

REVISITING BLACK MOUNTAIN COLLEGE. TEACHING TO TRANSGRESS

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Every art university wants to give its graduates the greatest opportunities after graduation, as artists, curators, actors, conductors, musicians, designers, filmmakers, or dancers. How to get from A to Z in this project is based on the respective creativity concept. Do you want to equip the students with management knowledge in order to pave their way into the creative industries? Do you want to provide them with expertise in their field, or is critical thinking required above all, as well as the ability to cooperate that enables students to survive in an extremely complex world?

In the following argumentation, I want to emphasize the historical moment of the renewed contemporary interest in other forms of knowledge production. So, the wish to install new forms of learning and teaching seems sometimes to be fueled by the idea of a shortcut, to get to innovative results, but without deep changes in organisations. The intensive work on structures and attitudes could be circumscribed somehow. Of course, this reminds us of *The New Spirit of Capitalism*,¹ the theoretical attempt to grasp the neoliberal reorganisation of work, without reorganising where the profit is going.

So, to understand what other forms of knowledge production in contemporary universities might entail, I would like to have a look at historical positions and movements that struggled for new perspectives in art and education.

The fascination today with Black Mountain College consists in the fact that a kind of wild knowledge developed, conceivably far away from ECTS points, fixed timetables, and curricula—that the artists and students presented there worked together enthusiastically, in unlikely and free constellations. They understood teaching and learning as collaborative proces-

ses; they cultivated, cooked, and ate together; they talked and lived together. The situation was certainly hierarchical, however, and only wealthy students could afford to attend the college. The admission of African-American students was a major exception at Black Mountain College. Gender differences definitely existed, but in some respects were also questioned, since a relative freedom to follow what one wanted was available.²

I therefore see it as symptomatic that, after the Europe-wide process of schooling and standardisation, there is a desire for free, wild thinking and wild action. One can classify our project to revisit Black Mountain College as typical for the situation today.³

As it happens, the very reason for founding a new school for further education was that the founders John Andrew Rice, Theodore Dreier, Frederick Georgia, and Ralph Lounsbury were controversially dismissed as faculty from Rollins College for refusing to sign a loyalty pledge.⁴ The disobedient colleagues together developed a concept for the new Black Mountain College, founded on three cornerstones: “complete democratic self-rule, extensive work in the creative arts, and interdisciplinary study.”⁵ I would therefore argue that a disobedient attitude is inscribed in the myths and the ideological settings of Black Mountain College.

2 See also video clips: <https://www.widewalls.ch/black-mountain-college/>, accessed Feb. 1, 2019.

3 The the Bologna declaration was signed by education ministers from 29 European countries in 1999. see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bologna_Process

4 See Jennifer M. Ritter, “Beyond Progressive Education: Why John Andrew Rice Really Opened Black Mountain College,” *Rollins Undergraduate Research Journal* 5, no. 2 (Fall 2011), accessed Feb. 1, 2019, <https://scholarship.rollins.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1044&context=rurj>.

5 William C. Rice, introduction to “Black Mountain College Memoirs,” by John Andrew Rice, *The Southern Review* 23, no. 5 (1989): 569, here quoted from Ritter, “Beyond Progressive Education.”

1 Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Gregory Elliott 2 (London: Verso Books, 2005).



1926 as sketch wall carpet by Anni Alber

IMMACULATE HEART COLLEGE ART DEPARTMENT RULES

- Rule 1 FIND A PLACE YOU TRUST AND THEN TRY TRUSTING IT FOR A WHILE.
- Rule 2 GENERAL DUTIES OF A STUDENT:
PULL EVERYTHING OUT OF YOUR TEACHER.
PULL EVERYTHING OUT OF YOUR FELLOW STUDENTS.
- Rule 3 GENERAL DUTIES OF A TEACHER:
PULL EVERYTHING OUT OF YOUR STUDENTS.
- Rule 4 CONSIDER EVERYTHING AN EXPERIMENT.
- Rule 5 BE SELF DISCIPLINED. THIS MEANS FINDING SOMEONE WISE OR SMART AND CHOOSING TO FOLLOW THEM.
TO BE DISCIPLINED IS TO FOLLOW IN A GOOD WAY.
TO BE SELF DISCIPLINED IS TO FOLLOW IN A BETTER WAY.
- Rule 6 NOTHING IS A MISTAKE. THERE'S NO WIN AND NO FAIL. THERE'S ONLY MAKE.
- Rule 7 The only rule is work.
IF YOU WORK IT WILL LEAD TO SOMETHING.
IT'S THE PEOPLE WHO DO ALL OF THE WORK ALL THE TIME WHO EVENTUALLY CATCH ON TO THINGS.
- Rule 8 DONT TRY TO CREATE AND ANALYSE AT THE SAME TIME. THEY'RE DIFFERENT PROCESSES.
- Rule 9 BE HAPPY WHENEVER YOU CAN MANAGE IT. ENJOY YOURSELF. IT'S LIGHTER THAN YOU THINK.
- Rule 10 "WE'RE BREAKING ALL OF THE RULES. EVEN OUR OWN RULES AND HOW DO WE DO THAT? BY LEAVING PLENTY OF ROOM FOR X QUANTITIES." JOHN CAGE

HELPFUL HINTS: ALWAYS BE AROUND. COME OR GO TO EVERYTHING. ALWAYS GO TO CLASSES. READ ANYTHING YOU CAN GET YOUR HANDS ON. LOOK AT MOVIES CAREFULLY OFTEN. SAVE EVERYTHING-IT MIGHT COME IN HANDY LATER.
THERE SHOULD BE NEW RULES NEXT WEEK.

Already the theorist whose ideas inspired BMC, John Dewey, mentioned in *Art as Experience* in 1934⁶ that he considered participation, not representation, the essence of democracy. He also insisted on the harmony between democracy and scientific methods: an ever-expanding and self-critical community of inquiry. As Jesse Goodman remarks, this has far-reaching consequences: “Drawing upon the thinking of John Dewey and recent critics of schooling and society, this paper argues for viewing education as a vehicle for critical democracy. From this perspective, schools are seen as forms for cultural politics that reflect, mediate, and potentially transform the societal order within which they exist.”⁷ The notion of democracy appeared to be quite radical, being very advanced for the time; however, from a contemporary viewpoint, equality was positioned as the equality of white men.

The other important inspiration for experiments at Black Mountain College came from ideas originating in the experimental art and architecture university of Bauhaus. The Bauhaus University was closed in 1933; the German fascists understood very well that the concern for better future living conditions for a diversity of people was not part of their cultural agenda. In addition, some lecturers had to flee Germany due to political or so-called “racial” reasons (whatever the Nazis understood as “race”). Overnight between November 9 and November 10, 1938, in an incident known as *Kristallnacht*, Nazis in Germany torched synagogues, vandalized Jewish homes, schools, and businesses, and killed close to 100 Jews.⁸ After years of su-

ppression, severe persecution now started, and some German Jewish intellectuals managed to leave Germany in time, because after 1938 even this became illegal.

So, from the beginning, policies inside and outside of the art institution influenced the beginning of Black Mountain College. One of the most surprising and often neglected outcomes of this horrible development is that in Tel Aviv one can find typical Bauhaus buildings. Emily J. Levine names as German Jewish refugees in the US: “Anni and Josef Albers, as well as their colleague Xanti Schawinsky, former student of Oskar Schlemmer, psychoanalyst Fritz Moellenhoff, and director of the Cologne Opera, Heinrich Jalowetz, for whom Arthur Schoenberg sent a letter of recommendation from Los Angeles. (Wives were also in tow, usually as poorly paid as they were highly trained in literature and the arts.)”⁹ In the first years, Josef Albers could

out by SA paramilitary forces and civilians throughout Nazi Germany on 9–10 November 1938. The German authorities looked on without intervening. The name *Kristallnacht* (“Crystal Night”) comes from the shards of broken glass that littered the streets after the windows of Jewish-owned stores, buildings and synagogues were smashed. Jewish homes, hospitals and schools were ransacked as the attackers demolished buildings with sledgehammers. The rioters destroyed 267 synagogues throughout Germany, Austria and the Sudetenland. Over 7,000 Jewish businesses were damaged or destroyed, and 30,000 Jewish men were arrested and incarcerated in concentration camps [British historian Martin Gilbert wrote that no event in the history of German Jews between 1933 and 1945 was so widely reported as it was happening, and the accounts from foreign journalists working in Germany sent shockwaves around the world. The *Times* of London observed on 11 November 1938: “No foreign propagandista bent upon blackening Germany before the world could outdo the tale of burnings and beatings, of blackguardly assaults on defenseless and innocent people, which disgraced that country yesterday.” See: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kristallnacht>.

⁹ Emily J. Levine, *From Bauhaus to Black Mountain: German Émigrés and the Birth of American Modernism*, in *Los Angeles Review of Books*, accessed Sept. 1, 2018, <https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/bauhaus-black-mountain-ger>

⁶ John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (New York: Minton, Balch & Company, 1934).

⁷ Jesse Goodman, “Education for Critical Democracy,” *Journal for Education* 171, no. 2, *Language Culture and Schooling*, Boston University, Boston (1989): 88.

⁸ *Kristallnacht* or the *Night of Broken Glass*, also called the *November Pogrom(s)*, was a pogrom against Jews carried

not speak English, and Anni Albers acted as his translator, which might signify the situation women found themselves in at the College.

How to deal with students, how to project a utopian horizon, concepts which inform an attitude as teacher or student that could be thought of as interpellation. This term coined by Louis Althusser implies that the way a subject is addressed has a deep impact on the formulation (or production) of his/ her subjectivity. Insofar as any pedagogical input would have far-reaching consequences, it influences the construction of subjectivity, the relation between singularities and communities, an understanding of gender roles, and so forth. This could, of course, also be argued from Foucault's theoretical perspective, as he sees that the control function is internalized as a main feature of the scopical regime of modernity. Emancipatory education and emancipatory cultural production would embrace diversity, would question their own paradigms, would ask for equality—notwithstanding that certainly at Black Mountain College, for example, no such thing as gender equality existed, or that the students were white, with one exception, or that, of course, a hierarchical situation existed. Even so, the situation opened up, and many unspoken or outspoken concepts of an institution or genre boundaries were called into question. Yet, from Black Mountain College onwards, (and, of course, this is an arbitrary beginning of new approaches to education), the seed of radical education flourished, and I want to follow up quickly on some of them to position our contemporary longing for other learning experiences.

As a very influential figure, Robert Buckminster Fuller is repeatedly mentioned; he experimented with geodesic domes on the basis of a

human-environment ecosystem. As he had dedicated his life to finding new solutions for humanity, he must have been an impressive person. In addition, the short engagements of John Cage as a summer lecturer at Black Mountain College proved to be important. Emma Harris informs us: "Despite his lack of students, for Cage the summer was significant. Robert Rauschenberg had returned in the summer of 1951 with Cy Twombly and remained through the 1952 summer. Rauschenberg's all-white paintings which Cage first viewed that summer were inspiration for his reputation-breaking silent piece 4'33" which is dedicated to Black Mountain student Irwin Kremin and which was first performed by David Tudor on August 29, 1952 at the Maverick Concert Hall in Woodstock. New York."¹⁰

Another most mysterious and most influential incident turned out to be the performance of Theater Piece No. 1 of 1952 by Cage, and while stories about the event differ, it is clear that many teachers were involved and some random system was used to perform it.¹¹ Especially because there is no photographic documentation of the enactment, Theater Piece developed into a legendary myth.¹²

In the following years, John Cage decidedly influenced New Music and Fluxus and other neo-avant-garde movements. In his later position as a lecturer at the New School of Social Research in New York, major Fluxus artists were students in his classes. Fluxus means not only event scores and editions, but also a complete

¹⁰ Mary Emma Harris, "John Cage at Black Mountain: by Mary Emma Harris A Preliminary Thinking," *Journal of Black Mountain College Studies* 4, accessed Mar. 31, 2019, <http://www.blackmountainstudiesjournal.org/volume-iv-9-16/mary-emma-harris-john-cage-at-black-mountain-a-preliminary-thinking/>.

¹¹ Levine, *From Bauhaus to Black Mountain*.

¹² See also the description in the article "Black Mountain: Pedagogy of the Hinge" by Steven Henry Madoff in this issue.

man-emigres-birth-american-modernism/#.

change of paradigms concerning production (in groups or collaborations), distribution (bypassing the gallery system and museums and doing events at auditoriums, at smaller spaces, in the public space and distributing editions through a “mail-order Flux house”), and reception (also in groups, or as mass editions). Furthermore, in many cases the position and therefore the projected image of the artist and the public was completely transformed, as the audience was invited or even forced to participate, which signifies, of course, a completely changed interpellation of the audience. Along these lines of re-reading all positions, one obvious outcome is an entirely changed idea of learning and education. This transgression was enabled by using notation to describe events; these scores made it possible to use everything as material. The following examples demonstrate this:

Event score by Fluxus artist Eric Andersen:
1961 Opus 9

Let a person talk about his/ her ideal(s).

Or, by Yoko Ono, an edition for which she pierced a little hole into cardboard, which was called *A Hole to See the Sky Through*, or Fluxus artist Robert Filliou with this poetic piece from: *Whatever I say is irrelevant if it does not incite you to add up your voice to mine*.

The well-known book by Robert Filliou, *Teaching and Learning as Performing Arts* by Robert Filliou, and *the Reader if he wishes*, with the participation of John Cage, Ben Patterson, George Brecht, Allen Kaprow, Marcelle, Vera and Bjoessi and Karl Rot, Dorothy Iannone, Diter Rot, Joseph Beuys. It is a Multi-book. The space provided for the reader's use is nearly the same as the author's own.¹³ This signifies an emphasis on

¹³ Usually quoted as: Robert Filliou, *Teaching and Learning as Performing Arts*, Koeln, New York, republished in 2014. The whole book is in German and English, and between the section of each language is space on each page for the

the reader as an active contributor, in the way Roland Barthes¹⁴ later describes in the death of the author that an active part of constructing a narrative is on the side of the reader, and in the way he sees writing as a process that is embedded in a broad discourse. The notion of the single author is an invention of modernity.¹⁵ In Robert Filliou's artistic approach, it is notable that he also invited the children of some of the Fluxus artists to contribute, mixing up the position of scholar and teacher, or of subjects and objects of pedagogy. And in our context, it is important to note that he included political statements, like the article on street fighting, in which he draws parallels from the Resistance against the Nazi Regime to protests against racial discrimination in the US to students' revolts in Europe.¹⁶

He shares this attitude, which meanders between politics and aesthetics, with many radical pedagogues, like, for example, Sister Corita Kent, a nun, activist, and artist who was affilia-

reader to become an active contributor. “Lehren und Lernen als Aufführungskünste von Robert Filliou und dem Leser, wenn er will. Unter Mitwirkung von John Cage, Benjamin Patterson, George Brecht, Allen Kaprow, Marcelle, Vera und Bjoessie und Karl Rot, Dorothy Iannone, Diter Rot, Joseph Beuys. Dies ist ein Multibuch. Der Schreibraum des Lesers ist beinahe so umfangreich, wie der des Autors,” also known as *Teaching and Learning as Performing Arts* by Robert Filliou, and *the Reader if he wishes*, with the participation of John Cage, Ben Patterson, George Brecht, Allen Kaprow, Marcelle, Vera and Bjoessi and Karl Rot, Dorothy Iannone, Diter Rot, Joseph Beuys. It is a Multi-book. The space provided for the reader's use is nearly the same as the author's own.”
14 Roland Barthes, “The Death of the Author,” *Image, Music, Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill & Wang, 1977).

15 « La mort de l'auteur » is an article that was first published in English under the title “The Death of the Author (en),” *Aspen Magazine*, n° 5/6, 1967, then in French in 1968 in issue 5 of the journal *Mantéia*, based in Marseille and close to *Tel Quel*. The article was then published as part of the anthology, *Le bruissement de la langue. Essais critiques IV*. See https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roland_Barthes, accessed Sept. 24, 2018.

16 Filliou, *Teaching and Learning as Performing Arts*, p. 208 German version, p. 209 English version.

ted with Black Mountain College. A list of “Some Rules for Students and Teachers,” was first attributed to John Cage, but was later discovered as being written and printed by Kent. It was developed as part of a project for a class she taught in 1967-68, and only the last rule was added by Cage. I will just quote two of the rules: “RULE SIX: Nothing is a mistake. There’s no win and no fail, there’s only make.” (Sister Corita Kent) And the last rule added by John Cage: “RULE TEN: We’re breaking all the rules. Even our own rules. And how do we do that? By leaving plenty of room for X quantities.” Again, for Kent, the connection of art, social justice, and political slogans was evident, especially in her later years. Her involvement in politics and her disagreement with the Catholic Church led her to leave the convent and to found a free community. Her work is today conceived in the realm of feminist positions and is shown at women’s museums.

New forms of learning spread in art and philosophy contexts; like in the beginning of the century when workers engaged in self-education, now student groups read and discussed Marx and Hegel in self-organized seminars. Since the student revolts in the West around 1968, female students demanded to not only just participate in fights on general human rights, but they also understood their position as involved in a power struggle. Gender was observed as a construction of exclusion. Demands by women to equal rights were based on different theoretical notions, which combined psychoanalytic approaches (Freud and Lacan) with post-Marxist positions and theories of power (Foucault) in order to develop new theoretical constructions, like those by Luce Irigaray, Judith Butler, and Julia Kristeva.

In Italy, “Diotima” was founded in 1975 in Milan by philosophers (Luisa Murano and others), a group of feminists who started to have discussions and publish together. This

took place in the context of the “Libreria delle donne di Milano.”

At the core of their concept is a theory of a politics of relations between women, which they called *affidamento* (Italian: to confide in one another). In the practice of *affidamento*, women confer authority and power on each other. This policy leads to a new “symbolic order” in their view, which can only arise, however, if the relationship with the mother is valued as the first relationship. Of course, this position was rejected by other feminists who thought of this approach as too essentialist, especially since the notion of a symbolic order, which draws on Lacanian theory, excludes “women” as subjects from any symbolic order. So, the symbolic order as such and the non-existing female position determine each other. And just to avoid misunderstandings, this is of course a statement that fundamentally critiques patriarchy, and the symbolic order of patriarchy. Women are seen as per definition as a crossed-out subject as a counterpart to male subjectivity, which defines patriarchal society. Nevertheless, the idea of *affidamento* was brought back into the cultural realm by British feminists in recent years in London (Helena Reckitt, Irene Revell, and Lina Džuverović) in the arts, who have based their recurrent reading groups on this notion. The group operates between a public and a non-public, hidden, private event and discusses the intersection of different modes of suppression and subalternity. Undoubtedly, the notion of *affidamento* informs an (oppositional) attitude in the current symbolic order and therefore strengthens the position of “women.” Of course, the idea of *affidamento* also proposes that women organize systems of support for each other, which again would change a teacher-scholar relationship. In this example, it became obvious that the question of power lurks beneath any reformulation of pedagogy. In

LIBRERIA delle DONNE di MILANO



the concept around affidamento, the actual differences in access to power are acknowledged; the preconception of any act would be to agree on the idea that women should especially focus on supporting other women, which, of course, also mimics the existing old boy networks.

Like in the example of affidamento, the practice of a theory and the theory of a practice became extremely close in the discussions around education and the access to the arts. In 1987, the publication by Jacques Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation* (original title *Le Maître ignorant: Cinq leçons sur l'émancipation intellectuelle*, published in 1987), became an important reference for intellectuals and artists. Disguised as a novel, Rancière argues for learning as a process of opening spaces for the development of skills and abilities; the “schoolmaster” gives way to others to use the space made available through his ignorance. For Rancière, emancipation becomes a political act of affirming and awakening the equal intelligence of all people. As a post-Marxist, he is convinced that all men have equal intelligence, and he follows the notion that under favorable conditions, all men and women would have the possibility of producing valuable

cultural artifacts and intellectual concepts. As you can see, this idea would not be applicable to grades in education. In Rancière’s view, the fixation of a social order is always part of the police order. The fight between different social groups over the possibility of participating in social processes, in aesthetics, in the distribution of the sensible, is part of an ongoing political process. Dissent with the police order would be always the basic component of any political process. This would imply a deep change in any institution that would be willing to embrace new forms of knowledge production.

In my subjective genealogy of pedagogical concepts, which are related to contemporary arts and (art) education, bell hooks is an important voice in recent discussions. As an African American feminist literary scholar, she advocates feminist, class-transgressing, and anti-racist approaches. The intersectionality of different layers of oppression come together in the specific situation of the addressee. Somehow surprisingly, her notion of resistance is based on the concept of love, which was emphasized even more in later years. In 1994, she wrote: “The academy is not paradise. But learning is a place where paradise can be created. The classroom,

with all its limitations, remains a location of possibility. In that field of possibility we have the opportunity to labor for an openness of mind and heart that allows us to face reality even as we collectively imagine ways to move beyond boundaries, to transgress. This is education as the practice of freedom.”¹⁷ In this approach, the attitude of the teacher/professor once again plays a major role; if the counterpart of a pedagogical situation is treated with respect and care, the encounter allows development. Her approach also operates on the precondition of a complicity between teachers and students, as the access to higher education for black students was not a given at all. Black and or female students (or in the most difficult case, black female students) would not have the same assurance that the institution of higher education is his/her given privilege, and he/she would need somebody to encourage and side with him/her. This might enable you to see the constructive character of all institutional rituals, because only if you are able to see your right to be there can you utter your concerns and demands and strive for the power in the system. In the new neoliberal reconfiguration of universities with short-term contracts for all lecturers and professors, this right is not a given for the teaching staff either, let alone for the students. Again, to implement more democratic systems in teaching/learning, the preconditions must be also revised.

When Jacques Derrida travelled to US universities on a lecture tour, he felt the urgency to formulate the programmatic “university without conditions,” based on the impressions from this trip; it is a model he positioned in 2002 against contemporary universities that work hand in hand with industries, be it in connection with

¹⁷ bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 14.

technical innovations or, I take the liberty to add, anything that might be called creative industries. In his words, he demands the positioning of a university in resistance to “economic powers (to corporations and to national and international capital), to the powers of the media, ideological, religious, and cultural powers, and so forth – in short, to all the powers that limit democracy to come.”¹⁸

From his viewpoint, it is important to claim the free space that a university can provide, without the idea of immediate utilization. A close relation to companies will not offer the freedom of scientific research. In the end the way into societal relevance, defined by a society in flux, with different parameters could be seen as being of major importance.

The social is related to the personal through the figure of the professor. Derrida insists on a specific attitude on the part of the professor. For him, the word “profess,” with its Latin origin, means to declare openly, to declare publicly: “The declaration of the one who professes is a performative declaration in some way. It pledges like an act of sworn faith, an oath, a testimony, a manifestation, an attestation, or a promise, a commitment. To profess is to make a pledge while committing to one’s responsibility.

¹⁸ Jacques Derrida, “The Future of the Profession or the University without Condition (thanks to the ‘Humanities’, What Could Take Place Tomorrow),” in Tom Cohen, ed., *Jacques Derrida and the Humanities: A Critical Reader* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 26. “Consequence of this thesis: such an unconditional resistance could oppose the university to a great number of powers, for example to state powers (and thus to the power of the nation-state and to its phantasm of indivisible sovereignty, which indicates how the university might be in advance not just cosmopolitan, but universal, extending beyond worldwide citizenship and the nation-state in general), to economic powers (to corporations and to national and international capital), to the powers of the media, ideological, religious, and cultural powers, and so forth – in short, to all the powers that limit democracy to come.”

Feminist Duration Reading Group, Unwritten Rules

Refer to the text.

We are not here necessarily to advocate for these positions, but to explore them and their current resonance and the difference in context between now and then.

Try not to show off about how much you know.

This is about learning and exploring, together.

Screen during a talk
by Helena Reckitt

To make profession is to declare out loud what one is, what one believes, what one wants to be, while asking another to take one's word and believe this declaration."¹⁹ This could, of course, be interpreted in many ways: the duty to position oneself politically, to commit to teaching/learning as a shared process, to be reliable, and to be available for answers.

The drive, the urgency we feel to re-evaluate teaching and learning is not only a symptom for the Europe-wide process of schooling and standardization. The situation nowadays is often described as a post-democracy and as a post-facts era; elections are manipulated by Whatsapp or Facebook in the US and in Brazil, meaning making algorithms are working, unseen and untraceable, but what they spread are ideological construc-

tions based on images and texts. This works, even if the messages as such might be highly absurd.

This implies a reformulation of the public sphere. A public sphere can be seen as the moment of articulated conflicts between interests; this cannot happen anymore when the conflicts are disguised, when they are hidden behind a screen of impenetrable post-facts and disguised interests. Along these lines, Bernard Stiegler claims that extensive TV consumption creates a globally synchronized hallucination. One might see this as hegemonic pedagogy that influences all addressees, everyone with access to a computer. These hallucinations are also locally loaded; they are pushed to reinstall reactionary forces. The reactionary connotations differ insofar as they reinstall national discourses related to the respective country. The outcome is undoubtedly an emotionalized, pathetic post-factual meaning-making machinery with very extreme

¹⁹ Derrida 2002 "The Future of the Profession or the University without Condition," 31–32.

Towards A Transversal Pedagogy The Silent University Principles and Demands:

1. Everybody has the right to educate.
2. Immediate acknowledgement of academic backgrounds of asylum seekers and refugees.
3. Acting knowledge without language limitations.
4. Acting knowledge without legal limitations.
5. Participatory modes of usership.
6. Artistic pedagogical practices need to be emancipated from commonly used terminologies such as "projects" and "workshops".
7. Pedagogic practices must be based on long-term engagement, commitment and determination.
8. We act in solidarity with other refugee struggles and collectives around the world.
9. Extra-territorial, trans-local knowledge production and conflict urbanism must be priorities.
10. Decentralized, participatory, horizontal and autonomous modality of education, instead of centralized, authoritarian, oppressive, and compulsory education.
11. Acting beyond limitations of border politics.
12. Adhocracy instead of bureaucracy.
13. Action Knowledge can only be produced through assemblage methods.
14. Revolution of decolonising pedagogies.



political effects in countries around the world. That is why we, as group of people (students/teachers) should install cells—cells of friendship, of a sisterhood/brotherhood. Perhaps the university could be place where this can sometimes happen. It is not by chance Derrida considers democracy the place where “everyone is able in the same way to be quite different.”²⁰

As tentative findings I would like to emphasize the following parameters for an emancipatory education, not of course as a method, but as a line of thought that would help to identify where one stands in the education complex.

- Participation, not representation
- Schools potentially transform the societal order
- Concern for better future living conditions for a diversity of people
- Working together, self-empowered learning
- Questioning one’s own paradigms
- Experimental forms, transgressing genre boundaries
- Relation of art, social justice, and political activism
- Changing the teacher-scholar relationship (ignorant schoolmaster)
- Can students influence and develop their projects and study programmes?
- Affidamento, as a support system for female identified subjects
- What role do grades play?
- The possibility of participating in social processes beyond the university
- Is dissent possible? What are the conditions for learning and for teaching, is there a secure space to speak from?
- Professor = declaring publicly, committing to responsibility
- > democracy to come (democracy in suspense)

²⁰ Ibid.

In many of his later texts,²¹ Jacques Derrida forcefully and with great persuasiveness repeatedly refers to the so-called founding paradox of democracy: according to Derrida, a democratic constitutional state cannot itself be founded by democratic means, it has to resort to more or less subtle violence for its foundation, thus abolishing a generally violent state by force. The negation of the rule of law, the violent state, is itself negated in a violent way and thus leads to its—doubtful—positive setting and recognition. Sovereignty and democracy are therefore always in suspense and in negotiation.

One of the contemporary artistic projects that operates in the negotiation spaces of democracy is The Silent University,²² which was founded by Ahmet Ögüt. “The Silent University is a solidarity based knowledge exchange platform by refugees, asylum seekers and migrants. It is led by a group of lecturers, consultants and research fellows. Each group is contributing to the programme in different ways, which include course development, specific research on key themes as well as personal reflections on what it means to be a refugee and asylum seeker. This platform will be presented using the format of an academic program.”²³ The art scene gives the project visibility and, of course, also funding; the question is whether it also operates in the political sphere, which means if it actually helps the members/lecturers, who “had a professional life and academic training in their home countries, but are unable to use their skills or pro-

²¹ Jacques Derrida, *Gesetzeskraft. Der »mystische Grund der Autorität«* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1991); Jacques Derrida, *Das andere Kap. Die vertagte Demokratie: Zwei Essays zu Europa* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1992); Jacques Derrida, *Schurken: Zwei Essays über die Vernunft*, Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 2002).

²² See <http://thesilentuniversity.org/>

²³ See <http://thesilentuniversity.org/>

fessional training due to a variety of reasons related to their status,²⁴ to find a position in their host societies.

The Silent University was founded in collaboration with the Delfina Foundation and the Tate and was later hosted by The Showroom. It operates internationally, which one might see as an answer to the worldwide interpellation through digital media, but of course it is also just connected to the international discourse of contemporary art. Other spaces of appearance were founded in Sweden in 2013, in collaboration with Tensta Konsthall and ABF Stockholm, and it spread as well to Hamburg in 2014, initiated by Stadtkuratorin Hamburg, to the 2015 Ruhr Festival. As the website indicates, the Silent University has also been established in Amman, Jordan, initiated by Spring Sessions from May 2015 on, and in Athens. Of course, the moment of self-empowerment seems to be extremely important for the project. Some questions remain: Is this construction sustainable, how are the actual learning situations performed, and does the project enable the participating lecturers and students to transfer it into a more durable structure? Are connections to further education institutions, universities, and NGOs also established?

From our experimental work with students, I would like to describe one project:

“How We Live Now – Art System, Work Flow, and Creative Industries.”

We wanted to start where the students are positioned in the art field, in a neoliberal work organization as their future. Our aim was to bring their own situation together with a more theoretical debate of contemporary contexts. For this production, we read and discussed Michel Foucault’s concept of gaze regimes of modernity,

which is based on the Panopticon sketched by English philosopher and social theorist Jeremy Bentham. The panopticon shows that the most effective control of behavior is instituted when a guard is situated in a tower in the middle of the building and the inmates do not know when they are actually being watched and when they are not. That means that they are motivated to act as though they are being watched at all times. Thus, they are effectively compelled to regulate their own behavior.

Michel Foucault takes this concept as the metaphor of modern disciplinary societies, and their function to establish power.²⁵ The Panopticon creates a consciousness of permanent visibility as a form of power, where no bars, chains, and heavy locks are necessary for domination. The function of control is in a way internalized. The state citizen controls himself or herself.

We cross-read that with the promise of contemporary cultural work and its neoliberal outlines: “You are free, but, by the way, also without social security.” The students had to write down their own experiences, experiences that were connected to what the text and its interpretation speaks about. The text of the film is based on written stories provided by students; they were transformed by the author Renata Burhardt into short scenes. For me, it is important in working with students to understand the relation between theory and the specific living conditions and vice versa, and to develop things with an open end. The film as such can be shown, of course, by all participants, as a trigger to initiate discussions, as a part of an exhibition, and so on. In the process, we actually played some of the scenes with the students, or the students spoke as a choir, “You are free to

24 See <http://thesilentuniversity.org/>

25 Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1977).

leave now...". The film as such was then edited and composed by Ronald Kolb and me; we used a lot of material that was shot as a by-product, the in-between moments, the working together, sharing a cigarette, rehearsing. The texts were spoken by two voices over the visual material. All these moments emphasize the alienation that is inscribed into the material. The shared working process and the moments when everybody shared their experiences strengthened the group and provided an understanding of everyone's own experiences as something that has a social and political context. It objectified, historicized, and contextualized living and working in the art field.