

We won't pay for your crisis, we create institutions of the common!

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Last year, the biggest social movement of the last thirty years erupted in the Italian political scene centralising the issue of the crisis in its double meaning; on the one side, the global economic crisis that defines the state of contemporary economic financialisation,¹ and on the other, the university crisis and the Bologna Process.²

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The crisis of the university system is bound by the conditions of capitalistic production, which is to say that knowledge has become a central commodity of production and the most important source of contemporary capitalistic valorisation: in this context, the university becomes immediately productive as a central site in contemporary capitalism, so that university administrations have a close relation to capitalist valorisation.

This importance of knowledge inside capitalistic production underlines how the university crisis is strictly bound to the crisis of knowledge measurement, and how the financial crisis points out the inability to translate it into an artificial measure, attempting to valorise what is not measurable. In fact, the Bologna Process is the most obvious attempt to establish a co-optation mechanism of social cooperation and productive *potentia*: knowledge is measured through the introduction of credits (ECTS) that qualify study-time; there is a frenetic modulation and fragmentation of training courses; a dizzying acceleration of study-times; differential barriers to graduate studies; a multiplication of control mechanisms and discipline of living labour; a homogenisation and standardisation of academic paths. Knowledge de-qualification means limiting its circulation, stratifying its distribution and differentiating access to it--*déclassement* is a *dispositif* that reduces the ability and autonomy of production in order to create a hierarchy in

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labour market and society in general. At the same time, hierarchisation and stratification of the labour force need some measure because it is a necessary condition and a grid of intelligibility over which the process of hierarchisation can operate.

Furthermore, the central importance of knowledge as a commodity establishes a continuous *déclassement* of the contemporary workforce in the accumulation of qualifications and masters, whereas access is not restricted to an élite--on the contrary, differential inclusion becomes the main selection instrument, so that the reorganisation of knowledge system definitely becomes a central knot of struggles in the university and across the metropolis.³

In fact, this close relation between the university and the metropolis is paradigmatic when we analyse the contemporary precariousness of life and labour conditions. The investigation of the elements that redefine the relation between cognitive hegemony and the lowering of the material conditions of contemporary labour, between the new qualities of labour and the new forms of governance is, more than ever, a strategic issue. Analysing what role the crisis plays inside these relations could open a new space of enquiry able to single out possible battlegrounds for intensifying struggles inside cognitive capitalism and its various articulation in different contexts.

To put it briefly, the university is becoming a fundamental place for contemporary social conflicts, but this is not a new. Over the past years in Europe alone, significant mobilisations have sprouted in France, Austria, Greece, Germany, Finland, Serbia, Denmark and Croatia.

Despite the objective difficulties that constitutional unification projects are having, the Bologna Process is influencing all national reform processes, in the attempt to define a homogeneous application of its dictates. At the same time, along with this homogeneity, we find national specificity, immediate translation processes and differential temporal applications.

In fact, Italy was the first country in which the Bologna Process was fully implemented in Europe, working as a sort of laboratory for this new process through different legislative measures. All kinds of governments, the centre-left as well the centre-right, immediately translated the European indications into structural reforms of research and the university education system. Just as in the last years when several social movements expressed their opposition to this process and to the reforms signed by different governments (above all in 2001 and 2005), the Anomalous Wave opened a new space of conflict among all

levels of education, not only opposing reforms but also opening a field of conflict that involved the entire political scene, spreading a constituent process over the whole country.

THE ITALIAN MOVEMENT OF THE ANOMALOUS WAVE

Last year was very important for the Italian struggles over the material condition of the cognitive production: the main point in this conflict was the education system. There were strikes, occupations and demonstrations, from primary and high schools to the universities; a general and diffused mobilisation against government disinvestment in public educational.⁴ The movement started with the approval of a series of measures that hit the whole world of education, from elementary schools to research, in the context of generalised funding cuts. Heavy financial cuts constituted the essence of Gelmini's reforms, paving the way for the transformation of the university into a private institution in terms of funding, with a consequent total submission of the university to the needs of private capital.⁵ For instance, the introduction of private institutions inside universities was implemented through the delegitimisation of the Academic Senate and the empowering of Administrative Council in which the 40% of members comprise private managers. This means that entrepreneurial forms are used as the only criteria to evaluate the compatibility of the university within the organisation of capitalist production.

Moreover, budget cuts led to the block of turnover, that is to say, a cut of research places that consequentially ends with a large presence of old professors: a step toward a gerontocracy faculty staff and a stabilisation of the power relation between professors inside the faculties.

Here, it is fundamental to take into account another feature of the Italian university: the persistence of feudal aspects inside the formal bargaining of academic organisational and managerial powers in the university. The pillars that sustain this power inside our universities--determining carriers and the distribution of funding--are constituted by personalistic power relationships, through promises and blackmail in order to measure the faithfulness of their subjects. If we add the tragic absence of a research market followed by private enterprises and the chronic poverty of public funds addressed to the research, we paint a clear picture of the elements that distinguish the Italian anomaly inside the European trend.

Furthermore, a central element of these juridical measures was normalising and disciplining student life, rendering university researchers increasingly precarious. To justify this frontal attack on education, the Italian government mounted a direct attack against students, based on the rhetoric of meritocracy and university under-productivity; they said that administrations weren't able to manage funds and students weren't prepared to work and were unsuitable for the job market. Far from establishing a meritocratic system, funding cuts and blocking turnover consolidated the old relations of power inside university departments through the role of our so-called 'Barons'.

At the beginning, the issue of a reduction of public funds was the most important element shared across the movements nationwide, but soon the claims concerning the modality of knowledge production opened other political debates. The critique of educational reform was set into a wider critique of the capitalist system and the economic crisis that directly struck the people whose conditions of life had been rendered more precarious and more uncertain through progressive

indebtedness (including students, following the Anglo-Saxon model) and a corresponding progressive degradation of knowledge. Moreover, Gelmini's reform introduced the so-called 'honour loan' that established the introduction of permanent debt within student life, assisted by the introduction of the part-time student. Being a part-time student means not being able to finish degree courses in time and thus being forced to pay double. This new figure clearly defines how differential inclusion and indebtedness operate as a tool of political command, making evident how students are central bodies of production today.

This is the context in which the student and researcher movement claims new rights; a movement that comes to terms with the impact of the economic crisis on the educational system after its initial phase, and with the cuts that immediately bring didactics and research activity of the universities to an increasingly deeper state of disqualification.

The main slogan circulating through occupied universities and demonstrations, 'we won't pay for your crisis', immediately testifies to the possible generalisation of the movement, trying to open a space of discussion in political discourses around the main themes of distribution of wealth, the construction of a new welfare system, foreseeing the political purpose of basic income as a possible field of struggles and as an hypothesis of escape from the blackmail of precariousness. The Wave movement immediately showed the affirmation of a newly emergent subject at the centre of politics, without representation, articulating forms of the social movements expression in pragmatic and non-ideological terms that hold politics to be an open and radical process.

Affirming the fullness present onto an absent future, an unrepresentable composition takes form in the streets, moving quickly inside the metropolis, unpredictable and unmanageable. Social movement practices are not confined inside university walls, creating a sort of ghetto. Above all, occupied colleges are increasingly a sort of base to organise ourselves, but the turning point in defining an innovative movement is the capacity to spread to the metropolis, to block the flux of production, visible to the whole city, to spread our political contents, communicating everywhere and blocking the central node of urban production.⁶ Of course, self-management of university spaces had a central role for the movement; from the self-managed classroom to temporary occupations, the university is configuring itself more and more as a place of meeting, exchange, artistic and cultural production that involves multiple metropolitan subjectivities.

After the Wave, the university has become the scene of entirely self-managed artistic events all over the country: students impose the opening of university facilities after hours and they experiment with new forms of connection, of expression and of inquiry with others figures of metropolitan creation.

Living the university space also as a place of political organisation means opening the university to metropolitan assemblies, discussing the comprehensive themes of metropolitan transformations and the role that communicative production circuits perform inside these processes. Opening these physical spaces also means opening political spaces of new connection between the subjectivities of the metropolitan production and the many faces of the multitudinary prism.

Within one month, every Italian city was overwhelmed by the Wave, showing the new emergent pressures in the world of education: a long series of occupations, marches, flash mobs and road-blocks culminated in three days of national meetings and protests held in Rome from the 14th to 16th November. Those days could be read as the beginning of a constituent process that continues to develop: through a series of debates and workshops on the themes of research, education, work and welfare, the movement sketched out some guidelines for a new university. It is important to highlight that we did not develop a universalistic or idealistic model of university, quite the contrary; we opened a constituent process, called self-reform, starting from the university we already are in as a basis from which to make our university!

The self-reform process is the refusal to preserve the existing university and the impossibility of traditional reform. Self-reform is not a closed process or a definitive solution aimed at establishing a utopian university or a socialist project. Rather, self-reform is a constituent process, always changeable, that affirms the impossibility of transforming the university inside of the actual representative system, attacking representative decision making and defining a radical new process of the common. Self-reform does not only define what we are against, it's a process of creation and proposals, a redefinition of functions and finalities inside academia, to build up new forms of cooperation, create innovative and independent knowledge production and to define new goals. It is a process towards the construction of an autonomous institution, that is to say, institutions of the common. The self-reform process starts here: innovative process, productive action and managing the process itself.

In extreme synthesis, we could say that the self-reform process configures itself immediately inside every constituent practice able to immediately exercise another way of producing, another time, the time of transformation and emersion into a new institutionality. The three guidelines of this process were focused on self-education and didactics, the definition of a new mode of welfare and the issue of research and valuation. In this brief article we would like to highlight two of these issues as advanced points in the battle for our university.

SELF-EDUCATION: FLIGHT, QUALITY, ORGANISATION

The Anomalous Wave movement has assumed self-education in the university as field of political practice: a constituent process, continuously crossed by moments of conflict with the purpose of redefining the relationship between living knowledge and dead knowledge, between self-management and subordination, between resistance to knowledge's common production and the vertical possibility of blackmail, between access to produced wealth and rent. Therefore, it is a process arising from the figures that live and produce inside the university-factory that want to affirm a common decision about educational and researcher processes in opposition to the rent of the public university and private interests.

If the Bologna Process involves the disqualification of knowledges and the *déclassement* of the material conditions of productive figures all around Europe, self-reform configures itself as a space of connection for different subjectivities assuming knowledge re-qualification and the battle around the distribution of produced wealth as a strategic battleground, moving in the direction of constructing new institutions. On one hand, self-reform rises from the failure of all reform attempts

made in the last decade that have tried to mould the education system from above, coming from the poverty of public education and from a crisis of consensus around the forms for regulating the cognitive workforce. On the other hand, self-reform's paths develop and take shape around a desire to redefine knowledge practices and the material conditions that influence the possibilities of its development. Connected to this desire, the process of a common constitution is the outline for developing new institutions. In *primis*, therefore, seeing the institution as a source of strength.

Research shows that there has been strong resistance to the Bologna Process in the university over the last few years: the refusal of disciplining study regimes, absenteeism from courses, attempts to define course curriculum with teachers and the push to insert exams into the individual study plan which often come from different departments can all be taken as examples of this resistance. They are micro-resistances, a living fabric that clearly demonstrates the desire for autonomy, mobility and self-determination that continuously exceeds the cages of knowledge measurement--the desire of knowing goes well beyond the state's educational offerings.

That is why we think that the node of a new institutionality has to be thought and acted upon starting from this *excess* in order to construct new cooperating powers able to implement and reinforce this desire of expression and research in an organised form, one obviously able to redefine power relationships, affirming new norms inside university halls. From the struggles of precarious researchers aimed at obtaining funds for independent research to the questioning of the knowledge evaluation criteria in the public university, a common project of consistence between different figures of the university world emerges: only within this tension between connection and autonomy is the development of new institutions of the common thinkable.

Let us now try to define some strategies for organisation, i.e. the formalities of constituent conflict inside which an autonomous university can be created.

Self-education is first of all a definite space of struggle defined by a common decision about the form and content of knowledge transmission and production. At this stage there are active courses and seminars being completely self-managed by students and researchers in nearly all of Italy's universities: in these independent seminars the themes, authors, bibliographies and course modalities are collectively discussed and decided upon. But self-education isn't restricted to a horizontal construction of knowledge, to new didactic and epistemological experiments: we are not interested in producing marginal spaces or counter-courses, we want to reclaim it all!

Credits (ECTS) are the attempt to artificially measure knowledge and a strategy for disciplining life-time. Self-education aims to take the sense out of this attempt from the inside: we claim more and more credits, year after year, for self-education, for an autonomous university that tries to free times and spaces, disjoining the rhythm of academic discipline. Self-education also tries to question the rigid university partition of knowledges, opening spheres of research through trans-disciplinary tension. In this way, the most interesting experiences are the ones that conjugate an innovative style of research and involve different university figures at the same time: students from bachelor, master and Ph.D. programs, with researchers, postgraduates and professors from different departments. Often, self-education interweaves didactic functions and research and increasingly puts the necessity to reclaim not only credits but also funds for these activities on their agenda.

The self-reform processes of the university also aim to widely impact didactic practices, providing the possibility of self-managing one's own formative career, changing classic frontal lessons into open seminars and building the conditions for increased autonomy in regard to the choice of the texts.

Another area of political research, born from the process of self-reform, directly concerns the subject of evaluation: it is only from the point of view of a struggle for a knowledge production independent of university castes and private interests, that a reflection about the topics of knowledge evaluation can be put on the agenda--a topic actually linked to the division of the public funds that are increasingly distributed to different departments and Italian universities in a differential manner. Inside this passage, the theme of common decision making and autonomous institutionality is evermore immanent to the identification of extenuating criteria decided in a collective form, able to oppose to the exercise of the vertical evaluation (from university departments to the student evaluation) with experiments of self-evaluation able to actuate the political priority of free social cooperation instead of the subordination and stratification constantly reproduced by the state university.

Self-education is primarily a *dispositif* of self-organisation while the university and dead knowledge accustoms students to accept reality without any capacity for critique. Self-education is the advice for analysing the trend of present-day transformations. Self-education seminars organise living, knowledgeable bodies inside and against the university-factory; in short, it is our *dispositif* of political organisation that continuously redefines the battlefields and goals of our struggle.

A NEW WELFARE TO SURF THE CRISIS IN THE METROPOLIS

During the Anomalous Wave's demonstrations a shout persistently rang out 'we won't pay for your crisis!' clearly defining the centrality of economic demands and welfare issues within the political discussion. Even if our primary battlefield is the university, the Wave also opened a struggle on welfare issues as social security supplementary to income doesn't exist. Direct and indirect income became central demands in order to make autonomy and independence possible for everyone and, moreover, to refuse precarious forms of life. Welfare issues are so central to our demands because the democratic re-appropriation of welfare means guaranteed basic income for everybody.

The movement introduced to the Italian political stage the issue of labour as a battlefield in which different figures are strictly connected in the contemporary labour force. This emergence of re-claiming a new welfare rests on a few axis of analysis that we will briefly touch upon here.

First of all, there is no longer a distinction between education and work, that is to say, there is no 'before work' and 'after school' during our life; quite the contrary, we are immediately productive all the time for our entire lives, even inside university: thought and language, cooperation and affects are all means of production.⁷

Contemporary production is primarily based on unrecognised work: capital subsumes the whole society, everyone's time, knowledge and relations spread through its territories, so that language, knowledge and care work is increasingly trapped inside the valorisation process. The subjectivity is valued inside companies and there is no longer any distinction between life-time and labor-time, thus increasing exploitation because this productive process involves cooperation and life-time where no measurement is possible, where only increasing profit through continuous exploitation is the main concern.

Inside an economy characterised more and more by cognitive resource mobilisation across Europe, such a strong and generalised attack against education institutions can be interpreted as an attack against the cognitive composition of labour through a rhetoric that misreads the strategic character it plays in contemporary capitalism. We cannot reduce this attack to the question of an attack against the public university; on the contrary, it involves cognitive production as a whole. In fact, even the process of rendering precarious large components of the labour market is not only a consequence of the scarce bargaining capacity of single precarious labourers, but it is also a clear error in understanding the cognitive dimension of their work. In other words, as Carlo Vercellone writes, 'there is a devaluation of remunerative and employment conditions in relation to the real competence shared and produced inside labor activities'.⁸ In this framework, even the division between intellectual and manual labour and the differentiation between skills is not objective but rather a tool of hierarchisation and control of the labour force.

Secondly, a characteristic element of labour today is undoubtedly the condition of precariousness which students are deeply involved in at all steps of their education and in later life, and it is not a collateral effect of capitalism; it represents the control, management and command of a new productive figure that is autonomous, intelligent and flexible. What we produce is not connected to a strict and determined time, no longer a series of gestures inside factory time. We produce outside and beyond the simple task and what we produce is increasingly related to education time, irreducible to what we learn inside academic institutions. The introduction of internships as full part of university education clearly shows how the student is a central figure in production at all levels. Far from being a part of student education toward the labour market, as governmental rhetoric claims, internships are unpaid labour in associations, government programs, companies, libraries and university administration offices.

Inside the crisis, the decision to apply different measures in order to redistribute wealth assumes a central role inside the university crisis while it implies disinvestment in research and the dismantling of the education system. The Wave does not merely speak to a specific subject, not paying for the crisis is the language of the whole of labour composition and contemporary precariousness-generalising the strike goes straight in this direction. In this sense, the movement refuses to pay for a double crisis, the financial crisis and university crisis.

Dismantling of welfare structures means privatising and appropriating the common through the government, and exploitation is part of the same process where subjection is a part of political expropriation when it refers to social and normative production.

Over the last years, the Italian government attacked outright all guaranteed figures in public administration, dismissing every kind of welfare and social security, completing the process of privatisation through the control of youth, the criminalisation of all dissent and making our lives more and more precarious. So, precarity also means a lack of future and no-time in the present, job uncertainty and reduced negotiation power, which is to say a new form of slavery that involves other subjects who, once protected, are now deeply affected by the crisis. As the subprime crisis showed, debt is the new protagonist of social security as income is distributed through credit while banks profit from people's debt and welfare state is completely destroyed--indirect income (like education, health and social services, etc.) is cut and ascribed to individuals. In other words, 'the more life and its forms and styles are put to work, as cooperation and social relations, affects and self-entrepreneurial ability, the less capital spends and the more cash it gets'.⁹

In this context, 'we won't pay for your crisis, the crisis must be paid by banks, companies, governments, and barons. We won't pay for your crisis, because we are the Wave that is their crisis!'¹⁰ Precariousness is the form of governance under which the labour force sits today, the form of managing our autonomy, our cooperation and speed inside the metropolis. Thus, basic income, independent from all remunerated activities, is now a central demand of Wave movement.

When social rights are not guaranteed by public welfare, getting into debt represents a limit to our primary needs, like education and access to knowledge. An increasing number of people enter graduation courses as they sink into debt and start the process of *déclassement* of their knowledge. In this sense, conflicts over knowledge production move closer toward labour issues, the process of hierarchisation and new welfare. The old 'right to study', formally recognised even by the State's constitution, is again a battlefield for quality services, self-management and knowledge re-qualification.

Since research, study and socialisation are not paid for by the government, students of the Wave took up the immediate claim of money for their unpaid intern work as a central question. As in France in 2006, this movement fought to be recognised as a productive subject inside and outside the university, against the process of *déclassement* that involves all dimensions of cognitive labour and the public university. In fact, knowledge is a central commodity in contemporary capitalism and at the same time it is not scarce.

Different forms of conflict have been used by the movement focusing on all claims connected to welfare issues: blocking traffic to stop the circulation of goods and productivity inside the metropolis; flash mob actions and spontaneous blitz demonstrations (the so-called '*manif sauvage*') often arrived at the doors of the Minister of Economy and Finance in Rome to point out the responsibility of State authority in managing the university crisis; and also flash mob actions inside the offices of job recruitment centres. These claims put nationally highlighted precariousness and the fact that funding cuts were not an extraordinary measure taken because of the crisis, but were fundamental and permanent elements of contemporary production.

Indirect income has been reclaimed occupying theatres and cinemas, demanding free tickets to give us the possibility of enjoying collective cultural production in front of the sad backdrop of the Italian dismantling of funding for arts and culture: the occupations and demonstrations dur-

ing the Festival of Cinema in Rome and in Venice called for a new welfare of culture and artistic production.

Furthermore, as rent is the new form of profit in capitalistic production--as gentrification exploits student productivity to widen profit margins while the state leaves houses empty to increase property value--we reclaimed spaces through public campaigns in which we occupied houses against the university and the state to reclaim our autonomy.¹¹

'RECLAIM OUR EDUCATION, RECLAIM OUR BODIES, RECLAIM OUR BRAINS'

As a banner upon the occupied university of Vienna showed last month, the world of education cannot be separated from the subject that innovates knowledge production as living bodies. It is a common and important point of different struggles spreading all around the world. Beginning with the fact that a new cycle of struggles is taking place, even on a simple common principle of opposition to the Bologna Process, we should move beyond and start thinking about the political necessity of creating common languages, moments of discussion, organisations and resistance as possibility of connection.

An articulated and complex Wave is overwhelming the contemporary realm of production, a different language is subverting the old channels of knowledge transmission, a new space is disarticulating the division of areas and national borders, constituent processes and demands are spreading through the universities. This is our time!

NOTES

* Claudia Bernardi and Andrea Ghelfi are members of Uniriot Network that is part of the Italian anomalous wave. See: <http://www.uniriot.org/uniriotII/>. This text has been revised in English by Jason Francis McGimsey.

¹ For an in-depth analysis of the economic crisis, see Mezzadra and Fumagalli, *Nothing will ever be*.

² The Bologna Process officially began in 1999, after a meeting of twenty-nine Eu-

ropean Ministers of Education in Bologna in September 1998. This process aims to create a homogenous area of higher education in Europe through a series of changes such as the introduction of the 3+2 system (bachelor plus master, instead of a single four year study cycle), the introduction of credits (ECTS), the promotion of mobility and cooperation, the establishment of permanent education, the homogeneity of qualifications and didactics programs and the promotion of European education outside Europe.

³ On the relation between the university and the metropolis, we refer to De Nicola and Roggero, *Nine thesis*. As a constituent space of conflict between the university and the metropolis, we refer to the experiences of E5C Atelier (<http://www.escatelier.net>, occupied in November 2004) and Bartleby (<http://www.bartleby.info>, occupied in March 2009).

⁴ The juridical measures for primary schools consisted mainly on the introduction of the 'single teacher' (instead of the previous two or three teacher system), the increase in the number of students for each class and the introduction of a behaviour grade as a discipline measure able to flunk high schools students.

⁵ Maria Stella Gelmini is the Education Minister of Silvio Berlusconi's government.

⁶ Even if university occupation was not the main tool of struggle, occupations of primary schools by teachers, parents and children produced an extraordinary experience during the autumn of 2008.

⁷ For an in depth analysis, see Vercellone and Negri, *Il rapporto capitale*.

⁸ Vercellone and Negri, *Il rapporto capitale*.

⁹ Raparelli, *La lunghezza*, 86 [our translation].

¹⁰ National Assembly of 15th-16th at La Sapienza University in Rome, 'The self-reform process-workshop on welfare', http://www.uniriot.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=blogcategory&id=38&Itemid=130.

¹¹ For instance, on July 8th, 2009 students occupied an empty house, deemed 'Point break', near La Sapienza University in a Roman neighbourhood threatened by a fierce gentrification process. See: De Nicola and Roggero, *Nove tesi*; Raparelli, *La lunghezza*; Vercellone and Negri, *Il rapporto capitale*.

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