The Think Tank that has yet to be named presents radical orations and conversations on art, activism and education.
THE THINK TANK THAT HAS YET TO BE NAMED initiates site-specific conversations, performative actions, and educational projects that interrogate contemporary urban issues in the places where we encounter them. As a networked group, the Think Tank is comprised of Departments, each led by a single Director. Directors are both autonomous agents and cooperative collaborators.
ABOUT RADICAL ORATIONS

As part of an ongoing conversation on art, activism, and education, we present documentation of radical educational texts broadcast throughout Philadelphia, Boston and Chicago in the style of public orations. The orations are sited in the location of each individual Director, documented, combined and distributed in this pamphlet.

The live interventions draw on the history of the street corner soapbox as a form of sited, distributable education. The documentation presented here intends to combine the temporal, performative, educational and site-specific nature of the project into a (re)distributable form. In particular, the remixing of the audio documentation is an assemblage of the orations in content and context. Somewhat aphoristic and fragmented, this editing down attempts to create connections between both the content of the radical educational texts and the ambient aural experience of the three distinct urban locations where the oration occurred.

Also included here is the prelude conversation that led us to this experimental project. For the participating Directors, this ongoing conversation is as important as this project. As you will see from our conversation, we believe our learning process is integral in a continual praxis dedicated to emancipatory education, critical discourse and strategies for resistance.

http://thinktank.boxwith.com/radical-orations

PARTICIPATING DIRECTORS
Director of the Dept. for the Investigation of Meaning (DIM)
Director of the Dept. for the Investigation of Failure (DIF)
Director of the Dept. for the Investigation of Cross-Pollination (DICP)
Director of the Dept. for the Investigation of Tactical Education (DITE)
PRELUDE

DIM + DIF,

I often think about how art + education + activism can be merged together, but haven’t really found others having that conversation. It seems there are many talking about art and activism, and often times using methods that might be similar to those of educators, but previous to the Pedagogical Factory* I’ve never heard them talked about in the same breath. It certainly seems to be becoming more hip, more and more I hear of artists citing Freire, but I’m yet to really find someone who is attempting to articulate how we can use all three effectively as one.

I suspect by your practice and work with the Think Tank (TT) you think about art/activisms’ relationship to education (and I don’t necessarily mean “art education”). More and more I’ve been thinking about these types of practices that attempt to implement some kind of educational tactics as a way of communicating. I don’t know if I have specific questions about these types of practices (I guess I’m referring to work that was included in the Pedagogical Factory and other similar practices), but I wonder what your thoughts are about attempting to cram together art/activism/education all into one? Is the collective/Think Tank model a way of educating ourselves so that we might move forward, or shake the foundation of three fields? How is that related to more traditional forms of education? I’m probably revealing my ignorance on the subject, but I guess that’s why I’m writing. I feel that this is an important discourse and I’d like to know what you guys think, or if you have any suggestions about where the more complicated conversation may be happening. So far I’ve been reading stuff from all three angles, and they often seem to overlap, but never quite merge completely.

Best,
DITE

* http://www.stockyardinstitute.org/PedagogicalFactory.html

Hey DITE,

Good to hear from you. Yes, DIM and I have been considering the conflux of art, activism and education for some time- though we are far from coming to any kind of a conclusion. I have attached a link for a writing that Jeremy and I produced a few weeks ago for a listserv called Empyre* - The list tends to be dominated by those who are densely theoretical, and few who practice - which seems common in these spheres. Regardless, after a month long web discussion about “critical spatial practice” KH asked DIM and I to contribute. We set out to talk about our experiences in Philly as artists and activists and the occasional convergence of the two. I think for a long time we had been also thinking about how to meld these two disparate practices. What came clear to us through the writing was a suggestion that perhaps this fusion was not necessary, but that our practices as artists and activists were two parallel practices that served to inform one another - as a way of grounding them, invigorating them and looking critically at them. And I think that is how we envision our Directorships within the think tank.

As far as the educational aspect, we are both very committed to teaching. I think we have both really thought of our educational practice as complimentary, and necessary to our work as artists. So again, everything intertwines and informs. Academia is the prize-- the coveted tenure track job-- right? But is there an educational model that lives outside of the institution? What we have not talked specifically about is what an alternative model would look like-- internet based, free, socially engaged-- or rather is it the creation of a model of self-education?

This week at Artivistic*, I think I certainly saw more people whose work fell somewhere in between art and activism-- but one of those distinct practices always seemed to dominate in the work. So I guess at this point I wonder if they can or should meld. When I think about the convergence of the three, adding activism, I think about how we could use an educational model to distribute the idea of the parallel practice. That a creative practice informs an activist practice, and an activist practice inform a creative practice. For me, this has been the more successful model so far. But I still have a hard time envisioning a form, a container for this whole thing.. what ever it is? This is all very much on the surface for me right now DITE: - and I thank you for giving me a reason to write some of it down. I have a suggestion: Perhaps we begin to gather and share text on delicious under the tag “reader3” pertaining to alternative models of education. Non-internet texts can be scanned and distributed in PDF form. Interested?

DIF

* http://www.artivistic.org/

DIF,

I wonder about the sort of default “alternative education” practice, which is the free or freedom school, or simple group of people meeting outside of the institution. I’m totally supportive (I’m certainly not making a case that many of these programs can’t teach essential critical thought, that I imagine is difficult with NCLB, and state mandated textbooks, etc.) and find these types of projects really exciting - I wonder if their effectiveness is all that it could be if a more creative approach was implemented. I guess in some ways I’m making the same critique of alternative education that I am of art or activism, which is that I think we could use a totally new, progressive, and creative form to push the
What you are talking about in the quote above, nearly precisely, is what we Directors recently determined was the “space in between”. Like the name, “the Think Tank that has yet to be named,” we have assigned the intersection of parallel practices with a name that is malleable for the user, or Director. The space in between, in our experience, has provided a location where these practices meet, but do not congeal into anything solid. And the reason for why we have chosen to create malleable, almost liquid forms is to avoid co-optation, branding or consumption. It is to borrow from Bey, from the Temporary Autonomous Zone* (TAZ). The Directors attempt to create distributable, usable forms that negate co-optation by the institution. The danger for instance: Collaborative practices, now all the rage, have only recently found their way into larger, economically driven institutions. What will happen to the practice of collaboration, a practice that was born out of the want to negate consumption, when it is made a commodity? (I am making some sweeping generalizations here, as you will learn I often do, but I think you know what I mean.) Directors attempt to create forms that make space in the world, forms that others can understand and borrow, forms that are there, then gone.

The space in between the directors is the think tank. The space in between our parallel practices (art, activism, education) is the un-named, unbranded site of convergence— another space in between. As a Director you have the autonomy to name that form if you choose— or to use the form by creating space for the form with out naming it.

DITE

If we could loosen the stranglehold that institutions have on all three disciplines it would be helpful for those who do not have access to them, although maybe that is a bigger problem that isn’t the point here. Hopefully that thought / question makes sense.

best,
DITE

DITE,

I think your observation of the need to look critically at forms of “alternative” education is key. What kept repeating in my head at Artivistic was-- these projects are excellent, but who has access to them? If academics are the only audience, what exactly are the projects doing in the world? My response to many of the projects at Artivistic, which I often thought were really thoughtful, critically significant and politically relevant, was-- if they only ever live here then they are impotent. They are selfishly created for an audience who already has privileged access to this information (everyone nods their head in unison.) Ultimately, I think these artists are interested in a broader form of distribution—but perhaps there is no forum for that. Artivistic tried to be that forum, but failed by leaning too far toward academia. For me, the problem is always-- who has access to this education?

“If we could imagine a container or forum for this practice, that we have yet to really define, but one that successfully merges 3 disciplines while simultaneously creating something new, are we also destabilizing and invigorating all three practices in a helpful way?” [quoting DITE]

What happens in the Think Tank is that we try to ascribe form to a particular practice— which is what I think you seem to be interested in doing. An example: having a dialogue about a site of contention, at the very site of contention, is a form that the Directors call a publicly held private meeting (PHPM.)

What you are talking about in the quote above, nearly precisely, is what we Directors recently determined was the “space in between”. Like the name, “the Think Tank that has yet to be named,” we have assigned the intersection of parallel practices with a name that is malleable for the user, or Director. The space in between, in our experience, has provided a location where these practices meet, but do not congeal into anything solid. And the reason for why we have chosen to create malleable, almost liquid forms is to avoid co-optation, branding or consumption. It is to borrow from Bey, from the Temporary Autonomous Zone* (TAZ). The Directors attempt to create distributable, usable forms that negate co-optation by the institution. The danger for instance: Collaborative practices, now all the rage, have only recently found their way into larger, economically driven institutions. What will happen to the practice of collaboration, a practice that was born out of the want to negate consumption, when it is made a commodity? (I am making some sweeping generalizations here, as you will learn I often do, but I think you know what I mean.) Directors attempt to create forms that make space in the world, forms that others can understand and borrow, forms that are there, then gone.

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DITE

* http://www.hermetic.com/bey/taz_cont.html

Pedagogical Factory + Think Tank’s pedagogical furniture
So, what is education? And, what is education for?

I recently pulled out a graduate thesis written by my grad school colleague, HP, who was trying to plot an alternative ethics for education.

Here’s an excerpt:

“We then moved to this category we call ‘education,’ in which we realized that there are always politics involved; those things that we take for granted as being the constitution of education do in fact convey, perpetuate and reinforce certain ideals that are valued for whatever reason by the dominant culture. This, of course, would be true even in a ‘transformed’ or critical classroom; but the critical classroom might admit this to itself [...] To give up the pretense of knowing in the classroom is to recognize that there is a responsibility in helping students develop their individual critical consciousness which cannot be ascertained before hand and which also requires the educator to be willing to acknowledge the different sorts of knowledge that will come to the surface in the classroom.”

Where art/activism/education intersect suggests to me a productive, critical, exciting way around of this -- much like many of the alternative schools are trying.

“I suspect by your practice and work with the Think Tank you think about art/activisms’ relationship to education (and I don’t necessarily mean “art education”). More and more I’ve been thinking about these types of practices that attempt to implement some kind of educational tactics as a way of communicating.”[quoting DITE]

Maybe I hadn’t considered before your e-mail, DITE. But the TT might be entirely about educational tactics. I think we want to affect change, we want to empower people, we want to reveal their latent powers of agency, their individual critical consciousness. And not by telling them in some sort of patriarchal approach, but rather through a dialogical project in which we are all changed together.

DIM

[Enter DICP]

Hi all,

When DIF asked me if I would be interested in participating, we started talking about art education programs, specifically for me education programs in museums. I think looking to this banking method that Freire puts out is appropriate, as viewers are brought to the museum, and a docent shows them around telling them about the work (even without the docent this works due to didactic labels).

So I ask what about participatory work? (I have been thinking a lot more than usual maybe about participation since I got back from Open Engagement*).

Well, the problem I find is there is still no real collaborative learning and cross-pollination (?) because the model is already established and the participants are just actors on the set. Where is the collaboration between the artist and the participants? Sure this might spawn something amongst participants, but it seems we have already placed the artist in the position of all knowing by leaving them out of this collaboration.

This is a good model and should be talked about (maybe it is and I just don’t know it) when talking about relational aesthetics.

DICP

* http://jendelosreyes.com/openengagement/

All,

I feel a bit behind because I have not (yet!) read the Freire, so I may be making some unfair/false assumptions about it, but there are a few things I am thinking about here.

1) In my own experience, I feel as if coming together for a free and open education is really no different to me than solitary learning. I work, read, learn in ebbs and flows, sometimes grasping up everything I can get my hands on, and others choosing to read nothing at all. I think about all the reading groups I have participated in; sometimes I attend, and (more often) I end up with something else to do. Unless, that is, I get into this idea of “praxis.” When learning and applying that knowledge, not only do we learn better, but there is some sort of collective obligation as well. A product.

2) I’m struck by the questions: Is it really free? Is it really open? etc. Of course this is a battle that we deal with in the broken educational system we currently face, as the funding levels and thus educational opportunities are not equal. Who has the time to participate? Who is chosen?

3) The school as factory removing children from participating in society. At Open Engagement we read John Holt’s Escape from Childhood, which proposes returning all freedoms to children so they may, on their own accord, participate as fully as they wish in society. This, of course, includes education.

What do you all think?

DICP
All

I am largely supportive of organic processes, especially in situations when the agenda is only to learn, accepting a complete lack of structure in any educational gathering with a goal (ie to learn theory, vocab, or perhaps something as simple as multiplication) but if the teacher fails to claim some sort of ownership or responsibility because of fear of imitating an oppressive, more traditional educational structure then could it easily become a kind of free-for-all situation? Though fun and organic exploration are invaluable, can our educational experiences completely subscribe to this methodology? At some point we must dedicate ourselves (though at times un-excitedly) to learning to add, learning history, etc. During the very beginnings of the “escuela moderna” (modern school) started in Spain by anarchist Francisco Ferrer, much, if not all, of the emphasis in learning was placed upon experience. They went so far as to discourage reading for some time because they didn’t see reading and academia as important in the learning process as experience. This method seems logical, but times are different, and to adopt this same type of methodology, one where the student studies what (s)he feels like when (s)he feels like it, seems to me to leave a lot of room for failure to engage with some very real issues, and most importantly develop critical thought, that could come from a more structured approach to education - when I say structure here, all I really mean is that “students” have some responsibility in showing up and continuing to be engaged. The failure of many “freedom schools” seems to be that despite often times being once, maybe twice a week, many students only show up half of the time. It is attractive to adopt a quasi-anarchist educational approach here and say that it has to be the students’ choice to freely engage in dialogical education, but this seems risky. If education is as immensely vital and dangerous as we claim – then why take this lackadaisical approach?

When we think of the “freedom school” we often think it to be inherently radical and resistant because generally it endorses an organic and autonomous curricula. Generally speaking this is probably true, but it is essential that we stay mindful of the fact that we are working against oppression, not simply outside of it. Certain instances of TAZ, like a freedom school (if we could call certain forms of alternative educational spaces such) are great methods for the avoidance of the indoctrination of public education and the spectacle, but perhaps it would be most helpful to not think of the TAZ only as a moment(s) of escapism from oppressive forces, but instead a space to unpack and reflect upon, without coercion, the society in which we live. It seems naïve to assume that the TAZ is inherently radical (unless perhaps millions, or at least thousands, exist together inside of it so that it has a concrete effect on the “real” world). For Freire, a revolution is only possible if we engage in praxis. This praxis, at its most basic form, is reflection and action. One without the other de-stabilizes the momentum of resistance. Without action we simply have verbalism, without reflection we have activism. Neither of which are, by their self, revolutionary. Perhaps the TAZ can be used for reflection and strategizing, and when we return from TAZ, these reflections and articulations can be put to use in ac-

tion. Bey speaks of the importance of the TAZ to remain invisible to avoid being crushed or co-opted by the spectacle, perhaps this reveals a pocket of resistance for us to take advantage of, if we can plan, and perhaps even execute our actions form the TAZ will they be more successful? Perhaps if we can create an invisible educational TAZ we can produce radicals in the dark – and when they emerge from the TAZ they will (hopefully) become some kind of force of resistance.

DITE

To respond to DITE’s writing—thanks for beginning a conversation!

“It is attractive to adopt a quasi-anarchist educational approach here and say that it has to be the students’ choice to freely engage in dialogical education, but this seems risky. If education is as immensely vital and dangerous as we claim – then why take this lackadaisical approach?” [quoting DITE]

DITE—

Here is a brief summary of the introduction to a book called “The School without Walls” by Bremer & Von Moschikzer, as I understood it. It is about the Parkway Program of Philadelphia* In the introduction, the authors describe the formation of the compulsory education that I assume each of us has received, and conveys this form as way to mold the children into the kind of citizen/individuals necessary to facilitate industrialization: the school as factory. I think this blends with DIM’s quote from Freire. The introduction also claims that compulsory schooling removed children from being integral parts of the community—where they learned by participating in the activities that sustained the community. Separation of children from the rest of the population disconnected them and created spaces between them - individuals who no longer contributed to the common good. They no longer really “became” citizens. To separate them, is to make for good workers.

Prior to compulsory schooling, children learned both the “fun” and the “boring” stuff through those same community-sustaining activities. It is implied that there was also less of a break between work and leisure (now we learn math: now you go to recess). The work of school, like the work of the factory, is boring and it lives in that compartment over there. Play and leisure happens elsewhere and facilitates respite from the dullness of work. {A note here that there is some dangerous nostalgia in this chapter that should be criticized—but still some useful info}

What I am getting at is this notion of open-education (organic, structureless, quasi-anarchist, lackadaisical approach) disguises something else - why do we learn, is it pleasurable? Is it boring? Instead of thinking about just going into the world, looking at it, discussing it and dissecting it—I think these alternative forms of education require that you BE in the world and DO in the world,
as a way to facilitate learning. And that yes, the lackadaisical approach is risky, and I believe will fail, if it fails to join work and play through the venture of a common goal. Instead of a lackadaisical approach, it must be an approach that moves towards the integration of labor, leisure and necessity. (A cross-pollination, DICP?)

And perhaps it is our perception of the form of this kind of education - and how we name it? Is it really without structure? Is it really free? Is it really organic? Is it really open?

“Perhaps the TAZ can be used for reflection and strategizing, and when we return from TAZ these reflections and articulations can be put to use in action.” (quoting DITE)

YES! This is a near definition of a Publicly Held Private Meeting [PHPM, a tool of the TTT]! Or at least how I see them functioning in our brief history. How can we take this form, and apply it to an educational model?

I think the chapter, Pirate Utopias* is in Reader 1 - but I wonder if it might not be useful in this Reader as well? As DITE mentions Freire’s idea of “Revolution”—I think Bey is critical of this notion in this chapter, comparing it to the uprising. So I would like to look for other texts that dissect this notion of “Revolution”—and particularly an educational revolution. Keep your eyes peeled.

Hope I have made some sense.

DIF

* http://www.dismalgarden.org/pages/backstory.html
* http://www.hermetic.com/bey/taz_cont.html

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ON GIROUX

All,

Whew! I’ve just finished the Giroux. The article was a bit tough for me to construct a completely coherent response, but I’ll piece together some fragmented thoughts I had and notes I took while reading. I hope you guys dug the article, let’s chat about it...

Giroux suggests an important relationship of our education to neoliberal tendencies and the typical left intellectual response by “debunking and demystification.” Perhaps here we begin to imagine how we (as “educators”) can move beyond typical forms of quasi dogmatic indoctrinations to something more dialogical with more agency.

With Giroux’s description and analysis of the neoconservative’s use of the media for their own neoliberal propaganda and “public pedagogy” I wonder if looking to [Stephen] Duncombe’s ideas on “ethical spectacle”* (from his book DREAM*) would be helpful. He says that an ethical spectacle, in order to be successful, must be rooted in truth. Does that then mean that it is actually a kind of public form of education, despite being a spectacle? For example, can we think of IVAW’s Operation First Casualty (OFC)* as a component of a larger leftist “public pedagogy”? Do we already without calling it that?

One of my favorite moments in the article was the Arendt quote:

“Without a politically guaranteed public realm, freedom lacks the worldly space to make its appearance. And it is precisely within such a realm that subjects are socialized into forms of individual and social agency in which they learn how to govern rather than be governed, to assume the responsibilities of engaged citizens rather than be reduced to consumers or investors.”

Here, can we again look to Bey and the TAZ or other anarchist influenced autonomist movements. Must we create our own “politically guaranteed public realms.” If that is a possible answer I wonder how we can be inclusive and reach-out in realms that are saturated with right wing and capitalist propaganda.

As he moves into his ideas of cultural practices that engage in forms of education, I found some of what he said to be helpful, but also felt as though its something we’re more or less aware of as cultural producers who are attempting to do what he is abstractly describing (“Pedagogy must address the relationships between politics and agency, knowledge and power, subject positions and values, and learning and social change while always being open to debate, resistance, and a culture of questioning”). For me, this article has been the closest in locating what this new practice (art/education/activism) might look like, but doesn’t quite get there in a practical sense, he fails to cite any possible models beyond the abstract. I think he puts forth some valuable insights to what we should consider while seeming to keep at a safe distance from diving into the tough
questions. I do think that in this article, more than anywhere else thus far, we might find some footing in thinking about our practices as educational models that exist outside of traditional conventions of teaching. But Giroux seeming to have difficulty totally detaching himself from what we generally understand to be educational methods slips back into talking about institutions and traditional student/teacher relations. Admittedly, I have been having the same problems, and often resort to traditional models of knowledge production when trying to articulate what Giroux is attempting to articulate here (not unlike this e-mail, or written papers, etc)… Ok, so I’ve run out of words…

**DITE**

* http://dreampolitik.com/
* http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2WvlaDeNlbk

**Hi All,**

First, I don’t think that Giroux really intends to get away from the educational models that we already have set forth. He seems to look at the content problems rather than asking that we change the entire system. He points rather to the loss of steam caused by (as he quotes from Susan Buck-Morss) the impotence of the academic left caused by the rise of neoliberalism and the retreat to “theory-world.” He seems to be talking about “fresh discourses” rather than fresh approaches. Correct me if I am wrong about this.

I find myself doing the same thing that you do, DITE, and I think that you see Giroux doing—which is trying to understand how to fix this system, then thinking about new inventive genius ideas, only to fall, obviously, short. Lately, I have been reading a lot about Structuralist’ approaches to change, which generally claim that change is near impossible, that the content can easily change and the system will remain the same (think sponge soaking up juice, water, soap, beer, still the same sponge). Here, we see the content changing, neo-liberalism and militarism, but little changing within the educational system to react to the changing needs based on the changing content (convoluted, yes, but so are Sahins and Levi-Strauss). I liked this:

“Culture as an emancipatory force affirms the social as a fundamentally political space, just as neo-liberalism attempts within the current historical moment to deny culture’s relevance as a public sphere and its centrality as a political necessity. Central to any viable notion of cultural studies, then, is the primacy of culture and power, organized through an understanding of how private issues are connected to larger social conditions and collective forces; that is, how the very processes of learning constitute the political mechanisms through which identities are shaped, desires mobilized, and experiences take on form and meaning...”

His conversations about cultural studies and public pedagogy are nice, but as you say, where do they get us as a way to change.

**DICP**

**Hey guys. Nice to hear from you all!**

I agree with your assessment that Giroux doesn’t leave us with any practical examples of how we might re-imagine formal educational institutions or create new educational spaces/models. But perhaps we have Freire (and [bell hooks?]) to help us in this regard. Giroux does lay out an excellent primer about the politics of neo-liberalism—I found it really helpful for refreshing my grasp of it. Giroux writes:

“In fact, education and pedagogy have long been synonymous with schooling in the public mind. Challenging such a recognition does not invalidate the importance of formal education to democracy, but it does require a critical understanding of how the work of education takes place in such institutions as well as in a range of other knowledge and meaning producing spheres such as advertising, television, film, the Internet, video game culture, and the popular press. Rather than invalidate the importance of schooling, it extends the sites of pedagogy and in doing so broadens and deepens the meaning and importance of public pedagogy.”

(Add to his list of “knowledge and meaning producing spheres” our good friend Art and a host of other “alternative” spaces and forums and forms that we’re familiar with.) This notion of public pedagogy is really exciting, I think, and seems to jive nicely with this art/education/activism tri-fecta that we’re so intent on. I wonder if when we say “radical pedagogy” we really mean “radical public pedagogy.” I mean, if the work that we’ve done in the TT is anything at all, I think it’s been a kind of public pedagogy. That’s a pretty cool way to frame it. Public pedagogy to me describes this field of possibility. I probably tend to agree with the Structuralist opinion of the relative immalleability of institutions. That said, I still believe in teaching within the institution (for now anyway) but understand its limitations. I suppose that I want to operate in different realms. I had a pretty amazing educational experience with a handful of students in Egypt where the lack of structure and lack of institutional pressures really opened up the space for us in the short 5-day workshop. (Especially for them—their university education is incredibly rigid, hierarchical, and non-Socratic.) It was the closest I’ve come to a really fluid, dialogical learning environment. Also, Giroux’s description of the dominance of corporatized public pedagogy as part and parcel of the neoliberal agenda gives weight to an argument for education as activism. At times I struggle with (and have been challenged on) the potentially propagandistic relationship between education and activism (as if education was neutral in the first place!). What Giroux does is make explicit the fact that there is this public education of citizens (a kind of de-citizenship effect), which comes from dominant culture. Of course we must counteract this through (tactical) education of our own making… duh. Right on.
ps. hooks next?

pps. Perhaps we think of versionfest* as a form of public pedagogy and then explore the fest as a specific site in which we reframe it through some kind of TT project. I’ll think more on it...

*http://www.lumpen.com/V8/about.html

Hello Directors,

Agreed, agreed. The article would be superb if it offered some tangible models or forms of education other than the academic institution as we understand it. Hopefully, we will find those examples as we read more.

I have to say that I was initially alarmed by what seemed like a nostalgic view of the 1960’s as an era of resistance worth replicating. Having been repeatedly disappointed participating in forms modeled from 1960’s era resistance (the march on Washington, etc). Yes, to reference the precedent is significant, but this era is leaned on heavily as a moment of resistance in our culture and it reeks of nostalgia. So when both academia and the 1960’s start to pile up, a little kernel of skepticism plants in my brain.

That aside, I can speak to what I found useful:

“the academic Left appears to be withdrawing from the demands of civic engagement by retreating into what Susan Buck-Morss (2003) calls "theory-world."

I was hyperaware of this during grad school. But even now I am persistently disturbed on some of the listservs like Empyre and IDC by the absolute lack of practical knowledge that many theorists have about participatory democracy—or the notion of participation in general for that matter. It is one kind of understanding to read and write about notions of true participatory practice. It is another kind of understanding to organize and act out in those spaces of participatory democracy. Few academics put their theories to practice—which I think bleeds into the larger problem of how education is or is not “connecting empowering forms of knowledge to the realities and social forms that bear down on students’ everyday lives.” Is it enough to teach criticality? Is that criticality nearly useless if a student has never been taught how to act, to organize, to participate? Citizenship is steeped in praxis. We, as citizens, must be capable of practicing both criticality and action.

But I think it is more complicated than blaming academics for simply retreating into theory. Rather, my suspicion is that the rigor of the academic world does not leave allowances for much other than academic labor (again relating to the neoliberal project). As academic institutions have become intrinsically linked to corporations, the government and the military, the culture of labor and production inside of the academic institutions has shifted to mimic corporate culture (work hard, produce, progress - the student as customer). I tried repeatedly to get academics that I worked with at UIUC to leave campus and engage in the larger Champaign-Urbana community. They failed primarily because of sheer exhaustion. Academic labor, like most forms of labor in our current economic climate, is under constant threat with very real consequences.

I think what is at stake is much more fundamental than academic education—it is the very way in which an individual becomes a citizen - and perhaps that was why we were all waiting for Giroux to put forward some alternatives. If the neoliberal public pedagogy is as pervasive as it is described, then what forms of resistance are possible to combat it? And shouldn’t these potential forms be employed long before a person reached college age? Some of the broad tactics Giroux touches on are locating a space in which individuals “learn how to govern rather than be governed, to assume the responsibilities of engaged citizens”... “and providing a language of critique and possibility, of imagining different futures, and addressing the pedagogical conditions that make possible the agents, politics, and forms of resistance necessary to reclaim the promise of a truly global, democratic future.” I like these quotes because I think they begin to provide a solid framework for the pedagogy of citizenship, but still the form is missing.

So I guess what I am wondering is, what is an educational form that teaches the practice of citizenship (acting + organizing in physical, political space)? What is the precedent for this? And can you site that educational form within spitting distance of its complimentary theories? It’s all about praxis, baby.

Cheers.
DIF
ON HOOKS + FREIRE

All,

Here is the excerpt from bell hooks’ *Teaching to Transgress* where she discusses Freire’s impact on her work. What I like about it is that while it is enthusiastic about Freire, it’s critical from a feminist perspective. Unfortunately I don’t know how helpful it will be, especially after Giroux. It’s worth reading (as is the rest of the book) but not quite as amazing as I’d have liked it to be (as some of her other work has been for me).

DITE

All

“We can not enter the struggle as objects in order to later become subjects”

- This is so essential and so often not understood.

“(Students) approach Freire from a voyeuristic standpoint, where as they read they see two locations in the work, the subject of Friere the educator and the oppressed/marginalized groups he speaks about. In relation to these two subject positions, they position themselves as observers”

I think this relates to the TT’s interest in self-implication (which is feeling more like an active form of conscientization than I previously understood). We take on our Directorship at a site, and approach it with a distinct understanding of what our selves, our bodies, our positions in the world do to alter a conversation, a space, a moment. It is an understanding of self that is site specific: Sited identity. It can also be construed as an anti-colonization tactic. To understand yourself, your position and how you locate yourself in a specific social or political site is an attempt to avoid, or at least acknowledge how your identity transforms (manipulates) that social and political space. The question is can it be a de-colonizing tactic (perhaps it already is)?

Hooks goes on:

“Again and again, Freire has had to remind readers that he never spoke of conscientization as an end itself, but always as it is joined by meaningful praxis.”

She states that we must:

“verifying in praxis what we know in consciousness”

and that Friere defines praxis, as action and reflection, not deprived of intension or finality. I feel like this is the first time I am feeling the weight and dimension of the notion of praxis in a very real way. hooks asserts that it is not just theory and practice moving in tandem, but that the actions you take in life must embody a “living example of (y)our politics.” She (together with Friere) just draws it out so simply here.

And then she finally hits it home with:

“I think that so many progressive political movements fail to have lasting impact in the US precisely because there is not enough understanding of praxis.”

This is why I am always so disappointed when I read the conversations on lists like edu-factory, Empyre or criticality. It is not enough to argue about Bourdieu’s theories on autonomy and its relationship to struggle. You must also be engaged in an investigation of autonomy through the experience of struggle, in an active, physical way—in a place other than in front of a glowing monitor. Praxis is seated in balance and a breadth of understanding that neither theory nor practice alone can provide. Striking that balance is the biggest challenge I have faced because stepping yourself in both is consuming. hooks quotes Freire:

“Authentic help means that all who are involved help each other mutually, growing together in common effort to understand the reality which they seek to transform. Only through such praxis—in which those who help and those who are being helped help each other simultaneously—can the act of helping become free from the distortion in which the helper dominates the helped.”

Again, this comment speaks to an intermingling, an entwining of those who are helping and those who are being helped. It underscores the value of reciprocity, of cross-pollination. I go back to edu-factory (you can see clearly I have a beef with this project) because I think it exemplifies a failure to provide what Freire calls “authentic help.” Edu-factory may fail because it is quickly adopting the hierarchy of the institution it is hoping to bend. It is not doing the hard work, the real work, of reaching out to its collaborators (those who are meant to be helped).

I’ll stop there, so I can go put this theory about praxis into practice, I mean praxis.

bell hooks - Honorary Director of the Department for the Investigation of Liberatory Pedagogy (DILP)

Paulo Friere - Honorary Director of the Department for the Investigation of Conscientization (DIC)

Yours truly,

DIF
Hi DIF,

I think you have framed her piece quite well. I too was quite excited to be reading this, and was really shocked by how well she balances theory and practice, something I have been recently finding quite lacking.

Something I found to be quite nice were her comments of Freire’s sexism. Not only does she aptly state that criticality invites criticality (yes!) but she states that this part of his work “represents a blind spot in the vision of men who have profound insight” (49). I know I am guilty of obtaining a certain piece of knowledge that tarnishes my vision of the person that I can no longer clearly see the “profound insight.” She clearly states that he need not apologize for his sexism because he is inviting criticism through the model he sets forth. Not only is this great for making us remember to see the whole picture and take what is good, but it also asks that as critical producers, we accept both responsibility for our work and criticism of it.

“To have work that promotes one’s liberation is such a powerful gift that it does not matter so much if the gift is flawed...When you are privileged, living in one of the richest countries in the world, you can waste resources. And you can especially justify your disposal of something that you consider impure” (50).

Nice!
DICP

All,

I’m glad that you got something out of the hooks reading. Your enthusiasm helped me take another look at it, and see it in a more helpful way.

I am excited about this idea of “decolonization.” This is the second time I’ve come across this word recently (the other being in Subversion of Politics: European Autonomous Movements*, which I recommend) and both times they’ve struck me as helpful and exciting. The Autonomous movements in Europe, filled with squatters and “post-political” folks who are “decolonizing” their lives by not participating in certain aspects of the capitalist system they don’t believe in (ie not paying rent, not voting/or supporting any political party, etc), I think offer an exciting model in many ways, but, for me at least, it seems somehow isolated from other currents of thought on resistance. So when hooks used the same term and linked it up to conscientization it helped me make some connections between the two potentially disparate tracks. I like to think of conscientization as a reflective practice that leads us to decolonization or perhaps a TAZ, and I think that is what hooks is suggesting, even if she doesn’t address these other ideas. I wish she would’ve elaborated on it a bit more, I felt like she was taking for granted a bit that everyone understands what it means to decolonize your life (though perhaps that’s too tall of an order for one chapter). Again, I realize what I’m describing is engaging in a praxis in a bit more liberal way, a practice of practices your own life as what one deems politically/socially appropriate, which is perhaps the first step toward involving others in an engaged pedagogy. I guess this isn’t a really new idea; it doesn’t seem that different from what Gandhi said in the 30s(?) - “be the change you want to make,” but I like this new kind of articulation of it. A sort of “de-schooling” or purifying yourself of practices you aren’t down with. As hooks says, it isn’t enough to change the way we think. Like you mentioned before, DIF, its about self implication as well as an engagement with a larger community and attempting to understand where we are located within a larger political sphere.

And I like DICP’s comments on hooks’ feminist criticisms of Freire (and perhaps as importantly his embracing of them). When she describes Freire’s embrace of her criticism I think she is saying that we can’t let him off the hook, but we can give him a break, if he is willing to work with others in his own conscientization. I think this story points to a need for a continual critical engagement with others, one that avoids egos and self-righteousness, and is sincere in its desire to work collectively on a decolonization of, as hooks would say, a white supremacist patriarchal society.

DITE

* http://www.eroseffect.com/books/subversion_download.htm
ON DARK MATTER + VERSIONFEST

All,

So the theme of Version 08 is “Dark Matter”* (via Sholette, which he describes as activity and things that exist, but you cannot see. So many activist artists like TS, Yomengo, etc, are “dark matter” living in the counter-public sphere), which actually seems kind of perfect for tactical education (TE). Just like the quasi-autonomy of “dark matter,” TE seeks to live in the “counter-public sphere.” If we are successful in establishing a strategy that is somewhat invisible (in that it isn’t crushed or co-opted by capital), as Sholette calls for, it will be part of the semi-autonomous counter-public sphere that needs an “articulation of the invisible” in order to gain momentum and have a real effect at a counter-cultural site of resistance. So here are my rambly questions about TE and our potential participation in Version.

Is a flash of success, though still a success and sometimes celebrated in activist circles, helpful for education? Is the anarchist-oriented spontaneity helpful for educational methodologies? Should we work towards a series of flashes of success? How do we create a tactical education that avoids being crushed by capital (as Bey suggests in TAZ), while making itself visible enough for a prolonged investment, what hooks would probably call “engaged pedagogy” (she describes this as a full dedication conciencization and self-actualization, both body and mind. This she argues, is essential to education as the practice of freedom). Are guerilla tactics suited for this? Is that what we’ve been favoring? Can we organize moments of TE that disappear as quickly as they emerge, and is that helpful? Is traditionally organized pedagogy contradictory to TE?

Obviously a lot of these questions are due to a lack of any kind of definition or outline thus far, but ones we should consider. I wonder if my excitement for projects like the “laundry lecture series”* (Red 76’s initiative with lectures in laundromats) is misplaced. Are those types of projects how “Art” articulates itself as education, as only a moment of democratic and non-discriminatory education. Perhaps we have such a difficult time getting the idea that “education” means collaborative projects with kids, when in fact that’s not at all what it has to mean.

So with a site like Version, how do we point to our interest in art as a site of education, without necessarily subscribing to the typical method or language of education? It seems it could go two ways – an attempt at beginning to define what this thing is (through a zine, powerpoint, documented conversation, etc) or an attempt at putting it in use. As DIF said, it’s all about praxis, baby. Honestly, I’m stoked to dive into that, but I am having difficulty conceptualizing it (no surprise there...). What do you all think?

DITE

* http://enoughfear.org/en/call

All,

“Should we work towards a series of flashes of success?” [quoting DITE]

My investigation of failure came out of a need to peel stability and longevity away from the notion of success. X, Y and Z organizations last for 20 years, but who gives a damn if they stagnated as soon as they signed the 501c3 paperwork. Longevity does not equal success. There is room to challenge the form at its most basic, and that is what I think you are suggesting. So, yes. This idea of the “flash” is a legitimate, and useful tactic.

I spent the morning combing through the most recent threads on edu-factory. (Bias alert - this conversation makes me want to tear my hair out) I should first say that the conversation remains theoretical, and the proposal is for a purely virtual project. I find this discouraging as I think it is terribly prohibitive, regardless of how “open” one might argue the online world to be. And practical access is not the only problem. The conversations and threads rely on a privileged kind of conversation, one that has access to a high level of education. I think there is a likely hood that many needs will not be met, and it seems to suggest that the groups of people who might use this forum, may be very limited.

Ultimately, the academics I see on these lists fail to site their work anywhere but the institution or the web - say, in the towns their home institutions occupy. This is where we come in. And I don’t mean this in a “we’ll show them how its done” way. I mean it as a gesture that creates a complimentary form: one that fills in the gaps of some of the other, more global educational projects like edu-factory. I’d like to think that we can ground a project locally, but perhaps use the web to network to other sites in a more active way. I am headed in that direction because Version always falls dead at the end of the academic calendar, so DIM and I will not be able to physically attend. I wonder if we can create a form that is a “flash” but a distributable flash. I also wonder if we can link the content in some way that is tied to the sites?

I am thinking of our friends J + N’s project where they provide phones on the street in the US and Iran for regular Americans and Iranians to talk*. I think this is a good example of networking people globally without the constraints of the internet. I am not saying we stay offline - just that we consider siting it also somewhere in the real world as a way of potential democratizing the work. (I am heading into choppy waters here, I know).

DIF

* http://www.red76.com/salem.html

* http://www.enoughfear.org/en/call
Hi all

I have been thinking a lot about change and the Structuralist’ since last emailing. I got into an interesting conversation with an anthropologist PhD student about them, and she had a nice comment: yes, the proof that change is a slow process. But what about the moments where a rupture occurs? We came up with what I think is a nice metaphor: tectonic plate movement—slow, steady, inevitable, change happens continually for better or worse. Tectonic plates have only a few ways they move: slipping next to each other smoothly, grating against each other and breaking apart, and one rising above the other. But sometimes, a rupture occurs and makes us stop and reevaluate—an earthquake.

The question is, how can we evaluate and understand these different changes. Is one better than the other, though we all assume perhaps that the earthquake is most able to shake people up quickly (no pun intended, I’m tired).

DICP
brings with it a sense of ‘being with’ constitutive of who I am that make my relationship to the world essential to who I am. In other words, my presence in the world is not so much of someone who is merely adapting to something ‘external,’ but of someone who is inserted as if belonging essentially to it. It’s the position of one who struggles to become the subject and maker of his history and not simply a passive, disconnected object.”

Director of the Dept. for the Investigation of Failure
Radical Oration pt. 1
Paulo Freire – *Pedagogy of Freedom*
Berk St. + Front St. Philadelphia

Read at Berks and Front Streets, in the Kensington section of Philadelphia, PA. This trash-strewn site is currently proposed for a new performing and visual arts high school. The proposal has been met with some opposition from the community siting the disruptive nature of the student attendees to the neighborhood.

“I like to be human because in my unfinishedness I know that I am conditioned. Yet conscious of such conditioning, I know that I can go beyond it, which is the essential difference between conditioned and determined existence. The difference between the unfinished that does not know anything of such a condition, and the unfinished who socio-historically has arrived at the point of becoming conscious of the condition and unfinishedness. I like being human because I perceive that the construction of my presence in the world, which is a construction involving others and is subject to genetic factors that I have inherited and to socio-cultural and historical factors, is none-theless a presence whose construction has much to do with myself. It would be ironic if the awareness of my presence in the world did not at the same time imply a recognition that I could not be absent from the construction of my own presence. I can not perceive myself as a presence in the world and at the same time explain it as the result of forces completely alien to me. If I do so, I simply renounce my historical, ethical, social and political responsibility for my own evolution from the life support system to the emergence of Homo Sapiens. In that sense, I renounce my ontological vocation to intervene in the world. The fact that I perceive myself to be in the world, with the world, with others,
[The philosopher Ernst Bloch] argues that hope cannot be removed from the world. Hope is not ‘something like nonsense or absolute fancy; rather it is not yet in the sense of a possibility; that it could be there if we could only do something for it.’

In this view, hope becomes a discourse of critique and social transformation. Hope makes the leap for us between critical education, which tells us what must be changed; political agency, which gives us the means to make change; and the concrete struggles through which change happens. Hope, in short, gives substance to the recognition that every present is incomplete.

[...] hope is more than a politics, it is also a pedagogical and performative practice that provides the foundation for enabling human beings to learn about their potential as moral and civic agents. Hope is the outcome of those educational practices and struggles that tap into memory and lived experiences while at the same time linking individual responsibility with a progressive sense of social change. As a form of utopian longing, educated hope opens up horizons of comparison by evoking not just different histories but different futures. Educated hope is a subversive force when it pluralizes politics by opening up a space for dissent, making authority accountable, and becoming an activating presence in promoting social transformation.

The goal of educated hope is not to liberate the individual from the social—a central tenet of neoliberalism—but to take seriously the notion that the individual can only be liberated through the social. Educated hope as a subversive, defiant practice should provide a link, however transient, provisional, and contextual, between vision and critique on the one hand, and engagement and transformation on the other. That is, for hope to be consequential it has to be grounded in a project that has some hold on the present. Hope becomes meaningful to the degree that it identifies agencies and processes, offers alternatives to an age of profound pessimism, reclaims an ethic of compassion and justice, and struggles for those institutions in which equality, freedom, and justice flourish as part of the ongoing struggle for a global democracy.”
democratic gains’ (Giroux). The most rudimentary behavior must be determined both in relation to the real and present actors which condition it and in relation to a certain object, still to come, which it is trying to bring into being. This is what we call the project (Sartre). We cannot enter the struggle as objects later to become subjects (Freire). We are engaged in some very ‘serious games.’ The idea of the ‘game’ is meant to capture simultaneously the following dimensions: that social life is culturally organized and constructed...; that social life is precisely social, consisting of webs of relationships and interactions between multiple, shiftingly interrealated subject positions, none of which can be extracted as autonomous ‘agents’; and yet at the same time there is ‘agency,’ that is, actors play with skill, intention, wit, knowledge, intelligence. The idea that the game is ‘serious’ is meant to add into the equation the idea that power and inequality pervade the game of life in a multitude of ways, and that, while there may be playfulness and pleasure in the process, the stakes of these games are often very high (Ortner). It is not blind action deprived of intentionality or of finality. It is action and reflection. Men and women are human beings of praxis, and in the process they have become capable of transforming the world, and giving it meaning (Freire).”

Director of the Dept. for the Investigation of Cross Pollination
Radical Oration pt. 1
Excerpts from – Giroux, Ortner, Sartre, Freire
Abel Smith School, Boston

Performed in front of the Abiel Smith School, the first school in the US for African-American children, Boston’s torrid history of racism and education can be examined. The building is situated in one of the most expensive neighborhoods of Boston, surrounded by private residences, and overlooked by many tourists. Boston’s integration troubles—with busing starting as late as 1974—are only a continuation between this race and class boundary present in this tourist site.

“Market fundamentalism and the militarization of public life mutually reinforce each other to displace the promise, if not the very idea, of the Great Society—with its emphasis on the common good, basic social provisions for all, social justice, and economic mobility.

Rather than reinventing and rethinking the challenge of an oppositional politics within a global public sphere, the academic Left appears to be withdrawing from the demands of civic engagement by retreating into... ‘theory-world,’ a space where the ‘academic freedom of critical theorists coincides with our lack of influence in public and political debate.’

Hope, once embodied in the politics of persuasion, the drive for instituting critical education in a diverse number of public spheres, collective efforts to organize struggles within major institutions, and the attempt to build international social movements seems, at best, a nostalgic remnant of the 1960s. Public spaces on the domestic front are increasingly being organized around values supporting a bellicose, patriarchal, and jingoistic culture that is undermining ‘centuries of
always more—even at the cost of the oppressed having less or having nothing. For them, to be is to have and to be the class of the ‘haves.’

[...] Sadistic love is a perverted love—a love of death, not of life. One of the characteristics of the oppressor consciousness and its necrophilic view of the world is thus sadism. As the oppressor consciousness, in order to dominate, tries to deter the drive to search, the restlessness, and the creative power which characterize life, it kills life. More and more, the oppressors are using science and technology as unquestionably powerful instruments for their purpose: the maintenance of the oppressive order through manipulation and repression. The oppressed, as objects, as ‘things,’ have no purposes except those their oppressors prescribe for them.”

Director of the Dept. for the Investigation of Tactical Education
Radical Oration pt. 1
Paulo Freire – *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*
Chicago Ave + Michigan Ave, Chicago

Performed at the corner of Chicago and Michigan Ave, on March 20, 2008, the fifth anniversary of the war in Iraq and a day of “creative protests and civil disobedience” designated by the organizers of Chicago Mass Action and the larger march held on March 19th. Chicago and Michigan Ave., also the location of Chicago landmark the Watertower, is in the heart of the “Magnificent Mile”, the famous shopping district and tourist attraction in Chicago with stores like Macy’s, the Apple Store, Louis Vuitton, Tiffany’s, etc.

“[...] Once a situation of violence and oppression has been established, it engenders an entire way of life and behavior for those caught up in it—oppressors and oppressed alike. Both are submerged in this situation, and both bear the marks of oppression. Analysis of existential situations of oppression reveals that their inception lay in an act of violence—initiated by those with power. This violence, as a process, is perpetuated from generation to generation of oppressors, who become its heirs and are shaped in its climate. This climate creates in the oppressor a strongly possessive consciousness—possessive of the world and of men and women [...] everything is reduced to the status of objects at its disposal.

In their unrestrained eagerness to possess, the oppressors develop the conviction that it is possible for them to transform everything into objects of their purchasing power; hence their strictly materialistic concept of existence. Money is the measure of all things, and profit the primary goal. For the oppressors, what is worthwhile is to have more—