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Praise to the Honoured

by Kostas Bairaktaris, Associate Professor of Clinical Psychology, School of Psychology at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece,

on the occasion of the awarding of an Honorary Doctoral Degree to Peter Lehmann

**Old Building of Philosophy, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki
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There are moments, like this very moment today, which should be imprinted into our minds or be approached as means of influencing the course of history instead of being interpreted within the narrow time limits set by our personal lifetime. For this is the only way, in my opinion, to understand the importance of the venture on behalf of Aristotle University of Thessaloniki to award an honorary doctorate, for the first time globally, to a man with psychiatric experience in recognition of his fight against psychiatric arbitrariness as well as his fight for human rights. These are the moments when questions regarding current issues such as the role of universities, the role of sciences as well as the role of scientists, emerge. And all these issues should be related of course to the social reality or society we live in. This period we are currently going through is considered to be a period of crisis. When we refer to the term crisis today, we mean exclusively an economic crisis. We very rarely refer to or reflect on the level of involvement that the sciences and the mainstream – for many decades now – scientific paradigm have within this economic crisis. We hardly wonder whether what we call mainstream economical system should directly concern scientists and universities. By this, I mean that “singing the same old song” is something extremely current for sciences these days, considering the fact that, scientists and various scientific fields “reproduce” theories that they draw from the heritage of previous generations of scientists. At the same time, there is a lack of production of new scientific discourse. The scientific discourse that is produced in universities and the practical applications which result from this are limited in its commercial use exclusively. This use serves needs that are determined exclusively by the capitalistic system.

It would therefore be very interesting to examine issues, within this framework, that are related to current and encouraging terms such as the term “innovation”. We should examine whether these kinds of “terms” are approached in a mono-dimensional way. For it is well known, not only within the academic community but also within society, that when we refer to the term innovation we mean mainly the scientific knowledge spread within different fields and scientists that serve in the best possible way the needs of the market or the needs of the

mainstream system of economical development. We should therefore wonder whether there is any kind of innovative approach, action or search that exceeds as well as abolishes this commercial perception of “innovation”. The university, in my opinion, should discuss these issues in public, in- and outside of the university in order to promote the meaning of “knowledge search” and the role that social sciences can play after they have escaped the confines of a university, and have managed to link themselves with the rest of the community. In this way, the crisis, the crisis of sciences, of scientists and the crisis of universities can find common ground with the community and the crisis of the mainstream paradigms can be transformed into a fertile ground for their abolishment.

So, instead of looking for mechanisms of control, mechanisms of conformity, of complete standardization thus “reforms” that serve these mechanisms, we can invent new things that will lead us to new creations. Therefore, we will accomplish a type of surge, escaping in a creative way from the poverty of a university that serves standardized knowledge and individualism in favour of profit and speculation.

Similar questions are asked in different places where mechanisms of control, of exclusion and the scientific fields that invent these mechanisms, which lead people to a complete subjugation and conformity, are constructed. These places are places that we all know by the name Psychiatric Institutions and Psychiatry.

Many of the people that are present in this room today, people with psychiatric experience, native and foreign, have experienced the consequences of these mechanisms of control and conformity in the worst possible way, into their bodies and into their souls. They have experienced the barbarity of psychiatric arbitrariness and the tolerance of this arbitrariness on behalf of the society. The hopeful message, however, is that through this diachronic conflict between our humanistic and non humanistic relationship and encounters with our fellow human beings that suffer mentally, the answers are given by those people themselves and should be recognised as fellow citizens that have the same rights as the rest of the people in the society.

It is therefore important to look for methods in which we could overcome our monologue of expertise, as this is expressed in its conventional or in its so called alternative form. To look for ways in which we will stop shrinking our fellow human beings into symptoms, into diagnostic categories so that they will no longer have to deal with the conventional and violent methods with which we are all familiar. Look for ways in which we will stop manipulating their behaviour and their words into symptoms with the aim of legalizing and promoting the necessity of our presence regarding their treatment, serving a certain social entrusting. The questions that are raised are therefore mainly concerning ourselves and the ways in which we will manage to overcome our monologue, to recognize our insufficiency, to meet on an equal basis with the people that suffer **or** to trade in various conventional or even alternative ways, their existence and their pain.

Peter Lehmann and his fellow wayfarers have been demonstrating to us their efforts and their fights on a scientific level as well as in actions, since the 70's. They have been showing a way that helps us more than it helps them – a way to overcome and abolish our monologue, a way to meet again with our fellow human beings in a different way and on the grounds of our

common problems, concerns and potentials. So, Peter Lehmann has contributed to a great extent in my opinion, to the search of this alternative discourse, to the abolishment of the monologue and to the development of a dialogue. In this dialogue, the voice of the people with psychiatric experience is no longer a voice of delusions, it is not an interpretation of their words or their voices, but is rather a human existence, with the right to being different, just as we keep and support the same right for ourselves. In this sense, I believe that Aristotle University's decision to honour Peter Lehmann with an honorary doctorate in recognition of his professional and humanistic work for the rights of people with psychiatric experience, apart from being symbolic, has practical consequences and dimensions that we might not fully value or appreciate today in the framework of our personal lifetime.

Thank you.