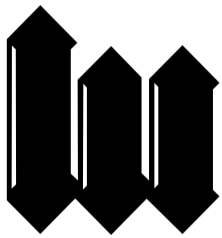


NOTES ON WHAT A RADICAL PEDAGOGY MIGHT FEEL LIKE

PROF. SHELLEY HYDRA
UNIVERSITY FOR
STRATEGIC OPTIMISM



What would a radical pedagogy feel like? Have we forgotten? Did we ever know? Perhaps, in the moments we do experience

it, we don't recognise it as being anything like pedagogy, learning or understanding (that is, the collective and collectivising transmission and production of ideas, strategies and practices.)

What we need to find out is what a radical pedagogy might now be, in the face of an exponential marketisation of thought, research and radical practice. How might a radical pedagogy be germinated and propagated, so that it becomes everyday, viral and voracious, unceasing and unstoppable? In other words, how can we learn with and from each other to become something inherently inimical to things as they are, caustic even to those technologies of capitalism that seek to recoup value at every node, even from those initiatives that seek its destruction?

I do not mean learning exclusively within the school, the university, the nursery or the workplace training centre. What is interesting is when learning starts to take place elsewhere. When collective learning reveals the classroom to be moribund, it must be mobilised and on the move, invigorated by having a point, enervated when struggle becomes pointed. I have only ever known I was learning in this way after the fact. These moments have been few and fleeting, but the flash of a liberatory social power experienced at Millbank gives an example of what I think radical pedagogy might feel like. True, this was something of a high watermark in terms of the student movement, but it was accompanied with the rupture of the classroom as the place of learning, with learning spreading beyond its walls.

The recent period has seen a proliferation of experiments with alternative forms of educational

institution and radical critique of educational institutions: Edufactory, The Really Free School, Tent City University and The University for Strategic Optimism to name a few. Being non-aligned and outside of "the university proper", these groups have sought to avoid reproducing the contradictions of the classroom in a more makeshift and less hierarchical way. Beyond the standard lecture format, the only obvious remnant of the traditional university is the decapitated seminar, sometimes called workshop. Not only do these formal aspects remain intact in the move beyond the classroom, or more accurately, moving the classroom outside, much of the content of the classroom remains the same also. By this I mean that people who take part in these experiments are usually the same disgruntled grunts from the classroom proper. As such, we bring the classroom with us intact, try as we might to deface its walls.

The need to bring people excluded from the classroom in, as the only possible means of breaking down the walls of that classroom, stumbles on precisely the 'radical' move outside. For instance, when the Marxist historian Eric Hobsbawm visited a prison to give a lecture, he acknowledged the unstable foundations of his status by suggesting to his audience that they probably knew more than he did. The prisoners reacted angrily at what they perceived as false modesty and castigated the professor along the lines of 'you are the one with all the learning, don't pretend you aren't, teach us.' The attempts to radicalise pedagogy often serve only to address the issues of those who already have access to the classroom, as well as what they suppose might be in the interests of those excluded, rather than the actual interests or concerns of those people themselves.

My point here is twofold. Firstly, we need to put a stop to the handwringing over our status as intellectuals, academics and students, and secondly we need to find out from those excluded



ANDREA BAKACS

from the classroom what they might want from us, and how (or if?) we can be of use. An advanced understanding of dialectics may not be as obviously useful to some as the ability to change a gearbox, but neither is there any reason to be embarrassed about a specialisation of learning like this. I would make a shit mechanic, and communism cannot live on bread alone.

This stumbling block, a pedagogy that replicates the classroom but with fewer resources, feeds into and is fed by something of a crisis of conscience and confidence of those in the university. On the one hand we see that the university has become like any other factory but the niggling concern of class privilege means we realise that we are not cleaners or coal miners. Neither one nor the other, we somehow believe the lie that the 'student movement' is bracketed off from 'the workers' proper. Swinging precariously from the Union Jack, we are closer to Bullingdon Club than NHS nurses. This, combined with the collapse of the student movement, has led many to claim that there is no radical possibility left in the university. It is important, I agree, not to privilege the educational sector as some type of a more radical hope, but to think of it as more hopeless than any other part of society also misses the point.

Education, conceived broadly as learning, is not something accidental to the struggle, or a privilege to be considered following some future victory.

It is a necessary part of the reproduction of ourselves, our lives, and any thought of social flourishing is unthinkable if it does not include thinking and learning for everyone. It is not as if capital hasn't noticed how important institutionalised education is to its own interests, both as a way of externalising the cost of worker training and discipline, and increasingly to provide terrain for its own constant need for expansion. Education must now produce surplus value for the capitalists even as it trains workers for them.

As a malignant and parasitic managerial class continues to colonise the university, it demands not only sustenance for its superfluous existence, but also that the host becomes a reflection of the infestation's own image. Students and staff alike must become self-regulating receptacles of core company goals and values. Value comes to be produced through an arbitrary institutional calisthenics and the spread-legged, spreadsheet-measurement of that performance. This motley new managerial class must learn to present itself as the petty bourgeois shopkeeper, marketing specious wares, or as the entrepreneurial visionary explorer, tasked with terra-forming new vistas of corporate training, consultancy and product placement; or as public brand-uni spruiker of telegenic 'ideas' and Verso-style controversy coffee chat radical publishing. Welcome to the factory of an absent future!



CHRISTINA E LOZANO



ANDREA BAKACS