

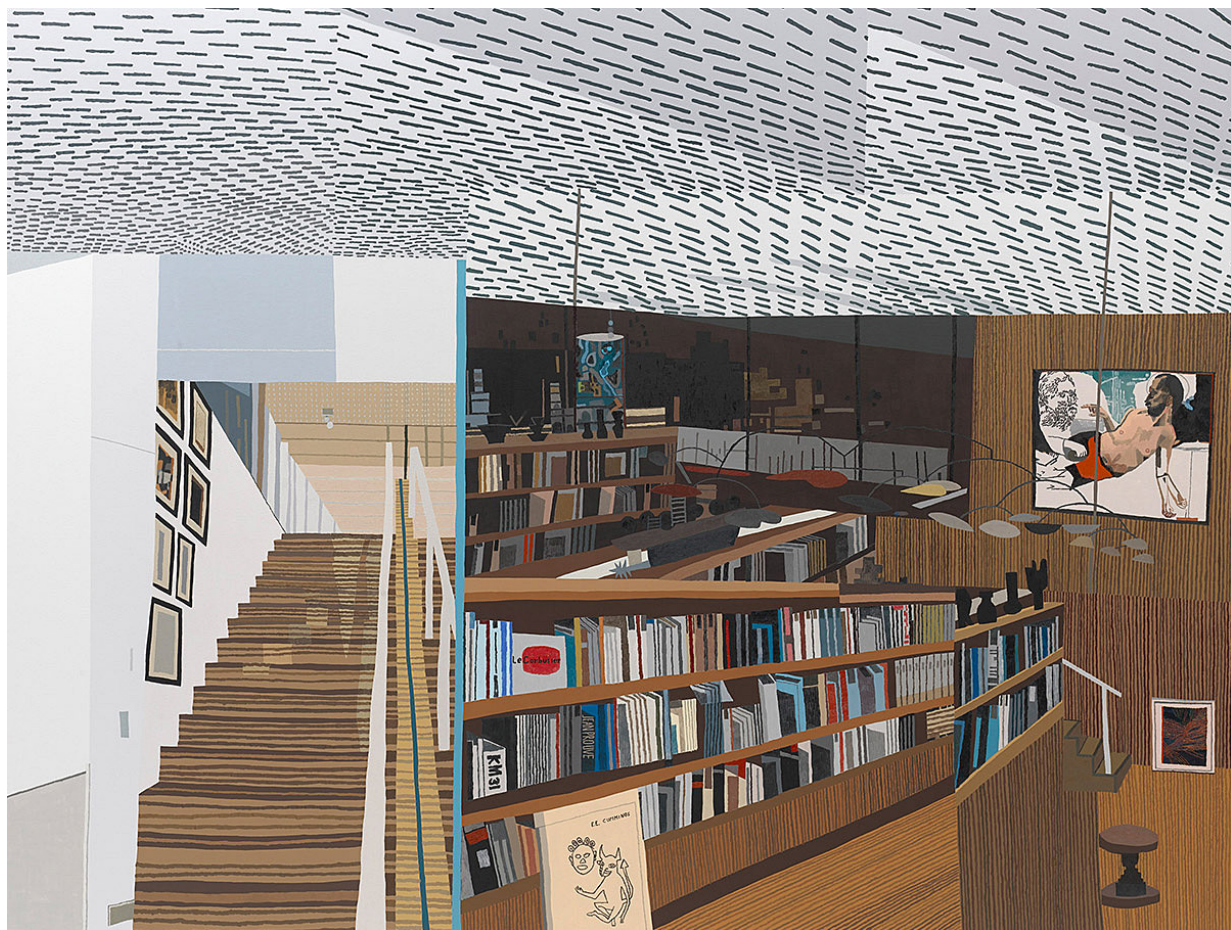
RADICAL TEACHER

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Teaching Note

Dancing Our Way Beyond Work: Playlists and Zines as Teaching Tools to Imagine a World Without Work

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Teaching Refusals of Work

George Clinton used to say that we needed to dance our way out of our constrictions (Kelley, 2022: 204). Members of social movements trying to bring a new world into being often sing and dance together. In this spirit, we asked students to suggest songs for a playlist to be assembled for a class on alternative forms of organizing and economic transformation. The playlist was used as a basis for a workshop in which we made a zine to imagine futures beyond work. The basic idea for the class was to imagine worlds to which we can say "yes." We drew inspiration from the Zapatista organizing slogan that we need "One no" and "many yeses" (Kingsnorth, 2012). The Zapatistas, in organizing their alternative to the Mexican neoliberal, capitalist, and colonial state, formulated a clear "no" to that state while insisting on engaging in the political work that is necessary to formulate "many yeses." Steering clear of one revolutionary alternative, then, engaging people in imagining worlds (plural) to which we can utter 'many yeses' is a radically democratic process.

Students in contemporary higher education in the social sciences, though, very often have had much more practice in formulating "nos" or offering critical analysis of capitalism, sexism, racism, and "our constrictions." To break away from that default, and to invite students to move beyond their practiced skills set and engage in something new, we used music and visualization in the form of the assemblage of a musical playlist and a zine of collages. This was inspired by reading Robin D.G. Kelley's *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* (2022) in which he traces the many ways in which Black radical social movements dreamed of alternative worlds and sang songs in that process. It was also inspired by the work done in feminist pedagogy on zines (for an overview of that literature see Creasap, 2014) and critical research and teaching about work and organizations through music (Rhodes, 2007; Simpson et al., 2021)

The context is a class for 12 students in a brand new Master's program in Organization Studies at Utrecht University, the Netherlands. The Master's program is called *Organizing Social Impact* and is focused on bringing together grassroots organizations, NGO's, and other organizations working towards societal change with students in teaching and research. The program, in its first year, has attracted a group of students from varying backgrounds, both international and Dutch. Nine students identified as women, three as men. All students were open to the feminist readings and discussions in class. Up until the moment of the playlist assemblage and in the context of this course, the students had studied capitalist organizations of society (Harvey, 2017) and alternative forms of organizing, drawing arguments and theories from degrowth (Kallis et al., 2018), commons (Caffentzis and Federici, 2014), diverse economies (Gibson-Graham and Dombroski, 2020), and cooperative organizing (Cheney et al., 2014). They were, therefore, already prepared to think of alternative worlds and to imagine ways to arrive there.

The week of teaching we are writing about now was scheduled to address work and labor and more particularly struggles to refuse or abolish work. Readings for this week included Silvia Federici's *Wages Against Housework* (1975),

Precarias a la Deriva's Adrift Through the Circuits of Feminized Precarious Work (2004), and a podcast with Ruth Wilson Gilmore on abolition and organizing (Adler-Bolton, 2022). The first meeting, which took place for 3 hours on a Monday morning in January, consisted of structured discussions of the literature and viewing of Precarias a la Deriva's film *Adrift in the Circuits of Women's Precarious Lives*. This film resonated well with this group of students, who like most students today work themselves to pay for their studies and to make ends meet, primarily in hospitality (restaurants and bars), but also for the university itself as student assistants. Students related their lives and experiences to the narrated and visualized experiences in the film.

Playlist and Zine-making

The second meeting was structured around music and visuals. Before the class, students were invited to suggest a song or piece of music that, to them, engaged the themes in the readings of the week. We assembled a playlist from these suggestions and shared this with the students a day before the workshop. Through this assignment and by making a selection of songs, students engaged the themes of work and exploitation before the class and were able to connect their private playlists to the theories discussed in the course. In class, each student made a page for the zine based on their chosen song. The zine was to advocate for liberation from work. To kick off, students discussed their song selection in groups of 3 and 4 and discussed potential visual representations. The zine pages were guided by a question that was inspired by the work of and interview with Ruth Wilson Gilmore (2022): "What world do we need to bring into being in order to abolish work?" The assignment was not graded. After the initial discussion, we played the playlist in the classroom and made room for a creative space for zine-making. With a pile of magazines and pictures, pens and markers, scissors and glue, we set out to create a page per person for our zine.

There were two main ways in which music allowed us to formulate "many yeses": the affective richness of songs and their lyrics and the social connections in the classroom that the music made possible (see also Rhodes, 2007). First, conversations around work and its alternatives took on a different affective language. Because the zine pages that the students assembled were based on a particular song, and the lyrics to these songs often contained the language of love and hate, talking with each other about work in these terms also became possible. The songs gave license to the presence of these affects in the classroom. We talked about how, in capitalism, gendered unpaid labor is often presented as "love," and how we may think of love differently as a result of a conversation about The Beatles' "A Hard Day's Night." A conversation ensued about the passionate Chaka Khan song "I'm every woman" in the new light of Federici's *Wages Against Housework*, therefore problematizing the idea that women should be "every woman/ it's all in me" and indeed our student Nikki Stekelenburg created an alternative poem or lyric to the song: "I'm every woman/ every woman I want to be/ I'm every woman/ not the woman you want me/ to be." At the same time, the music

offered us the freedom to talk about work in the language of "hate." The song "Fiebre del Viernes Noche" by the collective Los Chicos del Maiz allowed for the recognition that "your boss is a jerk" and offered an alternative in hedonism: "Dance, damn, dance/ because your boss is a jerk/ Dance, damn, dance/ we all need to escape/ escape the routine/ embrace hedonism/ Dance, damn, dance/ You know/ The circus of capitalism" (English translation from Spanish by Amaia Yoller Masedo). By allowing these strong affects in the classroom, students' experiences of working alongside their studies were validated, and a connection was made between their experiences and the studied literature.

Second, because we played the playlist in the classroom, and the materials for zine-making were scattered across the room, movement, social exchanges about the assignment, the music, the materials, and other things were more easily initiated and sustained. Kimberly Creasap (2004) writes about how the practice of zine-making facilitates the connection of biography to theory and does so in a collective practice, rather than the individualized assignments that are often required from students. Adding the collective listening to music is powerful because it de-sanitizes the classroom and makes it easier for apprehensive or shy students to engage in an informal conversation about the songs and the teaching materials. A togetherness was forged this way, and a welcome refuge from the seriousness and often depressing nature of teaching materials that often center on critique and a "no." Formulating "yeses" together with the help of contemporary music created room for other affects and stories about lived experiences. But most importantly, music created the freedom to move around the room, to have chats and share laughter, and to share our freedom dreams. So to conclude: contemporary music became a critical pedagogical tool in our teaching practice. It allowed us to go beyond critique and the familiar world of work and organizations, and facilitated an affective, creative, and aesthetic movement towards "many yeses" in the form of a zine to refuse work.

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