

Praktiken widerspenstiger
Lernräume

Access Rider
Tutorial

3

Conversation with
Ren Loren Britton

The publication project *Praktiken widerspenstiger Lernräume* (english: Practices of Unruly Learning Spaces) is dedicated to experimental learning formats that position themselves unruly with their content, composition, organisational forms and*or approaches and test their critical visions in practice. In conversations with the organisers of these learning spaces, experiences, difficulties and insights are to be documented and collective practical knowledge made accessible.

Access Rider Tutorial

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The zine series *Praktiken widerspenstiger Lernräume* (english: Practices of Unruly Learning Spaces) was created as part of Katharina Brenner's final thesis in the Visual Communication programme at the *Kunsthochschule Kassel*. The project was supervised by Johanna Schaffer and Johanna Schäfer.

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Katharina Brenner: When was the first time you came across access riders?

Ren Loren Britton: The first time I learned about them was working with Spiders, who was a student of Johanna Schaffer's at the time, at *Kunsthochschule Kassel* and in a research project that I was in at the time. They were first introduced to me as something coming from the world of music. I always kind of liked that, if you think of them from music - they correspond to being a band on tour. You send ahead of time a list of all the different connections that you need to make your amps work and your guitars and all that. The idea of having a document that eliminates the need for lots of back and forth discussion, and then provides access to set something up and make it possible was always the possibility energy that access riders were introduced to me as and that I hold in my imaginary of what they are.

Katharina Brenner: What does it mean to you to use an access rider?

Ren Loren Britton: I think for me, it's a document of collective access. Whenever I'm

using an access rider in a place, it tries to ensure that all of my access needs will be met where I'm working. It means that it puts me in a good position to do my work well. It also means that my colleagues and collaborators and community that I'm a part of can also show up. There are some things in my access rider that are just for me, and then there's also things in there that make a kind of collective access. It's something that changes my possibility, it hopefully changes collective possibility for me and my community to be in spaces, participating or accessing events, information or exhibitions.

Katharina Brenner: I was part of one of your online *Access Rider Tutorials* last year which you beautifully curated and organized. Could you explain what is important to you when facilitating a workshop? How do you care about access, especially in online meetings?

Ren Loren Britton: I think a lot of non-critical pedagogical spaces are not aware of the norms that they produce and reproduce. There is often a hidden architecture, how Annette Krauss talks about it, in her *Unlearning Exercises*

book¹ that I'm a big fan of. In that she talks about the ways that architectures presume certain bodies to be, and based on these presumptions – tables and chairs are designed, bought, installed and normalize that exclude and produce spaces in a specific way.² These literal architectures are linked to social infrastructures of who is imagined to be a student, a teacher – and is informed by assumptions of how do we learn and navigate spaces. Why is it for example, that most classroom spaces have really bad hybrid on/offline access? This is very much framed through *white* Western ideas of what and how it is to learn. The imagined student is often a non-disabled, *white*, cis-gender person, sitting in a small chair in which they can take notes very quickly with a pen and paper. They have no sorts of dependents, people that would need to be cared for or other sorts of access tools that they might need that would help them learn or learn in other modes

- 1 Krauss, Annette; Choi, Binna; van der Heide, Yolande: *Unlearning Exercises - Art Organizations as Sites for Unlearning*, Valiz. 2018.
- 2 Krauss, Annette: *Tables and Chairs to Live With*, in: *P|art|icipate - Kultur aktiv gestalten*, Ausgabe 10 (2014), URL: <https://www.p-art-icipate.net/tables-and-chairs-to-live-with/?pdf=4137>

like through reading along simultaneously or having Sign Language interpretation. It's often required in hegemonic spaces, that you're not moving, stimming or playing with something so that you can 'properly' take in knowledge. So there's a lot of assumptions that greet what kinds of bodies become welcome in classroom spaces.

Whenever I'm setting up any sort of workshop space, on- or offline – I'm really actively trying to unmake these norms. I find that the longer it is that we're told to be in spaces in a certain way, the more kinds of similar knowledge will be produced. If we always have to cosplay as though we're someone else, we're not fully in a space, it's not actually accessible to us. And because of this, only certain kinds of people who can fit into norms, can participate, which a lot of people cannot. And honestly, why would you even want to try?

In these ways, classroom spaces are quite oppressive. So, I follow people like Paulo Freire or bell hooks who talk about education as a practice of freedom. What kinds of permissions or ways of being in space can be created through setting it up with more intention? And in my work, that means many things, like it can

be working with practices like collective conditions³, which set up the space intentionally, naming access needs and gender pronouns at the beginning of a meeting, taking things with a pace that suits the group, making breaks. Or when I'm working in physical space, it could be to bring different kinds of materials to the room; some-times clay, sometimes pillows, sometimes scents, sometimes snacks. Things that kind of allow us to be in the space in a way that we can show up with our whole bodyminds; where we don't check our experience at the door and be these "empty banks", like Paulo Freire writes about. So it's a long-term practice I have and it's interwoven between practices of disability justice and critical pedagogy. How can I think about who is in spaces with more space – breath and less assumptions? And how can I set up spaces differently to allow more bodyminds to be there?

Katharina Brenner: After your workshop, I was thinking a lot about how to use access riders in learning spaces like universities. I also thought

3 Constant: *Collective Conditions*,
URL: <https://constantvzw.org/site/Collective-Conditions.html>

about writing my own access rider and sharing it with my class, but I haven't dared to do it yet. Do you think access riders could be a useful tool for example in seminars or class meetings? And can you imagine what this would look like?

Ren Loren Britton: I think that one part of ableism as an oppressive power structure is that it becomes shameful to talk about our needs. In any space, the idea that one should have needs and express them is not welcome. And so this is an impact of ableism. Self-silencing is also something that ableism produces: if it was normal for all of us to talk about how we learn best or what kinds of ways that we can be in space in a more embodied and present way, there wouldn't be worries there, I think. So from this, I think collective practice is one way of shape-shifting power dynamics within institutions. I think whenever you're trying to implement practices of more access, you need at least two people that are actively working on it together because it is too much for any one person to hold. Inaccessibility and ableism are power structures wound up in colonial continuums — this is very deep. We're talking about racism, anti-queer sentiment, ableism and

classism amidst other oppressions. These are things that are deeply embedded within institutional practices. To change them, transform them or to make it a space where these things can be shifted because they can be witnessed — this is difficult and slow work. First there is the work of collectively understanding why things need to be changed, and then there's the work of actually changing them. So I think that these realities are layered, and so perhaps you team up with some colleagues or some friends and practice it together because I think through collective practice, things can actually be shifted. If it's only through one person doing it, it's understandable that you would get worn down because there's so many things that need to be changed and people don't (yet) understand why this is important.

Katharina Brenner: I also thought about proposing to the group of people I'm studying with that everyone writes their own access rider and shares it.

Ren Loren Britton: I think that's great! I also think sometimes different kinds of care are needed. When we're talking about questions of

ableism, disabled people often are systematical-ly denied access into spaces. There's different things at stake when it comes to someone asking, "can I make this more accessible for you?" from a disabled or non-disabled perspective. It might be that for a non-disabled person writing about your needs is quite easy, but it could be difficult for someone who's been fighting for their needs to be witnessed and/or it's not normal for them to express themselves. So, I think that it's great to do that. I also think different kinds of emotional and/or structural support may be needed to find out ways to make it possible for everyone to actually share, safely.

Sometimes when it comes to accessibility, people are often afraid to start because the perception is that it's so much energy, time or money that will be needed in order to make changes. And maybe sometimes that's true. However, I think if access practices are integrated as a mood, where access needs and access practices are implemented within a context, there will be ways of negotiating how to get needs met. Access practices don't always have to cost a lot of money, they do need intention, time and care.

I think its about shifting to a culture where access can be experienced as a mood of how it is

that we are together, rather than something that we're fearful of that will cost so much energy or time or money. I don't want people to get discouraged before they've even started.

Katharina Brenner: A sentence from your Collective Conditions really stuck with me: "There are as many teachers in this room as there are people in this space." For me, this sentence completely twists traditional hierarchies in educational institutions. What characteristics of a learning space show that it fulfills or tries to fulfill this sentence?

Ren Loren Britton: I think it requires, at least on my side, as someone who teaches classes, attention and intention. Attention, like paying attention and intention, like creating the space where that's possible from myself as a teacher. I also think it requires the same from whoever's in the classroom with me. I also think it requires a setting aside of ego as me as a teacher, because it is an ego position. It is my ego coming through where I feel like: „Yes, I have something to say to you. I have something I can teach you. I know something." I maintain the perspective that everyone else in the room also

has something to teach me. I practice as teacher by often saying: „I don't know." I don't try and perform knowledge if I don't actually feel like I have something to say about it.

I also think when I'm a student, I try not to be a passive student. So that means that if I think I know something different from my position, I try not to set that aside, I try not to say: "Well, this person must be right." I ask or propose a different way of understanding something. Or sometimes I, as a student, accept that I'm in a beginner's position, and because I'm a beginner, maybe I don't know, but I try and learn it through my own words. I've seen it work best with people that work together over a long time, because I think that in a workshop of three hours, or in a course of one semester, it's still not really enough for us to have the trust to be able to undo those hierarchies, because they are so embedded within spaces. But if you're working with people for a long time, the teaching student paradigm can be questioned more radically through moving through different topics that people have interest in.

I think that forms of more radical un-making require trust, which can only be built over time. Through acknowledging "There's as

many teachers in this room as there are people in the space.", we acknowledge that we all have our own lived experiences that enrich each other and they're not to be disregarded.

Katharina Brenner: Does "There are as many teachers in this room as there are people in this space." mean to you, that students are getting included in the organization of a seminar?

Ren Loren Britton: I think that it comes down to terms of payment. Making people do work that they're not paid for is not unlearning hierarchy. That's a huge issue. I have some experience in how to set things up, but that's not to say that the way that I do this is best. Students setting up something in a different mode or with a different method could very well be great as long as they're paid for their time and energy. If someone is put in that position of 'working for free' because it's an anti-hierarchy thing to do, that's a different situation.

Ren Loren Britton is a trans*disciplinary artist-designer who holds values that reverberate with trans*feminism, technosciences, radical pedagogy and disability justice. Their work practices with loving accountability towards collaboration, accessibility, trans*gender politics and critical technical praxis.

Ren has shared artistic work within multiple institutions including *ALT_CPH Biennale* (Copenhagen), *Transmediale & Haus der Kulturen der Welt & Martin Gropius Bau* (Berlin), *Constant* (Brussels), *Sonic Acts* (Amsterdam), *Kunsthalle Osnabrück* (Osnabrück), *Het Nieuwe Institute & Varia* (Rotterdam) & *Rupert* (Vilnius). Recent academic articles have been published in *Catalyst*, *MATTER* and *Digital Creativity* and within edited volumes by *Bloomsbery Academic*, *Spektor Books* and *Barbara Budrich*.

Working in deep collaboration with multiple interlocutors, Ren works with Iz Paehr as the arts-design duo *MELT*; with Rosen Eveleigh on the project *Trans* Presents* and with other beloved crossers. As *MELT* they action shape-shifting processes along the interwoven themes of climate change, coalition building, critical technical

practice and access. *MELT*'s work resources ways of being together that figure in the present and future our flourishing. With Rosen Eveleigh they unfold an interview series that follows trans* infrastructures as those documents authored by many people that get one of us into a bureaucratic office as well as those visual materials authored by one person that get all of us to the party.

<https://lorenbritton.com/>

<https://meltionary.com/>

Praktiken widerspenstiger Lernräume

- # 1 *ANTIRA-Projektseminar + Alerta kbh!*
Projektseminar zu Antidiskriminierung,
Gespräch mit **Yewon Seo** und **Anna Wolf**
- # 2 *Teaching to Transgress* Research Group,*
Conversation with **Camille Circlde**
- # 3 *Access Rider Tutorial,* Conversation with
Ren Loren Britton
- # 4 *Feministische Gesundheitsrecherchegruppe,*
Gespräch mit **Julia Bonn**
- # 5 *Netzwerk Diskriminierungskritik,* Gespräch
mit **Francesca Romana Audretsch,**
Sevda Güler und **Hagen Verleger**
- # 6 *Climate Supporters' Support Group,*
Conversation with **Sophia New,**
Daniel Belasco Rogers and **Ju Rosenstock**
- # 7 *Stadium Planetare,* Gespräch mit
Antonia Grohmann und **Lena Schubert**

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