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If one principle could be seen to inform the opaque surface of what in the 1990s was called a "new economy" – the shifts and changes, the dynamics and blockades, the emergencies and habit formations taking place within the realm of immaterial production – it would certainly be: "Work together".

Facing the challenges of digital technologies, global communications, and networking environments, as well as the inherent ignorance of traditional systems towards these, 'working together' has emerged as an unsystematic mode of collective learning processes. Slowly and almost unnoticeably, a new word came into vogue. At first sight it might seem the least significant common denominator for describing new modes of working together, yet "collaboration" has become one of the leading terms of an emergent contemporary political sensibility.

Often collapsed into the most utilitarian understanding, 'collaboration' is far more than acting together, as it extends towards a network of interconnected approaches and efforts. Literally meaning working

Despite these negative origins, the term collaboration is mostly used today as a synonym for cooperation. Dictionary definitions and vernacular uses are generally more or less equivalent; but etymologically, historically and politically it seems to make more sense to elaborate on the actual differences between various coexisting layers of meaning.

Is it in principle, possible to make a relevant distinction between cooperation and collaboration and to what end? If so, what characterizes the constellations, social assemblages and relationships in which people collaborate? And last but not least: Does this have any impact for the current debate on education? What follows are seven notes and propositions in which I try do address these questions in a very preliminary, eclectic and sketchy way.

1.

In pedagogical discourse, both cooperation and collaboration are relatively new terms. They emerged in the 1970s in the context of "joint learning activities"

COLLABORATION

Seven notes on new ways of learning and working together

Florian Schneider

together with others, especially in an intellectual endeavor, the term is nowadays widely used to describe new forms of labour relations within the realm of immaterial production in various fields; yet despite its significant presence, there is very little research and theoretical reflection on it. This might be due to a wide range of partly contradictory factors that are interestingly intertwined.

As a pejorative term, collaboration stands for willingly assisting an enemy of one's country, especially an occupying force or malevolent power. It means working together with an agency with which one is not immediately connected. Most prominently, "collaboration" became the slogan of the French Vichy regime after the meeting of Hitler and Marshall Petain in Lontoire-sur-le-Loir in October 1940. In a radio speech Petain officially enlisted the French population to "collaborate" with the German occupiers, while the French resistance movement later branded those who cooperated with the German forces as "collaborators".

and "project-based learning", which were supposed to break with an authoritarian teacher-centred style of guiding the thinking of the student.

What might be defined as "educational teamwork" corresponds to an idea promoted at the same time by management theory; that is, in a teamwork environment, people are supposed to understand and believe that thinking, planning, decisions and actions are better when done in cooperation.

At the beginning of the last century and well ahead of his time, Andrew Carnegie, steel-tycoon and founder of Carnegie Technical Schools, said: "Teamwork is the ability to work together toward a common vision, the ability to direct individual accomplishments toward organizational objectives. It is the fuel that allows common people to attain uncommon results."

To this day, this famous quote has probably featured prominently in a myriad PowerPoint presentations by human resource managers across the globe, but its central argument only became a reality in the early

1980s, when the crisis in the car manufacturing industries triggered the first large scale proliferation of the concept of teamwork in the realm of industrial production.

Factories that had hitherto been characterized by a highly specialized division of labour usually coupled with a strong self-organization of the workers in trade unions were turned upside down: teamwork started being considered as a prerequisite for breaking the power of the unions, dropping labour costs and moving towards so-called 'lean' production, which was seen at the time as a response to global competition and the success of Japanese exports to the US and Europe in particular.

In late industrial capitalism, the notion of teamwork represented the subjugation of workers' subjectivity to an omnipresent and individualized control regime. The concept of group replaced the classical one of "foremanship" as the disciplining force. Rather than through repression, cost efficiency was increased by means of peer-pressure and the collective identification of relatively small groups of multi-skilled co-workers.

The model of teamwork soon spread across different industries and branches, yet without any great success. Meanwhile, various research studies showed that teams often make the wrong decisions, especially when the task involves solving rather complex problems. Teamwork frequently fails for the simple fact that internalised modes of cooperation are characterized by "hoarding" or stockpiling, quite the opposite of knowledge sharing: in the pursuit of a career, relevant information must be hidden from others. Joining forces in a group or team also increases the likelihood of failure rather than success; awkward group dynamics, unforeseeable external pressures and bad management practices are responsible for the rest.

This overall failure is even more staggering if we consider that rapid technological development and the availability of global intellectual resources were supposed to have increased the pressure on individuals to exchange knowledge within and between groups. Yet as knowledge became the main productive force, neither the free-wheeling and well-meaning strategies of anti-authoritarianism nor the brutal force of coercing cooperation seemed capable of establishing any new dimensions of the dynamics of 'working together'.

2.

Increasing evidence shows that 'working together' actually occurs in rather unpredictable and unexpected ways. Rather than through the exertion of the alleged generosity of a group made up of individuals in the pursuit of solidarity, it often works as a brusque and even ungenerous practice, where individuals rely on one another the more they chase their own interests, their mutual dependence arising through the pursuit of their own agendas. Exchange then becomes an effect of necessity rather than one of mutuality, identification or desire.

This entails an initial level of differentiation between cooperation and collaboration: in contrast to cooperation, collaboration is driven by complex realities rather than romantic notions of common grounds or commonality. It is an ambivalent process constituted by a set of paradoxical relationships between co-producers who affect one another.

In "Le Maître ignorant", published in 1983, Jacques Rancière indicates that ignorance is the first virtue of the master or teacher. He gives the example of Joseph Jacotot, an exiled French revolutionary, professor of French literature at the University of Louvain in Belgium from 1815. Jacotot taught French to his Dutch-speaking students in the absence of a shared language, through what appears to be an entirely collaborative method: without setting up a common agenda, identifying a common ground or communicating through a shared set of tools, he "placed himself in his students' hands and told them, through an interpreter, to read half of the book with the aid of the translation, to repeat constantly what they had learned, to quickly read the other half and then to write in French what they thought about it." This "teaching without transmitting knowledge," as Rancière defines it, seemed to be incredibly successful, because it granted a level of autonomy to the students, who acquired their own knowledge as they deemed useful and independently from their teacher.

Rancière's example is particularly enlightening in the context of collaboration and its relation to notions of hierarchy which so much of collaborative discourse deems to have vanquished. It exposes the hypocrisy of the supposed anti-authoritarianism that essentially underlies many notions of cooperation. This misconception might be seen as the practice of liberally weakening the position of power, yet ignoring the

inherent paradox of doing so, such that in an infinite line of regression power reappears even stronger than before. The more it tries to explain, mediate, communicate or teach, the more it reaffirms the distance, inequality and dependency of those who lack knowledge vis-à-vis those who seem to possess it. The same applies to cooperation and teamwork: a presumption of equality actually extends both discrimination and exploitation while seemingly providing continuous evidence in support of such an illusion, as if there were no radically different modes of working together.

3.

The work of Jacotot's students can be seen as a form of collaboration with their teacher that flattens the hierarchies and does away with the teacher-student relationship altogether, without romanticising it. Through collaboration hierarchies are neither criticised nor morally disapproved of and hypocritically discarded. This way of working together is capable of ignoring the ignorance of the ignorant and of pauperising the poverty of the pauper precisely because collaborators are neither questioning obvious authority nor pretending to be equal. Instead they have worked out a system not of exchange but of flow in which these positions are avoided altogether.

Collaborations are the black holes of knowledge regimes. They willingly produce nothingness, opulence and ill-behaviour. And it is their very vacuity which is their strength. Unlike cooperation, collaboration does not take place for sentimental reasons, for philanthropical impulses or for the sake of efficiency; it arises out of pure self-interest. Collaborations could reveal the amazing potential whereby an ignorant, poor or otherwise property-less person can enable another ignorant, poor or otherwise property-less person to know what he or she did not know and to access what he or she did not access. It does not entail the transmission of something from those who have to those who do not, but rather the setting in motion of a chain of unforeseen accesses.

Shifting the focus away from its components and outcomes, collaboration is a performative and transformative process: the sudden need to cross the familiar boundaries of one's own experiences, skills and intellectual resources to enter nameless and foreign territories where abilities that had been considered "individual" marvellously merge with those of others. In this sequence, outcomes and processes follow an

inverse relation, as do the relations of power. For what comes about is not the 'granting' of access but a recognition across the board of those involved in the process, that it is the unexpected multiplicity and uncertain location of the points of access that is at stake in the exchange.

4.

Translating the concept of collaboration back to the context of education also points to a reverse-engineering of the teacher's role. Etymologically, in Greek and Latin "pedagogue" or "educator" means "drawing out" or "pulling out" and refers to an ancient Greek practice: a family slave called "pedagogue" used to walk the child from the private house to a place of learning. Rather than the teacher, who was supposed to have and transmit knowledge, the pedagogue was the person who accompanied the student to the place where the teacher imparted it.

This rather spatial notion of bringing somebody across a specific border evokes striking associations with human trafficking. The escape agent or "coyote" – as it is named at the US-Mexican border – supports undocumented border crossers who want to make it from one nation state to another without the demanded paperwork. Permanently on the move, only temporarily employed, nameless, anonymous and constantly changing faces and sides, the coyote is, in an ironic way, the perfect role-model for both education and collaboration. As a metaphor it serves the purpose of destabilising the idea of 'knowledge in movement' away from its always assumed progressive direction. Instead it allows for a certain degree of illegitimacy inherent in all forms of collaboration, and distinguishes it from the always perfectly sanctioned and legitimate nature of cooperation. By extracting a principle of mobility and perceiving the lack of legitimacy as enabling - as opposed to criminally inhuman and disabling –, the 'coyote' who may or may not be motivated by self gain without ideological commitment produces a possibility whose parameters cannot be gauged.

The "coyote's" motivations remain unclear or, shall we say, do not matter at all. The "coyote" is the postmodern service provider par excellence. The fact that there is no trust whatsoever between those engaging in the transaction, does not actually play any part in the unfolding of its play. Here, we might say, conceptual insecurity overrides the financial aspects of the

collaboration and triggers a redundancy of affects and perceptions, feelings and reactions. Those who do not need the coyote's support hunt and demonise it; those who rely on the coyote's secret knowledge and skills appreciate it all the more. The extreme polarities of these responses instantiate the range of the collaborative field and the impossibility of navigating it through moralising vectors.

Ultimately, collaboration with a coyote generates pure potential: ranging from the dream of a better life to the reality of pure living labour power ready to be over-exploited in the informal labour market. If it wasn't for its totally deregulated character, this practice would bear similar results to that of traditional educational systems; we might say that in this exchange, nothing can be claimed for material existence, let alone possession, but nevertheless something very precious and entirely precarious comes into being; pure imagination, yet potentially powerful beyond measure.

5.

Against the background of post-modern control society, collaboration is about secretly exchanging knowledge independently of borders. It stands for the attempt to regain autonomy and get hold of immaterial resources in a knowledge-driven economy. It no longer matters who has knowledge and who owns the resources; what matters is access: not a generously granted accessibility but a direct, immediate and instant access, often gained illegally or illegitimately.

While cooperation involves identifiable individuals within and between organizations, collaboration expresses a differentiated relationship made up of heterogeneous elements that are defined as singularities. As such they are not identifiable or subject to easy categories of identity, but defined out of an emergent relation between themselves. As such collaboration is extra-ordinary in so far as it produces a discontinuity and marks a point of unpredictability, however deterministic. Its unpredictability takes the form of not being able to entirely categorise the components of the collaborative process, even when its general aim or drive may be steering it in a particular direction.

Rationality has here been replaced by a kind of relationality that constantly decomposes and recomposes information in order to make temporary use of un-

expected dynamics and contingencies: from stock market speculation to the development of network protocols, from the production of new forms of aesthetics in art and culture to a generation of political activism with global aspirations.

People meet and work together under circumstances where their efficiency, performance and labour power cannot be singled out and individually measured; everyone's work points to someone else's. Making and maintaining connections seems more important than trying to capture and store ideas. One's own production is very peculiar yet it is generated and often multiplied in networks composed of countless distinct dependencies and constituted by the power to affect and be affected. At no point in the process can this be arrested and ascertained, for it gains its power by not having explicit points of entry or exit as a normative work scenario might.

This excess is essentially beyond measure; collaboration relates to the mathematical definition of singularity as the point where a function goes to infinity or is somehow ill-behaved. The concept of singularity distinguishes collaboration from cooperation and refers to an emerging notion of precariousness, a systemic instability. This in turn can be seen as the crisis associated with the shift and transition from cooperation to collaboration in modes of working together.

The nets of voluntariness, enthusiasm, creativity, immense pressure, ever increasing self-doubt and desperation are temporary and fluid; they take on multiple forms but always refer to a permanent state of insecurity and precariousness, the blueprint for widespread forms of occupation and employment within society. They reveal the other side of immaterial labour, hidden in the rhetoric of 'working together'.

6.

Today it is tremendously urgent to learn how to deal with such excess. This is not simply the realm of an exclusive minority of geeks, nerds, drop-outs and neurotic freelancers; it invests a rapidly growing global immaterial labour force that is confronted with the prospect of life-long learning without the complimentary prospect of their ever having a teacher or a schoolbook in store, because knowledge emerges as useless as soon as it can be commodified and reproduced as such.

The crucial question is how a form of education to collaboration is possible that is not reduced ad absurdum to become the application of truism after truism. Certainly this would not mean the staging of a collaborative process within the classroom or other spaces of learning. This debate can take place at a meta-level or around the issue of "un-organizing" oneself in order to be aware and ready for the future challenges of collaborative working environments. It can take place in the fragmentation of the components of bodies of knowledge and their re-alignment with one another according to other principles. Or it can take place in the removal of pre-determined directions around the flows of knowledge.

Cooperation necessarily takes place in client-server architectures. It follows a metaphorical narrative structure, where the coherent assignment of each part and its relation to the others gets reproduced over and over again. The current educational system mirrors this structure and is therefore essentially incapable of responding to contemporary challenges, let alone future ones. Even worse, the more the system attempts to re-modernize itself, the more it sinks in the swamp of commodification, homogenization and hierarchization. Obviously the problem lies with the educational system's understanding of what contemporary imperatives are, and its insistence that these must have an 'applicable' function. If a model of collaboration were to be applied to educational cultures, then it would have to accept an inability to predetermine outcomes even while sharing a set of aspirations or directives or being anchored in a set of recognised problematics.

7.

Collaboration entails rhizomatic structures where knowledge grows exuberantly and proliferates in unforeseeable ways. In contrast to cooperation, which always implies an organic model and a transcendent function, collaboration is a strictly immanent and wild praxis. Every collaborative activity begins and ends within the framework of the collaboration. It has no external goal and cannot be decreed; it is strict intransitivity, it takes place, so to speak, for its own sake.

Collaborations are voracious. Once they are set into motion they can rapidly beset and affect entire modes of production. "Free" or "open source" software development is probably the most prominent example for the transformative power of collaboration to "un-define" the relationships between authors and producers on one side, and users and consumers on the other side. It imposes a paradigm that treats every user as a potential collaborator who could effectively join the development of the code regardless of their actual interests and capacities. Participation becomes virtual: It is enough that one could contribute a patch or file an issue, one does not necessarily have to do it in order to enjoy the dynamics, the efficacy and the essential openness of a collaboration.

In the last instance, the democratic or egalitarian ambition has migrated into the realm of virtuality: Open source developer groups usually do not follow the patterns and rules of representative democracy, the radical notion of equality reveals in the general condition that everyone has instant and unrestricted access to the entire set of resources that form a development. The result is as simple as it is convincing: Those who disagree may "fork" and start their own development branch without loosing access to the means of production.

On the Internet, distributed non-hierarchical information architectures are characterized as "peer-to-peer" (P2P) networks. They emerged in the 1990s and triggered a revolution of the conventional distribution model. These networks were first designed to exchange immaterial resources such as computing time or bandwidth, mainly in scientific academic contexts. Their aim was to overcome technological limits, incapacities and shortages by combining the existing free resources.

Since the late 1990s the same network architecture has been used to exchange relevant content: music and movies were distributed amongst ordinary personal computers that worked as both downstream and upstream nodes in mushrooming networks.

The enormous success of these projects, from "Napster" to "BitTorrent" – currently estimated to account for nearly half of the total of internet traffic – enabled people who do not know each other and probably prefer to not know each other to actually "share" their hard drives. In fact, their anonymous relationships are based on the irony of sharing, even in a strictly mathematical sense: due to lossless and cost free digital copying the object of desire is indeed multiplied rather than divided.

In the last instance collaborations are driven by the desire to create difference and refuse the absolutistic

power of organization. Collaboration entails overcoming scarcity and inequality and struggling for the freedom to produce. It carries an immense social potential, as it is a form of realisation and experience of the unlimited creativity of a multiplicity of all productive practices.

The possibility of relating these notions of collaboration to contemporary education and pedagogy, have less to do with emulating their operating modes and more to do with their ability to inspire a realignment of the relations in the field. Not limited to the seemingly good intentions and democratising impulses of the 'working together' dimension of collaboration, in education this might mean rethinking both the direction and flow of its activities. For example, the shifting of the focus of attention away from the exclusive direction of instructor to instructed, or shifting the directions of the exchanges that take place towards a circulation that values everything that is already within it. It might also mean thinking education's outcomes away from previously established criteria and towards the ability to constantly affect and restructure its own field.