



From Crisis to the University of Utopia

Allegra

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We conclude this dark thematic week on University Crisis with our insistence to be also 'tongue in cheek'. We remind both ourselves and others: when policy making is so absurd that it pushes one to the brink of tears, humour becomes the best tool of resistance! With these words we introduce to you the [University of Muri](#), originally the fictional creation of critic and metaphysician Walter Benjamin and historian of Jewish mysticism and Philosopher Gershom Scholem.



In his essay 'Walter Benjamin and his Angel' Scholem writes,

“The guardian angel of the Kabbalah from the year 1921 has become the guardian angel of the University of Muri, in whose Transactions a “philosopher” and a “kabbalist”- who in a traditional sense were neither a philosopher nor a kabbalist- made the traditional university and its scholars the object of their derision.”

While a complete course offering was never really available, Scholem reports that he and Benjamin mutually agreed to put Robert Eisler in charge of a course titled, ‘Ladies’ coats and Beach Cabanas in light of the History of Religion’. Despite of this cavalier air, Muri was accompanied also by some serious thinking. George Steiner recalls:

“In the winter of 1972/73 I had the privilege of sharing the guesthouse of the University of Zürich with Gershom Scholem. Gershom Scholem also loved to have his meals at the Schweizerhof Hotel in Bern. He took me to the very table where he and Walter were always together and where, at the end of World War I, they drew up the statutes, examination programme, seminar programme, of an imaginary satiric, comical university called Muri, it’s a suburb of Bern, the Universität Muri.

And one night Scholem said, ‘let’s sit down and do the prerequisites for any student wanting to enter a seminar on Benjamin. What are the prerequisites before we admit him to our imaginary seminar?’ The game turned very serious, as such games do, and we decided together on twelve areas before you can read a word of Walter Benjamin, and the figure 12 is of course not innocent for a Judaic thinker and kabbalist. It is almost a predestined number.”

Later University of Muri was shut down by Benjamin and Scholem a number of times it is, yet our reports suggest that it is still “open.” Although we have failed to locate the University on any physical map, we have found traces of [its virtual](#)



[existence](#) with the sub-heading of 'Aide Poétique Internationale'. According to its staff pages the University promotes "a poetic approach to learning and teaching through a broad range of courses and workshops ran by specialists and experts in the art of love." It further proclaims that all of its "staff is polyglot and has received intense inter-picnique training."

Its [selection of courses](#) suggests that inter-picnique training has been highly successful: prospective students can look forward to expert takes on 'Multiculturalism and Steampunk', 'The aesthetics and poetics of virtue among British binge drinkers' as well as a particular Allegra favourite 'Mating practices among Elvis impersonators'. (We encourage an equivalent course on [Zizek impersonators](#)).

The University has recently held [a series of exciting talks](#), and it is linked to a range of other interesting educational programs, including [The University of Strategic Optimism](#) and [The Department of Omnishambles](#), both of which undoubtedly offer an ['Introduction to The Temporary Autonomous Zone, Ontological Anarchy and Poetic Terrorism'](#).

More practice oriented students will undoubtedly enjoy the courses "'Oh, Look, a Chicken!' Embracing Distraction as a Way of Knowing', 'Things That Go Bump in the Night', 'Tightwaddery, or the Good Life on a Dollar a Day' and 'Goldberg's Canon: Makin' Whoopi' (and yes, [the latter four are actual university courses](#), in case you wonder). And if these fail to wet your appetite, there is also a link to the [random course generator](#) with an endless range of course topics to choose from (why not even use it yourself as you plan your courses for the next semester)!

So despair no more! Universities as we know them may well be in crises, even become destitute, but fortunately there will always be University of Muri! Sure, it has no funds to pay its staff, but soon this will barely distinguish it from most 'real' universities anyway. Yet, one very tangible difference shall remain: at the University of Muri you will never need to preoccupy yourself with mundane, meaningless bureaucracy, but instead you can allow your creative spirits to



flourish!

SEE Y'ALL THERE SOON!

This post was first published on 19 September 2014.