Subjunctivity, A New Form of Knowledge: On the Epistemology of Possibility

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The publication of the first issue of the *Journal of Social and Cultural Possibilities* is a cause for celebration, not the least of which because it provides an intellectual space to house the kind of scholarship often marginalized in the contemporary university. Perhaps I might be permitted a personal anecdote to illustrate. Some years back, I wrote a short book on the future of the internet, in particular the brain-internet interface. I was specifically countering the narrative that the "internet is making us stupid" by placing the question within a very wide historical context: in effect, a history and future of the internet stretching back to the first cave paintings. Humans have interfaced with cognitive technologies for millennia—cave paintings, writing, the Book--and the Internet is but the latest chapter of this larger and longer narrative. Given this deep history, what might the future of the brain-internet interface look like?[1] I asked a colleague for their feedback on the manuscript. They said, with a questioning face, "It's awfully speculative, isn't it?" The subtext of the comment, of course, is that there is something not quite scholarly or academically rigorous about engaging in speculation.

Chiara Marletto observes that "in the prevailing scientific worldview, counterfactual properties of physical systems are unfairly regarded as second-class citizens, or even excluded altogether. Why? It is because of a deep misconception, which, paradoxically, originated within my own field, theoretical physics. The misconception is once you have specified everything that exists in the physical world and what happens to it—all the actual stuff—then you have explained everything that can be explained."[2] Counterfactuals and other speculative disciplines have either existed outside the University or might be found only in small pockets within the existing university.

The purpose of this essay is to identify some of these disciplines of the possible, the speculative disciplines, to collect them under one category, and in so doing defend the idea that there is a "knowledge of the possible," a "knowledge of the inactual" that might be accorded a place within the University. I refer to this kind of knowledge as "subjunctivity."[3] There was once an academic discipline called pantology, which studied the classification of knowledge. This essay is an exercise in pantology, or, more precisely, in the identification of a new branch of knowledge, one that hides in plain sight but that has not been accorded the status of knowledge. If the University aspires to contain all forms of knowledge within it, then this essay argues for a refashioning of the University to accommodate subjunctivity. Specifically, this essay proposes the creation of a Subjunctive University placed alongside the existing University that would bring together these subjunctivists from around the University, an epistemological organization of all those who seriously investigate and speculate about "the possible."

Definitions

The subjunctive refers to a mood of verbs that express what is imagined or wished or possible. In English, we might say "If it were me, I'd go to the game." The use of "were" in the sentence (as

opposed to "was") indicates the subjunctive mood, meant to describe a condition that does not actually exist. I define subjunctivity, then, as the inquiry into the possible, the imagined, that which does not actually exist. Subjunctivity takes as its domain of inquiry the conceptual space of the possible, and is the approach to knowledge that studies the ontologically inactual. If science is defined as the systematic study of the structure and behavior of the physical and natural world—that is, the systematic study of reality—then subjunctivity is the systematic study of what the philosopher Nicholas Rescher has called "irreality." "*Homo sapiens* is an amphibian," he writes. "We live in the real world through our emplacement in space and time, equipped with bodies that can act upon and interact with the other realities that exist about us. But we also live in a thought world of ideas, of beliefs and suppositions. This thought realm itself divides into two sectors. On the one side there is the realm of thought about reality—of science, philosophy, and scholarship. On the other side there is the realm of conjecture and imagination, where the mind deliberately cuts loose from reality and produces a domain of its own—a realm of fancy, make-believe, and speculation that deals not with real things but with imaginatively devised artifacts of thought."[4]

Many writers have identified irreality as a kind of shadow world that hovers around the actual world. The novelist Robert Musil, for example, identified the "sense of possibility…as the capacity to think how everything could 'just as easily' be, and to attach no more importance to what is than to what is not." Musil described those with this sense as "possibilitarians," those who "live within a finer web, a web of haze, imaginings, fantasy and the subjunctive mood."[5] The philosopher Stephen T. Asma, asserts that **"**We live in a world that is only partly happening. We also live in co-present simultaneous world made up of 'almost' or 'what ifs' and 'maybes'."[6] "Philosophers call this ability to think of something that doesn't exist 'counterfactual' thinking. And the vast majority of our thinking is of this non-real, counterfactual variety," says Asma. "As Harvard psychiatrist Arnold H. Modell puts it, our minds have the ability to create 'a second universe'—an internal environment of possibilities that exists concurrently with the stubborn physical world.[7] The literary theorist Lubomir Dolezel wrote that "Our actual world is surrounded by an infinity of other possible worlds."[8] We might coin a name, the "subjunctivist" for the scholar who systematically studies these various possible worlds.

The imagination serves as the cognitive means by which we apprehend the subjunctive domain, the mental faculty that provides access to the ontological realm of that which is possible but inactual. To apprehend what is only possible, we must creatively imagine the hidden adjacent world (the chess moves not made but that could have been played, the history that did not happen, the future that might arrive), a shadow universe that surrounds the actual. Asma notes that "The philosophers characterize imagination as a kind of cognition rather than embodied action. This common mistake demotes the imagination to a kind of weak knowledge—making it derivative or secondary to 'real knowledge.'"[9] Subjunctivity is real knowledge of the inactual.

Maps of the Subjunctive

The domain of the subjunctive is a vast terrain: it includes counterfactual history, idealized design, fictional characters and, futures/foresight/visioning. Diderot and D'Alembert in compiling their *Encyclopedia*, included the "figurative system of human knowledge," a map of the structure of knowledge. We might similarly visualize, and thus understand, the terrain of the possible--the dimensions of the subjunctive--via a tense map of the verb "to be." (Figure 1)

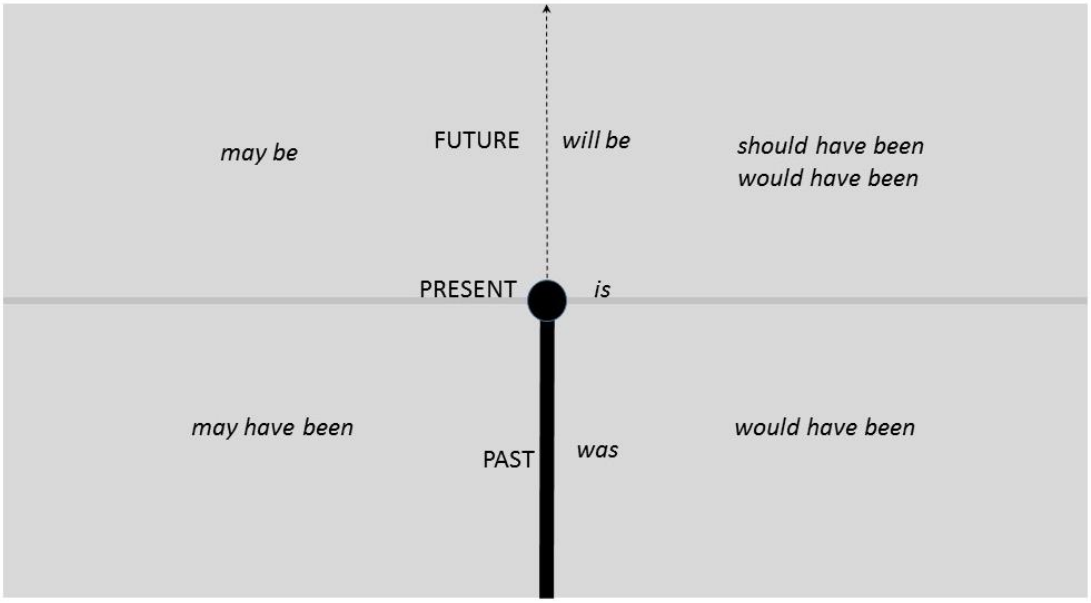

Figure 1: Tense map

The dark line is a representation of that which is (or was) ontologically actual. Thus the past, the present (and the future to come) are the subject of many pre-existing forms of knowledge: physics, history, psychology. The dashed line extending upward from the present represents that there will be some future that has yet to be actualized: it will be actual, but is not yet. The grey territory that surrounds the black lines is the realm of the subjunctive, the space that is "adjacent to reality," what may have been had circumstances been different. And a future world that may be or should have been, had other conditions applied. When philosophers describe subjunctivity as a kind of "shadow universe," they might be imagining the gray area that swirls around the line of the actual.

Another way of mapping the subjunctive is to draw a diagram with axes that represent that which is absent vs. present and that which is ontologically actual vs. inactual. Subjunctivity is that approach to knowledge that engages in the systematic study of the inactual (the lower half of the diagram) (Figure 2)

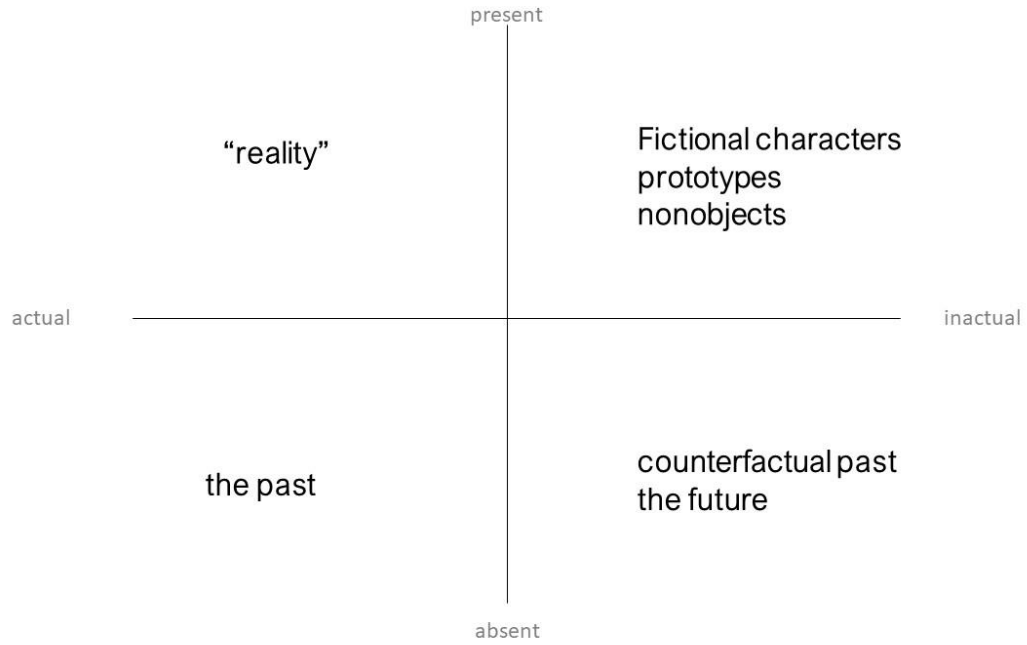

Figure 2: Mapping subjunctivity

In the upper left quadrant is the ontologically actual world that is currently present to our perceptions (the reality that physicists study, for example, as per Marletto). The lower left quadrant is the world that was actual but is no longer directly perceived by our senses. This is the realm of the past, of everything that once was but is no longer, except in material or mental traces. In the upper right is the realm of the inactual but present to our perceptions. These might include fictional characters, prototypes and other representation of the impossible. In the lower right are those ontologically inactual entities that are not present, such as the counterfactual past or, indeed, the future that may come.

The Subjunctive University

These two mappings can lead us toward a visual metaphor for the place of subjunctivity within the University. I propose thinking of the University as consisting of two "hemispheres:" one that contains the science and scholarship of the actual and the other the science and scholarship of the inactual. I do not intend to belabor the metaphor, but do want to suggest that the two halves of the University might be understood as similar to the two distinct brains inside our craniums. While the popularized version of "left" and "right" brain has been largely rejected by neuroscientists—that the left hemisphere is logical and the right hemisphere is creative, for example—the two halves of the brain are nevertheless distinct and function differently. "In general terms…the left hemisphere yields narrow, focused attention, mainly for the purpose of getting and feeding," observes the psychiatrist and literary scholar Iain McGilchrist.

> The right hemisphere yields a broad, vigilant attention, the purpose of which appears to be awareness of signals from the surroundings…It might then be that the division of the human brain is also the result of the need to bring to bear two incompatible types of attention on the world at the same time…In humans, just as in animals and birds, it turns out that each hemisphere attends to the world in a different way…[10]

It is almost as if there are two similar but distinct organs beneath the cranium. Can it be that when we speak of "the brain," what we might actually be describing are "two distinct, yet simultaneous brains?"

It is that metaphor I wish to employ to describe the location of subjunctivity within the University. We could say that the University that we have long recognized makes up one half/hemisphere, that which examines the ontologically actual, both present and absent. Subjunctivity—the knowledge of the inactual—constitutes the other hemisphere.[11] (Figure 3)

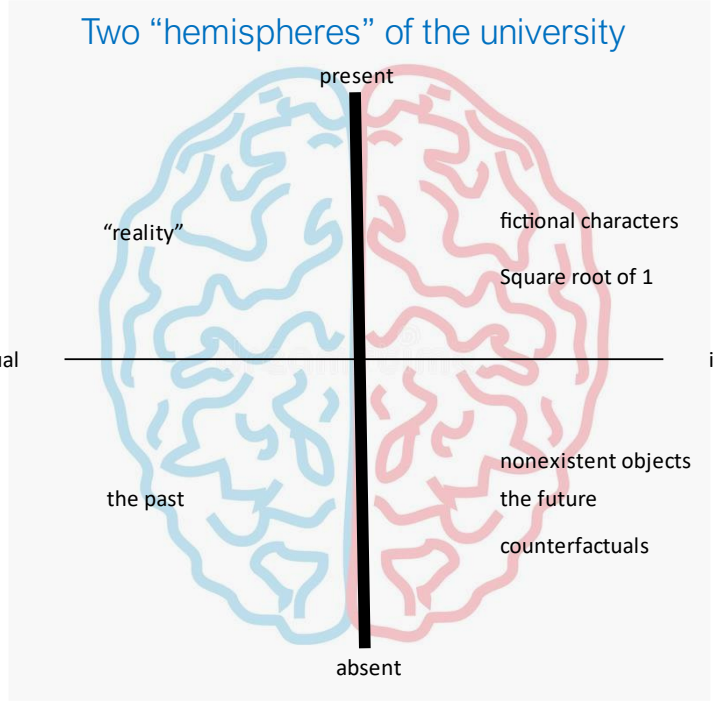

Figure 3: Two "Hemispheres" of the University

To extend the metaphor just a bit further: the corpus collosum is that bundle of nerve fibers that regulates communication between the two hemispheres of the brain. We might then imagine an epistemological corpus collosum, then, that would be the entity or organization or office that connects and regulates communication between the two hemispheres of the University. One such connection, moving from left to right hemisphere, would be using the methodologies that examine the ontologically actual to study the ontologically inactual. From the right to left, we

might create/make/imagine something and then actualize it, bringing it to the left side of the university.

Disciplines in the Subjunctive University

There is no reason to presume that we must organize the Subjunctive University to simply mirror the existing university; it could be organized into other categories that are not colleges, departments or schools. Nor must we expect that we need create a "subjunctive psychology" or "subjunctive history" that must match the disciplines in the other hemisphere. That said, in reorganizing the University to accommodate subjunctivity, we will certainly transport over those practitioners already carrying out subjunctive work in the existing University. For instance, there is a strain of Buddhist philosophy that considers the knowability and contemplation of nonexistent objects, "knowing what there is not." "Ever since Leibniz," writes the philosopher Zhihua Yao,

> The fundamental question of metaphysics has been: "Why is there something rather than nothing?" But before we can start to ponder on this problem, we should have some sense of the meaning of "being" (or "what there is") and "nothing" (or "what is not"). Philosophers throughout history have devoted themselves to these two subjects by developing the field of ontology. If, however, we are not satisfied with traditional speculative metaphysics, we could ask a more fundamental question, that is, "How do we know what there is or what there is not?" While the question "How do we know what there is?" makes perfect sense and has helped to plant the fruitful field of epistemology, the question "How do we know what there is not, or nonbeing?" encountered skepticism from the very beginning. A natural and even more fundamental question is: "Can we know what there is not?" or "How is it possible to know what there is not?" In other words, we need to ask whether we could possibly know nonbeing.[12]

Vlad Glăveanu notes that "Heidegger, for example, counterposed the possible with nothingness and placed the latter at the origin of the former…In Heidegger's view…human beings are constituted not only by what they are but also by what they are not or, rather, what they are not yet. It is the coming into existence that marks the dynamic relation between impossibility and possibility. Humans live in a world of possibility and, as such, they need to engage with nothingness, something that often triggers anxiety."[13] Given Heidegger's philosophy and the contemplation of Buddhist philosophers, we might envision the creation of a new discipline which would reside in the Subjunctive University: "nothing studies," which would consider not only philosophical questions such as those posed by Yao and Heidegger but also scientific work into, for example, the "Universe before the Big Bang."

As noted before, counterfactuals in physics have been largely ignored, and so we might expect a department of counterfactual physics to be part of the Subjunctive University. There might also be a department of counterfactual history. Counterfactual historians argue that if one makes a causal claim about some happening in the past—that Adolf Hitler was the catalyst for the rise of the Nazi Party, for example—then one has to simultaneously admit to the existence of

counterfactual claims, that another outcome was likely had there been no such catalyst. "The force of an explanation turns on the counterfactual which it implies," argues Geoffrey Hawthorn. "If such-and-such a cause or combination of causes had not been present, we imply, or if such-and-such an action or series of actions had not been taken, things would have been different. If we do not believe they would have been, we should not give the causes or actions in question the importance that we do."[14] Eric Hayot affirms Hawthorn's claim:

> This theory of the relation between context and action manifests itself in one largely unconscious but important consideration of humanist reason: the role played by historical events that did not take place. This consideration can be expressed as a strong ontological claim—something like 'the nature of a historical moment includes its non-actualized possibilities'—but it can also be thought of as an epistemological principle: *understanding social activity requires a complex understanding of nonactualized possibility in it*... A full understanding of history must include the various what-ifs and if-onlys that never occurred, who possibility actively orients our understanding of what did in fact take place at all.[15]

Hayot suggests that humanist methods can be extended into the subjunctive realm to study these nonactualized possibilities.[16] Two implication follow from the above: 1) A restatement of our central idea: that there is a realm of the non-actual that surrounds the actual, a kind of "dark matter" counterpart to matter. 2) That part of the humanist's methodology is able to study/contemplate this non-actualized world. By evoking it as an epistemological principle, Hayot claims that we are able to extract knowledge from the subjunctive realm. Although some historians have revived the practice of counterfactual history—there have been some recent books devoted to the subject[17]—there is no scholarly society, no journal, no regular papers or sessions at conferences that deal with counterfactuals. This repressed discipline could find an inviting place in the Subjunctive University.

Disciplines and practices that have hitherto been excluded from the University will be readily brought into the Subjunctive University. To take one case, foresight and futures studies have long been practitioner-driven fields, but have held very few places in university curricula. Indeed, there are relatively few degree programs in futures studies.[18] Newly emerging fields such as anticipation studies would most certainly transpose over to the Subjunctive University.[19] We might also imagine a cognate discipline to futures and anticipation studies that we might call "visioning." Gabriella Rosen Kellerman and Martin Seligman have identified an ability they term "distality," by which they mean "the skill of imagining things very different from the here and now. Many a creative genius has been described as someone who can envision something radically different from what the rest of us see today."[20] This would be a field of interest to budding innovators and entrepreneurs, those who envision new possibilities by looking very far into the future. Visionaries are often defined as those having unusual foresight and imagination, creating ideas that are often viewed as impractical, even a little bizarre. The discipline of visioning, or "distality," would be grounded in the idea that creative imagination, that far-sighted, seemingly impractical idea generation can be taught and is not simply a matter of having been born with this unusual capacity.

Utopia-as-method would constitute another discipline of the Subjective University. "In 1906, H.G. Wells argued that 'the creation of Utopias—and their exhaustive criticism—is the proper and distinctive method of sociology,'" writes Ruth Levitas. Such a utopian method

> provides a critical tool for exposing the limitations of current policy discourses about economic growth and ecological sustainability. It facilitates genuine holistic thinking about possible futures, combined with reflexivity, provisionality and democratic engagement with the principles and practices of those futures. And it requires us to think about our conceptions of human needs and human flourishing in those possible futures.[21]

"The core of utopia is the desire for being otherwise," a method Levitas names "the Imaginary Reconstitution of Society, or IROS." More than simply studying utopian thought, a practice found within the "actual" University, utopia-as-method is the subjunctive practice of imagining what is not (yet). Levitas' formulation demonstrates that the scholarship of possibility has actual world implications, that building nonexistent worlds is "the attempt not just to imagine, but to make, the world otherwise." Levitas argues that this "speculative sociology" already exists, found in "processes that are already entailed in utopian speculation, in utopian scholarship and in transformative politics and indeed in social theory itself." While speculative sociology might have a place in the "actual" University, "this encounter also implies thinking differently about what constitutes knowledge. It challenges the assumption that sociology constitutes a form of knowledge while utopianism is simply a form of speculation, and seeks to legitimize utopian thought not as a new, but as a repressed, already existing, form of knowledge about possible futures."[22] One way to legitimize speculative sociology, to liberate this repressed form of knowledge, would be to invite its practitioners over to the Subjunctive University.

Echoing Levitas, Vlad Glăveanu maintains that

> Utopia and dystopia thus have a great role to play in building possible societies or, at least, questioning existing ones, which is the first step in a long-term process of transformation…It is a way not of escaping reality, but of escaping certain taken-for-granted perspectives about it. In this way, the utopian impulse is one oriented toward possibility and, more specifically, toward the use of possibility as a way of changing the actual…With them emerges also the idea of radical change. Indeed, even if utopias (and dystopias) don't immediately transform the social reality, they fundamentally change the way in which we think about it. They expand the space of what is 'thinkable' or 'imaginable' about the world and, consequently, inform our perspectives on the collective future.[23]

This practice is an example of what I mean by traffic across the corpus collosum of the University, transporting knowledge from the Subjunctive Hemisphere into the Actual Hemisphere.

Utopia-as-method might be included under a class of disciplines we might call "normative subjunctivity," the study and creation of desired futures. Idealized design is a practice that imagines an ideal or preferred future, then works backward to determine what needs to occur to make that desired future come about.[24] Prefigurative politics refers to a mode of

activism which seeks to not only theorize but make a preferred future.[25] This sense of building a utopian space is reflected in the designer Tony Fry's use of the term "futuring," which for Fry means "giving the self (as the embodied mind acting in the world) a future."[26] This definition implies not merely predicting or anticipating future scenarios, but creating the conditions to ensure a future. Fry is looking for nothing less than design as a "redirective practice," directing change toward a preferred end.

Glăveanu is the architect of "possibility studies," which might encompass "creativity, imagination, anticipation, counterfactual thinking, serendipity, wonder, futures studies, and other related topics,"[27] each of which would be housed in the Subjunctive University. At the same time, he identifies something we might call "impossibility studies," another department in the Subjunctive University.

> One of the clearest forms of the impossible has to do with things or beings that could never exist in the 'real' world. A classic example here is represented by mythological beasts such as the chimera…or Pegasus…While these assemblages contradict the laws of nature as we know it, they can nonetheless be imagined and even depicted, more or less artistically, in paintings, sculptures, and other representations. So, here the impossible gains a certain representational substance, and, although remaining physically impossible, the materialized representation of the impossible open up a series of possibilities for our thought and action.

This "representational substance" seems actual—I can see a painting of a chimera, I can read a novel of a fictional character—but is in reality more inactual than actual. "One of the most obvious ways in which we explore thinkable impossibilities is through the construction of narratives," says Glăveanu, "in particular fictional narratives that specialize in going beyond or against the empirical world around us."[28] The semiotician and novelist Umberto Eco once described fiction as "parasitic on reality," suggesting—as we have above—that the subjunctive is a shadow world surrounding the actual world. "In reality, fictional worlds are parasites of the actual one, but they are in effect 'small worlds' which bracket most of our competence of the actual world and allow us to concentrate on a finite, enclosed world, very similar to ours but ontologically poorer."[29]

It turns out that there are different types of impossibility. Glăveanu notes that "we cannot define types of impossibility without referring to the possible. An interesting typology that brings the two together has been proposed by [John P.] Clark, who distinguishes [as on two axes] between what is actually possible (given the nature of things) and ideologically possible (according to what is allowed by society). The most interesting types are, of course impossible possibilities and possible impossibilities."[30] What might the scholarship of "impossible possibilities" or "possible impossibilities look like?

"Impossible figures," says Glăveanu, "are flat drawings that nonetheless give an impression of a three-dimensional object whose spatial interpretation cannot exist."[31] One class of impossible figures would be "nonobjects." The designer Branko Lukic has created representational substances he calls "nonobjects," the design of which would form another discipline in the Subjunctive University. "Architects have a long tradition of what in Italy is

called *architectura da carta*, visionary explorations of the unbuilt and the unbuildable," writes designer Barry Katz.

> From the Futurist Antonio Sant'Elia to the urbanist Daniel Liebeskind, they have often preferred the medium of pencil and paper to bricks and mortar, glass and steel…If we are to purify our thinking we must begin by refusing every compromise and rejecting every constraint. Industrial designers, by contrast, have rarely ventured much beyond the occasional concept car or luxury conceit. Once out of school their bravado wilts in the face of clients, schedules, and budgets. And few have dared to use design as an epistemological probe, a means of surveying the bounds of the believable and pressing against the perimeter of the possible.[32]

The design of nonobjects gives us a sense of what an "impossibility studies" might look like.

"In the process of perceiving and understanding an impossible figure," concludes Glăveanu, "we constantly construct possible interpretations of it and test them against our perception. Once more, the impossible gives birth to the possible, which, in turn, leads to new impossibilities."[33] Considering the impossible via impossibility studies afford us the opportunity to move back and forth across the corpus collosum between the two hemispheres of the University.

The philosopher Mikhail Epstein contends that "be able," "be," and "know" are "the three most important predicates on which the entire thinkable universe is constructed. The modal universe [the universe of "be able"] embraces even more than the universes of existence and knowledge, since it includes the continuum of possible worlds."[34] As other observers have noted, this modal, subjunctive realm is vast and still largely unexplored. Despite its size, the realm of "be able" has received far less attention from philosophers.

> Whether we speak of state power, the ruling capacity of a social class, legal or moral prohibitions, strength of individual will, erotic desires, belief in divine revelation, possibility of the existence of other worlds, or probability of collision of elementary particles, "ableness" is present as a universal characteristic, an all-embracing potential of man and the universe, which has not yet found a unifying discipline in the system of knowledge.[35]

If for no other reason than its ubiquity, the world of "be able" deserves its own scholarly discipline. "Whereas the theory of existence and the theory of knowledge constitute two main branches of philosophy, namely ontology and epistemology," notes Epstein, "the theory of ableness, which could be called potentiology, still remains very vague and poorly defined. In the study of 'ableness,' there is no historic continuity, no understanding of potentiology as an independent theoretical area, no generally accepted terminology; instead, there exist only some individual philosophical systems that give a certain place to the category of 'ableness.'"[36] Epstein would create that unifying discipline called potentiology, which would be "a discipline whose status is comparable to that of two main philosophical disciplines, ontology and epistemology."[37] That status will certainly be established once it is situated within the Subjunctive University.

In arguing for the creation of a subjunctive university--one that studies possibility, utopia,

potentiology, even the study of nothing--it will be immediately objected that it is hard enough in our current climate to protect and maintain some academic programs that study the ontological actual. We live in a time of what I have elsewhere termed "epistemological culling."[38] Some universities believe that the only way to address budget shortfalls or to respond effectively to market signals is to cull programs, what the education futurist Bryan Alexander has labeled "the Queen's Sacrifice."[39] As I write this, West Virginia University—the state's land grant and flagship—has decided to eliminate the entire program in world languages, literatures and linguistics, to say nothing of two graduate programs in mathematics, among many other programs, all in response to a budget deficit. Indeed, the higher education press is littered with stories of colleges and universities cutting programs, but we tend to associate these with smaller colleges or regional public universities. One might ask if a university cannot support existing programs—those that study reality-- how can it be expected to create and promote an entire parallel subjunctive university?

I would argue that to be considered a university at all, an institution cannot but include a subjunctive hemisphere. The *Times Higher Education* has made the observation that "a new analysis of…data reveals how…several leading universities have sought to become more comprehensive and build their prestige across a broader range of subjects."[40] One implication we might draw from this analysis is that some universities have determined that in order to be defined as world class, they must make the decision to become comprehensive. To cut programs, to reduce comprehensiveness, should be taken as a sign that the institution is not world class, perhaps not even a university at all. A university—as opposed to a college or a polytechnic or a community college or a trade school--is that institution which contains all of human knowledge. To claim the moniker of world class and comprehensive—indeed to be identified as a university—an academic institution must aspire to contain and also cultivate all knowledge, including subjunctive knowledge.

Anti-knowledge

What counts as knowledge, or at least knowledge admitted into the University? One could construct a history of the University that describes how it has brought in many forms of knowledge over the centuries, knowledge that at the time was considered unfit or inappropriate subjects for university study. "One thinks, for example," notes the philosopher of higher education Ronald Barnett, "of the struggles faced by engineering, sociology, the professions allied to medicine, education and art and design as well as the performing arts in being recognized as worthy of study in universities. Perhaps indigenous knowledge and feminist knowledge…are part of this pattern of exclusion and ultimate acceptance." I teach at a land-grant university, which brought the disciplines of agriculture and engineering into the University, an epistemologically radical idea at the time. "What are to be the bases for inclusion and exclusion?" Barnett asks, a question we might similarly ask about the inclusion of subjunctive knowledge within the University.[41]

Not all speculation deserves a place within the University, even the Subjunctive University. "Is knowledge in the university, then, to be construed as a matter of *competing*

cognitive interests?"[42] asks Barnett, what we might term knowledge politics. The diagram below might help us to determine which kinds of subjunctivity belong within the University. (Figure 4)

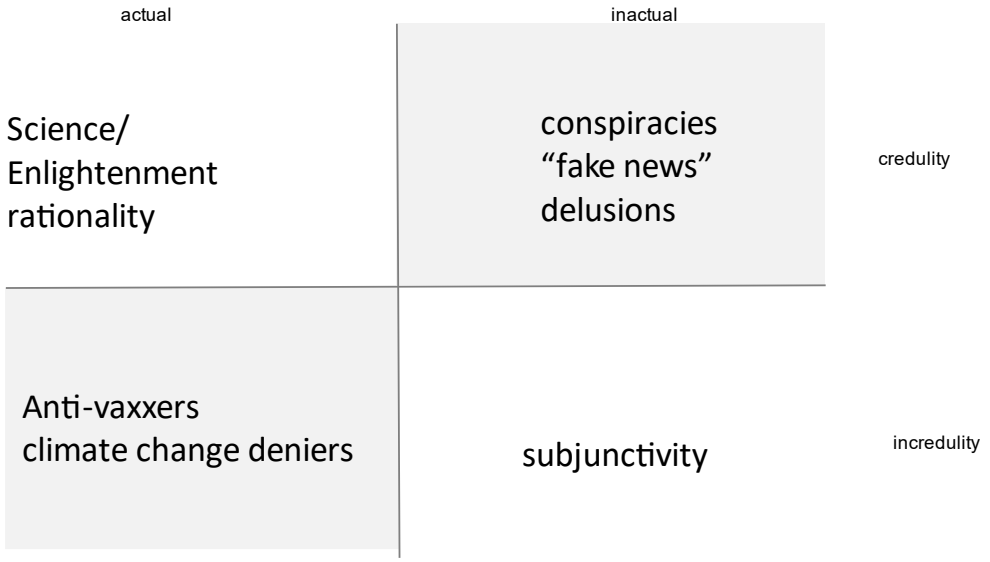

Figure 4: Knowledge and Anti-knowledge

One axis here represents ontological status—knowledge of the actual or inactual—with epistemological commitment on the other axis, that is, the degree of credulity or incredulity exercised by the knower. Knowledge in the upper left quadrant reflects epistemological credulity toward the actual. Science, scholarship study and explore the ontologically actual. The subjunctivist, in the lower right quadrant, studies the ontologically inactual, but is epistemologically incredulous about that knowledge. The scholar who writes a detailed counterfactual history of a second Kennedy presidential administration—owing to his having avoided assignation in November of 1963—does not believe that Kennedy was actually alive in 1968 or that he—not Johnson--actually escalated the war in Vietnam. The subjunctivist understands that what they are studying is inactual. Compare this to the upper right quadrant, the realm of conspiracies, fake news and delusions. Believers here trod an ontologically inactual space but with epistemological credulity, a commitment to a belief in its actuality. Believers in the Pizzagate conspiracy—where leaked emails claimed to have included messages implicating several high-ranking Democratic Party with human trafficking and a child sex ring operating out of a Washington D.C. pizzeria—express a certainty as to its ontological reality. In the lower left quadrant, anti-vaxxers, Flat Earthers and climate change deniers all are epistemologically incredulous to the ontologically actual—that vaccines do not cause autism, that the Earth is spherical, that global temperatures are rising, that humans landed on the Moon several times in the late 1960s and early 1970s.[43] The diagonal between the epistemological credulity of the ontologically inactual and the epistemological incredulity of the ontologically actual might be categorized as "anti-knowledge," and is to be distinguished from subjunctivity, the

epistemological incredulity of the ontologically inactual. This anti-knowledge has no place in the Subjunctive University.

Conclusion

The *Journal of Social and Cultural Possibilities* promises to provide "a space for the critical exploration of social and cultural probabilities, preferabilities, potentialities, promises, proposals, impossibilities, visions, alternatives, speculations, and so on," all of which I would organize under the epistemological category subjunctivity. There have been few such spaces in the University where subjunctivity as a form of knowledge has been taken seriously: the launch of JSCP represents a critical step toward legitimating that knowledge within the University. But JSCP must be understood as a vanguard: subjuncitvity is a vast terrain, and its full exploration cannot be expected to be confined within a single academic journal. This is why it has been necessary in this essay to take the subjunctive step of imagining a new University, the possibilities of which promise to make the scholarly and scientific study of the inactual the epistemological equal of the study of the actual.

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[1] David J. Staley, *Brain, Mind and Internet: A Deep History and Future* (Palgrave Pivot, 2014).
[2] Chiara Marletto, "Our Little Life Is Rounded with Possibility," *Nautilus* 38, 2021 90-97.
[3] I first explored the concept of subjunctivity in *History and Future: Using Historical Thinking to Imagine the Future* (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2007).
[4] Nicholas Rescher, *Imagining Irreality: A Study of Unreal Possibilities*, (Chicago: Open Court, 2003), 5.
[5] Cited in Geoffrey Hawthorn, *Plausible Worlds: Possibility and Understanding in History and the Social Sciences* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 5.
[6] Stephen T. Asma, *The Evolution of Imagination* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), 2.
[7] Asma, 40-41.
[8] Quoted in Anthony Dunne and Fiona Raby, *Speculative Everything: Design, Fiction, and Social Dreaming* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2013), 70.
[9] Asma, 4.
[10] Iain McGilchrist, *The Master and his Emissary*: *The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 27.
[11] This essay is part of my larger practice of the "speculative design" of possible epistemological forms. See David J. Staley, *Alternative Universities: Speculative Design for Innovation in Higher Education* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2019).

[12] Zhihua Yao, *Nonexistent Objects in Buddhist Philosophy: On Knowing What There Is Not* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020), 1.
[13] Vlad Glaveanu, *The Possible: A Sociocultural Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 216.
[14] Hawthorn, 14.
[15] Eric Hayot, *Humanist Reason: A History, An Argument. A Plan*. (New York: Columbua Univwersity Press, 2021), 102.
[16] Hayot, 102. "This extension of epistemological concern to the realm of the nonactual (but nonetheless historically potentially present) does not appear as a single unstriated or unending field of possibility…the set of unchosen possibilities or untaken paths that determine the full potential of a given historical situation—that are relevant epistemologically to our understanding or explanation of it—is itself contextual."
[17] See, for example, Philip Tetlock, Richard Ned Lebow and Geofrey Parker, *Unmaking the West : "What-if" Scenarios that Rewrite World History* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2009); and Catherine Gallagher, *Telling it like it Wasn't : The Counterfactual Imagination in History and Fiction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018).
[18] Ross Dawson, "University Futures and Foresight Degrees and Programs," https://rossdawson.com/futurist/university-foresight-programs/
[19] See Roberto Poli, *Introduction to Anticipation Studies* (Springer International Publishing AG, 2017).
[20] Gabriella Rosen Kellerman and Martin Seligman, *Tomorrowmind: Thriving at Work with Resilience, Creativity, and Connection—Now and in an Uncertain Future* (New York: Atria Books, 2023), 185.
[21] Ruth Levitas, *Utopia as Method: The Imaginary Reconstruction of Society* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), xi.
[22] Levitas, xiii-xv
[23] Glaveanu, 161, 164.
[24] Russell Ackoff, Jason Magidson, and Herbert J. Addison, *Idealized Design : Creating an Organization's Future* (New York: Prentice Hall, Philadelphia: Wharton School Publishing, 2006).
[25] See, for example, Lara Monticelli, ed. *The Future Is Now: An Introduction to Prefigurative Politics* (Bristol: Bristol University Press, 2022).
[26] Tony Fry, Design Futuring: Sustainability, Ethics and New Practice (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 2008), 113.
[27] Glaveanu, 20, 21
[28] Glaveanu, 200, 207.
[29] Umberto Eco, *Six Walks in the Fictional Woods* (Harvard University Press, 1994), 85.
[30] Gleaveanu, 201.
[31] Gleaveanu, 202.
[32] Branko Lukic, *Nonobject* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2010), xxv.
[33] Glaveanu, 202.
[34] Mikhail Epstein, trans. Vern W. McGee and Marina Eskina, *A Philosophy of the Possible: Modalities in Thought and Culture* (Liden: Brill Rodopi, 2019), 348.
[35] Ibid., 349.
[36] Ibid., 348.
[37] Ibid., 349.

[38] David J. Staley, "'Epistemological Culling' and the Future of Universities," Ingenious blog, November 23, 2020, https://ingeniousu.org/2020/11/23/epistemological-culling-and-the-future-of-universities-by-david-j-staley/
[39] Bryan Alexander, "Simpson College commits to a queen sacrifice," October 12, 2018, https://bryanalexander.org/research-topics/simpson-college-commits-to-a-queen-sacrifice/
[40] Ellie Bothwell "Top echelon of world universities finds room for new arrivals," *Times Higher Education*, October 23, 2020, https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/top-echelon-world-universities-finds-room-new-arrivals
[41] Ronald Barnett, *The Philosophy of Higher Education: A Critical Introduction* (London and New York: Routledge, 2022), 48, 56.
[42] Barnett, 49.
[43] To be clear, there are those scholars who study the behaviors of conspiracists and the deluded, and this analysis is not meant to refer to these scholars. Conspiracy theories and climate denialists exist in the actual world, and there are indeed scholars who study this phenomenon, to produce "knowledge of conspiracists." This is not to be confused with the believers of conspiracies, for this kind of speculation is anti-knowledge.