

# The Right to University: the Question of Democracy in the Polis at a Time of Crisis

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Received: 4 October 2012 / Accepted: 15 October 2012 /  
Published online: 8 November 2012  
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**Abstract** What is the task of the university and the role of the humanities at a time of economic and political crisis? This article attempts a response by turning to Socrates's Apology, a text that narrates the division of philosophy from politics and, by analogy, of the university from the polis. The historical context of the Apology symptomatically foreshadows the contemporary crisis in the humanities over the past two decades, the current debates about the future of the university (especially the public university in Europe) in the wake of the new educational policies implemented as a result of the Bologna Process, and the waning of democracy made worse by the current economic crisis. By drawing on the works of Hannah Arendt, Jacques Rancière, and Jacques Derrida and their respective readings of democracy and the polis, this article presents a case of how philosophy can make the university relevant to democracy and the polis which are in crisis. The article ends with the proposition that the university should promote interdisciplinarity and develop into a postnational and “trans-modern” (Mignolo) institution that resists the processes of corporatization that drain the university of one of its primary functions, to teach critical thinking and to contribute to the remaking of the democratic processes in the polis.

**Keywords** Apology · Arendt · Democracy · Derrida · Philosophy · Polis · Rancière · University

## The University in Crisis

Athens, January 2011. Three hundred immigrants with no documents traveled from Heraklion, Crete, to Athens to protest against the government for taking no measures to change their status as illegal workers, although they had been working in Greece for over a decade. To make themselves visible in the polis, they occupied the

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renovated but still empty buildings of the Law School of Athens located in the center of the city, in Sina Street, where they kept their hunger strike going for over a month. Protected by the university asylum law that the new bill on tertiary education was to abolish a few months later in August 2011, they left of their own will when a shelter was provided to them by the owners of the Hypatia Mansion, a short distance away from the university. During their occupation of the public university building, the university became a site of contest and contestation: did they have a right to be there? Is the public university a site where the conflict between citizen and denizen,<sup>1</sup> the polis and the communities transforming it, and between national laws and human rights should be fought? This event provoked a debate about the role of the public university, the crisis, and the question of democracy; not surprisingly, the foreigner, the university, the polis, and the general role of thinking in society were critically constellated at a time of national and global crisis—a crisis that is clearly not only a crisis of the banking system but also of democracy itself. The event also betrays the fate that the university and polis share within the context of globalization; the economic, political, and cultural effects of globalization on the university and the polis demonstrate how the distance of the university and, especially, the field of the humanities, as its symbolic cultural and educational capital, from the polis is suspended and transformed, especially in the face of the denizen, whose statelessness becomes both a political and an epistemological problem.

The anxiety about the university and the role of philosophy and the humanities is not a new phenomenon; it most probably came into being with the inception of the university as a modern institution. What transformed this anxiety in the 1990s, however, as several seminal texts of the decade reveal, was the fate of the humanities in a university that was being transformed into a corporate institution. Texts such as Jacques Derrida's *Du Droit à la Philosophie* (1991),<sup>2</sup> William V. Spanos's *The End of Education. Towards Posthumanism* (1993), Bill Readings's *The University in Ruins* (1996), and Peggy Kamuf's *The Division of Literature or the University In Deconstruction* (1997) delineate the cultural, epistemological, and political stakes of this transformation, which threatens to subject the role and purpose of the university to the market values and political interests of a neoliberal democracy that promotes a corporate culture.<sup>3</sup> Each of these texts responds to a process of educational reform

<sup>1</sup> See Giorgio Agamben's analysis of Tomas Hammar's use of “‘denizens’ for these noncitizen residents that has the merit of showing how the concept of ‘citizen’ is no longer adequate” (Agamben 2000, p. 22.3) as the defining line is disappearing and the concept of the citizen is also being transformed by an “increasing desertion of the codified instance of political participation” (22.3).

<sup>2</sup> Published in English as *Eyes of the University: Right to Philosophy 2* (2004).

<sup>3</sup> Spanos's text responds to the post-Vietnam war culture and the “knowledge industry” of the higher institutions of learning that co-opted and accommodated the students' movement in the 1960s in order to generate neo-humanist discourses of “sweetness and light” and preach the need to protect the university from politics by keeping it at a distance from the sphere of the polis. As a founding member of the Research Group on the Teaching of Philosophy, Derrida wrote his text in the process of the struggles to save philosophy programs and extended them into the secondary education system in the 1970s. Bill Readings portrays the ideology underlying the university of excellence that became the primary agenda of the 1990s, the decade during which the university was reformed as a “bureaucratic and corporate” university in North America and other places. Peggy Kamuf addresses the role of literary studies in the modern university, particularly in our times, and counters the thesis that deconstruction is responsible for the deterioration of literary studies in the North American universities.

that contrived to subordinate the mission of the university to the ideology of a “techno-democratic humanism” (Derrida 2004, p. 163), what Spanos in another context calls an “amnesiac” and “violently disinterested” humanism (Spanos 1993). This process of subordination is represented as an irrefutable necessity, at the expense of philosophy, theory, and literary studies and the humanities as a whole. Instigated by the crisis of the university as institution, these texts best represent the corporatization of the university, its transformation into what Readings calls a “bureaucratic corporation” (Readings 1996, p. 20). Walter Mignolo offers a succinct summary of this process with particular reference to the effects of this corporatization on the state universities in ex-Third World countries and the formerly colonized world:

What I conceive of as the “corporate” university is the type of university that in industrialized countries has been displacing the Kantian-Humboldtian tradition since the 1970s. Its best model is the U.S. university (see Wallerstein 1997). In ex-Third World countries the “model” began to be imposed in the late 1980s, but more clearly after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The first manifestations of the newly imposed “quality control” of the faculty as well as of departments and special programs, in Argentina or in Mexico, were the demands that professors publish in refereed journals, account for their research and publications periodically, and so on. Another manifestation has been the progressive deterioration of major state universities, and the parallel and complementary divergence between accumulation of money and accumulation of meaning, characteristic of capitalism and Western universities (Mignolo 2003, pp. 101–102).

In the second decade of the twenty-first century, it appears that Mignolo's analysis of the corporate university culture as a neo-colonial force in ex-Third World countries whose universities are now modernized according to standards of efficiency and quality control also applies to the “First World,” at least to Europe. The deterioration of the public character of the state university in Europe, the increase of tuition fees, the rapid dwindling of funding for research and teaching in the humanities, the recent closing down of philosophy and classical studies programs in the UK and other European countries, and the threat posed to the humanities in the wake of the implementation of the Bologna Process<sup>4</sup> would seem to point to the exhaustion of the university as an institution founded on the principles of reason and the nation-state, the superstructure and infrastructure of the European Enlightenment. The recent new bill on tertiary education that was voted in by the Greek parliament in August 2011 is a case in point. Passed with a majority of votes (250 out of 300), made up of the socialist party (PASOK), the right wing party of the opposition (Nea Demokratia), and a smaller extreme right wing party called LAOS (Populist Orthodox Alert), the

<sup>4</sup> The technocratic character of the Bologna Process with its emphasis on measurement criteria that are inappropriate to the humanities, and the indifference to the social and critical functions of the university and, in particular, to the specific cultural and political role it plays within various communities, has taken its toll. A number of European universities have had to shut down their philosophy, theory, and occasionally also their literature programs, which, arguably, form the core of the humanities. For more information about the Bologna Process, see the official website at <http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/> and also Chris Lorenz's “Will the Universities Survive the European Integration?”, an exemplary critical analysis of the problems that the Bologna process has created in its implementation at <http://dare.uvu.nl/bitstream/1871/11005/1/Sociologia%20Internationalis.pdf>

bill was celebrated by the government and the media as promising for future political collaborations and parliamentary consent in the midst of a raging economic, political, and democratic crisis. This bill is symptomatic of how a specific implementation of the kind of internationalized education envisaged by the Bologna Process is not always positive, at least not in so far as the humanities and their evaluation according to market values are concerned. The underlying principles of the Bologna Process may not sound so threatening; in fact for some, they set out the unifying principles for the constitution of a European university system defined by excellence<sup>5</sup>: the promise of mobility, the opening of the university to market values that can secure proper measurement of professorial productivity rates (in terms of peer-reviewed publications, research grants, etc.) as well as of students' professional success in the job market, the implementation of unified evaluation and measurement criteria that safeguard the accountability of the university to the market—but not necessarily to the polis—and, thus, the cash flow from grants and external funding, and, finally, the internationalization of university studies. The Bologna Process represents these principles as survival strategies for the university in a globalized economy, in which the nation-state has become a very weak economic player, especially in the case of small countries like Greece with a decrepit economy made worse since the intervention of the International Monetary Fund and its implementation of austere economic measures that have brought production to a standstill.

This last principle, the internationalization of the university, a key term in the Bologna Process and in the recent Greek bill on tertiary education, which calls for its full implementation in the public universities, reveals the agenda for the corporatization of the university. The university is forced to restructure itself by way of answering to the market and its needs. The bill and the Bologna Process require the European university to produce knowledges and prepare experts for the market and limit or even shut down programs that are not productive and useful in this sense. Within this context, certain disciplines within the humanities like philosophy and literature become redundant and begin to haunt the university like the denizens and stateless peoples who live in the polis but belong nowhere and are treated like waste, less than human. It is ironic that the humanities, and especially the disciplines of philosophy and literature that insist on the question of the human, are forced into a position of academic statelessness and are becoming pariahs within the walls of the universities. To acquire funding and remain economically viable, the various university disciplines need to prove their excellence, a term which, in the climate of the corporate university, is equated with marketability. The more money a discipline or a program secures for the university from the market through third party funding, the more economically viable it becomes. A literary project is bound not to get the same funding opportunities as a project from the field of biotechnology, for instance. This has created a vicious circle in which very few fields within the humanities that can prove their economic viability in the market by outsourcing funding can, at the same time, be academically useful in the university. Following Readings's analysis, the

<sup>5</sup> See Bill Readings's "The Idea of Excellence," in *The University in Ruins*, for an analysis of how the idea of excellence aligns the university with "the structure of corporate administration" (29) and turns the university into "a point of capital's self-knowledge, of capital's ability not just to manage risk or diversity but to extract a surplus value from that management" (40).

“idea of excellence” as a corporate idea that serves the interests of transnational capital understands “internationalization” in strictly economic terms that actually demands the severance of the university's ties with the local—its people, their polis, and the democratic system.<sup>6</sup> To be international is to be competitive and successful in economic terms: to bring funds from private corporations into the public university in order to save it. At least in Europe, where the public university is still central to the tertiary education sector of most countries, this has so far meant the closing down or shrinking of programs in philosophy and literary studies. But without philosophy and literary studies, without the humanities, can we still talk about the university? In his close reading of Immanuel Kant's *The Conflict of the Faculties*, Derrida draws on Kant's analysis of philosophy as the founding discipline of the university to emphasize that

without a philosophy department in the university, there is no university. The concept of universitas is more than the philosophical concept of a research and teaching institution; it is the concept of philosophy itself, and is Reason, or rather the principle of reason as institution. [...] Though inferior in power, philosophy ought “to control” (controlliren) all other faculties in matters arising from truth, which is of “the first order;” while utility in the service of government is of “the second order.” (Derrida 2004, p. 105)

The death of philosophy in the university and the subsequent disappearances of theoretical, philosophical, and literary programs and studies can only mean that the university has become something else, a school of instruction for the acquisition of skills and professional expertise. How can we resist this process without reducing the public university to a parochial mentality that refuses to accept the need for accountability at the national and transnational level? How can we define rather than measure this accountability and respond to the local and global transformations that are taking place in the economy and society? How can we reconfigure the role of the humanities without reducing them to techno-democratic humanism (Derrida 2004, p. 163)? And finally, how can we strengthen the role of the university not in the market, but in the public spaces of democracies, which are threatened and debilitated by transnational capitalism, something we need to do not simply for the sake of jobs for students but also to defend their right to democratic forms of labor and, most importantly, their right to form communities? These are, I think, central questions when it comes to the task of thinking the university today. Not very much has changed since Spanos, Readings, Kamuf, and Derrida entered the fray on behalf of the university; but the little which has changed is promising: more so now than then, we are aware of the university's responsibility to respond to the need to rethink community and democracy within the state and beyond the nation in “postnational” and “trans-modern”<sup>7</sup> terms. In other

<sup>6</sup> Here, I follow Jacques Rancière's analysis of democracy in *Hatred of Democracy*. See below.

<sup>7</sup> In “World Systems and Trans-modernity,” Enrique Dussel redefines modernity away from what western discourses represented as its inferior, albeit constitutive, outside, the space of the colony, the bios of the native inhabitant, and the ontopolitical terrain of the rest of the world. Rather than representing this constitutive outside as a space to be decolonized, released from historical oblivion and distortion and, thus, included or better appropriated as extra knowledge or annexed facts, Dussel affirms it as the event and site of the “trans-modern world,” (Dussel 2002, p. 237), a “beyond” that “transcends Western modernity (since the West has never adopted it but, rather, has scorned it and valued it as “nothing”) and that will have a creative function of great significance in the twenty-first century” (Mignolo 2003, p. 221).

words, the fundamental challenge is the same, to save the university, but the context has been radically transformed by the waning of democracy in Europe and the urgent calls for democratic reform in Europe and other parts of the world. Recent insurgencies, both within Europe and beyond its borders, attest to the urgent need to rethink community in the wake of the collapse of the nation-state into the global economy and the eruption of other types of community present but not visible in Europe and outside it. Maybe the hope of the university is to be found in (or even founded on) the events of insurgency and their enabling possibilities of creating affiliations between different communities “at loose ends”—another form of enabling the “community of dissensus” (Readings 1996, pp. 180–193) and the politics of “disagreement” as the political prerequisite of democracy (Rancière 1999);<sup>8</sup> students demonstrating for a new contract of education, citizens and denizens claiming their right to rights and work in the face of an economy of expedience that makes them redundant, immigrants fighting for their right to belong, and undocumented peoples for their right to become visible and appear in the polis. How can the university educate the privileged to do the work of affiliation, and how can it continue to open itself to the non-privileged constituencies who cannot afford to pay their fees? The recent increase of tuition fees in England and now also in Canada is a case in point: working class students, for instance, it seems, will find it impossible to get a university education; in view of the rise of unemployment, only a few will take out student loans and even fewer will afford to pay them off. How can the university educate citizens and non-citizens about new models of citizenship, about being trans-modern actors, about a range of cosmopolitical subjects with responsibility, and an attitude of openness towards radical changes at home and in the wider world? How can it become a trans-modern and postnational<sup>9</sup> institution relevant to the polis at a time when democracy is failing or even “hated” to invoke Jacques Rancière’s provocative term (*Hatred of Democracy*)?

### **The University and the Task of Thinking Democracy, the Polis, and the Anthropos**

“the unexamined life is not worth living”

(Plato, *Apology*, 38B)

<sup>8</sup> I expound on these ideas in the following section of the article.

<sup>9</sup> I draw on Donald E. Pease’s definition of the postnational as the “opening up” of the “gap within national narratives—in between state power and how to make sense of it” (Pease, “National Narratives, Postnational Narration,” 1997, p. 8), a praxis that requires the systematic deconstruction of the implication of the global in the neo-colonial and the reconfiguration of the “national” from the perspective of those constituencies, communities, and discourses that remained on its margins and were silenced or represented as the national order’s undesirable alterities.

It is the watchword Socrates uses to express his difference from the men of the democratic city: to really do politics, to do politics in truth, and to engage in politics as a way of bringing off the exclusive essence of politics. The watchword supposed a certain observed fact and a certain diagnosis: the observed fact is that of politics' always prior factuality with regard to any principle of community. It is first in relation to politics that philosophy always “comes too late.” Only for philosophy this “lateness” is the wrong of democracy (Rancière 1999, p. 62.)

The gulf between philosophy and politics opened historically with the trial and condemnation of Socrates, which in the history of political thought plays the same role of a turning point that the trial and condemnation of Jesus plays in the history of religion. Our tradition of political thought began when the death of Socrates made Plato despair of polis life and, at the same time, doubt certain fundamentals of Socrates' teachings. The fact that Socrates had not been able to persuade his judges of his innocence and his merits, which were so obvious to the better and younger of Athens' citizens, made Plato doubt the validity of persuasion (Arendt 1968, p. 6).

In light of the questions raised by these passages as well as by the event with which I opened this essay, an event which betrays the distance between the university and the polis, the denizen and democracy, I turn to the *Apology*, the Platonic dialogue that stages the trial and condemnation of Socrates by the polis, which precedes the founding of Plato's Academy as the institution which houses and protects philosophy from the polis and its politics. These two events, Socrates's trial and the founding of the Academy, symptomatically anticipate the ongoing debates about the role of the humanities and the future of the university on both sides of the Atlantic from the early 1990s to the present, as they represent one of the earliest gaps between philosophy and the polis, between the university and democracy. I return to this text, not to monumentalize Socrates and his thinking as an exemplary figure for the humanities today,<sup>10</sup> but as one of the first philosophical dialogues that bespeaks the historical event of the rift between philosophy and the polis, a rift that is so telling of democracy in crisis and the transformation of the political, both then and now. To this end, I draw heavily on Hannah Arendt's analysis of Socrates and the *Apology* but also Jacques Rancière's work on democracy and the political. I hope to demonstrate how this rift still remains the challenge for the university in our times, especially in view of the crisis that democracy and the polis are currently undergoing.

The inception of philosophy as an institutionalized academic discourse was marked by the following events: the death of Socrates, the philosopher who “had wanted—not to play a political role—but to make philosophy relevant for the polis” (Arendt 2005, p. 26), the founding of the academy, as the first kind of university that would record and disseminate epistemological knowledge and principles of inquiry to the offspring of a knowledgeable elite in the *demos*, and the crisis of democracy. The historical context of the *Apology* symptomatically foreshadows the contemporary crisis in the humanities over the past two decades,

<sup>10</sup> See Martha Nussbaum's *Cultivating Humanity* and her reading of the historical Socrates as the example of self-examination that “will help us fulfill our capacity for democratic self-governance” (Nussbaum 1997, p. 26).

the current debates about the future of the university (especially the public university in Europe) in the wake of the new educational policies implemented as a result of the Bologna Process, and the waning of democracy made worse by the current economic crisis. Bearing in mind the historical gap that divides Socrates's *Apology* from the current crisis in the humanities, I propose to read the text as a historical and literary case that narrates the division of philosophy from politics and, by analogy, of the university from the polis in light of the current pressure placed on the university by the techno-scientific demands of the market to define itself and its disciplines in terms of measurable productivity. In *The Promise of Politics*, Arendt returns to Socrates as a historical and literary representation of the gift the philosopher holds for the polis, which is the promise of the political. In the *Apology*, the content of this promise and the meaning of the political is revealed in Socrates's defense of the truthfulness of his words (*t'alethē legonta*, 17B 154),<sup>11</sup> the result of his elenctic (*elenchus*) and maieutic<sup>12</sup> speaking that cuts through the dialectical distance between the questions and answers and turns the examiner and the examinees into interlocutors in a dialogue that questions truth and justice to discover their meaning. In court, Socrates finds himself to be a stranger (*xenos*, 18B)<sup>13</sup> to the discourses and methods of examination employed and asks the judges to attend to the truth of his words and not to be affected by his way of speaking. However, it is his way of speaking and, by extension, his method of arriving at the right and just words for which he is put on trial. His plaintiffs accuse him of an unorthodox method of examination that can subvert knowledge and corrupt the youth. What is the official charge against him? "Socrates breaks the laws, for he examines what lies beneath the earth and in the sky and makes the weaker argument the stronger and teaches these things to others" (Fowler 1971, p. 75, 19B).<sup>14</sup> According to the charge that Meletus, Anytus, and Lycon bring to the court, Socrates is a dangerous sophist who corrupts the youth, for he dares to teach

<sup>11</sup> All references are from Πλάτων, *Απολογία Σωκράτους*, were translated and edited by Thanasis Samaras (2003). All translations into English are mine, unless otherwise indicated.

<sup>12</sup> Elenchus and maieutic are two terms that characterize the Socratic method of teaching; Socrates leads his interlocutors to question the truthfulness of their assumptions through a series of questions that probe their misconceptions or distortions. He thus painstakingly belabors their statements and views (maieutic refers to the process of midwifery) by forcing them to examine them with critical alertness (the process of elenchus as a process of self-examination as well as examination of others). For a more detailed analysis of the maieutic process, see Bowen (1972) and Cartledge (2009); for the significance of the Socratic self-examination in education, see Nussbaum (1997).

<sup>13</sup> For a poetic reading of how Socrates always remains a stranger not only to the discourses of the court but also to the written philosophical discourses that disseminate his thinking across time by "subjugating" Socratic questioning, see Kostis Papagiorgis's *Σωκράτης, Ο νομοθέτης που αυτοκτονεί* (*Socrates, The Legislator Who Commits Suicide*, 1999). See also Gregory Vlastos's *Socrates: Ironist and Moral Philosopher* (1991) for a persuasive and powerful reading of the historical Socrates.

<sup>14</sup> In "The trial of Socrates, 399 BCE," Paul Cartledge takes the "position that the Athenian jury of 399 BCE [...] were indeed right to convict Socrates" for they "did so on the basis of the main charge, that of impiety" (Cartledge 2009, p. 77). Cartledge argues against the position that the religious charge was a smokescreen for the "often violent political infighting that had transfigured the streets as well as the formal political arenas of Athens for over a decade" (77), for in ancient Athens, religion was political (77). In 399 BCE, democracy was fragile and in need of "vigilance" (80); Athens was a polis in crisis, after the end of the Peloponnesian war (404) and the reign of the 20 tyrants only 5 years before the trial of Socrates (80). This historical context accentuates the political weight of the religious charge: the philosopher cannot examine the ways of the men in the polis unchecked. The jury found him guilty of a method of questioning that they think destabilizes the polis at a time of precarity. The philosopher is no good in "times out of joint," at least not for the experts: the politicians, the poets, and the craftsmen.

them how to examine the un-examined, what lies “beneath the earth” and “in the sky.” Socrates's nebulous epistemology is the target of at least three comic poets in their comedies between 423 and 421 (Πλάτων 2003, p. 257)<sup>15</sup>; in these comedies, Socrates talks nonsense and wanders in the clouds. Both as literary figure and man, that is, as text and bios, Socrates faces the accusation of being potentially dangerous to the recently restored and still fragile democracy of the polis. The danger he poses to the polis does not arise from things he has done but from his method of inquiry that enables the questioning of the un-examined, the cross-examination of the aphoristic and the evident [*doxa*], and the elenchus of what lies beneath the ground and in the sky. He is threatening because he goes on to the streets of the polis, questions the truthfulness of gods and men, their oracles and expertise, their sayings, and deeds. Arendt argues that the irony is that, “Socrates did not claim to be a sophos” (Arendt 1968, p. 11); nevertheless, he is condemned as one. He is condemned for he refuses to accept the charge that wisdom, or at least the quest for wisdom, is good for nothing and insists on “overstepping the line drawn by the polis for the sophos, for the man who is concerned with eternal, nonhuman, and nonpolitical things” (Arendt 1968, p. 11). Socrates's crime is that he spills philosophy onto the streets of the polis.

To understand the true meaning of the oracle, which pronounces Socrates to be the wisest man of all (Samaras 2003, p. 21C), Socrates wanders the streets of the polis to measure the concept of wisdom against the expertise of politicians, poets, and craftsmen (Samaras 2003, pp. 22–23). He discovers that the oracle is true in so far as he does not claim to be an expert on anything and, hence, examines the limits of the expertise which these technicians of politics, poetry, and crafts mistake for the possession of profound knowledge about matters of which Socrates finds them to be ignorant. Through this elenctic process that divides wisdom from expertise and knowledge from skill, Socrates arrives at the measure of his own wisdom: Socrates knows his wisdom “is in truth of no value” [*oudenos axios esti tē aletheia pros sophian*] (Samaras 2003, p. 23B). To be wise, the wisest of all, Socrates knows that his wisdom has in truth no pragmatic value; unlike expertise, wisdom cannot be measured. In the streets of the polis, the roaming philosopher examines the *technē* (expertise and art) of the politicians, the poets, and the craftsmen. To examine the truthfulness of their arts and crafts means for Socrates to examine the mode by which their art of *poiēsis* (the principles and method of their making processes) summons and simultaneously “brings forth” (Heidegger 1992, p. 13) what Martin Heidegger calls “a mode of *alētheuein*” (Heidegger 1992, p. 13)<sup>16</sup> that reaches beyond any calculable value. Socrates is the wisest of all not because he knows that he knows nothing,<sup>17</sup> but because the mode of *alētheuein* in each *doxa* and *technē* is a process of

<sup>15</sup> See Samaras's comment, footnote 11, 257; as Samaras suggests, it is not clear why Socrates becomes a figure of mockery at this historical moment.

<sup>16</sup> The reduction of *alētheia*, the process of what Heidegger calls “un-concealment” as a process constitutive of the ancient Greek polis, to *veritas*, the Roman translation of *alētheia*, is symptomatic of the transformation of the polis into an imperial center and characteristic of the cultural colonization of Greek thinking by the Romans. See Martin Heidegger's *Parmenides* and Spanos's reading of Heidegger's analysis of the Roman form of cultural imperialism that founds Western modernity in “The Ontological Origins of Occidental Imperialism” and “Culture and Colonization” in *America's Shadow* (2000).

<sup>17</sup> Socrates's famous dictum is “one thing I know is that I know nothing” (*en oida oti ouden oida*).

“revealing” that philosophy brings forth; philosophy is after all related to all these modes of knowledge within the context of the polis and develops from within these relations. Socrates's teaching shows how philosophy is practiced in the streets and its insights are not gained from the safe and panoptic distance of a remote critique. This process, recounted as the philosopher's apology for practicing a theoretical elenchus in the polis, is a political act; as a philosophical training of the subject to acquire a *gnothi seauton* (“knowledge of him or herself”), it is fundamentally a process that Jacques Rancière calls “political subjectification” by which a subject is forced out of the “obviousness” of his/her position (Rancière 1999, p. 36). The ruptures, the events, the singular acts that instigate this process of political subjectification engender a “decomposing” and a “recomposing” of the “relationships between the ways of doing, being, and of saying that define the perceptible organization of the community” (Rancière 1999, p. 41). For Socrates and his contemporaries, the philosopher's examination of every *technē* (art) and *doxa* (opinion) is a process of examination of the subject's self and other. Hence, everyone learns to attend to a mode of *alētheuein* (Heidegger 1992, p. 13) or self-reflection that contributes to the subject's conscious participation in the polis. Through self-reflection, the people recognize themselves as constitutive parts of the polis, a task that takes priority over taking care of one's possessions in the polis.<sup>18</sup> The waning of this self-reflection that Socrates teaches with unabated commitment may result in the waning of democracy or rather its disappearance into what Rancière, describing our times, calls a “postdemocracy”: “the government practice and conceptual legitimization of a democracy after the *demos*, a democracy that has eliminated the appearance, miscount and dispute of the people” (Rancière 1999, p. 102). The “appearance, miscount, and dispute of the people” who represent the *demos* can only be effected through a continuous process of questioning of the politics, policies, practices, and products in which the *demos* is manifested. The people of the *demos* will hence appear as who they truly are, and this process of self-appearance will be enabled by the philosopher who, through this process of elenchus that Socrates represents, encourages the political subjectification of the subjects, a democratic principle and requirement. Socrates's crime is that he performs this elenctic process at a time of precarity: the polis is in crisis, democracy

<sup>18</sup> In his explication of the method of his “genealogy of modern subjectivity” in “Subjectivity and Truth,” Michel Foucault refers to the transformation of “the ancient obligation of knowing oneself” into “the monastic precept ‘confess, to your spiritual guide, each of your thoughts’” (155–156) that early Christianity imposed as constitutive of the modern “technologies of the self.” This transformation that begins with early Christianity reduced the openness and tentativeness of the philosophical training of the “whole Greek and Hellenistic antiquity” (156), whose goal was to “equip the individual with a number of precepts which permit him to conduct himself in all circumstances of life without losing mastery of himself or without losing tranquility of spirit, purity of body and soul” (156) to techniques of confession that turn the subject into “the point of intersection between a set of memories which must be brought into the present and acts which have to be regulated” (160) through discipline and punishment. The political subjectification (Rancière 40) that a philosophical training should enable by training the subject to direct himself (“the autonomy of the directed”) (Foucault 157) becomes emptied of disagreement and dissent, that is, of its political orientation, as the modern subject is trained to consent by confessing a truth about himself he should have known and should have remembered. Hence, Foucault supplements Louis Althusser's concept of “interpellation” and Rancière's concept of the “police” with his analysis of the body disenfranchised from its own memory, its own affects.

is fragile, and the political bios as a bios of questioning is an unsafe territory for any man who wants to act as a “question-asking being” (Arendt 2005, p. 34).

This crisis bespeaks the time when, as Arendt avers, Plato and Aristotle “became the beginning of the occidental philosophical tradition, and ... this beginning, as distinguished from the beginning of Greek philosophical thought, occurred when Greek political life was approaching its end” (Arendt 2005, p. 6). The historical context of the crisis that the trial of Socrates symptomatically unveils is very relevant to our times for two reasons which Arendt powerfully underscores in *The Promise of Politics*. The first reason is the “condition of apolity, or what we today would call statelessness” (Arendt 2005, p. 6); Arendt expounds on this condition in imperialism,<sup>19</sup> when she calls the twentieth century the “age of the refugee,” an appellation which Edward Said echoes with his reference to “the age of exilic consciousness” at the end of *Culture and Imperialism*, and Giorgio Agamben presents as a “limit-concept that at once brings a radical crisis to the principles of the nation-state and seals the way for a renewal of categories that can no longer be delayed” (Arendt 2005, p. 22.3). The second ground we share is the division between thought and action, which triggered the condemnation of the philosopher and the institutionalization of philosophy in Plato's Academy. This is how Arendt prefaces her analysis of the political significance of the condemnation of the philosopher by the polis in the opening section of “Socrates”:

The problem thus arose of how man, if he is to live in a polis, can live outside of politics; this problem, in what sometimes seems a strange resemblance to our own times, very quickly became the question of how it is possible to live without belonging to any polity—that is, in the condition of apolity, or what we would today call statelessness. Even more serious was the abyss which immediately opened between thought and action, and which never since has been closed. All thinking activity that is not simply the calculation of means to obtain an intended or willed end, but is concerned with meaning in the most general sense, came to play the role of an “afterthought,” that is, after action had decided and determined reality. Action, on the other hand, was relegated to the meaningless realm of the accidental and the haphazard. (Arendt 2005, p. 6)

Arendt aligns the crisis of the political, a crisis that both in 399 BC and in Arendt's and our times takes the form of the question of the *apolis* (the one who has been deprived or lost the right to belong to the polis or the one who has never had one) with the fundamental division between “thought and action” that banishes philosophy from the polis. Plato's Academy signifies philosophy's “turning away from the polis, an *a-politia*, so to speak, or indifference to politics” (Arendt 2005, p. 133). Socrates becomes a figuration proleptic of this *a-politia*; he loses his right to belong to his polis and, thus, to any polity because his wandering in the polis questions the

<sup>19</sup> This is Part Two of *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. See her last chapter, “The Decline of the Nation-State and the End of the Rights of Man.” For a critical analysis of Arendt and the precarity of the stateless in our times, and Agamben's concept of “nuda vita” (naked life), see Judith Butler's and Gayatri Spivak's *Who Sings the Nation-State?*

truthfulness of the doxa of the men of the polis who found its common space. To question the truthfulness of the citizens' work, as Socrates does by examining the politicians' opinions, the poets' poems, and the craftsmen's crafts, means to “communicate between the citizens and their opinions so that the commonness of this world becomes apparent” (Arendt 2005, p. 18). If Socrates takes the risk of teaching the difficult process of self-examination in the polis, Plato founds his academy on the outskirts of the polis to protect the philosopher and philosophy from the political control which the polis can exert over the practice of philosophy. This turning away of the academy from the polis cannot, however, protect it from a condition of *apolitia*, which forces the academy to constantly strive to stay connected with the polis and prove its significance within it. In Arendt's view, the philosopher's commitment to self-reflection and to the examination of the human is always a political act in tune with the true meaning of the polis, which is not “a geographical designation” but “men” (*andres gar polis*) (Καστοριάδης 1999, p. 38).<sup>20</sup> He characterizes the understanding which emerges from self-reflexivity further as follows:

If such an understanding—and action inspired by it—were to take place without the help of the statesman, then the prerequisite would be for each citizen to be articulate enough to show his opinion in its truthfulness and therefore to understand his fellow citizens. Socrates seems to have believed that the political function of the philosopher was to help establish this kind of common world, built on the understanding of friendship, in which no rulership is needed. (Καστοριάδης 1999, p. 18)

Through self-reflection, the common is to be rethought from the perspective of the outsider, who may be represented by those who take the position of the minor or the stranger, just like the roaming philosopher, who asks disturbing questions and who asks the citizens to be true to their views as manifested in their various practices of their *technē*. As Arendt argues in *Introduction into Politics*, the “conflict between the polis and the philosophers” (Arendt 2005, p. 133) is secondary to and consequent upon the “indifference of one realm toward the other” (Arendt 2005, p. 133), an indifference which was triggered by the waning of democracy in the polis of Athens in 399 and which led to the foundation of Plato's Academy as an institutionalized space of freedom for philosophy. Here, philosophy and the philosophers, having separated themselves from the polis, would be “freed from politics in the Greek sense in order to be free for the space of academic freedom, just as the citizen had to be freed from earning the necessities of life in order to be free for politics” (Arendt 2005, p. 131). The separation of the academic space from the polis and its substitution of the “agora, the central space for freedom in the polis” (Arendt 2005, p. 131), which still “defines our idea of academic freedom today” (Arendt 2005, p. 133) is part of the problem that the university, at least the public university in Europe, faces as its most immediate challenge. The isolation from the realm of politics necessary if the academy is to enjoy the freedom to think about the polis has further accentuated not only the division between thought and action but also, and most crucially for us

<sup>20</sup> See Ancient Greek Democracy and its Significance for Us Today by Καστοριάδης, for a beautiful and relevant reading of democracy and the polis.

today, the “a-politia” of the university. Arendt's analysis reveals the proleptic and projective trajectories of the problematic that determines the institutionalization of philosophy and the founding of the university: “the sphere of freedom for the few not only has trouble maintaining itself over against the realm of politics, which is determined by the many, but also depends for its very existence upon the many” (Arendt 2005, p. 134).

How can philosophy and the humanities, as a whole, return to the polis without accommodating their elenchus to the doxa of the citizens, without compromising the space of academic freedom at the expense of thinking? How can the university return to the polis, whose agora has become the market of a global corporate culture and whose democracy has for a long time now (and in most states in Europe at least) become hated (Rancière 2006) because it has become a euphemism for an oligarchic rule always represented by the “same dominant personnel” and the same administration (Rancière 2006, pp. 72–73)? When dissent ends and the demos is restricted to a particular idea about what it represents, an idea which may radically differ from the people who actually represent the demos, this is the end of democracy; it is not, however, the end of oppositional histories culminating in the “good news” (Derrida 1994, p. 78) of a “liberal democracy” that has apparently realized the ideal democracy by eliminating difference. In fact, this liberal democracy, what Rancière calls postdemocracy, merely idealizes the existing material conditions of a “techno-media” and corporate liberal democracy (Derrida 1994, p. 79). In other words, it is the reduction of democracy from a process open to the transformations of the demos to a *telos*, a final closure of democracy, the annulment of what Derrida calls democracy's “yet-to-come.” The yet-to-come designates a gap inherent to democracy, the constitution of which opens the door to its own transformation and even radical change by the irruption/arrival of the constituencies and their communities that are not yet part of the demos. This “appearance of the people” (Rancière 1999, p. 99) disrupts the “order of the distribution of bodies as a community” (Rancière 1999, p. 99), a consensus ordered by a police logic that tries to censor and delimit the possibility of dissent and, thereby, the possibility of the political. The appearance of the people radically disrupts the people as an idea, the idea of a singular identity, and questions the representations of the identity of the demos as a homogenous whole from within the material complexity of the peoples (and not just one people as the community of the nation-state imagined it to be) that make up the demos. The yet unimagined—for they have not yet been included in the imaginary of a community or a politeia—“appearance” of the others, which takes the form of their claims to representation and rights, makes those others present to themselves in the polis. Democracy is contingent on the appearance of the others not yet acknowledged as part of the demos; the arrival of the other, the one not yet here, not expected yet to arrive, and not yet imagined as a constituent member of the demos, is the promise of democracy. The presence of this other thereby transforms the space and time of the polis; it is the event that always already challenges the demos to an opening, a gap that promises democracy. In Derrida's words,

the effectivity or actuality of the democratic promise, like that of the communist promise, will always keep within it, and it must do so, this absolutely undetermined messianic hope at its heart, this eschatological relation to the to-come of an event and of a singularity, of an alterity that cannot be anticipated. [...] that

is, to the event that cannot be awaited as such, or recognized in advance therefore, to the event as the foreigner itself, to her or to him for whom one must leave an empty place, always in memory of the hope—and this is the very space of spectrality. (Derrida 1994, pp. 81–82).

This is echoed in Rancière's recent analysis of democracy:

Democracy really means, in this sense, the impurity of politics, the challenging of governments' claims to embody the sole principle of public life and in so doing be able to circumscribe the understanding and extension of public life. If there is a “limitlessness” specific to democracy, then that's exactly where it lies: not in the exponential multiplications of needs or of desires emanating from individuals, but in the movement that ceaselessly displaces the limits of the public and the private, of the political and the social. (Rancière 2006, p. 62).

Not incidentally, Derrida's definition of democracy as the possibility of a promise open to the one not yet represented, the one who is always a foreigner, is a parenthetical interference in his critique of Francis Fukuyama's end rhetoric in *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992). The latter prevailed in the 1990s as one of the end discourses of a new age that, with the fall of communism and the official end of the cold war narratives, was expected to witness the final arrival of a new world order, the end of history as a conflict of oppositional discourses, and the triumph of liberal democracy. Celebrating democracy as an end narrative was not only a misconstrued reading of the end of history as the end of oppositional discourses within the West, between the right and the left, and thus a reduction of history to the history of liberal democracy and the triumph of the nation-state in the West; it was also a destruction of the enabling possibilities presented by the demystification of Cold War rhetoric and policies that had ravaged the world for more than half a century since the end of the Second World War.<sup>21</sup> What is more important is that the eschatological trope of the end narratives concealed the transformation of democracy into its radical other, the reign of a “police logic” that, to follow Rancière's analysis in *The Hatred of Democracy and Disagreement*, would once and for all bring political subjectification and democracy to an end.

The growing distance of philosophy from the polis and its subsequent disappearance as a discipline in the institutional context of the university are symptoms of the effects of postdemocracy and its police logic on the university, which has undergone multiple transformations: from a Renaissance university into the Kantian–Humboldtian model of reason and, most recently, into a corporate institution. The university, as an academic site initially identified with philosophy, has lost or forgotten its orientation towards the human as the anthropos, a differential being in a differentiated and

<sup>21</sup> For an analysis of the end of history rhetoric and its relation to the amnesiac narratives of the Vietnam War and the Cold War, see William V. Spanos “The Question of Philosophy and Poiesis in the Posthistorical Age: Thinking/Imagining the Shadow of Metaphysics”; Spanos persuasively demonstrates that the end rhetoric is a neo-metaphysical discourse which, in celebrating neoliberal democracy, aligns itself with the metaphysical tradition that poststructuralist and postmodern discourses, drawing on Martin Heidegger's analysis of metaphysical thinking, systematically deconstruct.

uneven temporality, as designated by the polis, the natural habitat of the anthropos, an always already contested and transformative topos. By forgetting to ask questions about the “limit-concept” (Agamben 2000) that the appearance of new constituencies in the public sphere embodies for the polis, the university has also, and most crucially, deviated from challenging democracy as the rule of a continuously changing demos. What the event with the 300 immigrants actually reveals is the uneasiness with which the university is forced to think about the *apolis* (the one without a polis), especially when s/he appears in its buildings rather than remaining a theoretical question in the comfort zone of its academic discourses. What are the reasons behind this forgetfulness at a time when the humanities have witnessed a proliferation of anti-humanist and post-humanist discourses in the wake of poststructuralism? Is it the triumph of the end-of-history rhetoric that prevailed in the last decade of the twentieth century after the end of the Cold War? Is it because the humanities and especially literary studies have drifted away from a more philological analysis that would excavate the investment of the text in the world and enable the transformative possibilities of a secular criticism, as Edward Said argues in *Humanism and Democratic Criticism*?<sup>22</sup> Are poststructuralist jargon and the undecidability of deconstructive and anti-humanist discourses to be blamed for the loss of faith in the humanities?<sup>23</sup> The answer to these questions will vary, according to the political, cultural, and economic context of the university as an institution of higher education and in different faculties. Nevertheless, and despite the differences between the various academic contexts of public and private universities on both sides of the Atlantic and across the European continent, the task of the university in the contemporary polis appears to be the same: to face its complicity with the corporate ideology that has reduced everything and, especially, knowledge to a commodity; to not try to just survive in or cope with the corporatization, but to actively counter this process by generating alternative models of democratic praxis. Edward Said, who spent his entire life attending to the narratives and lives of disenfranchised constituencies, their concepts, and relevant cultures in their contrapuntal and affiliated temporalities, is of exemplary significance to the humanities today.

For philosophy and the university to become relevant to the polis and democracy once more, without reinforcing their subjection to corporate values, the university must develop as the site of a community of dissensus (Readings 1996) what, to take Bill Readings's term “posthistorical” a step further, I call a postnational and trans-

<sup>22</sup> See especially “The Changing Bases of Humanistic Study and Practice” and “The Return to Philology” for Said's insistence on a kind of “worldly humanism” which the humanities can invigorate through a “philological practice” whose main democratic goal and method is to “offer resistance to the great reductive and vulgarizing us-versus-them thought patterns of our time” (Said 2004, p. 59). Such a philological practice will have to reinvent humanism from the perspective of “marginalized peoples outside as well as inside the maw of the metropolitan center [who] can survive the grinding down and flattening out and displacement that are such prominent features of globalization” (Said 2004, p. 82). However, this process of “excavation” cannot be accomplished without the systematic analysis and deconstruction of the metaphysical heritage of humanism and its discourses. For an analysis of the problematic in Said's return to humanism, see William V. Spanos *The Legacy of Edward W. Said*, and especially his chapter “Said's Humanism and Exceptionalism,” and R. Radhakrishnan's “Edward Said” and “The Worlding of the World” in *History, the Human and the World Between*. See also R. Radhakrishnan's *Edward Said: Keywords* which succinctly introduces the contingencies of an anti-poststructuralist return to humanism.

<sup>23</sup> Kamuf builds a polemical and persuasive defense of deconstruction and literary studies in *The University in Deconstruction*.

modern institution. As such, it should try to engage critically with the current social and political transformations of national communities and the development of intercultural<sup>24</sup> and interdiasporic communities within them.<sup>25</sup> As a postnational and trans-modern institution, the university needs to promote interdisciplinarity, to draw on Readings here (Readings 1996, p. 176), which goes beyond the Kantian division of the disciplines; the university as a postnational and trans-modern institution is the site where culture, knowledges, and politics are formed and reconfigured, generated by communities of thinkers and, hence, engendering new ways of addressing, thinking, and reconfiguring community in the present as a concept always already in formation. This rethinking of community is particularly significant now, under the continuing presence and persistent claims of those who have not belonged and have yet to belong, who are silenced within the idea of a single unified national subject, and who are now allied with the unwanted and undocumented constituencies flooding the urban centers in the First World (even those that are severely plagued by the crisis like Greece). The university also remains the site of technocratic values and market pragmatism, the institution expected to provide students with the practical and necessary abilities and skills to meet the present and future needs of the market. This conflict between the university's different functions, different from the one in the 1990s when the question of community was still bound up with that of national culture and when the crisis in the humanities did not yet overlap with the current severe economic crisis, reveals the most important task for the university and

<sup>24</sup> What is the historical context of interculturality? With this concept, I seek to address the history of the present, a history marked by another concept, the concept of community that needs to be reconfigured from the perspective of “those who do not have a community” (Bataille in Blanchot 1968, p. 1). The events that the concepts of interculturality and community speak to are: the disintegration of the nation-state, the waning of democracy at the hands of transnational capitalism, new forms of expropriation and exappropriation, and new forms of exceptionalism. This does not mean the end of the nation but the waning of the control of the nation by the state and vice versa: the ideological center that the nation-state once provided as the concrete and solid point of reference is now replaced by supra-state and supranational policies. On the ground level of politics, people form their identities by multiple attachments not only to national but also transnational public spheres, whether virtual (like the Internet), social (the Indignados, the insurgency of peoples in the public spaces all around Europe), cultural (global exchange of commodities and ideas), and political. Interculturality refers to modernity as a world of dependency, affiliation, and other, subaltern, minority, or “border knowledges” (Mignolo 2000). The history of origins is being revised as a counter-memory of the narrative that begins like a fairy tale, “once there was the West...” But we need to be wary of the neoliberal tone of another form of multiculturalism that merely centers on a politics of tolerance (for an analysis of intercultural politics and pedagogy in Europe, see *Interculturality and Gender*). See, for example, Scholte's analysis of interculturality in “Reconstructing Contemporary Democracy” as “a politics of recognition that acknowledges and indeed emphasizes the diversity of modes of being and belonging within a single society. Strangeness is received with openness and indeed hospitality. Difference is tolerated and indeed embraced. The other is urged to speak and the self is indeed keen to listen” (Schotte 2008, pp. 345–346).

<sup>25</sup> Walter Mignolo's analysis of Ecuador's Universidad Intercultural de las Nacionalidades y los Pueblos Indígenas is a case in point of a university whose mission “is precisely to ground itself in that knowledge tradition that was marginalized and disrupted by the installation of the colonial-Renaissance university in the New World. But, of course, the mission of the Universidad Intercultural is not a recuperation of ancient knowledge but its reactivation in the process of appropriating Western technical contributions, although not Western values of education that are increasingly complicit with capitalism” (Mignolo 2003, p. 105).

especially for the humanities today, particularly in places where democracy is hated and its promise of a yet-to-come foreclosed: The humanities should strive to reveal the continuity between the economic crisis and the disintegration of a hated (Rancière 2006) democracy which is hated because it is failing, at least in Europe. Thus, they should reinvigorate their role in the university and thereby keep the role of the university open to its philosophical and political mission to proliferate new ways of imagining and performing community. The humanities would once more claim their rightful place as the site of disciplines and knowledges that reconfigure the political, the ethical, and the social by promoting and enhancing and directing constituencies “towards autonomy” (Foucault 1997) to think, interpret, and act in the world. Especially programs of literary and philosophical studies, no longer strictly bound by national cultures and their canons, but diversified by the contrapuntal and affiliated conversation of various literary and cultural traditions ranging from one end of the planet to the other, are called forth to project new possibilities of imagining and creating modes of coexistence, even in the dominant, metropolitical centers. This task is always new, for it addresses those who are not included in the Humboldtian or Kantian vision of the university: the classed, gendered, and racialized subjects that were not part of the national imaginary of the modern university of the nineteenth century, those “Judes the Obscure” that pounded on its walls but were persistently excluded.<sup>26</sup> The nostalgic return to the Humboldtian vision should not forget the forgetting of these constituencies, excluded by university walls for decades. Neither the safeguarding role of philosophy in Kant's and Humboldt's times nor all the courses on gender, postcolonial, and global studies taught at contemporary universities can make up for all those excluded not only from the university but also from the polis of postdemocracy (Rancière) because of their gender, race, class, ethnic, religious origins, and political differences, differences that show the illusion of a democracy of consensus is untenable and that threaten its police logic (Rancière). Their exclusion is symptomatic of the humanities' forgetting, not of humanism proper, as Said claims, but of the anthropos as an indeconstructible concept.

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<sup>26</sup> “He [Jude] saw that his destiny lay not with these [‘the unrivaled panorama’ of the university], but among the manual toilers in the shabby purlieu which he himself occupied, unrecognized as part of the city at all by its visitors and panegyrists, yet without whose denizens the hard readers could not read nor the high thinkers think” (Hardy, *Jude the Obscure*, 116; emphasis and parenthetical comments mine).

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