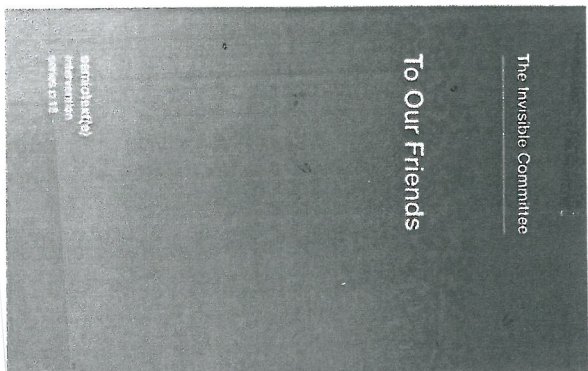
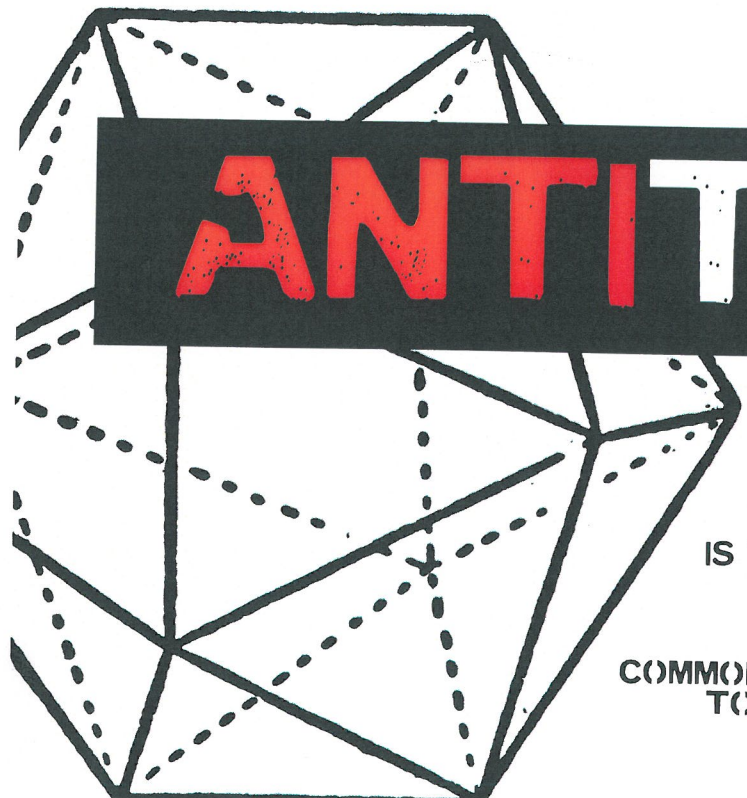




To Our Friends is written by *The Invisible Committee*, a group of French anarchists who have been active in many of the social movements of the last decade. In 2007, they wrote *The Upcoming Insurrection*, a political tract calling for the multiplication of insurrections against the collapsing capitalist culture. Seven years later, after taking part of the Arab Spring, the student revolts, Occupy, the anti-austerity riots in Greece and the Indignados in Spain, they have now written this critical essay about the insurrections that has finally erupted. Many problematic aspects raised in this book could feed the self-critical journey of DNU; the fetishism of direct democracy manifested through the general assemblies, the false dichotomy moderate/radical, the vanguard activism and its competitive aspect as well as the creation of communities. But first and foremost the necessity to continue our struggle by frontally attacking the infrastructures of the economic system, where the power is located.

A MUST READ

JUNE 19TH, 2015



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A POST-MAAGDENHUIS ANALYSIS |
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BEWEGINGEN BEGRIJPEN OM HEN TE VERANDEREN
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A POST-MAAGDENHUIS ANALYSIS

Many actions have been done since the eviction of the Maagdenhuis. On the 30th of April, a group calling themselves the students of the 1st of May Committee occupied the Information and Services offices of the UvA. The main slogan was clear: students and workers ought to be united. A month later, an internal mail by managers of the UvA administration was leaked to uva.lesk.nl. In the mail, the managers discuss the possibilities of getting around the national collective labour agreement (CAO). At the same time, it became public that 120 teachers at the Humanities Faculty wouldn't have their temporary contracts continued (read : they are fired). As a reaction to this, students – under the name of DNU – blockaded the entrance of the Maagdenhuis for an entire day (June 5), and hijacked UvA's email server to send out a call for action. Many graffiti and some broken windows, this time by obscure groups, could be observed around the campus. Because of their disruptive effects, but also because they are organized in a secretive way, those direct actions happened to be highly controversial.

DIVERSITY OF TACTICS

The diversity of tactics basically means that a wide spectrum of tactics is valid to investigate social change (from political reforms, elections, negotiations, commissions, petitions, to demos, hacking, graffiti, vandalism, blockades, occupations, etc). When acknowledged, this concept based on solidarity is warrant of trust and support, and ultimately prevents patronization. If we claim to have no leader and to fight for decentralization, it also means that we trust and support the initiatives that are done by other affinity sub-groups (the Bungehuis and Maagdenhuis occupations are the greatest examples).

It might be the right time to analyze the dynamics between the different forces of the movement (mainly between the action groups DNU, University of Color, Humanities Rally and Rethink UvA, but also between protesters themselves). A constructive way to engage this reflection might be to consider our relation to the diversity of tactics in the actual context.

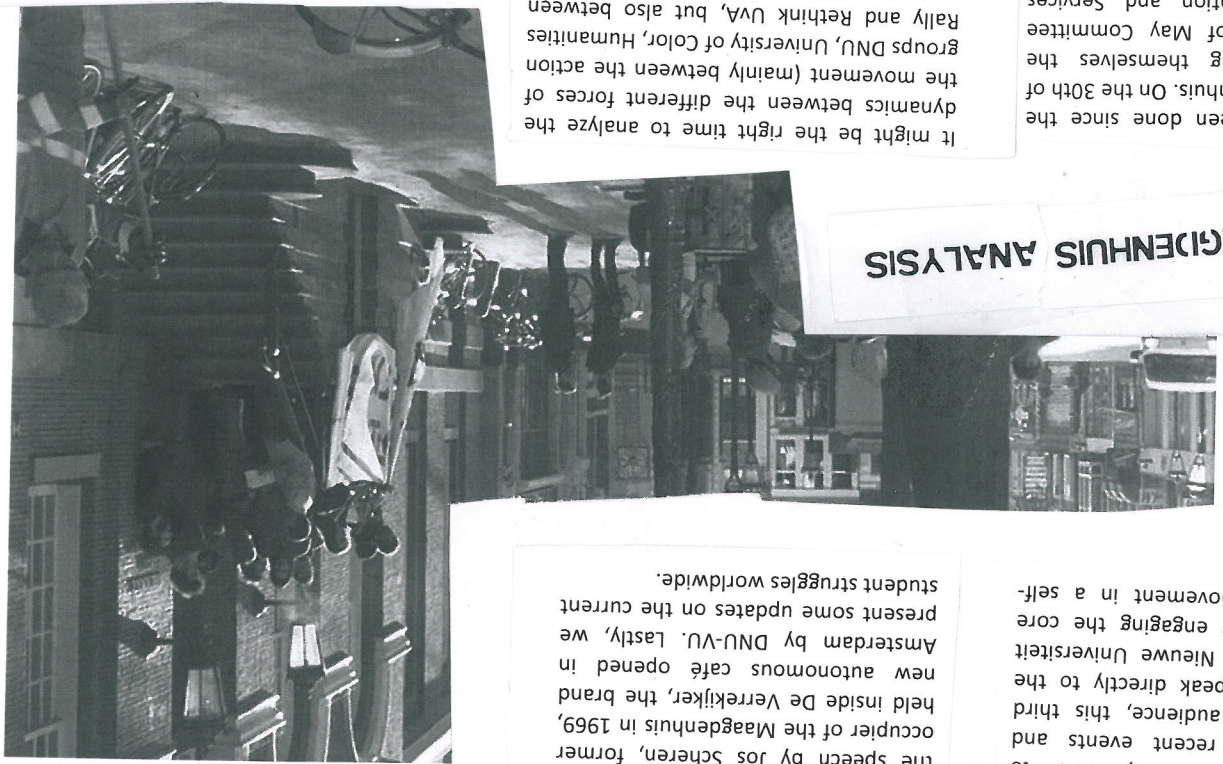
In order to do so, we publish *A post-Maagdenhuis analysis*, an essay about the last developments of the movement and some of the pitfalls we are now facing. The text from Ewout van den Berg, concerning other social movements (Occupy Wall Street, Indignados and the student movement in Québec), can be fruitful to look further and plan the sustainable future of DNU. Our editorial team interviewed members from DNU-Utrecht and DNU-Tilburg, to shed light on the development of other DNUs factions. You can also find the speech by Jos Scheren, former occupier of the Maagdenhuis in 1969, held inside De Verreklijker, the brand new autonomous café opened in Amsterdam by DNU-VU. Lastly, we present some updates on the current student struggles worldwide.

After months of protests, it seems the student movement that emerged from the series of occupations at the University of Amsterdam (UvA) has reached a turning point and could benefit from some in depth self-reflection. The summer is coming, and next September will be a crucial moment for us to see where we are and how we can continue our struggle against the mismanagement of universities. This third issue of *Antithese* proposes some starting points to envision the sustainability of the movement. Where our two previous issues clearly aim to document the recent events and reach a broad audience, this third issue aims to speak directly to the members of De Nieuwe Universiteit (DNU), hopefully engaging the core group of the movement in a self-critical process.

EDITORIAL

We hope this issue will help to place the movement in a broader context and we wish all "professional" activists the Climate Games and surely for the next round of our struggle, starting in September 2015!

Don't forget you can print and share this zine from our blog : antithese.noblogs.org. You can submit any texts or images any time at antithese.zine@gmail.com



Since this concept is hardly understood, we witness a lack of solidarity coming from many individuals and groups involved in the movement. Obviously, no one can keep an eye on everything that's being done, and this should be a strength. We need to escape the "good or bad" binary and accept that things are never completely wrong or perfectly right. Everything is part of a long-term process where experiments are being tried out in order to reach common goals. Our movement emerges from the spontaneous meeting of people from different beliefs and backgrounds. Acknowledging this diversity of thinking should be inherent to the acknowledgment of the diversity of tactics.

On the other hand, the concept of diversity of tactics always tends to manifest itself as a dogma, mostly used to justify harder actions as the ONLY way to improve social change. In our movement, this actually leads to a secretive, highly confrontational and impetuous behavior that puts aside the logic of diversity and falls into the trap of vanguard activism. Neglecting a certain balance in the spectrum of tactics eventually increases the risk of alienating many allies by underestimating their agency and excluding them from the actions.

GET THE POPCORN, THE IRON TOWER IS BURNING DOWN

Surely, the effects of the wide range of actions used this winter cannot be denied. The Executive Committee (CVB) of UVA is being forced to make concessions in order to calm the current anger, even though it seems clear that nothing will be deeply improved since the changes we are fighting for start with the abolishing of the actual top-down power structures. The strategy of the CVB, together with the Dutch government, is to stage a dialogue in order to be framed in the media as open authorities. The main problem lies here: this dialogue is not only fake – reaching at some point the level of a badly improvised theater play, often performed by all traditional politicians – it mainly reiterates the legitimacy of the authoritarian power structures we are fighting against.

Furthermore, implementing the most disruptive tactics because it worked in other social movements cannot be successful if we don't take in account the specificity of each situations. In the apathetic Dutch context, we have surprised many by showing the possibility to build up a momentum. We are now facing the risk of its deceleration by dismissing a considerable lack of mobilization as a non-problem. Since most of DNU's supporters are completely inexperienced in activism, the best way to "activate" them is to fight with them, and call for autonomous actions if only a minority of us have experience doing this. We should share our skills and knowledge to build up a strong community based on the shared necessity of the revolt.

"[...] the best way to "activate" them and not for them."

For the sake of a qualitative change, perhaps we should also reevaluate our emergency feeling and reconsider our priorities. In the last weeks, we became a small group of people burning out all our energy (and support) in a frontal fight with the board. To enlarge the resistance is the only way towards a radical change that is not imposed by a minority. It is also the biggest fear of our opponents. It is then crucial to evaluate at this moment the different criticisms that have recently been formulated on many platforms (about the dogmatic consensus decision-making, the fetishism of the general assembly, the white male domination or the uses of DNU's label).

"Let's not face our struggle as an internal issue between middle class white privileged academics."

WHAT S NEXT?

Apart from showing the (already known) incompetence of the CVB and the acquiescence of the COR and CSR, the concrete effects of the recent events seem somehow imperceptible from the eye of the storm. It is important to keep in mind that support has not decreased at all. More than a thousand people attended DNU's Festival of Sciences and Humanities on May 3rd, and the recent student elections have proven a large support to the movement. Likewise, the last training-weekend was a great success in terms of learning and encounters with student activists from outside of Amsterdam. We even hosted delegations of student activists from Burma and Mexico. Factions of DNU are getting active in more than ten Dutch universities where conscious students and staffs members are regrouping themselves to criticize the neoliberal agenda of their managers, to organize debates within the academic community or to open autonomous spaces (like the *Terecht* café in Nijmegen or *De Verreklijker* at VU University).

Since we just gave an electroschock to the Dutch academic world, it is necessary to look ahead and get prepared for the next academic year, keeping in mind that we still need to extend our struggle in order to pressure the economic-political elite. It doesn't just mean enlarging the mobilization, but to embody intersectionality. This means to stress the intersections between the student struggle and many other social movements because the questions we raise are entwined in a larger resistance. It is not surprising that, during the demonstration of the 13 of May (a group of refugees ignored by the state) joined us in the streets: we need to achieve the emancipation of all beings, even though the academia is our starting point. Let's not face our struggle as an internal issue between middle class white privileged academics. Take it as a whole and pave the way towards a society freed from oppression in which education plays an emancipatory role for everyone.

Antihese!

CURRENT STUDENT STRUGGLES

To keep informed about what is happening in the global student movement, you can follow the International Student Movement (ISM) on Facebook and Twitter.

CHICAGO, USA

On June 6, dozens of students, some dressed in their graduation gowns, did a sit-in (short-occupation) at University of Chicago. They protested for more transparency and against new budget cuts of 30 millions to all non-academic staff and student positions. Students were claiming the cuts would mean the firing of low-wage and mid-level campus workers, layoffs and freeze student employment, and tuition and fee increases in all departments and divisions. These cuts are also denounced as being part of a broader pattern of corporatization in higher education.

CHINA

Students from Taipei's Shih Hsin University over the past week have staged a series of protests over expensive dorm prices for exchange students from China. Led by the Shih Hsin University Student Labor Rights Action Group, the students accused the university of unfairly changing Chinese students higher prices, adding that Chinese students were being treated like "human ATM's".

NEW ZEALAND

Student activists occupied the University of Otago, protesting the forced closure of Aboriginal communities in Western Australia. The occupation was in solidarity with strikes across Australia at the same time against institutional racism and calling for the communities to remain open.

MEXICO

In Mexico, 10,000 people took to the streets of Mexico City to protest against the neoliberal education reforms of the current government on June 2. The tension is getting higher since it is election time in Mexico. Teachers' union members ransacked election burning ballots, seizing 11 offices in the state of Oaxaca and blocking a storage facility of the state-run oil firm Pemex. The teachers have announced a strike to protest the education reforms and boycott Sunday's midterm elections.

This situation in Mexico is escalating since the kidnapping of 43 students last year in Ayotzinapa. On May 17th, we received the visit of the EuroCaravan43 and met a group of students and parents doing an European tour in order to raise awareness about the violence of the Mexican State.

INDIA

At the beginning of June, the managers of the Indian Institute of Technology tried to ban a student organization, the Ambedkar-Periyar Student Circle, in order to silence criticism against the administration. Since the ban has been announced, students took the streets in order to denounce this attack of the freedom of speech. The Indian government detained 200 of them as a reaction to the blockade of the roads around the university. Under the pressure of the academic community, the administration revoked the ban a week later.

TAIWAN

The Alliance Against the Commoditization of Education staged a protest outside the Ministry of Education in Taipei on June 3, calling on the ministry to reject applications by universities to increase tuition fees. After a freeze of five years, 23 universities have applied to raise tuition by between 1.5 and 3.5 percent this year, which is seen as an attack on accessibility of education, forcing less privileged students to pass more time at work instead of studying.

BURMA (MYANMAR)

Since November, a series of student protests have been staged in Burma for the decentralisation of the education system, the right to form unions and the possibility to get courses in ethnic minority languages. The paramount of the protests was a two months long march from Mandalay to Yangon. Since then, 70 students have been put in jail and still are in there up till now. The first week of June, two Burma students came to Amsterdam asking us to put diplomatic pressure on their country to free their comrades.

QUEBEC

Civil organizations are protesting against a series of budget cuts in Québec. After a two months long student strike in universities, the teachers, parents and school commissioners joined the protests on June 1st by forming human chains around 70 high schools across Québec.

INTERVIEWING DNU-UTRECHT

How was the DNU Utrecht born?

DNU Utrecht was born after the appropriation of the Maagdenhuis. Some people organized a General Assembly, which was well attended, but at the same time we were still trying to find out how to structure it, which we found out over the course of the next couple of weeks.

What were the most remarkable events in the last months?

We joined the Red Square Everywhere action and painted some red squares around. At the entrance of the Drift (a university building in the centre of Utrecht) there is still one visible. Also we set up (and are starting now again) our Lunchboxlectures, which are lectures during the midday break concerning some of the topics we found interesting and relevant. Next, a shadow course was set up, which is now up and running on the post WO2 university, to create a more thorough understanding of the historical basis that has structured our modern university.

What are you specifically fighting in your university and how is that related to the struggle in the rest of the country?

We are fighting some of the budget cuts which have happened and are happening at Utrecht specifically, for example the creation of "verdiepingspakketten", which are structured packages of courses that are being sold as if the student would benefit from a more specialized whole. Or the policy concerning real estate for example.

But in general we already focus on more national problems, like countering the current view that knowledge is a productive force, the financialization of education and, more general, we work on showing how the university has become a semi-private organization and on creating a new narrative around it.

How do you see the coming course for these protests?

On a personal level, I'm pessimistic towards a structural change, because that would mean that the neoliberal view on society has to change, and thus it would mean that even our own language should change, as talking of "efficiency thinking" or "transparency" only reproduces the system we're fighting. But this pessimism means that the willingness to fight for his change becomes stronger, as we need to keep trying to create the space where impossibilities can thrive.

DNU Utrecht itself has more of a Rethink approach and is thus a bit more research oriented and thus the course for these protests would be more generally focussed on the spreading of knowledge concerning the problems at the university. At the same time there is a necessity to organize ourselves better on a national level as DNU, which will hopefully happen soon.

NEW UNIVERSITY TILBURG: A DNU WITH A DIFFERENT STORY

While students are standing up in protest worldwide, there seems to be no problem whatsoever in Tilburg: "It is quiet at the former Karl Marx University" said one blogger from Tilburg University newspaper *Univers*. Indeed, compared to some of the other universities, it is alarmingly quiet at TIU. At least, it used to be until DNU Tilburg was founded.

DNU Tilburg came into existence on the 4th of March. The New University of Amsterdam had called upon the students and staff of other universities to join the movement and to protest on Wednesday the 4th against the efficiency-mindset currently dominating the entire university system. Preceding this day, studentfactions Front and SAM had announced rather vocally - via national and regional news outlets - that no protests would follow in Tilburg: according to the factions, TIU-students and staff enjoy a healthy relationship with the Executive Board. Everything is just perfect in Tilburg, absolutely peachy.

But whilst the cameras and microphones were being put away at the end of that Wednesday morning - and news-vans sped off to the next disaster worthy of airtime - students and staff were slowly gathering on the steps in front of the Dante building, home to the Tilburg School of Humanities. This small group of around 30 people sent out a clear message: they had vocalized - merely by their presence - the preposterousness of the claim that students and staff enjoy a healthy relationship with the Executive Board.

|DNU-Tilburg|

In the days following this manifestation, the group grew in numbers and took on a more solid form with weekly meetings, regular lectures, articles written by staff, and recently a debate with national and local parties. DNU Tilburg has been working on breaking up the culture of silence so predominant at TIU. What this means in effect is, for instance, encouraging the Executive Board to engage in dialog with prof. dr. Eric van Damme and the other five full professors who launched a petition last summer called *RESEARCHERS FIRST, FOR A BETTER TIU*, in which they criticized the Strategic Plan of the university for the years 2014-2017. After a year of postponing, pussyfooting, waltzing around the issue - very elegantly, we might add - and simply ignoring the petition, the Executive Board finally yielded and agreed to a debate. It was announced that the long overdue debate on the contents of van Damme's petition was to be held on the 11th of June.

At least, we thought so. To call the event a debate would be an overstatement. To call the event a disappointment would be an understatement. As expected, the glorified Q&A held on June 11th was nothing more than a stage-play: pressing local matters were drowned in a cacophony of different topics of national importance, with none of them being the highly anticipated official response from the Board to van Damme's petition. Apparently, DNU Tilburg still has much work to do: we have a busy year ahead of us.

IS THIS WHAT DEMOCRACY LOOKS LIKE? BEWEGINGEN BEGRIJPEN OM HEN TE VERANDEREN

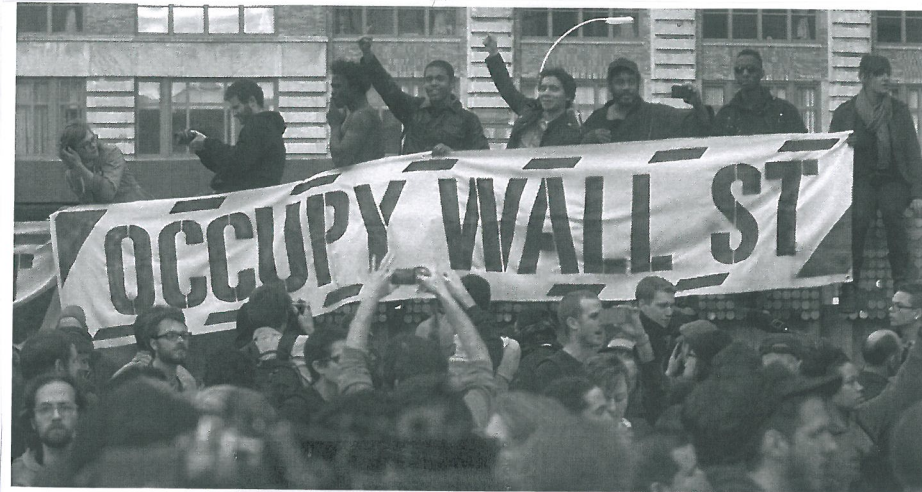
(Datum van inzending: 7 april 2015)

Samen met docenten hebben we de afgelopen paar maanden meer voor elkaar gekregen dan de formele medezeggenschap in meer dan tien jaar. De afbraak van de kleine talen is uitgesteld, er wordt (ongevraagd) een student aan het CvB toegevoegd en er zijn twee commissies ingesteld om te kijken naar de financiële stand van de UvA en democratisering en decentralisering. Dit is een stap in de goede richting, maar niet meer dan dat. Om echt tot een breuk te komen met de neoliberale universiteit is het geduldig organiseren van tegenmacht van onderaf cruciaal.

In het bouwen van deze brede beweging van studenten, docenten en ondersteunend personeel moeten we lessen trekken uit hoe we onszelf en onze democratie organiseren. We moeten onze overwinningen claimen, maar ook beseffen dat we veel uitdagingen voor ons hebben liggen. Hier geldt wat Zizek zei op het moment dat de activisten van Occupy Wall Street in het centrum van alle aandacht stonden: 'Don't fall in love with yourselves. We have a nice time here. But remember, carnivals come cheap. What matters is the day after, when we will have to return to normal lives. Will there be any changes then?'

Sinds het begin van de economische crisis in 2008 zijn er veel bewegingen opgekomen, maar ook gekrompen. Het woord revolutie met als betekenis fundamentele verandering heeft voor velen weer een actuele betekenis gekregen, maar 'contrarevolutie' jammer genoeg ook. Om te voorkomen dat we dezelfde fouten maken en om te zien wat de strategische keuzes zijn geweest die andere bewegingen hebben gemaakt, hier een aantal lessen van de afgelopen jaren:

1. Meer dan drie jaar geleden bracht de **OCCUPY-BEWEGING** de spirit van Egypte en Tunesië naar de VS en Europa. Met de eerste demonstratie in Amsterdam liepen



meer dan 3000 mensen mee. Tijdens het tentenkamp op het (symbolische) Beursplein zagen we dezelfde dynamiek als in het Maagdenhuis. Aanvankelijk ontstond er een groot enthousiasme bij mensen die onderdeel werden van een beweging die buiten de parlementaire en neoliberale kaders durfde te denken.

Gaandeweg ontstond er ook frustratie over het onvermogen van de bezetters om structuren op te zetten die voor werkende of studerende mensen ook toegankelijk waren. Een van de redenen hiervoor was dat besluitvorming door consensus als heilig werd gezien, in plaats van dat besluitvorming op basis van ervaring werd aangepast op een vorm die de beweging verder bracht. In de grote groep was altijd wel een individu dat een besluit tegenhield. Het consensusprincipe blokkeert zo scherpe debatten waarin er gedurfde keuzes gemaakt werden en leidde tot de minst controversiële en daardoor minst creatieve keuzes. Voor de slinkende groep gingen de discussies meer en meer over het kamp zelf - de positionering van de tenten en de wc's - en bij gebrek aan een gezamenlijk perspectief deed iedereen waar zij/hij zin in had. De vijandige pers kreeg steeds meer gelegenheid om de bezetters te ridiculiseren en als geïsoleerd neer te zetten.

In andere plaatsen betekende Occupy een versterking van lokale campagnes - van het stoppen van huisuitzettingen tot die voor een verhoging van het minimumloon - en het maakte een alternatief voor de kapitalistische status quo zichtbaar. Het meest indrukwekkend waren de ontwikkelingen binnen Occupy Oakland. Geconfronteerd met de problemen van consensusbesluitvorming kozen activisten om beslissingen met 90% steun aan te nemen, sloegen ze een brug richting veel arme (en zwarte) wijken en werkten ze intensief samen met de vakbond. Zo riepen ze een algemene staking uit en blokkeerden ze met tienduizenden de haven voor betere arbeidsomstandigheden.

Conclusie: acties kunnen met kleine groepen beginnen, maar ze verdwijnen als ze niet de brug weten te slaan richting andere groepen in de maatschappij. Onze macht is afhankelijk van ons aantal. Maar aantallen alleen zijn niet genoeg; de vraag is ook hoeveel economische druk we uit kunnen oefenen. De verbreding richting werkende mensen van Occupy Oakland liet het belang van klasse zien. Rapper, revolutionair en Occupy-activist Boots Riley stelde hierover: "Niet alleen is het de 1% tegenover de 99%, maar ook is het de 1% die verdient aan onze arbeid terwijl wij het hele raderwerk kunnen stilleggen."

2. Vier maanden voor de opkomst van Occupy zagen we al de massale straatprotesten van de **INDIGNADOS** in Spanje. Tegenover de dominantie van de sociaal-democraten en de conservatieven - twee kanten van dezelfde neoliberale medaille - creëerden zij een massabeweging van onderaf. In elke zichzelf respecterende gemeenschap werd een plein bezet; de pleinen dienden als trefpunt voor discussie en democratie. Op het moment dat de bezettingen hun nut begonnen te verliezen, namen de activisten het initiatief om de pleinprotesten te ontmantelen en zich verder te organiseren op buurtniveau. De eerste les is dat bezettingen van de publieke ruimte geen doel op zich zijn maar een middel waar vanaf gestapt kan worden op het moment dat dit niet meer effectief blijkt.

Een andere les uit de beweging kwam met de verkiezingen aan het einde van 2011. De Indignados kozen er in eerste instantie voor om geen stemadvies uit te brengen of een eigen partij op te zetten. De conservatieve partij won en voerde o.a. erg repressieve wetten door tegen activisten. Een aantal activisten trok de conclusie dat sociale strijd ook politieke strijd nodig heeft. Samen met een aantal linkse academici en socialistische organisaties zetten zij de nieuwe partij Podemos op die veel steun gewonnen heeft en ondertussen vanuit de politiek een megafoon kan vormen voor de beweging op straat.

Maar ook binnen Podemos is er debat: moeten we ons aanpassen aan de marges die de macht van het kapitaal toestaat binnen het parlementaire systeem of die macht juist confronteren door de strijd te versterken op de werkvloer en op de straat (zie ook de soortgelijke problemen waar Syriza in Griekenland mee te kampen heeft)? Studentenraden of -bonden hebben natuurlijk nog minder gewicht dan parlementaire politiek. Indien activisten hiervan gebruik van willen maken, laat het voorbeeld van Podemos en Syriza zien dat zij in de eerste plaats gebruikt moeten worden om het verzet van onderaf te versterken en door hen gecontroleerd moeten worden.

3. **QUEBEC.** Met het dragen van de rode vierkantjes plaatsen we onszelf in dezelfde traditie als de studenten die drie jaar geleden de provinciale regering van Quebec ten val brachten. Samen met de beweging in Chili laten ze zien dat studentenbewegingen ook over een langere termijn druk kunnen uitoefenen. De studentenbeweging in Quebec staat niet op zichzelf: sinds de jaren zestig kent de provincie een rijke traditie van studentenverzet en zijn er organisaties waarbinnen dat verzet effectief georganiseerd kan worden.

“Tegenover de dominantie van de sociaal-democraten en de conservatieven - twee kanten van dezelfde neoliberale medaille - creëerden zij een massabeweging van onderaf.”

De kracht van de studentenbeweging in 2012 is dat zij in staat is geweest misschien wel de helft van het totaal aantal studenten onderdeel te maken van het protest en de beweging. In grote maandelijkse demonstraties, maar misschien wel belangrijker: in een georganiseerde democratie. Er was een permanente discussie over strategie, tactiek en volgende stappen. Vergaderingen vonden in verschillende studentensteden plaats, afgevaardigden hiervan kwamen centraal samen en brachten de resultaten terug naar hun eigen steden ter stemming.

Vanaf het begin zagen studenten het belang van het bouwen van een bredere beweging tegen bezuinigingen en liberaal beleid. Door de samenwerking op te zoeken met de vakbonden wisten zij ook economische macht op te bouwen. Op het moment dat de regering probeerde de studentenbeweging te criminaliseren, steunden grote vakbonden de protesten van de

studenten. De studenten waren in staat om het platform van de media, (met al haar oppervlakkigheden en beperkingen) maximaal te benutten door te werken met gekozen woordvoerders. Een ander sterk punt is dat de mobilisaties van de protesten op organisaties en netwerken rustten die ook tussen de hoogtepunten door bleven doorgaan met het organiseren van informatiebijeenkomsten en het uitgeven van kranten en folders. Structuur en organisatie blijven centraal.

De protestbewegingen van de afgelopen jaren laten zien dat er een alternatief is voor de kapitalistische status quo: van de acties tegen racistisch politiegeweld in Ferguson tot de strijd tegen bezuinigingen in Europa tot de protesten tegen seksisme in India. We kunnen hier nu de opstand op de universiteiten aan toevoegen. “Er zijn decennia dat er niets gebeurt, en er zijn weken wanneer decennia gebeuren”, zei een Russische revolutionair ooit. Het gevaar met elke beweging die opkomt met de massale positieve media-aandacht aan het begin, is dat men denkt, zo ook wij uitzonderlijk te zijn. In bepaalde opzichten zijn we dat ook. Elke beweging is anders, maar als we op de schouders staan van zij die ons voorgingen, kunnen we verder kijken. Als we hier meer over discussiëren en lessen uit trekken, kunnen we de druk op het CvB en Den Haag verder opvoeren.

Kennis boven winst! Weg met het CvB! Alle macht aan studenten, docenten en ondersteunend personeel!

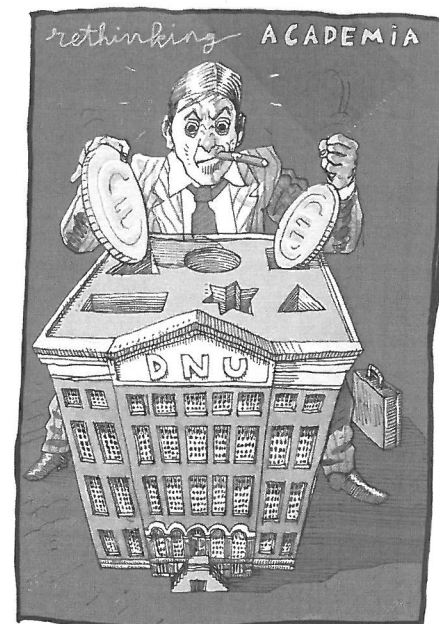
[Ewout van den Berg]

COMMON KNOWLEDGE AND AFFECTS, OR: HOW TO BUILD TOGETHER A NEW UNIVERSITY?

A talk at the Verrekijker, DNU-VU, May 29th 2015

A key issue in the recent occupations of the Bunge/Maagdenhuis has been “rendementsdenken”. With all the good things that the movement has brought us, we cannot uncritically pretend that we have understood once and for all what “rendementsdenken” means in our lives. While we are opposed to it, we should, for our own sake, go on understanding it, but not only that. It’s about time to construct real alternatives and start building the university of the future.

Talking about the future, let’s first go back for a couple of moments to the past, a far past: to Baruch de Spinoza who lived around 1650 in the Republic of the Netherlands. In my view his lovable and glorious philosophy contains for us at least two stimulating notions: 1) thinking, knowing, making ideas is a common natural thing for all of us and 2) any idea that we have, goes with emotions, passions, or as Spinoza says with affects. So affects and ideas are to him the oxygen of our lives.



Let me elaborate a bit more on ideas and affects. Everyone thinks with the help of ideas and affects and thus needs to find her or his way in reality. The better you succeed in doing that, the more joyous you become. But also the opposite is true: the less you can relate to the world and the more you are being forced to treat your knowledge as a private thing, the sadder you become.

We all experience both feelings. For instance the Bunge-Maagdenhuis episode was a joyful explosion of intensified relating and understanding. However, way too often we experience the opposite, for example the sadness of the quantification and privatisation of our ideas and affects. One could call this quantification and privatisation effects of “rendementsdenken”, but following Spinoza it would be more realistic to consider these effects as a threatening destruction of the natural humus of knowledge.

In that case “rendementsdenken” should rather be seen as an ecological assault.

Well, if that is our situation, we are in trouble. It means eventually that we in the world of academia and elsewhere are confronted with biopolitical powers that have their own agenda, their own irreversibility and, if you like, their own ivory tower irresponsibility. It will not be enough for us to complain about all this. On the contrary, complaining will not help us, it will make us sadder and for sure it will not impress or affect the powers either. Alternatives are needed that will help us to protect our affective and conceptual nature. We have made steps in that direction over the past few months and we need to continue to work at our own biopolitical projects, concentrating on new concepts and affects and constructing new institutions.

My time is limited. I’m afraid I have to jump now to the end of my talk. So you’ll have to excuse the bluntness of this last part.

New institutions in the world of academia, so a New University, would imply in the context of this talk at least three conditions:

1) Develop evaluation and assessment methods that prevent the privatisation of knowledge.

2) Accept only managers who are knowledgeable about what the nature of knowledge is. They should love or at least not hate the natural essence of knowledge.

3) Level the salaries of the inhabitants of ivory towers. The salaries of the current management layers is one of the main reasons why they can live in their ivory towers, blocked off from the rest of the academic community. If we want the university to become an open space where common knowledge may flourish, we should tear down any ivory tower within the landscape of our university. A levelling of income could be a first step towards that and a prelude to eventually a basic income for the whole academic community.

(A not inconsiderable side effect of this levelling of income is that it could mean once and for all the end of that obnoxious talk of the elitism of university protest. Any suggestion that we are the ones who are defending our ivory towers, will disappear once we succeed in putting the income issue on the agenda. It would mean a considerable step in the organising of the huge discontentment that exists outside the university over finance capital. We finally would be able by organising the indignation about finance capital to defeat, any kind of populism, that unworthy disarmament of the common.)

A part of the talk is taken from a text I’m currently working on. The text is inspired by the exciting effects of the Bunge/Maagdenhuis events and its working title is “Spinoza in the Maagdenhuis”.

[Jos Scheren]