

**Letters: The classroom is  
burning, let's dream about a  
School of Improper Education**

KUNCI Study Forum & Collective

Date: Jan 11, 2020, 11:10 PM

From: Sulastri<sup>1</sup> Nirvana Trimurti <sulnt@mail.com>

To: Murni<sup>2</sup> Dharmawinata <murninata@riseup.net>, Thothokkerot<sup>3</sup> <thothot@what.art>

Subject: A failed academia

Hey Murni and Thothokkerot,

Remember the postdoctoral fellowship I told you about the other day? I failed to get it. Again. I received a rejection letter from the university last week. I agree that what I need might be a little bit of luck. But I have my own theory about this:

I may have constructed a strong Curriculum Vitae with a relatively long list of written works and creative activities such as exhibitions and research residencies. But instead of regarding it as a valuable aspect of my intellectual profile, I was perceived as someone who has too many research interests. Someone who has too many research interests means he or she is not linear. Non-linearity means something that is not arranged in a straight line. Mine was definitely deemed too curvy, or too wild.

Exploration and creativity can be perceived as conditions that lack depth.

I am rejected because I haven't been nurtured by the university long enough. My coming of age as an intellectual has been molded not by the university *per se*, but rather by an independent system and self-taught attitude—study club, artists collectives, and nongkrong (hang out) with artists and activists.

I'm quite disappointed, it is as if I have to prove myself again and again in discomfoting ways whenever I'm writing an application letter. There is an endless judgement of one's capacity. I'm struggling with the unspoken competitive culture in universities, and

as usual it is only with you both I feel like I'm allowed to show my vulnerabilities.

How are you guys doing? It's still warm here. I need to brush up my swimming skills this year, like a proper prepper. Doomsday is near.

Cheers,

Sulastri

**Date:** Jan 12, 2020, 1:15 PM

**From:** Murni Dharmawinata <murninata@riseup.net>

**To:** Sulastri Nirvana Trimurti <sulnt@mail.com>, Thothokkerot <thothot@what.art>

**Subject:** Re: A failed academia

Hi Sul, hi Thot!

Sulastri, my commiseration to hear about the rejection. I hope you've allowed yourself to eat a redemptive sweet dessert (the carrot cake on your Instagram looks delicious!).

How do you feel now, Sul? I'm sure you'll need time to process everything, but do you find you still have a prospect to work in the university? What I mean by prospect here is not just the chance of being accepted in a university. But how actually does the prospect of being a university lecturer help to form our critical and political subjectivization in the age of neoliberal capitalism? Hehehe. I beg your pardon for being an old grumpy SJW,<sup>4</sup> speaking as an art school drop out here!

I do believe teaching can be a form of activism, but how resourceful—or on the contrary, how limiting—is the university when it comes to practicing education as social transformation in our context? What's actually your plan, if you're ever accepted in the university? What kind of intervention can you think of? I want to know your thoughts on this. Maybe by dismantling your expectation of the university, we can think differently about your “failure” to get the job.

I remember our colleague Stefano Harney, who talks (and practices) educational intervention in the “underground of the university” (you remember this from his excellent dialogical book with Fred Moten, *The Undercommons*), aiming to disseminate knowledge produced within the classroom beyond its walls.<sup>5</sup>

And here we are, outside the walls—not waiting for the university to disseminate its knowledge to us, right? On your “theory” of being rejected, I agree we’ve never been totally nurtured by the university, and to add to that, aren’t we kind of proud of it? Being a university lecturer is just a tool to reach a bigger transformative aim. If we ain’t got the tool, then we have to look, or even build another tool. The master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house.<sup>6</sup> We could not even possess the master’s tools!

Can we dream of building a new house with what we have? What kinds of pedagogical models, tools, and ecosystems have nurtured us to be critical, how do they sustain (or do they even sustain)? Let’s think and dream about what we can do together outside the walls of the classroom. Maybe then, we can break those walls from the outside?

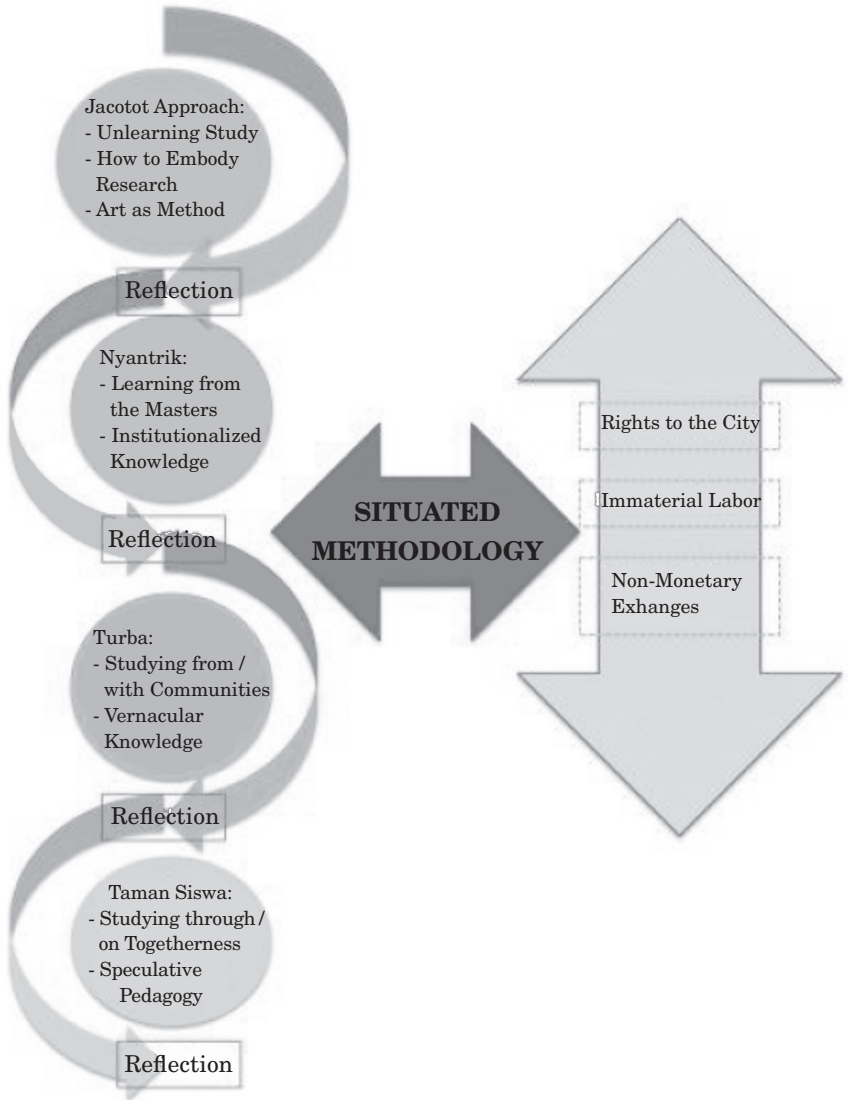
Cheers,

Murni

# KUNCI SCHOOL OF



# INVISIBLE ECONOMIES



## CODA

**Sulastri, Murni, and Thothokkerot set up a Google Doc and together wrote an open call for the School of Improper Education, reflecting the urge to put their questions on studying together into practice. The text reads:**

*Open Call for the School of Improper Education*<sup>30</sup>

*We are building a new school. The school is an experiment on the sustainability of (both material and immaterial) economies of organization. We want to test the idea of school as a garden of ideas, a laboratory of affects, and a space where new ideas clash and coalesce. We are not yet sure about what can be learned in this school. But we are absolutely sure about not starting from the premises that specify what needs to be learned and not learned. We want to study together, while interrogating the meaning of togetherness.*

*Our bodies are entrenched with histories and memories shaped by formal educational institutions—school buildings, respectable teachers, uniforms, flag ceremonies, wooden desks, libraries, high fences, narrow hallways, too many things to memorize, exams, grades, ranks, report cards, and strict school regulations.*

*We start from the question: what does an improper education mean?*

*We want to problematize the hierarchical relations between teacher and student. We aim to unpack the homogenizing tendencies of pedagogical principles upon the body and mind. We would like to vitiate the emphasis of curricular desires around use value. Is it enough to describe one's own practice as an alternative education? How do we operate a study environment that doesn't turn*



*knowledge into commodities?*

*We seek to recreate the notion of the classroom and invite those who have been improperly educated to engage in the space as well as disrupt it. At the School of Improper Education, the meaning of authority in knowledge reproduction will be scrutinized. We are looking for those who are eager to perform experiments on learning and teaching—of becoming a student and teacher at the same time, to oscillate in between different educational models. This invitation also goes to those who are keen to blur the boundaries between formal education and everyday realities.*

*At the School of Improper Education, you can stay within, and at once think outside of it. As a platform which strives for the principles of uncertainty and curiosity, the purpose of this school is to study the meanings of studying and the ways to study these meanings.*