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Civic Sociology

Civic University or University of the Earth? A Call for Intellectual Insurgency

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This article reviews an attempt to rejuvenate the concept of the civic university in the United Kingdom through the establishment of the Civic University Commission in 2018 by the UPP Foundation. This review is based on a critical appraisal of the concept of 'civic' on which the idea of the civic university relies. The review suggests another formulation for higher education: not the civic university but the university of the earth, built on a convergence of the social and natural sciences and Indigenous knowledges connected to world-wide progressive social movements and political struggles. The university of the earth supports an intellectual insurgency to deal with emergencies confronting humanity and the natural world.

INTRODUCTION

The Civic University Commission (CUC) was set up in 2018 in the United Kingdom by the UPP Foundation. The purpose of this commission was to see if the idea of the civic university, which had emerged in the United Kingdom and the United States in the nineteenth century, could be restored and repurposed as an ideal for twenty-first-century higher education. This article examines two reports produced by the commission where they set out the results of their deliberations. The reports find in favour of the idea of the civic university, showing that significant work is being done by universities within their local communities and regions, emphasising the civic nature of this activity. This article recognises the importance of this work; however, the article argues that the spatial and intellectual assumptions on which the idea of the civic university relies are not adequate to the challenges facing higher education, humanity, and the natural world. What is required is a more foundational, expansive level of critical practical inquiry: an intellectual insurgency to create not a new civic university but a university of the earth.

TWO REPORTS

The CUC reports are to be welcomed, opening a space to debate the future of higher education in the United Kingdom in a way that is not simply reactive to government policy, seeking to establish a vision for the university on its own terms. The reports show that universities that describe themselves as civic institutions are doing important work across a range of social, public, educational, and economic activities at the local level.

However, the terms on which the debate about civicness are framed are too narrowly drawn, constrained by the concept of "the civic" on which the commission depends. The debate about the role and function of the civic university can be extended by engaging more fundamentally with geographies of space, and by connecting with social movements and critical social sciences that are recasting the politics of urbanism as, among other things, forms of new municipalism and alternative ways of living our everyday lives (Lefebvre 2003). These new geographies of space and critical social science are working at registers beyond the local, national, and global, and with problematics shaped by the many emergencies facing planet earth and capitalist civilisation. This critical social science of space and the movement of social movements provide the basis for a worldwide form of intellectual insurgency.

CIVIC UNIVERSITY

Civic universities emerged across the United Kingdom in the nineteenth century as manifestations of the success of the Victorian city. The most notable Victorian cities in the United Kingdom included Newcastle, Liverpool, Birmingham, Glasgow, Cardiff, Sheffield, Manchester, and London. These Victorian cities were forged out of rapid industrialisation, expansive urbanisation, steam power, railways, and electrification. Along with science and technology, the Victorian city invented a compelling array of cultural, political, and economic practices, as well as advances in public education and public health, that provided a framework for the social development of the modern world (Hunt 2005; Briggs 1990; Jones 1988).

The civic university has been described as an institution set up "to meet the needs of a rapidly evolving industrial society" (Goddard and Louise 2016, 4), part of which was to provide a professional, cultural, and intellectual education for the expanding middle classes.

A more critical account of the rise of the civic university has it that the civic university emerged out of the project to establish the principles and practices of bourgeois (liberal) science and culture as the foundation for Victorian society (Whyte 2015). This was part of an implicit political project to impose the law of private property and the law

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of labour (employment) on the civilian population at home and abroad (Kay and Mott 1982; Neocleous 2000). *Civic* was not some philosophical ideal based on an abstract understanding of the public good; rather, to be civic was a virtue associated with those who owned, and aspired to own, property (Perelman 2000). Property provided the independence and store of wealth, with profits from rents, trade and manufacturing industries, for property owners to engage in local philanthropic and charitable public acts. The ownership of factories and the commodities they produce provides the basis for capitalist wealth when workers, who own no property other than their labour power, are paid less than the value they create for their employers (Marx 1990; Clarke 2005). Citizenship bestows the right to own property, including one's own labour power, and should not be seen as an antidote to economic exploitation. Citizens are the objects of administration as well as the bearers of rights (Kay and Mott 1982). To be civic is the epitome of liberal aspiration, which, during the period in which the civic ideal emerged, combined a toxic mix of "capitalism, European colonialism, slavery and 'race' ideology...complicit in racial tyranny, imperialism and class domination" (Seymour 2012, 271). The statues of prominent men in cities across the United Kingdom who supported slavery in this period are a testament to this civic ideal (M. Taylor 2020). The civic ideal supported a very particular form of liberal freedom and equality: freedom was predicated on the freedom to work for a wage or risk pauperisation; equality was predicated on the structured inequality of a class-patriarchal-racist society. Modern history shows "Liberalism is not the benign centre operating between extremes; it is itself extreme" (Ryan 1986, 122).

CITY BENEATH THE CITY

The civic university idea celebrates the rise of the Victorian city, but there was another city beneath the Victorian city, where workers and their families lived, described as "hell upon earth" (Engels [1845] 1987, 92). Worker resistance to the liberal project was met with brutal repression, but the workers could not be overcome (Thompson [1963] 2013; Riding 2018). Liberalism was forced to gain a sense of social responsibility, although its preoccupations remained the same: economic growth through the exploitation of workers and spoliation of nature, as well as the promotion of liberal arts, culture, and education in a form that sustained its political and economic project.

The rising power of the working class meant that middle-class politics and values were superseded at the end of the nineteenth century by municipal socialism. The wealth locked up in utilities—gas, water, and electricity—was brought under public ownership; the franchise was extended to include a residency and rate-paying qualification; and there was a decentralisation of national government power toward more local control (Hunt 2005). Despite these advances in the institutional arrangement of socialist politics, the wealth created and shared was still bound by the logic of profit and loss in a system that owed much to the practices of municipal capitalism (Hunt 2005).

After the Second World War, in an effort to contain the threat of communism and the rising power of the working class, municipal socialism was nationalised in the United Kingdom as a wider political project for social democracy (Binns and Dixon 1989). However, this version of socialist development could not provide a real alternative to bourgeois civil society: "public" and "private" provision are both forms of capitalist regulation, and, therefore, attempts to present these political projects as antithetical constitute a false dichotomy (Neary and Winn 2017). The global financial crisis of the 1970s tested the limits of this model of socialist accommodation. Working-class demands were not satisfied by the postwar collective social, political, and economic settlement (Clarke 1988; Cleaver 1989). In an attempt to recover from the global financial crisis, the politics of economics reverted to a toxic form of liberalism: neoliberalism, when all aspects of social, economic, and political life were made subordinate to the law of capitalist value: money (Clarke 2005). English universities were complicit in enforcing this neoliberal regime, introducing new forms of academic work performance metrics and measures, which the monetisation of the social world requires. The limits of the neoliberal project were exposed in 2008 when the law of capitalist value was undermined by a surfeit of fictitious money (Stiglitz 2019), unleashing the politics of austerity and populist political projects as well as protofascisms for the twenty-first century.

The new civic university, emerging from this crisis-ridden political economy, has become a significant presence in urban landscapes, with skylines filled by student apartments, offering expensive lifestyle living "as the epitome of our privatised cities" and architecture "of the very lowest quality" (Hatherley 2010). Meanwhile, in the absence of social housing and other forms of social security, bodies of the comatose homeless pile up on city streets (Boughton 2018).

In response to the rise of the neoliberal university, a new academic subdiscipline has emerged: critical higher education studies (Morrish and Sauntson 2019, Hall 2018; Chris 2018; Hall and Winn 2017; Winn 2015; Lybeck 2018). This genre of academic activity is predated by significant analytical writing on higher education politics and policy (Scott 1984; Shattock 2012; Brew 2006; Farrington and Palfreyman 2006; Halsey 1992; McLean 2006; Slaughter and Leslie 1999), including writing on the idea of the civic university (Scott 2014). The most radical versions of critical higher education studies show that the emergence of marketisation and globalisation is not a threat to the civic university, as argued by Vallance (2016), but, rather, its logical development.

UPP AND THE COMMISSION

University Partnerships Programme (UPP), the main sponsor of the Civic University Commission, is a university real estate investment company specialising in on-campus student accommodation. UPP makes profits from student rents. UPP's operating profit in 2019 was £50 million (UPP 2020, 20). UPP is owned jointly by PGGM, a Dutch pension company, and the People's Bank of China. UPP's holding company has its registered office in Jersey to take advantage of offshore tax regulations (UPP 2020, 33). The main risks for the student accommodation business are a decline in numbers of students, particularly international students, and the negative impact of online teaching and learning technology on numbers of students living on campus (Hale 2018). UPP did not collect rent from students during the first wave of the coronavirus crisis in 2020, when access to university campuses was restricted, if students moved out of their managed accommodation.

The UPP Foundation is a charity established by UPP in 2016. The foundation offers grants to improve university students' access and retention, as well as their employability, and to develop global citizens and enhance civic universities. The foundation provides a forum for higher education leaders, experts in higher education, and the public to

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debate and develop policy proposals for the future of higher education.

The CUC was established in May 2018, with the aim to explore how the idea of the civic university, which emerged in the United Kingdom and the United States in the nineteenth century, could be restored so that the contemporary university is better able to deal with the challenges facing the local communities in which universities are located.

The commission was made up of a former head of the Civil Service; university vice-chancellors and a former vice-chancellor; a former deputy vice-chancellor; chairs of university governing boards; the chair of Universities UK; a specialist in higher education law; a member of the Centre for Policy Studies, a right-wing think tank; and the chair of the UPP Foundation (Ridley 2019). The commission included an elected member of the National Union of Students. The only full-time academic on the commission was William Whyte, professor of social and architectural history at the University of Oxford. The membership of the CUC suggests a managerialist "top-down" approach to policy development.

The CUC reports were published with support from Public First, a PR company associated with Boris Johnson and the Conservative Party. Support for universities' "civic role" is contained in the 2019 Conservative Party election manifesto (Conservative Party 2019, 37). Chris Skidmore, the Conservative minister for universities on two separate occasions between 2018 and 2020, continues to be a strong supporter of the civic university project. Skidmore's views of British workers are close to those held by the nineteenth-century industrialists characterised by Charles Dickens in *Hard Times* (1854): "among the worst idlers in the world" who prefer "a lie-in to hard work" (Kwarteng et al. 2012, 61, 5).

The commission carried out its work in the style of a parliamentary select committee. The commission heard from experts at formal evidence-gathering sessions across the United Kingdom as well as written evidence from fifty-seven organisations, focus groups, and surveys of ten university cities. Despite the academic context in which they were working, the commission did not undertake any literature reviews or sponsor any independent research. There were two roundtable discussions with academics working in this field. Select committees have been described as an effective way of doing business (Bochel, Defty, and Kirkpatrick 2013). Select committees are inquisitorial, with a focus on expert witnesses and evidence-based reports. Academic forums are usually more discursive than this committee style of inquiry, challenging the conceptual and methodological assumptions on which evidence and expertise are presented.

The two reports produced by the Civic University Commission demonstrate a strong sense of social responsibility. The *Progress Report* (UPP 2018) provides an account of the origins of the civic university, the ongoing nature of universities' levels of civic engagement, the public perception of universities, expert opinion on the significance of place and local leadership, and the capacity of universities to apply their knowledge to the economic and social challenges facing local areas. The historical account of the rise of the civic university is based on a reading of William Whyte's *Redbrick: A Social and Architectural History of Britain's Civic Universities* (2015). A key factor identified by the CUC progress report is the importance of universities as "anchor institutions," providing economic and employment stability to a region; the report also recognised the influence universities have on local decision-making. One area of special concern is the decline of mature and adult learners along with ideas about how this decline could be reversed. The need to rejuvenate adult higher education is described as an urgent matter to promote economic growth and social mobility, as well as health and well-being. David Willetts, the government minister responsible for the exorbitant rise in student fees in 2010 in England—from £3,000 up to a maximum of £9,000, a significant factor in making adult learners reluctant to fund their own higher education—is quoted in the progress report. Willetts's role in the policy of charging exorbitant tuition fees, which led to a decline in the participation of mature students in higher education, is not mentioned. A conclusion of the report is the necessity for universities to think strategically about their involvement with the local community: to be civic universities rather than simply being civically engaged.

The second CUC report, *Truly Civic: Strengthening the Connection between Universities and Their Places* (UPP 2019), makes the case for universities as significant local and global institutions, and argues for a focus on place-making. The report presents a series of recommendations: civic university agreements between universities, local businesses, and the voluntary sector, measuring the effectiveness and incentivising the civic university; establishing a Civic University Fund; spreading good practice through a network of civic universities; widening participation for higher education; supporting the local public sector through staff training and education; enabling local economic growth and cultural activities; and promoting and supporting adult education. Both reports deal with transformations in the world of work, but only in terms of adapting to changes in the labour process or ameliorating a lack of funding for social services (e.g., through volunteering), without challenging the liberal work ethic (Deem 2015) or the law of labour (Neocleous 2000). The report makes no mention of other forms of purposeful activity that are being put forward as real alternatives to waged work (Pitts and Dinerstein 2016). Critical reflections on the impact of universities on cities is limited to the negative effects of students living in residential areas, and to the fact that some university property developments have not been carried out with the full collaboration of local authorities to gain maximum public benefit. The report features examples of positive effects of universities within their host communities, including support for local theatres and a community library, setting up schools, establishing social mobility partnerships as well as degree apprenticeship schemes, and involvement in projects that benefit local health education and employment, as well as promoting cooperative enterprises and cooperative education.

The *Truly Civic* report finds affinities between the notion of civic universities and the movement at the end of the twentieth century by American land grant universities to regain the sense of mission on which they were established in the middle of the nineteenth century. From the 1860s, states across the United States were granted land by the federal government to establish public universities focusing on the sciences and open to working-class students. The *Truly Civic* report argues that this mission could be rejuvenated by land grant universities becoming place-based transformational institutions.

The reporting process of the CUC lacks any meaningful engagement with universities' own communities: students, academics, and administrative and support staff. There is no mention of higher education or local trade unions and no real sense of democratic intent, apart from some references to the membership of decision-making bodies. The need to engage with local authorities as the only organisa-

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tions with a direct political mandate is recognised in the report (2019, 36). The ambition to recover the original mission of land-based universities in the United States fails to acknowledge that land was not "granted" to public universities but was taken from Indigenous peoples through "the violence of settler-colonial dispossession" (Meyerhoff 2019, 202; Nash 2019; Lee and Ahtone 2020).

NEW MUNICIPALISM

The progress report refers to universities as "analytical powerhouses" (2018, 35), but there is no sense of this analytical capacity in the reports, despite the roundtable discussions with academics working in this field. The power of academics' analytical and critical thinking could have been expressed by a more foundational discussion of the geography of place and place-making, key concepts in the reports, giving substance to debates about problems confronting the urban and its environs. The commissioning of academic research and a review of the literature would have provided academic rigour to the review of the idea of a civic university.

An important aspect of debates between academics and activists around place and place-making includes matters associated with the politics and sociology of space. In their attempts to reconsider the problems of everyday life in the city, academics and activists speak in terms of a "new municipalism." This focus on municipalism is important as the promotion of the civic university project is occurring against a background of the demunicipalisation and deregulation of democratically accountable local authority controls on public health, education, social housing, and building construction (Hodkinson 2019). New municipalism has its roots in the socialist municipalism that sought to develop a humane and democratic approach to urban planning in the United Kingdom from the nineteenth century onward. Left-wing municipalism inspired the Greater London Council's "popular planning" model in the 1980s and, more recently, the cooperative framework for economic planning adopted by Preston council, in the northwest of England (Blackburn 2020). New municipalism is keen to avoid what it refers to as "the local trap" (Purcell 2006), as if social, economic, and political problems are amenable to parochial solutions. The limits of localism are expressed by Williams and Srnicek (2015), who argue in favour of constructing a critical counter-hegemonic consensus based on an "ambitious, abstract, mediated, complex and global approach" (2015, 12) to confront the negative consequences of capitalism.

The concept of new municipalism can be a counter-hegemonic starting point to launch a set of strategies based on vital interests, embodying "a politics of place beyond place" (Massey 2007, 15). New municipalism seeks fundamentally to challenge the registers of scale within which liberal politics is affirmed, refusing to accept that levels of operation and categorisation are already predetermined. New municipalism looks to identify and support the new spatial and temporal paradigms emerging from the historical struggles that seek to counter the negative effects of the market-based model of social development (Purcell 2006). The fundamental difference between new municipalism and the civic university is that while the civic university starts with making connections between already existing public institutions, new municipalism is more openly political and sociological: focusing on the structural processes as well as social forces and levels of human agency out of which a new, more life-enhancing version of a politics of proximity can be created, emphasising the power of abstraction: as "a non-empirical form of critical truth" (Stoetzler 2017). The already existing public institutions are complicit in creating the problems they are now attempting to resolve and thus are part of the problem rather than part of the solution (LEWRG 1987). Not then a call for recognising local institutional anchors but, rather, an urban science *grounded* in a critical materiality from which new forms of social institutions, or "living knowledge," can be invented (Roggero 2011).

Along with a recalibration of levels and registers of space and place, the debate about the future of the city and its institutions needs to revitalise the human dimension of city life. Henri Lefebvre (1901–1991), the Marxist philosopher of space, referred to this revitalising project as a process for living, dwelling, and inhabiting the city (Lefebvre 2003). For Lefebvre, everyday life was to be based on the imperative of human liberation, rather than property ownership and commercial exchange. Lefebvre argued that those living in the city had a right to the city: not in terms of a legal right or a claim to private property, but as "a cry and demand" for freedom that comes from the street (Lefebvre 1996, 158). This demand is based on what Lefebvre calls subversive knowledge, which he defines as "a convergence of all of the sciences" (Lefebvre 2003, 56). This convergence can be provided not by philosophical universals or faith in a preordained ideal, like the civic, but rather by a "dialectical anthropology" (2003, 65), which sees human freedom emerging in and against the contradictory logics of urbanisation (Neary 2014). For Lefebvre, dialectical anthropology means rebalancing the linear machinic rhythms of capitalist space and the circular natural rhythms of the cosmological world: what he referred to as rhythmanalysis (Lefebvre 2013).

Lefebvre's political philosophy was grounded in concrete projects based on empirical research and engagements with urban planners and architects as well as research carried out in the French countryside (Stanek 2011). Lefebvre completed a design for a subversive university in 1986 as part of a proposal for an international competition for improvements to the New Belgrade urban landscape (Bitter and Weber 2009).

POPULAR REVOLT

Lefebvre's work is important, but the radicalisation of space and place is already a popular revolt: it comes from the people and cannot be attributed to individual political philosophers. Rather, the revolt builds on lessons learned from the history of working-class and popular education (Rose 2001); radical social movements and critical social science (Neary 2005); what we know about decolonising the university (Bhambra, Gebriel, and Nisancloglu 2018); and what we can learn from Indigenous knowledges (Whitt 2009; Meyerhoff 2019) and exilic spaces (Grubacic and O'Hearn 2016). Exilic spaces are like living on the edge of capitalism: not formal regions or nation-states but new sites of political settlements. We can learn from these radical experiments and their tangible accomplishments.

The Paris Commune (1870) provides a really existing example of the working class taking control of a major European city, based on a "mass active democracy" (Gluckstein 2011, ix) founded on the principles of equality, social justice, and international solidarity. The Paris Commune was "the first workers' state" (Gluckstein 2011, ix). The women and children of the commune were part of "a great gender event" (Holmes 2014, 105). The Occupy movement in 2011

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was a profound expression of the politics of space, with protesters setting up encampments in the downtown centres of major world cities. Although their demands were not fully systemised, they involved social justice, the fair distribution of wealth, and democratic reform of political institutions (Graeber 2013; Neary and Amsler 2012). At the same time, university students were occupying their campuses, demanding an end to the marketisation of higher education and calling for the democratisation of universities' governing bodies (Communiques from an Occupied California 2010). The West Coast of the United States saw the creation of an autonomous zone in the Capitol Hill area of Seattle (CHAZ), covering several city blocks and a park. The protest was part of #BlackLivesMatter. CHAZ called for abolishing or defunding the police, along with an end to gentrification, no longer imprisoning Black men for minor drugs offences, and an increase in funding public health programmes (Golden 2020). CHAZ had a No Cop Co-op shop where everything was free (Golden 2020).

A no-cop culture means the power of the police can be replaced by other models of community empowerment, public safety, and social defence (Vitale 2017; Neary 2020). The science of police has it that police are not only instruments of racist brutality but the enforcers of the law of labour (waged work) and poverty (unpaid work and unemployment) against the civilian population (Neocleous 2000). The law of labour and poverty involves the systematic devaluing and valuing of human life, based on each person's position in the capitalist labour process. It is out of this systematic process of devaluation and valuation of human life that the classic classifications of capitalist society are derived: gender, race, and class (Rancière 2004; Scholtz 2009) The historical and logical connection between unpaid and paid labour means the abolition of slavery must lead to the abolition of wage labour if human emancipation is to be achieved (Falk 2003; K.-Y. Taylor [1977] 2017).

The Gay Liberation Front (GLF) was a group of gay rights activists who emerged in the 1960s to fight for the radical sexual liberation of all people, along with freedom for all oppressed groups. The GLF had chapters in major American cities and around the world. The group came into existence following the Stonewall uprising in New York in 1969, when the police raided an LGBTQ bar in Greenwich Village (Bauman and White 2019). The gay liberation movement spread to cities around the world, taking over city streets every year in gay pride demonstrations, bringing dynamism, difference, vibrancy, vitality, and colour to city life.

Anarchitecture recognises the gap between the built environment and the self as an existential void brought by a sense of loss of community crushed by the catastrophe of the capitalist city (Attlee 2007). Anarchitecture provides an architecture for the street: the paraSITE, a collapsible portable shelter for people living on the pavement, sucking warm and cold air from the cities' heating and ventilation systems (Rakowitz 1973). Anarchitecture is not actually about buildings. This is social protest born out of a critical state of mind.

These practical and intellectual insurgencies are consolidated and sustained by social protests operating at a planetary level: the World Social Forum (WSF 2001) is an annual coming together of campaigning organisations from around the planet, NGOs and social movements, as part of the alter-globalisation movement, or movement of movements that began at the Battle for Seattle in 1999 against multinational corporations and the World Trade Organisation (Rikowski 2001). Ecoversities (2018) is a global movement of academics, educators, students, and activists asking the question: what would our universities look like if they were in the service of diverse cultures, economies, spiritualities, and life within our planet home? EarthCARE is a group that seeks to integrate ecological, cognitive, affective, relational, and economic approaches to local and global social justice, through deep learning and an ethics of care, to transform the root causes of global challenges (Andreotti et al. 2018). Extinction Rebellion focuses on ways of curtailing the climate crisis, which is leading to species extinction and exterminism of our own making (Somerville 2019). Earth Strike calls for a general strike to save the planet, demanding that government and corporations engage in policy to avert climate catastrophe, led by schoolchildren and young people (https://www.earth-strike.com/). Progressive International is a transnational political project to empower progressive activists around the world to create progressive social order based on climate justice, a green new deal, and transnational debt relief to improve the lives of people around the world. Progressive International proposes a system of socialised financial governance, including a universal basic dividend recognising the role citizens play in the production of corporate profits (https://progressive.international/). Honor the Earth is for an Indigenous just transition to an ecological and economically sustainable future (http://www.honorearth.org/). Women's Strike is happening in locations around the world. The strike demands equality for women and the dispossessed and violated framed around a politics of care. Women's Strike highlights the significance of women's paid and unpaid labour in capitalist circuits of production and social reproduction (https://womenstrike.org.uk/).

There are already formal and informal higher education institutions that frame their activities in terms of a connection with the land and the planet as a whole. Earth University (Costa Rica) seeks to work with students, staff, and communities to develop a sustainable and ethical relationship with the earth (https://www.earth.ac.cr/en/). The Universidad de la Tierra, Oaxaca and Chiapas, Mexico, organises autonomous, independent learning among Indigenous and non-Indigenous groups (https://unitierraoax.org/en/). The Universidad de la Tierra in Califas (United States) is a site for convivial and insurgent learning and research outside of the formal education system (Redenbaugh 2018). Uniterra Catalunya (Spain) seeks to build a culture at peace with the land and the world (http://uniterra.cat/).

All of this provides the basis for something other than "anchor institutions"; rather, this is a demand to break from the oppressive weight of liberal civic history, the police, and private property relations, so people can feel the lightness of their being, unconstrained by the gravitational force field of credit and debt, punishing work performance measures, and the fear of unemployment and poverty.

CAPITALIST CATASTROPHES: CLIMATE CRISIS AND CORONAVIRUS: CALLING FOR A UNIVERSITY OF THE EARTH

Since the Civic University Commission reports were written, and in response to the intensification of global protests for climate justice including school and university students, universities and other public bodies are recognising the climate emergency. Critical social theory teaches us that industrial society poisons every aspect of human and non-human life. The all-pervasive nature of this toxicity means that industrial society cannot be decontaminated, so it must be overcome, along with the liberal social theory on

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which it relies to articulate its versions of civicness and social responsibility. The challenges are formidable. A sense of urgency is not enough; rather, an intellectual insurgency is required, with a crucial role to play in rebuilding a post-capitalist civilisation. This intellectual insurgency means that higher education becomes part of the radical social movement of movements, supporting the many voices of this movement with the methods and methodologies of critical natural social science. This intellectual insurgency involves recalibrating the registers at which universities and other attempts to deal with the emergency are operating. Local, national, and global concepts of place are born out of a competitive market-based model of social development (Lefebvre 1991), presaging the apocalyptic future that a new politics of place beyond place is trying to avert. The new registers should encompass the universality that the concept of the university implies: not then the parochial civic university but, rather, the university of the earth.

And now, since the end of 2019, the world has been engulfed by a global pandemic, caused by a zoonotic coronavirus contagion. Millions will contract the disease, and more than half a million people have already died as a result of the coronavirus (Johns Hopkins University 2020), with the old and the infirm, the dispossessed and the disadvantaged suffering the most. This makes the arguments expressed in the article even more pertinent.

The United Kingdom has one of the highest rates of death from the coronavirus in the world. In the absence of an effective coordinated response to the virus, UK government ministers insist that the public's responsibility to contain COVID-19 should be defined in terms of "a civic duty" (Boseley and Stewart 2020). Some universities in the United Kingdom are responding to the virus by fast-tracking virus testing kits as well as making protective clothing for frontline National Health Service and care workers, developing a vaccine, and much more. Advocates for the civic university idea are attempting to define this work in terms of the civic university project (Brabner 2020; Calvert 2020).

At the same time, and as a result of the economic damage caused by the crisis, the UK university system appeared to be on the point of collapse, requesting emergency government funding to avoid a failure of its system based on student loans to pay tuition fees and living expenses (Jarvis 2020). The student loans model in England is much more vulnerable to the economic repercussions of the coronavirus crisis than publicly funded higher education models across Europe (Holmwood 2020). This appeal for a funding package rescue made no attempt to argue for a more socialist higher education policy, despite the fact that socialist-type policies had been introduced by the right-wing governments in the United Kingdom and the United States to alleviate the economic damage caused by the pandemic (Buiter 2020). Academic staff and their unions are continuing their struggle with the government and their university employers to protect jobs and pensions as well as campaigning against casualisation and pay inequality. This struggle with employers means challenging employer interpretations of the financial implications of the coronavirus crisis (UCU 2020). Meanwhile, university staff are working hard to provide blended learning for students: face-to-face and online teaching, where student engagement meets infection control.

A global infection does not respect national boundaries or international borders or abstract concepts of spatiality, like the local and the civic. The pandemic comes from sprawling sites of mass conurbations in China and elsewhere, encroaching into pristine jungles and forests, introducing animal and bird meats with novel viruses into the human food chain to which the human immune system has not yet been exposed (Carrington 2020)
. The result is Ebola, SARS, COVID-19, and more dangerous strains to come (Davis 2005), along with as yet unimagined political upheavals (McNeill 1998). The explosive growth of cities in newly industrialising regions and countries, as well as spoliation of the soil through intensive agricultural production, is the attempt by global capital to exploit labour, livestock, and land to overcome what is for capital always a crisis of profitability, exacerbated after the 2008 financial crisis. Focusing on the places where the pandemic emerges ignores the extent to which these specific sites of food production are funded by global capitalist conglomerates with head offices in the United States and other countries of the so-called developed world (Wallace et al. 2020). The response to the pandemic is already at the world level through the work of the World Health Organization, but the global economic competition between national states hinders its operation. Nation-states are outbidding each other to buy chemicals for COVID-19 testing and protective clothing for health workers.

The Victorian city and the municipal socialism of the nineteenth century provided for public health at a citywide level, dealing with pollution, malnutrition, contagion, and homelessness. Living with COVID-19 will require a public response involving door-to-door street-level containment (Augustin 2020), but living with COVID-19 forces us to rethink local health provision in relation to the planet as a whole. In order to deal more fundamentally and foundationally with this contagion, a new spatial register is required with a different set of imperatives: not private property and exploitation of labour and land on which the idea of the civic, local, regional, and national are based, but a reasoned and rational reappraisal of life on the planet in a way that nurtures and maintains the metabolic relationship between humanity and nature, grounded in the material substance out of which all life is derived: the earth (Moore 2015). Not as a glorification of Mother Earth, but as a study into the organic relationship between natural history and human history, what Lefebvre calls a convergence of all the sciences. It is this systematic process of study that should be the starting point for the university of the earth.

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