Brief Biography written by Victor Wallis in 2022.

Born in El Paso, Texas, George Katsiaficas grew up in the US Army. By the time he left home to go to college at MIT, he had lived more than half his life abroad, in Germany (Berlin, Frankfurt, and Wertheim-am-Main) and Taipei, Taiwan. In the US, he went to public schools in Brooklyn and Queens, New York, and Baltimore, Maryland, where he finished high school at Baltimore Polytechnic Institute (a public inner city school) in 1966.

From 1969, Katsiaficas has been active in social movements. In 1970, in the midst of the nationwide student strike, he was graduated from MIT while in solitary confinement after being convicted of “Disturbing a School” for organizing anti-war protests. MIT mobilized charges against him using a long disregarded 18th century statute. So egregiously unjust was MIT’s targeting of him that even his mother was imprisoned for a week in the notorious Charles Street Jail for objecting to the judge’s refusal to allow a witness whose testimony would have cleared him of the charges against him.

After being released from prison, he helped to realize an idea that came to him while in solitary and founded the Red Bookstore (which today survives as Boston’s Lucy Parsons Center). Escaping continual arrests and prosecution in Cambridge for his support of the Black Panther Party, he moved to California, where he helped to create a deep network of countercultural counterinstitutions in Ocean Beach, San Diego during the 1970s. Shortly after he moved to California, his collective house was shot up and his car firebombed by the FBI-organized all-Mormon Secret Army Organization. The FBI referred to him in their files as a “New Left/anarchist,” and he was classified “Priority 1 ADEX,” indicating that he was to be immediately arrested in the event of a national emergency.

In 1972, he moved briefly to Miami, Florida to help organize protests at the Republican National Convention. After returning to Ocean Beach, he cofounded Red House, an activist commune built upon agitating and building counterinstitutions to organize a revolutionary base area in Ocean Beach. Arrested during a shoot-out in which two policemen and one comrade, Peter Mahoney, were wounded, he went on to lead an anti-police movement from 1974 that aligned with Chicanos and African Africans to get the police chief of San Diego fired. He founded another collectively managed non-profit bookstore, the Left Bank, helped to organize a food coop (which today survives as Ocean Beach People’s Food Store), and led study groups based upon the writings of James and Grace Lee Boggs. After driving a taxi for several years, he became friends with Herbert Marcuse and enrolled at UCSD, where he was active against the CIA and for Palestinian self-determination. Despite two trials brought by UCSD, he escaped expulsion from graduate school because of overwhelming popular support.

With Marcuse’s support, he received a Fulbright Fellowship and enrolled at the Free University of Berlin. In his doctoral thesis, he uncovered the “Eros Effect” to explain the global synchronicity of movements in 1968. His 1987 book, *The Imagination of the New Left: A Global Analysis of 1968* was the first study to comprehend a globally unified uprising among the plethora of diverse social movements that had emerged simultaneously and previously been understood within national boundaries. The Eros Effect portrays how and why social insurgencies simultaneously erupt as much in relationship to each other as to larger economic and political dynamics. He developed the concept to explain the rapid spread of revolutionary aspirations and actions during the strikes of May 1968 in France and May 1970 in the US as well as the proliferation of the global movement in this same period of time as evident in the spontaneous spread of revolutionary aspirations in a chain reaction of uprisings and the massive occupation of public space. No other theory culd adequately explain the sudden entry into history of millions of ordinary people who acted in a unified fashion, intuitively believing that they could change the direction of their society. From his case studies, he came to understand how in moments of the eros effect, universal interests become generalized at the same time as the dominant values of society are negated (such as national chauvinism, hierarchy, and individualism). Katsiaficas’ 1987 book was the first to discuss how contemporary social movements have changed the world without seizing political power. In 2007 at a conference at Queen’s University in Canada, he maintained that despite the relatively quiet period then predominant, protests on a global scale were soon to erupt, a prediction verified by the subsequent Arab Spring, Occupy Wall Street, and Black Lives Matter movements. In 2017, Jason del Gandio and AK Thompson edited a volume of responses to the Eros Effect: *Spontaneous Combustion: The Eros Effect and Global Revolution* (SUNY Press).

For years, Katsiaficas taught at Boston’s Wentworth Institute of Technology, a working-class college, during which time he was a research affiliate at Harvard University in both European and Korean studies. After his book on 1968 was translated into Korean and became something of a best-seller, he visited Gwangju for the first time in 1999, where he eventually married filmmaker Shin Eun-jung, whose critical documentary about Harvard won a prize for Best Director of a Documentary at the 2011 New York International Film Festival. In 2007, Katsiaficas was awarded a Fulbright fellowship to Korea, and he lived and taught at Chonnam National University in Gwangju, South Korea for many years. Katsiaficas’ research and writings have consistently challenged Eurocentric and traditional approaches to social theory. When writing about movements, his vision is not restricted only to the West. Inspired by the 1980 Gwangju People’s Uprising, he spent 13 years of research before completing his two-volume volume book,  *Asia’s Unknown Uprisings,* which places the 1980 Gwangju Uprising at the center of an Asian wave of grassroots insurgencies that overthrew eight dictatorships in six years.

His second book, *The Subversion of Politics: European Autonomous Social Movements and the Decolonization of Everyday Life* (1997), analyzed post-1968 radical formations in Germany, Switzerland, Italy, Holland and Denmark. Katsiaficas’ writing about the German autonomous movement, with its emphasis on revolutionary politics, squatted housing and cultural spaces, and street militancy including black bloc tactics, was influential for many anarchists and other US-based radicals at that time. The protest tactic of the black bloc, for which demonstrators all dress in black, cover their faces, and move as a coordinated group to neutralize police surveillance and attacks, was first used in the US in the early 1990s at the Earth Day Wall Street Action and the DC march against the first US Gulf War. Katsiaficas’ work about the Autonomen traces the lineage from 1968 through Italian feminism, the antinuclear movements, and antifascism, to their confrontational politics. He also draws out the (anti)politics and the theory of autonomy from his movement investigations. He conclusively shows how the German Green Party grew out of extraparliamentary protests, and further portrays how grassroots militancy opened space for the huge participation in subsequent mobilizations for nuclear disarmament, the massive protests that opened the door for Gorbachev to relinquish Russian control of Eastern European buffer states once he realized that Germany would not invade the Soviet Union again in the 20th Century. He is critical of Antonio Negri and forms of “Autonomía” that failed to recognize how feminist autonomy preceded and patterned subsequent forms.

Katsiaficas is distinct from many academics in that he has also been a dedicated organizer. He goes beyond participant-observer to militant researcher, someone who lives amongst and collaborates with the people he writes about and sees his research as advancing global activism, not simply describing or analyzing it. This doesn’t bias him against abstraction and analysis, however, but rather grounds his theoretical work in struggles to transform the world. His prioritizing *praxis* explains why his theorizing appears at the conclusion of his books, rather than in the opening chapter(s) as is typically the case for academic monographs. It is the history of social and political revolt woven together with his personal commitment to radical politics that enlightens his work. Together with Kathleen Cleaver, he edited *Liberation, Imagination and the Black Panther Party*.  His latest book, *The Global Imagination of 1968: Revolution and Counterrevolution* (PM Press), discusses Sixties’ movements in more than fifty countries and outlines global waves of uprisings subsequent to 1968. During his international sojourns, he has been active in liberation struggles in Germany, Lebanon, Korea, Greece and other places. Translations of his books have appeared in Korean, Russian, Greek, Spanish.

He was editor of *New Political Science*, 1998-2003, Chairperson of the Caucus for a New Political Science, American Political Science Association, 1989‑1991, and founded a book series for the Caucus. He was a central organizer of a 2003 Harvard University conference about the Jeju Massacre of 1948, and in Bangladesh in 2010, he initiated a conference on that country’s 1990 uprising. Noteworthy awards he has received include the Kim Dae-jung Scholar’s Award (Hu-Kwang Award) at Chonnam National University in May 2016, being made an Honorary Citizen of Gwangju, South Korea, in 2016, the Charles A. McCoy Career Achievement Award for a progressive political scientist who has had a long career as a writer, teacher and activist presented by the Section for a New Political Science of the American Political Science Association in 2011, and in 2010 an award for Outstanding Service from the May Mothers’ House (widows and mothers of men killed in the 1980 uprising for democracy in Gwangju). He often participates in meetings of the International Herbert Marcuse Society.

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