

The Spook Goes On: From the Flying University to the Mobile Academy

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Does anyone still remember Professor Abronsius? He was the tragic hero of Roman Polanski's 1967 film *The Fearless Vampire Killers*. Notoriously denounced by his colleagues at the University of Königsberg as 'the old crackpot', Professor Abronsius was a charlatan who had turned his back on the tried and trusted methods of the critical sciences. He knew better than all others about the essence of being a vampire, and had a sweeping knowledge of the side effects that well-known objects such as crucifixes and mirrors had on the living dead. The fact that 'Vampirology' did not belong to the curriculum of the canonical sciences was of no concern to him, for his thirst for knowledge defied all academic conventions and extended far beyond the bounds of any semester course listings.

The effectiveness of a garlic clove combined with a bat's sense of navigation (*vis-à-vis* ultrasound) turned Professor Abronsius into a hero of interdisciplinary investigation. And as a representative of those dissident sciences, derivative of Roland Barthes's thinking, such knowledge resonates more as nonsense than any 'knowledge' as such. 'Science' is, according to Barthes, 'that which is taught', and it follows that one acquires a doctorate in the field of aesthetics, psychology, and sociology, rather than in heraldry, semantics or 'victimology'.

When the Mobile Academy's first away game takes place they will be reminded - without having wanted or planned things that way - that they are falling back on another form of knowledge transmission based on a very long and established tradition (especially in Warsaw). Indeed, it was because women were denied entrance into the academies that the concept of the 'flying university' emerged in the 19th century; the brainchild of women who organized themselves into loose circles, it yielded no less than a Nobel Prize winner: the physicist Marie Curie. During the 1970s and 1980s, breaking with the university that kowtowed to the prevailing ideology of the ruling regime, dissident intellectuals revived a nonconformist tradition of teaching in their own private homes. So what does the 'flying university' have in common with the Mobile Academy? It undermines the official state pedagogy in that it is neither tied to a particular curriculum nor has any specific regulations for obtaining a degree; nor is it aligned with any traditional architecture, by which the 'organisation' of knowledge normally finds concrete manifestation of its power. When the Mobile Academy sanctions the study of spirits, ghosts, and phantoms, it takes the disapproval of such popular science seriously and pursues uncertain territory. One must proceed as Professor Abronsius would, keeping one's eyes peeled not only for the obvious but also for the incredible. And when one distinguishes between those premature restless spirits, one comes upon the traces of the repressed and the forbidden - confirming that spooks do indeed abound.