Abstract: Knitting the Concept – the Use of Artistic Strategies to move the Knowledge Culture in Academic Teaching

By Anne Mette W. Nielsen, Ph.d., Assistant Professor, Aalborg University and Rikke Platz Cortsen, Ph.d., Postdoc, University of Copenhagen

Academic practices have been going through rapid changes in recent years in the way they operate, as well as their societal function (e.g. Hayles, 2012). University students are still expected to acquire new knowledge and think critically within their field of studies while facing new modes of thinking and a more unpredictable post-graduation future. For us it has meant to explore new ways of engaging students as independent thinkers and actors. The ambition has been to move the knowledge culture in the classroom from a reproduction of text-based knowledge to involve continuous inquiry, productive failing and new multimodal modes of critical thinking.

Our approach implies an extensive use of artistic strategies from mappings over re-enactments and different ways of curatorial practices. It is inspired by the French philosopher Bruno Latour’s distinction between representation and re-presentation (Latour, 1988) and his development of the theoretical concept of composition (Latour, 2010). The emphasis here is that rather than trying to represent the world, theoretical concepts present it. Latour explores this re-framing of academic scholarship in several of his multimodal works by highlighting the aesthetic concerns it implies, e.g. the online mapping project Paris: Invisible City (2004), the art exhibition Making Things Public (2005) and the re-enactment The Tarde Durkheim Debate (2007).

Much in line with Latour’s thinking we designed an MA-level theory course in Modern Culture at the University of Copenhagen in spring 2014 involving artistic strategies in order to rethink the knowledge culture in our teaching. The course combined theory, introduction to various art-as-research approaches by guest lectures, student inquiries (between them the knitting of a concept) and collaborative feedback sessions. During the last class the students selected and edited the produced material and turned it into a collaborative e-book using the online platform Booktype.

In our presentation we will describe four key components by which the students were able to access new areas of thought, i.e. both challenging thinking and pushing themselves further in their thinking: Productive failing, extended and different modes of attention, material reflection and collaborative thinking. We will provide examples of some of the assignments from our co-inquiry with the students in order to describe how we discussed their productions. We finish the presentation by analyzing how these new multimodal modes were qualified within the frame of the course, how they can be integrated in other courses and what the limitations might be.

References: