

ABSTRACT

Pedagogies of the Unknown – Training the Imagination for an Unsettling Future

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This PhD project is looking for pedagogies that can engage with the future in times of crisis. In light of anthropogenic climate change, a global environmental crisis, and its destabilizing impact on social and economic systems, there is an urgency to examine the relation between pedagogy and an unsettling future. In order not to succumb to panic, passivity or evasion: what are the possibilities to imagine otherwise? What kind of aesthetic education can “train the imagination for an epistemological shift” (Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak)? How could a pedagogy look like that is open to not knowing, to contingency and change?

While questioning the limitations of a Critical pedagogy that relies on Western democratic ideals based in empowerment, dialogue and reason, this research turns to pedagogical practices that engages all senses in the service of imagination. At the center of this project is a performance practice that explores the format of guided meditations, drawing from lecture performance and meditation as a quotidian and creative practice. The guided meditations are presented as performances or sound installations for art spaces, as well as elements of teaching. They combine traditional elements with interventions that disrupts the anticipated trajectory, allowing for an unsettled (Eve Tuck) storytelling that challenges the expectation of meditations to foster acceptance and alignment with a “greater good” (whether this be spiritual or in line with neo-liberal ideals of productivity and health). The aim of the guided meditations is to explore the potentiality of an embodied pedagogy to engage the participants in imagining otherwise.

Simultaneously, the project raises a critique of Western constructs of utopia as the dominant form of imagining otherwise, by looking to feminist and de-colonial theory that resists utopian fatalism and claims to universality. The aim is to make a critical shift from utopia towards a constantly changing and undetermined future – the unknown (inspired by the science fiction of Octavia Butler). By listening to Donna Haraway's call to “stay with the trouble” of the messy, muddy interrelations between all living things, and to the impossibility of the ethical that is addressed in Spivak's concept “the double bind”, this research finds that this move towards the unknown demands an alternative grounding condition – a willingness to engage with the future without guarantees, from a place that bell hooks calls “radical openness”.

To further emphasize the pedagogy of this research, the dissertation is structured as a workshop, consisting of entering the space of the dissertation, a set of modules for the reader-participant to play with, and an exit, with the hope for a more open ended presentation of the research.