

Professional Elites in "Classless" Societies
(from Marx to Debord)

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Professional Elites in “Classless” Societies (from Marx to Debord)

Abstract

Modern European identity has been forged in class struggles between the French revolution and fall of the Berlin Wall, which fell twice. Once, with the rest of the city in May 1945, when a national socialist alternative to a modernizing mix of parliamentary democracy and market economy crumbled after the hot WWII, and second time in November 1989, when a state socialist alternative crumbled after the Cold War. At the same time working class in the USA abandoned trade unions and class struggle buying shares, dreaming of upward social mobility within a middle class show and re-enchanting consumer lives in Las Vegas and Disneyland. Meanwhile, American intellectuals servicing the US power elite dismiss European elites as “Euroweenies” unable to stand up for “the West” against “the rest” of the world. Are they right? Have Europeans ungratefully forgotten the US support in times of two world wars? Aren’t European professional elites able to convince the rest of citizens about advantages of western solidarity in view of terrorist threats? Are the identities of the US and European professional elites tightly linked or loosely coupled? Are European elites more successful in preventing masses from bowling alone?

Historically speaking, the US and European elites are tightly linked. The role of professional elites in collective identifying processes underwent a dramatic change both in Europe and in the USA. Marx conceptualised class struggle as a historical drama, imposed on societies by the evolution of economy and a revolution of political counter-elites. Hans Castorp, of Thomas Mann’s “Magic Mountain”, hesitated between a liberal humanist Settembrini and an authoritarian Bolshevik-Jesuit-proto-Nazi Naptha. He hesitated between a clausewitzian war for national community and machiavellian highjacking of a revolutionary chance by class party. Finally, he chose for a more spectacular and emotionally appealing national war effort, and for the third way, with less ideological properties. His choice was individual (reflecting parallel role of Kafka in making Europeans distrustful of formal organizations) and aesthetic (hence the role of the dadaists, situationists and Debord in making Europeans distrustful of the organized aesthetization of daily experience). Debord, writing after the visual experience of aesthetization policies in Hitler’s Germany, Stalin’s Russia, and the USA before Vietnam war, predicted the world of seamless multimedia (he would have seen reporting on civil war in former Yugoslavia by producing images resembling Caravaggio or Manet as a confirmation of his predictions). He predicted the world, in which professional elites exempt themselves from class struggle by claiming aesthetic professionalism. The career of the professional photographer and film director, Leni Riefenstahl, is a case in point. Starting as Hitler’s protégé, she ended up as a protégé of the US feminists, who forgave her flirting with evil and praised her professional skills as superior to those of her male counterparts. Still, she

has not been invited to Berlin's love parade yet, nor was she graced with membership in any academy of sciences, arts and letters. .

Her fate is important to understand dynamics of professional elite development in Europe and in the USA. As Tom Wolfe has rightly noted in "From Bauhaus to Our House", the rise of Hitler and Stalin led to one of the strangest chapters in history of European elites. Artistic and architectural avant-garde, setting out to advance social revolution and build better houses for working class in Berlin or Vienna, fled to the USA and started designing corporate headquarters for large US corporations in Chicago or New York. When their design returned to Europe, it reinforced audiovisual, cultural americanization, and tacit acceptance of markets and parliaments, not social revolution. When professional management education entered Europe, it was shaped by the US benchmarks, and not by European traditions of elite professional education (president George W. Bush has even allegedly criticized the French for not having a word for "entrepreneur" in their language). Duchamp and Warhol became influential in shaping European artistic elites after their success in the USA. On the other hand, when George Ritzer develops a sociological thesis that McDonald's restaurant reveals the most recent form of rationalization of economic activities, he points out to the role of Max Weber in understanding rationalizing organization, and when he analyses shopping malls and casinos – he quotes Debord. Should we draw the conclusion that professional elites are linked with a seamless web of mutual borrowings and cultural export-import activities? Or should we say that they are loosely coupled and select elements of each other's legacy as it suits them, fighting the fragmentation of individual experience in a social landscape partitioned between professional organizations?

Contemporary European university is a case (of improvised search for a networked silicon valley) in point (about institutional evolution of knowledge). Professional elites cannot emerge without professional academic support at all times. Contemporary university is an organizational hybrid based on the one hand on the European legacy of participative organizational democracy and on the other on the US-inspired vision of an entrepreneurial social agent between various stakeholders – governments, corporations, citizens, employees, students-clients, etc. It begins to resemble a loosely - coupled system of networks and hierarchies, which continues to provide professional elites (more diplomas every day keeps class struggle away) and produces "content" for world wide webs and mobile phones of continuous telecommunications. Didn't a French novelist living in Ireland, Michel Houellebecq, envision western failure to keep the world safe for tourism before World Trade Center was struck?

Motto

"Education is useless because it leads us away from idealism. Among the humanists of the Renaissance and right down onto the present day, it is not really about inculcating learning or knowledge but rather about breeding social distinction. It serves elites not the truth. The careerism of today's students and the transformation of the universities into "knowledge factories" only make explicit the crude calculations of ambition that have always served to uphold most subtle refinements of thought. Education is a masquerade of power, a mechanism of power, and a means to power; beyond that, it is useless. As Dr Timothy Leary taught us, if you really want to learn

something, one of the first steps you must take is to drop out.”(Daniel Cottom, *Why Education Is Useless*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 2003, p.3)

1. From Venice to Davos: birthplaces of European identities

European identities have emerged in the wake of large scale processes, long term developments and in-depth transformations of social groups, bonds, clusters, ties, classes, relations and societies. Would anyone recognize ancient Roman *mare nostrum* in a network of commercial and military control exercised by the Venetian Republic in the Mediterranean Sea? No matter how massive, violent, disruptive and extensive these processes had been, they were registered in common traditions, reproduced in educational canons and introduced into imagined communities by individual intellectuals – poets, thinkers, philosophers, painters, novelists. An Italian painter, Caneletto, whose cityscapes of Venice and Warsaw help us reconstruct and restore palaces in both cities, is a case in point. His visual testimony helps us preserve both cities’ identities. Reconstructing stages of this European self-identizing, we are drawn towards these “eurohumanists” (a pleonasm – since “humanism” is by historical definition an invention of European professional intellectuals in late Middle Ages), who had dreamt visions of our identities haunting us until today. One such reconstruction can begin in Venice, where a writer, born in a decaying patrician family of Lübeck, has situated his novella, “Death in Venice”. This novella’s tragic vision has haunted her author, and eventually led Thomas Mann, one of the most important representatives of the European humanities of the past century, to situate his follow-up novel on Swiss mountain tops – in a sanatorium in Davos. Having decided to write a lighter version of a tragic novella set in Venice, and having replaced an aging Gustav von Aschenbach (lusting for a young Polish boy, Tadzio) with a young Hans Castorp (lusting for an experienced Russian woman Claudia Chauchat), Mann worked for six years – 1918 to 1924 – on what became his master novel on the role of the humanities in the formation of the new European elites, “The Magic Mountain”. The entire action of this novel takes place in Davos, perhaps in the same hotels and sanatoria, in which political and economic leaders of the world meet a century later. The protagonist of the novel, Hans Castorp, has taken a sabbatical from a real life, from a post - 1815 Europe of dominant nation states about to explode in World War I. This young German engineer from a middle-class family receives a crash course in the European humanist tradition from an Italian inmate of the sanatorium, Mr Settembrini. According to some critics, an Italian philosopher, sociologist and historian, Benedetto Croce, became a model for this character(1). He is also receiving an equally brief introduction to the totalitarian temptation from a Galician Jewish Jesuit, a Mr Naphta. Again, according to some critics, this character was based on a figure of a Hungarian Marxist philosopher writing in German, a sociologist, a literary scholar and a communist leader, Gyorgy Lukacs(2). Settembrini stood for the humanist tradition of the Renaissance, for the rational project of Enlightenment and for the idealist struggle to improve individual fate by ameliorating living and working conditions of broad masses. He has been involved in an international research project devoted to the “sociology of suffering”. In other words, he stood for liberalism, democracy and market economy. Naphta stood for the romantic cult of the irrational (found either in class, race, nation or religion), for the radical class division between those equal and those more equal than the others (managerialism for the inner party’s top functionaries), and for a scientist cult of

technological utility in an emergent elite's naked struggle for power. In other words, he stood for totalitarianism.

For whose soul are they competing, whose identity do they want to forge? They want to influence the formation of the European elites in all walks of life. Settembrini with classics and compassion, Naphta with opportunist ideologies and ruthless will to power. Settembrini stands for abstract justice and concrete fairness, but does not excel in logistics. Naphta stands for cool efficiency and disregard for human suffering.

Hans Castorp is a member of a professional elite in a society, which is about to face a world war and in its wake two temptations to employ terror on a large scale. In order to manage a transition towards a classless society, the communists and the fascists are ready to offer him a chance of jumping their bandwagons. He is also free to take an escapist route and to become a permanent patient of a Swiss sanatorium, with tuberculosis as an alibi for failure to choose and act. Mann makes Castorp choose. His protagonist ultimately enlists in the army and goes off to the trenches of World War I. The most bloody chapters in Settembrini's planned multi-volume edition of the sociology of suffering are about to be written. When writing this novel, Mann could not have known about the future of the communist and fascist threats to Europe, but it is clear that he had correctly realized the main ideological options open to his protagonist. Castorp stood for Europe's future managers - those members of its upper middle class, who were groomed to manage European economic, political and social affairs. In those pre-MBA times they had to be educated as professionals – engineers, lawyers, teachers, priests. The main ideological options open to “euromanagers” were the liberal versus the communist and the national socialist ones. These professionals who embraced the liberal alternative, as closest to their middle-class identities, and ideological sympathies, were least militant (at least less so than their communist or nazi counterparts), but even they had eventually to take up arms against both threats. A decade after publishing “The Magic Mountain” Thomas Mann left Europe, about to be plunged into an even more destructive world war, heading towards the United States. After WWII, his son Golo Mann returned to Europe in the uniform of the United States Army. His son's task was to help manage occupied Germany, so that the latter could recover from the devastation brought about by the national socialism, “denazify” and become a reliable partner of the organizational forms of western alliance. The latter, symbolized by the European Union of Coal and Steel and by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, were founded in order to prevent or slow down the expected communist invasion of western Europe.

Invasion of central and eastern Europe in the last phase of WWII could not have been prevented and professional elites east of Elbe had no choice – they had to accept the Naphtas and reject the Settembrinis. This difference in the fate of a middle class professional must be kept in mind. While the western middle class either flirted with communist parties or feared communist takeover, the central and eastern European middle class tasted the bitter fruit of the inability of “the West” to prevent the expansion of the Soviet domination. Totalitarian communist control in its Russian Soviet version has been extended over all social processes and institutions of the Polish, Czech, Hungarian, Slovak, Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian societies. Having recovered their nation-states after WWI, after WWII professional elites of these countries had to collaborate in turning them into cogs in the Soviet machine. The communist parties monopolized access routes to all social elites (thus turning Pareto's

circulation of the elites into a tightly run one party show), calling their control a true democratization of upward social mobility. In order to legitimise this claim, they started printing Settembrinis (and Manns) in large cheap editions for the masses. “Captive minds” of professional elites found that Marxism is an excellent opium for intellectuals and went along with their new identities of “engineers of human souls”, trying to contribute to historical transformations of class societies into classless ones.(3) They pretended to have seen the future and to have known that it worked.

The fall of the national socialist Third Reich in 1945 has thus led to a new distribution of chances for members of professional elites in Europe. These Castorps, who found themselves west of Elbe, were free to choose liberal option, enjoy Marshall plan and oppose the communist threat. They have also started a slow countdown towards the unification of Europe as a single market and a multicultural democracy. Those Castorps, who had been caught east of Elbe, were forced to choose the communist option, enjoy the imagined community of global proletariat and work to expand the classless society, temporarily under supervision of the “core comrades” and their special services. They have also been forced into a single state market and into militarised one-party states following Moscow as a new version of the “third Rome”. This division of Europe lasted from 1945 till 1989, when the Berlin Wall was finally broken down by citizens of the self-destructing state, German Democratic Republic. The fall of the Berlin Wall precipitated a peaceful breakdown of the Soviet Union and a final disappearance of the communist alternative from Europe.

In 1995, speaking in the Dutch parliament celebrating the 50th anniversary of the defeat of nazi Germany and the end of WWII, the Polish novelist, Andrzej Szczypiorski (invited on this occasion by the royal prince consort, German Klaus von Amsberg married to queen Beatrix Oranje-Nassau of the Netherlands) said that Europe’s ability to recover depends on her roots; Greek philosophy, Roman law and Christian religion. These roots have been common for the Dutch and the Poles, for the Germans and the Czechs, for the French and for the Hungarians (but not for Russians, who missed Roman law, nor for the Turks, who missed both Roman law and Christian religion). He was expressing a belief shared by the European intellectual and political elites that eastward expansion of the European Union confirmed Settembrini’s ultimate victory over Naphta, the victory of the classical European heritage and liberal strategy of modernization and inclusion over the totalitarian temptations of late modernity. Reading Latin and Greek authors, acknowledging Christian values even in their secularised, post-Enlightenment form recovered some of its glamour in the elitist education of Europeans. Soon afterwards, Davos in Switzerland became the seat of international conferences of world economic, political and intellectual elites (the “Davos Forum”, where Bill Gates meets Anthony Giddens and Alan Greenspan talks to Kofi Annan). Most of similar platforms and networks are culturally dominated by “the West” (i.e. Europe and the USA). A large number of such forums, conferences, congresses and global summits started emerging as a result of converging views of the US and European elites on the necessity to develop new instruments and institutions of global governance in the post-Cold War period. None of them has been able to work out an institutional framework upgrading or replacing the United Nations Organization.

A slow development and gradual enlargement of the European Union and a rapid breakdown of the communist system meant that Europe’s professional elites, political,

cultural and economic, found themselves in a different situation from the one experienced by the political and cultural elites in the USA. Their starting point was low (prevention of disruptive interstate conflicts in western Europe, defense against credible Soviet threat) and expectations moderate (no major war between Germany and France, no major Soviet invasion behind the “iron curtain”). The level of expectations of the US elites was much higher. Their country has been a favourite destination of world immigrants for the past two hundred years. Their army has been the most important shield against both nazi and communist military threats. Their living standards advertised by the Hollywood films kept the hopes of upward mobility alive among the masses of the world.

Prior to and during WWII, a considerable number of individuals from Europe’s professional elites immigrated to the United States of America, thus bringing about a veritable brain-drain for Europe and a parallel brain-fall for the USA. Thomas Mann left Germany for Switzerland and finally arrived in the USA, where he had written “Doctor Faustus”. Vladimir Nabokov left Russia for Germany and finally arrived in the USA, where he had published “Lolita”. Mies van der Rohe went to construct high-rise corporate headquarters in Chicago and left Berlin housing projects for the working class unfinished. Marcel Duchamp went to the USA to inspire avant-gardes, and his late follower, Andy Warhol returned the favour crossing the Atlantic in the opposite direction and dictating terms of avantgarde trade (influenced by the banality of mass-reproduced kitsch) to the European artists.(4) Max Horkheimer and Theodore Adorno left Frankfurt am Main for Paris and finally arrived in the USA, where they had published “The Authoritarian Personality” and “The Dialectics of Enlightenment”. They have exerted influence on the way humanities have been conceived of, developed and taught in the United States, and when they returned to Europe, their influence went hand in hand with the influence of the US academic centers (supported by CIA and large US foundations). After WWII and during the whole Cold War, Europe became a net importer of cultural and academic ideas. Karl Popper, who left Vienna for New Zealand and finally arrived in London, never making it to the USA, lost a decisive struggle for the soul of science to the historian of science from Harvard university in the USA, Thomas Kuhn.(5) Habermas, while continuing the critique of the Enlightenment project started by Adorno and Horkheimer, was clearly borrowing from Talcott Parsons. Nobel prizes in literature went increasingly often to the US authors and Nobel prizes in science (economics, physics or biology) went predominantly to researchers working in the USA. During the entire Cold War period Europeans have been importing ideas from the USA. Many of these ideas had previously been influenced by earlier European exports, but acquired a distinctly “American” flavour. To put it in a nutshell: Europe exported Werner von Braun in 1945 – and imported cruise missiles and joint strike fighters ever since. It has exported Freudian, Jungian and Reichian psychoanalysis and imported therapists ever since. It has exported Humboldtian model of a university and imported MBA programs ever since. It has exported expertise in cracking the code of Enigma and imported the products of IBM or Microsoft. Professional elites in the USA had thus a high starting point, an experience with collecting global payoffs and their expectations ran high. Therefore they have responded differently to the war in Iraq and to the terrorist threats. European professional elites were less self-confident, thus their members opted for low-key, long-term, non-violent and legalistic sanctions, while the US professional elites, much more self-assured, looked for more flexible and less constrained options - fit to serve the interests of the only remaining military

and economic superpower. In other words, European elites did not want to rock the boat of the United Nations Organization (based on post WWII consensus), while the US elites wanted to turn it around (based on a post Cold War balance of power) and employ it in making the world safe for democracy even if some non-democratic member states opposed it.

European hesitation results from an extremely ambiguous evaluation of the heritage of Enlightenment. European unification has been and still is an unfinished project. Transforming political shape of the EU and enlarging it eastwards are ongoing, increasingly complex processes, some outcomes of which are difficult to predict. Cold War is a finished project. Its outcome is already known. There is only one winner. Enlightenment, however, or rather its continuation with other means, is not a finished project. Settembrini has defeated Naphta in a struggle for souls of young professionals, but it took two world wars and a half-century long cold war to achieve this end. Is the price not too high? Is inclusion of further European states in the European Union a sufficient counterbalance to leaving population of large countries in Africa or Asia below subsistence levels? Is a purely formal loyalty to the letter of the law (*Verfassungspatriotismus*) a sufficient replacement for a religious faith in core Christian values (even if the latter have been secularised during the Enlightenment) in keeping social trust and solidarity with one's community alive? Inability to answer such questions in an unambiguous way made European elites much more sceptical about their chances of reducing human suffering and improving living conditions on a global scale. Moreover, European professionals (and some academics in the USA – for instance Immanuel Wallerstein influenced by “*ecole des annales*”) in general and Fernand Braudel in particular) are increasingly uncertain if masses can sustain their hopes for a better life and continue supporting the liberal – “third” way of managing contemporary societies. Classless societies promised by communists and nazis never materialized, but hidden injuries of class divisions did not disappear in market democracies either. Every step towards the consensus is paid for by articulation of a growing number of differences. Political parties realize that they are taking risks, inventing third ways and become empty shells between successive parliamentary elections. It looks like Settembrini has won, but at a price of taking over some of Naphta's ideological flexibility and opportunism. In a recent debate in the European parliament a new discussion erupted between those, who were for the secularised preamble to the new Constitution of the EU, and those, who would like to see the Christian roots of European culture more openly and unambiguously acknowledged. Majority voted for the secularised, Enlightenment-based and not Bible-based version. It makes European Union more flexible, for instance with respect to the Turkish secular elites aspiring to EU membership. But has this flexibility not been paid for by glossing over a significant component of the European heritage?

Political and military activities after 11/9 have not yet developed into a post-Enlightenment, large-scale project capable of motivating a sustained effort of complex societies, although all three complex interventions – in Kosovo, Afghanistan and Iraq led to complex international and interorganizational, networked projects. Military interventions in all three – Kosovo and Afghanistan (with an UNO alibi) and Iraq (without one) indicate a clear loss of traditional authority of the nation state and her institutional networks – but do they also signal new configurations of both? Hans Castorp hesitated if he should enlist in the armies marching towards the first world

war. His present day equivalents hesitate if they should start arming for the unknown wars of the future and forging alliances to fight them.

Where does it lead the present western elites, both the over-confident ones from the USA and under-confident ones from Europe? For the time being, all we know is that European nation-states have survived the XXth century in a much weakened form, while the non-national (but multinational) USA have developed a new brand of a global quasi-empire. Ironically enough, one of the first theoretical conceptualisation of this “empire” has been provided by a duo of an European leftist radical serving a prison sentence in Italy – Antonio Negri and his American colleague Michael Hardt in the bastion of the US academia – Harvard University. European nation-states have lost their globalization game after WWII (with gradual loss of the British, Dutch, French and Portuguese colonies). They have also been attacked on their own soil. First, they have been hijacked by home-grown terrorists earlier than the USA have been hit by the imported ones. In 1917 the Bolshevik terrorists hijacked the state of Russia and used its military power to terrorize the rest of Europe and the world. The communist power elites lost power as a result of a number of international pressures from the Cold War enemies (Reagan’s “star wars” are a case in point) and domestic spontaneous movements within enslaved societies (the Polish independent trade union “Solidarity” is a significant example of these), but not before it occupied half of the continent and threatened the other half. In 1933 the nazi terrorists hijacked the state of Germany and re-built its military power occupying almost entire Europe and terrorizing the rest of the world. They lost power as a result of a decisive military defeat on all fronts. Castorp started listening to Settembrini after two hot wars and one cold one. Davos acquired a new meaning on a world map. A liberal dream of Settembrini, a dream of a sustainable parliamentary democracy (freedom) with a robust market economy (welfare) and humanist ideologies (fairness), turned out to require much more governance, management, imagination (and risky compromises) plus military luck (the Cuban missile crisis, the blockade of Berlin) than most liberal thinkers were willing to admit. Most importantly, much, much more than a simple neo-liberal preaching a doctrine of privatisation, free markets and globalization (with an invisible hand and rational individual choices) would like us to believe. Again, Settembrini’s impossible dream (in Mann’s novel he never completes his contribution to the sociology of suffering) came true; the western idea of universal human rights has emerged in the last period of the Cold War, precipitated its end (the role of Helsinki Human Rights Watch committees) and survived it. It did, but at a price of acknowledging its euro-centrism as a secularised form of religious fundamentalism:

“European culture of the nineteenth century indeed considered itself as the incarnation of the universal. Pre-modern Europe held on to Christianity’s conception of the universal being comprehensible only to God, who can choose to convey it to humans through irrational events, such as miracles, or by giving it a particular body, such as the incarnation of god in Jesus. The Enlightenment sought to replace God with universal reason.”(6)

By replacing God with universal Reason, Europeans reshuffled their traditional cards and provided a new reading of the classics, especially of the Greek philosophers, who acquired new footnotes.

2. Footnotes to Plato or dynamics of European identization.

The prototype of “The Magic Mountain’s” Settembrini, Benedetto Croce, has dedicated his “History of Europe in the XIXth Century” to Thomas Mann. In a preface to this study of national liberation movements in Europe partitioned among member states of the victorious anti-Napoleonic coalition, Croce writes about the ideal of freedom. He claims that in spite of repressions against revolutionary slogans of “liberty, equality, fraternity”, the light of liberty spontaneously appeared on the horizon leading Italian, German, Polish, Belgian and Greek insurgents against Europe’s establishments after the Congress of Vienna in 1815. This light of the idea of freedom, writes Croce, has been preserved already in Greek and Roman poetry, rhetoric, drama, in short in the classical tradition, which young members of potential counter-elites encountered in their gymnasia and lycea (mid-level schools with classical history and languages). He adds that the idea of individual freedom has been present in all three components of the European heritage, in the Greek ideal of polis expressed by Plato and Aristotle, in the Roman tradition of civilizing the barbarians by granting them citizenship (and legal rights to liberty and property), and in Christian tradition (both in its original struggle against imperial power and in the Protestant rebellion of Dutch and Flemish cities). He concludes his preface by stating that the core of the liberal doctrine is manifested in an approach to the history of human societies as a history of freedom, linked to the liberal ideal of individual freedom as an ethical ideal (“spiritual freedom of a historically concrete individual”). Does it mean that he believes in the continuation of the project of Enlightenment after the fall of Napoleon – not by the victorious nation-states but by emergent national liberation movements (Cavour) or national unification movements (Bismarck)? And should we not be puzzled that a contemporary Nobel prize winner in economics, Amartya Sen, writes about problems of hunger and birth control in China and India equating development with freedom (of all individuals, including the poor and the female) and freedom (to discuss publicly the allocation of scarce resources) with development? Should we consider Amartya Sen a new reincarnation of Mann’s Settembrini?

In 1942 Croce wrote in his monthly - “La Critica”- an article entitled “Perche non possiamo non dirci Cristiani” (Why we cannot claim that we are not Christians). He realized that the Enlightenment project has been based on a replacement of God with universal reason. However, even when European thinkers had started to develop their secular theories of a rationally constructed society, of a proper and just life, of fair social relations and of the meaning and direction of history, they were bound to discover, to quote Alfred North Whitehead, that they are busy writing “footnotes to Plato” (and to Aristotle, to pre-socratics or, as Foucault had recently demonstrated, also to St. Agustin and Origen). If the Enlightenment project was based on a secularised version of Revelation (with the Light of Reason replacing the light of divine revelation), then the project of a more just, fair, egalitarian and free society owes much to the Greek roots of the European culture. Should we conjecture, after Croce’s son in law, that had he lived today, he would have written “Perche non possiamo non dirci Europei” (Why we cannot claim that we are not European)?(7)

The return to the Greeks has already happened twice before the industrial revolution, which transformed Europe in the second half of the XIXth century and the beginning of the XXth, forcing Europeans to re-examine their concepts of almost everything. They had to study changing social forms (Marx, Weber), circulation of elites (Pareto,

Michels), cultural transformations (Durkheim, Simmel), large-scale migrations (Znaniiecki, Thomas), clashes of cultures (Frazer, Malinowski), development of personalities (Freud, Pavlov), etc. Generally speaking, at the turn of the century European professionals undertook a re-engineering of the academic production of knowledge. In a sense they were busy with an “industrialization” of academic research and education. Again, the ancients played an important role in this process.

The return to the ancient Greeks (and Romans) had happened for the first time after the Reconquista of the Iberian peninsula from the Moors. Islamic Arab intellectuals (whose level of sophistication and learning far surpassed the European average of the time) have preserved many ancient Greek and Roman texts, which otherwise would have been lost to the European professional elites (as if compensating for the burning of the great library of Alexandria). The medieval class of professional intellectuals in Europe – monks and priests, i.e. members of clergy enjoying standard education and exemption from warfare, commerce and physical work – had profited immensely from the acquisition of these war trophies. Studying ancient authors helped shape both a medieval university and a variety of more popular educational standards for a broader strata of – mostly urban - population. Both Erasmus of Rotterdam, who started applying professional standards to social critique (“In Praise of Folly”) and personified a new mobility of European intellectuals, and his Italian colleague, Paccioli, who had introduced the double entry commercial book-keeping and had put his invention in hands of venture capitalists in Italian city-states, were monks, members of a community of practice sharing some professional standards, and inventing new uses for their profession. While they were exceptionally well educated and talented, the trickle-down effects of the enlargement of educational system was also taking place. Shakespeare, while not a monk, nor a member of a learned order, could participate in the Renaissance, could accomplish a cultural pilgrimage to Italy with his wealthy sponsor. He did so, because from his provincial school he carried with him “little Latin and less Greek”. Enough, however, to know how to find themes for his tragedies in ancient historians, to write about Coriolanus, Cleopatra and Julius Cesar.. Shakespeare’s monarch, upon ascending to the English throne, spoke for three hours in fluent Latin to her courtiers and counsellors, thus establishing her credentials as a young woman not only of iron political will, but also of considerable learning. Universities in Salamanca or Bologna, Cracow or Paris, Prague or Tübingen expanded and flourished – thus paving the way for the next European return to the classics – the Renaissance. It is hard to underestimate the role of this second “return to the ancients” in European culture. Suffice it to say that it introduced the classics – Greek and Latin philosophers, politicians, dramatists, historians, poets, orators and rhetoricians – into popular education and triggered a process of accelerated individualization, resulting, among others, in the breakdown of some of the constraints on intellectual, political, economic and religious entrepreneurship.(8) A historical cluster of a technological invention of print, of a religious invention of the protestant Reformation, of an economic invention of maritime commercial exploration and of a social invention of individuality moved a complex dynamic system of European transformations and global expansion. This cluster proved to be much more lasting and dynamic than the ones moving a Chinese or an Arab exploration and commercial exploitation of intercontinental trade routes.

When European professionals started redefining knowledge production in the beginning of the industrialization of academic knowledge production, which

continued throughout the entire XXth century and did not stop in the XXIst, they had also referred to the classics as the founders of the humanities. Their common educational background allowed them to translate the ancient ideals into paradigms guiding modern search for pragmatically applicable knowledge. Let us take an example of Max Weber of as the author of “Science as a Vocation”:

“The goal of knowledge is not *techne*, but the ancient form of *phronesis* (moral knowledge) and *prudentia* (prudence). It represents an ethic of moral responsibility and an integration of reason and virtue, passion and responsibility, and ethics and moderation towards the creation of a kind of individual who possesses a rational inner core of spiritual values and virtue. Economics (and thus also sociology) is a way of life and moral science that enhances our ability of developing an inner personality and moral imperative with a strong sense of identity, freedom and integrated purpose of life; it produces an academic calling... Weber’s early sociology and economics have their roots in an Aristotelian theory of ethics and politics.”(9)

Weber was not exceptional in believing that the ancients had defined our ethical and epistemological horizons, that we are, in a sense, always writing footnotes to Plato, always trying to break free from the iron cage of the social division of labour, from the technocratic mousetraps of instrumental rationality Thomas Mann(10) believed in the power of the founding myths of European culture (Greek, Christian, and Germanic) transmitted because of the humanist education (which he had praised in an expose “*Humaniora und Humanismus*”, presented in Budapest at the session of Commission Internationale de Cooperation Intellectuelle on June 9, 1936). Edmund Husserl, who fought against neopositivists and utilitarians because of their highjacking of the project of Enlightenment in the name of “*scientism*”, believed that philosophers, as carriers of this ancient tradition, are “*functionaries of mankind*” (and promptly said so in the last international congress he had attended in Prague, the last one he could attend before the nazis, hailed by his best student, Heidegger, deprived him of his chair). Settembrini’s prototype, Croce, believed in long-term viability of the liberal project. All of them were warning against instrumental rationality and against the coming of a well-rounded other-directed man without properties. Most of them perceived the American culture as a mass culture of a society obsessed with consumption.

None of them had foreseen two twists in the tale of footnotes to Plato; a parallel criticism of Plato as an enemy of an open society (and a propagator of a perfect state run by a professional philosopher-king) in Europe and a development of a society of conspicuous consumption as a society of the mass spectacle (made possible, successively, by illustrated press, radio, films, television and the web) as a remedy against radical social movements (of the nazi or communist sort) in the United States of America.

On September 8, 1933, Thomas Mann commented on Hitler’s latest speech about culture and cultural policies. He has coolly dismissed them as half-baked clichés worthy of a slightly retarded pupil of grammar school and noticed that none of the great political leaders – Napoleon or Bismarck – ever dared to pose as a teacher of mankind. Why did Hitler dare to impose his limited and extremely biased vision of culture on a civilized society while both superior politicians did not? The answer, according to Mann, is to be found in the totalitarian state, which wants to control

everything, including cultural consumption and civilized aspirations of all citizens. Then, quoting Plato, he adds that Plato's republic had also been a total state ruled by philosophers-kings. However, this is a modern state with all mass media at its disposal and it is ruled by a single unqualified philosopher – a simple craftsman (painter of the interiors) brought suddenly to power. This “nonentity” mistakes his helpless agitation for a profound vision. Mann closes the day's entry with a comparison of Hitler's crude tirade to a tactful approach of the first president of the Weimar Republic, Friedrich Ebert, to the matters of culture. What thus saves Plato from being blacklisted as a pioneer of a totalitarian state is the nature of his republic. It has not yet become a total state penetrating all walks of individual life and thought, perhaps due to the lack of technologically perfected media of such control. The second redeeming social grace of Plato's ideal republic is the fact that qualified philosophers do not leave a single *führer* as the sole authority in all matters of life, death and thinking but share their professional expertise with him as equals, not as humble subjects. Where Mann was lenient, Popper was much more critical. He saw Plato as a dangerous essentialist and a theoretician of a totalitarian state. Essentialism and historicism (or an idea that a single philosophical system is capable of deciphering the “hidden essence” of history) spelled disaster, especially when romanticized by German idealist philosophers. Plato's aristocratic elitism and ethical collectivism completed Popperian list of negative starting points. According to sir Karl Popper, aristocratic elitism made Plato insensitive to suffering of a simple man and ethical collectivism made him subject individual well being to a collective goal (determined by a single leader and imposed on a society, in which dissent was silenced in the name of the state and the will of all). Hitler's and Stalin's dictatorships came about as a result of an unfolding of a dangerous anti-liberal tradition undermining the open society – a tradition which runs from Plato (“there is an essence of being which can be discovered”) through Hegel (“understanding history means discovering the essence of being” to Marx (“understanding history means decoding class struggles which had shaped it”). What about Hitler? Well, after all, nazis were national *socialists*, introduced the word “worker's” into their party's name and established the 1st of May as a national holiday in Germany. They have found their core belief in racial rather than class essence, but this was a minor ideological point compared to the analogies, which linked them to their Soviet contemporaries.

The second footnote to Plato has less to do with his vision of the perfect state expressed in “The Republic” and more with Plato's epistemology (though it has also been presented in the same work, namely in book VII). One of the most beautiful and vivid metaphors Plato used in order to describe the imperfect nature of sensory information about the world was a comparison of our sensory data to scarce portions of visual and audio “food” meted out to prisoners locked in a cave. Data perceived with our senses are shadows on the wall of a cave. Prisoners, who stand for all of us, add their own intellectual activity to make sense of these strange forms. However, these are guesses, conjectures open to refutations. We remain, forever in fact, prisoners of distorted, imperfect starting points in our cognition. We do not see reality in her essential, true form – what we see is shadows, which the elements of reality – objects, humans, animals and their actions – throw upon our cave's wall. We are imprisoned in a dark cave, watching a wall with shadows as if it was a screen. Looking at this screen we mistake what goes on before our eyes and ears for actual reality in her essential, true nature. Plato's intention was to defend the realm of true ideas, of perfect forms, of essential forms of reality against empiricist illusions posing

as the only reality there is. True forms were – according to his Pythagorean tastes – best captured by mathematical formulae expressing perfect relations between any possible objects. The access to true forms was open to trained minds of sophisticated professionals. Plato’s aristocratic and elitist intentions were lost with time and growth of higher education, but aesthetic power of his metaphor survived all changes in epistemologies, paradigms and scientific research programs. The explosive growth of modern electronic multimedia has driven his message home in a different context. Shadows on a wall have been replaced by an integrated mobile multimedia cocoon of communication and information involving and networking most of us (though still less than a majority of mankind).

What all members of contemporary societies follow and what Walter Benjamin, Marshall McLuhan, Guy Debord or George Ritzer tried to conceptualise in their theories is this crucial passage from a cave to a screen, a transition from a collective cave into an individualized screen. Caves are at present mobile, the whole world becomes a cave, screens accompany us with our TV sets, laptop monitors, mobile phone screens, etc. Prisoners can move around, but they are still chained to images flickering on their individualized screens. Benjamin (Mann’s contemporary, who had unsuccessfully applied to Adorno and Horkheimer for membership in their Institute for Social Research) tried to understand social and political consequences of mechanical reproduction of art works. He had predicted a forthcoming domination of a dictator at the expense of a parliament and of a film star over writers, composers or painters. Dictatorship of the eye (cinema) and ear (radio) suited the mass culture and worked against the elitist warnings that there is more to reality than meets the eye. A “blitz” career of Leni von Riefenstahl (a photographer and a film director specializing in mystical movies about mountain tops as metaphysical challenges to the climbers) confirms his theoretical insights. Her aesthetization of politics allowed the mass media of the 1930ies to present the nazis as a reincarnation of a Platonic ideal, as the embodiment of movement, change, progress, future, Germanic mythology and technological inventiveness, racial purity and cool modernity. She claims nowadays that she was morally neutral vis a vis grateful Hitler, when the nazi party rally in Nürnberg had been filmed. She has started by photographing the Nubians in her twenties and nowadays, turning hundred, she is busy with underwater photography. She has successfully avoided persecution after WWII and at present acquired a cult status with the feminists, making her immune to criticism (with some notable exceptions, for instance Susan Sontag, who devoted critical passages to von Riefenstahl’s “Triumph of Will” in her classical treatise “On Photography”).

McLuhan regretted the passing of Gutenberg galaxy with literary canons and aesthetic standards watched over by royal and national academies and warned that a medium becomes a message, drowning traditional strategies of interpretation and humanist explanation, making contents less relevant than the babysitting presence of the medium itself. Zappers of the world do not unite – they roam the medium’s virtual realities, exchanging contents but remaining loyal, even addicted, to the medium itself. Where McLuhan still saw a redeeming social grace for new information and communication technologies, namely in their ability to recreate, re-enchant tribal community as if by electronic tam-tams, Debord saw only a more penetrating, more individualized, more compelling system of defusing social unrest by involving the masses in a gigantic spectacle, in which everybody was forced to play a role. This theatricalization emerged within all social processes – not everything is for sale, but

everything is for a show (including reality shows on TV, candid cameras registering us 24 hours a day, and couples trading anonymously recordings of their sex life). Where Benjamin or Baudelaire saw only subtle flaneurs walking through city boulevards and watching themselves in the eyes of passers-by, Debord saw the entire society thrown onto a stage. He and his situationists (Sanguinetti, Khayati, Vaneigem, Shtcheglov, Riesel) witnessed the making of a society of a spectacle, where consumption and infotainment became intertwined and provided a comfortable illusion of a middle class status to a vast majority of citizens within a state controlled society, defusing their potential for radical change, amusing them into docility and increased consumption. Nowhere did this process proceed so quickly as in the USA.

Most US citizens, when asked in polls, respond by classifying themselves as "middle class", even if their income, education or lifestyle place them either above or below this social stratum. No wonder that an American sociologist, George Ritzer, came up with an idea that the masses succumbed to a standardized, rationalized macdonaldization of society. Fast food, but also fast electoral speeches (sound bites for the media), fast track educational choices, etc. General history ("the way we never were") and general education have been macdonaldized for this nebulous middle class, thus failing to provide a solid support for individual identifying and collective bargaining. Ritzer took up Weber's twin theses about the growth of instrumental rationality (at the expense of substantial rationality) and about the progressive disenchantment of the world (and attempts to re-enchant it through intensifying the society of the spectacle). He came up with the idea that postmodern shopping malls, fast food restaurants and places like Disneyland in Orlando or Las Vegas are cathedrals of consumption, where an attempt at a mass scale re-enchantment takes place. If Venice's businesses continue to fold down and all that remains is an empty tourist shell filled by fast food restaurants and fast entertainment stage-settings, then Venice, too, can start resembling its copy in Las Vegas, the famous "Venetian" complex of hotels, casinos, boutiques and indoor copies of canals with neon skies above them. "Death in Venice" would then become a nostalgic memory of the past glorious republic and grand old city, which had been recycled for global tourist industry and left sterile and bare as an empty stage for ritual tourist re-enchantment.

One could remark that this re-enchantment is also taking place in elitist educational institutions (including the ones in the USA) – the access to which has been democratized (merit opens access to the best universities on a par with money, power or talents for sports) but not on a mass scale.⁽¹¹⁾ Learning Latin and Greek has not lost an elitist ring – though many more potential counter-elites are competing with the ones brought up on canons preserved by the humanities. Had Mann listened to jazz rather than Schönberg (on whom the protagonist of his last novel, "Doctor Faustus", an avantgarde composer, Adrian Leverkühn, has been modelled) he would have predicted that a film director and TV talk show host are becoming much more important for cultural production and consumption than avantgarde composers – Arnold Schönberg, John Cage, Krzysztof Penderecki or Pierre Boulez. Are film directors, fashion show organizers, authors of reality TV shows or curators of large travelling exhibitions still writing footnotes to Plato as a continuation of the European humanist tradition, only under new circumstances? Thomas Mann's "Death in Venice" has been filmed by Lucchino Visconti – does it suggest an affirmative answer to the above question? The fact that "The Magic Mountain" failed to inspire an equally interesting work of cinema suggests caution. Mann was criticizing the

nouveaux riches; the political dictators, the film stars and directors (his compatriot, Adorno, added jazz musicians and journalists running horoscope columns in daily newspapers to the list). They were attempting to shape culture – something Mann and Adorno thought a privilege of exceptionally cultivated and creative humanists with academic background – like themselves (though strictly speaking the only doctorates Mann acquired were honorary ones). One of the arguments Mann had used when expressing his disgust with Hitler’s speech on cultural policy of nazi Germany was a charge that the dictator lacked decent education in the humanities and spoke as an ignorant student of the lowest type of school for the broadest public. Having listened to contemporary pop stars (or to the members of Situationist International) he would have probably applied the same argument.(12) Political domination of the communist parties in central and eastern Europe has often been nicknamed “the dictatorship of the ignorants” by critical intellectuals and middle class opposition. However, at the threshold of the XXIst century, ignorance has come to be accepted as a bliss by spread of mass culture and by the mass consumption of images, rendering elites less anchored in a stable social structure and more volatile among networked organizations and institutions.

3. Ivory towers, silicon valleys, freely floating elites

Hans Castorp’s lot has been exceptional. He had to travel to Davos to encounter two “master tutors” influencing his personal choices. His successors do not have to do so. They see higher education as a natural and necessary stage in their lives. Professional elites in contemporary societies are always formed within a formalized academic system of education, and few exceptions (e.g. British university professors without a Ph.D.) confirm the rule. Hans Castorp belonged to an upper middle class, to the world of the Buddenbrooks. Had he been born in the working class district, his chances for an encounter with university education around 1914 would have been very low. Two world wars and one cold war later these chances have dramatically increased (though not through a construction of a classless society and not necessarily in former communist-dominated societies). Contemporary educational systems are the closest approximation to a relatively classless meritocracy in class societies that we know.(14) Young men and woman from Venice or Davos have to go to Bolonia (or Cambridge, Zurich, Sorbonne, Harvard) in order to acquire necessary diplomas testifying to the rest of the world that they have acquired some knowledge and some skills. Being very rich or very talented helps, but a chance is basically open to everyone, who successfully completed a middle-level high school or a college enabling him or her to enter a university.

Universities underwent a dramatic change; they have become real “knowledge factories” in terms of numbers of students trained, numbers of research activities and numbers of professional networks, in which they participate. After WWII two major developments shaped contemporary university, while the third is beginning to shape it at present. The first was triggered by a press magnate, the prototype of Orson Welles’ “Citizen Kane”, Randolph Hearst, who successfully lobbied for granting each demobilized US soldier a voucher, which could be cashed as a teaching fee at the university of their choice. Student ranks swelled, and universities flourished, though students, grateful for this upward educational mobility, did not question the institution of a university itself. The second development was triggered by the mass protest movements of the late sixties (starting with the Free Speech Movement at Berkeley in

the summer of 1966, going through the explosive May 1968 in Paris to the mass anti-war protest against war in Vietnam in the early seventies). Students realized that a university has already grown out of the feudal social relations between the teachers and the taught (industrial scale of concentration made it easier for the students to exercise influence upon administrators and teachers), but this has not yet been reflected in a structural adjustment of the universities to this new balance of power. Large-scale democratising reforms followed, and although it took only thirty years to undo most of them and to return the power safely into the hands of a network composed of top teachers and top administrators, contemporary university is a much more democratic institution than a typical alma mater of half a century ago. The second development was shared by both the US and the EU academic environments. We can detect an echo of the critical theory of the Frankfurt school in a sudden popularity of such philosophers as Herbert Marcuse (who granted rebellious students in the West and peasant masses in the rest of the world a status of honorary proletariat capable of overthrowing the capitalist system), Wilhelm Reich (who tried to link a theory of political and sexual oppression) or Erich Fromm (who tried to analyse “The Escape from Freedom” and subsequent enslavement of the masses). The third change, which is currently under way, has also been shared by the EU and the USA. It is linked to the increasing presence of information and communication technologies in daily activities of a university (as an electronic blackboard-like support for the courses, as an online access to the latest publications, as an e-mail supported real-time networking of research communities, etc.). It may be too early to predict consequences of this generation of changes (they work against the rigid professional bureaucracy of a traditional European university), but an expression “freely-floating intellectual”, which Settembrini, Croce, Weber or Mann would have been proud to employ, acquires a new meaning due to the virtual worlds and instant access to world wide web.

Meritocracy replaces other venues of upward social mobility, as majorities of populations in western Europe and in the United States are concentrated in large urban centers, ready to move and stay geared for employment in rapidly transforming industries and services. Formal education – which is subjected to an almost permanent transformation (both format and content-wise) because of multiple economic, political and demographic pressures - becomes a necessary precondition for an employment and for a professional career. But do these young people learn at least little Latin and less Greek in order to be able to fall back upon their classics, their European heritage? Do they learn about these classics before they arrive at the universities? Do they stand a chance of learning it at the universities if pre-university education does not provide them with a chance of doing so? Can they follow Joyce, who, when accused of being trivial in his writings, replied curtly: “I am not. I am quadrivial”?

As of the present writing, the European system of university level education is being shaped by the political elites of the EU. The Bologna agreement of the ministers of education to simplify and standardize all programs into bachelor + master subcomponents has already influenced the way in which most of universities in the EU are changing their curricula. No significant attempt to increase the exposure of students to the classics can be noticed. This standardization opens a gate for a broadening of university-level programs by upgrading higher forms of vocational training at the post-mid level – again, without a parallel increase in student’s exposure to the humanities in general and social sciences in particular. On top of these changes

caused by the European integration, universities within the EU are also influenced by business schools in the USA. Both the elite and second-rate business schools of the USA participate fully in an expansion of the MBA programs within European universities, usually in joint ventures or in other forms of networking and accreditation swapping with the US schools of business. The very idea of an MBA program for a general manager in either a business company or a public institution already presupposes an uneasy mix of elitist language (an attempt to train individuals to become future leaders within formal bureaucracies) and mass production of “standardized packages” of knowledge and skills (an attempt to train thousands of future managers, for whom there will simply never be enough top positions in formal bureaucracies to occupy). Can this attempt to bring the university as a former ivory tower (or, rather, a Platonian academy for leisurely pursuit of wisdom) for free-floating independent intellectuals (distancing themselves from daily political and economic conflicts) closer to a hands-on, personal-networked based, creative and inventive Silicon Valley-like institutional landscape? After all, Silicon Valley is where big minds (universities), big money (venture capital and large investment banks) and big business (both small, flexible, inventive firms and large, research-funding corporations) meet and celebrate their spectacular rises from rags to riches or equally spectacular crashes of their hype? Can our MBA programs spreading through universities in a long march of the americanization of the European elites facilitate this transition? And what will happen to the identity of academic professionals if they shift from ivory towers towards silicon valleys? Max Weber would have had his doubts about this new twist in the tale of a professional scientist or scholar understanding science as a vocation:

“The vocation of science, while seeking to establish the realm of the possible, must be subordinated to an ethic of responsibility and confined within strict limits; it should not confer the legitimacy of values, arbitrate within value conflicts, or be used to create new values or norms. This position is part of a practical project that seeks to establish the limits and uses of scientific reason, a project, which seeks to protect values and beliefs from the encroachment of instrumental rationality, and which thereby offers a possible, although limited, form of resistance to the further rationalization and disenchantment of the world.”(13)

An ability to see that a rationalization of higher education, a streamlining of business schools and the integration of the MBA programs into our university curricula does not necessarily mean that our values and ideals will be upheld, an ability to foresee that individual freedom will not necessarily be granted if organizations are managed in the most efficient way, is at the core of an independent judgement informed by knowledge of the classics as the foundation of European identities. Academic education cannot continue without these our classics (and their reflections in European social sciences, in European literature and in European philosophy) – hence the role of the ancients.(14) Hence also the role of less ancient writers, for instance of the writers of the Italian Renaissance, like Niccolo Macchiavelli, whose whole theory of political management is derived from a comparison of the ancients to his contemporaries. Hence also the role of the present writers who are capable of demonstrating the ongoing passionate drama of the European identifying, for which new elites have to be formed and which, in turn, will be formed by these very elites in future. Should we allow the freely floating novelists, film directors, art curators and media professionals from Mann to Kubrick and from Croce to Sontag to bypass our

academic institutions in both securing the continuity with the European tradition and pioneering the new ways of extending it into the future?

Notes:

- (1) Mann became acquainted with Croce, when the latter published a critical article about Mann's "Reflections of an Apolitical Man" in "Critica" (a periodical Croce filled mostly with his own texts) in 1920. They maintained contact ever since. After WWII, Croce's daughter married a Polish writer, Gustaw Herling-Grudziński, who escaped Stalin's Gulag and wrote one of the first first-hand accounts of it - "Another World".
- (2) Mann met Lukacs in 1922 in Vienna and has been influenced by the latter's study "The Soul and Its Forms", while Lukacs has subsequently written on Mann's oeuvre. Lukacs, who had been a cultural commissar in a short-lived Hungarian communist government of Bela Kun, went on to become one of the most important Marxist philosophers, especially as the author of an influential "History and Class Consciousness".
- (3) The phrase "Captive Mind" has been coined by the Polish Nobel prize winner in literature and a Berkeley professor of literature, Czeslaw Milosz. Milosz has asked for a political asylum in France in the early fifties, when sent by the Polish communist authorities to the embassy in Paris as a cultural charge d'affaires. He published an analysis of the attitudes of his fellow-writers in Warsaw, most of whom had signed the pact with the communist devil in return for a professional status and material privileges.
- (4) Prompting Serge Guilbaut to write his pamphlet "How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art. Abstract Impressionism, Freedom and Cold War" (The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1983), which has been duly noted and promptly forgotten.
- (5) A brief presentation of this argument can be found in Steven Fuller, Popper vs Kuhn. The Struggle for the Soul of Science, London, 2003.
- (6) Susanne Schech and Jane Haggis, Culture and Development. A Critical introduction, Blackwell, Oxford, 2000. The authors quote a leftist critic of the Eurocentrism, Ernesto Laclau:
"European universalism had precisely constructed its identity through the cancellation of the logic of incarnation and, as a result, of the universalization of its own particularism. So, European imperialist expansion had to be presented in terms of a universal civilizing function, modernization and so forth. The resistances of other cultures

were, as a result, presented not as struggles between particular identities and cultures, but as part of an all-embracing and epochal struggle between universality and particularisms – the notion of peoples without history expressing precisely their incapacity to represent the universal.”(Ernest Laclau, “Universalism, particularism and the question of identity”, in: J. Rajchman, ed., *The Identity in Question*, Routledge, London, 1995, 97)

- (7) Gustaw Herling-Grudziński has suggested that this, indeed, would have been the case. He did so in his afterword to the Polish translation of Croce’s study of Europe in the XIXth century (cf. Gustaw Herling-Grudziński, “Posłowie”, in: Benedetto Croce, *Historia Europy XIX wieku*, Czytelnik, 1998, 354)
- (8) When Mann chose to follow the story of “Death in Venice” with a story of “The Magic Mountain”, he was expressing his intuitive judgement about the unimpeded march of individualization as a leitmotif of the European culture. This fact did not go unnoticed: “In “Death in Venice” passion brings about the collapse of all that has made Gustav von Aschenbach singular – his reason, his inhibitions, his fastidiousness. And disease further reduces him. At the end of the story, Aschenbach is just another cholera victim, his last degradation being to succumb to the disease affecting so many in Venice at that moment. When in “The Magic Mountain” Hans Castorp is discovered to have tuberculosis, it is a promotion. His illness will make Hans become more singular, will make him more intelligent than he was before. In one fiction, disease (cholera) is the penalty for a secret love; in the other, disease (TB) is its expression. Cholera is the kind of fatality that, in retrospect, has simplified a complex self, reducing it to sick environment. The disease that individualizes, that sets a person in relief against the environment, is tuberculosis” (Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York, 37)
- (9) George E. McCarthy, *Classical Horizons. The Origins of Sociology in Ancient Greece*, State University of New York Press, Albany, 2003, 108-109). The author has similar comments on Marx and Durkheim, who co-authored a major re-orientation of contemporary European social sciences at the end of the XIXth and the beginning of the XXth century: “By integrating Aristotle’s theory of science and physics into his critique of political economy, by returning to the political, ethical and communitarian ideals of classical antiquity, Marx was attempting to overcome the limits of modern economic and utilitarian thought. (...) Marx has regenerated the lost elements of a critical historical science based on the Greek principles of practical knowledge – ethics, economics and politics – into a comprehensive theory of social justice.”(op.cit.,59) On Durkheim: “Durkheim concludes his analysis of the state with a recapitulation of the Aristotelian view of social justice in the *Nicomachean Ethics*; commutative and distributive justice. (...) Durkheim’s theory of commutative justice calls for the transformation of the power relations within the workplace based on a change in contracts, industrial law, and the guild system to establish a balance between the opposing classes respecting the principles of the value and dignity of workers.”(op.cit.,155)

- (10) Mann did not stand alone. Franz Kafka, Robert Musil, Herman Hesse, Bertold Brecht, Gottfried Benn or Hermann Broch were all German writers born in the last quarter of the XIXth century and all of them contributed to the humanist critique of the one-dimensional industrial-bureaucratic nation-states in the first half of the XXth century.
- (11) Donna Tartt's famous academic thriller "The Secret History" illustrates ambiguous feelings about classical humanist education in elitist universities. Privileged students of Plato turn into cold-blooded murderers, thus confirming popular resentment against both privilege of the upper classes and sophistication of a "high" culture in an era of a mass conspicuous consumption..
- (12) This inability to notice a redeeming social grace in the early forms of mass culture would make Mann, Adorno and their contemporaries (or even their continuators – cf. Habermas' inability to see the point of Sloterdijk's metaphor of human genetic "Disneyland") conservative and unable to enter a dialogue with subcultural artists and humanists working within contemporary popular culture. They would have also missed the emergence of multimedia, of, to quote Castells, "The Internet Galaxy". They would have been horrified by a distinct possibility that novels and essays are being replaced by open platforms for "internauts" surfing the web and clustering in Silicon Valleys or chatrooms rather than in libraries and reading rooms, these more traditional places of civilized encounters for an exchange of views and a comparison of visions. If this is, indeed, the case, then, ironically, multimedia cocoon furnishing us with billions of shadows on our personalized screens can also become just another footnote to Plato in the European tradition.
- (13) Nicholas Gane, *Max Weber and Postmodern Theory: Rationalization versus Re-enchantment*, Palgrave, 2002, 63 Interestingly enough, Gane quotes Weber from "Intermediate Reflection" (*Zwischenbetrachtung*) as claiming – after a visit to Ascona in 1913 and 1914 and an acquaintance with Freud's pupil, Otto Gross (who had exerted some influence upon Weber and his Heidelberg circle) that: "The last accentuation of the erotic sphere occurred in terms of intellectualist cultures. It occurred where this sphere collided with the unavoidably ascetic trait of the vocational specialist type of man. Under this tension between the erotic sphere and rational everyday life, specifically extramarital sexual life, which had been removed from everyday affairs, could appear as the only tie which still linked the man with the natural fountain of life"(op.cit.,176) Weber's wife, Marianne, described Gross's doctrine of sexual communism as follows: "The life-enhancing value of eroticism is so great that it must remain free from extraneous considerations and laws, and, above all, from any integration into everyday life. If, for the time being, marriage continues to exist as a provision for women and children, love ought to celebrate its excesses outside its realm." (op.cit.,177). Both von Aschenbach from "Death in Venice" and Castorp from "The Magic Mountain" would have agreed. Would Mann?

(14) Not everybody would agree. Some would argue that: “education counts for nothing because identity is governed by irrational prejudice, not enlightenment, by privilege, not by merit, by power, not by knowledge, by might, not right. From this uncompromising viewpoint, one might conclude that education is an irrelevance or even a danger in the real world of the poor, the oppressed, and the disenfranchised.”(Daniel Cottom, *Why Education Is Useless*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 2003, 108)

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