

## University movements as laboratories of counter-hegemony

**Panagiotis Sotiris**

*Department of Sociology, University of the Aegean*

### **Abstract**

*Beginning with a reading of Kant's *The Conflict of the Faculties* and then moving towards a tentative possible theorization of the University as a hegemonic apparatus this paper aims at discussing university movements in terms of (counter) hegemony. Recent struggles against austerity, neoliberalism and the erosion of democracy, have brought together students, researchers and academics along with activists from different movements. The current restructuring of Higher Education induces profound changes in its functioning as a hegemonic apparatus, in the Gramscian sense, aiming not only at making universities more efficient and market oriented but also at embedding a new and more aggressive form of neoliberal hegemony. In light of all these, resistances to the entrepreneurialization of Universities should be viewed as not only attempts to defend public education as a public social good but also as attempts to create new forms of subaltern counter-hegemony. Militant academics must see themselves as critical educators but also as facilitators of mass critical intellectuality in direct relation to movements both within and outside academia. This requires experimentation with new forms of collective research and critical enquiry, new practices to produce and disseminate knowledge within movements, and an awareness of the potential to change the ideological balance of forces. In this sense mass movements in Higher Education can be seen not only as 'pressure groups' in favour of public universities but also as integral parts of efforts to create laboratories of a new (counter)hegemony.*

**Key words:** Higher Education, Hegemony, Gramsci, University movements, Derrida, Kant

## 1. Introduction: Kant and Derrida on the responsibility of the University

Immanuel Kant's *The Conflict of the Faculties* (Kant 1979) defines the open questions regarding the very idea of the University in Modernity. It is interesting that Kant begins with a comparison between the division of labour within academia and the factory system, since this division is, in his own words, *fabrikenmäßig* (Kant 1979, 22). At the same time, Kant insists on the need for philosophy to defend the autonomy of reason and suggests that the Faculty of Philosophy is the one that can guaranty the autonomy of public reason as opposed to the power constraints imposed upon other faculties. As Pierre Macherey (2011) has noted this insistence on the primacy of the Faculty of Philosophy, nominally an inferior Faculty compared to Theology, Medicine and Law, is a theoretical revolution, in the spirit of the French Revolution. We know from Kant's text 'An answer to the Question: 'What is Enlightenment?'' (Kant 1784) that the *public* use of reason is oriented to the well-being, enlightenment and freedom of all society as opposed to the *private* use of reason, namely its restricted use in support of particular interests and functions. It is also interesting that for Kant philosophy as the faculty representing public reason is on the left side of the parliament of knowledge (Kant 1979, 59). Of course what Kant was actually facing were the attempts to impose censorship especially in matters of religion and theology and not market forces as in contemporary universities. But it is obvious that what he was trying to think was the place of public reason in a university that was on the one hand trying to accommodate the knowledge production needs of society (namely bourgeois society) and on the other hand trying to cope with various forms of political intervention, with both tendencies – coping for practical needs and guarantying political manipulation – being in a certain synergy and with public reason and its freedom in opposition to both. One might say that right from the beginning Kant's *idea of the University* brings forward the tension inherent in the very fabric of this institution, namely the tension between on the one hand the constraints of the market, of the emerging reality of capitalist society, and of state power and on the other hand the challenge of articulating a rational criticism of contemporary society.

In this sense, there has never been a golden era of a liberal humanistic university and in reality the 'Humboldtian' university, based upon the freedom of teaching and

research, the unity of science and scholarship, and the primacy of pure science over professional training, is more of an historical construction, a myth that never actually existed in its full form (Paletschek 2001; Rüegg 2004; Ash 2006). From the beginning the liberal humanist university represented this tension and contradiction, was a condensation of contradictions, it was a battlefield between antagonistic constraints coming from the reality of research, the various forms of state and bureaucratic intervention, the pressures coming from the reality of the evolving capitalist industry, the repercussions of social, national and political upheavals within universities.

Jacques Derrida offered impressive commentaries on this text on various occasions in an attempt to rethink *the responsibility of the university*. For Derrida (2001) rethinking the University in its *unconditionality* means rethinking both its potential for critical reasoning, but also its vulnerability to the pervasive influence of market forces that jeopardize the very idea of the University.

Because it is absolutely independent, the university is also an exposed, tendered citadel, to be taken, often destined to capitulate without condition, to surrender unconditionally. It gives itself up, it sometimes puts itself up for sale, it risks being simply something to occupy, take over, buy; it risks becoming a branch office of conglomerates and corporations. This is today, in the United States and throughout the world, a major political stake: to what extent does the organization of research and teaching have to be supported, that is, directly or indirectly controlled, let us say euphemistically “sponsored” by commercial and industrial interests? (Derrida 2001, 28).

Derrida’s answer is that the very profession of teaching, especially in the field of the Humanities includes a certain moral responsibility, entails a public ethical commitment to theory and consequently requires a critical rethinking of the very notion of the Humanities. This ethical commitment and necessary resistance to the forces of the market cannot be limited only to theory, but also to an alliance with forces outside academia.

One thus touches on the very limit, *between the inside and the outside*, notably the border of the university itself, and within it, of the Humanities. One thinks *in* the Humanities that one cannot and must not let oneself be enclosed within the inside of the Humanities. But for this thinking to be strong and consistent requires the Humanities. To think is not an academic, speculative or theoretical

operation; it is not a neutral utopia. No more than saying is a simple enunciation. It is on the always divisible limit, it is at this limit that what arrives arrives. It is this limit that is affected by the arriving and that changes. This limit of the impossible, the “perhaps” and the “if”, this is the place where the university is exposed to reality to the forces from without (be they cultural, ideological political, or other). It is there that the university is in the world that it is attempting to think. On this border, it must therefore negotiate and organize its resistance. And take its responsibilities. Not in order to enclose itself and reconstitute the abstract phantasm of sovereignty whose theological and humanist heritage it will perhaps have begun to deconstruct, if at least it has begun to do so. But in order to resist effectively, by allying itself with extra-economic forces, in order to organize an inventive resistance, through its *oeuvres*, its works to all attempts at reappropriation (political, juridical, economic, and so forth), to all the other figures of sovereignty. (Derrida 2001, 55-56)

It is obvious that Derrida was not thinking simply in terms of a defence of a traditional role of the University and of a traditional conception of reasoning and rationality and the traditions of liberal humanism. He was thinking in terms of both a redefinition of the Humanities, their role and their orientation, and, at the same time, in terms of an alliance, a common work and struggle with movements outside the University. In order to move the internal limit of the university, the limit between critical reasoning, teaching and knowledge production and the forces of capital (and the constraints imposed by political power) we need to overcome the limit between the university and its outside. As Derrida notes the University is always exposed to forces and constraints from without. Therefore, the question is how to use other forces, coming from society and its movements, in order to defend the university as a public university.

If we are going to put up this ‘inventive resistance’ Derrida was referring to, we need first of all to look at the changes that have taken place in Universities. Changes in University administration have attempted to violently incorporate entrepreneurial practices within academia through changes in funding, through privatization, but also through the use of representatives of the business community in academic administration. The whole ‘Bologna Process’ poses new challenges (de Sousa Santos 2011). At the same time new forms of censorship emerge and disciplinary restraints emerge. Fighting against them cannot be the sole responsibility of forces within

Universities. We need to rethink this challenges in terms of an alliance with movements outside academia. At the same time, we need to think of the specific positioning of university movements within contemporary broader resistances against austerity and neoliberal restructuring and within movements for social change and emancipation.

## **2. The University as hegemonic apparatus**

Therefore, we need to move from the *idea of the university* to an attempt to actually theorize its role and the potential of resistances within it. In the past decades there has been an impressive literature on the process of entrepreneurialization of universities and on the resistances to it. I think that this process cannot be defined simply in terms of commodification of knowledge and / or of privatization of Higher Education, despite the importance of both tendencies. Or, to be more precise, it is not enough to theorize commodification and privatization. What is needed is to actually try and think of the changing role of the University as a hegemonic apparatus.

Antonio Gramsci introduced the concept of the hegemonic apparatus in an attempt to theorize the very complexity of bourgeois exercise of power as hegemony, as a complex articulation of domination, direction, coercion, and consent. It refers to one or many institutions emerging as the hegemonic apparatus as the basis of the State in its narrow coercive sense.

I have remarked elsewhere that in any given society nobody is disorganized and without party, provided that one takes organization and party in a broad and not formal sense. In this multiplicity of private associations (which are of two kinds: natural and contractual or voluntary), one or more predominates relatively or absolutely –constituting the hegemonic apparatus of a social group over the rest of the population (or of civil society): the basis for the State in the narrow sense of the governmental-coercive apparatus (Gramsci 1971, p. 264-265; Gramsci 1977, p. 800 (Q6, §136)).

As Peter Thomas has suggested a hegemonic apparatus is ‘the means by which a class’s forces in civil society are translated into power in political society’ (Thomas 2009, p. 226). Therefore we are dealing with a concept that attempts exactly to see the

complex and necessarily contradictory modalities of political power as transformed social forces. The concept of the hegemonic apparatus is crucial in order to offer a better and more precise theorization of hegemony. According to Christine Buci-Glucksmann,

the hegemonic apparatus qualifies the concept of hegemony and gives it greater precision, hegemony being understood as the political and cultural hegemony of the dominant classes. As a complex set of institutions, ideologies, practices and agents (including the 'intellectuals') the hegemonic apparatus only finds its unity when the expansion of a class is under analysis. Hegemony is only unified into an apparatus by reference to the class that constitutes itself in and by the mediation of various sub-systems (Buci-Glucksmann 1980, p. 48)

The realization of a hegemonic apparatus is also always linked to a transformation not just of the ideological balance of forces, but a more general transformation of forms of knowledge, consciousness and collective practice. 'The realization of a hegemonic apparatus, in so far as it creates an new ideological terrain determines a reform of knowledge and of methods of knowledge: it is a fact of knowledge, a philosophical fact' (Gramsci 1971, p. 365-366; Gramsci 1977, p. 1250 (Q10II, §12)). I think that this conception offers us a way to think both the importance of the university as a hegemonic apparatus (or to be more precise as part of the hegemonic apparatus of the bourgeoisie), the ways the current neoliberal entrepreneurial restructuring of the university has to be related to changes to actual hegemonic strategies, but also the political and (counter)hegemonic potential of movements within universities. This Gramscian approach can also help us understand the non-teleological historicity of the University, how it became part of the bourgeois hegemonic apparatus as the result of whole history of struggles and strategies, at all levels.

It is interesting that in most radical theorizations of education Althusser's theory of the Ideological Apparatuses of the State (ISAs) (Althusser 1971) is usually a reference point and not Gramsci's conception of the hegemonic apparatus. The importance of the whole conception of the ISAs is undeniable, since it represented a rupture with any 'socially neutral' conception of education, linking it to the reproduction of classes and the social division of labour. However, I think that the original Gramscian conception of the hegemonic apparatus offers a better way to theorize the role of

education and Higher Education in particular, in the sense of incorporating all aspects of the educational apparatus: ideological, political, economical etc. In light of this, Althusser's criticism of the concept of hegemonic apparatus is not justified. Especially in *Marx in his limits*, a 1978 manuscript he chose not to publish, Althusser insisted that the problem is that Gramsci does not define what the basis of the hegemonic apparatuses is. Althusser asks: 'a petrol engine runs on petrol; an Ideological State Apparatus runs on ideology; but what does a hegemonic apparatus run on?' (Althusser 2006, p. 140) In my opinion this is exactly one of the problems with Althusser's conception of the Ideological State Apparatuses, especially when used in reference to higher education. Limiting our scope only to ideology cannot account for the complexity of the practices within educational apparatuses. In its original Gramscian conception a hegemonic apparatus is not a 'machine' running on ideology, but a complex and contradictory set of material processes and practices that transform social force into political power and hegemony, (re)producing not only ideological formations, but also social forms and hierarchies, political and economic strategies, discourses and knowledge practices. Contemporary universities incorporate ideological, economic, disciplinary, political practices, in sum they form a hegemonic, not simply an ideological apparatus. I believe that we should re-read the usefulness of the concept of hegemonic apparatus, in the sense that it includes and expands the insights of Althusser's own conception of the Ideological Apparatuses of the State.

I believe, on the contrary that the concept, of the hegemonic apparatus enables us to think the strategic character of current transformations of the University, including commodification, entrepreneurialization and privatization, as aspects of a changing capitalist hegemony. What is being currently (re)produced in Higher Education is not simply the dominant ideology and the division between manual and mental labour, but crucial aspects of a broader class strategy from the part of the forces of capital. At the same time, this implies that also crucial aspects of the very materiality of social struggles and conflicts are 'internalised' within higher education. Therefore, such an approach can bring forward the many ways that class struggles transverse hegemonic apparatuses. Althusser's self-critical insistence on the primacy of '*class struggle over dominant ideology and over ideological apparatuses*' (Althusser 1995, p. 255) must be read in the more general sense of the primacy of struggles over the hegemonic

function of apparatuses such as education, exactly what Poulantzas tried to theorize in his conception of the State as the material condensation of class relations of force (Poulantzas 2000).

Therefore, thinking in terms of hegemonic apparatuses can help us think of the current role of Universities. Universities do not simply produce knowledge or degrees. They do not simply help capitalist profitability in terms of applied research. They do not simply reproduce social divisions of labour and professional hierarchies. Because of the increasing importance of university-based or affiliated research and knowledge production for the development of new technologies, new forms of production and for the articulation of discourses and theories on contemporary issues and their role in the reproduction of state and business personnel, universities also act as strategic nodes in the development of class strategies (both dominant and subaltern), in the production of subjectivities, in the transformation of collective practices (Read 2009; Sotiris 2012) . They affect “common sense”, they disseminate forms of thinking, and they act as paradigms of successive entrepreneurship but also of successful movements. The evolution of mass Higher Education implies that they affect a growing number of the contemporary workforce, even if higher education does not necessarily lead to upward social mobility, in comparison to the past. That is why struggles within academic institutions have to be studied in their relation to the broader social and political conjuncture.

### **3. The transformation of the universities**

The current capitalist crisis and the transformations it has brought along have led to new wave of neoliberal restructurings of the universities. In most countries the combination between austerity policies and a more general drive towards privatization has led to an even higher dependence on high tuition fees and to the quest for various forms of private funding of research (Sotiris 2012; McGettigan 2013; Hill (ed.) 2013). Budget constraints and the search for alternative forms of funding has accelerated new forms of academic management based on the use of representatives of the business world in steering academic organs, especially in countries such as Greece with a



strong tradition of academic democracy and student participation (Sotiris 2013). This new wave has also been increasingly authoritarian in the sense of representatives of the new form of entrepreneurial academic management targeting collective practices and activism within academia. From the iconic struggle and occupation of Middlesex University over the closure of the philosophy department to the disciplinary procedures against militant academics in Turkey, and from the various anti-union initiatives in American universities to the attempt in Greece to limit the possibility of mass student action, there are many examples of such authoritarian attacks on university movements. In certain cases the aggressive character of these reforms goes beyond the actual realities of contemporary resistances to neoliberalism, suggesting a strategy close to what Alberto Toscano has described as ‘counter-revolution-without-a-revolution’ (Toscano 2013a, p. 100).

This authoritarian turn should not be seen only in its ‘instrumental’ rationale, namely as an attempt to make sure the normal functioning of universities. Nor should it be seen as a manifestation of neoliberalism’s aversion to collective practices and struggles. Above all it should be seen as a strategic move, the result of a deeper apprehension of the stakes involved in contemporary struggles. The University is never only about knowledge and research; it is also about collective aspirations, representations and practices. Contemporary neoliberal strategy aims at reproducing a labour force that is at the same time more qualified, more able to move to different posts, in a position to cope with processes of retraining, but also with fewer rights, lower wages, more ready to accept intervals of unemployment, more eager to accept the management’s prerogatives. It is obvious that such a labour force must also be more fragmented, more individualized, more ‘atomized’, without collective organizing and collective experiences in general. In this sense for students to go through the experience of collective struggle and organizing that one can have in case of a major student and / or university movement is *per se* a counter tendency to the dominant one. To use Jason Read’s concept of the neoliberal production of subjectivity (Read 2009) such movements produce different militant forms of subjectivity. This also has to do with the political potential of contemporary struggles within academic institutions, in the sense of a new radicalism.

As a *hegemonic apparatus*, the University acts as one of the laboratories of hegemony. From the development of new productive techniques, as hegemonic strategies (in line with Gramsci's reference to hegemony beginning in the factory), to new economic discourses, to new ways to relate to technology, to new aesthetics and in general collective practices, the university is – in many aspects a laboratory of hegemony. At the same time the university as a hegemonic apparatus, either public or private, internalizes the general tendencies of social antagonism. Moreover, the very attempt towards a Higher Education that is more responsive to the needs of capital and business, has the result of internalizing the very contradictions of contemporary capitalist production: from the increasing precariousness of labour, including intellectual, 'cognitive' labour to the various faces of austerity, students (and academics) have an even greater than before knowledge of and experience of the realities of the workplace. Current struggles, not only in their discourse but also as material tendencies and practices are not simple demands for better education and work prospects. They form one of the expressions of the broader struggle between capital and labour takes place. This is evident in the discourse of contemporary movements and their renewed anti-capitalist radicalism (Solomon and Palmieri (eds.) 2011; (Collective) *After the Fall* 2010). In this sense crucial aspects of the balance of forces that determine hegemony in its relational and practical sense, are being determined within Universities. To give a recent example: An important aspect of the recent reemergence of radical movements all over the world from the Arab Spring to the Indignados movement, and from the Greek struggles to the Occupy! Movement had to do with the radicalization of important segments of university trained intellectual and affective workers. This in its turn had to do with the continuing reproduction of various forms of student radicalism. Although many announced the end of radical student politics after the 1970s, in reality there has been, in different scale and intensity, a continuous emergence of student movements, especially since the 2000s (Kouvélakis 2007; Solomon and Palmieri (eds.) 2011; Somma 2012) However, we should not limit this perspective only to student movements and their results. As stated above, contemporary universities in their research and teaching functions can be considered laboratories of capitalist hegemony. They help the articulation of dominant ideologies, the elaboration of technological, economic and political strategies, the attitudes and forms of thinking of the prospective labour force.

Consequently, struggles over what is being taught or produced as research can also affect the hegemonic balance of force. But these struggles cannot be defined simply in terms of content, of what is taught or being produced as research outcome. I do not want to underestimate these aspects, nor the work that has been done in critical directions. However, I think that simply teaching subjects or producing papers in critical directions is not enough, and it can also act as a legitimization process of the entrepreneurialization of universities. It is as if university administrators are saying: ‘We might have subjected the core of our research operations to the demands of private sponsors, but we are not so bad, because we can still fund a cultural studies graduate program in a post-marxist direction.’

Therefore, we have to understand the nature of the contemporary hegemonic function of the University. If we treat the hegemonic function simply in terms of content, in terms of the discourses articulated within academia, then we miss a great part. The university is not simply a venue or a forum of ideas, it a complex articulation of practices and strategies. The new emphasis on commodification, the functioning of the university as a commercial provider catering for customers’ needs, the new emphasis on competence, the new forms of administration, the significance of debt, all these are parts of the hegemonic function of the university. The University acts as a node or a hub in the development of new capitalist strategies, in the evolution of techniques, in the articulation of the dominant discourses. At the same time the university is more than instrumental in the imposition of the current form of neoliberal ‘passive revolution’, in the sense of disarticulating, disjoining fragmenting collective practices. The very concept of the student as consumer, the deep, pervasive, anthropological character of student debt (Lazzarato 2011; McClanahan 2013), the new pressure on students, facing extreme precariousness, to acquire as many qualifications as possible, all these attest to the actuality of the current hegemonic function of the university.

#### **4. The counter-hegemonic potential of contemporary university movements**

All these transformations can also account for the counter – hegemonic potential of current struggles within universities. If we manage to have alternative practices, collectivities, sensitivities within struggles in Universities, if we manage to intensify the contradictions of its functioning, if we manage to have major victories against current restructurings, then we can say that we are actually affecting the balance of forces in a process that goes beyond simple demands and can affect the whole of society.

Of course this also requires redefining what constitutes a potential counter-hegemony. Simply articulating resistances to neo-liberalism, or defences of the public university is not enough. If we associate counter hegemony as the strategic condensation of a new politics of labour, an attempt at social experimentation beyond capitalism, new forms of democracy and collectivity and new forms of social interaction, in sum what one might describe a socialist perspective, then we need to think in a more radical way. I am not referring to revolutionary reveries or artificial intellectual constructions, but to the elaboration and projection of the traces of communism evident – as material potentialities – in today’s struggles against austerity, privatization, commodification and entrepreneurialization. But such a perspective cannot be reduced to defending public universities, in their present form, especially if we take into consideration that the current form of public university is also pervaded by market practices, is also subject to pressures to present marketable results, and represents a certain hegemonic function. That is why Alberto Toscano is right to insist that we cannot simply demand a formal democratization of universities and instead search for the subversive potential of contemporary struggles in the sense of a search for a different practice of the University (Toscano 2013).

What we need is a strategy to defend, re-appropriate and transform university through struggles and movements. Instead of the dual schematic reactions of either self-limitation within the contours of academic functioning and trade unionism or of an exodus from the university – a recurring theme in radical student politics from 1968

onwards, with students trying to move from university politics to society – I would like to suggest a strategy of dual power within universities. Usually, we associate dual power simply with a situation of a catastrophic equilibrium between the revolutionary movement and the forces of capital. However, even if we take Lenin's definition of a 'power directly based [...] on the direct initiative of the people from below, and *not on law* enacted by a centralised state power' (Lenin 1975, 34), and think about it in the more positive sense of movements creating alternative spaces of struggle but also of alternative new social and political forms, collective practices and configurations, based exactly upon the initiative of the people from below, then indeed we can see the relevance of a dual power reference. This would imply not simply mounting resistances, but also experimenting with attempts to make use of the university, its people, its resources in a manner antagonistic to the dominant entrepreneurial model, offering concrete examples of critical and emancipatory social and educational practices. Moreover, only in this way can contemporary movements actually become experimental sites for a new socialist perspective, sites of collective experimentation with new social forms. This experimental and learning aspect of contemporary movements is one of the most challenging aspects of contemporary movements

What is more important is to realize that we must think of socialism not as a project, but as constant and conscious experimentation. And we should not wait until working class seizing power to start this experimentation. [...] Running a self-management factory, organizing the collapse of the public health system, using school facilities to offer gratis tutorials, creating networks of distribution based on fair trade or even non-monetary exchange, resisting contemporary enclosures in cultural products or software, and even the numerous single acts of solidarity, using general assemblies as a decision process, all these should not be seen simply in an instrumental way. They must be seen as the necessary learning processes for alternative non-capitalist social configurations. (Hill *et al.* 2013, p. 316)

So what we need is to combine the development of movements and resistances to the current wave of neoliberal entrepreneurial reforms with the full flourishing of alternative knowledge practices. What is important is that these alternative practices are already part of the current repertoire of struggles within universities. The new solidarity between students and professors as apprehension of the common demands for public education but also of the importance of a critical pedagogical relation, the

experimentation with collective knowledge practices as part of sit-ins and occupations, the very concept of the Occupation as a re-appropriation of space (in both its material and symbolic function), the extended use of new media in order to disseminate critical discourses, the new desire to produce not only demands but also discourses, visions even theory from the part of striking students, all these attest to new possibilities for counter-hegemonic practices within university movements. This also makes imperative a different approach from the part of radical academics, a new collective ethos of research, teaching and working within the movement. This demands that we go beyond simply trying to be critical and radical in what we produce as theoretical outcome. I am not denying the need for high standards of academic writing, but we must think beyond simply being the left-wing or radical limit of contemporary academic scenery. Nor do I think that what we need is simply having more ‘public intellectuals’ as Russel Jacoby suggested some years ago (Jacoby 1987) (one is tempted to think how do figures like Žižek or Badiou – undoubtedly public intellectuals – fit into Jacoby’s conception). What we need is new intellectual and theoretical practices.

First of all we need a new form of militant research, new forms of theoretical research on the side of movements, in collaboration with militants, with militants actually being part of the research process in the sense of both suggesting ideas and for research and offering help in the very research process. There is a wealth of such experiences to study from the 1960s experiments in radical alternative education and research practices, such as the Kritische Universität in Berlin of the Negative University at Trento (Socorso Rosso 1976), to more contemporary experiences. In this sense, it is important to study the experience of Higher Education reforms in Latin America and especially Venezuela and the experiences of alternative higher education structures giving emphasis on the refusal of economic efficiency in favor of integration within the community (Muhr and Verger 2006; MacLaren 2013). Experiences such as the Unitierra in Oaxaca and the Unitierra at Chiapas point to this direction of a radically different collective conception of teaching, knowledge and research, of working along mass movements and of using the experience of people themselves (Esteba 2007). The same goes for experiences such as the Workers and Punks’ University in Slovenia, a radical collective of students, researchers and

activists that has had an important theoretical and practical contribution in radical socialist politics in Slovenia.

Secondly we need a new wave of popularization of knowledge and theory. One of the most important aspects of contemporary mass movements is the emphasis they lay on public debate and discussions of ideas. From New York to Athens people have been opening up their ears to alternative projects and militant academics have a moral obligation to contribute with ideas, information, and analyses of the conjuncture. Radical and progressive academics must contribute to this emerging alternative public sphere.

Thirdly, we need new forms of collective theoretical production within movements: a movement to fight precariousness of labour must also include the production of knowledge on contemporary capitalist restructurings; a movement to fight environmentally dangerous mining practice must also produce knowledge on the economics and tactics of the mining industry; a movement in favour of public health must also produce research on the social and health costs of neoliberalism. To all these alternative knowledge practices possible we can still make good use of universities, especially in times of struggles. It is true that university authorities in the past years have done whatever they can in order to limit these possibilities. From measures such as the abolishing the university sanctuary in Greece, to increasingly higher costs for the use of university rooms for purposes other than teaching, to moves such as the dismantling of the University of London Union (ULU) , to all forms of institutional barriers to such practices, we can see all signs of this pre-emptive authoritarian transformation of the university. But we can still find ways to re-appropriate the university as public space. Moreover, there is also the possibility of linking or coordinating such practices with other alternative public spaces within or outside of academia (exemplified in the presence of radical academics in the Occupy! meetings). The same can be said for the use of other aspects of the infrastructure of public universities. For example in Greece the battle around whether [athens.indymedia.org](http://athens.indymedia.org), a radical alternative collective news-website could be hosted in the servers of the Athens Polytechnic was such an example.

At the same time it is necessary to see how also movements can also be knowledge sites and processes how we can combine activism with collective learning and also forms of militant research. As radical academics we have much to offer to this direction. In a way, this will be our opportunity to work towards processes helping the emergence of new ‘organic intellectuals’ as envisaged by Antonio Gramsci. Today’s ‘organic intellectuals’ of the forces of labour should not be conceived only in terms of articulate propagandists of the general political line or of political theorists. We can also see other forms: from software engineers dedicated to open source code to radical educators involved in alternative forms of schooling to radical historians bringing forward new forms of subaltern histories, to doctors bringing forward and fighting the devastation to public health brought by neoliberalism. This is the contemporary version of Kant’s insistence on the *public* use of reason, of the use of knowledge and expertise within the framework of social and political movements. And all these must be accomplished through a new collective practice of the university that should follow the lines suggested by Gramsci in 1917.

Let us organize culture in the same way that we seek to organize any practical activity. Philanthropically, the bourgeoisie have decided to offer the proletariat the Popular Universities. As a counterproposal to philanthropy, let us offer solidarity, organization. Let us give the means to good will, without which it will always remain sterile and barren. It is not the lecture that should interest us, but the detailed work of discussing and investigating problems, work in which everybody participates, to which everybody contributes, in which everybody is both master and disciple. (Gramsci 1985, 25)

All these should not be read as an attempt at simply creating parallel structures and avoiding direct confrontation with the forces of capital. On the contrary, we are refereeing to a process that goes along central struggles, supports them, and helps their politicization. The aim of all these practices is not simply to create alternative knowledge practices, but to create conditions of counter-hegemony. Political projects cannot be conceived simply in terms of catch phrase and general directions. Producing again ‘concrete utopias’ and ‘archaeologies of the future’ of emancipation, cannot be the responsibility of party leaderships or of enlightened leaders, as it was the conception in traditional left-wing politics. Nor is it enough to seek the advice of experts, as it is the tendency in many cases of left wing reformism. What we need is a



collective process of experimentation and knowledge production. People learn during movements. They are forced to learn the terrain of struggle. They are forced to understand their situation. They are forced to think of alternatives. This learning aspect of movements of protest and social emancipation is usually underestimated by the political Left.

Movements can therefore become ‘hotbeds’ of new projects, can dialectically and critically incorporate the experiences of militant action and self-management into a critique of capitalist socialist relations that leads to radical alternatives, both in the sense of a projects, analysis, transition programs, but also of a changed ‘common sense’, of transformed collective representations. That is why we must go back to Gramsci who insisted on political organizations and movements being the elaborators of new forms of mass intellectuality (Sotiris 2013a). Only under such conditions can we talk about the emergence of not only mass movements but of a new ‘historical bloc’, to borrow Gramsci’s term, namely of the encounter of a radicalized alliance of the subaltern class, with programs of social emancipation and transformation, through new forms of collective organizing, of subjectivity, of new forms of mass critical intellectuality. It is only in this sense that we can contribute to a profound social and cultural transformation, in the terms that Gramsci described:

The educative-formative work that a homogeneous cultural centre carries out, the elaboration of a critical consciousness that it promotes and favours on a specific historical base which contains the concrete premises for such an elaboration, cannot be limited to the simple theoretical enunciation of ‘clear’ methodological principles: this would be to proceed merely in the manner of the eighteenth-century ‘philosophes’. The work needed is complex and must be articulated and graduated. It requires a combination of deduction and induction, formal logic and dialectic, identification and distinction, positive demonstration and the destruction of the old. And not in the abstract but in the concrete, on the basis of the real and of actual experience. (Gramsci 1985, 417-418 Gramsci 1977, 2268 (Q24, §3))

Of course this is not to be conceived simply in terms of the role to be played by militant radical academics with a moral commitment to working within the movement. It will be a much broader, more collective experience. But radical academics have the opportunity to be part of this process, to face this challenge, to

beyond simply academic dignity towards their contribution to the creation of an alternative future.

## Conclusion

This article started with a discussion of the *idea of the university* as defined by Immanuel Kant. This *idea of the university*, as a critical social and political space, entails this possibility of turning universities into laboratories of counter-hegemony, even though the old master himself would have been content with a more humane and democratic functioning of public universities.

As we tried to show, this is not simply the result of the internal dynamic of the university as a public space producing critical knowledge. Rather, it is exactly the result of a history of struggles and demands that actually redefine the very meaning of 'public'. The recent global trend towards a more 'entrepreneurial' higher education, is also an attempt into articulating a new more aggressive capitalist neoliberal hegemony. However, the same process towards this kind of hegemony, also creates the conditions for university movements with an important counter-hegemonic potential, especially if we think of movements as learning processes and experimental sites for new social forms and configurations.

Therefore for us, within contemporary university movements, facing again the possibility of potentially insurrectionary sequences, it is necessary to try and defend a certain *idea of the university that at the same time includes Kant's conception and goes beyond it, goes to the direction of social emancipation and socialist transformation*. If we read Kant's reference to public reason as exactly the collective potential and obligation for the thinking of new social relations, new institutions, new forms of mass intellectuality, in sharp contrast to capitalist violence and exploitation, then what we need is a *movement that is at the same time social, political but also cultural*. The Public University as a site of struggles for hegemony can play an important role. *This is our responsibility*.

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### **Author's Details**

Panagiotis Sotiris has taught social and political philosophy at the Department of Sociology of the University of the Aegean in Mytilene. As part of the austerity measures his adjunct lecturer contract has not been renewed. He has published widely on Marxist philosophy, radical social theory, university movements and the social and political situation in Greece. He can be reached at [psot@soc.aegen.gr](mailto:psot@soc.aegen.gr)