

Praktiken widerspenstiger
Lernräume

Climate Supporters'
Support Group

7

Conversation with
Ju Rosenstock , Sophia New and
Daniel Belasco Rogers

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.

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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: While I've been working on my final project *Praktiken widerspenstiger Lernräume* over the last few months, I kept thinking about our seminar *Climate Supporters' Support Group*. Because in many self organized contexts that I have been part of, I have experienced that despite student organisation, there is still a clear separation between organisers and participants. And unlike in any other seminar I have co-organized till now, in our format, all the participants were able to contribute to the program. And that's also why I thought it would be great to use this conversation as a reflection and documentation of our block seminar.

So you, Sophia and Dan, approached the *Klasse Klima*¹ in November 2020 with the idea of organising a *Studium Generale Kollisionswoche*² at the *UdK Berlin* together. So what was your idea and thoughts behind your request? As far

- 1 The *Klasse Klima* is an open, transdisciplinary collective founded by students to anchor climate justice in artistic and creative education and practice.
More information: klasseklima.org
- 2 The *Studium Generale* is a cultural studies and interdisciplinary-artistic basic programme at the *Berlin University of the Arts* and an integral part of the bachelor's and graduate degree programmes. The *Kollisionswoche* is an interdisciplinary project week that takes place annually in the first week of January.
More information: www.udk-berlin.de/studium/studium-generale

as I remember, you already had the idea that the week should be about self care and activism.

Sophia New: I was always really curious just to know what *Klasse Klima* were doing. There was also something that I observed at *HZI* (*Hochschulübergreifendes Zentrum Tanz Berlin*), which was a desire from the institution that students get involved in self-organised formats. But I could also see the pressure that it was putting on students sometimes. So getting this balance right between self-organising and feeling exploited is important. That's why it was about supporting people that give support anyway. It's so easy to burn out when you're an activist, because you easily forget what your own needs and desires might be. If you don't take care of yourself, you actually can't do anything for anybody else.

And then of course, we were in a pandemic, which is a really different situation. So for us, it was an opportunity to get a little bit out of our comfort zone. *Kollision*, I find a very dramatic word, but it is an opportunity to really find out: How might you do things differently from a self-organised perspective? And what could we do differently, just taking the opportunity of the situation that we were all in?

Daniel Belasco Rogers: We've been interested in approaching non-hierarchical teaching methodologies for a while. We were aware that there are pitfalls, that you can't pretend as someone who's much older than the students you're teaching and on a different financial deal, that you're all the same. That's not non-hierarchical. I think that it's important to remember that. It's something that we've been thinking about for a while. Not just say it, and then set up the same hierarchy, but actually try and really properly do it. It's not just a question of, „Let's all sit in a circle, and pretend that we're all equal.“ I think you need to do more work than that. And so I think we were entering this project with an interest in how you might work with a student organisation like the *Klasse Klima* and as people that have a lot of privilege in the institution, to ask how we can help or how we can feed it? How can we become gatekeepers that let people in, rather than exclude people? I think that was always the kind of role we saw ourselves in at *Studium Generale*. I mean, because all of these university structures are, in varying degrees, violent, because they're keeping some people out and they're welcoming some people in.

Sophia New: There's always a little bit of this feeling that some students are just there for the points. But I think as an organiser it's challenging to work with that energy and then still to make it into a meaningful time spent together. I acknowledge you're here for that, but let's not make it feel like it's something you're just ticking off. Let's bring in your desires, let's bring in what you'd want to do with that time. So it's not just another exercise in getting your credit points.

Ju Rosenstock: I like what you said about thinking about your needs and desires to start with, and then plot together how you can use the infrastructures of the university to start satisfying them. I really like that approach, also when it comes to studying. At *Klasse Klima* for example, we always use the credit points to give people time to do activist work.

Katharina Brenner: I felt like the (online-) tools we were using because of the pandemic played quite an important role in our seminar and maybe even supported the aspect of self-organisation.

Sophia New: I think we talked about breakout rooms and online rooms where we could meet and one of you said, „Let's think about it like a house.“ That was such a fantastic metaphor for me. We were all stuck at home, but to think about this portal that we were all using as a house was brilliant. So we created these several online rooms and named them *kitchen, living room, bathroom* etc. We got excited about those rooms, „I'm going to go into the *kitchen* now,“ and then you could switch the online *room* and literally take your laptop into your kitchen. That was just fabulous. For me, that was a really great way to think about this platform that most of us felt really stuck with. And that metaphor really opened up something for me, in a way that got me excited again.

Ju Rosenstock: It was this abstract structure for people to play with, maybe that sparked more creativity which made it easier for people to engage, compared to a classical zoom seminar where people assume specific hierarchies right away. You had the possibility to stay with what you need and join the rooms you felt like in that moment.

Katharina Brenner: I think it was also very helpful that we didn't just have one online room where we always came together with the whole group, but many individual rooms where the participants could also be among themselves and organise themselves. I am wondering if you could transfer this principle into analog learning spaces?

Daniel Belasco Rogers: I always try and incorporate getting outside in seminars, just because it offers you that. It can offer you multiple different spaces.

Katharina Brenner: I remember that there was also the opportunity to meet outside during the *Kollisionswoche* under the current regulations. I remember talking a walk once and going ice bathing with some participants. And that was super exciting! We had this online Pad where anyone could write down activities they would like to do and add a date, time and maybe contact information. So participants could join other activities if they felt like it. It was like an online blackboard! Do you remember other activities we did together?

Ju Rosenstock: I remember I made salt dough to build little sculptures with it. I was really drawn to it, because after all this computer time, I was really looking for other ways to sense or to process things. And I really liked that, actually. We also organized a reading and exchange group. But generally it was more about being with one another, doing sensory things, feeling what you need and using the time to react to that.

Daniel Belasco Rogers: I still remember that it was super nice that we incorporated the body a lot. Especially in that winter time when we were all online, it was very important to connect with our bodies.

Katharina Brenner: That's so often left out of education. We're mostly sitting in rooms on chairs and we're not talking about how our bodies feel or how we feel with the workload or with the world around us. And sometimes it's really crazy that we leave all that out and just sit in a room and talk about a text or an art work or something.

Sophia New: Someone taught us how to mix olive oil with sugar as a DIY exfoliator in the shower or the bath. And clothes swapping. I mean, I did clothes swapping before, but what was really nice was to make sure that everyone really received the clothes that they asked for online. There was also mending activity and someone took time to sort out his room.

Katharina Brenner: And I also remember meeting in the *kitchen* just to talk to people. I mean the seminar name was *support group* and I felt like as we were doing all these activities, people started opening up about their struggles, for example with their studies. I kind of like the idea of thinking about a seminar as a support group. Because in the end we really want to support each other to learn something and to help us with our projects. And I feel maybe that's what a seminar should be like sometimes.

Daniel Belasco Rogers: From the point of view of being the older teacher, you often don't actually know what difficulties the students are having, they're kind of hidden from you. Your experience is different because you're often more established and at another stage of

your life. You often don't know the questions to ask. It's super important that the students feel that they can actually share and that they can integrate into the seminar all of that stuff they care about. You know, all of the struggles, all the side jobs, all the side hustles. When you start to share your circumstances, you start to see people in a different way, you start to engage with people in a more rounded or more holistic way. But of course it has to be consensual. You shouldn't set up a situation where students should reveal everything about themselves.

Ju Rosenstock: If everyone could be transparent with their struggles in a university space, we could learn so much from each other and we could also discuss studying from completely new perspectives.

Sophia New: I think also what helped the participants to open up was the very basic fact that there were two students co-organising the week.

Katharina Brenner: At the end of the week, like all the other groups of the *Kollisionswoche*, we had to prepare a presentation to represent our

project. Looking back, I thought it was a bit of a shame that we had to do this presentation because I had the feeling that it added unnecessary pressure and stress to the week.

Sophia New: Thinking about it now, it would have been so nice if in the presentation people could have visited us in different digital rooms somehow, that all those activities would be going on for those few minutes and they just came and visited us and just sort of popped around.

Daniel Belasco Rogers: It's always such a difficult question! I've been involved in teaching formats where we've all decided not to do something at the end. There was also a disadvantage to it, it felt like somehow we hadn't really marked the end; so if you don't do anything, it can be difficult too. We only had four days together, more or less, didn't we? How can we possibly represent that experience? Especially if it was intangible in the sense that we weren't all making something. If we were all making a film, then that would have been obviously what we'd show. But if it's intangible in the sense that we're all receiving benefit, but it's quite individual,

then it's very difficult to represent that. It feels like a distortion to take an experience or multiple experiences and sum them up very briefly. It's really a challenge! It's a tension that's often inherent within processes that are more participatory or more process orientated.

Katharina Brenner: And I feel that we live in a culture where we have to present ourselves a lot and often show our work really fast; maybe sometimes too fast. I mean we were just starting to develop a practice in those few days. I think it would have been nice if we had used that time to continue what we were doing.

Ju Rosenstock: We could have had a dinner all together to mark the end of the week.

Daniel Belasco Rogers: Yeah, that would have been nice.

One of the things that got a little bit tiring working for three years in *Studium Generale* was this very limited format of the *Kollisionswoche*. You've got four days to give a workshop and you can't really go terribly deep. You can open stuff up or you can form a group sometimes, but as soon as it's formed, it's over. It's nice

to have an intense four days, but you realise at the end of it, you're just beginning.

Climate Supporters' Support Group was a block seminar that took place in January 2021 as part of the *Kollisionswoche* of the *Studium Generale* and that year's theme *Bodies in Crisis* at the *UdK Berlin*. It was organised by Sophia New and Daniel Belasco Rogers from *plan b* as well as Ju Rosenstock and Katharina Brenner from the *Klasse Klima*.

Ju Rosenstock is a berlin-based multimedia artist, currently studying in the Master's program *Live Arts Forms* at the *Akademie der Künste Nürnberg*. Julia's current practice revolves around sensing entanglements with narratives of progress, focusing on the interconnection of economy and sociality, along with the associated power structures. These sensings are shared in video installations or discussed in participatory practices such as the *sensing class study group* that Julia is organizing.

Sophia New and **Daniel Belasco Rogers** have worked together as the performance duo *plan b* since moving to Berlin in 2001. Originally from London, their work is concerned with site, intimacy, public space, technology and durational performance. They have a long-term practice of

recording everywhere they go, everyday, with a GPS. From this collection they make prints, drawings, performances, video works, sculptures and carpets. Since 2010 they have regularly taught on a variety of courses including *Hafen City University*, Hamburg, *Hochschule für Grafik und Buchkunst*, Leipzig, *Folkwang Universität der Künste* and the *University of Arts*, London. Between 2020–2023 they were guest professors for *Studium Generale* at the *University of Arts Berlin*.

Katharina Brenner works in the context of collective teaching, critical design practice and experimental text production at the intersection of institutional critique, queer feminism, mental health and activism. She studied Visual Communication at the *Berlin University of the Arts*, at the *Estonian Academy of Arts* and is currently working on her final thesis *Praktiken widerspenstiger Lernräume* at the *Kunsthochschule Kassel*.

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 *Studium Planetare,* Gespräch mit
Antonia Grohmann und **Lena Schubert**

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