

*from a fall of protest...*

*...to a spring of resistance  
and refusal*

a collection of  
written insurrections from vienna

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### ***don't strike / replace - a call from and to vienna***

*On March 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup>, ministers and diplomatic delegations from 46 countries will meet at a summit in Vienna and Budapest to celebrate the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the so called Bologna-Process, which was used mainly to make European universities more repressive places with less freedom for students and more chances to select them, to build elites with privileges and masses who may prove themselves by showing their obedience first to strict curricula, mass lectures and multiple choice tests, and then to an economy that has a need not for free and autonomously thinking people but for laborers of knowledge.*

*Around the summit, there will be*

*demonstrations and attempted mass blockades, a counter summit, workshops, creative actions and the like.*

*This call wants to readdress the idea of occupation, which is the political means that started the last enormous wave of protest in Vienna and many other places.*

Occupation means to take a certain space away from the influence of the existing powers, who have little choice but to use police force to reassert their control. As long as a space is occupied, the people inside have at least the chance to define what's happening in it.

It's a hard task not to reproduce all the forms of what we have learned to be normal social interactions, forms of learning, forms of political organization, but it is necessary to try.

The university was never a space for emancipating individuals by free self determined learning.

If it is ever to be anything like that, this will not happen by reform from above. Whoever has the power to reform has little interest in this kind of university.

While the ideas and concepts of a different university are at least vaguely present in our minds, we will never see them in reality unless we make them happen ourselves.

Even if our attempts will be instable, temporary, and within the current social framework even dysfunctional, the mere

act of occupation gives us the chance to try and try again, and learn each time.

The thorough transformation that is necessary in this world can only come about if people lose their mindless trust in the existing institutions of society and learn to create different structures from below. The existing ones will always be dominated by those who have an advantage from them and thus support them.

*Come to Vienna to open up spaces in- and outside universities, and make them anti-national schools of resistance and refusal. Organize yourselves with others to learn and teach at the same time, break up the roles of student and teacher, the separations between faculties, nationalities, enrolled and non-enrolled people. De-commodify knowledge by ripping its transmission out of the academic form. Be the change you want to see in the world.*

*Don't only protest against the university of the Bologna system, don't strike for a symbolic day or two, but occupy whatever space it takes to make something different come true, and at the same time, break the functionality of the Bologna university by using the spaces where it was supposed to happen.*

*Don't stick to one huge lecture room that has only the architectural setting ideal for heroes of the revolution to tell everybody how it works.*

*Instead, take small rooms and places, and be unpredictable.*

*Let's start together in Vienna in March, and carry the idea and experiences everywhere!*

## ***Vienna, taking over our university***

What happened in Vienna last October was unplanned, spontaneous and beautiful. Events took us by surprise. A demonstration of approximately 200 participants turned into an enormous happening of 1500 people who occupied the main lecture hall "Audimax". Many students stayed there until they were evicted by the police a few days before Christmas. During the entire two months, no lectures or exams could take place in the Audimax due to the student blockade.

*All students had their own ideas and their own frustrations with the university situation and a motivation drawn out of the collective movement that had its beginning then.*

The first weeks passed with excited energy. Everyone who had an idea just joined a "working group", in order to find people with similar interests. In this manner more than 100 working groups came into being, all with different aims and activities. They were our driving force.

*We want to live and to protest the way we demand our education to be.*

We demand the right to participate politically and we scream\_for individual freedom in curricula.

We stand up to the co-operations and politicians who want to use universities as tools to maximize profit.

We fight against discrimination of any kind and we want everyone to have equal access to university education, regardless of nationality, or financial and social background.

We want to be empowered, to take responsibility for our own actions and to learn how to truly live our freedom without the unconscious constraints induced by society.

To make these claims real we live them already. We don't wait for those with power to establish them.

We let everyone present participate in any discussion and decision. We never close up, but are open for new ideas and people; be they students, children, workers, adults or the homeless. Everyone uses the freedom to take action in whatever way they want and everyone has to take the responsibility for their own actions. We don't identify as a single-willed movement that speaks with one voice. We have many voices and all need to be heard. No one can claim to speak for the entire movement.

This is not the easiest and certainly not always the most efficient way to work. Still this method has released a plenitude of creative energy and allowed a very heterogenous group of people to become involved. And it stands as a not articulated, but monumental critique of the "democracy" we live in and its prevailing system.

*Though sometimes not achievable, we do our best to not reproduce what we criticize about the society within the free spaces we have created.*

## ***From occupied spaces and around***

What seems to have started as a sudden eruption of discontent, an unwillingness of individuals to put up with their own more or less common situation, was really something that many people had been waiting for, people with an unwillingness to put up with the situation of life in general. This attitude of refusal is a central component of this, probably of any protest that becomes something more.

It's a refusal to play by the rules, the rules of a game we've never been asked to join or not. Rather it is a game that has reached so far into our lives that to refuse playing it when we are isolated means to cut ourselves off from most social relations, from resources, opportunities for productive activity, infrastructure, space.

The rules of the game are clear. Property is the one category of law that enjoys seemingly eternal protection. This appears so appallingly logical to most people. It's appalling because it should be obvious, but seemingly is not, that it's a different thing if i have a horse and an axe, and i don't want anybody to take it from me without asking, or if social life's structure is predefined by the standard of utilizability for the reproduction and accumulation of power.

As the horse and the axe are already far beyond of what many people own, to use an axe or ride a horse, even for someone else's purposes, they need to sell their time, nowadays not even necessarily to someone who probably has or at least could have many horses, but to a structure that seems to offer no escape from relationships and forms of cooperation mediated by one principle: The idea that if

things are traded on a market without interference, and if whatever exists is considered a thing, then the price of every thing is equivalent to its value, and everyone is equal. Amen.

But to own things, or the money to buy them or what's attainable by selling them, means to have control over other people's labor, and by this, over their time.

If these things are usable for something, they are usually at least partially product or consequence of other people's past efforts, and be it just the fact that someone before discovered the fact that it can be used or how, or someone gave a hint about the location before another one finds it and declares it to be her or his own.

As i own the thing, i can control by who and how this past effort of other people can be used and for what purposes. If i own enough things or supposedly equivalent money to acquire them, i can buy people's time to use them and appropriate the outcome as well. Again, this outcome is treated as a thing, even if really it might be just the handling or 'management' of some social process.

Owning the horse, or a share of a corporation, in the end means being in the position to keep the product and hire someone to produce it for just the amount necessary to make her or him come back to work, be it for fear of starvation or the illusion that your above-average ability to buy things makes your human life complete.

And if someone comes and asks what happened to the idea of justice, or where the power is in this, the official answer is clear: Superior performance is at the root of all advantageous positions and

accumulations of 'wealth', and being in control really means to take responsibility and thus the big share of the risk, so disproportional reward is only fair.

The results shouldn't look too ugly of course. If we manage the disaster well enough, everybody will have something to eat, be it just rice. For some people it needs some more reward to keep them quiet, so they may even participate in the management of disaster and in return, they can take a loan and buy a plasma-tv. For those less fortunate, there's always some ngo that takes care of them, right?

Besides, all this is a student protest. Our goal is to save public education, and to make it free for all and give everybody a chance. If everybody gets a chance, everybody can get a good job and buy a plasma tv.

Also, it would be nice to be a little more free and a little more self-determined and to have less pressure and more time, and to learn and work on what makes sense to us and to follow our interests, and to participate in the creation of our surroundings, sometimes misleadingly referred to as democracy, but we must rely on the ones who are responsible for us being unfree, dominated, under pressure, in haste, learning what can be applied for profitable production, be it ideology, responsible for giving us the wonderful roles of customer, product and workforce. They are the only point of reference for change, because they have the legitimate final decision.

If we manage to put pressure on the administration and some government officials, they will listen to us with our demands and if we agree to sit at a table with them they will offer us coffee or even wine and we will be important too. They

will be so happy that finally someone is talking to them who understands that too much change is in nobody's interest. But we will be important, too.

In the end the game is still theirs and not ours.

Who the hell are we and they?

Are we the students, the teachers, the one who protests, the people who want change and ask for it to be enacted, the ones who want our situation to be better.

Or are we the people who want to learn and share their knowledge freely, the ones who refuse to play by the rules, because we can see that what we want will not turn reality within this frameset, are we the ones who are really willing to create our situation ourselves?

Are they the people in power who are responsible for the university of today, the university that we have always questioned, that we are determined to change? Or are they also the ones who, often unknowingly cooperate with those dominant forces, the ones whose main focus is on getting the attention of the powerful and hope to pressure them to enact the different university that we wish for.

The question is where to draw a line.

Experience shows that cooperation with reformist forces is complicated. They can give a protest or movement official legitimacy, they position them inside the framework of the normal civic forms, and by this, they can possibly give a temporary halt to repression or evictions, as it happened in vienna. But on the other hand, exactly this process of legitimization within the bourgeois society is the death of any radical critique.

It is not only the universities neoliberal restructuring, not the so called bologna process or the bachelor/master system that need to be refused and fought against, it is the institution of the university itself. Universities have never been the place of free research and learning that some romantics have painted as imaginary castles. Neither has the attempt to open universities to critical social theory and such helped to let actions follow. The output of those universities, even the most critical departments, has had little consequence apart from a bunch of self entitled critical people ending up marching through the institutions of this society, in the end not changing the institutions but being changed by them.

What else?

We can only organize the termination of compliance with what's supposedly normal. We can spread the disrespect for any authority that is only symbolic really, may be able to use sanctions, but has no power whatsoever if nobody listens.

Imagine war when nobody goes to war.

Imagine university when everybody does something different.

The clue to university occupations, as to any other occupation, is to take over a space and transform it, ignore the institutional control over the space, disobediently create a social setting that differs from what is supposed to happen in that space.

To occupy as a means to apply pressure on the powerful may work for temporary protest, but in a situation as hostile for emancipation as the current universities, there's little hope that they will be changed

as we wish from above.

A short look at the demands of recent student protests and at agenda of european and worldwide education policies shows the incompatibility of the two. Whoever is responsible for, say, the bologna process, has obviously little interest in making universities free spaces of learning in solidarity, and whoever follows them in their positions will not have any interest either, because they would have to go through basically the same institutions to get there.

There is of course the option of reducing demands to almost nothing, and to celebrate little victories whenever a minister or someone else important initiates a commission who will asses the possibilities to make a little step in our direction.

This option is hardly attractive. The forces are against us, and even if some concessions are made in one area, there will be so called reforms that make everything worse shortly after. It takes a small look into history to understand that, or even just into the history of recent student protests on any university.

While the normal, the status quo, is still in action, working properly, it is hard to think beyond it. As long as the university as it is can function, it protects itself against a thorough critique from within. Whoever is participating in the normal will not be able to question their own role completely.

*In some of the most crucial days of our struggle, some people made a step forward, while others were about to step back. They occupied new spaces, the same spaces that some other people were*

*planning to acquire legitimately by negotiations with the administration and in exchange for other occupied spaces.*

*Even though the eviction followed quickly, this move was necessary to bring up the clash that exists and probably exists in any movement: that between protest, demands, appeals and maybe negotiations on the one hand and direct action on the other, the clash between the idea that what is being criticized can be made considerably better by the forces in power, and the idea that any real change can only happen if those powers lose their support, if people attempt to implement their utopian ideas in the present.*

*This clash will stay.*

*Some people will always try to limit protest to a civic form, they will acquire this form for their ideal of internal organization as well as for the ways they communicate with the rest of the world. Legitimacy is a central point of this approach.*

*Some people, though, will see that the reality of the existing world has little left worth preserving.*

*As all processes of collective life including the way we learn are being integrated into markets that are governed by the economical powerful, as the political organization of so called modern societies is a spectacle, a tv performance, where maybe the showmasters can be elected but the show behind the scene stays the same, what the hell is the point of dreaming about 'saving' the university as it was?*

*Only one thing left to say:*

*What keeps us from making reality what*

*we imagine the university to be?*

### ***What the university is and what it is not***

The university has never been the free place of self-determined learning that some imagine it to have been, before some recent reform or budget cut. Not only recently has it turned into an undemocratic employability machine that now we have to scare away so our beloved public university may return.

Always has it been a place of selection, always a place to shape people to become obedient citizens that are useful as workforce, and that produce knowledge applicable for the expansion of influence and power. If ever people truly used this institution for something else, it was possible due to their privileged economic position.

It can hardly be denied, of course, that, as in any process involving knowledge, there is and has been an empowering potential in the university. But as much as this has lead to universities being one source of social conflict again and again, it has been successfully contained, at least over time. Like relics of past struggles, here and there some people or even whole departments teach a thorough critique of the existing society but remain on the grounds of theory forever, and one can even get grades and a degree for being oh so critical. But by symbolically acknowledging the value of this kind of potentially subversive knowledge, the critique is put in a finalized package that demands no further action, and that not

even the labor market cares much about.

Now that in Europe, as in other places, the universities are being restructured, many cry for a halt, pledge that market powers may not govern the university, and that the state must return to its supposed role of representing the public interest.

But what runs by labels such as “Bologna Process” is most of the time more or less functional within the existing economic and political structures. There is no need for people thinking freely, for people enjoying an education that empowers them to become active participants in society, and since struggles of especially the 60ies and 70ies had opened a small window pointing in this direction, the forces in power now try to close it again.

With the tailwind of a neoliberal discourse that has leaked into most corners of life, the permanent fear of unemployment, and lately again with the great narrative of a threatening but seemingly punctual and repairable crisis, it must have seemed easy to make this attempt.

Clearly, the emancipating potentials of the university must be kept out of reach from the masses, so what is being sold to them as academic knowledge can be reduced to applicable information they are trained to memorize, if they succeed to adapt accordingly they will be labeled 'Bachelor', which translates to: usable workforce with comparable qualifications in a certain standardized field of knowledge.

Whoever qualifies to become a 'Master' is neither the smartest nor the most hardworking, but rather one of those most willing to adapt themselves. The illusionary chance they get is that they might be, at least in some programs, studying in better conditions with more

'freedom', but the chance that they might use this freedom to emancipate themselves and engage in social change is efficiently prevented by internal competition and the promise of a considerably bigger share of the cake if they make it.

It's important to see that the university, especially in some European countries, was already at a crucial point of a certain costly overproduction, with far more people educated to think at least partially autonomously than an authoritarian society like the one we live in needs. At the same time far less people than necessary choosing the kind of education that makes one the obedient knowledge-laborer that an economy like the EU needs.

So now that the changes imposed in the context of the Bologna Process have manifested in even most of the last corners of European universities, who are we to ask it all to be undone from the same institutions that made it happen?

There is no point in wishing back the half-opened window of before, since it has always been a window with bars. And not even that would be given to us in the current situation. The same actors that are responsible for 'Bologna' are to be the ones we appeal to for change?

We must see that there is no antagonism between capital and the state. Rather, the state is an instrument to ensure the perseverance of the economic relations, and makes concessions to other causes only to perpetuate social peace. If we direct our hopes for a different university towards the state, we declare implicitly that social peace will prevail as soon as concessions are made, that any breach of peace is temporary only, and as soon as our own situation has been alleviated we

will return into the arms of this paternalistic regime of domination happily, if only we may continue to criticize it in our own academic perversion of revolutionary aesthetics that never leaves its bourgeois cage.

What some see as a recent attack of market powers on the public university is really just a chance taken to adapt this institution to the ever-altering economic system. The immediacy of this is what produces friction and entails unrest among students and teachers. It is also a chance to see the contrast between what was and what is being enforced now, and if we want, to imagine something different as we see neither is or has been what we are hoping for, and what was before is out of our reach anyway.

All appeals to so-called democratic institutions to save the public university will suffice for nothing. No condition of the past is worth romantically looking back to. The time has come not to save the university, but to decompose it, to dissolve its institutional patterns, to destroy its ritualized reality, as well as the rest of this society, and to build something new on the ruins.