

Collective Futures

Organizing Critical Experience

The idea for this symposium emerges from the current wave of struggles against educational cuts in the United Kingdom. The present crisis does not only affect the British educational system and British society as a whole. It derives from broad socio-economic changes imposed by global capitalism everywhere. Hence, the proposition of using the space of the next joint symposium to discuss issues and explore possibilities that concern not only London, but also Berlin, Copenhagen.

We consider important not to limit ourselves to a debate about cuts, percentages and financial amendments. The primary targets of the British government and the transnational powers beyond it are places where critical thinking is developed (see for instance the closure of the Continental Philosophy Department at Middlesex University). It is the development of what we call here ‘critical experience’ that we want to address together in this symposium. The aim of the symposium is not to discuss how to save existing academic structures as they are, or how to go back to the good old days of academia, but to think and experiment collectively new (future) forms of production of ‘critical experience’.

We use the term ‘critical experience’ to insist on the need to recognize that what we do, as academics that do not seek refuge in the crumbling, or reinforced, depending on the viewpoint, ivory tower of academia, goes (or should go) beyond a purely intellectual exercise. The way we operate should be both intellectual and practical, personal and collective, rational and affective, academic and non-academic. And this is what the three joint symposia in 2011 propose: to open the intellectual to the practical, the personal to the collective, the rational to the affective, the academic to what is not academia, to what is “public”, or has to be re-appropriated or reconstituted as such.

The plans to further privatize academia have triggered a variety of self-organized activities, not only in London, but across Europe. These activities are not confined to the classroom, nor are they limited to protests and demonstrations. Discussions take place in the streets, teach-ins are organized in occupied libraries, exhibitions are curated in occupied art galleries, lectures are happening in banks and shops. These collective forms of thinking and acting question conventional understandings of thought as an individualistic and purely academic activity.

During the Unplugged Humanities symposium in Berlin last November we already developed various experiences responding to the current crisis of academia, and some of these experiences are continuing. The London symposium does not invite participants to analyze or emulate the self-organized activities which have recently

emerged in London in order to appropriate and exploit their creativity and secure the ultimate innovative academic model. The struggles call for the organization of critical experience beyond the managerial parameters that administer nowadays higher education. We invite the participants of the London symposium to respond to this call by proposing activities to experiment with the transformative capacities of collective critical engagements.

CALL FOR ACTIVITIES

The London symposium makes a “call for activities” in order to participate. These activities can be proposed individually or collectively, but a collaboration of some sort, either between academics and between PhD students and people outside academia, is encouraged.

We welcome different formats of activities:

- Activities engaging with public spaces / spaces outside academia, and their possible ‘inhabitants’ or communities
- Workshops developed using the theory we use in our research (putting theory into practice).
- Performances (including facilitation of a critical discussion)
- Invitation of guest speakers/presenters and facilitation of discussion (again the guests do not need to be academics)
- Collective presentation of papers
- Screenings (including the facilitation of a discussion)
- Games (including the facilitation of a discussion)

The deadline for the call is Sunday 6th of February 2011.

Contact email: collectivefutures@gmail.com