

THE AUTONOMY OF LIVING KNOWLEDGE IN THE METROPOLIS-UNIVERSITY⁴⁴

Gigi Roggero⁴⁵



In this article we will hypothesize the passage from the elite university, through the mass university, to the contemporary *metropolis-university*. Each passage of this periodization is determined first of all from the movements and struggles, and then from the capitalistic response. Within these university transformations trends, we talk of the rise over the past two years of a new political “cycle” of university struggles, from Italy to US precarious students/researchers and graduate students, in France against CPE, in Greece against the *Bologna Process* reforms, or in China in the elite universities. Beyond the evident differences of contexts, academic governance, and forms of conflict, there are some common elements: the affirmation of a new hybrid figure of student, moving permanently between lifelong learning and the labor market; the framework of precariousness, the *déclassement* processes and the differential inclusion mechanisms; the reconfiguration of the space-time coordinates in the metropolis and in the production of oppositional knowledge. The whole of our analysis is based on the movement, struggles, self-education experiences and attempts to build up new *common institutions* - inside the university, along its borders, and in its relationship with the metropolis. This is the political point of view through which we can embody our research.

Within the Paradigm of the Transition: Cognitive Labor

In the analysis of the university transformations, we have to start from the framework: there is a close link between changes in the capitalistic modes of production and higher education systems. Particularly, it is situated in what is hypothesized as the rise of the *cognitive capitalism*,⁴⁶ of which the main characteristics are: a new organization and nature of production and labor; the central role of knowledge, information and relations not only as intangible products, but first of all as means of production; the formation of a “diffuse intellectuality,” both for the expansion of education and for the spread of the knowledge production within social cooperation; the increase in the use of Information and Communication Technologies, not as a disembodied deterministic vector of development, but as a temporary objectification of social relations and struggles; and the shaping of new space-time coordinates of production and living labor in the framework of the globalization and of a transnational system. We put forward the concept of cognitive capitalism not as a theoretical postulate, but as a research hypothesis to be verified and a tool to be used in our daily political activity. We are not interested in making epochal claims about novelty, but rather in inventing concepts to understand the transitions at hand, and to act on them. Nor are we interested in making general sociological descriptions. Rather we work within the partiality of struggles and the production of subjectivity.

⁴⁴ Accessed from <<http://transform.eipcp.net/transversal/0707/roggero/en>> on August 25, 2009.

⁴⁵ This article was born in a collective debate and in the political activity of the Rete per l'Autoformazione, Atelier Occupato Esc of Rome <<http://www.escatelier.net>> and edu-factory collective <<http://www.edu-factory.org>>.

⁴⁶ Vercellone, C. (Ed., 2006), *Capitalismo cognitivo. Conoscenza e finanza nell'epoca postfordista*, Rome: Manifestolibri.

In the framework of this transition, we use the term *cognitive labor* in a different way from the usual term *knowledge work* or the category of the *creative class*.⁴⁷ both these definitions are related to the sociological description of the stratification, or to the concept of *class* used for the most part in the Marxist tradition, which concerns the objective belonging to an exploitative situation in the capitalistic system. These terms, in a paradoxical complementarity with the orthodox faith in the working class (intended as the factory workers), could be dangerous because they risk binding itself to observe the class hierarchy, without acting on it. From the political point of view, it is better to identify the common elements that form the whole spectrum of the composition of living labor.

Particularly, it is interesting to note the diffusion of the concept of creative class in a part of movement debate. Beyond the undoubted elements of innovation of Florida's analysis, in some ways this category is a new ideology of the middle classes as a subjective force of mediation and conservation of the capitalistic social relationships. This produces a segmentation, and not the condition of possibility to recombine the issues inside the class composition. In fact, one of the limits of some of these struggles is the unrecognized interests and condition of commonality, and the alliances inside the composition of cognitive labor. For example, the Italian case shows that the recent "precarious researchers" mobilization became feeble when it preferred alliances with the power professorial lobbies inside the academy, in order to recognize its market value inside the "creative class," abandoning the strategic link with the new student figure and the metropolitan *precariat*.

So, we adopt the interpretative key, elaborated by Italian *operaismo*, of *class composition*:⁴⁸ it points to the combination between exploitative relationships and processes of subjectivation, conflicts and collective identification. To summarize: there is no class without class struggle. Moreover, with cognitive labor we do not identify a specific category of workers, as in the distinction between creative jobs and "Mcjobs." Instead, we use this category to point to the paradigmatic form of contemporary labor and the crisis of the classical dichotomy between manual and intellectual labor. We do not only suggest that in cognitive labor the physic aspect does not disappear. We point to the continuous overlapping -obviously with different degrees of hard work, position, and income- of the intellectual and manual faculties in contemporary labor forms. Besides, the composition of the workforce and the peculiar combination of faculties deployed by it, have undoubtedly changed in contemporary labor processes. For example, the classical figure of the artist does not at all correspond to the productive (and *precarized*) figure of today: as the struggles and research of *intermittents* in France show,⁴⁹ the contemporary artist carries out a multiplicity of activities in which there is a continuous overlapping of manual and intellectual activities, and of which performance is only one among many others. At the same time, the workers in just-in-time factories around the world are daily faced with the manipulation of signs and symbols of global technological chains, and they are probably more similar to the data-entry "netslaves" of "net economy" corporations rather than workers of the tayloristic factories. And migrant women care workers, who are exploited in carceral and ethnicized labor regimes in Europe or in Asia, have to provide first of all relations and affects, beyond hard physical work. In cognitive capitalism the material assumes even a growing importance, but the forms of its production change. As the statistics demonstrate, the diminution of the workers in the manufacture sector in the "West" does not correspond to a movement towards once were defined "Third World." Rather, it is based on the increase of the productivity in industrial labor.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Florida, R. (2002), *The Rise of the Creative Class. ...and How it's Transforming Work, Leisure, Community, & Everyday Life*, New York: Basic Books.

⁴⁸ Wright, S. (2002), *Storming Heaven: Class Composition and Struggle in Italian Autonomist Marxism*, London: Pluto Press.

⁴⁹ See the webpage of the Intermittents et Précaires d'Île de France <<http://www.cip-idf.org>>, the text of Antonella Corsani, *Knowledge production and new forms of political action* <<http://transform.eipcp.net/transversal/0406/corsani/en>> and further texts that have been produced in the framework of transform, translate and republicart <<http://transversal.eipcp.net>>.

⁵⁰ Marazzi, C. (2005), *Capitalismo digitale e modello antropogenetico di produzione*, in Chicchi, F., Laville, J.-L., La Rosa, M., Marazzi, C. (Eds.), *Reinventare il lavoro*, Rome: Sapere 2000, pp. 107-126.

In the whole process, the cognitive element and measure is central to the formation of new hierarchies and class compositions. So, the cognitive labor means the cognitivization of the measure and exploitation; the cognitivization of the class and wage hierarchy; the cognitivization of the labor division, in the crisis of the traditional form of international division determined by the movements of migrants. Consequently, cognitive labor does not mean a linear process of intellectualization of the living labor composition. This contrasts with the *déclassement* process, one of the struggle field of the last mobilizations. Instead, this means the central role of the social cooperation in the knowledge production, and its spillover from the places of the formal education. And when we speak of the cognitive labor composition we do not think only to some “Western” place, but we think first of all to the Indian engineers who are at the same time software developers and cab drivers in the Silicon Valley: so, the overlapping of manual and intellectual activity crosses continuously also individual biographies.⁵¹ Finally, in this regard the care labor is a complex work, with a co-presence of semi-slavery and wage labor, of “material” aspects and cognitive faculties, first of all the affection production. In some ways, it is paradigmatic of the cognitive labor. So, the “feminization of work” we do not refer only on the mass entry of women in the labor market, but first of all to the becoming productive of the relations, affection, care attitudes, once confined in the reproductive sphere and historically determined as feminine. In other words, cognitive labor is the watermark through it is possible to observe the whole spectrum of production and labor forms of contemporary capitalism, in their co-presence and peculiar combination.

The Transnational Rise of the Metropolis-University

In the new hierarchies and emerging class composition, the university is not the only place of knowledge and culture production: the academy is exceeded by flows of knowledge production that spread into the social cooperation of the metropolitan area. With this term we do not refer to the traditional Western metropolis, but to new global spaces: in fact, they have a paradigmatic development in the postcolonial zones.⁵² So, the problem for us is not to re-build the ivory tower, but to act on the borders between the university and the metropolis. In other words, our aim is to transform the metropolitan area into an oppositional university. Consequently, the university is for us a site of force application, and a base for autonomy and exodus.

The hypothesis of the rise of the cognitive capitalism leads us to examine the new coordinates of space and time in production and labor. The traditional image of the international labor division, based on the geographical division between First and Third World areas, is now unusable: as we saw above, it was substituted by a cognitive division of the labor. As postcolonial scholars have shown, the classical dialectic between centre and periphery, between industrialized and developing countries, is in crisis. This does not mean the hierarchies, inequalities, and exploitative forms disappear. On the contrary, they are globally spread beyond the traditional lines of First and Third World, crossing borders and reproducing themselves inside the metropolitan areas. So, the point of view from which we have to analyze university transformations is completely transnational. At the same time, these transformations are situated at the local level. For example, the corporatization of the university (which refers not only to the increase of private funds, but first of all to the becoming corporate of academic governance) in Italy involves the co-presence of the feudal power of the so-called “barons” (powerful professors whose positions have often been transmitted along family lines).

There are some common trends in these transformations, in Europe summarized in the *Bologna Process*. We limit our analysis to four of these. The first is the passage in educational selective mechanisms from exclusion to *differential inclusion*. In other words, in the framework of the accreditation system

⁵¹ Ong, A. (2006), *Neoliberalism as Exception. Mutations in Citizenship and Sovereignty*, Durham and London: Duke University Press.

⁵² Ong, A. (2007), *Please Stay: Pied-a-Terre Subjects in the Megacity*, in *Citizenship Studies*, vol. 11, n. 1, pp. 83-93.

the curriculum vitae does not depend so much on whether a person attended a higher education institution, but first of all it depends on *what* institution he or she attended. So, the value of the degree is related to the position of the university in the education market hierarchy, corresponding to the prestige of the institution, its brand and the possibility to accumulate advantageous relationships, measured as social capital, and not necessarily to the quality of knowledge. This is a process that has developed for a long period in US, and it is now developing in Europe too: this is one of the main aspects of the *Bologna Process*. This trend is similar in the changes to citizenship in the era of globalization. In both cases, in the university system and the figure of the citizen, the differential inclusion processes concern the production of borders and class, race and gender hierarchies in the transnational division of cognitive labor. Consequently, the increase of degrees in higher education is often accompanied by a process of *déclassement* in the labor market and in the qualification of knowledge. In the lexicon of the university management, the word *equality* is substituted with *equity*, which is equality and differential inclusion. So, the fundamental field of struggle is not along the exclusion line, but it is the quality of inclusion. The university-metropolis is not a place to train the elite, or to diffuse mass education: it is *one* of the nodes and devices - in the lifelong learning market - regulating of the value of the cognitive labor.

The second similar trend is the casualization of academic labor. Social movements, mainly in Europe, called this process *precarization*, and the *precarious* subject lives inside this process. Anyway, the struggle against precariousness does not have for us the aim of restoring the “old” rights and work forms. On one side, cognitive activity is incompatible with the rigidity of space and time of the “fordist” model. On the other side, above all, there is an *ambivalence of flexibility*, which is highlighted by Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiappello in their important study about the “new spirit of the capitalism.”⁵³ In the genealogy of this category, which became the magic word of labor politics and of the casualization process in the Nineties, there are also workers’ struggles and the mass exodus from wage labor in the Seventies. Paradoxically, when the key-words of postfordism (flexibility, mobility, innovation, unpredictability, adaptability, non-standardization, singularity) are fully acted upon autonomously by the living labor subjects, there is a crisis in the devices of capitalistic control over the workforce. The political problem is whether this intrinsic flexibility assumes the form of precariousness or promotes the autonomy of living labour, through the conquest of basic income, free mobility and communication rights, and the expansion of free cooperative activity and self-valorisation processes against the blackmail of wage labor and the market.

The third similar trend is the rise of a new student figure. As the graduate students struggles show clearly, in cognitive capitalism -where knowledge is a direct means of production- the graduate student is no longer an apprentice member of the workforce in training, but a fully (precarious) worker in the so-called “knowledge factory.” In this regard, we note also that this expression is undoubtedly effective as rhetorical figure, to allude to the centrality of knowledge production in contemporary class formation, and the disciplining of forms of *living knowledge*. At the same time, any use of this term knowledge factory has also to analyze the impossibility of the imposition of the tayloristic scientific organization of labor in the current formation. In this impossibility there emerges the potential autonomy of living labor/knowledge, embodied in the new hybrid figure of the student/precarious researcher and teacher, permanently moving between lifelong learning and the labor market.

Finally, the fourth similar trend is the imposition of a *cognitive measure* to quantify the production of knowledge and relations (through the credit system, IP, or the categories of human and social capital). This measure is fundamental to allowing the exploitation of relationships and private appropriation. According to McKenzie Wark, the education system, as cognitive capitalism in general, involves the organization of knowledge through the artificial creation of scarcity, as in the laws of classical political economy, but in a situation where there is potential abundance and richness.⁵⁴ In fact, there is a sort

⁵³ Boltanski, L. –Chiappello, È. (1999), *Le nouvel esprit du capitalisme*, Paris: Gallimard.

⁵⁴ Wark, M. (2004), *A Hacker Manifesto*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

of knowledge spillover (determined by subjectivities and conflicts) with respect to the quantification units and the law of value. This is the main contradiction of the *political economy of knowledge* and the field of struggle between the subordination of social cooperation and the autonomy of living labor/knowledge. But the excess of the knowledge production does not mean the automatic crisis of the capitalism, but it is the field of battle between the autonomy of the living labor and the capitalistic capture. So, it is not enough to say it is impossible to measure knowledge as a good, since an artificial measure is, in any case, a measure. The struggles around the cognitization of the measure are nothing but the line of conflict in knowledge production.

But there is another element, in the condition of possibility of this struggle: in a (partial, nothing is completely new of course) different way to industrial capitalism, today knowledge -which is central productive force- cannot be totally separated from its producer and transferred to firms. The knowledge transfer and the theft of intellectual property are great problems for corporations.⁵⁵ Some scholars say that constant capital is becoming the human being. We limit our analysis to saying that the crystallization and objectification of knowledge in the system of machines is not obsolete, but articulated in a peculiar and new way: dead labor/knowledge needs to be given life more and more rapidly, and in this process an excess of living and social knowledge continuously escapes. It is precisely this excess of living knowledge that determines the new temporality of cognitive capitalism. Based on this new relationship between fix and variable capital, today the use of technology is immediately a field of battle in which to contest the capture of living labor in dead labor and re-appropriate the production of knowledge in an oppositional way.

The Flight Lines and the Organization of the Common Institutions

Based on this contradiction, struggles in the metropolis-university are conflicts in knowledge production: between autonomy and subordination, between the imposition of capitalistic time and the affirmation of subjective times in knowledge production. The self-education courses and the construction of experimental, autonomous and “nomadic” universities, which are spreading out in Italy⁵⁶ and at a transnational level⁵⁷ for some years, are not simply a way to diffuse antagonistic messages, but a flight line and a form of exodus from the crisis of academy, in its state and corporate forms. They are an attempt to organize an oppositional university not in the far future but in the present. The self-education courses address first of all the new time coordinates in cognitive capitalism. In fact, the spread of the corporate model in the university, the reforms processes of the last few years in Europe, the central role of the credit and IP system, are the attempts -to use the words of Walter Benjamin- to impose artificially an homogenous and empty temporality, against the heterogeneous and full temporality of knowledge production; the objective time of capital and the market, against the subjective time of social cooperation and autonomy of living labor.⁵⁸ To use the words of Karl Marx, it is an attempt to reduce living knowledge to dead knowledge, to reduce the times of the living knowledge to the abstract labor time.⁵⁹ Situated on this battlefield, oppositional knowledges organizations are trying to re-appropriate for themselves autonomous time in production and life forms, creating new *commons* against the new capitalistic enclosures. From this point of view, knowledge is common only insofar as it is a product of social cooperation and not in the sense of good that exists in nature -in fact, on this crucial point there was sometimes a confusion in the movement debate in the last year.

⁵⁵ Ross, A. (2006), *Fast Boat to China. Corporate Flight and the Consequences of Free Trade: Lessons from Shanghai*, New York: Pantheon Books.

⁵⁶ See <<http://www.uniriot.org>>.

⁵⁷ See <<http://www.sindominio.net/unomada/>>; <http://www.knowledgelab.org.uk/wiki/AUL/Main_Page>; <<http://www.ux.org.ar>>; <<http://www.excotc.org>>; <<http://www.tentstatemn.org>>.

⁵⁸ Benjamin, W. (1995), *Angelus Novus. Saggi e frammenti*, Turin: Einaudi.

⁵⁹ Marx, K. (1970) *Lineamenti fondamentali della critica dell'economia politica*, Florence: La Nuova Italia.

Chandra T. Mohanty points out that oppositional knowledges are caught permanently between radical challenges and the risks of cooptation.⁶⁰ Specifically, the institutionalization and capture of oppositional knowledge is intrinsic to the governance model, fully developed in the corporate universities (in Italy it is mixed with feudal government forms). This model allows a degree of self-managed knowledge, separated from struggles, and compatible with the maintenance of market logic: its profit motive and units of measurement. So, it is a form of differential inclusion of alternative experiences, deprived of their autonomy. From this point of view, governance is a response to the student and “precarious” movements, an attempt to reduce them to stakeholders. So, we claim credits for our self-education seminars, with the aim to inflate the credit system and to knock over the imposition of the cognitive measure of production. This oppositional knowledges production also means the refusal of institutional knowledge transmission; for this reason the right to study of the classical welfare system is comparable to the right to work. In fact, there is no oppositional knowledges and production of common goods without struggles.

The category of the common needs clarification. In fact, it is radically different and incompatible with the traditional category of universalism, because it is based on partiality, singularity and multiplicity, and not on the reduction to homogeneity. This displaces both the liberal cult of the individualism, and the socialist myth of the collective. From this point of view, translation becomes a fundamental terrain of battle. As Jon Solomon and Naoki Sakai write:

Seen from this perspective, the modern regime of translation is a concrete form of ‘systemic complicity’ whose primary function is population management within the purview of imperial domination. In other words, it is a globally-applicable technique of segmentation aimed at managing social relationships by forcing them to pass through circuits on the ‘systemic’ level.⁶¹

So, the concept of common assumes the differentiation of spaces, times, and subjectivities in transnational space, and poses translation as a central question of the communication of struggles and the links between different ways of liberation.

On these bases, the conflicts in the crisis of welfare do not mean to come back to the welfare-state system, or the mass university, as the left parties and unions argue. The problem is to build up the *commonfare*, involving the central questions of the basic income, free mobility and communication, to enlarge the autonomous spaces and the self-managed flexibility of the living knowledge/labor. Among the rubble of the university, we have a great possibility if we try not to heal the crisis, but to deepen it. In other words, we have exit from marginality, to re-appropriate money and funds, and to organize the self-education experiences and the autonomous and nomadic universities as *new common institutions*. This is the exodus line. And this means flight and cognitive labor struggle.

⁶⁰ Mohanty, C. T. (1990), *On Race and Voice: Challenges for Liberal Education in the 1990s*, in *Cultural Critique*, n. 14.

⁶¹ Sakai, N., Solomon, J. (2007), *Translation, biopolitics, colonial difference*, available at <http://www.edufactory.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=45&Itemid=33>.

FROM KNOWLEDGE OF SELF-MANAGEMENT TO THE SELF-MANAGEMENT OF KNOWLEDGE⁶²

Cátedra experimental sobre producción de subjetividad⁶³

What and for What

The Experimental University⁶⁴ is a project that various students, researchers and professors engaged in social movements have been working on for some time in the city of Rosario, Argentina. It is an attempt to produce a constituent form of university activism or “militancy.” We propose to go beyond the critique of the decomposition of the public university and the emergent marketized university. In this sense the experimental university would prefigure a non-state public university, a model of university that is alternative to the market/corporate university.

For 2006 we built a path that paused along the different mechanisms/*dispositifs* of contemporary subjectivity production: Work, the State, the Market, Communication, the University. And through these, within these, against these, beyond these, the processes of self-organization, the mechanisms of self-alteration/transformation of life that produce times and spaces of autonomy in which we can decide how we would want to live.

From this process of constructing an experience of self-organization on managing university knowledge, we also advanced in elaborating a common horizon of composition with other processes of self-organization being developed by social movements that focus on constructing new forms of subjective experience and processes of community production.

Self-management and levels of participation

The general decisions within this initiative are taken by the Assembly of Problematization, Elaboration, Organization and Management. This assembly is in charge of the general coordination of the project, its political and institutional relationships, financing and outreach for the space. It works through weekly meetings focused on evaluation, registration, discussion as well as (self) critique and reflection on the different events taking place.

The process of self-education⁶⁵ is organized around five work-units which take place chronologically, a theme by month. The units are the following: Work and subjectivity production, State and subjectivity production, Market and subjectivity production, Communication and subjectivity production, University and subjectivity production. Each unit is defined by the Autonomous Elaboration Teams. These teams define contents, bibliography, visiting speakers and the pedagogical guides of the encounters. The emerging elaborations are shared in the space of the assembly.

⁶² Translated by Maribel Casas-Cortés and Sebastian Cobarrubias. Accessed from <http://transform.eipcp.net/transversal/0707/catedraexperimental/en> on September 12, 2009.

⁶³ <www.catedrasubjetividad.com.ar> | <producciondesubjetividad@gmail.com>, Rosario, Argentina

⁶⁴ This same project was called the Experimental Chair on the Production of Subjectivity (CXPDS for its acronym in Spanish) up until very recently. We use the new name for the most part in this translation. The Original Spanish version, and other older texts by the group use the older name.

⁶⁵ We translate the term “*autoformación*” as self-education throughout this text. Given the content of the piece this seemed more appropriate than self-formation. Nonetheless, on occasion we use the duo education/formation in order to refer to other connotations of the word “*formación*” that are not implied by “education.”

The self-organizing processes constitute the transversal axis that shoots through each of the five units: work self-management, political self-management, economic self-management, communicative self-management, self-management of theoretical practice. The “university” also has two transversal spaces: a space of research and pedagogical formation, and a space focused on days destined for book presentations and reflections to be defined as we move forward.

Participation in the “university” is open to anyone, and to all its activities, under the premise of what we call “previous agreements”, in accordance with criteria that have been defined earlier. The requirement implies engaging with the definitions that are being elaborated in the group, as well as collaborating in the carrying out of the tasks that each part of the “university” is focused on. In summary, the participation is open to every person under the sole condition of their own desire - sustained by practice- of engaging in the experience of the “university”.

Subjectivity production ... some hypotheses

The following hypotheses constitute our point of departure:

1. Subjectivity means culturally constructed ways of life
2. It is unknown how process of subjectivity, self-management, and self-education come into being, nor how much they are able to do. This is why we come up with the idea of the “university” in order to experience them.

Our common denominator is the desire of transforming the conditions in which we live in. We resist by inventing other ways of living within and from spaces that we inhabit on a daily basis (university, workspace, etc.). Then, if subjectivity means ways of living, our questions point directly to the production of contemporary subjectivity: how are ways of life constructed nowadays? That it is to say, how do the contemporary mechanisms of subjectivity production work? What generic procedures are able to produce singular/unique formations from within the concrete experiences of our lives? What blocs of knowledge and what domains of power affect our lives from without, affecting the ways that we become?

Self-education in (state-run) public universities

The decision to create a space for self-education responds to a concrete problem that we have been facing: the need to develop mechanisms of thought inside the state-run university. If we need something like this it is because we can’t find it within the current configuration of the university.

The Experimental University is a hypothesis that tries to materialize/create effective procedures for the self-management of knowledge in the context of the hegemony of market dynamics and the decadence of the state-run university. Of course the state-run university is not excluded. Rather we try to link ourselves with this ‘form’ but in a new way, based on a constituent critique. In any case, rather than confronting or ignoring the state-run university, those of us that are participating in the experience propose to inhabit it but from the basis of a self-managed project.

Multiple examples and experiences of ‘free universities/classes/departments’ have existed within the state-run university. Nonetheless, in the case of the Experimental University we are experimenting with a different path. Whereas other free universities were designed to develop, induce, and convince, others; the decision here is to create a space where we can form/educate ourselves. This situation does not exclude the presence of other people who do not form part of the assembly that manages the

project. On the contrary, the mechanism of self-education erases the distance that can at times be generated between organizers/militants and external attendees. The very notion of external agent is dissolved, insofar that what we are trying to construct is a plane of immanence to achieve collective production. There is no longer an academic public to conquer or to fill with skills but rather a composition of singularities that inhabit that same plane of immanence for self-education. The project is also distinguishable from the type of workshops that occur within political organizations, since we don't 'educate-ourselves' in order to know more or to transmit a particular knowledge but rather to produce ourselves in the common-public space that we are creating/materializing.

Pedagogical experimentation

We sustain that the creation of a space for self-education that seeks to experiment with new forms of acquiring, sharing, and producing knowledges and new forms of collective thought, should necessarily experiment not only at the level of the contents themselves but also at the level of the pedagogical mechanisms that are proposed. This is to say: the work dynamics and relationships generated between subjects amongst themselves, and, between these and the knowledges that are placed on the table.

Knowledge presents itself as an integral component of our lives. Our goal/challenge is to make this knowledge a useful instrument rather than a theoretical institution. The idea of knowledge-as-instrument or conceptual-tool demands the accompaniment of new modes of carrying out education and formation in order to exist. For this reason we have often dedicated ourselves to the search for pedagogical paths that are especially suited for this work. From this perspective we consider methodology as an instrument of production (of thought, of strategies, of questioning).

If we explore methodologies that are alternative to academic-lecture like explanations, it is because we believe that where explanation predominates- so does a type of purely declarative knowledge. This type of knowledge is difficult to reuse in a concrete situation given that, from the start, the theory used is not understood as a conceptual tool that can act in a concrete situation but rather as conceptual knowledge that must be learned in order to be archived.

We believe that the university should be constituted as a space that facilitates collective thinking and reflection about life in common. For us, the function of the university resides in helping to think through society's problems starting from available knowledges and producing new, mobile knowledges that provide solutions, proposals or ways of enacting them.

Compositions with the "outside"

In considering the relationship between the Experimental University with the "outside", something clearly imposes itself on us: it is impossible to reduce "the outside" to a logic. "Outside" is not a thing but rather they are a multiplicity of institutions, movements, tendencies. More than an outside, what exists is a pile of multireferential, polysemic and unnamed "possible." In addition, if an outside does not exist, then, strictly speaking, neither does an inside. The space is defined by its movement and the movements of others. These multiple modulations might be able to locate their basis in a certain notion of university: as an open, mobile, connective, and not a self-referential space.

After we discovered the existence of numerous contacts with which we use different tools each time, we can signal, a *grosso modo* those which can be understood as the most transited paths that lead towards (or to a relationship with) the Experimental University:

-The Experiment and the University

Many of the comments we have received mention the fact that we are constructing this space in the institutional territory of the university. Not on the “inside of” nor “in the framework of”. This strange coexistence surprises many because the typical political gesture is not the encampment but the exodus. As distinct from many other projects that have emigrated from the university, the “Experimental University” remains. It is not an ideological matter, neither is it a haphazard decision. This encampment responds to a certain availability of resources.

On the other hand, this “university” is thought of as a space to invent mechanisms of production and interchanges of knowledges. In this regard, the project not only distances itself from, but also re-signifies and combines practices and knowledges produced within both the state-run and private university. For example: many of the texts we work with have that very origin (the university), nonetheless, we don’t disregard them because of their origin, rather it depends on the productive, or unproductive, that a text is for us, that we discriminate amongst them. In this sense, a university is not so much a grouping of texts, but rather a way of proceeding to read/engage those same texts. The gamble we make is for a relational reading, to raise our heads and eyes while reading in order to form productive connections between what we are reading and the rest of our experiences. The gamble is a political one.

-Participants/students

When the Experimental University was formed, the first space of visibility that was generated was its public presentation. The form that presentation took was quite a surprise for local academic customs: dim lights, glasses of wine, minimal-techno music, dialogs and not monologues, the absence of chairs as well as a central presenters’ table; and all of this in a university classroom. This was strange for those who awaited a classical ‘free classroom’, that normally does not go beyond the inclusion of certain contents that are often excluded from the syllabi of institutional classes/lectures, but at the same time follows the exact same dynamics of those more institutional lectures. Our gamble here, has not only to do with the content but also with the practices involved.

The Experimental University has one of its most relevant moments of visibility during the regular meetings every Friday: the encounter/meetings of the work unit. In this space we encounter the first experience of a prolonged relationship with others. Here we can find various and unexpected modes of encounter: there are those who “limit” themselves to following up with the readings, those who try to connect the subject matter being read with their own ideas and elaborations- in this way enriching the discussion, and those who over time come to form part of the organization of the space. These figures need not be exclusive nor progressive.

-Guests

It is possible to say that our “invitation policy” always works in relation to what is being discussed in the units/modules. Our encounters with guests are used then as (other) occasions for thought. On different occasions we have asked ourselves whether or not we were reproducing a type of ‘transmission’ logic linked to academic cultures: presenter-audience; monopoly of speech- monopoly of listening. Nonetheless, we believe that after going through our ‘modular’ experience, both those who were called originally to ‘speak’ as well as those called to ‘listen’ can no longer occupy those pre-assigned roles nor do they desire to. The resulting dynamic is tighter and more dialogical.

-Co-research

Alongside union representatives from a call center in the city we have begun some long-term work. We could say that, in terms of collective compositions, this is the first one that aims to be a long-term relationship. Everything started after we made an invitation to those union delegates to give us a report of their work experiences in the framework of our most recent module dealing with work. After a series of exchanges that developed into the Experimental University writing a text to be published in the bulletin that those delegates were planning on printing, we found ourselves currently in the initial stages of a militant research project that we have jointly agreed to keep afloat. The idea is to problematize our practices, in other words to interrogate them (both political practices as well as research ones) in such a way that we can produce multiple approaches that at the same time facilitate multiple strategies of intervention.

Problems in the course of the experience

Expected or unexpected, predictable or not, discussing from the basis of the problems that have emerged during the experience has contributed to reinforcing a degree of maturing of our process of experimental self-management.

1. Modularization and fragmentation: the difficulty of sustaining general decisions

A politics of ‘happenings’, a politics of experimentation cannot exist without a dedication to the care and promotion of the events that tighten its constituent praxis (even if constituent of itself). This ethical position recognizes, and anticipates, that its practice does not contain a pre-ordained logic or methodology. Its method and even that carrying out of different projects can only be achieved through constant self-reflection that, in the face of what’s happening at that moment, will always lead to new methods. It is this very ethic which demands that we muster all our potentials and virtualities through pedagogical mechanisms, experimental vocabularies, working groups, and techniques that we can use in order to keep ourselves and each other in check. When all of these begin to take shape, we begin to enter the sphere of questions and answers, in the space of tensions and problematics.

To be sure, a political practice of this nature is not without its consequences. The tensions that emerge demand an effort of balancing and reflecting without which the experimentation in the group would be weakened. For these cases the Experimental University has constituted an assembly space where we work weekly on emergent events and precise analysis that question and disturb, when they don’t directly mobilize, our experiences.

A problem that we encountered as our experience developed was that new people began to join the Experimental University through the modules and/or the assembly, who were not aware of previous decisions made collectively by the group, or the work that we had done during the first months of existence. Confronted with this situation, we had to deal with the first tensions around a basic agreement that we had on how to participate in the Experimental University: participation is open to all who desire and are able to dedicate themselves to the experimentation of the group. That tension was produced amidst the ethical recognition of radical alterity, of that fortuitous and anonymous ‘other’ as a potential source of problems and for this very reason a fundamental part of the experimentation. Additionally we recognized that the events that happened and continue to happen do so from and in the very same experimentation. Each event had its own relative importance and history and played a role in the development of the group, but were often underestimated by those who did not participate in them, who arrived later to the group and did not know about what came before. From that first tension we developed a reformulation of how we invite participation in the groups. We advise potential participants that “participation in the Experimental University is open in all aspects based on previous group agreements, and conforming to the criteria constituted by the instances that compose that aspect of the group...”

Would this condition have been possible without the tension that we emerged from the lived process of experimentation? Didn't the reformulation bring us back to the very question of subjectivity-information? Don't we find ourselves before a subjectification process that maintains the very space that configures and pushes it forward, with a permanent gesture of retrospective reflection as well as deconstruction and re-institution?

Situations such as these are not only recurrent in our ethical-political experimentation but fundamental. On the basis of this, the tensions (we call them that without hesitating) are a central, even if intimidating, element of our way of producing.

2. The traces of instituted university subjectivity as obstacles to experimentation.

When we created the Experimental University we started from a presupposition: the state-run university does not produce a student subjectivity. It does not leave traces nor does it brand those taking the classes. Rather this university has become an institution that serves merely as a depository where people accumulate while searching for a diploma allowing them to better confront the labor market. Nonetheless, as the project began during the month of May, we recognized the difficulty of putting alternative pedagogical mechanisms into practice; practices that distanced themselves from the typical academic methods we had all gone through and suffered through during our transit through state-run formation/education.

During the encounters that we proposed, the figure of the "expert that explains" emerged with force, embodied by the coordinators of the mechanisms that were in play. Even if we used texts that the university normally excluded, the pedagogical operation based on explanation and the subjective effects among participants were identical to an official class: passivity; boredom, and hierarchization between "teachers" and "students".

At the same time that we confronted the figure of the "explaining teacher/expert", another sharp problem that we encountered was the lack of pedagogical mechanisms that were effective enough to avoid the proliferation of what we call "opinions". By opinion we mean a pronouncement made in a collective space that does not subjectively affect/touch its interlocutor, that is to say that it generates dispersive rather than cohesive effects. The mass proliferation of mechanical, unconnected opinions about a wide variety of themes is an operation proper of the mass media scene. Rather than a citizenship right, the act of expressing an opinion about something is an automatic response promoted by the media. During the first encounters of the Experimental University, the absence or weakness of a pertinent pedagogic mechanism brought forth the apparition of all sorts of words, affirmations, pronouncements, that had little or nothing to do with the axis of study that was at hand. What are the effects of the "opinion-syndrome"?: confusion about the proposed objectives and a sensation of emptiness regardless of the amount of participation being achieved.

A series of diverse reflections after our discussions in the assemblies lead us to double our efforts to work on our methodological engineering. Finally, and not without due work, we are beginning to achieve pedagogical mechanisms that distance themselves effectively from the "teacher/expert that explains" and the mere "superposition of opinions". These mechanisms are allowing us to begin to reach a type of thinking that is common, in the moment, and self-managed.

3. Multiplicity without a synthesis: the end of the plenary form?

During our first encounters, the work produced by each sub-working group was placed in common towards the end of the encounter. We called that process of "socializing" each group's work Plenary. But after two months we began to notice the plenary was converting itself more into an instance of

exposition and opinion than into a space of elaboration. It became an opportunity to manifest ones agreement or disagreement with an author or to demonstrate how well-read one was, and not an experience in the self-managed elaboration of conceptual tools.

Thinking through the exhaustion of the Plenary has nonetheless placed another tension in our midst: during the last encounter of the module on the State as well as during the module on the Market, the coordinating groups proposed making a sort of balance of the work that had been done (pedagogic mechanisms, coordination styles, etc.). The productive results of these balances/evaluations, that included intense debates, provoked another question, and on the same token another subjectivity: we could say that at this point (after four months of experimental activity and nine months existing as a 'university'), the participants wanted to reflect on the work processes that can determine the most relevant modality to self-manage knowledge.

After discerning this characteristic it didn't take long for a question to arise: why should we understand the plenary as a modality of synthesis of what we've been working on in the discussion subgroups every Friday we meet? It so happens that we had inhabited this very mechanism of the plenary umpteen times during our militant experiences without the slightest bit of reflection. This type of space that we organized at the end of each encounter, and where very few productive elements emerged, began to disturb and finally 'kick-out' many people that were participating. At the same time it became an obstacle and a problem in thinking about the type of Common Public Space that we were trying to configure. After a series of collective discussions the problem became clearer: doing plenaries is not equivalent to drawing out common conclusions/results. For something 'common' to emerge, the experience of a path, the trajectory of an entire project is necessary. A trajectory where problems emerge that will change and strengthen the composition of that same project. In summary, constitutive questions such as: "for what," "why," "where," "how," would need to replicate themselves throughout the process, questions that reflect a multiplicity... without a totalizing synthesis.