

Towards Real Utopias in Higher Education

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Abstract

In this article we search for real utopias for higher education by first introducing and describing a vital counter-hegemonic students movement of the early 1960s – Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), and their Port Huron Statement (1962). The movement maintained that universities are not communities of equals but served the elite. In the statement they highlighted the various socio-political problems within the United States that ought to be solved and demanded that higher education needed to be something more than a mere status and reproduction apparatus for the privileged. After describing the Port Huron Statement, we ponder its lessons and legacy as well as its implications for the present moment and for the future of higher education as a public good. We urge a new statement as a real utopia and an era of intellectual collectivism for today's students and their teachers—an era that would also cause them to embrace the greater world, to take a deep look at their own position in society, and look uncomfortably but hopefully at the world they will inherit.

Keywords: *collectivism, higher education, student activism, university, real utopia*

Introduction

Real utopias involve showing that another world is possible by building it in the spaces available, and then pushing against the state and public policy to expand those spaces. (Wright 2012, p. 22)

The impossible must be imagined if it is to be realized, and it is true sanity to do so. (Kovel 1991, p. 12)

Higher education has been an ideological battlefield since the birth of modern universities from the 19th century. For the last four decades they have been under the capitalist assault not only in the US but also in other parts of the world. Currently we are living in paradoxical times in the academic world: On one hand the state-corporate nexus demands financial accountability in terms of external indicators alien to the traditional research ethics and academic norms (at the same time) as general pressures to the privatization of universities has increased. On the other hand, there are calls to

arms in protecting universities as autonomous public spaces and for their connections to civil society—free from the capitalist interventions and neoliberal market mentality. (See, e.g., Burawoy 2004; Best, McLaren & Nocella 2010; Denzin 2010; Chatterjee & Maira 2014; Giroux 2014; Reekum 2015). Elsa Noterman and Andre Pusey have put it in a nutshell:

Universities, as well as other educational institutions, are currently facing economic instability, debt, and an uncertain future. The squeeze on higher education is like the crisis of capital: global. But so too is the emergent resistance. People around the world are challenging the neoliberal model of the university, which produces ‘skilled’ workers to be put to use for the (re)production of capital. (2012, p. 175.)

During the radical decade of 1960s there were several counter-hegemonic student movements around the world. Among them were the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) in the United States. Its participants across the United States gathered to Port Huron, Michigan, on June 1962 to draft a statement known as the Port Huron Statement. In the Statement they argued that capitalist societies are not communities of the equals and that universities do not serve all of the people, regardless of their social status. They also demanded that higher education needed to be something more than a mere status and reproduction apparatus for the privileged by transplanting information from those who were supposed to know, that is professors, to those who were supposed to listen and memorize. (See Miller 1994.)

In this article we bring up the SDS and its Statement as a case and a reminder that the fundamental questions of the purpose and functions of the university (from whom, by whom, to whom) are not new. The university–student movement nexus almost always embraces a utopian dimension (see Coté, Day & Peuter 2007; Firth 2013). Thus we interpret SDS as an exemplar of a real utopia referring to Erik Olin Wright who defines the expression “as a way of thinking about alternatives.” While he uses the expression consciously as “a provocation” in that utopia refers both to “a nowhere place and a good place”, his intention is to embrace

“tension between dreams and practice: *utopia* implies developing visions of alternatives to dominant institutions that embody our deepest aspirations for a world in which all people have access to the conditions to live flourishing lives; *real* means proposing alternatives attentive to problems of unintended consequences, self-destructive dynamics, and difficult dilemmas of normative trade-offs.” (Wright 2012, p. 3.)

Thus a real utopia “holds on to emancipatory ideals without embarrassment or cynicism but remains fully cognizant of the deep complexities and contradictions of realizing those ideals” (Wright 2012, p. 3.) In contrast to ameliorative reforms real utopias “envision the contours of an alternative social world that embodies

emancipatory ideals and then look for social innovations we can create in the world as it is that move us toward that destination” (Wright 2012, 9). “Building real utopias can both prefigure more comprehensive alternatives and move us in the direction of those alternatives” (Wright 2012, p. 21).

In defining the concept of utopia we also refer to Karl Mannheim’s interpretation. He emphasizes that utopia “is incongruous with the state of reality within which it occurs.” As he further points out: “Only those orientations transcending reality will be referred to by us as utopian which, when they pass over into conduct, tend to shatter, either partially or wholly, the order of things prevailing at the time.” Such utopian orientations can break “the bonds of the existing order.” (Mannheim 1954, p. 173.)

In what follows we first describe the student movement’s achievement, the Statement as a real utopia, and then ponder its lessons and implications for the present and future of higher education as a public good. We believe that higher education is an institution that should embrace utopian aspects and, in conclusion, we urge a new Statement and an era of intellectual collectivism for today’s youth—an era that encourage them to reflect on their own position in society, and look critically but hopefully at the world they will inherit.

The Port Huron Statement and Beyond

The SDS was established in 1960 by a small group of young radical intellectuals who felt “moral outrage” with the socio-political direction of their home country the United States (Jacobs 1970, p. 2). In a mimeographed letter to the SDS members and friends in December 1961 Al Haber, an early member of the SDS, stated that the general purpose of the organization was to be “an educational association concerned with building a responsible and articulate left in the universities and to extending the influence of this community into the political life of the society more generally” (cit. in Sale 1973, p. 7). During five days on June 1962 the SDS activists formulated a statement of over 25, 000 words called the Port Huron Statement. The Statement, first distributed in twenty thousand mimeographed copies, was a revolutionary vision for American society that presented the foundation for a future of hope for students across the United States and other countries. Furthermore, the Statement highlighted the various socio-political problems within the United States that the students felt needed to be solved. However, the Statement also focused on the US education system and its learning structures and practices that the activists felt had become domesticated and sterile.

The Statement was written by the students of a post-war generation, born in the late 1930s and early 1940s. They had not experienced war directly, but inherited a rather

hopeful world, or so they believed at first. They thought that they would live in “the wealthiest and strongest country in the world” and this country would spread the influence of the Western civilization to the other parts of the world. In the introduction of the Statement they wrote: “Freedom and equality for each individual, government of, by, and for the people—these American values we found good, principles by which we could live as men. Many of us began maturing in complacency” (Hayden 2005, p. 45). As they grew up in the 1950s they started to realize that the views they were holding were skewed. Thus, two problems especially were too urgent to ignore:

First, the permeating and victimizing fact of human degradation, symbolized by the Southern struggle against racial bigotry, compelled most of us from silence to activism. Second, the enclosing fact of the Cold War, symbolized by the presence of the Bomb, brought awareness that we ourselves, and our friends, and millions of abstract ‘others’ we knew more directly because of our common peril, might die at any time. (Hayden 2005, p. 45–46.)

Other problems and issues rouse when they entered colleges and universities. They began to realize that there were undernourishment, poverty and lack of natural resources in the world, and that their home country was not only doing good but also waging wars. They understood that democracy was used in undemocratic ways and for undemocratic purposes, but that there was a possibility for “[t]he worldwide outbreak of revolution against colonialism and imperialism, the entrenchment of totalitarian states, the menace of war, overpopulation, international disorder, super-technology” (Hayden 2005, p. 47).

The state of the world in general, and the United States in particular, was seen as pessimistic as if a light at the end of the tunnel, was the light of an oncoming train; people were defined as mere puppets of democracy who were fallen into political apathy and social isolation. It was declared in the Statement that the solution to the social and political ills was to be found in participatory democracy and in a redefinition of politics as a “means of finding meaning in personal life.”

As a *social system* we seek the establishment of a democracy of individual participation, governed by two central aims: that the individual share in those social decisions determining the quality and direction of his life; that society be organized to encourage independence in men and provide the media for their common participation. (Hayden 2005, p. 53, italics in original.)

The following root principles summarize the aims of the Statement: Public groupings make decisions pertaining to “basic social consequence”; people see politics “as the art of collectively creating an acceptable pattern of social relations” and “bringing people out of isolation and into community”. In addition to this, politics should give people “outlets for the expression of personal grievance and aspiration” and allow

opposing views and voices and relate people to knowledge and power in order to turn private problems into general issues. Furthermore work should be rewarding and fulfilling not only financially, but also educationally: “it should be educative not stultifying; creative, not mechanical; self-direct, not manipulated, encouraging independence”; “the economy itself is of such social importance that its major resources and means of production should be open to democratic participation and subject to democratic social regulation.” (Hayden 2005, p. 53–54.)

The Statement offered a rethink about how everyday life was being lived, focusing on economic structures, social structures, foreign policy, and knowledge reproduction. However, what was most important for these young activists was to initiate the process of change and offer an alternative perspective to the dominant discourse they were experiencing in their learning institutions and in the society at large. As Aronowitz states:

The Port Huron Statement is a manifesto of democratic hope combined with strong criticism of the corporate power that had come to dominate American political culture. (...) It called on America to make good on its promise of equality for all and to fulfil a new participatory democracy, in which ordinary people make the decisions that affect their lives. (Aronowitz 2006, p. 22–23.)

Such student activists wanted to encourage their peers to have and use their political voice in their student lives and in how the United States was being governed through a democratic, participatory process that would be inclusive, regardless of race or creed. The statement brought together what could be considered privileged white youth for a reawakening of critical consciousness in how they engaged their own shared lived experience as political social beings. Hence, the legacy of the Statement lives on and nourishes both academic research on student activism and on student activism itself (see, e.g., Brick & Parker 2015; Flacks & Lichtenstein 2015).

The student-activists who wrote the Port Huron Statement were influenced by late sociologist C. Wright Mills (1916–1962) (Miller 1994, p. 79; Hayden 2006, p. 55; Bailey 2003). Mills had early on—in the fall 1960—responded positively to the students’ movement by publishing an open letter in *New Left Review* (Mills 2008). In his letter he emphasized the students’ revolutionary potential. According to Mills, the new left was comprised of university students and their teachers, and representatives of cultural life familiar with societal questions. The old left stood for a working class that did not hold the key to societal change any longer but was stuck in Victorian Marxism and in the metaphysics of the working class, with goals that had become unrealistic (Mills 2008, 263). Instead, the needed political philosophy that “helps people to acts” can be found in student movements and their direct, nonviolent action

“that seems to be working, here and there” (p. 265). For these young people in the student movement, politics was not done in isolation from the social commons but rather in pursuits that would create active individuals who could recognize that change can happen if done together in mass movements and demonstrations. They embraced the notion that democracy can be achieved when people come together in deliberation as free and equal citizens.

The Statement gave students the opportunity to reflect on the world that they were inheriting upon graduation and to see it all through a lens of uncomfortability and criticalness. Carl Davidson, vice president and national secretary of SDS from 1966 to 1968, reflecting on the Statement fifty years after, stated that it “defined politics as generational,” but more importantly, it drew him into the movement as he began to understand the “cultural alienation” of his generation, coming from the dark days of McCarthyism. In other words, the statement awakened his sense of sensibility as he looked at his position in American society and saw in it much to dislike and revolt against should this be in quotes? (Davidson 2012.)

The Statement was largely made possible due to the historical context of the U.S.: growth of “social rights that protected labor from the market: social security, unemployment compensation, pensions, labor legislation and minimum wages” (Burawoy 2005, p. 157). At the time, a part of the social sciences began to deal “with such familiar issues as inequality, educational opportunity, poverty, political stability, industrial organization, and the family, all with a view, implicitly if not explicitly, to developing state policies that regulate the destructive consequences of the market” (p. 157).

Academics and the Student Movement

In several universities in the United States, for example, at Columbia University, the progressive spirit of the students manifested itself in increasing student and teacher activism, culminating in the growth of a much more radical SDS. The stereotypical picture of the passive student of the 1950’s suddenly became replaced by a generation of student and teacher radicals who according to Bailey went beyond the Statement in their radicalism (Bailey 2003, para 15, 16). As Bailey stated:

The politics represented at Port Huron bear little resemblance to those that SDS would advocate just a few years later, but the drafting of the Port Huron Statement and the feeling that SDS was beginning to break out of the impasse of American radicalism contributed to an atmosphere of intellectual ferment in SDS. As the struggle of the decade intensified, the politics of SDS would change accordingly. The political climate changed so quickly that when SDS issued a second printing of the Port Huron Statement in 1964, it included a

disclaimer saying that most of its authors no longer agreed what was in it (Bailey 2003, para 15).

Although the sixties were known for student activism, academics were also becoming more involved in radical politics by joining forces with the new peace and civil rights movements. Let us take only two examples. Howard Ehrlich was the model of a young professional in the University of Iowa in 1965 when he realized that “the university was in complicity with the war makers.” As he witnessed how the radical members of the faculty were fired and radical students flunked he turned from a liberal faculty member to a committed radical, and “became an insurgent sociologist organizing students and faculty for the coming revolution” (Ehrlich 1991, p. 233).

Paul Feyerabend (1924–1994), an emigrant philosopher from Austria, who taught in the University of California at Berkeley, also remembers that, when African American, Latina/no and Native American students started to enter universities as a result of a high-education reform, it suddenly dawned on him “that the intricate arguments and the wonderful stories I had so far told to my more or less sophisticated audience might just be dreams, reflections of the conceit of a small group who had succeeded in enslaving everyone else with their ideas.”. With some others he began to question his philosophy teaching, if not the academic profession at large. Accordingly, he stated: “Who was I to tell these people what and how to think?” (Feyerabend 1987, p. 264.)

Radicalism was also seen in various university departments and many academics were drawn to the Movement. For example, the Radical Sociology Movement started in 1967 and became an integral part of what had been termed as the “Movement” during the 1960’s, a term used to describe the various struggles in social justice that were occurring during the later part of the decade. Also, some radical sociologists formed the Sociology Liberation Movement in 1968 to address the injustices of the Vietnam War. Students and academics were also drawn to the Movement by a common concern for civil rights, gender equality, anti-imperialism, and student rights. (Flacks 1988; Fuller 1996, para. 2–3.)

Although there were many academics and students involved in the Movement, the university was still seen as a bastion of conservatism and hegemony giving rise to student protests and counter-hegemonic demonstrations (Bailey 2003). The SDS grew substantially from 1964 to 1966. When in 1964 it had only 2,500 members two years later there were 25,000 members and the number of SDS chapters sprouted up on several university campuses (Bailey 2003, para. 30). Furthermore, it was during the SDS convention in 1966 that the organization became more militant in its resistance to the status quo. Later that year the organization came up with the slogan “From protest

to resistance” (Bailey 2003, para 30). In the following years the slogan came into practice in demonstrations as in the University of Wisconsin-Madison campus against the Dow Chemical Company, one of the napalm providers for the US military during the Vietnam War. The student protest was brutally repressed by the police. The harsh outcome of the event sparked the students across the United States to fight against the Vietnam War machine, from draft offices, campus recruitment drives, and against the draft, students began to actively organize protests of resistance (Bailey 2003).

A pivotal moment for the student resistance movement came in 1968, six years after the Statement was written. That year marked the advent of revolutionary politics across the United States. From the black power demonstration at the Mexico City Summer Olympics to student occupations of their campus buildings the Movement became more ideological and revolutionary focused. After the failure of the 1968 Democratic Party convention protest where the mayor acted out draconian measures against the protestors, the resistance movement grew in numbers and by 1969 the number of students who considered themselves revolutionary or socialist numbered in the hundreds of thousands (Bailey 2003).

However, by the late 1960s, the organization became an ideological force in student and academic life. According to Kopkind, for many white radicals, the SDS was “the only show in town” whose young membership was “seized with a new vision of the revolutionary possibilities of its future” (Kopkind 1970, p. 15). The sixties became a decisive moment for the students and faculty of US universities, mainly through the short-lived teach-in movement, which brought students and teachers together in democratic learning settings and where “New Left students and faculty interacted in hallways and meeting spaces, discussing what was happening in the world, and what others were doing about it” (Gamson 1991, p. 42). The radical part of the students and teaching staff challenged the ideological direction of their society (Gamson 1991). Whether the challenge was in anti-Vietnam war protests, women’s liberation, civil rights, peace movements, or in the direction of US hegemony, the SDS played a key role in organizing young people and faculty for collective action which, in turn, gave radical academics cause for their own philosophical directions and inspirations (Gamson 1991, p. 42).

In retrospect the Statement happened at the right moment—a moment when society was rife for reform, or as Burawoy has stated, when the past was a “fool’s paradise that simply could not last” (Burawoy 2011, p. 27), and when students needed encouragement to use their imagination in shaping a new society, a society based on moral idealism and change. The Statement was a collective work, bringing various people together to formulate a manifesto that was meant to stir collective possibilities.

Its central thesis was in “activist values” and in democratic participation (Haber 2012, para. 5). Furthermore, it provided future activists with a framework for collective action, a manifesto that can be reinvented for current moments and the complexities of the here and now.

However, the Statement was written in 1962 and since then calls for a new statement have been invoked. Haber, among others, has urged for a “manifesto for the now or more humbly a statement for these times”; a manifesto that would be more inclusive, a manifesto that resulted in “collective thinking” (Haber 2012, para. 8. See also Best, McLaren & Nocella 2010; Holmwood 2011; Halffman & Radder 2015). “It surely is the case that the age which we inhabit so precariously demands manifestos” (McLaren 2015, p. 132).

Statement for our Time

The SDS came to an end during their conference in 1969 due to factionalism and infighting. As the SDS collapsed the golden age of student and teacher activism came to an abrupt end. However, as Geddicks have pointed out, many of the radical generation continued to work for “in ongoing community struggles as researchers, advisers, advocates, grants writers, technical experts as well as participants” (Geddicks 1996, para. 53). At an institutional level the student movement of the 1960s had a fairly deep impact on the universities:

Heightened emphasis on student autonomy and independent learning, interest in processes of group learning, a much-broadened curriculum (now including such new disciplines as Cultural Theory and Women’s, Black, or Gay Studies), and an attack on ‘the canon’ all have roots in the student movement, not least in their heightened sensitivity to the role of power in education (Blake & Masschelein 2003, p. 51).

All of the achievements for a democratic development of the university have been undermined, however, by the growing capitalist expansion across the globe. From the late 1970’s, although some of sixties generation were, and still are, active in the struggle for social justice and social equality, students and teachers have experienced a massive capitalist assault on higher education on every continent of the world (see Giroux 2014). This assault has not been limited to higher education but to other public services and welfare structures as well. As Halffman and Radder (2015, p. 165) aptly put it, “[t]he university has been occupied – not by students demanding a say (as in the 1960s), but this time by the many-headed Wolf management.”

The capitalist Wolf has not only colonized academia with a mercenary army of professional administrators, armed with managerial data, output indicators and audit procedures, loudly accompanied by the “Efficiency and Excellence March”, it has also

occupied other areas of the public space with evaluative measures, combined with a permanent status of efficiency and competitive practice. The current university may be just one cog in the capitalist machine, but it is also a necessary cog to dissect and analyze because like in the 1960s, students and faculty need to be once again activated to be social agents for educational change.

The current moment is indeed difficult because at the same time as there are budget cuts even useful reforms in higher education are met with opposition and doubt by the teachers and students. At times it is hard for an individual student or teacher to discern which reforms to support and which to oppose because almost every change will be interpreted as a weakening in the working and study conditions of educational workers and students. Thus, under the new Wolf governance, educational reforms have usually had a negative impact on stakeholders mainly through capitalist occupation.

One result of the capitalist occupation in university management is academic competition, or, as Halffman and Radder (2015) term it, ‘a state of war’ between academics as they try to be published within the subtext of their own departments. The publishing industry becomes a winner/loser game of thrones as academics sacrifice their own dignity in order to climb to the top by being number one in published articles. The spirit of comradeship or collectivity is obliterated by the ‘Wolf’ as each sheep is separated from the herd to be hunted and preyed upon by ‘Wolf’ managers. Accordingly, as Halffman and Radder state: “The academics allow themselves to be meekly played off against one another, like frightened, obedient sheep, hoping to make it by staying just ahead of their colleagues” (Halffman & Radder 2015, p. 165).

The consequences of such capitalist ‘Wolf’ management techniques should not be underestimated. The work-related pressures that academics face to secure an economic advantage over other academics through publishing and the corporate influence over university policy does have dire implications for students and academics alike. As Halffman and Radder point out the continuous state of competition found within Wolf managed learning institutions can lead to “destroying the social fabric of the university” (p. 167). Following Halffman and Radder there are six main trends that have impacted the public space of universities: measurability for accountability, permanent competition under the pretext of ‘quality’, the promise of greater ‘efficiency’, the adoration of excellence: everybody at the top, contentless process management, and the promise of economic salvation. (p. 165.) These techniques can certainly damage the everyday social fabric of universities for they contain nothing that is centered in the social and emotional fabric of human connectivity.

Thus we, as teachers in higher education, see an urgent need for a new Port Huron Statement not only for today's youth and education workers but also for the general public—a statement that would also cause the students to embrace the greater world, to take a deep look at their own position in society, and look uncomfortably at the world that they will inherit. Perhaps today's students may not have read about the dark days of McCarthyism, but they have experienced the dark days of an ever-tightening capitalism, a system of market sponsored imperatives, and Washington Consensus policies. Thus, a “new American authoritarianism” (Giroux 2015) is given to students by the advocates of neoliberalism, as the one and only fundamental truth for democracy to prosper and flourish inside a neoliberal new world order.

Unfortunately, the current generation of students in higher learning have mainly experienced almost nothing but shock therapy and crisis governance (see Klein 2007). Having been born and raised in the 1990s, words such as austerity and structural reform have become common in their daily lives and when we consider that we are now well into the 21st century, these students can be called the ‘crisis generation’ because they have been led through various crises whether they were real, fabricated or perceived to keep diploma mills also known as universities functioning on a par with ‘disaster capitalism’ mode of economic liberalization.

What is new about the current threat to higher education and the humanities in particular is the increasing pace of the corporatization and militarization of the university, the squelching of academic freedom, the rise of an ever increasing contingent of part-time faculty, the rise of a bloated managerial class, and the view that students are basically consumers and faculty providers of a saleable commodity such as a credential or a set of workplace skills. More striking still is the slow death of the university as a center of critique, a vital source of civic education, and crucial for public good. (Giroux 2014, p. 16.)

In this situation we believe that the Port Huron Statement can offer fresh inspiration for today's students during these times of global capitalist transformation because the transformation now occurring all over the world are taking progress not forward but backward, and thereby deadening the students sociological imagination and critical creativity.

The university needs to break away from capitalist policies and embrace a more socially just democratic discourse—a discourse where alternative ideologies are discussed, deliberated and questioned inside a classroom that views everyday life from a position of authentic freedom. However, to achieve such a change of direction, the university system needs a new reform initiative where both students and faculty need to be involved. The reform led by academics and students should consist in creating a socially just education system in which the university acts in conjunction with an

“awakening community of allies” that are found within the cities, towns and villages. In addition, as put in the Port Huron Statement:

They must wrest control of the educational process from the administrative bureaucracy. They must make fraternal and functional contact with allies in labor, civil rights, and other liberal forces outside the campus. They must import major public issues into the curriculum—research and teaching on problems of war and peace ... They must make debate and controversy, not dull pedantic cant, the common style of educational life. They must consciously build a base for their assault upon the loci of power. (Hayden 2005, p. 168)

The Statement planted the foundation of hope for many university students who were seeking change in their socio-economic environment. It strongly influenced the New Left and the student movement and it offered a new vision for the young generation of students who were coming into political maturity. Perhaps the most pertinent sentence in the statement is the sentence that is also most hopeful in attaining its vision: “If we appear to seek the unattainable, it has been said, then let it be known that we do so to avoid the unimaginable” (Hayden 2005, p. 169). Accordingly, Michael Kazin, a former member of SDS, stated fifty years after Port Huron:

For those who believe in and work for beneficial and enduring change, such longings should never be dismissed as merely “utopian.” They are, instead, the very soul of realism—the only way to motivate large numbers of people to join and commit themselves to the lofty purposes of left-wing social movements. (Kazin 2012.)

This is the lasting legacy of the Statement: bringing together students from across the United States and all over the world to work for socio-economic change, clinging to a vision that was more than utopian; rooted in the realism of the young who believed in change to avoid the unimaginable.

Towards Real Utopias of Hope

Today, as in many other times in history, people must come to terms with unemployment, poor working conditions, increases in poverty, cuts in health and elderly care, in education and other public services among other various oppressive circumstances in their lives. Quite often they do so in the conditions not of their own choosing and, as consequence, are in danger of fall into personal shock, social apathy and political passivity. Such shock therapy is happening throughout the world as governments attempt to bring their budgets in balance with capitalist governance, that is, governments spoon-feed people with strict fiscal policies, privatizations, tax reforms, deregulations, free trade initiatives and a more limited role for the state in governing the collective good. Although there have been spurts of protests in almost every continent, the great majority of people have suffered in passive silence as their

life-world has been transformed by the financial elite's shock doctrine (see Klein 2007).

Economically and socially oppressive social conditions are paid for at the individual level, for social conditions always have individual consequences. Among the costs are the lack of active engagement and fear of visibility. Feminist writer and civil rights activist Audre Lorde (1934–1992) once gave a wonderful explanation for the lack of active engagement in referring to the women who face patriarchal oppression. She implied that the main reason for women's passive behaviour was fear: "Fear of contempt, of censure, or some judgment, or recognition, of challenge, of annihilation" (Lorde 1984, p. 42). Lorde interpreted these fears as signals for another, a deeper fear, that of visibility among women, and she began to talk and write about its presuppositions. Accordingly, fear of visibility demanded first that women learnt the vital lesson, their historical position: they "were never meant to survive. Not as human beings." (Lorde 1984, p. 42.) She did not stop there but expanded her message to the other oppressed too by stating: "And neither were most of you here today, Black or not." Thus, Lorde's second lesson is a variation of the Freirean pedagogy of hope (see Freire 1999) in the form of the Hegelian negation of the negation:

That visibility which makes us most vulnerable is that which also is the source of our greatest strength. Because the machine will try to grind you into dust anyway, whether or not we speak. We can sit in our corners mute forever while our sisters and ourselves are wasted, while our children are distorted and destroyed, while our earth is poisoned; we can sit in our safe corners mute as bottles, and we still be no less afraid. (Lorde 1984, p. 42.)

The same fear of being is also prevalent among an average student who seeks conformity inside a circle of what Žižek refers to as 'formal' freedom, a freedom that allows the student to stay within "the coordinates of existing power relations" (Žižek 2002, p. 544). This student rarely questions the basic parameters of her learning: the curriculum, the study contents, the modes of teaching and learning. However, a Freirean pedagogy of hope, directly related to a pedagogy of active engagement, seeks to overcome students' silence and with it, their passivity by giving the student the opportunity to have a voice not only in the classroom but also in the community and other realms of public life (FitzSimmons et al. 2015, p. 13; Freire 1999). Furthermore, through the awareness of hope students can claim a 'critical visibility' in the social commons through an active engagement with their practice of a critical life.ⁱ Paulo Freire himself claimed that alongside with hope critical praxis would also be needed. Critical hope and reflective action would change the world together. "Opportunities for hope" should be nurtured and unveiled in everyday praxis of living (Freire 1999, p. 8–9). Critical hope needed to be included in dialogues, deliberations and debates about the world that is being read in the classroom because hope can

overcome despair, cynicism and hopelessness of the world (p. 9), all of which leads to a terrible sense of passivity without further notice. As such, hope is of primary importance so that the student sees her connection with the greater society and also understands just how people act and react to each other. At best, it leads to and encourages a sense of solidarity.

As such, solidarity is a word for action emphasizing an active relationship with the social commons. It implies cooperation with other human beings and not a rugged individualism that can be found in a neo-classical liberalism that puts competition between the human species as prime importance for a better and more successful life. Furthermore, solidarity puts the social commons in the center of social life as an antithesis to capitalist individualism with a social Darwinist tendency. Solidarity is expressed through a “value of comradeship” (see Newman 2005, p. 143). The idea of comradeship implies a commonality in struggle and a oneness in understandings and goals. Comradeship takes on an understanding of social solidarity and togetherness and a fraternal relationship of individuals—where ideas of sisterhood, brotherhood and human-hood are put in the center of ideological development. Furthermore, comradeship also puts emphasis on confronting an ideology of an unregulated free market with socialist ideals that put social solidarity as the subject of human values so that the word solidarity has a definitive meaning and not just a hollow word said by ‘left-wing’ politicians during election canvassing. Thus, we also see a need for the pedagogy of not just hope but with it, the pedagogy of solidarity so that the student can see the interconnectedness of the world both on the micro level and on the macro level. The goal would be to make the student an organic human being so that she can be an effective and compassionate activist-citizen both in the classroom and in the greater society on behalf of other human beings and other species life.

For a little moment in history—three decades after the Second World War—the university used to be a common, shared by all and intended for all. Even then, though, there were pressures and attempts from the elite to take over universities and rule them by money. If universities are now under capitalist pressure, and already occupied by neoliberal wolves, perhaps what we need is to look for new alliances from the public and informal branches of learning to turn the tide of the managerially and administratively occupied university. Halfman and Radder (2015), among others, cherish an idea of the public university, which would be as far as possible from the nightmares of capitalist management, but also from an old and worn out ideal of an ivory tower. It would not mark a return to a golden age either, for as they remind, “[t]hose times were not as blissful as some nostalgic dreamers suggest: the unequal access, the nepotism, the endless meetings, the ineffectuality, the fiddling, the mustiness” (p. 174). Instead the public university would concentrate on new social

cooperation, and ‘knowledge commons’: “a shared, organically growing garden of know-how and wisdom from which everybody may learn according to their needs, and to which everybody may contribute” (p. 174). It would consist of “new allies, new students and new partners” as well as researchers who respect good thorough scholarship instead of a publication survival of the fittest rat race.

In addition, Halfman and Radder make several propositions to reclaim the university as a public commons. Among them is a suggestion that education administration should be reorganized in an inclusive manner so that students and teachers and supporting staff have a voice in decisions making. In addition they state that every academic devotes at least 20 % of their time to teaching, and that publication arrogance would not be tolerated anymore in the public university. Furthermore they demand that “[i]n the university’s knowledge commons, learning is a collective right, even if you are older, or cannot afford to take the financial risk of a study loan. The more the fruits of our academic garden are shared, the greater the problem-solving capability of the society, the greater the country’s wealth” (p. 176).

No one can achieve or create a pedagogy of hope and solidarity alone. Thus a fearless collective scholarship and an “autonomous collective intellectual” are valuable ideas in creating alternatives to a current university regime. The idea of a collective intellectual was first put forward by the late sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, who especially in his later years became an activist sociologist. A collective intellectual consists of artists, writers and scientist engaged in political action (Bourdieu 2002, p. 5; Bourdieu 2003, p. 20). The primary goal of a collective intellectual is “to break out of the academic microcosm and to enter resolutely into the sustained exchange with the outside world”; it must form a scholarship with commitment (Bourdieu 2003, p. 24).

The idea of a collective intellectual has both negative and positive functions. *Negatively* it works to produce instruments of defence against dominant symbolic discourse of capitalism. It submits to discourse toward a merciless logical and sociological critique aiming “at uncovering the social determinants that bear on the producers of dominant discourse”, and countering “the pseudoscientific authority of authorized experts (chief among them economic experts and advisors) with a genuinely scientific critique of the hidden assumptions and often faulty reasoning that underpin their pronouncements” (Bourdieu 2003, p. 20–21). *Positively* the collective intellectual operates in reconstructing the idea of critical thought now hiding in the small corners of the academe, causing no threat to the structural order of things or anyone in positions of power. According to Bourdieu this positive, reconstructive work needs to be done in universal comradeship because the time of a single great

intellectual thinker thinking in solitary confinement is ending. The collective intellectual can “create the social conditions for the collective productions of *realist utopias*.” As Bourdieu states:

It can organize or orchestrate joint research on novel forms of political action, on new manners of mobilizing and of making mobilized people work together, on new ways of elaborating projects and bringing them into fruition together. It can play the role of midwife by assisting the dynamics of working groups in their effort to express, and thereby discover, what they are and what they could or should be, and by helping with the reappropriation and accumulation of the immense social stock of knowledge on the social world with which the social world is pregnant. It could thus help the victims of neoliberal policies to discover the differential effects of one and the same cause in apparently radically diverse events and experiences, especially for those who undergo them, associated with the different social universes, that is, in education, medicine, social welfare, criminal justice, etc., within one country or across countries. (p. 21–22.)

Conclusion

We need to keep asking questions: How are universities mirrored in capitalist societies? How are they reflected inside capitalism as they navigate through their own power and political practices? Questions about the role of universities in society need to be put on the table for critical discussion and deliberation. There needs to be an awareness that universities are a reflection of the ideology that they work within and that universities can play an active role in society on behalf of people and not on the behalf of big business. Universities can educate students to engage the world reflectively, collectively, and questioningly on behalf of the social contract, a social contract that does not favour capitalist agendas but a social contract that has social justice as its foundational claim.

There are signs of hope that people do wish to create an alternative to capitalist occupation of the state, civil society, and public institutions such as the university. There are vast examples from the recent years: Occupy and Blockupy Movements in different cities and countries, Reclaim the Streets actions, Bungehuis and Maagdenhuis occupations in the University of Amsterdam, marches for peace and justice and marches that another world is possible. We applaud students at the University of Amsterdam who occupied the university’s administration building (in February 2015) to protest austerity measures as well as their comrades at the London School of Economics who protested against capitalist education policies (in March 2015). According to *the Guardian* these students wanted a free student space to have “open, creative, and liberated space where all are free to participate in the imagining of new directly democratic, non-hierarchical and universally accessible education” (Khomami 2015). The occupiers’ main goal was to begin a dialogue with university management over the direction of the school, which the occupiers see as profit-driven

and not student-driven. Such demonstrations of resistance have a similar goal: to force dialogue and negotiation through tension. These actions of civil disobedience are in direct contradiction to the pedagogy of passivity and silence that the capitalist elite would like to impose in our lifeworld. They demonstrate in their action that a necessary ingredient “for a capitalist free, conscious and critical life is the ability to dream” and “the predatory rule of capital would be impossible without the ability to dream of a concretely better life, and an alternative social existence” (Moisio et al., 2010, p. 177).

The Port Huron Statement was a beacon of light for many of the New Left as it laid groundwork for radicalization. It galvanized the young and sent tremors into the Old Left that was basically tied to the classical foundations of Marx and Lenin. There is a question as to whether the Port Huron Statement succeeded in the aftermath of the demise of the Students for a Democratic Society, due to infighting and splits in its orientation. In the immediate aftermath of its demise, radicalization leaned toward violence. Such militant groups as the Weather Underground and Symbionese Liberation Army in the United States, Baader-Meinhof-Gruppe (the Baader-Meinhof Group), also known as Rote Armee Fraktion (the Red Army Fraction) in the Federal Republic of Germany, and Brigade Rosse (the Red Brigades) in Italy can be seen as aftershocks having their roots in the 1960’s. However, if we catapult into the 21st century we can see a re-insurgence of radical movements challenging the Establishment and the elite of various societies throughout the globe. This re-insurgence has taken up the baton from the students of the Port Huron generation. In fact, wherever the young have protested against injustice, inequality, and in favour of social justice (all examples of participatory democracy) sprung up from the values found in Port Huron. For these reasons we need to seek again the idealism found in the young of the 1960’s and refocus in bringing a much needed idealism to the youth of today who are found in high schools, colleges, trade schools, universities, and various other places where the youth generation inhabit.

One of Albert Camus’ (1964) short stories *Jonas, ou l'artiste au travail* (The Artist at Work) tells about a painter Gilbert Jonas who had written on a completely empty canvas, in very small letters, a word that could be made out, but without any certainty as to whether it should be read *solitary* or *solidary*. It is our task as critical scholars to magnify the word on the canvas, and realize that the word really is *solidary*, for in order to confront the pedagogy of passivity we will need to be instilled with a spirit of solidarity fuelled with vision, imagination, foresight, community, concern and hope. Today we need students and academics coming together to act and to draft new Port Huron Statements and to reclaim our universities and other institutions to defend basic universal human rights. We agree with Jim Burns who believes that we “can envision

and realize an alternative. We can re-appropriate and reframe social, political, economic, and education discourses to create a counter-narrative and liberate ourselves through liberating our public spaces, including schools, colleges, and universities. Through a praxis of refusal, we can reposition education as a mode of being and becoming in the pursuit of justice.” (Burns 2015.)

In conclusion we take the liberty to put our argument in the form of a condensed manifesto: We need vision to see into the future and harness possibilities to make that future aspirational toward people’s needs. We need imagination so that ideas that are deliberated in the classroom can be imagined in everyday practice. We need foresight to exercise a critically sound judgment based on correct reasoning. We need a sense of community, a feeling of kinship with other human beings and species. We also need to understand community as closeness and togetherness in everyday life, which is different from an individualized society where the ‘cash nexus’ and human relationships tend to be impersonal and disconnected from each other and other species. We need to be concerned for the future, whether due to climate change or due to loss of community and the impersonalization that consumerist culture can bring to the human habitat. Finally, we need to believe in hope that productive change can happen when we work together for just causes that put people before profit. We need to believe in solidarity and in human connectedness, because in the final analyses this is where hope is born, whether in the university or in our greater habitats. Langston Hughes put it right in his poem *Good Morning Revolution* (1932) written during the Great Depression—although the poem is dated to its timeframe, it still has a meaningful message for today:

(...) Together,
We can take everything:
Factories, arsenals, houses, ships,
Railroads, forests, fields, orchards,
Bus lines, telegraphs, radios,
(Jesus! Raise hell with radios!)
Steel mills, coal mines, oil wells, gas,
All the tools of production.
(Great day in the morning!)
Everything –
And turn’em over to the people who work.
Rule and run’em for us people who work. (...)
(Hughes 1973.)

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¹In pondering students' chances of developing their “critical visibility” we are reminded of Martin Luther King and his *Letter from Birmingham Jail* written on April 16, 1963. In the letter he explained in detail, why passivity and silence were not the answer for challenging the White hegemony that existed in the city of Birmingham,

Alabama, during that time. He equated passivity to “monologue” rather than to “dialogue”. Monologue was the language of the White supremacy. It was its means to silence the other, that is, preventing African Americans from engaging in the conversation. For King, this is what the White local and national power structure was doing to the Black community: preventing a Black voice from being heard through repressive monologues where the oppressor speaks and the oppressed listens. In his *Letter* King also wrote about why direct action was necessary to accomplish civil rights. He said that sit-ins and marches occur because the oppressor refuses to negotiate with the oppressed. The purpose of direct action tactics is “to create such a crisis and foster such a tension that a community which has constantly refused to negotiate is forced to confront the issue”. For King, in order to confront forced passivity, nonviolent direct action was necessary to force the oppressor to have a dialogical negotiation with the oppressed so that the oppressed no longer live in mindless monologues. (King 1963.)