

Critical Pedagogies in the Neoliberal University: Expanding the feminist field in the 21st-century art school

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Critiques of the neoliberal university are ubiquitous. Research is instrumentalised towards the production of quantifiable outcomes for the economy. Academic learning environments are evaluated for effective delivery of enterprising, if uncritical, citizens, into the global marketplace. Student fees and debt form a virtuous loop with employability agendas. To deliver its objectives, the corporate university speeds up performance demands upon permanent and precarious faculty colleagues.

Feminisms have long intervened in economies of knowledge production, asking critical questions concerning authority, inclusivity, and the role of education in empowerment and political change. What feminist pedagogies can we develop and maintain in the neoliberal corporate university? How can feminist reflexivity, creativity and aesthetics counter the anaesthetising effects of education-as-commodity for 'student-consumers'? Can we develop responsible, responsive, critically affirmative knowledge projects through learning and teaching? How can we foster collaboration, connection, inter- and cross-disciplinary feminist creativity and thought in the academy? How can feminist pedagogies function within neoliberal universities while also offering spaces for critique? How does money work in feminist-friendly 'alternative art schools' – who can afford to study, and who cleans the toilets? What are the pre-figurative or alternative practices? How can the 'long march through the institutions' (Dutschke, c.1970) function as transformative experience rather than as co-option or assimilation? If 'the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house' (Lorde, 1979) how can we undo, while remaking, pedagogies, and not fail ourselves as students and as academics? Is it sometimes OK to 'go slow'?

Papers included in this session will critique, theorise, propose, and strategise towards environments that enact inclusive feminist pedagogies.

Speakers and Abstracts

(Re-)Turning to Radical Feminist Pedagogies

Barbara Mahlke (Researcher, Curator, Art Educator, Vienna)

This contribution examines the role of emerging queer/feminist pedagogies in art and education representing modes of critical engagement against the neoliberal transformation of the art school in the 21st century. In recent decades, the studies of art and education have been restructured by neoliberal governance. Entry processes and assessments, models of teaching and learning and curricula have been reshaped on the premises of creative industries, cultural entrepreneurship, and the logic of the global (art) market. Moreover, 'neoliberal feminism' (Catherine Rottenberg), and 'libertarian authoritarianism' (Wendy Brown) undermine the sense of political agency.

Radical queer/feminist, decolonial and critical pedagogies situated between art and non-art institutions engender critical investigation, political engagement, collective self/education, and self/organisation and the integration of the personal and the political.

I argue that a return to the archive of radical feminist self/education and pedagogy at this very moment in time is central. As a case study, I will examine the feminist initiative and school 'Scuola senza fine – 150 ore' (School without End – 150 hours) initiated by Lea Melandri together with a group of housewives in Milan in the 1970s. The archives and the repertoires of historical feminist pedagogy might unfold new potentialities of re-configuring feminist agency, collectivity, and pedagogy.

Past Pedagogies and Feminist Futures

Jen Kennedy (Queen's University, Ontario)

In response to the questions raised by this panel about the possibilities of practising feminist pedagogies within neoliberal universities – 1) What feminist pedagogies can we develop and maintain in the neoliberal corporate University? and 2) If ‘the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house’ (Lorde, 1979) how can we undo, while remaking, pedagogies, and not fail ourselves as students and as academics? – this paper looks back at two radical feminist pedagogical experiments in the USA and Italy in the 1970s and 1980s that simultaneously aimed at dismantling the subjective oppression of gender and economic exploitation of capitalism.

If one of the imperatives of neoliberal education is to produce ideologically appropriate subjects (administrators, pedagogues, students, future workers...) for capitalism, perhaps radical feminism’s combined critique of heteropatriarchal subjective and economic relations may offer insight for thinking through the situation faced by feminist teachers today? Examining two moments from the transnational history of radical feminism, namely the Milan Women’s Bookstore Collective and the Lesbian Art Project in Los Angeles, this paper explores the methods practised within each and considers what they might retain as models for critical feminist pedagogy today.

Feminist Pedagogy and Strategies of Denial: Enabling confrontations for intergenerational solidarity and survival

Joanna Boehnert (Loughborough University)

I will use this paper to reflect on tensions between generations of feminists in higher education with a focus on strategies of denial and their toll on the goals of feminist movements. Feminists have worked historically (with varying degrees of success) to end the normalisation of the denial of social injustices and political, structural, symbolic and/or everyday violence. This paper will address denial in the face of divisive issues such as the ‘me too’ movement; the precarity faced by younger generations; and the intersections of patriarchy and ecological crises. It is based on my personal experience as a daughter of a feminist academic in Canada, as a student at art school and my current role as lecturer in design education oriented towards social and environmental justice.

My experiences have led me to the conclusion that many, if not most, oppressive behaviours and attitudes are rooted in various types of denial and unconscious bias – as opposed to conscious discrimination. Unconscious bias and denial are deep-seated forces that prevent many of us (and especially those with more privilege) from seeing things that disturb our self-image. I will describe my own approach to negotiating these difficult confrontations in higher education as I moved from art to design education. I will describe how survival increasingly depends on our ability to make confrontations with disturbing information a catalyst for change. The lessons learned from feminist struggles inform the work of confronting all types of oppressions, including those on issues of environment justice.

Why Art History? Experiential learning and female employability in in the 21st-century art school

Ruth M Cereceda (Bader International Study Centre, Queen's University, Ontario)

A recent survey published by the National Endowment of the Arts indicates that although the percentage of women artists in the art market is close to equality (51%), they still earn 20% less than male artists. The research paper ‘An Asymmetrical Portrait. Exploring gendered income inequality in the arts’, further indicates that women working across arts professions make almost \$20,000 less per year than men (Lindemann, Rush & Tepper, 2016). At the same time, women still comprise the majority (sometimes up to 70%) of the student population in Art and Art History degrees.

The role of Experiential Learning (EL) is to bridge the gap between academia and the workplace. EL fosters off-site learning, extending the student learning experience outside the classroom and beyond traditional learning. Embedded in an environment of guided reflection, critical thinking, positive engagement and

active learning, EL is an essential tool for the application of knowledge and skill acquired in class to out-of-class scenarios, thereby improving the opportunities for internationalisation and employability of our (female) students.

My paper analyses a first-year university survey course in Art History that has been designed with EL as a key concept. The course aims to develop transferable skills, such as visual thinking, critical thinking, critical writing or public speaking, with the objective of fostering collaboration, connection and interdisciplinary creativity both in the academic field and beyond, in the workplace. My paper will focus on specific examples of course and didactic units' design, considering specifically how EL contributes to course objectives, and development of specific learning outcomes.

Out of Office: Working feminist spaces in troubled times

Lenka Vráblíková (University of South Africa (UNISA))

Elsbeth Mitchell (Loughborough University)

Reading feminist ethnographies on the current state of European universities suggest that, for those who pursue what feminist theorist M Jacqui Alexander calls 'teaching for social justice', these institutions are becoming unliveable. In this performative paper we explore how feminist theory and practice can counter the effects of academic culture that puts emphasis on enhancing productivity and profitability and invests in generating a certain appearance of research and teaching 'excellence'.

We follow the path laid out during a feminist reading & mushroom-hunting walk undertaken in October 2017 that we organised as part of a teach-out programme set up by the University and College Union (UCU) during a strike to defend statutory protections for staff at the University of Leeds. The walk involved reading feminist texts aloud together and foraging for mushrooms in the nearby woodland of Meanwood Park, Leeds. Going out of office in the context of a strike provided space and time for feminist readers and mushroom hunters to critique the conditions of labour, reflecting on how it shapes our intellectual and institutional (working) habits and their possible transformation.

We use this small example of our feminist practice to think about the possibilities of working and living feminist pedagogy inside and outside the institution. In doing so we seek to imagine and try out forms of collectivity, knowledge-sharing and creative and political work that might follow patterns different from those currently prescribed in academic culture.

Virtually Feminist: The feminist turn for socially engaged art in higher education

Roxane Permar (Reader in Fine Art, University of the Highlands and Islands)

In this paper I will examine the impact of feminist art practice and theory on pedagogical practices from a personal and institutional perspective. The relatively new programme, MA Art and Social Practice, at the University of the Highlands and Islands will provide a case study to consider the expanding feminist field in the 21st-century art school.

The MA Art and Social Practice is delivered entirely virtually, offering access to a wide range of students who have not previously been able to study at MA level for a variety of reasons. Virtual learning provides opportunities for education among diverse learning communities, such as those that are geographically remote or those who cannot leave home to study, such as those with childcare responsibilities or chronic illness. The programme is in its second year of delivery and is run and taught by an all-female team of lecturers. Almost all students are female, currently 25 out of 28. Feminist principles underpin the programme, promoting non-hierarchical, open and inclusive learning and teaching environments through teamwork and student-centred learning, generating a sense of shared ownership and responsibility for teaching and learning. Diversity and plurality of practice characterise the curriculum content. Networking and collaboration are fundamental to our practices. Feminists work for change, to make a difference to our lives.

Core feminist values contribute to improving our teaching and learning environments, foster innovative teaching practices, inclusive curriculums and progressive course development. Analyses of social and political structures encourage our students and colleagues to better understand institutional structures that impact on learning, teaching and professional careers. Students thus become better equipped to understand their position as professional practitioners, and empowered to shape a sustainable career, whether in education or art and design.