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Occupying School Buildings in Greece of the  
Memorandum: The Discursive Formations Around Pupils'  
Political Activism

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***Introduction***

So far 2011 was probably the hardest and most strenuous year since the beginning of the Greek debt crisis in 2009. It was the year it became evident that the austerity measures imposed by the first memorandum were unbearable; the heterogeneous social movement of the Greek 'indignants' (aganaktismenoi) emerged; the Greek parliament passed the second austerity bill and protesters were violently subdued by the police; the government voted for a highly contested reform in higher education, and public spending on education and health was slashed.

There has been a significant participation of pupils in the movements, culminating with a massive wave of school occupations in the fall of the same year. In particular, almost immediately after the beginning of the school year serious problems, such as the lack of books and the scarcity in teaching personnel, inhibited everyday school life. Pupils responded through massive mobilizations that took the form of participation in assemblies, voting, demonstrations and school occupations. The spread of school occupations, in particular, was massive (there were over 700 occupied schools), and they lasted almost the entire fall-trimester. Here we must take into account that the same phenomenon also occurred during the previous year, albeit at a smaller scale. School occupations and student movements are not something new; nevertheless, it is interesting to look at this form of political protest in the context of

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the current economic crisis. What differentiates the protests and occupations in 2010 and mostly those in 2011 is their agenda against the memorandum. In my opinion the pupils' struggle is part of a broader series of local struggles, that emerged and multiplied due to the dislocation of the social and economic web in Greece; a result of the global monetary crisis, and the implementation of the bailout plan and subsequent austerity measures.

The objective of this essay is to explore the forms of knowledge that were produced around the significant occurrence of pupils' school occupations and mobilizations during fall 2011. To be more specific, school occupations are a given fact, no matter what we say or think about them. Nevertheless, the event of the occupations inaugurated a discursive struggle about their meaning and the prospects of dealing with them. This created an antagonism amongst divergent discourses, each of them producing a specific understanding of the situation, and proposing a way to handle it. Hence, those discourses competed for hegemony that is to prevail as 'the truth'.

In this essay I will deal with the following questions:

- How were the school occupations and pupils' political activism discursively constructed?
- Which discourses inform the attitudes towards pupils' mobilizations?
- What are the consequences of such discursive constructions?
- Which discourses did the state, the political parties, the media, the sociological theory, and the pupils themselves articulate?
- What meanings are established and what meanings are excluded?

- Do different discourses define the nodal points in different ways, so that there is a struggle to fix meanings in terms of one discourse rather than another?
- Which meanings are taken for granted across different discourses?
- What subject positions and identities are discursively constructed?

### *Discourse*

The concept of discourse is used here as a methodological tool for the development of a theory on the relationship between knowledge about pupils' occupations and the diverse forms of social control imposed upon both young people and adults. By focusing on the discourses about the occupations and other forms of youth's political mobilization, we may explore which subject positions and experiences are open to them (and accordingly, which subjects positions belong to the adults).

Discourse analysis allows us to explain how and why only certain statements about childhood and youth and their correlation to adulthood, schooling, politics, public life etc. are taken as 'natural' and are considered true, whereas others are not (Phillips & Jorgensen, 2009). According to discourse theory (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985; Torfing, 1999; Howarth, 2000; Howarth, Norval and Stavrakakis, 2000), the truth, the subjects and the relation between them, are constructed within the discursive field; access to an objective truth is therefore impossible. As reality is always already mediated by various discourses, discourse per se becomes the object of analysis.

Discourses are a form of representation of a specific subject such as pupils' mobilizations, the occupation of school buildings, young people's politics, childhood and youth; hence they produce particular forms of knowledge about their topic of interest. Such knowledge affects social practices, and has real consequences for the

subjects involved. For example, the hegemonic discourses that are articulated by the school, the media, the research, and the political parties about the occupations and the competence of the children and youth to participate in public life, determine how adults who draw from those discourses, handle the young people that participate in the mobilizations. In few words, discourses are a means to impose power on the subjects (in this instance on youth or children). The purpose of analyzing the various discourses dealing with school occupations is, therefore, to expose dominant beliefs and ideas about children's and youth's political activity and their entitlement to participate in public life. This way I shall attempt to uncover the broader underlying symbolic structures, and to explore the social consequences of such representations about childhood's and youth's politics in late modernity.

I should mention that the limits between the terms 'childhood' and 'youth' are blurred and indiscernible, because they are constantly constructed in various ways in different discursive and social contexts. Precisely because they are social constructions, they bear different social connotations according to their discursive use. It is not by chance that, in our case, adults (state school authorities, politicians, journalists, and parents) tend to define pupils who occupy the school buildings mainly as children recalling the dominant discourses about childhood. In the social context of the dominant discourses, 'childhood' produces negative connotations such as immaturity, incompetence, lack of skills, dependence, etc., which justify and legitimize the intervention of adults on children's bodies to control and regulate them according to specific ethical-political criteria.

In order to bring the discursive construction of pupils' political activism to the fore I focus on the statements about school occupations in the fall trimester of 2011. Statements were collected from a variety of sources such as university students,

pupils, and teacher's organizations, blogs, various Internet posts, TV and radio interviews, and articles in newspapers. I approach these statements (posts, texts and declarations) employing discourse analysis (Foucault, 1989; Laclau and Mouffe, 1985) in search for the various discourses that are inscribed into these texts.

A central issue in this essay is to unveil the ambition of hegemonic as well as non-hegemonic discourses to exert ideological influence, and to unmask the power relations and the domination they entail. Hence, a main aim of this essay is to trace the limits of these discourses, and to acknowledge their conceptual discontinuities, in order to challenge their power over youth.

To start with, I will critically present the prevalent interpretations of youth participation in the school occupations and the social mobilisations during the fall of 2011; then, I will attempt to analyse the formation and the consequences of the discourse articulated by the pupils about these occupations and political mobilisations in general. In accordance with the 'new sociology of childhood' (James and Prout, 1997) and 'youth studies' (Furlong, 2013) I endorse the position that childhood and youth are historical and social constructions, so as to expose and challenge possible hypostatisations produced by hegemonic or counter-hegemonic discourses around the concepts of childhood and youth.

Moreover, I will explore the relationship between space and power, arguing that physical space is still highly politically significant in late modernity (Gordon et al., 2007; Gordon, 2010, Rheingans and Hollands, 2013). Based both on empirical data and theoretical insights (Furlong and Cartmel, 2007; Gordon, 2010; Rheingans and Hollands, 2013) I challenge the assertion made by sociologists such as Ulrich Beck and Antony Giddens and in youth studies literature that virtual experiences have reduced the significance of physical space in late modernity. We will see that the built

school environment plays vital role in the pupils' occupy movement in both political and practical ways. Therefore, I will try to explain the political significance of the occupations and to situate the debates around the 2011 occupation movement within the wider sociological debate about the dynamics and limitations of young people's politics in late modernity. In this context, I will be discussing some of the relevant literature on youth and childhood political participation, changing political values and young people's relationship to educational space.

### ***Analysis***

School occupations, obstructing lessons and recurrent demonstrations during the hours the pupils were supposed to be in class, provoked serious social preoccupation, which caused, in turn, the intervention of school authorities and the state. The occupations were described as anti-social behavior, and fear of anomy was strategically implied to present the mobilizations as a form of social pathology with serious consequences for the pupils, and society in general. As a result, state officials, representatives of the pro-memorandum political parties, and the majority of the media, treated the occupants as delinquents, which eventually led to the suppression of the mobilizations. In what follows we will see that fragments of heterogeneous discourses, which have been integrated into a cohesive narrative, and have formed a hybrid hegemonic discourse, helped construct the occupants' identity in a particular light.

Notice, for example, the following statement by the under-secretary of education (at the time) Evi Christofilopoulou on Greek public television:

*I respect and understand the bitterness and quandary in the pupils' families. But to occupy a school in protest is not right. There are other peaceful means of protest. That is what democracy is all about. Today pupils close the schools; but afterwards they will need to go to school on*

*Saturday, to replace every single school-hour they lost, both for their own sake and for the benefit of Education.*

*I shall refer to a couple of recent events that occurred during the weekend. If you visited the 5th Zografou<sup>1</sup> High School you would encounter a tragic picture. You would see the gym demolished along with other destructions. At the 8th Patisia<sup>2</sup> High School all computers were stolen from the lab. There has been a burglary! And of course similar incidents happened in other schools all over the country.*

*We must discuss the problems in Education; it is normal that there will be some kind of opposition, but I really do not understand why the schools have to be closed. Eventually this will turn against the pupils. The occupants, who are merely a minority, only bring harm upon themselves.*

*In recent years school occupations in October have become something of a trend. I have to admit that occupations have been more widespread this year due to reasons you [the anchor] have already mentioned. But we are dealing with a dangerous situation here! I should mention that at schools in two cities, Ioannina and Patras, we have recorded alcohol consumption.*

*Authorities ought to be notified in such cases. School personnel have the obligation to inform the authorities on occasions like this. It is impossible for the Ministry of Education to be present at every school (Papamattheou, 2011).*

Thereupon, in a radio broadcast, the secretary of education (during that period) Anna Diamantopoulou demanded an immediate stop to vandalisms at occupied schools:

*The issue that emerged at a school in Komotini was merely the triggering event and not the cause; besides it is not the first time for such a thing to happen. Nevertheless, it is the first time school occupations are so widespread. The initial estimation of the damages is 100.000 euros. You face the image of a destroyed school - computers on the floor, wrecked furniture, writing on the walls everywhere - and no one is held responsible.*

*All this is happening in a small town, where it would be easy to instantly notify the police, the authorities, and the principal; but nobody is arrested and no charges are pressed. This is a major issue. [...] over the last few years occupations emerge customarily at the beginning of each school year, when children between 13 and 16 years of age simply decide to shut the school down and inhibit the educational process. There are specific groups at certain schools who are responsible for the occupations. No one can just go and occupy a school; moreover, such behavior cannot remain unpunished. This is why, at the beginning of the school year, we specifically sent an administrative circular, which clarified that school councils and committees (consisting of parents, teachers, and a representative of the pupils) are responsible for dealing*

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<sup>1</sup> An Athens neighborhood.

<sup>2</sup> Another Athens neighborhood.



*with this problem; it is their responsibility to decide what to do. This is a basic duty of a democratic school [...]*  
*Occupations entail dangers [...] pupils will also be held punishable. It must be clarified that this kind of discipline is not authoritarian; it is just how society works (Papamattheou, 2011).*

As becomes evident from the statements by the secretary and the under-secretary of education, it is obvious that the government's approach to occupations draws from a discourse on juvenile delinquency. Deviance is the nodal point around which various other signifiers are articulated: 'vandalism', 'anomy', 'financial default', 'loss of school hours', 'disruption of order'. State school authorities ascribe a delinquent identity to the participants in the mobilizations; pupils are regarded as troublemakers, rabble-rousers, anti-social, indifferent or bad at school; supportive teachers are considered instigators, accomplices, or serving their personal interests or the interest of their political party. In this framework, the state appears as an omniscient subject, that dictates which are the proper ways to protest, and ordains that the deviant be punished. The discourse on delinquency underscores the importance of protecting and restoring order for the sake of society and the individual. School occupations are, therefore, seen as a threat to the pupils' future careers as well as a sign of institutional and adult incapacity to effectively control the youth. The moral incentive behind this discourse is to maintain order, and the means to achieve it are discipline and punishment.

The threat to call the police and to press charges, the prosecution of pupils for obstructing regular school life and the indictment of parents that are held responsible for their children's actions, the advance notices and warnings to teachers who are considered lax or non-compliant, and the blackmailing by the Ministry of Education that it will ban school excursions and enforce classes on weekends and holidays (to make up for lost school time), confirm that this form of protest is seen as delinquent.

At the same time these strategies aim at reassuring public opinion; they are designed to restore order and adult authority. These practices were hardly criticized at all by the majority of the media. Moreover, the media often enforce the image of the delinquent child, focusing on those cases where its behavior contradicts the nostalgic ideal of children's inherent innocence (Such, Walker και Walker, 2005: 303; Ennew, 1994; West, 1999). It is interesting, however, to examine the convergences and the variations in the assessment of the occupations by different political parties.

In particular, Aris Spiliotopoulos, the Head of the Education Sector of *New Democracy* (a conservative party, and the main party of the opposition at the time), made an appeal to stop the occupations. Mr. Spiliotopoulos asked pupils to keep schools open, while professing that 'the government is hugely responsible for the current degradation in Education'. He underlined the duty of the government to protect public buildings from the rage of the occupants implying that school occupations are a form of delinquency, which he strategically attributed to outsiders. In this way he did not consider the political dimension and the social causes of this particular practice (school occupations), and furthermore he failed to take into consideration the occupants' demands:

*The school year started without basic resources; there was no appropriate teaching material, and hardly enough staff. Instead of books, pupils were told to use photocopies, notes and dvds, and there were thousands of vacant teaching positions, all because of the inefficiency and the lack of organization by the Ministry of Education.*

*This unprecedented situation was exacerbated by school occupations, the loss of teaching hours, but also incidents of destructive rage against public buildings; this is happening under conditions of unparalleled ferocity, provoked not by the pupils, but by instigators from outside and by anarchist agitators. Such incidents don't honor our History, our Education, or our Culture; besides they curb the struggles and efforts made by all those pupils who aspire a better education. Even more, those events have been a shock to everybody in this country.*

*The damages inflicted upon the occupied school buildings by various instigators (...) usually cost us tens of thousands of euro. There are quite a few questions to be answered by the political leadership at the Ministry of*

*Education: What measures are taken to protect public school property? What is being done so that the offenders will be held accountable, especially in the current economic situation? And how will our schools become safe again for both pupils and teachers?*

*However, there are political responsibilities for the current mess in Education. The pupils and their parents are the last to blame. For this reason, in sympathy for the difficulties they are facing, we appeal to the pupils to return to their classes and to keep schools open (Spiliotopoulos, 2011) .*

Equally interesting is the stance of DIMAR, a social-democratic party, that (although it voted against the memorandum) distanced itself from the other anti-memorandum parties of the Left, SYRIZA and KKE. In a press statement on the school occupations DIMAR criticized the government for its stance on education; however, it stressed that schools must remain open to facilitate the dialogue about the problems in education between pupils and school bodies. It is also implied that school occupations are a form of delinquency. The DIMAR party youth expressed apprehension for the protests, but it declared that:

*We consistently advocate that schools need to stay open. Pupils should be in their classrooms, and struggle for improvements in education through dialogue with their teachers, and by employing the lawful means available to them [...]*

*The new school year began with the usual shortage in teaching staff, but this year's 'new school' (in summer the government passed a very controversial reform in education) arrived with a surprise-shortfall: The 'new school' was inaugurated without any books, which is the exclusive responsibility of the government and the competent authorities (Dimar, 2011).*

The discourse on delinquency is articulated with a certain discourse about childhood and adolescence; in this context youth delinquency is explained in emotive terms such as anger, rage, spontaneity, uncontrolled feelings, unpredictable emotional vicissitudes, immaturity, and irresponsibility. In this framework, children and adolescents are supposed to be driven by impulse rather than reason; consequently, they are considered incomplete, imperfect, weak, dangerous but also in danger, and

incapable to express rational judgment or to participate in public life. In other words, they are discursively constructed as emotional, irrational, and therefore menacing. For this reason they need adult guidance, care taking and education, and they are socially marginalized and excluded from the realm of politics. This pigeonholing further magnifies the supposed threat posed by the youth, and so adult intervention becomes an imperative. This discourse also describes occupants in derogatory terms; as children they are considered inherently weak, lacking judgment, suggestible, and easily influenced and directed by adults, who use them to serve their own individual, trade union, or party interests. The following example is telling of the dominant position held by the media:

*At many schools all over Greece occupations continue under the direction and influence of the parties of the Left (especially the Workers Militant Front (PAME) that belongs to the Communist Party (KKE). As a result, things are getting out of hand with all those vandalisms and destructions; and this at very dire times, both financially and psychologically, when the country is desperately trying to recover.*

*The Left in Greece sees this difficult juncture as a 'revolutionary condition', and tries to stir up the 'revolutionary' process to overthrow the system. Ergo, we witness an unprecedented series of trade unionist interventions in schools. Children - that is minors - are instructed to occupy schools primarily by the Workers Militant Front, who still seem to believe that pupils are the gear in the boisterous train of the revolution!...*

*It must be a real novelty to defend Education by suspending it, because, by closing a school, you invalidate it. It is obvious that underage pupils are not completely aware nor can they be held fully responsible for their actions; this is why they are supervised by their families and the state, and NOT THE WORKERS MILITANT FRONT, which attempts to disintegrate Greek society in the name of the revolution. It is also plain to see how highly irresponsible it is to exploit young pupils in an attempt to raise meager polling rates, and to aspire an aberration with unpredictable consequences. [...]*

*Their unprecedented irresponsibility will have grave consequences! Those people literally toy with the future of the children, their families, as well as the patience of Greek society that, besides its own problems, also has to put up with a trade union, which inhibits it from operating by circumventing any sense of democratic legitimacy and order (Broudsakis, 2011).*

The way childhood is perceived today is the result of a long series of overlapping material and discursive practices. Children's exclusion from public space, the abolition of child labor, and the establishment of compulsory schooling became part of a universal ideal about childhood (Prout, 2005). Nevertheless, this ideal is neither cohesive nor coherent. Rather it comprises contradictory ideas about children, which are seen, on the one hand, as innocent, dependent, pure, unfit to work, and needy of adult protection and caretaking; on the other hand, however, they are considered inherently fierce, cruel, and menacing, putting themselves and society in danger because they lack the necessary cognitive and normative principles that would enable harmonious social cohabitation; hence they must be disciplined (Jenks, 1996; Pechtelidis and Kosma, 2012). Although these ideas are contradictory, they coexist as dominant discourses about childhood; both contribute to the exclusion of children from public life, and legitimize their meticulous surveillance and strict social control.

This particular socio-political management and governance of children corresponds to the generalized interest of the modern states to control, put under surveillance and manipulate the entire population, both at the level of social groups and individuals (Rose, 1989). 'Modern' disciplinary power exacts social consensus about the legitimacy of its preventive and corrective practices through its refined and subtle ways of surveillance and control, which are closely related to a utilitarian discourse about the usefulness of its proclaimed causes. This way power effectively manages to conceal the restrictive and coercive consequences it has on its subjects. In this light, children are the quintessential object of control and surveillance of the adult society (Rose, 1989); control is masked as protection, prevention, and preoccupation

in the children's interest, while surveillance takes the form of attention to their health and wellbeing (Jenks, 1996).

It is not by coincidence that an important consequence of modernity has been the radical transformation in the understanding and the attitude towards childhood. Children are culturally defined as 'other'; childhood is constructed as the opposite of adulthood inside a binary framework (Jenks, 1996; James and Prout, 1997; Gittins, 1998; Mayall, 2002; Qvortrup et. al. 2009). In particular, children are connected to nature, irrationalism, dependence, disability, immaturity, play, and the private sphere, whereas adults are seen as related to civilization, rationalism, independence, ability, work, and the public sphere. Modernity is therefore connected to a specific conceptualization of childhood founded upon the rigorous separation of children from adults.

However, through their active intervention in public life, children are challenging this division in late modernity. Through their mobilizations, young people prove to be dynamic, critical, complex, and in possession of significant social skills and abilities. Not only do they identify the problems they face in the family, in school, or in the community at large, but they also *speak out*. They challenge common beliefs about childhood, and they show that children are not 'the same everywhere'; they are neither inherently innocent and pure nor savage and menacing; childhood is not a golden age; and adults do not necessarily respect children's rights. Hence they undermine and subvert previously stable ideas about what childhood is, or at least what it is supposed to be, and at the same time they compromise adult authority, which largely depends upon the control of knowledge and public life (Freeman, 2000).

Another important discursive strategy that aims at the devaluation and downgrading of pupils' school occupations and participation in demonstrations, is the equation of such forms of mobilization with common school delicts. In particular, such forms of resistance are represented as opportunities for truancy, skipping class, or hanging out at cafeterias. Even more, there is the common belief that occupations are an end in themselves; teachers are just too lazy to work; staying at home is an opportunity for pupils to rehearse for their finals (utilitarianism); and that there are no actual demands behind the mobilizations. Hence, occupations are represented as customary, a mere trend, or a bad habit.

The main problem with this approach is that occupations are perceived as a cohesive and undifferentiated phenomenon repeated annually. Because of this attitude, mobilizations are regarded as a form of anomy and are rejected in advance, ignoring any social causes behind them. This is a tested and trusted strategy in the formation of public opinion towards youth protests. As shown in various studies (Such, Walker & Walker, 2005; Makrinioti, 2012), by addressing youth's mobilizations through negative stereotypes, and by equating resistance with a common delict, pupils's actions are stripped from every political dimension. The main reason for that is because their actions take place in a school setting and are exclusively subject to school rules. Political protest is transformed into a school delict, and 'delinquents' are punished as such. Sometimes, negative assessments of the protests even appear in selected statements by certain pupils. I draw the following examples from a blog active at the time:

*What can I say... I think occupations are a good opportunity to review your lessons... However, in high-school occupations should not last more than a couple of days, because the seniors loose classes, which is bad because they have to prepare for their finals. That's my opinion!*

- 1) *No teacher, and definitely no pupil, has the right to obstruct public services.*
- 2) *Whoever wants to skip school, should stay at home. Nobody is forced to attend.*
- 3) *Some schools do not even have any actual demands... the occupation is just a way to skip class and kid around.*
- 4) *Before people decide to occupy the school, they should first exhaust all other options (dialog, written reports etc.)*
- 5) *Only the pupils who participate in the occupations should be obliged to go to school in summer to make up for the classes they lost... Unfortunately, those are usually the daft, anyway...*
- 6) *At the end-of-school-exams, the pupils who participated in the occupations do not have a clue anyway, because they simply do not care. However, even those who have been studying all year long do not do well, because they were not taught the material properly... I will stop writing now, or I will never finish!!!! (Portal of Zefiri<sup>3</sup> Public School, 2011).*

The selective presentation of such statements by the Greek media has the clear intention of reinforcing the strategy of equation of pupils' school occupations and demonstrations with common delicts by foregrounding the point-of-view of pupils who feel deprived of their right to education. Here we might consider how the discourse on human rights is exploited to legitimize the exertion of power.

At this point it would be interesting to see what the protesting youth has to say; what their demands are; and from where they draw their arguments from. It should also be noted that the anti-memorandum Left press mostly promoted their positions. Here pupils from Vironas and Kareas<sup>4</sup> announce their decision to occupy their schools to their teachers and parents:

*We are pupils from the schools of Vironas and Kareas who want to express our discontent against the new measures (as part of the reform in education), which concern and affect us directly!*

*We are pupils who are willing to fight for the school that we deserve, and the future that we hope for!*

*We say no to: the merging or closing of schools; the discontinuation of free school books (and the closing of the publishing agency for school books); the reduction of public funding for education, and the passing of*

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<sup>3</sup> An Athens suburb.

<sup>4</sup> Athens' suburbs.



*the expenses to the parents; the filing of pupil records, and the penalization of mobilizations; the shortage in teaching personnel; the abolishment of the status of universities as sanctuaries (which was introduced by law 1288/82 after the collapse of the military junta).*

*Who can expect us to back down? We organized, we protested, we raised our voice, we resisted. Our collective struggle will continue with greater force.*

*We do not want this school; this is not our school. We shall reclaim the right to schooling, to higher education and work.*

*We say no to the school of the Memorandum - We demand free public education for all.*

*We will not stop here! We will fight as hard as we can! We will prove that they should have taken us into account! If we do not succeed, we will at least have learned to stand up for our rights, our future, and our lives.*

*Besides, the only lost battles are the ones you never fight. Are you with us? (Avgi, 2011a)*

The demands of the pupils who participated in the mobilizations were articulated around elements from the counter-hegemonic discourse produced by the parties of the Left, anarchist groups, and local and global social movements against the neoliberal policies, such as the ‘indignants’. It is important to note that pupils participated actively, and often creatively, in the production of this discourse. They tried to express specific problems they and their parents were facing everyday, which were not only related to school, but to the general socio-political situation that emerged with the imposition of the memorandum, and the hegemony of neoliberalism in European and international politics. In my opinion, the pupils’ discourse owes to the reserve of political experience and knowledge the youth accumulated during the events in Greece in December 2008 (Pechtelidis, 2011a).<sup>5</sup> This reserve consists of effective strategies and practices of resistance, negotiation, debate, and coordination of the mobilizations. In order to articulate their own response to the memorandum, the pupils have drawn from this previous experience. They attempted to communicate

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<sup>5</sup> Protests and riots took place in Greece in December 2008. These riots occurred after the assassination of a 15-year-old pupil by a police officer in the center of Athens. The uproar caused by the event had a major impact not only everywhere in Greece but also all over the world. Young students played a leading and central role in the protests so that the majority of journalists as well as many politicians and theorists claimed that it was a ‘revolution of the youth’, the ‘democracy of children’ and so forth.

their unique interpretation of the crisis from their particular point of view as children, young people, and pupils, but also to form a common front, or else a ‘chain of equivalence’ (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985) with their teachers and parents. The teachers’ union (OLME) also took a stand on the pupils’ mobilizations by criticizing state authorities and the government policy on education.

The teachers’ union board denounced assaults against pupils participating in the occupations of high schools and junior-high-schools by school directors and deputy directors. According to the report:

- *The deputy director of the high-school in Galatsi seriously injured a female pupil.*
- *At a junior-high-school in Argyroupolis an ‘exasperated’ parent attacked a pupil who participated in the occupation with a cutter. The incidents of violence against pupils are so many, that it is impossible for our union to register them all.*
- *Threatening, insulting, and exerting physical violence on pupils is pedagogically unacceptable, and teachers who do so have no place in a public school.*
- *Colleagues who behave this way have no place in the union.*
- *The Ministry of Education is morally responsible for this unacceptable situation (Avgi, 2011b).*

The union documents its position by invoking a circular that the ministry had communicated to schools on the 20.09.2011. According to the teachers’ union, the specific circular encouraged harsh disciplinary methods, which it presented as reasonable pedagogical practices, and tried to turn parents against their children by the old ‘divide and conquer’ tactic. It is quite clear that the teachers’ union addresses the pupils’ occupations in terms of social and political struggle. The union attempts to confront and invalidate the government strategy of ‘divide and conquer’, and to create a ‘chain of equivalence’ between pupils, parents, teachers, and the public opinion. We will have to take into account that OLME is generally opposed to the memorandum and the subsequent austerity measures that the government imposed. We could, therefore, consider the

union's outlook on school occupations as part of a general reaction to government policies, which induced deep salary cuts and generally deteriorated working conditions for the teachers.

In that sense, the teachers' union attempts to construct a 'chain of equivalence' between teachers, parents, university students and pupils by highlighting the struggle against a common enemy, which is the government and the parties that support the memorandum. Something similar was sought by Greek university students:

*Pupils do not need any update from us to know that they do not have any books. Besides, the reform in education concerns them directly, stresses Georgia Diamantogianni, student at the National Technical University, who participated in the information campaign at the 4th high-school in Peristeri.<sup>6</sup>*

*At many pupils' assemblies, the children also discuss problems such as their parents' unemployment, or heavy taxation that burdens their families, which have a direct impact on their day-to-day lives. This year the public expenses for education were cut to 1/3 in comparison to last year, claims Costas Papageorgiou, biology student and member of the general assembly of university occupations (Vasileiadou, 2011).*

The formation of a common front between university students and pupils (and teachers) becomes evident by the articulation of a similar anti-hegemonic discourse against the memorandum, they both seem to have in common:

*In Peristeri thousands of jobless people have already filed applications at the employment service; at many homes electricity has been cut off because the residents could not afford to pay the bills; and there are more individuals everyday who rummage through the garbage to find something to eat. With the education reform, at university you 'll not be awarded a degree anymore; instead you'll be handed a file with credits. The European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) begins at junior-high-school, and school awards also count as credits. Already as pupils we are drawn in a cutthroat competition, states Nicolas Kavaklis, pupil at the 4th high-school in Peristeri.*

*We reject: the merging or closing of schools, further cuts in public funding for education, the discontinuation of free school books and the passing of the expenses to the parents, pupil records, the reduction of teaching personel, and abolishing the status of universities as sanctuaries, he adds.*

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<sup>6</sup> An Athens suburb.

*They are saying that we are closing the schools. We reply that Ms Diamantopoulou (the secretary of education) is the one who is closing the schools. We ask for our teachers' support. Besides, in our demands we also include issues such as the teachers' salaries, claims Orestis Kattis, pupil in the first year in high-school, at the same school (Stefanakou, 2011).*

In its announcement the General Assembly of schools in Peristeri emphasized that:

*not only was Ms Diamantopoulou's 'new school' inaugurated without any books, but she also had the nerve to sustain that pupils and teachers should use dvd's and photocopies instead (Stefanakou, 2011).*

We should also mention that 25 out of the 32 university teachers' associations in Greece, aligned with the pupils front by expressly rejecting the new policy framework for higher education at their Panhellenic meeting. In an announcement they called for the chancellors to block the reform, and they protested against the new cuts in public spending for higher education.

An important role in the defense of the pupils' mobilizations, the formation of 'chains of equivalence', and the reaction against the government policy and aligned political forces, had the parties of the Left, which rejected the memorandum. The following statements are telling, although unfortunately they partly overstate the pupils' participation in the occupations and the mobilizations in general, and they tend to hypostatize childhood and adolescence.

*The school occupations, which spread out all over the country day by day, foreshadow the rise of a new pupils' riot. Pupils occupy schools, take the streets, rally, communicate their positions, and sit-in at the Ministry of Education. For the second day in a row pupils from Heraklion and Nea Ionia<sup>7</sup> protested in front of the Ministry in Marousi. Even more of them gathered today, and expressed their dissent by shouting catchy and fervent slogans.*

*The authorities of the Ministry also hardened their response; special police forces were called in and a police coach blocked the entrance to 'protect' the secretary of education from an unarmed 'enemy' aged 16.*

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<sup>7</sup> Athens' suburbs.

*The internet is also on fire by adolescents who vehemently express their indignation and commit to win the day and reclaim the future. Tens of thousands of pupils respond to peer initiatives on facebook, who invite them to participate in occupations all over the country, with the 3 October as a milestone.*

*The occupations are about the lack of books, teachers, and resources; against the merging of schools; in defense of free public education and higher education; and the status of universities as sanctuaries. The children's demands are all inclusive; they range from the smallest to the most crucial of issues. And yes, they even demand that [...] they will not increase the VAT rate on items at the school canteen (Avgi, 2011b).*

We see that in order to denounce government policies and to stir public opinion, the text presents the pupils as children, or as 'the unarmed 16-year-old-enemies', who are incapable of harming the Ministry. This way, however, the youth's power to actively play a part in social and political life is seriously undermined. On the other hand, 'the adolescents' indignation and their decision to win the day' are presented to have universal consequences. Adolescence is idealized (Lesko, 1996), because it is constructed as inherently revolutionary, able to sway all other age groups. The hypostatization of adolescence is quite evident in the following statements, that present the pupils' local struggles as part of a wider political mobilization against the memorandum:

*Everybody [...] had probably long been expecting an outrage by the pupils. To be honest, it would have been strange if it did not happen. [...] Now the children are indeed protesting; and they express their dissent about everything; from the tiniest to the gravest issue. They protest about the books they did not get, the teachers that are lacking, the education system that drains them (when schools are open), the library that was closed down, the kilometer-long way to school (at districts were schools have been merged), the horrible school buildings, the dirty classrooms, the authoritarian principle, the meager pocket money (due to the crisis), and that everything in the school canteen is getting more expensive...*

*Kids are revolting. They revolt against their parents who had their salaries slashed, or lost their job; who calculate their limited income hoping that there must be some mistake, because the money is not enough to cover the expenses. What will they tell the landlord? How will they pay the bills? 'We can't afford to give you any pocket-money right now, do not you understand? Maybe you could go to the cinema some other time'.*

*Children express their frustration because neither the grandfather has anything to offer anymore; his pension was also diminished. How far will this situation go? What else is ours to see?*

*They protest for the present. They do not even think of the future; they do not want to, because it seems even bleaker than the present. 'I do not have any money, my child', ordinary people say. They are the people who, when the children asked 'are you with us', responded with a big 'yes'.*

*It is the first time that school occupations, which are more than 630 by now, have gained such a support from the pupils' families. These are the families that have been deeply affected by the crisis, yet are struggling to survive and provide for their children.*

*Pupils also protest on behalf of their parents, and this is a completely unprecedented phenomenon in pupils' mobilizations. Maybe this is precisely the trait that outrages the government of the memorandum, making it so willing to suppress the occupations at any cost. If the shock doctrine succeeds at breaking the youth, then nobody else will dare to react anymore... (Stefanakou, 2011)*

A fundamental issue that emerges from the antagonism between hegemonic (pro-memorandum), and counter-hegemonic (counter-memorandum) discourses about the occupation of school built environments, pupils' mobilizations, and the subsequent loss of school-hours, is the relation between young people, educational space and politics.

### ***Space and power***

Compulsory education and the confinement of pupils to determined disciplinary spaces embody dominant hypostatized ideas and assumptions about the social position and the nature of childhood. Children are, therefore, considered to depend on adults (parents or teachers); to lack experience and knowledge; to have a limited participation in decision making about matters that concern them; and to need their everyday lives to be monitored and controlled. Moreover, educational practices are the material evidence that childhood is generally addressed as coherent and universal, as they claim to equally serve the needs and interests of all the pupils. School is a social field where the limits between children and adults are clear, discernible, and

strict; consequently children are constantly surveilled and controlled. Drawing from Simmel (Lechner, 1991: 198), we could claim that a rigidly restricted and enclosed space such as the school, might make subjects even more aware of a specific social order. However, the school's detailed spatial arrangement does not only intensify the imposed order, but it also makes more evident the antagonisms and conflicts between pupils and teachers.

The schools have been appropriated by the pupils who redefined space, and created their own territory, far from adult control and surveillance. The exclusion of adults from school grounds upsets dominant power relations between children and adults, challenging fixed beliefs about the meaning of being or acting as a child, and certainties considering age categories and child development.

Besides, the occupation of institutional spaces such as schools invalidates their panoptical purpose (Solomon, 1992; Pechtelidis, 2011b), which depends on a particular organization of time and space, and the way teachers operate to achieve specific ethical and political aims, such as the formation of docile bodies and the preservation of school and public order. To 'blind the surveilling eye' of school and social authorities, reinforces the threatening and menacing presence of the young people who participate in the occupations. From the perspective of the hegemonic discourse, school occupations are an indicator of insufficient structural organization, the absence of rules, excessive freedom, and bad influences. Consequently, in the social imaginary, occupations symbolize danger, because they challenge the limits of young people's accepted mobility, activity, and social contacts. Young occupants are out of the reach of adult surveillance and control, outside the realm of authority, and thus they are considered out of place.

Everyday young people face an adult world that is prejudiced and indifferent towards their problems; therefore, they often have no other choice than engage in symbolic forms of protest like the occupation of an emblematic territory, such as a school building. Obviously, youth mobilizations begin from their own social locations. This means that they have to construct their own spaces within spaces that are alien to them (Roche, 1999). Occupation is their last resource of political protest. It is well known by various research findings (Gordon, 2010; Rheingans and Hollands, 2013) that the occupied space is one of pupils' and students' most powerful strategies, because it enables them to sustain a political campaign and attract public interest, something they consider impossible to achieve otherwise.

As Rheingans and Hollands (2013) claim, built environment is a battleground and the relationship between space and power works both ways; acting both to liberate as well as to control. The dominant sociological ideas (Giddens, 1991; Beck, 1992; Beck & Beck-Gernsheims, 2003) about youth and space fail to consider education as a significant political space. However, according to Rheingans and Hollands (2013), educational built environment remains a physical space that young people occupy for significant periods in order to promote and sustain their interests and demands. For instance, the school becomes the pupils' territory, where they can create unofficial forms of community, 'communities of protest' (Diani, 2009: 66), and to produce new forms of subjectivity based on solidarity and bonding amongst subjects with similar experiences (Hopkins et al., 2011; Salter and Kay, 2011; Biggs, 2011; Casserly, 2011; Rheingans and Hollands, 2013). The actual act of taking space from school authorities' control offers an opportunity for embodied hierarchies in the institution to be reversed and resisted (Gordon, 2010). Occupations are threatening



precisely because their dynamics undermine traditional forms of control, that adults impose on youth's social contacts and experiences.

### ***Young people's political participation and schooling***

Makrinioti (2012: 56) claims that young people's political participation gives prominence to the contradictory beliefs about the uneasy relationship between children and politics, and brings to the fore the need to control childhood, which is considered potentially threatening. Cunningham and Lavallete (2004) claim that whereas childhood is perceived as a time of schooling, children are hardly instructed on political issues, as neither society or school give them any opportunities to engage politically. Consequently, 'citizenship education' involves nothing more than a strictly apolitical individualistic version of the political (Cunningham & Lavallete, 2004). Makrinioti (2012: 56-57) refers to citizenship education both in Greece, and in the U.K., which she considers a telling expression of the school's attitude towards political education, stressing the enormous gap between its proclaimed aims and actual educational results. Typically, citizenship education aims to prompt critical thinking, and public engagement; in effect, though, it channels pupils into predetermined (that is controllable) social and political roles (Makrinioti & Solomon, 1999). Citizenship education as taught in schools foregrounds specific moral responsibilities that meticulously delineate what citizens should (or should not) do at the level of social interaction; however it does not mention the citizens' right to criticize, to protest, to change, or to subvert bad laws and unfair policies (Makrinioti, 2012: 57). This way the pupils' preparation in public life is more or less a spoof, because 'it begins and ends with activities such as planting trees, cleaning beaches, or in the worst case the 'Adolescents' National Parliament' (Makrinioti, 2012).

We could claim that this apolitical and individualistic version of the political, produced through citizenship and school education as a whole, is related to the hegemonic discourse of post-political neoliberal bio-power (Douzinas, 2011). By the term post-politics (Ranciere, 1991; Crouch, 2007; Mouffe, 2008) I refer to the descending autonomy of political authority and its sub-ordination to financial powers and external interests. Post-political governance ceases to form and to organise social relations; it is limited to an administrative role within a fluid and unstable environment that is constantly influenced by the fluctuations of the financial capital and the shifts in the interests of the power bloc of the financial and political elites. The technocratic ‘realism’ of post-politics is correlated with bio-power. Bio-power (Foucault, 2008) is understood as a technology of governance in the broad sense of guidance towards specific ethical and political goals; it aims directly at the subjects’ body and spirit (mostly of the children and the young), and it controls them through their formation. In this sense bio-power is the power over human life. The neo-liberal socio-economic system is based upon the bio-political control of subjectivity and desire. Along with commodities, the bio-political system produces subjects who accept such a totalizing mode of economic, social, and ideological production, thus conforming to the choices they are given by the system. Characteristics of the neo-liberal subject are individualism, consumerism and the lack of political interest.

In my opinion, ‘citizenship education’ is a bio-political technology, which in practice sidelines any participation of young people in public life. Even more, it produces an apolitical and individualistic version of the political. Nevertheless, pupils involved in the occupations demonstrated a will for collective action. They sought collective solutions to collective problems such as the privatization of public education, poverty, degeneration of democracy, precarious life chances, etc.

Additionally, young occupants pursued a compromise between collective and individual interests. This way, they challenged both the bio-political post-democratic<sup>8</sup> governmental technology of ‘citizenship education’ and the dominant theoretical ideas about youth politics in late modernity, which have underestimated the possibilities of collective action in favor of more individualized and post-materialist forms of politics (Furlong and Cartmel, 2007; Rheingans and Hollands, 2013). They challenged Giddens’ (1991) and Becks’ (1992) idea about young people being incapable of acting collectively due to an inevitable move towards a more individualized society and the subsequent dissolution of traditional political institutions and affiliations. Collective actions like the occupation of school built environments also question the ‘apathy or disinterest model’, which underlines a low youth political awareness and participation. In fact, they declare that the individualization process is incomplete and changeable (Marsh, et al., 2007; Furlong and Cartmel, 2007; Rheingans and Hollands, 2013).

Furthermore, the young participants at the occupations challenge the division made by Giddens (1991) between ‘emancipatory traditional politics’ with a focus on reducing social inequality and oppression, and ‘life politics’ which is supposed to concern ‘lifestyle’, ‘choice’ and ‘self-actualization’ (Furlong and Cartmel, 2007; Rheingans and Hollands, 2013). Pupils locate their struggle within a broader critique against neoliberalism, cuts at the public sector, and the current monetary crisis, challenging the sharp division between materialist values, focusing on the essential human needs, and post-materialist political values (Inglehart, 1977, 1990) which focus on self-expression, quality of life, autonomy and belonging. Furlong and Cartmel (2007:134) argue for the changing style of young people’s involvement in

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<sup>8</sup> For a very interesting discussion of the future of post-democracy in Greece see Stavrakakis, 2013.

politics and their increased participation in the new social movements (Feixa et al., 2009) and ‘single issue’ politics. In this context, the pupils’ occupation movement was not a typical class-based movement although it is clear that the occupants placed class issues such as exploitation and inequality, rights, life chances provided by education at the core of their political agenda. Most of the occupations raised issues not only about public education cuts, future job prospects and austerity measures, but also considered, more broadly, the purpose of education in society. It is also important to consider that political activity is differently perceived by adult researchers and young people in many cases (Henn et al., 2002). In addition, it is testified that young people participate more in politics if they are allowed to define political activity in their own terms (White et al., 2000).

### *Conclusions*

What becomes evident from the occupants’ demands and the pupils’ mobilizations altogether, and is confirmed by the findings of the relevant research, is that young people are very much aware of the political, social and financial situation, they reflect upon it and react accordingly (Cunningham & Lavalette, 2004; Such, Walker & Walker, 2005; Furlong and Cartmel, 2007; Blankemeyer, Walker & Svitak, 2009; Pechtelidis, 2011a; Makrinioti, 2012; Rheingans and Hollands, 2013). Young people reclaim educational spaces and in turn declare the need for a politicized understanding of the built environment. School’s built environments embody particular values and hierarchies, and attempt to ideologically discipline youth bodies; however, forms of political action such as school occupations challenge precisely this form of discipline.

The school occupations generally caused confusion about the role and participation of young people in public life. This bemusement arises from the inevitable uncertainty around the nature of ‘childhood’ and ‘youth’, and the shift of

power between young people and adults. The mobilizations of youth in December 2008, and in fall 2010 and 2011, which included everyday rallies at the center of major cities in Greece, students' meetings, general assemblies, and the occupation of school and university built environments, are evidence of such a shift.

It is quite interesting that at one level the hegemonic discourse expresses apprehension about young people's contempt for politics. At a different level, however, the youth is materially and symbolically excluded from active political participation, and collective action. Whenever the young transcend the limits of their exclusion from the political, they produce a series of subversions threatening the given order of things. This usually results in the attempt to control any kind of disturbance, in order to restore social order. In this context pupil's political mobilizations and the subsequent subversion of the status quo, invite various explanations, which usually underestimate, and seek to control juvenile political action. Generally, the Greek media, the government, and the political parties in support of the memorandum interpreted the pupils' protests and political interventions:

- (a) as a form of delinquency (focusing on the vandalisms)
- (b) as impulsive. Children and adolescents are considered to be inherently driven by spontaneity, rage, and anger; hence, they are supposed to react emotionally, instead of rationally.
- (c) with depreciation. Because of their young age, pupils are considered vulnerable, weak, and easily carried away, instigated and manipulated to serve alien interests.
- (d) with anxiety about the pupils' future career.
- (e) as an indication of adult incompetence and institutional inadequacy to effectively control the youth.

In conclusion, the representation of pupils' occupation movement in television, Internet, and the press, and the declarations and operations of the state education authorities reveal perplexity, anxiety, and fear. In many occasions the way the events were handled by the media, the political parties, and the social and educational bodies disclosed the exploitation of youth protests by various groups. Furthermore, the adults' response to the protests was telling of their political views and reflected their stance towards the memorandum.

Pupils demonstrated a need and will for collective action and they also emphasized the political process of merging not only collective and individual interests, but also materialist and post-materialist values. In late modernity, young people are still likely to locate their struggles within a broader critique against cuts at the public sector, unemployment, and capitalism. In this empirically grounded framework, I claim that childhood and youth studies should re-consider young people's political involvement (Skelton, 2011; Such, Walker & Walker, 2005; Rheingans and Hollands, 2013), as well as their potential for social change.

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Ελληνική Εταιρεία Πολιτικής Επιστήμης  
Δίκτυο Ανάλυσης Πολιτικού Λόγου

Στόχος του ερευνητικού δικτύου για την «Ανάλυση του Πολιτικού Λόγου» είναι: (α) η προαγωγή του επιστημονικού προβληματισμού γύρω από την έννοια και τις θεωρίες του λόγου (discourse – discours - diskurs) και (β) η συστηματική εξέταση του πολιτικού λόγου και των επιχειρημάτων που αρθρώνουν οι πολιτικοί δρώντες (κόμματα, κινήματα, ΜΜΕ, κ.λπ.) καθώς εμπλέκονται σε σχέσεις αντιπαράθεσης ή συναίνεσης.

Η δημοσίευση σειράς «Κειμένων Εργασίας» (Working Papers), τα οποία αναρτώνται στον ιστότοπο του δικτύου και της Ελληνικής Εταιρείας Πολιτικής Επιστήμης (ΕΕΠΕ), αποτελεί αξονική προτεραιότητα του δικτύου για την «Ανάλυση του Πολιτικού Λόγου». Τα κείμενα εργασίας λειτουργούν ως παρεμβάσεις στο δημόσιο διάλογο είτε και ως ερεθίσματα για περαιτέρω επιστημονικό προβληματισμό. Βοηθούν δε τους συγγραφείς τους να ελέγξουν «υπό κατασκευή» επιχειρήματα και υποθέσεις εργασίας πριν λάβουν την τυπική μορφή επιστημονικών δημοσιεύσεων. Εξέχουσα θέση στο πλαίσιο του πρώτου κύκλου «Κειμένων Εργασίας» κατέχει η θεματική που αφορά σε «Λόγους της Κρίσης», σε πολιτικούς λόγους δηλαδή οι οποίοι αρθρώνονται με αναφορά στην τρέχουσα οικονομική -αν και όχι μόνο- κρίση στην Ελλάδα και την ΕΕ.

Τα κείμενα εργασίας που κατατίθενται προς δημοσίευση αξιολογούνται από τουλάχιστον δύο μέλη του δικτύου. Σε κάθε περίπτωση, τα κείμενα εργασίας εκφράζουν τις απόψεις των συγγραφέων τους και δεν απηχούν θέσεις του δικτύου ή της ΕΕΠΕ.