

One-day conference: *Arts and Democracy*

Renewing democracy from within the university: toward a practice-based approach to teaching and research.

University of Toulouse-Jean Jaurès, F 417

Date : Dec. 11th 2026

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Organizing partners:

Democratic Role of Universities (DRU) project. HORIZON.1.2 - Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA)

Work Project 5: Education in a hospitable university

Center for Anglophone Studies (EA 801), UT2J.

How can practice-based approaches to research and teaching contribute to the creation of alternative democratic spaces within universities?

One of the foundational pillars of the democratic ideal is rooted in Kant's conception of Enlightenment as the emergence of an autonomous individual able to think him/herself out of a state of self-imposed "minority." Since Kant, the term autonomy has been extensively theorized as a means of democratic emancipation, particularly in the field of education. The university, as an institution entrusted with the formation of citizens, has long been understood to bear an emancipatory function. Yet, the articulation of this emancipatory function with the regulatory framework of the university as institution raises a number of questions. As part of a larger reflection upon the democratic roles of universities, the conference aims to address these questions through the exploration of practice-based approaches to teaching and research. Scholars working in a wide range of academic disciplines are invited to share pedagogic experiences and research projects engaged in forms of knowledge generated by the dialectical relation between collaborative creative practice and scientific thinking. Philosophers, political scientists, sociologists, researchers in literature, visual and performance arts, as well as artists and anyone academically involved in blurring the lines between thinking and doing are welcome to discuss the ways in which democratic life can be reimagined and renewed from within the university.

In their philosophy of the arts, John Dewey and Walter Benjamin argue that democratic art is grounded in the plurality of voices, shared experience, and equality of access. This perspective is further developed by the French philosopher Jacques Rancière in *Le Partage du sensible*, where he contends that, within the aesthetic sphere, art becomes democratic insofar as it reconfigures the boundaries of collective perception — rendering visible and audible those who were previously marginalized — while resting upon the principle of "the equality of intelligences." In *Le Maître ignorant*, Rancière extends this argument into the domain of pedagogy. He argues that the role of the teacher is not to impose knowledge, but rather to foster intellectual autonomy. Reimagining the university as a democratic space through practice-based learning and teaching therefore entails reconsidering the mission of the educator: how can we cultivate minds capable of judgment within a civic framework grounded in the coexistence of differences rather than in civic conformity, to borrow Michel de Certeau's terms? Rather than conceiving the teacher-student relationship as an institutionalized

hierarchy in which a presumed authority of knowledge imposes a singular interpretation, it may instead be understood as a space of exchange in which multiple forms of knowledge, recognized as equally legitimate, nourish a collective process of critical reflection.

Within this intellectual tradition, the teaching of the arts acquires particular democratic significance. Visual and performing arts have increasingly become academic disciplines engaged in a form of knowledge that emerges from the dialectical relation between collaborative creative practice and academic thinking. As Pascal Gielen has argued, arts education can become a privileged laboratory for democratic experimentation.

The collaborative, participatory, and multicultural modes of engagement that characterize arts-based pedagogies create conditions hospitable to what Hannah Arendt theorized as the "public sphere": a shared space in which new forms of political imagination and collective action can take shape. The development of arts-based pedagogies in higher education thus represents more than an innovative approach to teaching: it seeks to open democratic spaces within institutional frameworks.

This conference addresses the broader question of collaborative, practice-based pedagogical and research experiments as political tools capable of renewing and reinvigorating democratic life from within the university. It seeks to examine the role of such experiments in fostering alternative forms of democracy within higher education institutions. But it also aims to develop a hybrid inquiry that bridges practice and research, with the aim of highlighting how creative processes and scholarly methodologies inform and sustain one another. The umbrella term "actor," encompassing students, teachers, researchers, and artists, is central to understanding creative practice as a form of experiential knowledge co-produced by all participants.

By bringing together artists and scholars from a wide range of disciplines in France and abroad, the conference will provide a unique space to assess current developments in the field, share experiences and engage in a reflection on the diversity of pedagogical and research experiments that are implemented within academic institutions, while fostering the emergence of a collaborative, multidisciplinary, and international research network connecting the different partners of the DRU project and beyond.

Areas of research participants are invited to explore include, but are not limited to, the following themes.

- State of the art on existing practices and projects
- Pedagogical experimentation grounded in playfulness, empathy, imagination and creativity
- Action-based research
- auto-ethnography
- Creative doing as a form of knowledge generation
- Investigating the concept of "cultural democracy" (Belfiore et al. 2023, Matarasso 2019) and "sensory democracy" (Ryan and Flinders 2018)
- The idea of democracy as a particular "mode of connection" (Calhoun 2017)

In order to trigger dialogue and exchange viewpoints, participants will take part in panel discussions and roundtables.

Please send a 300-400-word abstract and a short biography to:

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Submission deadline: 15 October, 2026

Languages: English

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