality in the sense that voices at the world-university are not claiming that they are the only ones to be able to explain and understand where others could or can not. They are also not aiming at undermining other voices that are concerned (nor are they giving instructions or teaching lessons, or are they self-reflective or self-indicting), but they are voices that *add*, voices that 'can imbue these other voices with the feeling that they do not master the situation they discuss, that the public arena is peopled with shadows of that which does not have a voice, cannot have or does not want to have one. This is the feeling that political good-will can so easily be obliterated when no answer is given (by the idiot) to the demand: "Express yourself, express your objections, your proposals, your contribution to the common world that we're building" (Stengers, 2005: 996)'.

A world-university could be conceived of as an architecture (a space/time organisation) that 'passes fright that scares self-assurance, that makes an interstice in the soil of good reasons' and therefore *makes us think*. This frightening that is making us think is neither achieved by speaking or acting in the name of something, some rational ideal or essential duty, nor by declaring that making people capable of critical thinking is the aim or goal of the university. The university can make it happen in a mode of indeterminacy, that is, in a mode 'of the event from which nothing follows, [...] but that confronts every one with the question of how they will inherit from it. The event is a presence without interaction, causing no transaction, the event does not speak (Stengers 2005: 996)'. Fright, then, is not sufficient. Interstices or disruptions close easily and rapidly. Often, we can not defy the rules of the game that is disrupted by the event, or we cannot imagine any solution other than a return to the familiar answer and the common world. This raises the question how the cry of fright, or the murmur of the idiot, can be heard and maintained, individually and collectively. Neither the idiot, nor the one frightened knows how to proceed, how to give a place to the insistent question which entrances them. As we said

before, this insistent question can be given the name of the world (cosmos) and we have to invent (and to decide) the way in which to deal with it (we have to invent the valid and legitimate reasons) precisely '*in the presence*' of that which remains deaf to this legitimacy (in the presence of the question or murmur of the idiot, in the presence of things made public). What is important is, precisely, this 'in the presence of'. We have to invent, not 'in the name of', but 'in the presence of', in the presence of what is giving no answer to the demand: express yourself. The point is (and that is what constitutes a world-university) to retain the question, the murmur, and to invent in its presence. Proposing the idea of a world-university is inviting to invent an habitat, as Stengers calls it, or an architecture as we called it, that affords opportunities for an *original ethic that risks itself*, i.e. an experimental ethic. As Latour states: '[...] plus on est scientifique, plus on est en situation expérimentale, plus on est dans l'incertitude concernant le monde commun (Latour 2003: 53)'. Therefore, one could say that inventing a world-university means to invent measures, strategies, practises, exercises which give power to things (to matters) and which oblige us to risk ourselves and to think (and to think about what to do in front of this idiotic question). These measures, strategies, practices and exercises could be conceived of as what constrains (challenges) the protective manoeuvres through which researchers escape their decision, escape being exposed, being obliged to think and decide 'in the presence of', i.e. what constrains the protective manoeuvres of immunisation.

Since this might still be rather abstract, let us refer to the example that Stengers is elaborating. It is the example of animal experimentation and the way to deal with this issue. According to Stengers, in laboratories where experiments are performed on animals, all sorts of rituals and ways of talking and referring to those animals exist, that attest to the need of the researchers to protect themselves, that is, to protect themselves from this 'in the presence of'. 'The grand tales about the advancement of knowledge, rationality defined against sentimentality and the necessities of method are part of such rites, filling up the interstices through which the "what am I doing" insistently nags (Stengers 2005: 997)'. Of course, researchers need to decide on the legitimacy of an experiment, but, so she says, we should try to invent constraints against these protective or immunising manoeuvres, 'forcing the researchers concerned to expose themselves, to decide 'in the presence of' those who may turn out to be the victims of their decision (Stengers 2005: 997)'. This means that, continuing in this line, the proposal for a world university is also including the researcher herself, this self being itself presented as an issue, giving its full significance to the unknown element of the question: 'what would the researcher decide "on her own" if that "his/herself" were actively shed of the kinds of protection current decisions seem to need?' In this sense the experiment would not, in the

first place, be about applying experimental methods, but about an experimental ethic, putting oneself to the test, to risk oneself. It would involve an attentive and experimental attitude in the full meaning of the word: an opening to the present (living and thinking 'in the presence of') and thus accepting to be touched, infected or even intoxicated, accepting to think and become different – without immunising oneself in advance.

How, one could ask, would the researcher (the experimenter) decide if his ethic (his way of behaving) would be thoroughly experimental, an original ethic that risks itself? For example by living together with animals (and we can think of these famous examples of Jane Goodall, Diane Fossey, Biruté Galdikas who spend large parts of their lives face to face with apes, and managed to make them 'present' and to think, and behave, 'in the presence of') (Herzfeld 2005). And how could we think of a habitat (the architecture of a world-university, which we could properly call a laboratory referring to its experimental attitude), which would offer opportunities for such an ethic. This does not mean that the ethic can be transformed in any predictable way by transforming the habitat. We concur with Stengers, who is very clear and explicit about this: 'The habitat proposes, the being disposes, gives or refuses to give that proposal a significance [...] we don't know what a researcher who today affirms the legitimacy or even the necessity of experiments on animals is capable of becoming in an *oikos* that demands that he or she think "in the presence of" the victims of his or her decision (Stengers 2005: 997)'. But, and that is of crucial importance, it will in any case be the researchers' own becoming. He or she will become and be present in it. A world-university would thus invent constraints against any protective immunising manoeuvres. Such constraints are idiotic. Not because they would deny articulated knowledge, or see it as lies, not because the idiot would refer to an external arbitrator capable of judging the validity of the urgencies and emergencies that the entrepreneurial experimenters claim exist. They are idiotic in that they say: 'we may agree with your arguments, but we have to make sure that you are fully exposed to their consequences (Stengers 2005: 997)'. The constraints are therefore to be seen as measures against anaesthesia and immunisation. Before, we continue on this idea, it is perhaps worthwhile to bring the example of the animal experimenters to the case (or business) that we are dealing with here: the business of the university.

Let us look again at the architecture or habitat constructed by the entrepreneurial regime of quality and excellence in which inhabitants of the university have to work and study today and what it actually asks of them or us. We are fed, as we briefly indicated, on a discourse and equipped with procedures and instruments that permanently mobilise us and require us to agree that to publish, and to publish in a particular way (articles in highly-ranked journals), as well as to obtain funding, and to obtain funding in a particular way (highly-ranked

funding agencies), is the inevitable consequence of the competition, or, in order to call it what it is or increasingly becomes, the war between universities regarding quality and excellence (as being the prerequisites for their survival). Publish or perish and perform better or disappear. This is so at the level of the university but it is especially so at the level of its inhabitants. If our universities cannot make 'the sacrifices' that competitiveness demands, we are told, we will not survive or have to deal with ever harsher conditions. Following the idea of Stengers regarding animal experiments, we could say: So be it, but in that case, those who perish, who disappear (who are not managing to make their doctorate in time, to produce the quantity and quality of publications that are required, to obtain the necessary and high-ranked funding or research projects) ought to be considered as victims of war. It means that is their sacrifice that enables us to survive and to continue our permanent striving for excellence. Ceremonies are their due, medals, commemorative plaques, all the ways of recognising a debt. Imagine, then, the repercussions if all the suffering and mutilations imposed by the university war (and we could include not only the staff, but also the 'objects', 'animals', etc.) were celebrated in this way, that is, commemorated and actively protected from falling into oblivion and indifference, and furthermore protected from being anaesthetised by the themes of necessary flexibility and the permanent mobilisation of all for a society of knowledge in which every one has to accept the rapid obsolescence of what they know and to take responsibility for their constant self-recycling and self-mobilisation. The fact that we are caught in a war with no conceivable prospect of peace might become intolerable and frightening. This is, of course, an idiotic proposal since it does not offer in itself a program for a better university, but a diagnosis of our seemingly passive acceptance of permanent competition or war as framing our common fate. In other words, thinking about the university war in the presence of its victims could maybe make us think differently and invent other things.¹ To paraphrase what Stengers said: we don't know what a researcher, a dean, a chancellor or a minister of education, who today affirms the legitimacy or even the necessity of ranking and output financing, is capable of becoming in an *oikos* that demands that he or she think 'in the presence' of 'the victims' of his or her decision. But in any case, it will be their own becoming! He or she will be present in it. A world-university would thus invent procedures that install

¹ An interesting example is to be found in what happened recently to the chancellor of the University of Leuven (Belgium). On the basis of an assessment procedure formerly accepted by the majority of university staff, but strongly marked by the entrepreneurial regime, he received a negative assessment for missing the necessary entrepreneurial capacities and is to be replaced later this year. However, in the 'presence of' the victim of their former decision, a presence which was strengthened by the fact that someone started a kind of mourning or commemorative register on the web which one could sign, a majority of the staff appeared now to be in favour of a fundamental revision of the procedure and the return to a more traditional, collegial way of dealing with the election and assessment of the chancellor. In fact, the university itself became a matter of concern and created a large public.

constraints against protective manoeuvres and help to avoid any generality that evades or predetermines the issue (for example by building up an active memory of the way solutions that we might have considered promising turn out to be failures, deformations or perversions – and in that sense the world-university is not only a laboratory but also a library and an archive). One could say that these constraints are helping to give the matter, – which is in this case: ‘what is a university and what is it for’, – the force or power to make us slow down and to provoke thinking, and thinking again. It is the constraints that are displacing the question of how universities are to be governed, away from a matter of fact, need or emergency towards a matter of public concern, which could lead towards other, new responses and answers, towards different decisions.

However, let us return to the idea of the proposal of a world-university itself. Such a university would thus have to invent procedures to slow down and to provoke thinking. As we said above, provoking thinking is not done simply by declaring that we should think or by celebrating it in ceremonies and rituals or writing it down in programme texts (although we should certainly also do that). As Stengers suggests, provoking thinking could be rather an art that universities have to develop and cherish. This art is precisely the art of ‘making things public’ (or, violating the English a bit, one could say the art of ‘publishing’) that is, the art (i.e. the ethos, the manners, the behaviours, the practices) that gives the issue the power to activate our thinking, to become a thing that gathers, a thing made public and calling a public into being. This art is the art of ex-position in all its connotations, of being exposed to which also implies the art of presentation and representation, that is, to make present, and to be oneself present to that present. This art requires not so much a method, but an experimental and attentive ethic. This experimental ethic is an ethic of risking oneself and to think ‘in the presence of’ (the murmur of the idiot). This does not mean to give up the methodological neutrality of science. But it is about researchers also exposing themselves (so that another agreement may emerge) and leaving behind the protection that is offered by theory and method. We already heard how Stengers called experimental method a ritual of protection, but theory itself also works in that way. ‘For the power of a theory is to define an issue simply as a case that, as such, is unable to challenge it. That power prevents the representatives of the theory from giving the issue the power to oblige them to think. [...] the ethos associated with a researcher incapable of giving up the position of spokesperson of a theory or method supposed to make him or her a scientist, is not a matter of “either that or I stop being a scientist”, but rather of the *oikos* that favoured such a position (Stengers 2005: 998)’. Therefore, we have or can think, again, about another *oikos* or habitat, about another architecture for the university (then the one that fosters permanent mobilisation).

How, and by which artifice, which procedures, can we make that the murmuring of the idiot, the ‘there is something more important’, is taken into account (as the idiot neither objects nor proposes anything that counts). This question points towards an *art of giving* the issue around which we gather the *power* to activate thinking. In this context Stengers herself refers to the art of magic. We could talk about the magic of a moment, an event or a thing, every-thing that enables us to think and to feel differently. The art of magic can indeed be seen as the art of triggering events where a ‘becoming able to’ is at stake. This art, then, is one of invocation or even better: convocation: ‘a ritual of appealing to a presence’. But what is convoked does not say ‘what ought to be done, gives no answer as to a decision to take, offers no “prophetic” revelation.’ The efficacy of the ritual is the not the manifestation of something which might offer an answer, ‘but that of a presence that transforms each protagonist’s relations with his or her own knowledge, hopes, fears and memories, and allows the whole to generate what each one would have been unable to produce separately’ (Stengers 2005: 1002). The convocation, then, is what calls the world and the public into being. And the university, so we believe, is one of the places where this is happening, where this invocation and convocation is literally *finding (a) place*. And even more precisely, it is the university lecture room (and to some extent also the seminar room) which is the privileged place where it happens, or at least can happen, given that we are mastering the art of convocation and refuse the protections that immunise it (that prevents it from being an event and transforms it into a performance or spectacle). In other words, we believe – and it is a *belief*, that the habitat of the world-university should be one in which the public lecture is one of the main practices or procedures and the public lecture hall one of the main architectural devices to ‘make things public’. Moreover, related to the foregoing, one could maintain that, in essence, it is the ‘professors’ (who are doing research and studying) and their public (audience), and not experts, researchers or students, who are the inhabitants of this world university.

One could think, then, of the world-university as the place where we are not mobilised, but slowed down and provoked to think, and where this provocation finds (its) place (and the university as this place), the place where research is put on the table (made present) and its protection (by methods and theories) undone. It is, too, the place where teaching is stripped of its protections (by teaching methods, didactic devices) and is no longer instruction but becomes what we would like to call lecturing, i.e. precisely not teaching a lesson but making things public, reading them before an audience, exposing them (and being in the presence of), making them speak as it were, giving them a presence that calls a thinking public into existence. Making things public, then, is not only making them known, but making them present and inviting us to explore new ways of relating to them (i.e. to the matter and to ourselves). Let us elaborate this a bit further.

Lecturing and the Art of Making Things Present

Following what we just said, we maintain, that the public role of universities has not, at least not in the first place, to do with research (publishing research and informing the public) or with teaching (as transmission of knowledge), but mainly with public lecturing (in aulas, in the auditorium, in seminars), involving that particular form of public speech that is perhaps the most crucial task of a professor. According to this hypothesis one could say that a university certainly combines what is usually called three activities (research, teaching, public service) and that this combination finds (its) place and time in the public lecture in the lecture hall and that the three activities come together in the moment of the public speech of the professor. The public lecture is then also one of the most important places and times where the principal right of the university to speak out freely, even *the duty* to speak everything, out of love for the truth and for the world, is exercised and where the professor appears as a truth-teller or parrhesiast (Derrida 2001; Foucault 1989). The public lecture is where we can have the magic that Stengers is referring to, where the professor manifests *présence*.

In a certain way, we all know or have known this kind of lecture. It is the kind of lecture where we feel that something is happening, that this happening has something to do with this public speech, that something, and we underline 'some thing' (a text, a virus, a river), is at stake, is so to say, present, and that in this way also we ourselves and our relations to some things are at stake, that we, as audience or public, have to see and think for ourselves. These lectures are associated with a new consciousness, an overtaking of the self that extends one's 'own business, making things public business.

In these moments or lectures there is no expert informing us, (with or without nice PowerPoint), making us clear how things are, '[...] and therefore [...]' (which leaves us in our comfort), but we are confronted with a professor who is presenting something, making something present through which we ourselves are also at stake and which seems to have a meaning (even, or precisely, if we don't know which meaning precisely) for our own lives (our lives not only as part of the public, but also as a public, as people gathered around a thing, a matter, a business). It is a professor who, although speaking in his or her own name, is articulating in a certain sense that matter, giving it a voice and a presence and thus a power that makes us think. Therefore we could perhaps say that a professor is also something of a conduit, a witness and a diplomat, all these being 'roles' that have to do with 'making present', making something resound and circulate (voices of persons, things, happenings) in a way that is likely to cause us to have second thoughts and to force us to think about the possibility that our favourite (familiar, evident, or evidence-based) course of action may be an act of war.

To be a professor, then, means to profess, which is not simply to state something, to state how things are and to depict what is (Standish 2008). To profess comes from the Latin 'profero', which had different meanings: to 'present/offer oneself out of free will', 'to make appear', 'to suspend' (*ex professo* means public, openly, *professus* means what one has made public, *professae feminae* are public women). To profess is a mode of speech in which something is added to the world because it is an invocation/convocation of thought. It implies a declared commitment or attachment (Derrida 2001). To profess mathematics or pedagogics is not simply to teach mathematics or pedagogics, but it is engaging oneself through a public promise to dedicate or devote oneself (and to have been dedicated, devoted) to the matter (so that one feels obliged towards that matter – and the professor then appears also as an enthusiast, not an expert but a kind of amateur, that is, someone who, to a certain extent, 'loves' – or at least cares about – what he or she is presenting). To profess is committing oneself by 'declaring' something (and not only explaining), it is giving words and images (representations), but also giving one's word. The lecture is not just the place where knowledge is transmitted or communicated, but the place where as professor one is engaged in a truth telling in which one is present oneself. It is the place where one gives something to think, because one is also giving one's own thinking, demonstrating and showing one's own thought (and also in that sense it is a public speech). At that moment the research is exposed, and does no longer belong to any one, but to everyone, or to no one in particular. Speaking about the public role of the university and about the way it 'gathers' people, therefore, does not mean to invoke a kind of general interest (or emergency) as opposed to self-interest, but to invoke thought. It is about an issue or an affair which needs to be given the power to activate thinking. This again raises the question of the art (the ethic) and the habitat that constitutes the world-university. How to become a professor in the sense we mentioned, how to turn a virus or a river into a cause for thinking? How can one design the scene (through which art of staging) in such a way that thinking proceeds in the presence of the issue or thing? How can one conceive of the scene of lecturing for example, its architecture (the inside and outside of the habitat), its technology of speech, its material way of bringing together those concerned? How can one avoid that a lecture becomes a performance or a spectacle, that it remains a (re)-presentation? How can one construct a certain closeness (being close spatially and temporally), since being present means also to be close to, near to, next to, to be-with? We cannot further deal with these questions here, but one of the important things to start with is maybe to refuse and contest the student-centered and demand-driven teaching discourse that seems to have invaded our thinking about university education and joins the mobilising discourse of quality and excellence. Indeed, we could start by recalling Humboldt's

statement that the professor is not there for the student, nor the student for the professor, but that they are both there for the truth and have to be concerned with the matter (the thing).

Conclusion

We suggested that one start seeing the university, the world-university as the space of 'slowing down and thinking'. Put better: it is this 'slowing down and thinking' literally finding (its) place, not its only place, but one of its places. Of course one could say that this proposal just repeats a banal or trivial idea: slow down and think.²

However, as we tried to indicate, it is perhaps not so easy to make it happen and most certainly not under the actual conditions of extreme mobilisation with regard to the emergencies that are invoked in order to guarantee our survival, a mobilisation that functions in most cases as an immunisation.

Proposing a 'world-university' is a matter of contrasting the entrepreneurs that we are asked to be today (defined by interests, needs, emergencies) with those who 'stick their noses into what should be nobody's business'. The university in this sense could be one of the places where the issue of being-with (being in the presence of) and the question 'in what kind of world do we want to live' are maintained. In this way, by making things public, the university would complete or complicate matters in a way that entrepreneurs are possibly no longer able to assimilate. It would make the decisions not easier but, on the contrary, as difficult as possible. It would make the inhabitants of that university present in a mode that precludes simplification and that avoids *a priori* differentiation between what counts and what does not. The entrepreneurial version of the common world implies giving voice only to the clearly articulated needs, the clearly defined interests that have the means to mutually counterbalance one another. But the world has no representative, no one talks in its name, and it can therefore be at stake in no particular consultative procedure. Its mode of existence is reflected in all the artificial manners to be created, whose efficacy is to expose those who have to decide, to force them to feel the fright, to think 'in the presence of'. Therefore, the proposal for a world-university '[...] means opening the possibility of the idiot's murmuring being answered, not by the definition of 'what is most important' but by the slowing down without which there can be no creation. We must dare to say that the cosmic idiot's murmur is indifferent to the argument of urgency, as to any other. It does not deny it; it has only suspended the "and therefore [...]"', that we – so full of good will, so enterprising, always ready to talk on everyone's behalf – master (Stengers 2005: 1003)'.²

A university, then, which is not declining its public role, could establish some 'poles of attention', attention here being 'in the presence of' instead of (or at least alongside) the 'poles of excellence' that seem to be requested today in the

entrepreneurial university. Its academic community would not define itself by confessing to the same methodology or the same tribunal (the scientific tribunal, the quality tribunal), but appear as a community of people sharing an opening towards the present. Their speaking together would not be imitations of war by other means. It would be a community of curious people who are taking care of the present. What they share is not a language, but a habitat, an ethic and thoughts. They would not form schools into which people should become initiated (and whose entrance gates and hierarchies should be defended). Being part of this community would be edifying because the community invites one to test oneself, it invites one to 'experience' and it is itself a kind of laboratory of experience and of thought.

² For a different approach to slowness see also the proposals for 'slow science' by Pels (2003) & Boomkes (2008).

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