

Learning, Exchange and Play

Practicing a deleuzian pedagogy

Essay by Dr Iain MacKenzie, Hollie Mackenzie, and Conor Heaney

It is clear that the current global higher education sector is experiencing a process of capture. All aspects of University life are increasingly articulated within an unabashed logic of capital accumulation. What is less clear is why this is something that should not be welcomed; or even if that judgement should guide responses to these processes of capture? This uncertainty results from the fact that the University system of old, which we may be tempted to valorise, was suffused with such subtle and not so subtle hierarchies that the few who attended were simply moulded into the bastions of the established order; even if that was an order they (occasionally) sought to challenge. Given this, the problem of how to respond to the privatisation of the contemporary University system is that opportunities for learning have never been common. There was no pristine moment when learning belonged to all, nor its partner moment of enclosure and accumulation to which we can trace its privatisation. **And yet privatisation is the only game in the higher educational town.** So, what is to be done in the face of this rampant privatisation if there is no common stock of learning to defend? The suggestion is simple: *experiments in commonisation*. It is time to pull apart the rich mix of feudal and modern, hierarchical and bureaucratic, at the level of classroom experience, in order to expose the complex web of private interests served in the very fabric of our Universities. It is time to take the pieces and mix them together in new amalgams, to form unknown compounds of learning. It is time to get help by finding common cause with those doing the same in other institutional settings. Together these will become experiments in forging new forms of common experience, new forms of learning. The workshop was one such experiment: with the classic texts of criticism, have some

serious fun; with the art on the walls, interpret the given; with the 'toys' in the middle, become a child again. Only the materials at hand can be used to create new ways of experiencing the world, new ways of learning. They can be twisted, turned, flattened, coloured, bleached, and so much more: the workshop was a way of bringing the existing and familiar into new forms of contact in the name of *experiments in commonisation*.

Dr Iain MacKenzie

Our installation *Not One / To Be Two* was one experiment in *commonisation*. Exhibited within the clinical and hierarchical space of the *Anatomy Museum* at King's College. This installation was created in response to the privatisation of the contemporary University system, with its aim to escape its totalitarian capture of social spaces and attempt to create an opportunity for learning, in common. As an enclosed installation, it formed a space of resistance within that *neoliberal refrain*. This space of enclosure is a totalising space, but not totalitarian. By marking a territory within the seminar space, it offered an **opportunity for flight** away from the totalitarian nature of the neoliberal classroom. As the two participants crawled one by one through the opening of the installation into its inside, they entered into a transformative space. Here, they were asked to sit in the enclosed space and exchange eye contact for five to ten minutes. Through this silent non-instrumentalised exercise, the engaged participants enacted an unspoken exchange with one another. **This exercise in bond formation** was an attempt at inciting a common experience. By learning through the encounter together, the participants forge a new form of learning which is situated against the instrumentalist nature of neoliberal education. Rather, this new form of learning is aimed at creating a more open and accessible epistemological atmosphere. Of course, each participant will have experienced this installation differently. We could not and can not presume what they will come to know or learn through their encounter with it. What we can understand is that given the pervasiveness of dogmatic and representational forms of thought within education, one of our tasks

as a challenge and resistance is to learn how to think differently. This should be thought of as a continual practice of *learning the art of expressing ideas as problems*. Therefore, our idea, then, was to explore different ways to *reconceptualise*. Through offering *Not One / To Be Two* as an *experience of the new*, where there was not a ready-made concept or representational image to refer to, the participant has to react to this immediate experience creatively in order to mediate a concept. In doing so, the untimely learner-participant thinks *against* the common sense and orthodoxies of the present in order to engage in and create new ways of experiencing the world.

Hollie Mackenzie

Discussing 'Minority Experiments in School' whilst in Brazil in the 1980s, Félix Guattari highlighted the process of institutional schooling as a process through which the child's creativity and expressivity drops to a sort of degree zero. Guattari then confidently proclaimed:

'The people who have tried to experiment seriously with other educational methods know very well that it is possible to dismantle this infernal mechanism; they know very well that with another kind of approach this wealth of sensibility, this wealth of expression, can be relatively persevered.'

Our experiments in commonisation or experiments in transversalisation were attempts at this. Pedagogical experimentation seems to us to be a crucial facet in any creative-resistant practice under contemporary conditions of enforced austerity disguised as economic necessity. A second installation which attempted this was *Of Other Spaces* – a nod to Foucault's famous discussion of heterotopias – which created a curtained, hidden, and enclosed space, the express purpose of which was to *listen*. Participants were invited to enter a personal audio-visual space – which a number of us occupy in our day-to-day lives in any case – *listen*, and *reflect* on some (hopefully) challenging audio-visual material. Our examples were primarily drawn from contemporary hip-hop. We can't really know how, if to any extent, we encouraged listening. Such an encouragement is not easy, and listening cannot be forced.



Cynicism is the neoliberal cliché *par excellence*: a boring and putatively 'informed' permanent scepticism about the possibility, or indeed desirability, of transformative micro- and macro-political praxis. Of course, cynicism functions quite well as a form of political disempowerment: a cynical population doesn't conduct experiments, a cynical population doesn't listen. Cynicism is a strategic adversary.

Two things do seem clear, however.

One: minority experiments are only the beginning, only one possible beginning, in any creative-resistant practice today.

Two: we have had quite enough of the

administration, individualisation, cynicisation, instrumentalisation, and precaritisation of all aspects of life through neoliberal usurpation.

Experiments in commonisation are a strategy, a tactic, an attempt to create new spaces that are generated immanently within (we cannot recourse to a transcendent authority) extant power relations, but point and create beyond them. We join others before us in doing this, and invite others to do so.

Conor Heaney

ALL PICTURES/VIDEOS CREDITED TO BEN COOK. WE WILL BE RELEASING A SHORT FILM ON THIS WORKSHOP.

Iain MacKenzie is a Senior Lecturer in Politics at the University of Kent, Canterbury (UoK) as well as the Director at the Centre for Critical Thought. His research explores the idea of critique; a form of practical, theoretical and creative activity that reaches beyond the indifference that necessarily results from the mere to-and-fro of opinion. His research remains oriented by this notion of critique, and the potential for 'critical events', feeding into his work on dramatisation, resistance, art, and politics.

Contact: I.MacKenzie@kent.ac.uk

Hollie Mackenzie is an artist and a PhD candidate in Social & Political Thought UoK. Her research is focused on practicing an egalitarian relationship between art and politics, through feminist and poststructuralist perspectives. Predominantly drawing upon the literature by and on Deleuze and Guattari. Weaving together artistic practice, scholarly work and political engagement, she aims to both practice and explore this feminist philosophy of 'labial' art-politics.

Contact: HollieMackenzie89@hotmail.co.uk Website: <http://mackenzieartist.co.uk/>

Conor Heaney is a PhD candidate in Social & Political Thought at UoK. His research presently focuses on the mental ecology or mindscape of contemporary capitalism and its relationship to political disempowerment using the work of, among others, Félix Guattari and Maurizio Lazzarato. He is also researching the transformative pedagogical and political potential of popular culture, as well as institutional and pedagogical experimentation.

Contact: C.C.J.Heaney@kent.ac.uk Website: <http://conor-heaney.com/>

Ben Cook is a documentary and fiction film-maker based in the UK. His documentary work has covered mental illness, social housing, women refugees and AIDS awareness, as well as biographical documentaries on artists and charity workers. In a fiction film capacity he co-founded Anti/Type Films in 2009. Since then he has written and directed eight short films, a feature film and a produced a number of others.

Contact and Website: <http://antitypefilms.co.uk/>