CURATING AND THE EDUCATIONAL TURN
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Paul O’Neill & Mick Wilson (Eds.)
16 Beaver Group
Peio Aguirre
Dave Beech
David Blamey & Alex Coles
Daniel Buren & Wouter Davidts
Cornford & Cross
Charles Esche
Annie Fletcher & Sarah Pierce
Liam Gillick
Janna Graham
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William Kaizen
Hassan Khan
Annette Krauss, Emily Pethick & Marina Vishmidt
Stewart Martin
Ute Meta Bauer
Marion von Osten & Eva Egermann
Andrea Phillips
Raqs Media Collective
Irit Rogoff
Edgar Schmitz
Simon Sheikh
Sally Tallant
Jan Verwoert
Anton Vidokle
Tirdad Zolghadr

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# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Authors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11–22</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>Paul O'Neill &amp; Mick Wilson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23–31</td>
<td>Control I'm Here: A Call For the Free Use of the Means of Producing Communication, in Curating and in General</td>
<td>Jan Verwoert</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32–46</td>
<td>Turning</td>
<td>Irit Rogoff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47–60</td>
<td>Weberian Lessons: Art, Pedagogy and Managerialism</td>
<td>Dave Beech</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61–75</td>
<td>Letter to Jane (Investigation of a Function)</td>
<td>Simon Sheikh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>76–82</td>
<td>Wonderful Uncertainty</td>
<td>Raqs Media Collective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>83–96</td>
<td>Education Aesthetics</td>
<td>Andrea Phillips</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>97–107</td>
<td>'Education, Information, Entertainment': Current Approaches in Higher Arts Education</td>
<td>Ute Meta Bauer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>108–117</td>
<td>An Aesthetic Education Against Aesthetic Education</td>
<td>Stewart Martin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>118–123</td>
<td>A Simple Turn: Notes on an Argument</td>
<td>Hassan Khan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>124–139</td>
<td>Between a Pedagogical Turn and a Hard Place: Thinking with Conditions</td>
<td>Janna Graham</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>140–147</td>
<td>Some Turn and Some Don’t (On Set-Ups)</td>
<td>Edgar Schmitz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>148–156</td>
<td>Exhibition to School: unitednationsplaza</td>
<td>Anton Vidokle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>157–164</td>
<td>The Angry Middle Aged: Romance and the Possibilities of Adult Education in the Art World</td>
<td>Tirdad Zolghadr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>165–173</td>
<td>Educational Turns Part One</td>
<td>Liam Gillick</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>174–185</td>
<td>Education With Innovations: Beyond Art-Pedagogical Projects</td>
<td>Peio Aguirre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>186–194</td>
<td>Experiments in Integrated Programming</td>
<td>Sally Tallant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>195–200</td>
<td>Introduction to The Paraeducation Department</td>
<td>Annie Fletcher &amp; Sarah Pierce</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>201–216</td>
<td>‘Please Teach Me…’ Rainer Ganahl and the Politics of Learning</td>
<td>William Kaizen</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION
Paul O’Neill & Mick Wilson
Contemporary curating is marked by a turn to education. Educational formats, methods, programmes, models, terms, processes and procedures have become pervasive in the praxes of both curating and the production of contemporary art and in their attendant critical frameworks. This is not simply to propose that curatorial projects have increasingly adopted education as a theme; it is, rather, to assert that curating increasingly operates as an expanded educational praxis. It is this proposition — that curating, and art production more broadly, have produced, undergone or otherwise manifested an educational turn — to which the authors gathered in this volume have been invited to respond.

As will become clear, this is a profoundly contested proposition; the credibility, significance and critical currency of the proposed turn is disputed across the texts assembled here. Indicative of this contestation is Marion von Osten’s assertion that ‘we must be somewhat sceptical with regard to the ‘educational turn’ […] in terms of […] displacing the real questions of knowledge economies and cognitive capitalism’.[1] Our purpose in preparing this volume has been to critically describe, locate, reflect upon, think through and, ultimately, to trouble this mooted turn to educational models and practices in recent curatorial and artistic practice.

Initial talk of an educational turn was prompted by the widespread adoption of pedagogical models, as problematised through various curatorial strategies and critical art projects. Discussions, talks, symposia, education programmes, debates and discursive practices have long played a supporting role to the exhibition of contemporary art, especially in the context of museums, biennials and, more recently, art fairs. Historically, these discussions have been peripheral to the exhibition, operating in a secondary role in relation to the display of art for public consumption. More recently, these discursive interventions and relays have become central to contemporary practice; they have now become the main event. However, these discursive productions are not only pervasive; increasingly, they are framed in terms of education, research, knowledge production and learning. Furthermore, in many instances, there is a pronounced impulse to distance these platforms from the established formats of museum education and related official cultural pedagogies. This is not simply a reinstatement of the curator as an expert charged with educating a public about the content of a given collection, but rather a kind of ‘curatorialisation’ of education whereby the educative process often becomes the object of curatorial production.

Projects which manifest this engagement with educational and pedagogical formats and motifs have been divergent in terms of scale, purpose, modus operandi, value, visibility, reputational status and degree of actualisation. They include Daniel Buren and Pontus Hultén’s *Institut des Hautes Études en Arts Plastiques*, 1996; the ‘Platforms’ of *Documenta* 11 in 2002; the educational leitmotif of *Documenta* 12 in 2007; the unrealised *Manifesta 6* experimental art school as exhibition and the associated volume, *Notes for an Art School*; the subsequent *unitednationsplaza* and *Night School* projects; *protoacademy*; *Cork Caucus; Bel(com)ing Dutch: Eindhoven Free University; Future Academy; The Paraeducation Department; Copenhagen Free University*; *A.C.A.D.E.M.Y.: Hidden Curriculum*; Tania Bruguera’s *Arte de Conducta* in Havana; *ArtSchool Palestine*; *Brown Mountain College*; *Manoa Free University*; and *School of Missing Studies*, Belgrade. Given the volume of work available for discussion in terms of art as educational praxis, this is a very short list. However, it hopefully indicates the broad distribution of the work under consideration.[2]

The escalation in discursive events has also been at the centre of new and experimental, though often short-lived, institutional models.[3] Adopting a counter-institutional ethos, these discursive productions often implement a durational dialogical process, along the informal lines of

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1. See *Twist and Shout: On Free Universities, Educational Reforms and Twists and Turns Inside and Outside the Art World* in this volume. (pp. 271-294).

2. In identifying a broad list of examples, we are conscious of not beginning with a delimited category, such as that developed by Kristina Lee Podesva who proposed that ‘education as a form of art making constitutes a relatively new medium. It is distinct from projects that take education and its institution, the academy, as a subject or facilitator of production’. Drawing on research in the Copenhagen Free University and elsewhere, Podesva identifies ten characteristics and concerns across a spectrum of education-as-medium projects. These include: ‘a school structure that operates as a social medium’; ‘a tendency toward process (versus object) based production’; ‘an aleatory or open nature’; ‘a post-hierarchical learning environment where there are no teachers, just co-participants’; ‘a preference for exploratory, experimental, and multi-disciplinary approaches to knowledge production’; ‘an awareness of the instrumentalisation of the academy’. See Kristina Lee Podesva, ‘A Pedagogical Turn: Brief Notes on Education as Art’. *Filip. 6*. 2007 [http://filip.ca/content/a-pedagogical-turn]. It is also worth looking at Anton Vidokli’s ‘Incomplete Chronology of Experimental Art Schools*. [Notes for an Art School. International Foundation Manifesta. 2006. p. 19.]

3. Examples include programmes by Maria Lind at Kunverein München; Catherine David at Witta de Wirth in Rotterdam; Maria Hlavajova at BAK in Utrecht; Nicolas Bourriaud and Jérôme Sans at Palais de Tokyo, Paris; Vasil Kortun at Platform Garanti Contemporary Art in Istanbul; and Charles Esche’s museum model at Rooseum in Malmö. Esche described his model operating as ‘part community centre, part laboratory and part academy’. See [http://www.republicart.net/disc/ins titution/esche01_en.htm]. Other ‘new institutional’ precedents from the 1990s include Kunstraum Stuttgart (under Ute Meta Bauer; then Nicolas Schafhausen); Arteleku in San Sebastián (Santiago Eraso), DAC in Vinnus (Kestutis Kuzinas, along with Deimantas Narevicius and Raimundas Malakauskas) and Shedhalle in Zürich (Ursula Biemann).
Socratic *elenchus* rather than prescriptive ‘schooling’ or ‘explication’. In other words, they seem to seek not the masterful production of expertise and the authoritative pronouncement of truth but rather the coproduction of question, ambiguity and enquiry, often determined by the simple contingencies of where people happen to begin a conversation.

Many of these exemplary projects and tendencies are explored and discussed by the authors in this publication. For several of the authors gathered here, these primarily function as points of departure for performative or polemical texts which themselves refuse a masterful discourse of explication in an attempt to honour the ethos of counter-institutional and counter-hegemonic practices of dissent and emergence. In a countervailing tendency, some authors have elected to focus on micro-practices, within formal education or within the development of institutional off-site projects, in which questions of site, public, community and education converge. These texts often diverge not only in terms of genre, criticality and authorial voice but also in terms of the broader universe of discourse posited. This dispersion of positions has been retained, and we have not imposed a superstructure of sub-sections to domesticate the discordances.

In developing this anthology, we conducted a series of seminars and public discussions in London, Dublin and Venice, which readily identified several points of contention, notably the very impulse to name something as seemingly unitary and all-inclusive as an educational turn. Many of the contributors to this volume begin by problematising these very terms and, indeed, this is indicative of the urgency with which the question of non-instrumentalised, emancipatory and critical cultural practices are approached against a political background increasingly dominated by rhetorics of culture-as-service, knowledge production, the creative economy, immaterial labour and educational outcomes. This is perhaps especially so given that such rhetorics go relatively un-interrogated within mainstream debate and policy discourses.

Arguably, the ‘turn’ as a rhetorical device for positing a particular moment of re-alignment is hackneyed, somewhat superficial and all too easily commodified. On the other hand, the term is useful for suggesting a logic of development that can be both autonomous and heteronormous; it can name a process of change that can be intrinsic or extrinsic or both; it can name an evolving process without inevitably constructing a radical or over-blown discontinuity; and this verbal noun can usefully posit a processual dynamic rather than a fixed condition or stable state. With this rhetoric, there is also an invocation of flux and the shifting of territories, stabilities and normative positions. One contributor summarily captures the torsion of the term when he asserts:

> The trope of ‘turn’ as in ‘educational turn’ could certainly garner the kind of academic attention that ‘takes account’, i.e. collects all the traces/evidences of the allegedly ‘educational’ without noticing what goes on beyond the chosen paradigm. The claims for ‘turns’ (visual, pictorial, spatial) clearly tend to be reductive and exclusive. However, one could consider them to be of heuristic value as well. Their mere existence and career as tropes generate moments and constellations that make apparent the need for a more differentiating and discerning perspective.

In our original formulation of the brief for this volume, the term ‘pedagogy’ was more prevalent than that of ‘education’; over time, however, this primacy was reversed. Unlike the term pedagogy — etymologically, the art of teaching the child — education does not privilege the

### Notes

4. ‘You talkin’ to me? Why art is turning to education’ was a roundtable discussion that took place on 14 July 2008 at the ICA, London. The discussion was organised by Paul O’Neill and Mick Wilson and speakers included Dave Beech, Liam Gillick, Andrea Phillips, Sarah Pierce and Adrian Rihin. An edited transcript of the discussion has been published in Mark Sladen et al. (eds.), *Nought to Sixty*. ICA, 2009.

5. ‘Ambivalent Ruins: Anvissarvies in art education’ was a roundtable discussion that took place on 26 September 2008 at the Graduate School of Creative Arts and Media in Dublin. Speakers included Maeva Connolly, Andrea Phillips, Declan Long, Glenn Loughran and Martin McCabe. See [http://gradcam.ie/speaking_matters/ambivalent_ruins.php](http://gradcam.ie/speaking_matters/ambivalent_ruins.php).


7. Rhetorically, the figure of the ‘turn’ may be connected with a range of imagery pertaining to the path, to conversion and to reversal. The philosophical currency of the term may be attributed to Kant’s description of his critical philosophy in terms of a ‘Copernican turn’. (For an interesting discussion of the ‘turn’ metaphor see Kojin Karatani, *Transcride: On Kant and Marx*. MIT Press. 2003. p. 23.) This has been greatly reinforced by Heidegger’s *kehre* and by discussions of the by-now-commonplace (although variously construed) linguistic turn. However, in a range of English expressions, such as “as it turned out”, “things took a turn” and “a turn up for the books”, there is general application of turning as an image of happenstance and contingency. Julia Kristeva’s playful etymology of ‘revolt’ suggests another dimension to the rhetoric of ‘turning’ as a matter of circular movement and by extension, temporal return, but also as a matter of ‘overturning’ an established order. (See Julia Kristeva. *The Sense and Non-Sense of Revolt: The Powers and Limits of Psychoanalysis*, Volume 1. Columbia University Press. 2000. pp. 1–3.)

8. See Tom Holert’s contribution to this volume, ‘Latent Essentialisms: An Email Exchange on Art, Research and Education’. (p. 320–328).
theme of teaching over that of learning and, unlike pedagogy (with its complementary construct, andragogy), education is not etymologically posited upon the adult/child distinction. However, the contemporary semantic resonance of both these terms is rich and overlapping and, as such, both seem adequate to the purpose of initiating a broad critical exchange within which greater clarity can emerge as writers re-negotiate the terms of their invitation to contribute. It is a welcome feature of this book that many contributors provide a further consideration of these and related terminologies as they rehearse their perspective on these issues.

Any attempt to name a particular moment of cultural practice faces a number of risks and possible pitfalls. On the one hand, in mobilising the heterogeneous list of curatorial projects cited above, and naming these as evidence of an educational turn (and further identifying many of these as speculative, open and emancipatory instances of cultural pedagogy), there is a risk of blunting critical analysis by too crude a generalisation. On the other hand, by isolating these developments from broader tendencies (say, within mass media, formal education or broader cultural politics), there is a risk of de-contextualising or reifying these practices.

It may be that, by aligning these practices and projects in terms of the educational or the pedagogical, we are failing to attend to another, and more primary, line of analysis, such as the discursive. Many of these practices are consistent with an appeal to discursive models within curatorial practice (a development especially noticeable since the mid-1990s) which might, perhaps, have been recommended as the better path of analysis and critical reflection. Mindful of these risks, however, we have sought not only to combine a variety of critical positions (some polemical; some reflective), but also to bring together a number of different genres (the academic essay, the performative and/or poetic statement of position and the dialogical exchange). In doing so, we have tried not to ‘place under erasure’ (to use a familiar critical idiom) the pronounced resistance to critical (and institutional) recuperation voiced by several contributors.

Education has historically been an intensely contested category. It has been a key site for social, political and economic conflict, as evinced by the conservative assaults on public education throughout the Anglophone world of the past several decades. While earlier conflicts substantially played out over content and purpose (epitomised by various wars over curriculum and canon), education has more recently been globally re-engineered as a sector of the service economy and a space of private enterprise. Thus, the widely referenced Bologna Declaration, the process of alignment of higher education across Europe, does not principally propose an international homogenisation of curricula and programme content or a standardisation of ‘outputs’, but rather an inter-operability of service provision and a system of exchange equivalence for ‘outcomes’ — a common market. Arguably, attacks on public education are simultaneously mobilised as attacks on ‘public’ provision in what is seen as an expanding market full of (private) profit potential and as attacks on a basic notion of what ‘education’ should be. The informal education sector and the less widely acknowledged cultural pedagogies of mass media have increasingly come to play an important role in the re-engineering of the state educational apparatus and in providing countervailing and divergent norms of education. Contemporary contests over the nature, role and purpose of education are deeply marked by longstanding disputes about the ends of education. Many of the practices cited in this volume are configured precisely so as to resist easy assimilation to these pre-established terms of debate, but many also exist within the orbit of formal educational provision.

Many contributors present a strong critique of formal and state educational policies and practices. Again, this is apparent in recurring references to the Bologna process. Some contributors have voiced a strong resistance to reading current art-as-education in relation to the landscape of higher education, asserting that we miss ‘the productive potential of this educational turn’ when ‘we pivot our observations around formalised encounters like art education and we enlist what we know’.

On the other hand, it is notable that many protagonists in these conversations are attached to formal academic programmes, whether as students, researchers, educators or visiting professors (often as precarious academic labourers). Yet other contributors to the debate have specifically cited art as education as a way of critiquing existing dispensations within higher education:

In exhibitions and biennales in recent years there has been a move towards including quasi-educational projects – not as add-ons but as an integral part of artistic production. By default this has exposed even more clearly the fact that today we encounter an art school system that generally does not reflect the potential of cultural practice.\(^{11}\)

While many contributors concur in their wholehearted critique\(^{12}\) of the Bologna process in terms of its prescriptive outcomes for the ‘good’ subject that should be engendered by education, some are concerned, implicitly or explicitly, with the formation of counter-subjects or participant-citizens. Other contributors are profoundly unwilling to foreclose on the modes of subjectivity that might emerge in these radically open transactions of do-it-yourself learning. (Unsurprisingly, this latter position correlates strongly with a resistance to the very impulse to fix a cultural moment as the educational turn.) What is striking about the multiple conjunctions of curating and education discussed in this volume is the way in which both practices are so often construed in a processual mode, eschewing the foreclosure of ends. They converge, rhetorically at least, in valuing the emergent and as yet undisclosed; they speak of potential. Emphatically resisting the pre-determination of outcomes, these practices attempt to reject a normative production of the ‘good’ subject as cited above. This is not, however, necessarily true in all cases, and herein lies another field of tension.

Curating offers a different kind of challenge when it comes to orientating the discussion. In prioritising curating, the brief invited contributors to address a spectrum of practice that could not be reduced to exhibition production or cultural event management. Many anthologies and historical surveys have appeared which foreground the diversity of curating styles, forms and practices to have emerged in the past twenty years, a particularly important example being the archive at the heart of Barnaby Drabble and Dorothee Richter’s ongoing project, Curating Degree Zero.\(^{13}\) Having moved, since the late 1960s, from an activity primarily involved with organising exhibitions of discrete artworks to a practice with a considerably extended remit, contemporary curating may be distinguished from its predecessors by an emphasis upon the framing and mediation of art and the circulation of ideas around art, rather than on its production and display.\(^{14}\)

In according to this expanded reading of curating, which includes exhibition-making, discursive production and self-organisation, we aim to resist the tendency to privilege (and police) the boundaries between the internal organisation of the work of art — as enacted by the artist, producer or author and the techniques concerned — and its external organisation, through different modes of distribution, reproduction and/or dissemination. In doing so, we are interested in curating as a wide-reaching category for various organisational forms, co-operative models and collaborative structures within contemporary cultural practice. The significance of curating for the current discussion is primarily as it pertains to the organisation of emerging and open-ended cultural encounter, exchange and enactment — and not the supposed authorial primacy of the curator.\(^{15}\)

Clearly, posited in this way, curating may not be reduced merely to the administrative, the managerial, the exhibitionary, the spectacular or the thematic co-ordination of disparate or convergent works. Curating, in this sense, is ‘processual’ rather than ‘procedural’ or instrumental. Rather than deploying a means-ends rationality, the processual mode entails both means and ends, however they may emerge in the flow of activity. The processual mode is not linear, nor are its ends foreclosed; there is no imperative to achieve an exhaustive disclosure of final meaning, value or purpose. It is in this sense that a processual activity may be radically undermined by a bureaucratic instrumentalism or a narrow accountability of ‘quality’.

Of course, there is a risk that the procedural/processual distinction, thus construed, may be mobilised merely at a rhetorical level and

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13. For a full list of contributors to the project, its touring history, a detailed bibliography and a statement by the curators, see [http://www.curatingdegreezero.org].
15. Elsewhere, we have expanded on this question of curating as a model of ‘emergence’ that engenders new practices, the production of new meanings, values and kinds of relationships. Emergence, in this sense, ‘is not the mere appearance of novelty: it is the site of dialectical opposition to the dominant — the promise of overcoming, transcrossing, evading, renegotiating or bypassing the dominant — and not simply delivering more of the same under the blandishments of the “new”.’ See Paul O’Neill and Mick Wilson, ‘Emergence’, Sladen et al. op cit. pp. 241–245. See also Raymond Williams, ‘Dominant, Residual and Emergent’, Marxism and Literature. Oxford University Press. 1986. pp. 121–126. (Orig. 1977) This articulation of curating with the emergent is motivated by a wish to foreground the critical and transformative potential of the extra-exhibitionary dimension in much recent work.
deployed to insulate our cultural undertakings from a broader critical accountability without substantively altering business-as-usual in project development and delivery. These last two terms — development and delivery — are, of course, already redolent of an instrumental and procedural ethos, while the processual terms of ‘emergence’ and ‘adaptation’ are perhaps all too readily consonant with the organic and the vitalist. As always, rhetoric, can work both sides of the room. The possibility of business-as-usual — jostling for symbolic capital in the reputational economy of cultural entrepreneurship — being dressed up as emancipatory, or open-ended, practice is a recurring concern in many of the contributions to this volume. There is a refrain of anxiety across several of the texts assembled here, about the possibility of bad faith, on our own part and on the part of others. This has prompted some contributors to work critically against any hegemonic move to institute a new orthodoxy or to construct a ‘movement’. We share this anxiety, but we also believe in the potential of intersubjective critique.

It is notable that, across the various texts gathered here, there is also an uneven engagement with precedent in terms of artwork as alternative cultural pedagogy. Some Anglo-American precedents that have achieved high visibility might include, for example, Martha Rosler’s If You Lived Here…; Group Material’s Democracy;[16] the Hirsch Farm Project; Tim Rollins and ‘the Kids of Survival’; Adrian Piper’s ‘Funk Lessons’; the work of John Latham and the Artist Placement Group; General Idea; the Independent Group and those other aspects of conceptualism that Michael Corris has referred to as an ‘Invisible College in an Anglo-American world’[17]. This is not to suggest that these earlier programmes are of a piece with current projects. Rather, it is to point out the recurrent appeal to alternative educational formats as critical cultural practice characterises a broad terrain of 20th century art. The specificity of current models may, in part, proceed precisely from this displacement of art precedents in favour of an appeal to non-art traditions of micro-political mobilisation and intervention. It is notable that, within these debates, certain authors’ names have great currency — Rancière, for example, and, to a lesser extent, Freire and Illich — while other names are much less prevalent than one might expect given the priority accorded to education and critical cultural practice within their work, such as Badiou or Giroux or Apple. Again, this reinforces the sense that there is a specificity to the current moment that warrants unpacking rather than reification.

The editorial premise for Curating Subjects (2007), the preceding volume in this series, informed the development and trajectory of this current project. The introduction of that earlier volume noted that: ‘In the end, anthologies are similar to exhibitions. They are testing sites that evolve through variable degrees of dialogue [...] and self-determined modes of resistance’. This observation applies a fortiori to Curating and the Educational Turn, which seeks to build upon the work of that earlier project. While the bulk of the material presented here has been specifically commissioned for this book, a small number of the texts have been reproduced from other sources, often in modified form. These include Irit Rogoff’s key text, ‘Turning’, significantly expanded since its first appearance in e-Flux Journal; Uta Meta Bauer’s ‘Education, Information, Entertainment’, an early and pivotal text on developments in higher arts education in the German-speaking context; Stewart Martin’s critical contribution to the Documenta 12 magazines project; William Kaizen’s catalogue essay on the educational work of Rainer Ganahl; and Sarah Pierce and Annie Fletcher’s concise context-setting introduction to the Paraeducation project. We were keen to integrate these texts within the book project as a whole, because of the different ways in which they establish a framework and context for broader issues that resonate across the newly commissioned essays and texts. We are extremely grateful to all the authors represented here, who have so critically and passionately engaged with the project, whether by originating new material specifically for this anthology, as the majority have done, or by generating revised versions of earlier texts in the handful of instances indicated above.

The editorial strategy has, to some degree, been to forfeit the teacher’s masterful and taxonomising voice. Our reasoning has been that the book should function as a heteroclitic production that does not pretend to produce the final authoritative word, but rather acts as a relay in an ongoing, dispersed multiplicity of conversations and practices. In terms of the editorial choices made in commissioning a range of artists,
curators, critics and educators, we sought to engage the key protagonists in recent debate and practice; however, there are inevitably omissions in this regard. Our aspiration is that the volume in your hands will help to grow a range of conversations and reflections on contemporary cultural pedagogies within the field of curating and beyond.

CONTROL I’M HERE: A CALL FOR THE FREE USE OF THE MEANS OF PRODUCING COMMUNICATION, IN CURATING AND IN GENERAL

Jan Verwoert
Why do curators always have to work so hard? Because they do an impossible job. It’s not as if writing or making art were properly possible today either, but curators still seem to be most strongly exposed to, and affected by, the contemporary condition of the impossibility of working on one’s own terms. The terms imposed on creative communicators like us curators, artists and writers are, in fact, the demands of the communications industry to professionalise our art according to its industrial standards. For their part, curators are expected to turn the art of social communication into a professional means of seamless production. The industry’s ideal is a curatorial type operating like a factory, which, hydraulically powered by the ceaseless ebb and flow of e-mails between in and outbox, would churn out an unending stream of exhibitions, events, publications, etc. But, lest we forget, it is an art, the art of curating.

The art of curating resides in the capacity to grasp the potentials inherent in the magic of social encounters and the power to activate these potentials in the act of facilitating collective cultural manifestations. The medium of this art is communication. To curate means to talk things into being, not just exhibitions or events but the very social relations out of which such manifestations emerge, through the effort of creating and sustaining the channels of communication between the parties involved (the artists, the staff and board of the host institution, donors and sponsors, the press, members of the audience, etc.). It takes some considerable skill to do this. But anything can be learned, can’t it? So why speak of impossibilities?

The impossibilities lie in the demand to transform this art into an industry. For it is an illusion to assume that communication could ever become seamless production. Unfortunately, this is not just any illusion but the illusion on which the entire communications industry, the whole notion that there could even be such a thing as industrialised communication, is premised. The collapse of this illusion creates a constant source of frustration in everyday curatorial practice. No matter how industriously you work at keeping track of the multiple strands of correspondence which should lead to an exhibition coming together, no matter how many e-mails you write and meetings you hold, it remains impossible to avoid all those silly misunderstandings or serious social fallouts that can potentially occur at any point along the way. People can be difficult. Not just artists, but anyone really. Of course, you could simply understand such mishaps as opportunities to develop your sense of humour enough to accommodate even the worst cases of slapstick communication. Doing so may be inevitable anyway. The trouble is only that, as the curator, you will be held responsible for any miscommunication, not least because its consequences will be apparent in how your exhibition comes together, or not. No doubt, professionally, we have to face up to our responsibilities. But, what if some of the expectations that determine what a curator will be held accountable for are fundamentally warped? Warped because they are based on the widely held belief that communication could, and should, become an industry of seamless production — and that an exhibition or event should give the impression that it was the perfect product of such a neatly industrialised process!

If we were to recognise this false belief in industrial standards of social communication to be the source of an alienating pressure to fulfil impossible demands, would it not then be time to speak out against these standards and propose alternatives? What form could an exhibition (or any curatorial endeavour for that matter) take if, instead of conjuring up the illusion of seamless communication, it were to allow for the seams, ruptures and sutures, occurring in the process of producing a collective cultural manifestation, to become visible? Visible in a way that was pronounced enough to challenge people’s preconceptions of what such a manifestation should look like in order to fulfil the industry norm!

Perhaps this is already happening anyway and it is simply up to people like me, critics and writers, to back up such alternative curatorial approaches by insisting on other standards of judgement. Still, without wanting to sound too cynical, one could get the impression that, in many of the cases in which curators push the boundaries — to the point where projects start to come apart at their seams in provocative ways — this is motivated by a desire to maximise personal and institutional productivity at all cost, rather than by an urge to stop and think for a minute. While it should be possible to do just that, to step out and think at any given time (Why not? Just close the gallery for some time! Who cares? The public doesn’t need new attractions every other month!), it is arguably also the hardest thing to do. (How do you justify an empty gallery to the board? Doing nothing won’t pay the rent when you are freelance!) In this sense, it seems almost understandable that, if the ghost can’t leave the machine, the ghost might want to try wrecking its mechanisms from inside, by taking productivity to a surreal extreme where it becomes its own caricature and thereby generates its own crooked form of self-reflexivity. This is a logic of excess and, as such, will always seem appealing; but wise it is not.
Beyond the demand for simulacra of seamless communication, a second, no less warped, premise of the phantasmagorical notion of the communications industry is the all-pervasive belief that context could generate content. Following the inherent laws of bad faith, this is only logical. If we assume that the forms of our social exchange could be seamlessly organised (i.e. curated) in such a way that they would constitute a working apparatus, then it must seem natural to believe that this apparatus could work all by itself. Why even insist on there having to be a ghost in the machine, when the machine can be invoked as the ghost. All its critical intentions notwithstanding, a collateral effect of the recent debates on ‘new institutionalism’ is precisely that; to designate the institutional apparatus as a subject (of discourse) here usually implies to posit it as a subject (with creative agency), as if it were structures, not people, artworks and texts which created communication! As if our institutional/industrial formats of communication — exhibitions, publications or conferences — could generate substantial content, in and out of themselves, if we only addressed their structural workings insistently enough, in exhibitions, publications or conferences! (Not that I would not happily participate in such collective attempts at self-reflection, like this publication, albeit in the hope, repeatedly voiced by Tirdad Zolghadr, that, when self-reflexive loops come full circle, disruptive moments may occur which might make the whole thinking process jump its rails.)

In a wider context, this tendency to attribute all cultural potential to the apparatus itself can be seen at play in media strategists who propagate the idea that it is the platform, not the content, that matters; as how you set up your portal, how you pitch a new media format as a product, for the time being, you happen to be either too inspired or too depressed to reply to e-mails. For curators, this is rarely an option, since to stay in the loop of communication is what is expected of you and the failure to be reached when contacted with an urgent request will seriously count against you. Another reason people will be reluctant to let you slip away is that, from an outside perspective, the creative potential of curating is all too often conflated with its institutional mandate. As practice and position are thus identified, curators are imagined only to be at their own proper pace. For artists and writers, even if the practical and/or perceived need to stay connected remains ever present, at least there is an established set of pretexts which may be used to withdraw from the fora of the communications industries to the studio or study. You just slip into the default diva mode that bohemian culture reserves for you and let it transpire that, for the time being, you happen to be either too inspired or too depressed to reply to e-mails. For curators, this is rarely an option, since to stay in the loop of communication is what is expected of you and the failure to be reached when contacted with an urgent request will seriously count against you. Another reason people will be reluctant to let you slip away is that, from an outside perspective, the creative potential of curating is all too often conflated with its institutional mandate. As practice and position are thus identified, curators are imagined only to be doing their job when busy socialising or wielding institutional power. The fact that dropping from the social radar, to do research or reading and dedicate time to gathering inspiration is equally essential to doing curatorial work, is simply not part of the picture. To put it back in there, and to strongly avow such time as a crucial ingredient, might help to support the possibility and necessity of taking more time out.

then again, who could be blamed for thinking so? After all, an unfortunate precondition for undertaking work in the cultural field is the (perceived or real?) necessity to subject yourself to the rites of vernissage, or after dinner conversation, out of which possibilities for professional engagements are born, as people get to know who you are, what you are about and why they may want to invite you to do (and possibly even pay you for) what you appear to be capable of doing. Undergoing this experience is already upsetting for artists and writers. For curators, however, it must be even more disturbing as, contingent on the circumstances, their role constantly oscillates between being the one with the power to grant an invitation and being among the many desiring to receive it. This is the stuff of social comedy or tragedy depending on how people go about seeking their opportunities: with some style, or just recklessly.

But, there is more to the art of communicating in the art sphere than the rites of job-related transactions. The practical questions are how and where room is made and time given for this other art of non-industrialised and non-industrialisable communication to take place, and how space and time are created in order for the ideas, emotions, experiences and forms of expression — all the things that constitute the content you may want to share in the sphere of art — to develop on their own terms and at their own proper pace. For artists and writers, even if the practical and/or perceived need to stay connected remains ever present, at least there is an established set of pretexts which may be used to withdraw from the fora of the communications industries to the studio or study. You just slip into the default diva mode that bohemian culture reserves for you and let it transpire that, for the time being, you happen to be either too inspired or too depressed to reply to e-mails. For curators, this is rarely an option, since to stay in the loop of communication is what is expected of you and the failure to be reached when contacted with an urgent request will seriously count against you. Another reason people will be reluctant to let you slip away is that, from an outside perspective, the creative potential of curating is all too often conflated with its institutional mandate. As practice and position are thus identified, curators are imagined only to be doing their job when busy socialising or wielding institutional power. The fact that dropping from the social radar, to do research or reading and dedicate time to gathering inspiration is equally essential to doing curatorial work, is simply not part of the picture. To put it back in there, and to strongly avow such time as a crucial ingredient, might help to support the possibility and necessity of taking more time out.
With such polemical arguments, the question is, of course, against whom are these polemics directed? What social institution is it that represents the standards of the communications industry and imposes these impossible demands on the practice of curators, artists and writers? You could simply call it ‘control’. Control is the authority we report to when we start and end the day, or set our goals and evaluate our achievements as creative producers. Control is in our heads. Control is us. There is no denying that the authority — which establishes the standards, demands and expectations, governing how everyone in the art world acts — is everyone in the art world. We, all of us, are the communications industry. There is no one else to blame. This is a game that we play with ourselves.

So, how could we collectively make ourselves change its rules and lift the pressure? What about playing some peek-a-boo? Possibly along the lines of Nitzer Ebb’s iconic stanza: ‘Control I’m here. You don’t need me. I slip away’.¹

But slip away to where? Is there any place out there? Sites of education seem to offer the promise that, as protected zones of learning and research, they could be precisely the places in which there is enough time and space to talk about content, to freely exchange ideas and to generate emancipatory experiences. Indeed, they can be, but this is not because they have an inbuilt disposition to be that way. On the contrary, universities are as inherently bad as, if not worse than, any place in the art world. The essential companion for understanding the structural logic of institutions as traditional as the university continues to be Kafka’s writing. Arguably, the belief that universities should be at the forefront of our newborn knowledge society (a notion premised on illusions similar to those of the communications industry) has only increased the power of the Kafkaesque bureaucratic apparatus inside the university, which today seems dead set on the commodification of education through its permanent evaluation. Teachers evaluate students, students evaluate their peers in a fight to the death over reaching tenure. A pathway to freedom this is not. Just as in any museum or gallery, freedom usually only exists due to the happenstance that some people in responsible positions defy the internal pressure of the institutional apparatus for long enough to open up a space in which liberated forms of exchange can actually develop.

¹ Nitzer Ebb, Control I’m Here. UMG. 1988.
the un-industrialisable soul of communicative creativity. There should be
many more techniques to invoke, embody and (en)gender it, in a curato-
rial, artistic, writerly or creaturely (learning from *The Muppets*) practice
dedicated to the collective free use of the means of communication.

Collective improvisation is exemplary in that it is the closest we
may get to an experience of autonomy. This is to experience that the
relation between what is possible and impossible in a given situation,
among particular people, is not exhaustively governed by external
standards (of Control), but also shaped by the immanent dynamics
of that situation. The blind urge to satisfy external standards typically
stifles those dynamics. The capacity to grasp and gradually shift the
terms of possibility/impossibility from within the situation, on the other
hand, constitutes the intelligence of any creative process attuned to the
immanent logic of its own unfolding.

To invoke the attunement to the inherent potentials of a creative
process as a means of realising relative autonomy is, admittedly, a
modernist move, but I think that such a move is needed now in defiance
of the demands to industrialise communication. But, this defiance would
have to be performed in a new, contemporary mode. In their more
mindless moments, many classical modernists interpreted autonomy
as a fantasy of removing oneself to untouchable places. That their
interpretation was escapist doesn’t imply that the desire for autonomy
is necessarily so. The point now is to relocate this desire to a touchable
place. This means rethinking autonomy within the horizon of precisely
those cultural practices that much classical modernist thought relegated
to the sphere of heteronomy — the practices of diplomatic brokering
necessitated by mutual social dependencies. To grasp how crucial the
most heteronomous aspects of social communication — like the need for
its basic administrative coordination — are for free creative exchange to
become possible is the task that the mundane realities of curating present
for rethinking autonomy. Conversely, to wholeheartedly re-dedicate those
realities of curating (and any practice of creative communication for that
matter) to the spirit of enabling the free use of the means of communi-
cation may be one of the most pressing practical, as much as literally
’spiritual’, challenges in the contemporary climate of (their) increased
containment and Control.

The overall point, then, would be to quite simply remind ourselves
that, since we all do impossible jobs in the field of creative communi-
cation and as it is effectively no one but ourselves who enforces these
impossible conditions, it should be as possible as it is necessary to
change them. One good reason to do so is that, at the end of the day, as
a result of all the work and regardless of any work, we all deserve a better
life. And this life should fundamentally involve the freedom to create the
communication that we want and to create it just how we want it to be.
We have recently heard much about the ‘educational turn in curating’ among several other ‘educational turns’ affecting cultural practices around us.\(^1\) Having participated in several of the projects that are being invoked in this perceived turn, it seems pertinent for me to think about whether this umbrella term is actually descriptive of the drives that have propelled this desired transition.\(^2\)

My questions here are, firstly, what constitutes a turn? Are we talking about a ‘reading strategy’ or an interpretative model, as was the understanding of the ‘linguistic turn’ in the 1970s, with its intimations of an underlying structure that could be read across numerous cultural practices and utterances? Are we talking about reading one system, a pedagogical one, across another system, of display, exhibition and making manifest, so that they both nudge each another in ways that might loosen and open them up to other ways of being? Or are we talking about an active movement, a generative moment in which a new horizon emerges in the process, leaving the practice that was the originating point behind?

Secondly, it seems pertinent to ask: to what extent can the hardening of a turn, into a series of generic or stylistic tropes, be seen as resolving the urgencies that underwrote it in the first place? In other words, does the educational turn in curating address education, or curating, at those points at which it urgently needs to be shaken up and made uncomfortable?

Finally, this leads me to wonder about the difference between turning — as an active process, a movement, which actually and critically breaks down the very components of a practice — and its branding as a recognisable style, which can then be seamlessly appropriated by a variety of activities from curating to writing funding applications to the production of ‘research outcomes’. A similar discussion, from which we could certainly learn about such branding modes, has recently arisen around the concept of what has been termed ‘new institutionalism’, by which is meant the emulation of institutional structures for two purposes: (a) the production of a mirroring that can provide some form of critical

\(^1\) See [http://www.ica.org.uk/Salon2Discussion5A2027You20Talkin-2720to20me3F20Wh20art20to20education].

Irit Rogoff recently argued, ‘Administrative, information, or service aesthetics, introduced at various moments of modernist and post-modernist art, emulated, caricatured and endorsed the aesthetics and rhetoric of scientific communities. They created representations and methodologies for intellectual labor on and off-display, and founded migrating and flexible archives that aimed to transform the knowledge spaces of galleries and museums according to what were often feminist agendas’. How this stylistic branding is being resisted by what Gerald Raunig has termed ‘institutive practices’ — the practice of instituting oneself, rather than of recognising oneself within a set of existing protocols or subverting those protocols to suit one’s claims — is one of the paths that will be sketched out further along this essay.

Since our discussion here focuses on education as the force which galvanises this supposed turn, we need, in the first instance, to return to it as an arena far beyond its representations. Delving into these questions around education is made more difficult by the various slippages which currently exist between ‘knowledge production’, ‘research’, ‘education’ ‘open-ended production’ and ‘self organised pedagogies’ — all of which seem to have converged into a set of parameters for some renewed facet of production. Although quite different in their genesis, methodology and protocols, it seems that some perceived proximity to ‘knowledge economies’ has rendered all of these terms part and parcel of a certain liberalising shift within the world of contemporary arts practices.

Being much concerned by the fact that these initiatives are in danger of being cut off from their original impetus and may be hardening into a recognisable style, I would like to invoke, towards the end of this discussion, Foucault’s notion of ‘Parrhesia’ — free, blatant and public speech — as perhaps a better model through which to understand some kind of educational turn.


5. Initiated by Angelika Nollert, who was then at the Siemens Art Fund, A.C.A.D.E.M.Y was a collective project between Hamburger Kunstverein, MuKha Antwerp, Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, and the Department of Visual Cultures, Goldsmiths, London University. It took place in three cities across 2006 and was accompanied by a book published by Revolver and edited by Angelika Nollert, Irit Rogoff et al. See [http://vanabbemuseum.nl/en/browse/?tx_vabolddisplay_pi1%5Btype%5D=18&tx_vabolddisplay_pi1%5Bproject%5D=157&cHash=70d173357].
or by thinking of the cultural sector as a market economy, but rather by bringing the principles of education to the cultural sector and making them operate there as forms of actualisation’.

When we say that these institutions of ours could be so much more than they are, we don’t mean larger, or more efficient, or more progressive or more fun, though they certainly should be more fun, but that their reach could be wider, that they might provide sites for being so much more than they ever thought they could be.

In asking ‘what can we learn from the museum beyond what it sets out to teach us?’ we were not focused on the museum’s expertise — what it owns and how it displays it, conserves it, historicises it — but on the possibilities it opens up for us to think about things from elsewhere and differently. So, the museum in our thinking around this project was the site of possibility, the site of potentiality.

A.C.A.D.E.M.Y. wanted to stimulate reflections on the potentiality of the academy within society. It situated itself in the speculative tension between the questions ‘what do you need to know?’ and ‘to what do you aspire?’ Academies often focus on what it is that people need to know in order to be able to start thinking and acting. Instead, we approached the academy as a space that generates vital principles and activities – activities and principles you can take with you, which can be applied beyond its walls, becoming a mode of life-long learning. As such, A.C.A.D.E.M.Y. aimed to develop a counter point to the professionalisation, technocratisation and privatisation of academies that are the consequences of the Bologna Declaration and to the monitoring and outcome-based culture which characterises higher education in Europe today.

In thinking about what we might have at our disposal to counter such official assessments of the ways in which learning can be evaluated and appreciated, we had focused on two terms: ‘potentiality’ and ‘actualisation’.

By potentiality, we meant the possibility to act which is not limited to the ability to act. Acting, therefore, can never be understood as something simply enabled by a set of skills or opportunities; it is also dependent on a will and a drive. Even more importantly, it must always include within it an element of fallibility — the possibility that acting will entail failure. The other term we wanted to mobilise in conjunction with A.C.A.D.E.M.Y. was that of actualisation, by which we mean understanding that there are meanings and possibilities embedded within objects, situations, actors and spaces and that it is our task to liberate them, as it were. It points to us all being within a complex system of embeddedness in which social processes, bodies of learning, individual subjectivities cannot be separated and distinguished from one another.

Both of these terms seem very important to mobilise for any re-evaluation of education, as they allow us to expand the spaces and activities housing such processes. Equally, they allow us to think of learning as taking place in situations or sites that don’t prescribe this activity.

At the Van Abbe museum, we envisaged an exhibition project that brought together five teams of different cultural practitioners who had access to every aspect of the museum’s collection, staff and activities. Each of these teams pursued a line of enquiry with respect to what we could learn from the museum beyond the objects on display and its educational practices. The access that was given was not aimed at producing institutional critique or exposing the true realities of the institution. Instead, it aimed to elicit the unseen and unmarked possibilities that already exist within these spaces: the people who are already working there and who bring together unexpected life experiences and connections; the visitors whose interactions with the place are not gauged; the collection, which could be read in a variety of ways, far beyond splendid examples of key art historical moments; the paths outwards which extend beyond the museum; the spaces and navigational vectors which unexpectedly take place within it.

There were many questions circulating in our spaces in the exhibition, each room and each group producing their own questions in relation to that central concern of what we can learn from the museum. These entailed questions regarding who produces questions, what are legitimate questions and under which conditions do they get produced? The seminar class and the think tank, the government department and the statistician’s bureau are some of the sites for question production, but we were suggesting others, born of fleeting, arbitrary conversations between strangers, of convivial loitering and of unexpected lines of flight in to and out of the museum as in the Ambulator project (Susan Kelly, Janna Graham, Valeria Graziano); questions regarding the relationship between expertise and hope, expertise and governance, knowledge that is used to bolster hopeful fantasies and knowledge that is used to impose dominant concerns as in the Think Tank project (John Palmesino and Anselm Franke); questions regarding what kind of modes of attention are paid in such a context as a museum and a library and what these
modes of attention could be liberated for — could they be made use of in some other ways, could they become important in our liberation as in the *Inverted Research Tool* (Edgar Schmitz and Liam Gillick)?; questions regarding the very nature of ownership of an image or an idea, of how a simple object comes to stand in for an entire complex network of knowing and legitimating and conserving and ‘anointing with cultural status’ — all of which operate under the aegis of ‘ownership’ — as in *Imaginary Property* (Florian Schneider and Multitude e.V.), which asked: ‘What does it mean to own an image?’; questions regarding cultural difference, which ask whether a museum really is an institution of representation, meant to represent those outside it and its systems and privileged audiences. If it is not, then maybe those ‘outsiders’ are not outside at all but can be recognised as already here and part of us, but only if we listen, really listen, to ourselves, as in *Sounding Difference* (Irit Rogoff, Deepa Naik); and other questions, about the museum’s knowledge vs. our own knowledge, about open forums for learning, which are at the edges of that which is acknowledged, as in *I Like That* (Rob Stone and Jean-Paul Martinon).

‘Summit’

That initial project, within the spaces and parameters set by the museum, led several of us to think about taking those questions into a less regulated and prescribed space, one in which institutional practices could encounter self-organised, activist initiatives, which led to ‘Summit — Non Aligned Initiatives in Education Culture’ that took place in Berlin in May 2007. (6)

In a sense, we came together in the name of ‘weak education’ — a discourse of education that is not reactive, does not want to engage in everything that we know fully well to be wrong with education: its constant commodification, its over bureaucratisation, its ever increasing emphasis on predictable outcomes etc. These other approaches place education as forever reactively addressing the woes of the world while we hoped to posit education ‘in’ and ‘of’ the world, not as a response to crisis but part of its ongoing complexities, producing realities, not reacting to them, and many of these are low key and un-categorisable and non heroic and certainly not uplifting but nevertheless immensely creative.

Why Education and Why at That Particular Moment?

To begin with, this provided a way of countering the eternal lament of how bad things are — how bureaucratised, how homogenised, how under-staffed and under-funded, how awful the demands of the Bologna Process, with its drive to regulate and standardise, how sad the loss of local traditions that it is dictating. This voice of endless complaint, not without its justifications, serves to box education within the confines of a small community of students and education professionals. So, to paraphrase Roger Buergel, how can education become more? How can it be more than the site of shrinkage and disappointment?

And why at this particular moment? Because this moment of Bologna and all its obvious discontents is also the moment of an un-precedented number of self-organised forums outside institutions and self-empowered departures inside institutions.

Propelled from within, rather than boxed in from the outside, education becomes the site of odd and unexpected comings together — shared curiosities, shared subjectivities, shared sufferings, shared passions congregate around the promise of a subject, of an insight, of a creative possibility. Another reason for ‘why now’ is that education is, by definition, processual; involving a low-key transformative process, it embodies duration and a working out of a contested common ground.

And here was, perhaps, one of the most important leaps from *A.C.A.D.E.M.Y* to ‘Summit’ — an understanding that education was a platform that could signal a politics and bring together unexpected and momentary conjunctions; academics, art world citizens, union organisers, activist initiatives and many others see themselves and their activities reflected within the broadly described field of education.

At its best, education forms collectivities, many fleeting collectivities which ebb and flow, converge and fall apart. Small, ontological communities are propelled by desire and curiosity, cemented together by the kind of empowerment that comes from intellectual challenge. The point about coming together in curiosity is that we don’t then have to
come together in identity; we, the readers of J.L. Nancy, encounter we the migrant or we the culturally displaced or we the sexually dissenting, all of them being one and the same we. So, at this moment in which we are so preoccupied with how to participate, how to take part, in the limited ground that remains open, education signals rich possibilities of coming together and participating in an arena that is not yet signalled.

Having liberated myself from the arena of strong, redemptive, missionary education, I want to refurnish the field with the following terms:

- Replacing the reorganisation of education for better distribution and dissemination, with notions of potentiality and actualisation: the idea that there might be, within us, endless possibility that we might never be able to bring to successful fruition. Instead, ‘academy’ becomes the site of this duality, of an understanding of ‘I can’ as always already yoked to an eternal ‘I can’t’. If this duality is not paralysing, which I do not think it is, then it has possibilities for an understanding of what it is about ‘academy’ that can actually become a model for ‘being in the world’. Perhaps there is an excitement in shifting our perception of a training ground to one which is not pure preparation, pure resolution. Instead, it might encompass fallibility, understand it as a form of knowledge production rather than of disappointment.

- Equally, I would wish education to be the ground for a shift from emergency culture to one of urgency — emergency is always reactive to a set of state imperatives which produce an endless chain of crises, mostly of our own making. So many of us have taken part in miserable panels about ‘the crisis in education’. Urgency is about the possibility of producing for ourselves an understanding of what the crucial issues are, so that they become driving forces. The morning after G.W. Bush was re-elected president, my class moved swiftly from amazement to a discussion of why electoral forums are not the arena of political participation and what these might actually be, i.e. a move from an emergency to an urgency.

- Perhaps most importantly, I want to think about education not through the endless demands that are foisted onto both culture and education to be accessible, i.e. to give a quick and easy entry point to whatever complexity we might talk about; Tate Modern as entertainment machine celebrating critique-lite comes to mind here. Instead, I want to think of education as all of the places to which we have access. And access, as I understand it, is the ability to formulate one’s own questions, as opposed to those that are posed to you in the name of an open and participatory democratic process, for it is clear that those who formulate the questions produce the playing field.

- And, finally, to think of education as the arena in which challenge is written into our daily activity, where we learn and perform critically informed challenges that don’t aim at undermining or taking over. When political parties or law courts or any other authority challenges, it’s with the aim of de-legitimising and offering another solution or position, of establishing absolute rights and wrongs; in education, when we challenge, we are saying there is room for imagining another way of thinking, of doing so in a non-conflictual way so that we don’t expend our energies in pure opposition and reserve some for imagining another way. At a conference I attended, Jaad Isaac, a Palestinian geographer, produced transportation maps of the Israeli occupation of the West Bank which had an almost mind-blowing clarity to them. It made me think of the gargantuan energies which had been put into turning the evil chaos of that occupation into the crystalline clarity of those maps — energies that were needed in order to invent Palestine — but, in their pristine clarity, the maps performed exactly that: a challenge to the expenditure of energies as a response to an awful situation.

If education can be the release of our energies, from what needs to be opposed to what can be imagined, or at least some kind of negotiation of that, then perhaps we have an education that is more.

Turn

Quite a long time ago, when I had just finished my PhD and was embarking on a post-doc and a radical change of path towards critical theory, I ran into my very first art history professor on the street. This was unexpected; a different country and city and the promise of another life on the horizon were not conducive, at that moment, to knowing how to deal elegantly with that which I had left behind. Having asked me what I was up to, he listened patiently as I prattled away, full of all the new ideas and possibilities which had just opened up to me. My professor was a
kind, humane and generous scholar of the old school; he may have been somewhat patrician, but he had an intuitive grasp of changes shaping the world around him. At the end of my excited recitative, he looked at me and said, ‘I do not agree with what you are doing and I certainly don’t agree with how you are going about it, but I am very proud of you for doing this’. It is hard to imagine my confusion at hearing what I now realise, with hindsight, was recognition of a turn in the making, rather than concern with, or hostility to, what it was rejecting or espousing. Clearly, this man, who had been a genuinely great teacher of things I could no longer be excited by, saw learning as a series of turns.

In a turn, we turn away from something or towards or around something and it is we who are in movement, rather than it. Something in us is activated, perhaps even actualised, as we turn. And, so, I am tempted to turn away from the various emulations of an aesthetics of pedagogy that have taken place in so many forums and platforms around us in recent years and towards the very drive to turn.

So, my question here is twofold; on the one hand, concerning the ability of artistic and curatorial practices to capture the dynamics of a turn and, on the other, concerning what kind of drive is being released in the process.

In the first instance, this might require that we break somewhat with the equating logic that claims that the process-based work, open-ended experimentation and speculation, unpredictability, self-organisation and criticality that characterises the understanding of education within the art world, and which many of us have worked with quite consistently, has, in and of itself, affected the desired transitions. While some of these premises have been quite productive for much of our work, they nevertheless lend themselves far too easily to emulating art educational institutions, archives, libraries, research-based practices etc. as representational strategies. On the one hand, moving these principles into the sites of contemporary art display signalled a shift away from the structures of objects and markets and dominant aesthetics and towards an insistence on the unchartable, processual nature of any creative enterprise. On the other hand, it has led all too easily into the emergence of a mode of ‘pedagogical aesthetics’ in which a table in the middle of the room, a set of empty bookshelves, a growing archive of assembled bits and pieces, a classroom or lecture scenario, the promise of a conversation, have taken away the burden to rethink daily and dislodge those

dominant burdens ourselves. Having myself generated several of these modes, I am not sure that I want to completely dispense with them, for the drive that they made manifest — to force these spaces to be more active, more questioning, less insular and more challenging — is one to which I would want to stay faithful. In particular, I would not wish to give up the notion of conversation, which, to my mind, has been the most significant shift within the art world over the past decade.

In the wake of Documenta X and Documenta 11, it became clear that one of the most significant contributions that the art world had made to the culture at large had been the emergence of the conversational mode that it hosted. In part, this has had to do with the fact that there already exists a certain amount of infrastructure within the art world; there are available spaces, small budgets, existing publicity machines, recognisable formats such as exhibitions, gatherings, lecture series, interviews etc. as well as a constantly interested audience, made up of art students, cultural activists etc. As a result, a set of conversations not experienced previously, between artists, scientists, philosophers, critics, economists, architects, planners etc. came into being, engaging with the issues of the day through a set of highly attenuated prisms. Not being subject to the twin authorities of governing institutions or authoritative academic knowledge liberated these conversations to adopt a speculative mode and enabled the invention of subjects as they emerged and were recognised.

And so, the art world became the site of extensive talking — as a practice, as a mode of gathering, as a way of getting access to some knowledge and to some questions, as networking and organising and articulating some necessary questions. Did we put any value on what was actually being said, or did we privilege the coming-together of people in space and trust that formats and substances would emerge from these?

7. I say all this with a certain awkwardness, as my own involvement with so many of these initiatives — exhibitions, self-organised forums within the art world, numerous conversation platforms — all shared the belief that turning to education as an operating model would allow us to re-invigorate the spaces of display as sites of genuine transformation.
8. Documenta X, 1997 (curator Catherine David), included the ‘Hundred Days’ project which hosted 100 talks during the exhibition.
10. Another key example is the unitednationsplaza project in Berlin 2006-7 [www.unitednationsplaza.org] (the exhibition as art school), continued in New York under the heading of Night School, and, in this reincarnation connected to Marten Spanenberg’s project of ‘Evening Classes’ at the YourSpace.com section of the A.C.A.D.E.M.Y. exhibition at Van Abbemuseum.
The concern regarding the closure effected by branding, which I mentioned at the beginning of this essay, is not simply with respect to the largely opportunistic haste of an art world in a permanent state of hyper mobility and the rush to get attention and make careers. But, more importantly, it is a concern with the inability to sustain a process for long enough to actualise itself before declaring it to be this or that named phenomenon — a move which allows consumption to take place even before the innovative process has been fully articulated. This form of branding allows the market to enter the world of art beyond its preoccupation with material objects, for branding produces an economy of scale and value that materialises processes by giving them a graspable circulatory value within cognitive capitalism.

In a series of essays on ‘instituent practices’, philosopher, Gerald Raunig, has drawn on a particularly significant distinction within political theory for the discussion at hand — between ‘constituent’ and ‘instituent’ practices as viewed in relation to the contemporary art world.\(^\text{11}\) The term constituent is understood as operating at the level of representation, in the name of all those who make up the field of representation, proceeding to produce a series of protocols for both governance and representation. As a form of social organisation, both constituent and constitutive forms get caught up in the formats which will legitimate them in ever expanding forms; as Raunig says: ‘The generally problematic aspect of constituent power as constituting assembly lies in the crucial question of how this assembly comes together, in the circumstances of legitimising this assembly’.\(^\text{12}\)

Instead, Raunig invokes the example of the Park Fiction project in Hamburg as instantiating the curatorial field as a series of what he calls ‘instituting events’ — ones in which one institutes oneself, rather than locates oneself, within the field of representation, as part of something which has been constituted to include the claims one might have. Raunig sees this project as ‘a further development of Negri’s conceptualisation of constituent power, whereby Park Fiction uses the term “constituent practice” as a self-designation’.\(^\text{13}\) From the description of the ongoing impulses for collective desire production, however, it is particularly the quality as an instituent practice that should be clear here. In terms of the two main interlinking components of instituent practice, ‘a stronger participation in instituting can be recognised in the pluralisation of the instituting event; the concatenation of so many ongoing and diversely composed instituting events especially hinders an authoritarian mode of instituting and simultaneously counters the closure of (in) the institution Park Fiction. The various arrangements of self-organisation promote broad participation in instituting, because they newly compose themselves as a constituent power again and again, always tying into new local and global struggles’.\(^\text{14}\) Therefore, it is not only the moment of instituting oneself but also the plurality of the activities involved, the fragmentation of one clear goal and protocol into numerous registers of simultaneous activity, that are the hallmarks of instituent practices, which thereby refuse the possibility of being internally cohered and branded.

Increasingly, it seems to me that the turn we are talking about must result not only in new formats, even when they are as plural as the argument above posits, but also in finding another way of recognising when and why something important is being said.

In a lecture at Berkeley, Foucault once embarked on a discussion of the word ‘Parrhesia’ — a common term in Greco-Roman culture.\(^\text{15}\) He stated that it is generally perceived as free speech and that those who practice it are perceived to be those who speak the truth. The active components of Parrhesia, according to Foucault, are: frankness (‘to say everything’), truth (‘to tell the truth because he knows it is true’), danger (‘only if there is a risk of danger in him telling the truth’), criticism (‘not to demonstrate the truth to someone else, but as the function of criticism’) and duty (‘telling the truth is regarded as a duty’).\(^\text{16}\) In Parrhesia, Foucault tells us, we have ‘a verbal activity in which the speaker expresses his personal relation to truth, and risks his life because he recognises truth-telling as a duty to improve or help other people (as well as himself). In Parrhesia, the speaker uses his freedom and chooses frankness instead of persuasion, truth instead of falsehood or silence, the risk of death...

\(^\text{12}\) Ibid.
\(^\text{13}\) Ibid.
\(^\text{14}\) Ibid.
\(^\text{16}\) See ‘Discourse and Truth: the Problematization of Parrhesia’, Six lectures given by Michel Foucault at the University of California at Berkeley, October-November 1983. See [http://foucault.info/documents/parrhesia].
instead of life and security, criticism instead of flattery and moral duty instead of self-interest and moral apathy’. (17)

It is hard to imagine a more romantic or idealistic agenda for invoking turns in the educational field. And yet… I am drawn to these with less embarrassment than you might think one would have if one were a self-conscious critical theorist working within the field of contemporary arts. Perhaps because nowhere in this analysis are we told *which truth* or to *what ends* it is being deployed. Truth, it would seem, is not a position; it is a drive.

To add an even more active dimension to Foucault’s discussion of Parrhesia, we can also establish that, in Aramaic etymology, the term is invoked in relation to such speech when it is stated ‘openly, blatantly, in public’. (18) So, this truth, which is in no one’s particular interest or operates to no particular end, must be spoken in public, must have an audience and must take the form of an address.

Foucault called this ‘fearless speech’ and, at the end of his lecture series, he says ‘I would say that the problematisation of truth has two sides, two major aspects. […] One side is concerned with ensuring that the process of reasoning is correct in ensuring if a statement is true. And the other side is concerned with the question: what is the importance for the individual and for the society of telling the truth, of knowing the truth, of having people who tell the truth, as well as knowing how to recognise them?’ (19)

Increasingly, I think that education and the educational turn might be the moment in which we attend to the production and articulation of truths. Not truth as correct, as provable, as fact, but truth as that which collects around it subjectivities which are neither gathered by, nor reflected by, other utterances. Stating truths in relation to the great issues and within the great institutions of the day is relatively easy, for these dictate the terms by which such truths are both arrived at and articulated. Telling truths in the marginal and barely formed, barely recognisable spaces in which the curious gather is another project altogether — one’s personal relationship to truth.

Artists are turning to education, borrowing its techniques, social settings, tools, aims, furniture, characters and so on. Janet Cardiff produces ‘audio walks’, similar to the audio guides provided by museums to assist tourists to navigate the collection. Tim Brennan’s ‘manoeuvres’ do a similar job but without the technology, recasting the artist as a critical escort through history, politics and place. Andrea Fraser’s performances often take their forms from the institution’s own techniques of mediating between works and the public in an attempt to inform and educate. In Wig Therapy, Barby Asante invited participants to make appointments to see her individually so that she could help them to understand the relationship between self-image and happiness. Goll & Nielsen replicated an educational institution within a gallery in Evening School, enacting a series of ‘teaching’ events, conducted by a number of invited artists, researchers and musicians, to address questions of race, nationality and identity at the border between Sweden and Denmark. Mark Leckey delivers roaming lectures and the Copenhagen Free University constructed an artist-run space as an entire institution of critical and marginal knowledge.

We need to consider this turn to pedagogy within the immediate context of other artists turning to cuisine, clubbing, sport, business, therapy, leisure, spectacle, retail and communication in the pursuit of an ‘art of encounter’. Then again, this context needs to be seen in the broader context of what John Roberts has called ‘post-Cartesian’ art, as well as in a wider cultural context in which expertise plays such a conspicuous role. And this, in turn, needs to be addressed within an over-arching UK political context in which New Labour felt it necessary and expedient to announce its top three priorities in government as ‘education, education, education’. So, in one sense, the turn to education in contemporary art needs to be played down, to recognise that it is no more significant than any number of competing and equivalent formats in the repertoire of the art of encounter. And yet, at the same time, the turn to education carries a unique charge that deserves to be analysed in all its specificity rather than being reduced to the generic category of social encounter.

A detailed and expansive debate has been taking place over the past several years about the relative merits of various categories of social encounter for art. Nicolas Bourriaud has put his weight behind ‘conviviality’, providing a sophisticated theoretical defence — based on a postmodernist micropolitics — of such social events as Rirkrit Tiravanija’s Thai soup installations and Carsten Höller’s scientific tricks, games and amusement rides. Educational events are not singled out for special praise in Bourriaud’s thesis; conviviality is exemplified more by Andrea Zittel’s furniture-as-meeting-place. On the face of it, then, relational art seems to be an art of the generic social encounter, the programmatically unspecified event, the boundlessly open exchange. Relational art is one of the key examples of the art of encounter, within which the turn to pedagogy belongs; but relational art can only explain the motivation for merging art and education in generic terms.

Claire Bishop takes issue with Bourriaud’s emphasis on conviviality and ‘immanent togetherness’, instead emphasising an art that reveals real antagonisms within its social and cultural exchanges. Bishop is right to ask questions about ‘the quality of the relationships in relational aesthetics’. In particular, she seeks to contrast the ‘informal chattiness’ of a typical relational artwork with the inherent friction that Chantal Mouffe argues is necessary for any genuine democratic process or political dialogue. For this reason, Bishop highlights projects ‘marked by sensations of unease and discomfort rather than belonging, because the work acknowledges the impossibility of a ‘microtopia’ and instead sustains a tension among viewers, participants, and context’. She cites the work of Santiago Sierra and Thomas Hirschhorn as examples of work that is disruptive and destabilising through friction, awkwardness and discomfort.

4. This work was part of a residency and exhibition project, ‘I Accept Your Image; I Am You’ at 198, Brixton, London in 2001. See [http://www.198.org.uk/pages/archive%202001.htm].
6. See [http://www.copenhagenfreeuniversity.dk/].
10. See [http://www.zittel.org/].
Bishop’s main argument — that Bourriaud’s conviviality is not adequately antagonistic to count as democratic — provides a strong corrective to Bourriaud’s ethics of inter-subjectivity. Bishop’s critique of Bourriaud opens up questions of the political substance of relational art by asking for an antagonistic (i.e. political) rather than convivial (i.e. ethical) account of art’s social relations. Nevertheless, Bishop’s account turns on its own structural absence. She promotes antagonism and censures conviviality insofar as they are present in the work itself. In other words, she presupposes that the politics of the encounter has to be resolved formally within the work. This is why she praises Sierra and Hirschhorn for the structure of their works; she seeks works that are marked by antagonism. However, it remains unclear why the antag-
nism has to appear in the work. Even if her political analysis is germane, Bishop neglects the variety of possible ways in which hegemony can be challenged and the variety of ways in which art can contribute to that process. Grant Kester has offered a third model, which neither limits its social encounters to convivial ones nor restricts its political antagonisms to ones that are markedly present in the work (as stipulated by Bishop). In his book, Conversation Pieces, Kester tracks projects that operate ‘between art and the broader social and political world’. Kester’s model is, in other words, a politically spiced-up ‘new genre public art’, which develops an ethics for artists out of the contrast between a ‘patronizing form of tourism’ and ‘a more reciprocal process of dialogue and mutual education’. Kester thus proposes ‘a very different image of the artist, one defined in terms of openness, of listening [...] intersubjective vulner-
ability relative to the viewer or collaborator’. However, by focussing on the conduct of the artist in relation to the communities he encounters, Kester’s argument can default into a moralising analysis.

The social models and techniques that Kester’s dialogical artists use, however, tend to be derived from political contexts. WochenKlausur, for instance, intervene directly in the social fabric, providing medium-term infrastructural, institutional and strategic solutions to perennial social problems such as prostitution, care for the elderly and medical provision for the homeless. Even if we want to defend this work, we need to be careful not to let its particular methodologies limit our theory of the art of encounter. A political interrogation of the art of encounter surely does not require that artworks take their models of encounter from the political field. One of the lessons of modern emancipatory political move-ments is that politics cannot be restricted to the field of professional and official political conduct. Žižek puts this point abstractly when he says that ‘politics is the antagonism between politics proper and the apolitical attitude’, by which he means that politics needs to be understood as the struggle over what counts as political, including the highly political assertion that something is non-political and the highly charged demand that some politically neglected element of our private life must be brought into the sphere of politics.

Where does this leave us? We now have three theories of the art of encounter, each of which has been subjected to critique. Together they map a context, albeit incomplete, into which the turn to pedagogy has recently been made. They also provide a set of debates through which we might begin to evaluate the turn to pedagogy, especially in terms of its relative ethics, politics and social relations. My suggestion is that we understand the turn to pedagogy better if we locate it within this discursive field of relational, antagonistic and dialogical practice, but also, and of no lesser importance, that an analysis of the turn to pedagogy can contribute to our understanding of this field. I want to suggest something else too, though, which is that this entire field needs to be contextualised in terms of broader changes, which I will call the emergence of a new social ontology of art.

In The Intangibilities of Form, John Roberts identifies within this development what he calls the emergence of the ‘post-Cartesian artist’:

‘Too often the discussion of the readymade languishes in the realm of stylistic analysis, the philosophical discussion of art and anti-art, or, more recently, the Institutional Theory of Art’, Roberts says, and ‘not as a tech-
nical category’. In his view, the key transformation of the readymade is that it ‘brings the link between artistic technique and general social technique in the modern period into inescapable view’. Harry Braverman’s classic analysis of the historical advent of ‘deskilling’ provides Roberts with a framework for thinking through the complex and mediated ways in which art intersects with the division of labour. Braverman explains how the degradation of work under Fordism
Amateurism and incompetence have critical promise within modern and avant-garde art because they shake the hegemony of what has been authorised as skill in any antecedent settlement of art. In other words, amateurism and incompetence test the limits of what is proper, good, acceptable and virtuous. T.J. Clark develops this line of argument in his conception of ‘practices of negation’, by which he means those techniques through which modern artists ‘deliberately avoided or travestied [a] previously established set of skills or frame of reference — skills and references which up till then had been taken as essential to art-making of any seriousness’. Working on the basis of Clark’s analysis, Art & Language assert that ‘changes in criteria of technical competence [...] act very directly to signal intentional changes of position in relations of production’. In fact, it would be impossible to imagine a significant shift in culture without such a change in the criteria of technical competence. This position was radicalised and extended by Terry Atkinson in the 1980s who argued for a ‘disaffirmative practice’, shot through with mistakes, anomalies, feints and incompetence — a ‘botched’ art. Atkinson thus constructed a cognitive bridge between Clark’s critical modernism and Adorno’s dissonant, mute, mangled aesthetic. Disaffirmation is art’s critique of the social and cultural world expressed as the immanent critique of art.

Roberts extends this debate considerably by thinking of the critique of skill in art not in terms of the various ‘incompetences’ of early modernist painting, but in terms of the division of labour implied by Duchamp’s readymades. His new reading of Duchamp is also a new reading of art after Duchamp. The result is an ontology of art in which there are no longer any specifically artistic skills or techniques, such as painting or sculpture, that define art (what Thierry de Duve calls ‘generic art’), rather art draws its techniques from industry, politics, entertainment, philosophy, science and so on, without limit. And this means, among other things, that the artist goes through the same kind of expansive transformation and can no longer be identified or conceptualised in the old ways. This is the birth of the post-Cartesian artist.

What Roberts calls the ‘aggressive Cartesianism and asocial aestheticism of modernism’, is radically undermined by Duchamp and Taylorism — which converts crafts and skills into manageable units of manual labour — goes hand in hand with the massive expansion of management and administration, whereby experts, planners and managers replace the knowledge that is sucked out of labour. Taylorism systematically divorces intellectual and manual labour, based on the argument that ‘all possible brain work should be removed from the shop and centered in the planning or laying-out department’. There is a basic economic motive for Taylorism (the more management can deskil labour, the cheaper the labour is), but there is an ideological one too. It gives management the aura of truth and persuades us that for every task, every aspect of life, every anxiety, feeling and problem, there is an expert. Taylorism did not restrict itself to industry; it has permeated culture, society, politics and everyday life. Agribusiness would not be able to convert farming into industry without Taylorism. Similarly, the shift from the large Victorian kitchen to the small modern kitchen was largely determined by Taylorist principles of the scientific management of bodily movement and the efficient engineering of labour. Automation, which is one of the key aspects of deskilling, has colonised everything from microwave cooking and predictive text to photography in which every decision is pre-programmed into the camera.

Roberts does not translate Braverman into art in any unmediated, mechanical way — by, for example, latching onto moments of deskilling such as the introduction of digital technology or the various waves of appropriative art. Instead, he argues, that Duchamp inaugurated a shift away from handcraft and representation that ushered in ‘a discourse on the diffusion of authorship through the social division of labour’, So, it is not so much that art is deskilled, but rather that, through a double movement of ‘diffusion’, art sheds its old techniques and absorbs the whole gamut of techniques at large. Often, these go hand in hand, as in the case of conceptualism which conspicuously abolished artistic skills from art while simultaneously drawing on linguistic philosophy, science, and so on. The reception of Mary Kelly’s Post Partum Document was typical in this respect. For all its prominent discursive complexity, Kelly’s work was remarkable, in the eyes of its opponents, for its technical barbarity. The absence of artistic skill was seen as an annulment of art itself.

then redoubled by Warhol's Factory, but it is only fully jettisoned by Conceptualism, when art’s preoccupation with crafting a unique object is replaced with a repertoire of techniques borrowed from anywhere and everywhere.22 ‘The displacement of the first person singular discourages the author to think of himself or herself as a unified subject bounded intellectually and conversationally as art historical’. An example that suggests itself in this regard is Alex Farquharson’s list of Carsten Höller’s practices: ‘zoologist, botanist, paediatrician, physiologist, psychologist, occupational therapist, pharmacist, optician, architect, vehicle designer, evolutionary theorist and political activist’.23 Thus, for Roberts, ‘the artist’s voice becomes subordinate to the forces of reproducibility and general social technique’.24 And this subordination, crucially for our discussion here, opens the artist up to a multitude of previously unavailable roles, discourses and modes of address.

We used to have three heroically singular elements of art: the artist, the art object and the viewer. All of these have been opened up to ‘general social technique’, creating a lot of anxiety and excitement and a handful of theories, each promoting one possible way of being post-Cartesian. We need to see that the critique and transformation of the gallery, which has occurred at roughly the same time, is fundamentally related to the emergence of the art of encounter; the gallery is the institution of those three singularities and cannot, therefore, survive their demise. Thus, the gallery, which has begun to mimic or host other institutions, has itself been opened up to general social technique.

Recent interest in interactivity, participation and dialogue in contemporary art is, at least in part, a critique of the viewer who was once the default subject of art’s reception. It would be going too far to say that the viewer is dead, but the gallery is now occupied by new, more diverse, subjects and rival bodies, so that very little of the new art is made with that customary aesthetic subject — the viewer — in mind. That is to say, it is not just that the art community has been faced with different works and different situations; the very subjectivities and experiences that can be had in the name of art have been transformed. The new art of encounter cannot help but propose a far-reaching amendment of art’s ontology; the art object is dislodged as the primary focus of the encounter with art. Art’s addressee, no longer necessarily even a gallery-goer, is reconfigured as a participant, interlocutor, guest, peer, comrade and so on; the white box institutions in which we encounter art have adapted by mimicking libraries, cafés, laboratories, school rooms and other social spaces.

There is no viewer for the art of encounter and if, by chance, a viewer turned up then their activity would probably be seen as a troubling social presence affecting the inter-human action that it views. As such, any objects that are included within these inter-human relational artworks are generally used rather than viewed. Liam Gillick’s work, for instance, is always visual, but always within a social framework of the visual. He is interested, he has said, in how the visual environment structures behaviour. His work, therefore, can be understood as a politicisation of the visual in art and culture. Hence, even when his work looks well designed or even beautiful, it ‘is better as a backdrop to activity […] If some people just stand with their backs to the work and talk to each other then that’s good’. Gillick thus expresses a vital element of the new social ontology of art, jettisoning the viewer, transmuting the art object in the process and establishing a new set of social criteria by which the art is judged. But how exactly are we to understand this shift? To answer this, we are required to extend our terms of reference.

Among the non-artistic discourses that the artist turns to within the post-Duchampian ontology of art is a set of techniques derived from pedagogy. Although the art of encounter is not necessarily Duchampian in its style or approach, we can detect a Duchampian legacy within its very conception of art. The readymade, we can say, inaugurates a transformation of the ontology of art, without which the development of the art of encounter and the turn to pedagogy would be impossible. But, again, pedagogy should not be singled out here as especially useful or promising. It is simply one of the social forms to which the post-Cartesian artist has turned. Roberts is quite clear about this: ‘Collective authorship represents the promissory social space of the organization of art’s ensemble of skills and competences beyond their privatization in “first person” expression, aesthetics, and the whole panoply of possessive individualism inherent in the Cartesian Theatre’.25

This is not yet the full story of art’s turn to pedagogy. The immediate social and cultural context for it is the emergence of educational formats within factual and entertainment television programming, We

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can list the genres without too much effort — programmes about cookery, wine, antiques, gardening, survival, technology and medicine, as well as a profusion of programmes to help you decorate your home, to dress better, to buy and sell property better and to bring up children better. Celebrity chefs are a prominent symptom of this development of educational television. According to Demos, these ‘mentoring formats’ should be adopted by Teachers TV to aid teachers in the classroom: ‘What Not to Wear and Queer Eye for the Straight Guy are both examples of popular reality TV programmes where style experts critique a person’s dress sense or etiquette, suggest new approaches — in some cases “tell them what not to wear” — and then watch them applying their newfound knowledge in practice. This coaching model of observation and reflective dialogue is both an effective learning model and a successful entertainment model’. (26) To others, however, these programmes have a dangerous agenda; for example, What Not to Wear has attracted critical analysis from Angela McRobbie for its post-feminist symbolic violence. (27) What I want to do, though, is to look at why education is expedient for entertainment TV and how education-as-entertainment addresses its audience.

Education-as-entertainment on TV is part of a vast proliferation of factual programming that developed in the 1980s and 1990s. The TV landscape changed over this period, at first with the arrival of Channel 4 in the 1980s and then with the Broadcasting Act 1990, (28) which put pressure on the BBC to deliver cheaper popular programming. As Annette Hill has observed, ‘It is no coincidence that the BBC was the major developer of popular factual programming during the 1990s, and paved the way for the dominance of reality genres in peak time schedules in the 1990s’. (29) One of the overlooked reasons for the proliferation of education-as-entertainment, though, is that, as a form of address, educational formats place the consumer in a familiar subjective position. Not only are consumers happy to adopt the role of student, learning to cook and shop better or finding out about distant lands and top-drawer cars, but they are also happy to watch others learning something or being put through their paces. This is not simply a matter of some possible warmth being drawn from the nostalgia that we might feel for having been to school or taught things by our parents; I am thinking here more about what Christopher Lasch has called ‘the abdication of authority’. (30)

The embedding of education in entertainment, I want to argue, is a contemporary articulation of the rise of the expert in culture. Education-as-entertainment can only cast the consumer or audience as student or spectator of other students within an economy of knowledge and knowledge-acquisition in which others are cast as experts, professionals, insiders and so on. Within the pleasures of education-as-entertainment, of course, the presence of the expert is neither alarming nor remarkable; some people simply know things that the rest of us don’t know. Against the idea that the expert is nothing but the bearer of specialist knowledge, experience and authority, however, we can raise fundamental questions about why we want to devolve truth to experts. Therefore, the social history of expertise explains something hidden and crucial here; the rise of the expert as an unremarkable social presence can be seen as following the pattern of an increasingly rationalised, bureaucratic, managerial and administered society.

The most influential thinker on the bureaucratisation of society is Max Weber who argued not only that the expansion of bureaucracy is inevitable within a society as complex as ours; it is, moreover, the only way of administering large-scale social systems. (31) Bureaucracy, in Weber’s description, is not the regime of experts but officials and pushers whose tasks are routine and procedural. Administrators are not experts in the full sense; they are trained to be competent in a limited set of duties. For this reason, they take advice from experts, consulting them, commissioning reports from them and so on. Bureaucracy is not the rule of experts but it establishes the structural need for them. Weber described this process as the rationalisation and disenchantment of society. This increased bureaucratisation of society corresponds with the historical trend in which traditional or value-orientated behaviour is superseded by goal-orientated behaviour. Practices that were once run on tradition, superstition, custom, religious code, spiritual inspiration or mysterious forces would be liberated from irrationalisms and anach-

ronisms in a clean-sweep kicked off by the Enlightenment. Sometimes, this supposedly liberating confrontation with the enchanted world is just called modernity. For this reason, bureaucracy is the signature style of modern authority. Indeed, Marshall Berman’s analysis of the experience of modernity, *All That is Solid Melts into Air*, can be seen to chart the effects of Weberian rationalisation on culture and everyday life. [32]

Experts and expertise are no longer restricted to business and management; they have colonised the everyday, the family and private life. Here, the skills of citizens are alienated from them in the same way that they are alienated from workers under Taylorism. In modern culture, rather than turning to traditions within the family and community, professional experts are relied upon for advice on parenting, marriage, cookery and other domestic concerns. In true Weberian style, Taylorist management science rationalises, modernises and controls, submitting practices that were once run on tradition to scientific and economic scrutiny. And it is from this analysis that Adorno and Horkheimer developed the idea of the ‘totally administered society’. [33]

This line of argument is not an attempt to transplant the whole Frankfurt critique of the social totality onto contemporary art’s turn to pedagogy. Educational formats enter the world of contemporary art in the context of Weberian modernity, but not within this alone and not in any mechanical or inevitable fashion. These developments are also linked to the development of the art of encounter after the emergence of the post-Cartesian artist and the post-Duchampian ontology of art. There is a need to integrate an analysis of the rise of the Weberian expert into that of the specific historical development of deskilling in order to provide the full social context of recent art’s turn to pedagogy. Finally, as I have argued, it is more helpful to see art’s specific turn to pedagogy as connected with the proliferation of educational formats in entertainment. What I have attempted to show is that the turn to pedagogy can be read in terms of any of these historical developments but, more importantly, that it is a result of the combination of these various separate developments. However, I want to finish by suggesting that this broad analysis shouldn’t be taken as a condemnation of the turn to pedagogy in contemporary art, but as a constellation within which decisions need to be made.

I want to propose that we approach the question of pedagogy in much the same way as Mark Hutchinson, alerted to the dangers of expertise, has thought through the question of the curator as an expert on art. [34] Hutchinson draws heavily on Adam Phillips’ incisive challenge to the convention of regarding the psychoanalyst as an expert given that psychoanalysis cannot tell us what we want or what frightens us. ‘Freud’s account of obsessional neurosis’, Phillips says, ‘is a critique of knowledge as privilege, and of the privileging of knowledge. The obsessional exposes the violence, the narrow-mindedness, of a certain kind of expertise about the self’. It is the task of the analyst, he concludes, to ‘facilitate the patient’s capacity not to know themselves’. [35] Either the psychoanalyst is an expert in this resistance to self-knowledge or psychoanalysis ‘becomes merely another way of setting limits to the self’. Phillips, thus, subverts the expertise of the psychoanalyst by formulating it paradoxically, as an expertise in uncertainty, ignorance, forbidden knowledge, secrecy.

Hutchinson applies this principle to the contemporary curator, the half-manager, half-author that has, over the past few years, come to occupy art’s centre stage. Psychoanalysis is a good model for thinking about the curator-as-expert, Hutchinson argues, because it is ‘a conversation about what cannot be solved by knowledge’. [36] In this way, he hopes, psychoanalysis can shed light on the problems of expertise in general, perhaps even help cure us of our need for experts. Expertise in any discipline, he says, protects ‘against the absences, ills, lacks, divisions, exclusions, negations, contradictions and silence upon which that discipline exists’. Hutchinson proposes that the antidote to the expertise of the curator is to learn to manage without the guarantees that expertise promises, ultimately to be left with nothing, a nothing that would be very welcome — even critical — within the deskilled, unitised, standardised and degraded Weberian world in which the expert thrives.

My suggestion, then, is that the turn to pedagogy in contemporary art, like the turn to education-as-entertainment in TV, is tied up with the role of experts, expertise and managerialism within our Weberian modernity. In saying this, though, I don’t mean to imply some sort of reductive

reading of pedagogical techniques as symptoms of modern bureaucratic society. This is why it is important to see the turn to pedagogy as a turn to a specific mode of address and a corresponding mode of subjectivisation. In other words, artists, curators and other art professionals are using teaching techniques, settings and skills in large part because they offer a particular coded style of social encounter, with its own set of familiar characters, roles and subjects. In this respect, the turn to pedagogy is clearly not merely a mechanical reflection of Weberian society, but rather it is highly mediated by, and dependent upon, the post-Duchampian development of the art of encounter. However, insofar as the modes of address, and modes of subjectivisation, of pedagogy, are caught up within Weberian themes of expertise, rationalisation and managerialism, they cannot satisfactorily be read uncritically as an affirmative, enhancing, hospitable exchange of knowledge, information and experience.

The turn to pedagogy must also involve the turn to the controversies, hierarchies, tensions and troubles that characterise pedagogy at large. Education is a fraught social process that leads systemically to an uneven distribution of cultural capital. Given that art as an institution benefits from the profits of cultural capital, art and education are already in cahoots before they even turn to pedagogy. But, in this context, surely we must be very suspicious of the turn to pedagogy within contemporary art as a set of techniques for reinforcing and underlining art’s enjoyment and requirement of cultural capital, its complicity with managerialism and its investment in the culture of expertise. Before embarking on any pedagogical artistic projects or any defence of them, we need to go back to school and learn some Weberian lessons.

LETTER TO JANE
(INVESTIGATION OF A FUNCTION)

Simon Sheikh
In 1666, at the instigation of Colbert, LeBrun introduced the practice of the Discourse; every month, a work from the royal collection was to be discussed before the public by the Académie assembled as a whole. Whereas the guilds had transmitted instruction by practical example, now instruction takes the form of codex, and an official stenographer is employed to transcribe and later publish the proceedings of the debates.\(^1\)

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Let’s not just talk about art. Because finally, the museum’s purpose is not just to develop an appreciation of art, but to develop an appreciation of values.\(^2\)

Understanding is never more than translating, that is, giving the equivalent of a text, but in no way its reason. There is nothing behind the written page, no false bottom that necessitates the work of an other intelligence, that of the explicator; no language of the master, no language of the language whose words and sentences are able to speak the reason of the words and the sentences of a text.\(^3\)

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In her famous 1989 performance, *Museum Highlights: A Gallery Talk*, Andrea Fraser appeared as the docent Jane Castleton, giving a guided tour of the Philadelphia Museum of Art and its collection to a number of unsuspecting visitors. This piece now holds a significant place in art history, as a prime example of institutional critique — of what some have termed the second wave of institutional critique — as well as an example of art as service (in Fraser’s own critical terms) and finally as a seminal piece of performance art employing such theoretical notions as ‘speech acts’ and ‘performativity’. The persona that Fraser embodies in order to perform her critique (of institutions, gender and speech) is of the utmost importance for our purposes here — namely the role of the docent — someone involved with the institution in a specific way — instituted, as it were — as a guide to the audience, as a pedagogue, as someone working in the education department of the museum, rather than as a curator or, for that matter, janitor in the museum.

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**Mediation as Medium**

Jane Castleton is there to *explain, educate and engage* the public on behalf of the institution, both in the narrow sense of the Philadelphia Museum and in the broader sense of the institution of art and its constituents. But, crucially, she is not a creator of art or a producer of knowledge but a mediator and, as such, situated in a specific relation of time and space *vis-à-vis* the objects of art. She comes in *after* the moment of creation (which we might presume to be sited in ‘the studio’) and *after* the moment of engagement, and indeed purchase, between the artist and the curator (as a representative of the institution, again both concretely and generally) as well as *after* the period of installation, and thus presentation to the public. Time-wise, she comes in at the very moment of presentation and contemplation, we could say at the moment of ‘publication’; that is, the very moment at which the public becomes constituted as a *specific* public, namely viewers of art. In spatial terms, the placement of the docent is also quite specific, even peculiar: she is situated in front of the work, *in between* the work and the spectators, not only mediating the work, but operating also as an intermediary. She provides entry into the work and, by extension, into the institution of art and art appreciation. Furthermore, she is herself a representative of the institution, representing its discourse on art, its ‘order of things’, for the public, at once dictating the right perspective and involving them in the knowledge of the museum.

Jane Castleton is, in a sense, a pedagogical subject; her position is that of the pedagogue and, as such, inscribed in special relations of knowledge and power within the museum, within certain politics (of representation). In turn, she also inscribes the visitors within these relations, albeit in a dual, and perhaps even contradictory, manner. Firstly, it is clear that she speaks to the audience but — unlike the critic, that other major figure of mediation — she does not speak on their behalf. As indicated above, she speaks, for the museum, for the institution. She *institutes a relation*, then, where the visitors are, in the first instance, objects for her (or, more accurately, for the museum’s) discourse on art, and brings the visitors onto the same plane as the (art) objects, that is,

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as objects of knowledge in the museum. Even though the docent creates docile bodies, her special role is actually twofold — obviously, a purely passive body of visitors is neither adequate nor productive; rather, interaction and involvement are desired. The spectators must also be made to partake in the distribution of knowledge, to become subjects with a greater appreciation of art. In other words, they must cease merely being objects in the museum and become subjects. This is why the docent — in contrast to both the objects on display and (for the most part) the curators of these — is open to question. She is there on behalf of the museum but for the public, offering, to use Fraser’s own term, a service:

Providing the services of a guide in the galleries and at the information desk, a volunteer docent is not just someone who gives tours for a small percentage of the museum’s visitors; she is the museum’s representative. Unlike the members of the museum’s non-professional maintenance, security, and gift shop staff that visitors come in contact with, the docent is a figure of identification for a primarily white, middle-class audience. And unlike the museum’s professional staff, the docent is the representative of the museum’s voluntary sector.⁴

Mediation, then, is a service to the public, part of what makes the museum a public place. Educating the audience, guiding the visitors, informing the guests, and so on, are public services alongside the access given to the museum’s exhibition spaces and works on display. (It is worth remembering, however, that there are also the non-public spaces of the museum such as offices, workshops, storage spaces etc.) Indeed, the service consists of giving another access to the works than the one visitors would get by just being there — namely a linguistic introduction and initiation into the works and their appreciation and, moreover, an initiation that is proper if not formal; it is always about more than just looking, about looking ‘justly’, looking in the appropriate manner, getting it right and not wrong. It implies that there is something that one cannot see without the introduction, that a certain knowledge — the right view and even the right ‘point of view’ — can be transmitted from the institution, through the mediator, onto the audience, or, perhaps we should simply say, through mediation, i.e. through pedagogy in its many forms and mediums.

The museum mediates and, as such, pedagogy personified in the docent is not an additional function of the institution but constitutive of the institution. It is how the institution institutes both its subjects and objects of knowledge. The museum and, by extension, curatorial processes inscribe both subjects and objects in specific relations of power and knowledge, in a transfer of knowledge and a coordination of desire and agency that operates as education, entertainment, narrative and information — functions that are as often complementary as they are conflicting.⁵ Simply put, the museum and the practice of exhibition-making is always already a pedagogical endeavour, as Tony Bennett has argued in his analysis of the museum and what he calls the ‘exhibitionary complex’.⁶ Taking his cue from Douglas Crimp’s suggestion that the museum should be read as a disciplinary space in Foucauldian terms, Bennett regards the museum as a space not only for disciplining bodies but also for enlightening minds. It is thus not a space of discipline and punishment but discipline and pedagogy — at once panopticon and panorama, surveillance and spectacle. The museum does not effect its power through coercion but through persuasion: ‘This was, in other words, a power which aimed at a rhetorical effect through its representation of otherness rather than at any disciplinary effects’.⁷

In this manner, the right way of seeing was not to be enforced on the spectators but, through the exhibitionary complex, was offered as narrative pleasure, giving the spectator access to the viewpoints of power — indeed, empowering them by infusing them with knowledge while situating them within the grand narrative of the nation state and Western civilization. The discourse of the museum is thus one of cultivation but also one of corrective vision — this is evident from the early academism of 17th century France through to today’s multi-faceted and mediated art institutions with their confluence of spectacle and education, national history and multicultural internationalism. The exhibitionary complex — with its myriad disciplines and functions and curatorial techniques — is, by definition, pedagogic; the pedagogical function is not just


⁵ Indeed, the assemblage of the relationship between them is the task of any reflexive curatorial practice and what should be taught in the now myriads of curatorial training programmes. These curatorial training programmes are, in their own way, also a pedagogical turn in curating, as well as a so-called professionalisation of the field.


⁷ Ibid. p. 89.
something belonging in the education department (of large scale public institutions). Indeed, the existence of education departments can be seen as a later development and specialisation of the museum alongside the establishment of curatorial departments and public programming divisions. It attests to a corporatisation in managerial, perhaps even governmental, terms and a partition of the sensible in aesthetic and philosophical terms. Perhaps this division of labour, and this temporal division between production and reception (as outlined with respect to the role of the docent and the separation of curatorship from mediation), indicates that a pivotal connection between the exhibitionary and the pedagogical has been severed. Might it be that the pedagogical ‘turn’ in contemporary curating is, then, rather, a ‘return’?

Two Sets of Rhetorics

This may be put another way: How are we to understand the role of education departments in institutions if exhibition-making is, in itself, an educational enterprise? Is it a matter of ‘education on education’ and what could that possibly imply or even produce? Conversely, if the exhibition is indeed educative, what are its pedagogics, and are these transposed through curatorial method and history or merely implied within various contexts and thematics? In other words, are the narratives and spatialisations of subjects, objects and their relations in curatorial techniques — what may be termed their articulations — also their pedagogics? Since such questions are not rhetorical but immersed in praxis, they must, obviously, also be broached, elaborated, answered and problematised.

Firstly, ‘education on education’ may sound like we are moving onto a meta level of pedagogy and curating, when, as indicated above, we are merely dealing with an addendum — the transformation of the idea of public service into corporate servicing. This is not to say that ‘education on education’ cannot be a speculative category or certainly an artistic practice, as demonstrated by Fraser’s transposition of the docent function into an aesthetic object of desire, as well as by recent concepts of paraeducation and participation, as developed by such artists as Sarah Pierce and Jorge Menna Barretta. But, as Fraser’s intervention also shows, educating the public on exhibitionary displays of knowledge and value is a means of control over the language on art, if not the language of art.

Indeed, there may or may not be a difference, even dispute, between the language ‘on’ art and the language — that is the rhetorics, articulations and pedagogics — ‘of’ the artworks and artists themselves. As Fraser discusses in her text on the performance cited earlier (her language on language or, if you will, her ‘education on education’), the docent is there not only to represent specific class interests but also specific class aspirations; Jane Castleton is a volunteer, representing both museum (directly) and audience (indirectly) — the latter in the form of identification and aspiration. The docent’s audience wishes to know what she knows, which is, after all, to know what power knows, to know what is both desirable and attainable. As a docent, Jane Castleton is an expert but as a volunteer she is also an amateur (in the positive sense of the word, meaning enthusiast); thus, she is much closer to the life-world and experiences of the audience than, say, the curator or the artist. She is, therefore, representing ‘us’ and not just a representative for ‘them’, the institution, the museum; indeed, anyone can become her, can occupy her subject position, and this is why it is she, and not the curator, who leads the guided tour of the exhibition or collection. The curator would rather do tours for other professionals and, indeed, for other class positions, such as other curators and critics, at the so-called professional ‘preview’, and potential and active sponsors at the fundraiser. In both cases — the curator’s and the docent’s — however, it is a matter of

8. ‘Paraeducation’ refers to the institutional and spatial support for self-organised reading and meeting groups, within the exhibition, but which takes as their points of departure concerns and interests that may well lie outside of the exhibition as such. ‘Paraeducation’ can be set up according to a few simple principles of engagement, and takes its cue from the educational ideas of such writer-educators as Noam Chomsky, Paulo Freire and Ivan Illich. Groups are given access to the space for discussions without audience, they do not act as representatives of certain fixed positions, and they are self-sustained, taking the form of reading groups, at least initially. The principle is thus one of self-education. (See Sarah Pierce, The Paraeducational Department. Interface. 2006. See also ‘Introduction to The Paraeducational Department’ in this volume.) Working in Brazil, Jorge Menna Barretta’s participatory projects also deploy the exhibition space as a social space. One method employed is to set up a space for reflection within the exhibition that allows for a more informal mediation, a so-called ‘Café Educativo’. This is a café in the exhibition where the public can have a coffee, relax, but also have access to magazines, videos, computers and other ‘mediation material’ (both directly connected to the exhibition as well as unrelated). The interaction with this material, then, does not depend on any direct discourse by the mediators. The difference between this kind of café and other such facilities is that the staff have the training and ability to talk about art and the exhibition or other related cultural and contemporary issues, and that is why it is called ‘Café Educativo’. In other words, these café attendants are also ‘collaborators’, and thus trained just like other ‘mediators’, and can engage in a conversation with the public in an informal way.
poignantly speaking over the works, not beside them, indicating an ironic hierarchy of language, the institutional voice above the artworks, the artists and their times and contexts. As Robert Smithson once wrote with respect to the over-determination of the language on art in institutions, ‘[t]he function of the warden-curator is to separate art from the rest of society’.¹⁹

Smithson’s comment, initially delivered as his contribution to Documenta 5 in 1972 (arguably the first major international exhibition to highlight the figure of the curator by specifically foregrounding its director, Harald Szeeman) was, of course, directly aimed at curatorial language (in the form of selection and display). This leads us to the second issue: exhibition as education, curating as pedagogy. If we accept that the educational is part and parcel of exhibition-making’s modes of address — that ways of placing subjects and objects in a situation, a narrative or even a nation are integral to exhibition-making — then we are, in a sense, merely dealing with two sets of rhetorics, those of mediation and those of curating. These two rhetorics are separated only through the terms of institutional hierarchy, division of labour and the particularity of spatial and temporal location but, crucially, not in terms of functionality or ideology. These rhetorics may or may not, as stated, overwrite the works and their contexts, as Smithson insists. Seen from a contemporary perspective, the clearly anti-curatorial institutional critique of Smithson seems overly didactic and ideological (for, although rightfully sceptical of the power of the museum and of curatorial authority, Smithson never questions the author-position of the artists in the way that, for example, Fraser does). In the current moment, other antimonies seem to appear, such as the distinction, now prevalent in most institutions, between the practice of mediation and the curatorial process, as an unfortunate consequence of specialisation and compartmentalisation in current modes of governmentality. What should, at the very least, be parallel processes are too often rendered contradictory and counter productive. Surely, then, the pedagogical, or educational, turn is, at best, an attempt to reconnect these processes, to recover what has been lost and, at its most ambitious, it becomes an attempt to redirect these processes towards a new self-reflexivity, a new auto-critique, even towards a new potential of ‘publicness’, and a renewal of how ‘publics’ are conceived and produced.


There are also antagonisms other than those that might exist between artist and curator, or between the intentions of curating and the practicalities of mediation — namely those between the exhibited works of modern and contemporary art and their (present and absent) spectators. Therefore, the pedagogical does not always achieve its goal, within mediation and curating and their confluence, since subjects are not always responsive or responsible, not always content with how they are implicated and represented. Indeed, they may even be downright rebellious in the encounter between the artwork and mediator — that is, with both presentation and representation. It requires only the very slightest degree of participation in order to be addressed as a ‘public’; it suffices that one is present in the space and time of the event. Hence, the great preoccupation with participant counting and the accountancy of public presence/audience numbers in modern democracy and its self-authorisation and perceived legitimacy. Subjects may negate mediation indirectly by refusing to turn up, thus refusing to become, however nominally, ‘the public’. In this way, staying away is an act of refusal, whether at the polls or in the museum. This also sheds further light on the many outreach programmes that art institutions are obliged to implement due to political demands, mediating great art to social groups who, for one reason or another, do not feel addressed by art, who do not recognise themselves as being represented by the institution and its values or, indeed, who feel excluded by art and its institutions.

**Pedagogy and Misrecognition**

Whether or not such exclusions are active or passive, perceived or real, is hardly the issue at hand here. It suffices to say that the pedagogical cannot be thought of in isolation from artistic productions or institutional policies; rather, it should be recognised as a mode of address that produces its publics, its constituencies, for better or worse, ranging from so-called populism to so-called socially engaged art practices. In any case, the curatorial cannot be distinctly separated from the process of mediation, and outreach programmes can never truly reach out, never really be adequate in the sense of political subjectivity and agency without a (re)consideration of the whole praxis of exhibition-making and ‘instituting’, since an exhibition not only presents artworks but also represents social subjects. It places the spectators in a specific relation
to works and narratives, and produces a public (and thus a relation) that is simultaneously social and aesthetic. If, indeed, the exhibition has always had a pedagogical role — even one that has often been forgotten or overlooked — it is also a *historical* role. It is something which must be historicised; the history of exhibitions is also the history of specific and shifting modes of pedagogy, shifting subject positions and productions of subjectivity. Whereas, historically, exhibitions attempted to produce a (national) citizenry and, from the 19th century onwards, a specific bourgeois subject-of-reason, which lent exhibitions a strong disciplinary inclination, today the pedagogy of exhibition-making must take the fragmentation of the public into account. Contemporary exhibition-making, and its intrinsic pedagogies, must accept that there is no unified public, only a number of possible public formations, which are sometimes aligned but as often as not oppositional to each other and to the grand narratives of the state — indeed, oppositional to ideological state apparatuses, such as the public museum. Likewise, the museum (and, with it, the exhibition) is no longer the same central and centralising space for the articulation of national narratives it arguably was in the classical and early modern period. This is the case even when the exhibition attempts to act like a mass medium, as in the case of mega-museums and large scale ‘blockbuster’ shows. Such modifications and modulations need to be taken into consideration in contemporary projects and when seeking to produce publics through exhibitions. Other narrations and modes of address, both political and social, must be formulated if the genuine intention is to reach other groups and produce other subjects, not just tell the same old stories with new words. Then, and only then, can a discussion on the politics of pedagogy properly begin; it is only in these circumstances that we can meaningfully contest whether these pedagogies are disciplinary or emancipatory, progressive or regressive, and through which traits these judgements might be traced and traded.

In the meantime, however, the alienation of misrepresentation is not only manifested in disinterestedness and (presumed) passivity towards art and its institutions, but also through disdain for contemporary art and its (presumed) constituency and values, through direct conflict and confrontation ranging from sneering asides to shouting matches. This alienation persists not only at the level of the individual’s elective or combative disengagement from the institution’s mediation in the narrowest sense (the guided tour etc.), but also at the level of mass-media representation. It is an alienation that has garnered specific currency even within mass movements that have gained more and more political traction in the postmodern era. While there surely were significant anti-modern-art platforms within the period of historical modernism (roughly from the mid-19th to the mid-20th century), such attitudes are now integral aspects of party politics, evident mainly at the right-hand end of the political spectrum. Contemporary art and its support structures are regarded not only as expensive, but also expendable — as a questionable form of public service. It is argued that contemporary art is difficult to understand, fundamentally elitist and in opposition to the ‘real’ people and their ‘real’ values. Moreover, it is perceived as *anti-national* and, thus, not a cause worthy of state funding; it is construed as something not in the national interest. This is the attitude that modernist thinkers such as Adorno deemed ‘philistine’, a term which has been revisited by Dave Beech and John Roberts as part of ‘the philistine controversy’, with philistinism being accorded positive status, or at least given greater consideration as art’s inevitable ‘other’ or aporia. Interestingly, Beech and Roberts view philistinism as a potential act of resistance in what is basically a cultural class struggle and, as such, they attempt to rewrite the history of the high/low culture debate, taking issue with what they term the Left’s ‘new aestheticism’, meaning its continued belief in the maxims of high modernist art and its enlightening, if not downright emancipatory, politics of possibility. Instead, Beech and Roberts find political agency and emancipation in the pleasures of ‘mass’ and ‘low’ culture, in what we might call ‘fan-ism’, i.e. strategies of (over)identification established through self-construction rather than through the disciplinary subject production of ‘good taste’ and of established (modernist) culture. Rightfully critical (perhaps even self-critical) of certain leftist cultural theory, nevertheless, like Smithson, they do not directly target modernist *artistic* strategies in their critique, only aesthetic theory.

After all, is anti-modernism, or philistinism, always already a *reaction*? Whether evaluated by theorists as being backwards and/or resistant, anti-modernism is viewed as a mode of reception rather than production, as being on the receiving end of a flawed communication. It is construed as a failed pedagogy, or, moreover — as if to suggest that certain subjects are beyond the reaches of enlightened knowledge — philistinism is located by some as beyond the reach of pedagogy. But, what if philistine negation is actually encouraged by the mode of address,
if it is actually the required response? What if, in other words, the artistic programme is explicitly anti-pedagogical? And, here I am not so much thinking of provocative or transgressive artistic practices, which, although this could never be openly acknowledged, have a very clear pedagogics of their own, albeit in the form of highly reductive dialectics. The provocateur always seeks to expose boundaries, to prove a point, even if that point is merely that everyone can be provoked when pushed hard enough (wow!). Rather, I am thinking of the modernist traditions of elusiveness and non-linguistic approaches, in both their deconstructive and romantic varieties, for example dada and expressionist abstractionism respectively (to employ some reductive dialectics of my own). With such approaches, and their contemporary permutations, there is never any explanation, never a discourse to be discussed. Rather, these approaches either entail circumventing any stability of discourse and language, or they attempt to exist outside language or at least linguistics (i.e. they are often posited in terms of an ‘artistic’ or ‘painterly’ language in opposition to ‘linguistic’ language). Such tendencies fraudulently allow artists to disengage from the politics and ethics of the image by stating — and thereby reproducing that lanest of excuses in (post)modern art speak — that the work ‘means whatever you want it to mean’. While acknowledging that readings of the work ultimately cannot be controlled by the creator of the work, this in itself cannot be taken to mean that the author has no responsibility whatsoever! The death of the artist/author does not automatically mean the birth of the viewer, because the viewer automatically gets tangled up in the game of meaning set in play by the process of receivership, and sometimes the viewer also succumbs, becoming strangled in these strictures of receivership.

The Politics of Pedagogy

Refusal by the author, of meaning or of audience, and by the spectator of (modern) art as art (in a universal sense) or of grand narratives as adequate, inclusive representations and identities, are all political positions and, as such, filled with conflicts and conflicting desires and (re)directions of desire; again, these may be regressive and/or progressive, disciplinary and/or emancipatory, and so on. So, when talking about pedagogy, about ‘educational turns’, we are talking about politics, not only of reading and representation, but also of circulation and production. Indeed volumes could be written analysing modern art history through art’s relationship to the viewer and to pedagogy, along the lines of Brian O’Doherty’s rewriting of modern art history according to modernism’s usage of space in his Inside the White Cube. What was conceptual art if not a pedagogical turn, in the installation of art as well as in the philosophy of aesthetics? At the same time, however, there is an anti-pedagogical impulse within aesthetic theory that informs the practices of conceptualism. Just consider a trio of influential essays from the period of conceptualism — Umberto Eco’s ‘The Poetics of the Open Work’ (1959), Susan Sontag’s ‘Against Interpretation’ (1964) and Roland Barthes’ ‘The Death of the Author’ (1967) — each providing different ways of undoing the power of discourse, finding liberation in openness, silence, even death. For Eco and Barthes, the main focus is on the role of the reader, with Eco finding specific art practices instructive and productive in securing openness. Sontag’s effort is more puzzling; her text actually concerns itself with the role of the critic, which has already been cited as the other great figure of mediation. Sontag tries to achieve an apparently logical impossibility; she seeks to remove the pedagogical function from the role of the critic. While this is perhaps not entirely impossible, it does create a highly paradoxical figure — that of the anti-pedagogical pedagogue.

We also meet this heroic figure in the philosophy of Jacques Rancière, nowadays so central to art discourse. The anti-pedagogical pedagogy is, of course, the topic of The Ignorant Schoolmaster, the story of one Joseph Jacotot, an exiled French teacher, who, in the early 19th century, discovered that he could teach French to Dutch students without knowing a word of their language, and vice versa. Instead of a hierarchical distribution of knowledge from the master to the inferior students, the master offered his ignorance and thus emancipation rather...
than stultification. Rancière calls this universal teaching, the idea that we are all equal, all capable in our different ways: ‘Universal teaching is above all the universal verification of the similarity of what all the emancipated can do, all those who have decided to think of themselves as people just like everyone else’.\(^1\) It is, therefore, no real method of teaching, no pedagogy, no explication model, but a radical break with the distribution of knowledge and the circles of power and powerlessness. Rather, it is artistic: ‘Me Too, I’m a Painter!’ he exclaims, obviously following Joseph Beuys. But, in making such claims upon the artist’s role, one cannot help wondering whether some of his recent supporters — such as Thomas Hirschhorn and Liam Gillick — would really follow him when he states that artists need equality the way that pedagogues need inequality, or that true emancipation will annihilate any difference between artists and non-artists, indeed any idea of expertise. This, of course, is the most radical version of the anti-pedagogical impulse and a much more forceful insistence on equality as foundational than is readily apparent from a quick reading of his later *The Politics of Aesthetics*.

In the earlier book, Rancière describes how Jacotot achieves his goal through the reading of a novel — that is, through an artistic expression — but he also indicates that it could have been any other book. However, is this really so? Would French have been learned from a book that did not have such a clear narrative as that found in the classic novel, *Télémaque*, which Jacotot used? What would happen if we exchanged this for a quintessentially modernist work instead, say *Finnegans Wake*? Could French be learned from that work or would it, rather, lead to wholly other notions of language? That is, the book, any book, surely articulates, it surely situates its reader in a relation that is pedagogical as well as narrative, literary, aesthetic and so on. This is not to say that the book requires explanation and exploration as supplement, not to say that the book transmits successfully or unsuccessfully, not to say whether it is instructive or deconstructive, but rather that it is always already fully immersed in such impurities. A book, or a work, cannot be disentangled but must, rather, be constantly formulated and reformulated with reference to a specific politics of pedagogy. We must ask how the pedagogical can be turned by the aesthetic and vice versa. We must, therefore, try to engage educators in questions of aesthetics and production, to engage curators in questions of mediation and to regard educational models as modes of address on a par with exhibition-making. In turn, we must develop some new models of our own — that is, ‘instituting’ practices rather than merely institutional practices — models for emancipatory, rather than disciplinary, pedagogies. Such emancipatory pedagogies must work for another production of the social that can include people’s experiences with art as well as outside of art, in the very encounter with art and its exhibitions, in the encounter with the interlocutor, the situation and the other participants. This instituting, then, will be a series of dialogues and discussions without an end or resolution — more an expansion of the questions posed than a simplification or even a foreclosure. We need, not just an ‘educational’ or ‘pedagogical’ turn, but rather a *turn in pedagogies*. 

\(^1\) Rancière, op. cit. p. 41.
Waiting For Rain

The first rain that ends a long, arid summer in a hot country quickens the heartbeat, unleashes the sudden release of the scent of the waiting earth, makes leaves, bark, tar and metal glow, cleans the light that falls from the sky and transforms children and dogs into heroic shamans and rain-dancers. It is said that even un-romantic people find themselves falling in love more often in the first week of the advancing monsoon.

What the first rain does to our senses, to our bodies, to our dry and waiting minds is the sly undertaking of just a quiet shift, a barely perceptible re-calibration of our appetite for life. The rain invokes something latent, something unformed, something hidden in us, and coaxes us to give those musty, locked-in aspects of ourselves an airing. It awakens sensations just under our skin, makes us remember snatches of forgotten songs and stories, and allows us to see things in the shapes made by clouds. We open windows, unlock doors and let the world in. Our dreams turn vivid.

The best kind of art, like the rain, invokes a re-ordering of the cognitive and sensory fields. It asks of its actual and potential publics to open doors and windows and let other worlds in. This re-ordering — subtle, slight, sure, sharp or soft as the case may be, whether it is a desultory drizzle across a few frazzled or jaded synapses, or the neurological equivalent of an electrical thunderstorm and sudden downpour — is why we bother with art in the first place. When it rains art, we do not reach for umbrellas. It makes sense to let ourselves soak, as long as we can, like children dancing in the season’s first rain.

However, unlike the process of paying attention to the environment within and around our bodies (which we cannot avoid as long as we are alive), attending to art is not simply a matter of staying alive but a highly contingent series of choices which remain acts of conscious will even if they are rooted in our somatic instincts. Despite appearances to the contrary, art neither kills us nor keeps us alive, but being in the presence of art is sometimes a matter of fathoming exactly how alive we are prepared to be.
The Unknown Addressee

This awareness of how alive we can become is a form of embodied, sensate knowledge, which may or may not be expressible in words and readily available concepts alone. It is what people ‘know’ they experience when they encounter an artwork, even if they are not always able to say what it is that they know. This knowing ‘non-knowledge’ may open a few of the windows that have been closed by ordinary knowledge and so let the rain come in.

This process is not only about what people ‘take away’ from a work of art, but also about what they ‘bring forward’ in their experience of it. Different publics bring their own dispositions, which may be as fresh, original and unfamiliar as that which artists and curators purvey. Each may not know the gifts that the other brings to the encounter, and in each case there may be discoveries waiting to be made in the surprises with which the encounter itself is laden.

The issue of not knowing enough about the ‘other’ cuts both ways. It is not just publics that do not know their artists or what lies hidden in a work of art; artists are equally susceptible to not exhaustively knowing either their own work or sometimes, not even minimally knowing, their public. But the artist’s ‘non-knowledge’ (echoing, but not necessarily identical to, the public’s own ‘knowing non-knowledge’) is not to be confused with ignorance. It is a generative, productive impulse that propels a desire to communicate. It is what brings artists, curators and their public to the same place.

The artist may or may not know everything that lies in their work simply because they are as much an author as a medium for the channelling of different currents and energies (originating elsewhere in time and space and coming to inhabit their practice) of which he or she may as yet be only dimly conscious.

The artist also may or may not know all the things that every person will experience when they encounter his or her work; people bring their own histories, memories, scars and desires to bear on any work that they encounter. An artist cannot possibly know what these may be; in fact, when an artist works, he or she has little or no intimation of how members of the public will get to know themselves when they face the work. The private language of the artist will never be the same as the private language with which the work will be ‘read’ by its viewer. In this sense, the artist is like someone who writes a letter to a lover they do not know they have, in a language that they do not understand, without any guarantee that the letter will either reach its intended addressee or be opened and read, if indeed it ever arrives.

Like Don Quixote asking Sancho Panza to deliver to an unknown address a love letter written to a Dulcinea imagined only through desire, or like the lonesome forest spirit trying to inveigle a passing rain cloud into carrying messages to his distant lover in the opening canto of the classical Sanskrit verse-drama The Cloud Messenger, artists often find themselves having to rely on mediators to even begin to become visible to their publics, their distant Dulcineas.

The Illiterate Wanderers’ Revenge

How wonderful it could be if, like Sancho Panza, there were people who could return with replies from audiences, even through the opacity of a correspondence carried on to some extent deliberately at cross-purposes. Like a true and faithful lover, or the earth waiting for rain, the artist would then be susceptible to being transformed by the encounter with his or her public, as much as the public itself might care to be altered by its encounter with his or her work. Then the work itself would become a portal, through which both artist and public passed in search of each other and things other than those contained within the boundaries of their beings and practices.

The point is not to render all things and ourselves transparent and legible, but to insist on the interpretative worth of margins of error, of accidents and serendipity, of uncanny resonances and speculative layering, of doubt and ambiguity as the foundations of an epistemology that does not have to ground itself in the dead habit of certainty.


2. For the forest spirit’s (yaksha) request to a floating cloud to act as a messenger, see Meghadootam (The Cloud Messenger) a classical Sanskrit play by Kalidasa (c. 100 CE). For a useful translation, see Kalidasa, Meghadootam: A Rendering from the Sanskrit into Modern English. Rajendra Tandon (trans.) Rupa & Co. 2007.
Nathaniel Katz, who worked as part of the education team on the exhibition ‘The Rest of Now’ (Manifesta 7, Bolzano, 2008), writes in response to our query about his experience of ‘mediating’ an exhibition:3

I wanted to write again though also to maybe clarify, or expand on an idea that came up during your visit. If you remember, while you were giving your guided tour, I approached you to say that there are some different attitudes toward mediation at an exhibition, and that a ‘traditional’ guided tour is perhaps not necessary. The way I perceive the situation (and this is by no means definitive or even correct), there is one attitude toward mediation that views the role of the mediator as one who creates the necessary conditions for the visitor’s understanding and engagement with the work. In this attitude, the intention of the artist takes supremacy [over] anything else, the purpose of mediation is to arrive at this intention (albeit through perhaps non-frontal means).

Another attitude toward mediation is that the artwork is a catalyst for an engagement that takes place within the group and in conversation with the work. However, the intention of the artist is, in many ways, secondary, as the meaning that is generated from such an exchange is open-ended. My interest in this work lies in the potential that is created by an open-ended exchange within the context of art. This is the approach that I have taken in my workshops at the exhibition. For me, the artwork, curatorial concept and workshop structure are a context […] in which to have an entirely new generative experience. I view art mediation as creative work, not as supplemental work.

I guess that I felt it may be important to share this with you as I [have] often felt that the educational programmes at large exhibitions were treated as important but not given the same level of importance as, say, the artists. It created an unfortunate hierarchy, given that those engaged in mediation are those with the largest amount of contact (and most impact) with the visitor to the exhibition and with their experience of the exhibition. For me, this is a shame, a missed opportunity to really rethink the way in which we interact with an art exhibition.

What is significant here is the desire to hold in abeyance the question — or the fact — of the intention of the artist, and hence to re-assert the authority of an exhibition. This frees the work of mediation from being, at best, a supplement to the authorial or curatorial contribution. It makes it possible instead for the mediator to set in motion a series of open-ended interpretative manoeuvres (set up through an exchange in which neither mediator, nor artist, nor curator, nor public have the final word), which seek to take a work of art or an exhibition (and their public) into areas that may not necessarily have been anticipated by its creators or custodians.

This calls for the slow, deliberative prolongation of the interaction between the artwork, its public and its critical milieu, which is not predicated on the instant processing of readily available information alone. What it probably requires is the belated insertion of the category of discursive and critical wonder (which could be another tangential understanding of the category of knowing non-knowledge that was referred to earlier), as a valid mode of orientating oneself towards a work of art as opposed to the need simply to know. Wonder is not necessarily a retreat into ineffability. Rather, it can, in some ways, be a side step into an eloquent and busy conversation founded on possibilities rather than on certainties.

A 1936 report, produced by a committee set up to examine the condition of museums in India, complained that the foremost museological problem in India was the fact that vast hordes of illiterate people flocked to museums not to ‘know’ but to ‘wonder’4. In fact, the colloquial Hindustani term for museum was ajaib-ghar or ‘house of wonders’. The report concludes that the only way to improve museums and museum-going and the appreciation of art and culture in India was to discourage the illiterate itinerant and make museums places in which to create the appropriately ‘aware’ modern subjects — the projected future cognoscenti. Since that day, museums in India have become sepulchral. The living breath of disorderly, ill-informed, wondering and wandering visitors, who walked in and out of galleries as freely as they walked in and out of

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3. Personal correspondence with Nathaniel Katz, art mediator, Manifesto 7 Education Department, 2008.

4. For a discussion of museums and museum-going in colonial India, see Museums of India (the first report on Indian Museums) prepared by S.F. Markham (Empire Secretary of the Museum Association) and H. Hargreaves (Director General, Archaeological Survey of India). The report was published in 1936. For an interesting discussion and citation of Markham and Hargreaves’ report, see Vidya Shivadas, ‘National Gallery of Modern Art: Museums and the Making of National Art’, in Shivi Panikkar, Parul Dave Mukherji and Deeptha Achar (eds.), Towards a New Art History: Studies in Indian Art. DK Print World, 2004.
competing knowledge systems and epistemic frames, has given way to the hush of empty halls and display spaces.

When we pause to consider the educational turn in contemporary art, we nurture the hope that the life-giving rain, which washes away certainty, be given its due. Getting wet in the rain was never as welcome as it is today.
Practice never ceases to conform to economic calculation even when it gives every appearance of disinterestedness by departing from the logic of interested calculation (in the narrow sense) and playing for stakes that are non-material and not easily qualified.\(^\text{(1)}\)

Pierre Bourdieu

In recent art publications, exhibitions, workshops, seminars and biennials, an ethics of practice weaves its way through various claims for the disarmament or rearrangement of institutional pedagogy. This ethics rests on two displacements — the displacement of art and the displacement of education, onto sites in which both constructs can lose (or at least loosen) their authorities. Many artists and educators (myself included) might be bound up in these scenarios — implicated, intrigued, committed in a general way. Yet, whilst ethics plays to the crowd, the political effect of such displacements — displacements performed at the level of aesthetics — is left unexamined. Here, under the umbrella of shifting conceptions of practice, I will try to think through how the aestheticisation of education by artists and curators proposes a utopian milieu of thought and action based on ethics, and, at the same time, institutes a process through which the politics of such thought and action are rendered generally ambivalent.

Putting Practice to Work

The term ‘practice’ needs to be examined here, by taking account of the set of paradoxes variously at work in: the institutionalised expansion of arts (and other) education; the use of pedagogy as a utopian socialised site by organisations and individuals outside orthodox educational structures; the deployments of galleries and museums — with their own taste and assessment distinctions — in the name of aesthetics — is left unexamined. Here, under the umbrella of shifting conceptions of practice, I will try to think through how the aestheticisation of education by artists and curators proposes a utopian milieu of thought and action based on ethics, and, at the same time, institutes a process through which the politics of such thought and action are rendered generally ambivalent.

entrepreneurship, in which terms such as ‘precarity’ and ‘equality’ are mobilised across platforms that are often, on the face of it, oppositional.

In this scenario, usually temporarily, art and education are rescripted as alternative forms of production, or, to use a phrase from Michel de Certeau’s reworking of practice as a utopian tactic, given over to ‘different ways of locating a technicity’ — that is, to different ways of thinking and showing the relationship between making, performing and participating.\(^\text{(2)}\) Relocating ‘technicity’ might be understood here as a method of separating artistic practice from its apparent goal in the development of a discrete product. Instead, in de Certeau’s terms, this would entail understanding practice as an ‘ensemble of [non-delimited] procedures’. *Techne*, always a potential site of immanence, once taken up in a curatorial vein, liberates exhibition-making from its relation to discrete forms of making and puts it to work as a process of arranging and distributing that links the practising of an art with the practising, or rehearsing, of novel, collective forms of sociality.

Here, pedagogy and curating both become practices, uncoupled from their institutional heritages. Pedagogy is installed in the armoury of contemporary curating as an alternative methodological possibility in which people can come together to learn and discuss things in galleries rather than seminar rooms. Practice develops as a sociospatial, participatory activity, uncoupled from erstwhile market objects. But, this deployment of the pedagogical is also weighted against other, more orthodox, sites of education — schools, academies, universities — in which learning is seen to be instrumentalised and disciplined. An ethics of shared and ameliorative spaces of participation is thus crossed with a politics of education, with the effect of dividing relations between sites of pedagogy and galleries, curators and artists. Within a contemporary situation marked by disappearing funding and programmatically mandated networking, this paradoxical mobilisation of practice is made more complex by changes within formal and institutional education cultures.

On a broad scale, there are the necessities of partnerships in the production of provable instances of knowledge transfer between cultural and formal educational institutions. At a more discrete scale, there is the development of practice-based research, whereby the very languages of resistance asserted by alternative pedagogical schema (free schools,
night schools, open academies, caucuses, etc.) would seem to be contradicted by the assertion of practice-as-research, an institutionally serviceable and assessable construct. Such a knot demands careful attention, not least in order to commit, as I would like to, to the possibility of gallery sites and education sites being equally, and occasionally collaboratively, capable of developing projects that relocate the politics of terms such as ‘practice-based’ and ‘participatory’ to a more rigorous realm of enquiry.

From Work to Practice

Providing the background noise to this situation are questions of immateriality and affectivity, brought about by shifting relations of work and production in the world at large. The by now widely understood evolution from material to immaterial concepts of labour (literally, the production of services that ‘result in no material and durable good’) ushered in terms such as practice-based. ‘Practice’ is radically different from ‘work’ in its temporal and spatial, operational and aesthetic, organisation. To be practice-based is to be more flexible; more embedded in the immanence of operations; more responsive to material and conceptual change; more reflexive. In art and education, this has widely been recognised as a useful reshaping of what constitutes work and/or research; in terms of labour, more generally, a division occurs between those who regard immaterial or affective labour as a new form of social collectivisation and those who strongly oppose it on the grounds of exploitation. Many post-Marxist thinkers determine that this shift produces major problems with regard to the development of new forms of poverty; the deskilling of traditions; social exclusions; the eradication of traditional structures of democracy in the workplace (unionism, bargaining power, etc.), which results in lowering wages; deregulation of state structures such as welfare, housing and medical provision; and the increase in privatisation linked to developing forms of capital. Of great influence, however, and particularly within art and higher education, is the view that such critiques delimit workers as reactive rather than active authors of new forms of production. Chief theorists of immaterial labour emerging from, and influenced by, the Italian *Operaiismo* (‘Workerist’) movement, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, suggest that, through the understanding that labour ‘produces an immaterial good, such as a service, a cultural product, knowledge, or communication’, there comes ‘a new kind of intelligence, a collective intelligence, a swarm intelligence’. This new ‘collective intelligence’ is based on what occurs when workers are released from the ties of productivist or Fordist forms of labour relations and instead turn to autonomous and self-defining modes of practice. Meanwhile, Maurizio Lazzarato understands immaterial or affective labour as a new form of hyper-exploitative ‘totalitarianism’ — which uses the precariousness and mobility of a widely defined ‘working class’ — and as a labour system within which ‘it becomes increasingly difficult to distinguish between leisure time and work time’ and ‘life becomes inseparable from work’. Like Hardt and Negri, Lazzarato also believes that:

An analysis of immaterial labour and a description of its organisation [...] can lead us to define, at a territorial level, a space for a radical autonomy of the productive synergies of immaterial labour [...] a polymorphous self-employed autonomous worker has emerged as the dominant form, a kind of ‘intellectual worker’ who is him or herself an entrepreneur, inserted within a market that is constantly shifting and within networks that are changeable in time and space.

Furthermore, immaterial labour ‘constitutes itself in immediately collective forms that exist as networks and flows’, opening up ‘antagonisms and contradictions’ to capitalism via this immanent socialisation, making both production and consumption ‘a creative act’ within the newly available milieu of practice.

Richard Sennett, writing in opposition to immaterialist conceptions of labour, mourns the processes of deskilling that accompany the development of contemporary forms of work practice. Arguing that ‘inequality has become the Achilles’ heel of the modern economy’, he suggests that contemporary, ‘creative’ ‘cutting-edge’ forms of work...
organisation exacerbate a ‘divorce between power and authority’, resulting in a weakening of institutional knowledge and a widening gap between power and authority: ‘the social has been diminished; capitalism remains. Inequality increasingly becomes tied to isolation. It is this peculiar transformation that has been seized upon by politicians as the model for the “reform” of the public realm’. 

For Sennett, the term practice is necessarily more closely aligned with the repetition of actions in order to perfect skill or, in his recent terms, crafting. Practice is here modified towards rehearsing, a process through which the worker/practitioner is subservient to the task of perfect production. Arguing, after Ruskin and in a manner similar to de Certeau, for a return to the traditions of workshop learning, in which masters teach apprentices craft skills which are then rehearsed endlessly until perfect (the artistic-educative model would here be the conservatoire), Sennett proposes that ‘one element has irretrievably gone missing’ in the loss of master-apprentice culture; ‘[t]his is the absorption into tacit knowledge, unspoken and uncodified in words, that occurred there and became a matter of habit, the thousand little everyday moves that add up in sum to a practice’. Here, the artist/craftsman gradually gains autonomy but on politically different ground to the immaterial labourer. Most evident here is the difference in understanding with regard to resistance. For Lazzarato et al, the concept of immaterial, affective or ‘illegible’ labour allows for the possibility of collective and autonomous organisation — resistance — in the face of, and in utilisation of, new forms of capital. Whereas, for Sennett, whether he is describing violin-making or software production, resistance is subservient to material conditions and limitations: ‘The skills of working well with resistance are, in sum, those of reconfiguring the problem into other terms, readjusting one’s behaviour if the problem lasts longer than expected, and identifying with the problem’s most forgiving element’. 

The argument between immaterial and material labour, between practice as a form of deregulation and practice as a form of rehearsal, might be characterised as this: if we work, we expect remuneration and discrete satisfaction for our part in the production of an object, an event or an outcome; when we practice, we do not have such discrete expectations — rather, we understand that we participate in a flow of process that is both immanent and interdisciplinary, through which we develop an event-based and ongoing, improvisatory state of productivity. We also repeat ourselves, in the sense that we work at this productivity every day, every week, to get better at it (we can always work harder to get better but there is never a final state of achievement). If we are artists, we produce objects that do not summarise this process but rather embody states in the level of flow. This practice, then, asserts a different way of being in the world, one that modifies the concept of work, and thus has a different relation to the politics of production. Pedagogy slips between these definitions. It is at once involved in the production and promotion of skills-based training (however ambiguous) and in the production and promotion of immaterial conceptions of practice-based knowledge; this situation is perhaps most exacerbated by arts education itself.

Angela McRobbie sees this contradiction in the relationship between the influx of young women into higher education institutions — resulting from the expansion of universities and colleges to broader capacities of inclusion at entry level — and the precarious and often self-exploitative patterns of work in the cultural sector within which those same women aspire to work on graduation. Working in fashion, art and design industries, educated to a high degree to recognise the cultural politics and modes of distinction of these industries, paid poorly or not at all and existing on a portfolio of occupations in order to maintain contact with work which is — wrongly in McRobbie’s view — considered ‘privileged or even […] elitist’, these women ‘emerge as the archetypal subject of work-without end’, performing ‘women (in movement) as the multitude, and the non-elitist university as a site for a new politics of immanence’. What happens, McRobbie asks, when a whole diversity of occupations,
all variously and loosely defined as creative, get ‘absorbed under the couplet of immaterial and affective labour’? (16) She goes on to enquire:

What is at stake in contemporary radical democratic politics is then this boundaryless field of life itself. Do we allow ourselves to belong wholly to the world which is shaped and defined by capitalism, or can we join forces to invent other worlds? (16)

McRobbie points to Lazzarato’s declaration of the necessity to ‘co-invent values which resist the market and the forces which harness and pollute our minds’, reminding us that feminism has long been involved in the networked and micro-political establishment of such ideals on a practical basis (e.g. crèches, women’s refuges, support structures of many sorts). (16) It is interesting to note that both these sets of terms — McRobbie’s reminders of what women have done and continue to do and Lazzarato’s call for market resistance through autonomous social invention — are utilised by artists and curators who seek to use pedagogy as a critical tool and aesthetic format for their work. In a manner similar to the paradox that McRobbie reveals, artistic pedagogy and art-as-pedagogy present the two faces of practice — one an opening to social aesthetic invention, the other a potentially compliant formatting of creative entrepreneurship: ‘As is the case with all of these potentials there is only ever a thin line between what can be grasped onto and retained for the common-good as critique, and what finds itself given over to improve the functioning of the new capitalism’. (17)

Practice-based Research

Yet another example of such paradox at work can be found in the complex formulations of practice-based doctoral degrees in the arts — the most common being one in which a doctoral candidate is examined partly on his or her theoretical establishment of a set of concerns (in writing) and partly on his or her exhibition, performance or documentation of practice (in which a ‘full understanding of the research can only be obtained with reference to the artefact itself’). (18) In these instances of research — in my experience, compulsively, and occasionally productively, fraught with concern over the relationship between the two elements — the rhetoric of the positively immanent versus the governmentally striated is performed in microcosm. Clearly, the development of practice-based research opens up tertiary degrees to a broader range of candidates, and clearly this is profitable in all senses of the word. Clearly, some artists, curators and writers benefit enormously from a period of extended research and others don’t (and not all artists should have to be/can be interested in getting a PhD). The ethics of practice-based research versus its instrumentalisation can be summed up roughly as follows:

• Practice-based research supposes an ideal way of working, one that describes what artists do anyway and allows them to do it to profitable effect between galleries and education systems. Practice-based research allows for the recognition and further articulation of art as a process of knowledge production and transfer which can and does access a whole range of practices as well as those traditionally defined as artistic, influencing and being influenced by them to broad social and creative effect. Practice-based research is the only way to describe what artists do — it is a way to describe what all artists do (not just those in the academy) and a great many other people besides. It is an achievement to have practice-based research recognised in the education and funding systems of Europe as this allows artworks to be understood on a greater and more profound level across various strata; practice-based research is thus an equalising process that allows people of different orientations to understand and be with each other. Practice-based research is ethical — it should be supported as a concept as it levels and creates parity and discourse between people, images and objects. Artists who understand their work as practice-based are invariably involved in interesting, complex and highly evolved projects, often incorporating the production of useful and politically necessary discursive and communicable spaces for evolving publics.

15. Ibid.
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid.
18. In searching for an academic definition of practice-based research, the most affirmative I found came from the Creativity and Cognition Studios of the University of Technology Sydney: “Practice-based research […] is research where some of the resulting knowledge is embodied in an artefact. Whilst the significance and context of that knowledge is described in words, a full understanding of it can only be obtained with reference to the artefact itself. Artefacts in practice-based research can range from paintings and buildings to software and poems”. See [http://www.creativityandcognition.com/content/category/10/16/131/].
Practice-based research has been invented to confine the work of artists and other creative professionals through processes of assessment and measure. Practice-based research is a ‘scientification’ of artistic process, motivated by governmental demands to measure what artists do in terms of knowledge production and transfer. Practice-based research creates divisions between artists and people, overly complicates what artists do anyway, muddles people’s genuine emotional and intellectual response to making, participating in and appreciating art and artistic environments. Practice-based research perverts — or seeks to dis-identify the politics of — the author-effect. Practice-based research should be banned (and artists should not be allowed to gain PhDs by submitting their work for examination) in recognition of its government-bureaucratizing and institutionalising procedures. Artists who do describe their work as practice-based are usually second rate and cannot support their work other than through teaching and receipt of government funding. Good artists do not need to think about and research their practice or understand their process; these are distractions and excuses.

In Education in the Gallery

Writing on the ‘the Privatization of the “General Intellect”‘ in the wake of the Bologna Declaration\(^\text{19}\) on the reorganisation of higher education in Europe and beyond, Christian Marazzi says:

From now on, education can only rhyme with casualization. The economic colonization of the field of education has set in motion a new cycle of struggles for the right to education – struggles in which the flexibility/precariousness of educational curricula also affects researchers faced with diminished public budgets and the corporatization of knowledge production.\(^\text{20}\)

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19. The Bologna Declaration is the main guiding document of the Bologna process. It was adopted by the ministers of education of 29 European countries at their meeting in Bologna in 1999. It proposed a European Higher Education Area in which students and graduates could move freely between countries, using prior qualifications in one country as acceptable entry requirements for further study in another. The process has caused high profile arguments in political and academic communities.

aim appears to be to include as many art institutions as possible within the field of expanded academia, rather than to define the specific role of the art academy as such. Very often, the academic turn seems to be a way to turn away from the academy: indeed, if the art field becomes an academic one, then what an academy has to offer can also be found elsewhere, at other institutions and self-organized initiatives constituting the field of expanded academia. The suggestion seems clear: we don’t need the academy.\(^{[21]}\)

There is a Rancièrean logic to this conclusion, in that the democratic outcome of education for all (an outcome in which the ‘Pastor’ or teacher might be forgotten) is one in which equality is established to such an extent that there is no need for artistic education; everyone will be happy to create, experience and exhibit, as necessary, their own and each other’s work in processes of flexibility and informality, motivated by the inclusivity of growing circuits of social (and economic?) support.\(^{[22]}\) Also in this scenario, there is no necessity to assess and establish a qualitative grading system for artistic production, since everyone is an artist or curator with their own determinations of quality. The needs deemed important, but subsidiary, by art academies (and universities in general), such as convivial space, social networks, focal events, can be provided by the gallery in recognition of their cultural and fiscal importance. Whilst this does not have the pragmatic feel that underpins Angela McRobbie’s examples of the support structures set up by feminists in the late 1960s and early 1970s (the point, as Tom Holert has identified, at which the expansion of a critique of art schools was also first in evidence),\(^{[23]}\) there is no doubt that here is an iteration, at least theoretically, of Hardt and Negri’s potentialising swarm intelligence (we might say ‘curated intelligence’) at work. Secondary questions arise: Will we miss critique? Will we miss the objects that assert a competitive and authoritarian visual and sensual economy for art? If we do, then we will no doubt find comfort through conversations with artists in galleries and learn new things there.

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relationship to those things it seeks to critique in education (economic and productive attachments, measures of assessment, restrictive entry points, etc.). Curators have a responsibility to think through their own participation in re-branding, via temporary art school biennials, exhibitions-as-academies and the renaming of lecture series and installations as schools and pedagogical experiments. Intriguing and convivial as these spaces and events may be, their heterotopic format decreases their capacity to intervene politically on the path along which their aspiration must inevitably lead; that is, to the reformulation of education and the recognition of art ‘work’ as a distinct and often problematic fact of our economic milieu.

The folly of our times is the wish to use consensus to cure the diseases of consensus.\(^{27}\)

Here, we are merely playing with the dissolution of identities when the real crisis of education lies elsewhere (in the UK, in primary state education, where procedures of access, class, race, wealth and measures of assessment work with regularity to decimate lives before children can imagine a practice at all). The conflict between practice and education, aligned, on the one hand, with a radical politics of immanence, in which aesthetic, cultural and social decisions are made with a performative and potentially collective intelligence, and, on the other, with the imposition of a sanctioned version of the same, needs to be redrawn in the seminar room, in the institution. Rancière suggests that we must ‘repoliticise conflicts so that they can be addressed, restore names to the people and give politics back its former visibility in the handling of problems and resources’ and this should be done in the name of the university on all levels, but perhaps especially in the departments and schools that have bent over so readily to embrace the immateriality of practice and thus opened the way for its easy aesthetic economisation.\(^{28}\)

Alternatives in galleries and curatorial projects only serve to mask conflict through their heterotopic performance, and this constitutes a political problem.

\(^{28}\) Ibid.
The series of symposia entitled ‘Education, Information, Entertainment’, at the Institut für Gegenwartskunst (Institute for Contemporary Art) of the Academy of Fine Arts, Vienna, involved a discussion of the range of approaches to higher education in art, focusing on ways of changing and expanding the spectrum of such approaches. During the first two symposia of the series, women in teaching and leading administrative positions within academies, art schools/colleges and universities presented their curricula, course contents and methodological principles. Another focal point was the question of how students would structure such a programme of studies on their own initiative.

The third symposium in the series was concerned with the adoption of an Anglo-American concept of Cultural Studies at art schools in the German-speaking region, while the fourth symposium centred on international opportunities for postgraduate studies in the field of art. The underlying concern and point of departure for this series of symposia was an enquiry into the place and role of artistic practice in the context of newly emerging, post-industrial economies. In the course of the related restructuring processes, the classical definitions of ‘work’ and ‘labour’ are being questioned while, at the same time, the roles of art, culture and education in contemporary societies are discernibly shifting.

With respect to labour, we recognise a transfer of production cycles into the sphere of society and a tendency toward diversification of production processes. The different forms of ‘immaterial’ or creative production in audio-visual industries, particularly in the fields of computer-aided design, advertising, marketing and media, are becoming increasingly important. These processes require subjects who not only possess intellectual, cultural and artistic capabilities but also manual and technical skills, people who are flexible enough to organise their activity on a project-based, ad-hoc basis. In light of this development, it comes as no surprise that these new economies generate needs and desires that relate to artistic practices. On the other hand, however, entirely legitimate demands for compensation for the fruits of artistic labour emerge among cultural producers, who also want to reap the economic benefits of this new market.

These developments unfold at a time marked by significant changes in the field of culture and art, the result not only of economic reorientation but also of the concurrent retreat of governments from cultural responsibility. In view of the increasing tendency of government institutions to transfer this responsibility to the private sector, concern on the part of the producers of art and culture for their own ‘welfare’ is entirely understandable. And, thus, a fundamental transformation in the self-understanding and the professional profile of the artist is inevitable under the influence of rapidly changing modes and environments of production. Increasingly, activities devoted to earning a living are being incorporated into current forms of practice, as artists grow weary of neglecting their everyday realities in the hope of achieving the kind of market success that was possible even for young artists during the prosperous years of the 1980s. While those involved in art and culture have long been well aware of these significant changes in working conditions, society at large continues to entertain illusions about the nature of artistic and cultural production based upon the stereotype of the unique ‘artist-genius’.

1. The title alludes to the mandate expressed by the founders of the BBC public television network.
2. Speakers at ‘Education, Information, Entertainment’ Part I/1996 included Laura Cottingham (on Critical Studies at Cooper Union, NYC), Anna Harding (on the then-newly established Curatorial Studies course at Goldsmiths College, University of London), ine Govers (on the theoretical focus of the postgraduate Ian van Eyck Akademie in Maastricht); Part II/1997 featured Guadalupe Echevarria (Director of the Ecole des Beaux Arts Bordeaux), Iwona Blazwick (on the Curatorial Studies course at the Royal College of Art, London) and Catherine Quéloz (Director of the Sous Sol Programme at the Ecole Supérieur Arts Visuelles in Geneva); Part III/1999 participants included Helmut Draxler (who made an appeal for an approach to open up practices that foster the growth of different relationships to theory), Eva and Attila Kosa (on the newly developing field of research in the sociology of art); founders of ‘MODE2RESEARCH@Cultur Studies for the Learning Society — NPO — Austria’), Susanne Lummerding (who focused attention on problems related to the relationship between theory and practice), Christina Lutter (an historian for the Austrian Ministry for Education, Science and Culture, who examined the significance of cultural science and cultural studies) and Oliver Marchart (a political scientist who addressed questions of whether cultural studies fulfil their promise for interdisciplinary and the politicisation of subject matter); Part IV/2000 included contributions by Doug Ashton (who presented the MFA at the Visual Art Program at the Vermont College of Art), Jula Dech (discussed several projects of ‘Art in Context’ postgraduate programme at the Hochschule der Kunste Berlin), Charles Esche (who presented the Protoacademy as a research fellow at Edinburgh College of Art), Renée Green (who spoke about the New York based Whitney Independent Study Program) and Sarat Maharaj (who raised issues of globalisation, difference and diversity as a professor of art history and art theory at Goldsmiths College, University of London).
3. In Part II/1997, the Freie Klasse Wien presented their concept and their demands for self-determination with respect to the structure of studies at institutions of higher arts education.
4. Antonio Negri introduced the concept of ‘immaterial’ labour. It refers to new forms and structures of work that emerge as economies change. Its consequences include the formation of new working ‘subjects’, whose personal, social and intellectual capacities become an integral part of the production process. See Antonio Negri, Maurizio Lazzarato, Paolo Virno, Umherschweifende Produzenten. ID Verlag, 1998.
It is still, or perhaps once again, quite possible for self-styled eccentric ‘Malerfürsten’ to sell themselves quite well in the society of culture, be it through advertising for men’s apparel, for example, or through adding a touch of glamour to finger-food events. The fact remains, however, that, according to a study commissioned by the German Federal Ministry of Commerce, \(^{(5)}\) 71% of people in Germany who regarded themselves as artists in 1996 needed additional income to support themselves. \(^{(6)}\)

Given these economic conditions, and for a number of other reasons, ‘budding’ young artists have long since realised that they can make more lucrative use of their skills and knowledge by producing video clips or operating new programmes such as Paintbox\(^{(7)}\) than by situating themselves within the confines of the exclusive and regulated art system. New platforms for innovative artistic production are more readily available on the Web or in the night programmes of the cable channels of MTV or the German music channel, VIVA, than in opera houses, theatres or museums. Although it is not easy to obtain funding for experimental productions, even in the entertainment industries, it is at least understood by all those involved that products have their price, whereas no one in the art world speaks openly about what artistic productions cost (regardless of medium) and how they are financed. The recently revitalised art market stubbornly insists upon traditional forms of regulation, i.e. accepting, at best, limited editions alongside unique artworks, while unlimited product lines as, for example, proposed by German artist Katharina Fritsch\(^{(8)}\) remain the rare exception.

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\(^{(6)}\) It is also the case that, in Germany for example, the urgently needed institution of a State Social Welfare Fund for Artists (KSK) – which has, since the mid-1980s, assumed 50% of the costs for health insurance, welfare and pension payments as a form of employer’s contribution – is currently pursuing a policy of forcing artists whose insurable incomes do not exceed the base level of approximately 3,750 Euro (representing some 40% of all artists) onto the welfare rolls. A member of the KSK staff informed me in a telephone conversation that those who are unable to show evidence of incomes above the cited minimum after the prescribed grace period are advised to look for a different profession. What such a policy clearly overlooks – obviously in response to orders ‘from higher up’ – is the economic and professional realities of a minority, rather than a majority, of freelance artists and authors.

\(^{(7)}\) A soft- and hardware tool, launched in 1981, for television graphics.

\(^{(8)}\) Between 1981 and 1989, Katharina Fritsch produced six unlimited-edition multiples: a white brain, a fluorescent yellow Madonna, a vase, a scarf, an abstracted black cat and a stack of coins in a plastic bag. According to Fritsch, these unlimited editions should ideally be sold in department stores.
of the shifting direction, function and potential instrumentalisation that will be imposed upon, or voluntarily assumed for, art and culture. Culture, to quote Stuart Hall, is ‘a field of flourishing antagonisms’, the scope and content of which can be grasped only by recognising its inherent contradictions.

It is for these and other reasons that educational institutions — and this applies equally to art schools and academies of all kinds and at all levels — must seek and find answers to the fundamental restructuring process from the public to the private sector that is currently taking place in culture and all other parts of society. Prevailing ideas about art and culture at numerous academies and art schools in the German-speaking region are still based upon the concept of originality and uniqueness in art — art in service of representation rather than critical reflection. And there is a widespread lack of recognition of the fact that, in an entirely mediatised environment, new and complex requirements are being imposed upon artistic production and thus upon their producers, the artists, as well. Art schools and, in fact, the community of cultural administrators as a whole have long neglected this development. As the few recently available surveys show, only a fraction of all students who graduate from art schools and academies pursue the traditional paths one generally associates with a career in art, i.e. the path from art school to gallery to museum. The majority of graduates must invent their own economy in the field of audio-visual media. Sources of new topographies for artistic practice, and thus also for research in the field of art, are to be found precisely in this contact and interaction among different fields of culture and society and in the free exploration of their interplay.

Aside from artistic production, art schools show insufficient concern for alternative modes of distribution and self-organisation, capable of counteracting the trends toward either designating art as an exclusive ‘good’ for those who can afford it or toward the degradation of art and culture to the status of a mere service. With respect to both the self-assessment of art schools, academies and universities and their curricula and teaching methods, the goal must be to take up the cultural mandate of ‘Education, Information, Entertainment’ and renew it through critical thinking and innovative (re)action.

Such a fundamental revitalisation of curricula and teaching methods at art schools in the German-speaking region would necess-
sarily require that, in addition to the so-called traditional and art theoretical contents — such as art history and cultural philosophy — subjects like cultural, social and media theory, gender, cultural and critical postcolonial studies, curatorial studies and methods of presentation, cultural policy, the study of transcultural and popular-cultural issues be firmly anchored in curricula. These subjects should be incorporated as course content of equal merit and not relegated to the status of supplementary ‘fringe’ offerings. We see striking evidence of how effective such implementation could be if we look back at the example of art schools in Great Britain in the 1970s, when a significant numbers of pop musicians descended from such environments and people who have taken the autodidactic route to success — be they DJs or club-owners — are today appointed as faculty members and achieve impressive results in departments created especially for them (e.g. Visual Culture) on the basis of their theoretical backgrounds and experience in cultural practice. I would prefer to see the figure of the ‘genius’ replaced with that of the ‘self-conscious acteur’, the person who is ultimately — even within the context of the art school — self-educated and organises heror himself within the framework offered by an art school curriculum. Teachers from diverse backgrounds could provide access to a wider range of critical and artistic skills — the ability to explore, to experiment and to improvise, to work and think in unconventional ways. By virtue of these qualities, the artist figure I have in mind is predestined to find her or his own vocation in society.

The time has come to abandon the restricted ‘master class’ system, favoured by some German-speaking academies, and adopt permeable arrangements and heterogeneous team structures and to expand the emphasis on conventional studio-class instruction by theoretical courses and project based methods. Why not regard students as competent partners capable of cooperating and being actively involved in the design of their learning environment? Concurrent promotion of collective and co-productive working structures and the individual activity of the artist-subject represent a further step toward structural expansion of artistic practice. Curatorial Studies should also be firmly established in art school curricula, as the public presentation of art, along with the studies of process, of positioning and contextualising art production, have long been a part of what constitutes ‘art’. At this point, it is interesting to note that some German art schools do not actually operate with a curriculum. As everyone knows, ‘art is free’ and cannot be taught as some ‘genius’ artists state even as they accept positions as professors at art schools/academies. In principle, there is nothing wrong with more open structures, and a degree of latitude is an essential prerequisite for independent, self-reliant creativity. Yet, if the independence of art school students is to be taken seriously, there must be a curricular setting which encompasses and identifies all of the issues and requirements to which independent producers of art are exposed today.

This focus on the many different theoretical discourses pertinent to the study of art is in urgent need of strengthening, and the interplay of theory and practice should become a perfectly natural part of the process in the form of individual or project-orientated studies. The feminisation of art schools, which is not to be confused with the gender balance among students that has gradually been achieved, should be reflected not only in a corresponding balance within art school faculty staff but also in curricula which accommodate gender-specific issues as a matter of course. Art schools and academies, particularly in the German-speaking region, lack an international orientation in their faculty and curricula, and little emphasis is placed upon the study of diverse concepts of societies and cultures based upon different geopolitical contexts and constellations. In addition, redesigned art education programmes should also include transdisciplinary and/or anti-disciplinary postgraduate studies in an environment of close international cooperation, in order to establish research at art schools and academies, which has been sorely neglected thus far, by students and faculty members alike. The justified appeal for life-long learning and ongoing research would once again assume appropriate social relevance through the creation of postgraduate programmes at art schools and the establishment of different fields of research not only by artists, but also across all the arts.

In the course of of transforming the Academy of Fine Arts, Vienna, into a university, consideration is being given to the need to change existing structures and curricular content. However, some professors and artists continue to oppose the acceptance of theoretical content as an integral part of a course of study in art, whereas studies after nature and from the nude are maintained without critical reflection. The amalgamation of the various institutes, which is intended in accordance with the mandate contained in the new Austrian University Studies Act, to

13. Although it should be noted that the Cultural Studies programme, developed and implemented at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) in Birmingham, is currently undergoing critical review and evaluation.
promote the ‘equality of studies in the arts and sciences’,\(^{14}\) will foster the reorganisation of existing potentials. If, in the course of transforming our Academy into a university, the existing institutes are joined together, while retaining their fundamental autonomy, and a future department of Art and Cultural Studies is firmly anchored in artistic research and teaching under the revised academic programme, this could represent a step forward in establishing theory and practice on an equal footing at art universities. The goal of this restructuring process is to establish the dialogue between artistic practice, different fields of theory and scholarship, as well as curatorial practices — a dialogue that is already taking place outside the sphere of art schools and universities — at the level of academic studies, while expanding it through the inclusion of new fields of practice and theory.\(^{15}\) In this way, the vast potential inherent in an altered spectrum of functions associated with art history, cultural philosophy, cultural science and contemporary art could be studied and exploited.

This orientation, which is already being pursued by staff and students at the Institute für Gegenwartskunst, concentrates on interdisciplinary artistic practices, theories of contemporary art and culture and includes curatorial, gender and cultural studies, popular culture, theories of space and day to day conditions at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, the art system and its circulation.

It remains to be seen whether the opportunity offered by this restructuring effort and the intensified integration of theoretical and cultural studies in art school curricula — the chance to address the full complexity of the field of art and culture — will be exploited more effectively than has been the case thus far. For it will take a co-ordinated coupling of theoretical and artistic studies to enable students to develop a self-determined, reflexive and critical view of their own position and the role of art in society.

\(^{14}\) See (in Austria) (AnStG, 3/98; ‘Allg. Erläuterungen’ I. and III; the linking of science and art/research as defined in the body of the text. 3(3)); the scholarly thesis as an equally recognised alternative to a diploma project.

\(^{15}\) Such new fields of theory are encompassed by cultural studies. See, for example, Stuart Hall, op. cit.

First published in 2001, Ute Meta Bauer’s text formed the introduction to a publication of papers from a series of symposia entitled ‘Education, Information, Entertainment, Part I-IV’ which were organised by Ute Meta Bauer during her tenure as Professor for Theory and Practice of Contemporary Art through the Institute for Contemporary Art at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna between 1996 and 2000. The Institute’s substantive focus at this time was the interplay between contemporary art and its changing social function. The traditional constellation of artist-mediator-institution-public was being consciously re-examined and re-mapped by the Institute’s work. ‘Education, Information, Entertainment’, edited by Bauer and Sønke Gau, explored a range of issues relevant to the changing structures and contents of higher education in art at the time, and the organisers endeavoured to establish cultural studies as a viable option within art education. This partly amended and abridged version of the text has been included here by way of mapping the broader context of educational enquiry emergent in higher arts education within Europe immediately prior to the emergence of the Bologna Declaration. This text demonstrates a degree of convergence between earlier concerns within higher arts education and thematics and initiatives emerging from beyond the academy as such. While this text was produced within a specific historical conjunction, it resonates with the broader discussion of ‘Curating and the Educational Turn’, and helps to situate the current debates with reference to an earlier moment of reorientation within European art education. (Eds.)

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Translation into English by John Southard.
AN AESTHETIC EDUCATION AGAINST AESTHETIC EDUCATION

Stewart Martin

Documenta 12’s commitment to the question of what is to be done in education is to be welcomed from an institution that has sought to sustain itself as an autonomous cultural realm, a public sphere, in the face of its fabulous state sponsorship and relationship to the art market. The articulation of the question in terms of the self-education of artists and audiences and a globalised cultural translation of localised forms of self-organisation broadens its address. In the context of the uneven globalisation of cultural centres — as manifested in the blossoming of biennials from Istanbul to Johannesburg and Seoul — the old school of international art exhibitions is obliged to respond not only to one or other of these newcomers, but to the fact of their profusion and their representation as the authentically subaltern. In this respect, Documenta 12’s positing of itself as the stage for exchanging local, self-organised projects is a way of sustaining its global significance as an organisational centre in an art world that has become increasingly decentred. Its benevolence is thus liable to a quasi-imperial perversion, the irony of multitude and empire.

The conservative reaction to Documenta11’s commitment to postcoloniality was more parochial and short-sighted, and ‘Documenta’ has subsequently become an answer in Germany’s citizenship test for immigrants. Documenta 12’s project of a ‘journal of journals’ is itself liable to this colonising function. Journals were invited to take part in a global exchange and translation of their ‘position’, hosted in a virtual, but no less codified, space. But, an intranet site and copyfree rights are hardly enough to retain the dream of a republic of letters here. Participation, in line with the best intentions of this project, therefore needs to question its terms of exchange. Having been offered citizenship of Documenta 12, one is perhaps obliged to try to fail its test and answer its question(1) by criticising it.

The Devil in the Deep Blue Sea

To say that education is a constitutive issue of contemporary culture is to risk tautology, especially in German. The implicit claim that ‘culture is education’ only rings true when it is heard not as a translation

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but as a speculative proposition, determined by an antagonism between the terms that are also inherent in each of them. These antagonisms have become familiar within modernism, the culture of the new. The dissolution of traditional, dogmatic or externally imposed authority problematises the idea of education — how can freedom be taught? — orientating it towards autonomy and self-organisation. But the contradictions harboured by the idea of an education in freedom manifest themselves in the ironic formation of new modes of dogmatism, above all the neo-dogmatism of the law of value. These issues have not become antiquated by the globalised scenario emphasised by Documenta, except in so far as one might characterise the present as a classicism of antagonism. The artistic director of Documenta 12 claims: ‘Today, education seems to offer one viable alternative to the devil (didacticism, academia) and the deep blue sea (commodity fetishism)’. This is wishful thinking. It is difficult not to be struck by a certain educationalisation of contemporary culture that is characterised above by the fusion of didacticism and commodification.

Meritocracy — certainly across the neoliberalised social democracies of Europe — is among the preferred means of mediating democracy and capitalism, exemplified in former British prime minister, Tony Blair’s trinity of education, education, education. ‘Life-long learning’ is a phrase that oscillates between the dream of fulfilling self-transformation, beyond the privileges of youth, and the nightmare of indiscriminate de-skilling and re-skilling according to the dictates of a flexible labour market. Many are left dumbfounded by the breathless, exponential pace at which education at all levels is being commodified. The liberation of ‘choice’ and ‘opportunity’ is the carrot; the threat of self-incurred poverty, whether of the nation or the individual, is the stick. This threat infuses the political discipline of states seeking technological sovereignty, but the de-nationalisation of labour markets has added a further dictate: your nationality will no longer save you from poverty, only your education will. The expansion of postgraduate degrees — note the contradiction in terms — is fraught with tensions between widened accessibility to more self-directed study and the instrumentalisation of higher education into training or research guided by state or corporate-funded interests, if not its indiscriminate commodification as a leisure industry, often misrecognised by those seeking a job in academia. Qualification is a receding horizon; its promise of maturity takes the form of infantilisation.

Art education is not exempt from these phenomena, despite its exemplary resistance to them in many ways. Often, art education is an exception and derided as such, as not ‘an education’, or as an ‘education for failures’, the uneducated and the ineducable. But, what appears to be infantile to the schoolmarmish can, at its best, be an assumption of autonomy, rather than its deferral or evasion; one begins already an artist in a way that few other disciplines can even comprehend, let alone match. This fact infuses the auto-didacticism of the art school intellectual and, while it might be difficult to recognise among the fat-and-felt mythology, Beuys’ thesis that ‘everyone is an artist’ remains a pivotal contention of modern art education, central to the self-critical and even self-negating task of the art school. Of course, the irony of this educational radicalism has frequently been an undisciplined demagogy. Few manifest this more powerfully than Beuys himself. And, while the public fascination with, and scandal of, contemporary art is infused by the idea that ‘I could do that’, the art world remains dominated by graduates from select academies. Art schools are certainly brand names in the market for young artists.

The dismantling of academicism within the art academy — the undermining of the strict observance of genres and art, of artistic competence and authorship, indeed, of what art should be — mimics, albeit at times critically, the nominalism of new processes of the commodification of labour and their protocols. A neo-academic tendency is also apparent in the pervasive critique of the supposedly ‘uneducated’ capacities of taste and genius — and their actual formation by social class, ethnicity, gender, sexuality or other determinations — a tendency which is indifferent to how taste and genius contribute to the cultivation of non-dogmatic forms of authority and self-determination. If the capacities of taste and genius can be seen as effects of commodity fetishism, their dissolution into the determinability of social space and identity is no less symptomatic of the calculation of consumer markets. The theoretisatisation of art practice and education that has accompanied this sociologically reductive tendency is frequently entranced with academicism. ‘Theory’ has proven to make just as good packaging as the connoisseurial puff. Criticism is the antidote to both.

According to a similarly ambivalent pedagogy, exhibition space has been widely transformed over the recent period, with various ‘aids’ to mediate the audience’s experience of the artwork, from ubiquitous and
expanded catalogues, to orientating wall texts and audio guides, audience-response forms and posting boards. The whitewashing of art space to prime the unaided exercise of taste is being reversed. Even where art is sold as an experience, an encounter with something unknown, there is usually a guide on hand. Within under-resourced public spaces, education offers a respectable merchandising opportunity.

Documenta 12’s appeal to self-organised educational projects offering an alternative to academicism/didacticism and commodity fetishism suppresses the extent to which the modern idea of education is embedded within these terms. Indeed, the very idea of education as emancipation is infused with the contradictions of these terms. Commitment to this idea thus requires its immanent critique. How else could an injunction to education today be formulated?

Lessons in Autonomy

It was, perhaps above all, the modern political-philosophical idea of autonomy, codified by the French Revolution and its German philosophes, which induced the crisis and reinvention of the idea of education that continues to the present. The French Revolution grounded freedom on equality, as an inalienable right, introduced in the form or guise of ‘man’. Equality is not derived from freedom in the manner of the aristocratic democracies of antiquity, in which equality is a category of distinction, of an elite. Rather, the modern idea of autonomy requires a coincidence of freedom and equality: equality without freedom is subordination; freedom without equality is privileged, particular and, therefore, constrained. This mediation is infused with a non-dogmatic idea of law; freedom must be subject to universal law as a guarantor of its equality, but law must also be subject to freedom; it cannot be unchallengeable by the individual. The idea of autonomy resolves this tension into the idea of individuals determining themselves, according to universal laws to which they subject themselves, with the inalienable or natural capacity they have as subjects. Thus, Kant argues that the moral law expresses nothing other than the autonomy of pure practical reason — that is, freedom. One is not subjected to dogmatic or externally imposed rules — heteronomy — but to the rules one gives to oneself as a subject. Autonomy is, therefore, a unity of subjection and subjectivity.

This idea of autonomy produces a crisis and reinvention of the idea of education. For, if education is essentially a relation of subjection — of student by master — then it is incompatible with the constitution of autonomy. Even if education means merely the transmission of something from those who have it to those who do not, how can there be an education in autonomy? Autonomy is not owned or understood by certain beings such that it can be transmitted to others who do not possess it. Rather, it is the egalitarian presupposition of any such exchange. As such, education is best left behind in the seminary or reduced to a minor, or subordinate, cultural function incidental to forging a culture of autonomy. These problems justify various forms of anti-education, attached to the natural, the naïve and the untrained, or perhaps self-trained, for which Rousseau provides the slogan: ‘Man was born free, and yet everywhere he is in chains’. And yet, this idea of anti-education also induced ideas of an education against education, proposals for the paradoxical task of an education in autonomy. Rousseau’s Émile, or On Education, sees his Savoyard vicar professing a faith in ‘common reason’ to his young companion rather than conducting ‘learned speeches or profound reasonings’: ‘I do not want to argue with you or even convince you. […] Reason is common to us, and we have the same interest in listening to it’. Famously enthused by this peculiar education, Kant conceived of enlightenment as a matter of courage: ‘Have courage to use your own understanding!’ Finally, Joseph Jacotot’s universal teaching, cited by Rancière in The Ignorant Schoolmaster, articulates the paradoxical principle of an education against education most succintly: ‘I must teach you that I have nothing to teach you’.

Socrates’ insistence that he knew nothing more than his interlocutors and that they should enter into the search for truth together, as equals, established a pedagogic precedent for education in autonomy to become essential to the idea of philosophy, opposed not only to sophistry but also to the inculcation of doctrine. But Socrates remains the master, followed and admired, contradicted by his pupils on pain of misleading themselves, the hero or sovereign of Plato’s dialogues. His

students remain students. Meno’s slave is brought to know what is forgotten within him, what appears to be a capacity above his rank, but, in being brought to that point, he remains subjected in reaching it. He remains a slave. The lesson to Socrates’ select pupils, certainly to Plato, is to establish themselves in their superiority, as those ‘golden’ boys, philosophers, and thereby rulers, of the serried ranks beneath them. It is the promise of sovereignty through subjection. But subjection remains subjection, if not to Socrates then to ‘the forms’. Sovereignty is reduced to compensation for one’s subjection by the subjection of others. If the idea of philosophy is intrinsically tied to this education in subjection, then we need to think of an education in autonomy as forging an alternative discipline or anti-discipline.

The contradictoriness of an education in autonomy should not be overstated, insofar as freedom is subject to equality — albeit as much as equality is to freedom — then the subjecting function of education might be conceived according to the discipline required of freedom. But this only extends the crisis of education to the idea of autonomy itself, exposing an essentially disciplinary sense of autonomy as a concept of rule or domination. Freedom is conceived as the domination of oneself. One becomes free through subjecting oneself to oneself, as if two subjections emancipate a subject. The educational hero of autonomy names this well: the autodidact. Thus, the unity of equality and freedom is rendered essentially and necessarily antagonistic, as the unity of competing rules. It is as an alternative to this dominative and antagonistic conception of autonomy, and its education, that the idea of an aesthetic education acquires a decisive significance. The rule-like but non-ruling character of various features of making and experiencing art renders them exemplary for thinking of a non-dominative, non-antagonistic unity of freedom and equality — for instance, the extent to which taste can be agreed upon despite not resulting from obedience to a rule. Schiller’s *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* is the most conspicuous attempt to draw out the significance of 18th century discourse on taste and the beautiful for an education in autonomy.

**Freedom With Sense**

Schiller maintains the idea that freedom cannot be learnt. Aesthetic education teaches the already free, although what is at issue here is not courage but the ‘realisation’ of freedom in another sense, its actualisation. This involves a disciplining of sorts, but through beauty, not law, and through harmony or affinity rather than domination. An education in autonomy is re-orientated towards that which follows no rules and gives no rules and yet is not antagonistic or chaotic: the beautiful artwork. Autonomy is thought not in terms of self-government or self-ruling, as much as in the suspension of rules. The inculcation or giving of rules, indeed the whole ethos of discipline, is displaced by play. The modern anthropology of autonomy becomes a discourse of play: ‘man only plays when he is in the fullest sense of the word a human being, and he is only fully a human being when he plays’. *Homo ludens*. It is as such that the beautiful provides a model for a free community, the ‘aesthetic state’. Aesthetic education is conceived as an antidote to the pathologies of the neo-dogmatism of reason and its idea of freedom, principally its abstractness or indifference to sensuous particularity, and the splits and alienations this generates — in short, the formalism, mechanism and alienating specialisation of the modern state, as opposed to the polypoid state that Schiller derives from Greek antiquity, in which ‘every individual enjoyed an independent existence but could, when need arose, grow into the whole organism’. Objections to Schiller’s bourgeois classicism are familiar but reductive. Schiller does not propose that the ‘aesthetic state’ simply returns the ‘moral state’ to a ‘natural state’, but that it realises a free community by overcoming the opposition of morality to nature. Nor does Schiller abandon a commitment to equality in his insistence on the mediation of freedom with sense. Rather, the sensuous manifold becomes a radicalisation of the determination of freedom by equality: that all are free in their particularity rather than just in their universality. Schiller emphasises a latent dogmatism in freedom’s domination of nature, sensibility, felt at the heart of self-determination. Despite the consensual impression of this politics of beauty, the category of the beautiful proposes a far more challenging unity of freedom and sensibility than does the sublime, which — at least in Kant — is the experience of freedom from sense.

With Schiller, the modern political ontology of autonomy comes to rest on an education in beautiful, or fine, art. He provides a manifesto for the historical avant-gardes, not only with respect to what they seek
to overcome, and, through them, such an education is extended into the terms of contemporary art. But our distance from Schiller is measured by his naivety with respect to the commodification of culture. Nonetheless, the idea of aesthetic education permeates the critique of capitalism. Indeed, Marx’s critique of the value form — its abstraction from the particularity of use — can be understood as a transposition of Schiller’s critique of the dominance of form over sense. Marx’s recovery of living labour from capital, as dead labour, reiterates Schiller’s conception of the beautiful as living form, as opposed to the lifeless form of ‘modern man’. Communism is an aesthetic state for Marx, also modelled in the artwork. Capitalism is a pathological rationalism, a dominative mode of autonomy, in which humanity’s autonomy is alienated. The law of value is precisely a neo-dogmatic authority, emerging from within the project to overcome natural or feudal forms of subjection, to which aesthetic education offers an alternative model.

But the attempt to conceive of the critique of capitalism in terms of an aesthetic education is complicated in so far as capitalist culture itself has affinities with the ‘aesthetic state’. The value form may abstract from the particularity of labour and its products, but, in so doing, it also forms them according to the accumulation of surplus value, generating not only value or money, or even an economy, but a capitalist society — capitalism as a whole way of life. This induces a new anthropology of autonomy. The supersensuous sensibility of beauty is reproduced in the supersensuous sensibility of the commodity fetish together with its apprehension through taste. For Schiller, beauty is sense apprehended from the standpoint of the moral law; for Marx, commodity fetishism is sense apprehended from the standpoint of the law of value. The idea of aesthetic education appears to have turned against itself, as if it were an antidote that produced its own poison.

The contention here is not that Schiller or Marx offers a forgotten answer to the question of education today, but rather that they introduce the problem that still needs to be addressed — namely, the constitution of aesthetic education as both the critique and the embodiment of a neo-dogmatism of the law of value. More or less consciously, this problem pervades current debates about the ontology of art, in particular the conflict between the anti-aestheticism generated by conceptualism and the neo-aestheticism that has emerged in reaction to it. Being constituted by this conflict over aesthetics enables contemporary art to reflect the profound ambivalence of an aesthetic education in a way that it could not do if it were limited to the aesthetic or, for that matter, to taste and the beautiful. As such, art becomes the locus of an immanent critique of aesthetic education — an aesthetic education against aesthetic education. This would form a lesson in emancipation.

This text first appeared as part of the Documenta 12 Magazines project. See Radical Philosophy. No. 141. 2007.
The turn we speak of here is a simple one. It is the one that the art industry demands with predictable regularity every couple of years. It’s the turn from politics to form, from form to context, context to engagement, engagement to critical distance, from universal utopias to regional specificities, from open interpretation to didacticism. For if it is the lot of intellectual fashions to come and go, as fashions do, it has been the art industry’s prerogative to gloss these already fickle moments, to recurrently validate itself with a set of key words lifted from philosophy, economics, sociology, political science, literary theory and psychoanalysis. With ideas serving as gestures, spectacle becomes currency and fetish the ultimate arbiter of value.

Value in art is a tricky thing indeed. In one sense, the production of value is what art has, historically, always been about. The process of production follows a set of rules that are in a continual process of codification. These are rules which, paradoxically, can never become completely fixed. The modulation between codification and modification is perhaps one of the most striking features of this field, contributing to its specificity. The tension between these opposing poles helps to define the relationships between value and product within the industry or, to be more precise, what is being negotiated within the industry are the very terms on which value is negotiated. What we have, therefore, is a highly hierarchical and codified industry which, at the same time, has to accept (at least the potential for) an open fluctuation in value as part of what guarantees its own relevance. In other words, we find an industry constantly forced to regulate value by modifying the very elements that produce this value. These forms of regulation are structurally inherent to that industry, are part and parcel of its identity. The continual shift in general aesthetic or theoretical ambiance, demanded by the idea of the ‘turn’, is just one of these regulatory operations. In this precarious and fragile system, the strategies of accruing value are both myriad and predictable.

Case Study Number One

This space accrues value and international currency from its claim of a liberal humanist agenda. These claims are supported by its location in
a popular neighbourhood in the heart of the once swanky downtown area. The space showcases its popular location as a chance at bettering the lives of the unfortunate inhabitants; indeed, countless projects produced through this institution take the locale as their backdrop. Ironically, over a ten-year history, the interest in contemporary art seems to have receded in favour of the civilising mission. Indeed, whenever the issue of art arises it is usually in the framework of presenting the artist as an eminently marketable ethnic and class product.

Something is symptomatic in the art world’s recurrent choice of the word ‘turn’. Although a turn usually implies a change of direction and a movement, a maze we constantly navigate, it does so with reference to a genealogy. In the context of art history, turns are laid out as a series in a chronological, rather than spatial, configuration. This conflation of motion and temporality highlights a break from the past that is not a rupture. An operation that constantly performs a break from the past, while reclaiming that very past as a form of nostalgia, a commodity that discharges symbolic value while maintaining its materiality at a clean and hygienic distance, is very well fitted to the requirements of the aforementioned relationships of value and the continuing dynamic of codification and modification.

An institution is practice in the most insidious and profound fashion. An institution is always involved in a constant state of normalisation; its operational choices define the nature of the professional relationships and social protocols that fall within its reach. For if it is an interface, a set of a priori assumptions that subjectivise the world, then those who interact with that interface must face these constitutive a priori assumptions on a daily basis. The sum total of this operation I will here call education, for it is the process that helps shape and formulate precedents (both legal and social) as well as subjectivities. It is, thus, no mere accident that we find the public rhetoric of cultural institutions vaguely reminiscent of the civilising discourse of the colonial project, with all its imperial associations.

Anger

And now the artist enters this argument, this contestation over definitions, for the normalising practices of the institution are always invested in definitions that the artist has to structurally and endemically face in all of his or her interactions with that institution. The conflict over definitions is also never far away from the relationships of value proposed earlier. The institution always proposes its conditions on the level of structural adjustment, while the artist, the holder of a subtler and more conflicted language, stands, by definition, in tension to this situation. The artist is, therefore, continually faced with two equally distasteful choices — an acquiescence which, over time, will make him lose relevance to the idea that motivates value itself, or a distracting resistance that is narcissistic in tenor.

And therefore we begin with anger.

What we have here is the artist at the intersection of a practice which profoundly normalises all that surrounds it, and the unfixed, precarious conditions of fluctuating value that are paradoxically kept in check by constant shifts and changes — a system in which value is produced in mysterious fashion yet amassed and transformed into capital by a clearly regimented network.

Our starting point is an endemic and structural anger, one that really has nowhere to go. Initiatives that attempt to break out of the double bind — acquiescence or narcissistic resistance — appear as an urgent response to a real need. However, because institutions are always constituted at historical junctures under ‘rules of emergence’, which bracket the founding moment and place it within a telic mythology of aims and ends, these attempts at breaking through the dialectic are unfortunately deeply involved with the production of propaganda. I use the term ‘propaganda’, according to my previous definitions, as the point at which ‘the product is consumed by its intended telos’, where ‘it is difficult to smile about the naivety of the project’. Propaganda is, thus, always contingent upon the historical juncture and the institution, as a constituted entity with a founding moment, a mythology of origins, and a prophecy of achievements, always communicates these to its members.

Operating under conditions and practices that have been routinised and normalised, produces an emotional landscape which becomes the member-subject’s only possible horizon. Institutions that attempt to accrue value by formalising that member, the artist, into a well formulated, even regimented, entity belonging to a discursive whole (one with its own taste, hierarchies and protocols), runs the risk of becoming a mere reflection of the conditions which dominate that horizon.
Case Study Number Two

In this city by the sea I saw a scene cradle itself, self defensively, close to implosion. For this is a scene that has suffered from working too hard at establishing itself. There are limited seats to this party and everyone must scurry to hop onboard. The artist is fuel and there is a price to pay for outreach. Stuck, static, world weary, neurotic, and emotionally crippled; the years of representing, of developing a clear discursive formation and using it to elucidate, explain, define a condition, to educate an art world, and thus to gain currency, have taken their toll.

My argument is simple or maybe it can be simply put. The institution is the location at which the process of normalisation is constantly at play. The institution is the educational agent, the source of civilisation. It is through this process that the institution can come to know about itself. Turns are a structural demand of the industry of which this institution is a member. The turn, whether a noun or a verb, will always lead to a re-appropriation of the conditions of the past while claiming radical breaks, because the turn is merely a fetishised gesture rather than an actual attempt at movement. The turn helps to produce value in an industry in which the relationship between product and value needs to remain unfixed while the structures and hierarchies remain intact. Torn between conflicting fetishes, the artist is forced to discover his or her anger, and to, in the best of cases, possibly consider it a starting point. It may be that in this anger — as a response to the industry, both in its institutional and curatorial guises — the artist may find him/herself capable of fashioning a subject position which, in turn, is sensitive to the relationship between a fluctuating, unfixed value and a hierarchical market. In other words, if we are to accept let us do so in the full knowledge of what it is we actually accept.

My argument is simplistic because it presumes neatness and order. It presumes a location at which the artist is clearly identified — another one for the generic total institution (lacking in specificity or historicity, my institution has to be a sham), an art industry with a fixed, self-interested hierarchy and clearly defined borders. It does not take much to see that such an argument does not take into account the actual complexities of the system. However, this is an argument that is simple because it is exactly that — an argument and not something else (an analysis for example). These simplifications have been enacted for the sake of that argument. They are also a reflection of a growing desire on my part to simplify, to find the easiest and shortest paths to one’s intentions, to polemicise. Every polemic is, in its heart, a proposal, a message, a position. The argument here is, therefore, no claim to truth; it is merely the reflection of the artist's anger.
BETWEEN A PEDAGOGICAL TURN AND A HARD PLACE: THINKING WITH CONDITIONS

Janna Graham

When a society highlights the problem of education, that’s because it’s asking questions about itself, about its past and its future.

Fernand Oury

In the face of recent claims for a ‘turn’ to pedagogy in artistic practice and curating, it is necessary to ask how and why such a turn is coined and constituted.

Beyond the production of a thematic — which, like those of ‘the political’, ‘the archival’ and ‘the spatial’, enter a whirl of turnings, only to produce value in the form of new specialisms, new careers, new books, new exhibitions and biennial panel discussions — it seems important to situate this ‘pedagogical turn’ in relation to the deeply troubling developments that conjugate creativity and education with the policies and practices of neoliberalism. Paradoxically, these shifts enable critical arts education and research to continue in the form of courses, programmes and exhibitions that de-bunk the central authority of the author, question the notion of artistic genius, problematise the imperialisms of the corporation and the nation state. However, they at the same time, require arts practitioners to hatch new ‘geniuses’, identify and produce more efficient ‘talent pathways’ between creative education and the so-called creative industries, consolidate institutional brands, demonstrate better time management (with less resources) and accelerate their output of ‘knowledge products’ of various forms.

Crises necessarily emerge from occupying such an ambiguous position — crises which are inherent in the desire to be a critical agent in the arts. In light of this, the proposed turn may be interpreted as a concrete demand being made by artists on the spaces in which art is produced. This demand is for the location, time and resources which enable us to teach ourselves about the kinds of resistant pedagogies that are possible.

Working on this basis, two lines of thought (with corresponding strategies) seem to have emerged. One posits the spaces afforded by exhibitions, artistic encounters, biennials etc. as sites at which to articulate other forms of arts education and culture, generally led by artists or curators, seemingly away from the gaze of academic bureaucrats and research funders but also from the work and spaces in which education (and, hence, struggles within the many fields engaged by education) take place. The implication here is that artists, curators and arts intellectuals are in a better position to produce — or at least imagine — alternative
models (academies, night schools, art schools) than those encumbered by the daily practices and instrumentalised demands of education. The other line of thought suggests that the academy (the university, the art school and its expanded network of museum, gallery and corporate networks of ‘knowledge transfer’) is a space in which to resist the incorporation of art and creativity into the excessively technocratic exercises and forms of standardisation that have become customary in higher education.\(^1\) What is at stake in both of these lines of thought is a kind of freedom or autonomy for the artist, as model pedagogue and researcher, away from the standards-setting exercises and various other instruments of governance which intricately weave state management with the labour and research interests of corporations.

While aiming to demarcate spaces in which to avoid the constraints of neoliberal educational institutions, the deployment of art spaces (whether in the form of temporary encounters in exhibitions and events or in the longer term strategies of art schools) as sites of pedagogy or a ‘pedagogical turn’ often rely on old and recurring distinctions. Such distinctions understand ‘education’ — the work of public servants, bound in their lack of agency by the rules and regulations of the state, the methods and understandings of which are elementary and populist — as opposed to the artist, curator or arts intellectual as ‘autonomous’ cultural producer.

Here, an interest in pedagogy within the erudite and distinct domain of artistic practitioners is often positioned as categorically different and without interest in those forms of education undertaken in schools, clinics, trade unions, social movements and museum education departments. However, if we have learned anything from the countless ways in which a denatured notion of creativity has been mobilised against the intentions of critical actors in the arts in the preceding decades it is that any notion of ‘artistic freedom’ cannot be accepted without consideration of the intricate ways in which it is linked to the subjectivisation, and often exploitation, of a range of social agents (whether a student undergoing talent testing, a worker making ‘creative’ lattes or an uncompensated cultural worker whose non-payment is justified by the title of curator). It is clear that a hidden pedagogy of the ‘creative class’ makes use of such distinctions to produce new axes of social desirability and undesirability around which to organise cities, educational institutions and the expectation of workers.

Pierre Bourdieu suggested that it is this very mechanism of the artist’s ‘interest in disinterest’ — their distancing from the social sites and issues which they reference, depict or represent — which secures the bourgeois ‘love’ of the artist over that of other workers. Belonging to a virtuous class that exists above and beyond the banal spheres of wage-earners, policy-makers and the complexities of institutional life, the artist’s reproduction as ‘artist’ is dependent upon conditions of production — whether the bourgeois patron, as Bourdieu suggested, or the international circuit of contemporary arts venues — which distance the production of social content from social consequence. Recourse to pedagogical alternatives which deny social consequence in the spaces semiotised as art must be understood as a key factor in art and creativity becoming such important instruments of state (and corporate) governance of subjectivity. The ‘creative’ person — if dissociated from their micro and macro-political circumstances of production, in favour of an idealised, or aestheticistically separate, condition — is much less likely to acknowledge the conflicts of these circumstances, let alone mobilise to resist or struggle against the sites in which conflicts are experienced.

**Artistic Autonomy and Political Autonomy are Not the Same Thing**

This redistribution of the rhetoric of creativity tells us that we cannot conflate the desire for political autonomy — that is, to resist the current forms of instrumentalisation of culture and education by coercive economic and governmental forces — with the discourse of artistic autonomy, which sits in direct contradiction to the ambition that lies at the heart of most theories of radical pedagogy — that is, to connect the production of critical knowledge with the production of critical consequences. Political autonomy, as it is understood by certain groups working within contemporary social movements, is construed neither as an ‘outside’ nor as the operation of an avant-garde political party but as an active practice of ‘eluding the imperatives of production, the verticality of

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institutions, the traps of representation’. (2) It is not, therefore, a matter of exceptional acts or actors but a sensibility towards the continued production of exchanges, commonalities and collective transformations, beyond any fixed notion of profession, field of specialisation or skill-set. This is understood in opposition to a notion of artistic or curatorial autonomy and contra to manipulative and regressive instrumentalisations of culture and education; such a notion of political autonomy asks: to what emancipatory purposes, toward the instrumentalisation of which resistant sensible beginnings, can cultural work operate?

It is this notion of political autonomy to which Félix Guattari directed his words in a discussion with alternative educators in São Paulo in 1982 when he said:

What we are doing in our pedagogical experiments [...] is simply modernizing them, and that’s because we really don’t have a mobilized population that is able to impose its interests. It seems to me that being ‘alternative’ here has much more to do with working politically to mobilize these interests than with directly carrying out work already linked to an institution.

By ‘linked to an institution’, Guattari clearly did not mean to exclude the pursuit of critical work within schools, universities or clinics as he was himself engaged with these kinds of institutions all his life. His understanding was deeply rooted in a particular way of functioning within these institutions and working against modes of serialisation — the repetition of tasks, roles and desires insulated from broader society. Guattari suggested a mode of research and pedagogy that he described as constituting an ‘associative sector’ — an association based neither in the state nor in private capital nor in small collective practices, but in the combination of those committed to working transversally across social institutions, social movements and artistic strategies, against the forces attempting to link creativity to the production of alienated and exploited subjectivities, no matter where these were located. (3)

Beyond unquestioning adherence to the notion of artistic autonomy, and without succumbing to the regressive, outcomes-based, neoliberal reformulations of learning, here we have another way of considering the possible meaning and implications of an ‘educational turn’ in which we move beyond spheres of work, professional affiliations and social hierarchies, asking rather: what do our efforts in the arts in relation to education make possible and for whom?

Re-skilling

One of the often-cited mechanisms through which ‘alternative’ pedagogies produced in the spaces of art are rendered ‘distinterested’ is the extremely short-term, spectacular mode of presentation that arts institutions habitually employ. This often prevents transformative processes of education from occurring. For this and other reasons, many artists and curators have turned to the longer time periods and more experimental possibilities offered by the formulation of radical or experimental projects as ‘research’. Rather than merely situating this notion of research in relation to artistic process or to notions of the study that can be known and shaped in advance, I have for some time been guided by the idea of the ‘possible study’, the study that is not yet constituted and emerges only through relations formed between artists and transversal constituents. Such a study situates itself within the context of relations across the divisions of the creative class and its others, de-centring the artist researcher as author and propellant. (4)

In this, strategies described within contemporary social movements as ‘militant research’ have become important to my understanding of the potential that research might lend to projects attempting to engage in socially consequential and politically meaningful artistic work. As described by the Argentinean collective, Colectivo Situaciones, ‘Militant research works neither from its own set of knowledges about the world nor from how things ought to be’. Rather, it is carried out in ‘theoretical and practical work oriented to co-produce the knowledges and modes

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2. This phrasing comes from an historical example — that is from Sylvère Lotringer and Christian Marazzi’s account of ‘autonomy at the base’, the definition practiced by the autonomia movement in Italy in the 1970s — found in S. Lotringer and C. Marazzi, ‘The Return of Politics’. Autonomia, Post-Political Politics. Semiotext(e). 2007. pp. 8-10.


4. The idea of the possible study has recently been launched by transversal groups of artists, residents, shop owners, students, teachers and other workers in the neighbourhood of Edgware Road in London, the base for which is ‘The Centre for Possible Studies’. This work is sponsored by Serpentine Gallery and grows out of the gallery’s long term work on Edgware Road.
of an alternative sociability, beginning with the power of [...] subaltern knowledges’. (5)

Among these traditions, two genealogies of research practice have become particularly instructive. The first is a movement in which sociological researchers turned away from their field of specialisation and re-positioned their work in relation to concrete social and political struggles under the name ‘Participatory Action Research’ (PAR). The second is a development in which transversal relations were actively cultivated within institutions and between institutional actors and outsiders under the names ‘Institutional Pedagogy’ and ‘Institutional Analysis’. (6) Together, these genealogies promote a two-fold practice. This includes the production of honest accounts of, and interventions into, the conditions which shape us as educators, students, curators and artists vis à vis relations of power, hierarchy, sensibility and desire. It also entails the intersection of these accounts with the struggles and desires of ‘others’ — with those that find themselves semiotised as outside or to our specialised milieu of ‘expertise’ or competency.

Looking first to the histories of Participatory Action Research, we might find a path that privileges neither the knowledge paradigm of the university nor that of the vanguardist or autonomous intellectual/artist. PAR was initiated by university-based intellectuals, primarily sociologists in the 1960s, many of them based in the global South. Fuelled by the emergence of anti-colonial and anti-imperialist social movements, which highlighted the straightjacket of regimented schemas of knowledge production and their associated professional hermeticism, such researchers did not claim an independent space for their own research — which would have replicated the very authorial paradigms at the heart of the university’s mode of governance — but rather sought to place their skills as researchers in the service of popular struggles. While firmly located on the left, PAR researchers also rejected the Marxist left’s positon of an intellectual vanguard as the advanced cadre of the mass movement — which proposed a separation between intellectuals/artistists and the masses. PAR practitioners rejected the ‘relationships of submission and dependence implicit in the subject/object binomial’ of sociological studies, in which the researcher was subject and the ‘other’ (community, person, social thematic) always already remained object. (7) Instead, PAR characterised itself as emerging from vivencia, (8) a combination of experience and commitment, producing — instead of objects — actions in the world that were both the content and results of their studies.

Based, to some extent, on the popular pedagogy of Paulo Freire — particularly his elaboration of the relationship between the outsider/researcher and community in his work on thematic investigation (9) — PAR researchers were dedicated to the principles of thinking with, of working against regimes of dependency and of moving through cycles of reflection to analysis and action. These cycles did not end with action, but rather saw radical actions as test sites, stimulating a return to collective thought. PAR practitioners went further than other materialist propositions, such as Mao’s ‘from the masses to the masses’, by suggesting that, in their practices of knowledge production, people also have access to the means of systematising this knowledge in ways that directly impact their lives, rather than ending up in forms of knowledge valuation developed by, and servicing, the careers of the elite.

Located in peasant communities in Colombia, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and, later, in rural and urban contexts all over the world, what

6. While I encountered PAR and Institutional Analysis through research undertaken with young people while working at the Art Gallery of Ontario in Toronto between 1999 and 2004, a useful overview of these processes and their links to other forms of Militant Research, including those used by feminist collectives and workers’ groups can be read in Marta Mala de Molina’s Common Nations, part 1: Institutional Analysis, Participatory Action Research, Militant Research. 2004. [http://transform.eipcp.net/transversal/0707/mala/en].
9. This formulation is developed in Chapter III of Freire’s Pedagogy of the Oppressed, of which I have engaged in many collective readings in recent years, in collaboration with other members of the sound art collective, Ultra-red. The methodology laid out regarding a mode of insider/outsider collaboration has served as a backdrop to our work with students and teachers in schools, as well as in the context of anti-racism work in the UK. See Paulo Freire, Chapter III. Pedagogy of the Oppressed. Continuum Publishing Company, 1970. [http://www.marxists.org/subject/education/freire/pedagogy/]. Prior to this, my encounters with PAR came through the development of projects with youth and other activists in Toronto, where this and other popular education methods have had a strong base. Whereas the aesthetic sensibility of popular education is often attributed to folk or popular aesthetics, these projects have suggested that the aesthetic training of the artists functions much like that of the academic, and often generates the tensions produced between vocations, vocabularies and aesthetic sensibilities.
characterised PAR projects was a number of key components, including: a concatenation of intellectuals and non-intellectuals and the tension between the different knowledge-forms associated with each; a notion of co-investigation or co-research based on the collaborative investigation of questions of injustice without imposing foreclosed answers; a commitment to the self-deliberation of groups and to the creative power to be found in the collective generation of mechanisms for self-deliberation; a commitment to the recovery and use of critical popular and folk histories; instead of a reactive rejection of university-based knowledge on the basis of class divisions or elitism, a use of this knowledge as supplement to the elaboration of collaborative popular knowledge; the extension of research processes to others through camps and collaborative training sessions; and an interest in research as a framework not only for alleviating conditions of social inequity but also as a way into the micro-political realm of group relations, with special attention to the dynamics of power, to the allocation of roles and to the relationships between intellectuals and non-intellectuals.\(^{10}\)

Today, many projects take place in the name of participatory research or action research, in the contexts of government, large NGOs and university commissions, which have clearly co-opted some of PAR’s methods (though often as action research in name only) in order to implement what can only be described as participatory coercion. Such co-optations are often used as justification, by artists and intellectuals, for not engaging with minoritarian struggles, which are thought to be always already defined by the assumptions and identifications prescribed by governing bodies, corporations and the like. Rather than avoiding these situations of encounter, we might take heed of one of PAR’s main cautions: that the word is only as valuable as its enactment in the world. That is, whenever anyone — be they academics, government agencies or artists — make use of the terms of radical pedagogy, we might attempt to understand how these terms link to actions and consequences that serve emancipatory aims, the definition of which has been determined by those engaged in collective struggle.

Where more radical iterations of PAR practices do still exist (experimental schools, women’s groups and radical research within the contexts of prisoners’ justice and indigenous struggle), the long-term temporalities, process-based methodologies and rejection of authorial paradigms pose fundamental challenges to the production mechanics of artistic work or the autonomy of artistic research.

Thinking With: The Artist As Co-Researcher

Interestingly, inherent in all PAR methods there are what might be described as aesthetic processes at play — whether explicitly, as in the use of popular theatre, or implicitly, as in the analytic and synthetic uses of abstraction, the arrangement of formats for encounters and meetings, the making and re-working of recordings etc. For Freire, in fact, the framework for a radical and popular education was, indeed, the production of culture itself. He described the meeting points between researchers and local people as ‘Culture Circles’ and made use of abstract images in the process of codifying local experiences (registering them in coherent pictures) and engaging groups in their de-codification (deriving from the codes an analysis of the situation of oppression, injustice and exploitation).\(^{11}\)

How might this understanding of research re-position the artist in relation to a so-called pedagogical turn? If the artist and her research have become useful as disciplinary tools in an economy formulated around the rhetoric of creativity, how does the artist — not as a researcher but as a co-researcher or co-investigator of the conditions of coercion, exploitation and alienation that result from these policy shifts — locate herself directly in the spaces where their ramifications are most poignantly experienced? How does she engage those spaces in which policies say ‘yes’ to creativity as it is beneficial to capital and ‘no’ to all other modes of living (migration, sex work, young people, those deemed anti-social, those interested in producing neighbourhoods on their own terms)? Which of the skills necessary for aesthetic research — intelligences with regard to sensible production, participatory formats, analysis, collective thought production as it is currently rehearsed in exhibitions and encounters — produced in the name of radical pedagogy in the art world might the artist as co-researcher lend to struggles which enable people, herself included, to actually live and sustain creative lives? And, crucially, how might this artist-as-co-researcher use the contemporary valorisation of creativity, artistic research and even the demand for research

\(^{10}\) Ibid.

\(^{11}\) Ibid.
outcomes in order to move beyond the production of cultural products (or careerism) and transfer more time and resources to creative participation in these struggles? How might attempts at a truly transversal and interventionist pedagogical process make good on artistic and curatorial claims to radical pedagogy? Equally, how might this process connect struggles for fair and creative education with those that exist outside of the institutions and fields in which artists and curators operate?

Asking these questions opens up what might otherwise be a very closed discussion — a discussion between artist/curators, as autonomous agents, far away from those institutionally inscribed educators (both in their own way contributing to a re-formulation of the artist as proficient creative technocrat) — to elucidate a set of possibilities that go beyond small interventions within well established circles.

**Lay Analysis and Learning To Be Where We Are When We Think**

Returning to Guattari’s demand for alternative educators to mobilise ‘a population able to impose its interests’ — that is, to connect our own struggles with those within and outside of the institutions in which we operate. This is perhaps one of the most difficult problems to overcome given that, for many, an existence which is exclusively outside of institutional life — whether through short-term occupations or through ongoing engagements — is simply not possible.

However, on the rare occasions that they do exist, struggles for fair education within the institutions of the art gallery and the university have a tendency of closing in on themselves to become strictly about the rights of a particular group of art students and educators. Like the methods of institutional critique developed in artistic practices from the 1960s onward, they tend to become sealed within the day-to-day operations of institutions, rendered invisible in an exhausting barrage of teaching and learning councils, curatorial committees etc. Beyond the various options of non-participation, the restriction of criticality to teaching (via the presentation of critical content) or the creative class consolidation exercises that take place under the heading of ‘professional development’, what other kinds of pedagogy might emerge?

**Inspired by his early encounters with his teacher, Fernand Oury, one of the founders of Institutional Pedagogy**[12] — a practice that combined the institutional psychotherapeutic work of the LaBorde clinic developed by Oury’s brother, Jean, and the experimental education techniques of French pedagogue Célestin Freinet — Guattari developed the term ‘Institutional Analysis’ to describe the radical re-working of institutions through their ‘permanent reinvention’. [13] This referred to the heterogeneous opening up of people to ‘otherness’, both in their work within institutions and those which fell outside their normal modes of existence. For Guattari:

> A discussion of the process of institutionalization has nothing to do with pre-established organization charts and regulations; it has to do with the possibilities for change inherent in collective trajectories—evolutionary attitudes, self-organization, and the assumption of responsibilities. [14]

It was important for Guattari to ‘be able to work out life programs in relation to complex personalities exposed to rearrangements that are sometimes dangerous’.

While somewhat abstract in its use of language, the work of Institutional Analysis in practice involved very concrete actions most vividly realised in the LaBorde Clinic where Guattari was based. First and foremost, these included the re-arrangement of tasks such that service workers, doctors, residents (a ‘hybrid population ranging from the region’s peasants to members of the Parisian cultural scene’) and bureaucrats regularly altered their roles, holding weekly meetings to understand the theoretical and practical tensions that were produced. An elaborate schedule, called ‘the grid’, served as a kind of pedagogical mapping through which participants learned how to think what had been, and was still to be, learned from their re-arrangements, both in terms of the care of the residents and their own forms of subject-making. Furthermore, understanding that any analysis of the unconscious must

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12. Description of Guattari’s early encounter with Oury is outlined briefly in François Dosse, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Biographie Croisée. La Decouverte. 2007. p. 97.


be organised in conjunction with other social segments, Guattari and colleagues set up cross-sector working groups, sharing the practices and findings of La Borde to the fields of architecture, social work, pedagogy and the arts under the name Federation des Groupes d’Etude, Recherche et Formation Institutionelle (FGERI).

To understand the kind of research developed by Guattari, it is useful to acknowledge the pedagogical framework that was its predecessor — that of the Freinet schools and Guattari’s own training with the radical educator Fernand Oury. Working from the 1920s through to the 1950s, Freinet and his colleagues sought to develop a self-reflexive mode of educational study to overcome the polarised (and classed) debates which pitted the teaching of education as the study of pedagogical technique — dismissed by scholars as the absence of social critique — against the pursuit of pedagogy as a series of theoretical investigations — dismissed by teachers as ignorant of practical concerns. Teachers and students in Freinet schools collectively owned and ran printing presses and made collaborative newspapers, which contained ‘free texts’ about their experiences of the school. These texts addressed the experience of individual teachers and students in the classroom, the classroom’s interaction with the school and the way in which the school inter-operated with the broader community.

The circulation of these texts ensured that the school engaged with, and was visible to, the locality as a whole, making it less a space of isolated practices and more of a participant in the debates around community politics. Stories in the newspapers often began with the contradictions of the classroom, between teachers and learners and their relation to broader social issues. So, for example, using Freinet’s approach, one school adopted an anti-fascist maths curriculum in response to racist and anti-Semitic tendencies in the country. In all cases, rules and roles were in constant negotiation, run by councils of teachers and students. A central principle of Freinet’s methodology was ‘building on what is there’ — that is, learning to think collectively from the very material of school. Much of Guattari’s writings on the political efficacy of the assemblage and the machinic encounter was informed by such encounters.

While much of Freinet’s work took place in rural contexts, Fernand Oury brought these methods to urban contexts, synthesising the self-analysis of teachers and students with the work of psychoanalysis and group formations developed by his brother and others at LaBorde. Where Freinet’s teaching collectsives and classroom assemblies began with the school, Oury’s processes began with work on the individual and their relation to the class, and from there to the class in the school and the school in the community. Working with transversal agents attached to factories — the workers, their families, managers and other members of the community — Oury saw the practice of pedagogy as combining analyses of macropolitical struggle — for wages and better conditions — with those of micropolitical operations — the relational fabric and affective modes of conditioning family and broader social community life engendered by social institutions. He was deeply invested in the level of education known as ‘formation’ — in which young people developed life skills. Far from the kind of career training and exploitative internship schemes espoused in current educational institutions, in these ‘formations’ young people gained and developed skills in critical analysis, beginning with their own conditions as social occupants and applying these to power relations as they functioned in the workings of groups of all scales.

Building on this pedagogy and on his own work with militant youth organisations, Guattari formulated a notion of analysis as that which would, ‘assess the possible relations of subjectivation within and between the various castes and social strata […] through a detailed jurisprudence concerning social groups, hierarchies, sexual relations’.

From the contemporary vantage point of highly stratified art galleries and educational institutions in Britain, such committees as those at LaBorde — which was collaboratively governed and open to non-specialists — seem almost unimaginable. However, contemporary manifestations such as the ‘Art and Body in Occupational Therapy Study and Research Project’, developed by occupational therapist, Elizabeth Maria Freire de Araújo Lima and colleagues in the Department of Physiotherapy, Speech Therapy and Occupational Therapy (FMUSP) in


São Paulo or the UEINZZZ theatre group developed by Peter Pelbert, also in São Paulo, realise both the spirit and the concrete methods of institutional analysis. With working groups comprised of university researchers from departments of occupational therapy, psychology, philosophy and art, local artists and the mentally ill, these projects develop ongoing, collaborative research projects that simultaneously explore group work, aesthetic production and the social exclusion of madness. Participants regularly argue for space within the arts and the university, in order to maintain their project over the long term. As co-researchers with significantly differentiated roles and identities, this longevity enables power and position to be explored across the various social backgrounds from which participants emerge. In the words of Pelbert, the use of aesthetic practices grants ‘visibility to what is intangible and legitimacy to what social sense despises, fears or abhors [thus inverting] the game of social exclusion and its cruelty’. The use value gained from aesthetic practice further enables ‘the self-construction of subjectivities in progress, configuring and shaping chaos and the sense break-up that, many times, exists in them’.\(^{18}\)

What if this kind of instrumentalisation of the art school, the gallery education department or the exhibition was to be made the characteristic of a pedagogical turn?

What we are afforded by these two genealogies of research — the one which locates itself at the conjunction of intellectual training and popular struggle and the other within and beyond the institutions involved in the formation of subjectivity — is an autonomy gained from the deep inhabitation of the complexities, the problematics and the possibilities of the current and possible spaces in which art and education combine. At a time when social movements are not robust, and thus our ability to mobilise resistance to reforms in arts education is reduced to small and isolated efforts, it would seem that working across subjectivities and social sectors beyond the arts is not only a necessary move but the only counter to the very stratifications that reduce our work to measurable outcomes, time management exercises and strategies of wealth creation for the few.

These two genealogies of research also remind us of other paths through the bureaucratisation of encounters with others, found in funding policies and programmes for artists and curators for whom difference has been radically re-cast along socially conservative lines as a matter of ‘inclusion’, ‘anti-social behaviour’ and ‘community cohesion’. Equally, these exemplars suggest that demands, made by the university, for ‘knowledge transfer’ and ‘social impact’ might be re-routed from socially conservative notions of ‘outcome’ toward much more critical consequences — adopting aims that exceed the currently widespread and critically impoverished trend to produce exhibitions, publications and conferences steeped in the valorisation of individual authorship and celebrity.

Finally, what these genealogies share is a commitment to thinking with conditions, where thinking is understood as a practice that is inseparable from action and from a commitment to living and working otherwise. Autonomy, here, is not a place outside of situations of complexity, but a collective refusal of pre-established terms, whether these be short time-frames, social segregations, coercive power relations or roles that transform desires into easily governed subjectivities.

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Some Turn and Some Don’t (On Set-Ups)

Edgar Schmitz

‘Maybe we never turned her’, one cop says to another, staring at a puddle of blood, in respect of Ella, who seems to have died when trying to hand her master-criminal girlfriend, Nichol, over to the police. ‘Maybe they are both dead, or maybe one got away’. [1]

There is a double cliff-hanger in this story of a set-up gone wrong; on the one hand, there is the question of the master-criminal who may have got away. Here, the uncertainty resides in not really knowing what has happened to her and what may come from her in the future, if anything at all. This cliff-hanger is about the possibility of escape — whether and/or how she managed to get away; whether she may have survived; whether this is it, the end, or whether she may return, as she has returned in the past having been presumed dead. On the other hand, there is another nagging doubt; we don’t really know (even the cops who set it all up appear not to know for certain) whether Ella, the one we now know to be dead and who was supposed to be a part of the plan to trap her girlfriend, could have been working against the set-up all along; had she ever really been turned against her girlfriend? Where does the set up end and where, or indeed whether, did it all go wrong? Perhaps it all went precisely to plan and we simply don’t understand whose plan it was in the first place. This second cliff-hanger resides in never knowing what has really happened here; how much of the situation was planned and by whom? Did the two women have a joint plan — a set-up — that Nichol betrayed when she killed her lover? Was it all only ever her set-up anyway, and did Ella ever really mean it as a trap for her former lover before things went wrong?

This is all internal noise. The details remain just out of reach. That the story comes from a not very clearly remembered TV episode probably helps, too. The set-up is a teaser, summoning everybody’s best guesses, yet these speculations can only ever attempt to suture and suspend what is a certain and crucial amount of slippage between the external architecture of the plot and whatever may have played out inside the undisclosed internal drama. This is a slippage between knowing the frame and not quite being able to stabilise what may be happening on the inside, once this arrangement has been set in motion. The difficulty resides in thinking through the unclear dynamics of their internal feedback loops.

The police thought they had managed to turn Ella and they thought it was, therefore, safe to send her back in. Their move is a double turn,
first turning Ella away from, and then back toward, her lover. It is under-
pinned by their presumption that she has shifted her allegiance. This shift is
crucial but remains opaque, imperceptible and unverified. Their ruse can
only ever work if they have managed to turn her and they assume just
that — that her motivations are now aligned with their plan and that their
respective attitudes and agendas can now complement and facilitate
each other. But, whether this turn has ever happened or how far Ella has
turned remains a matter of speculation; it is a, more or less sophisticated,
guessing game. Maybe Ella’s move back into the value frame of the cops
emerges from her coming to know something new, from learning about
her lover, and may have been prompted by the revelations about her
lover’s past betrayals. Or maybe she hasn’t turned at all. Maybe playing
her part in all this is simply a way of getting back ‘to’ her lover rather
than getting back ‘at’ her. Maybe they never turned her and she only
learned later, if at all, the ‘hard way’ as the cop puts it, staring down at
her corpse.

The thief’s manipulations, the lover’s realisation, the double-
agency of at least one of them, their mutual desire for proximity and
the possibly clashing interests behind this shared desire, the escape
route(s) and the plans in service of all these — appear in a generalised
blur of multiple readings and investments, multiplying possibilities and
plausible trajectories. There are multiple stories here, competing plots
and interpretations, and they are not necessarily all mutually exclusive.
The salient thing is that they come together in a convoluted situation and
that there is a complicated uncertainty around what happened when, and
who turned whom, and who turned whom where, and how much of it was
set up, and how much of it was simply accidental, just contingent stuff
playing itself out. The effect is a condition of not knowing — not knowing
what the sequence of events may have been; what kinds of recognitions
and revelations may have occurred in the process; how they may have been
prompted; who or what is being set up here in this cliff-hanger-mix
of tricks, manoeuvres, attitudes, allegiances and their embroiled articula-
tions; and even how, precisely, all this could ever be mapped. And, more
specifically, we are left not knowing how this could ever be mapped in
relation to education.

What appears clear is that linearity seems an inappropriate
modality with which to account for what is interesting here; it is clear
that set-ups don’t really determine what happens in and through them
and that education itself operates through turning quite a lot, but that
these turns are unstable and difficult to discern. This is the very nature
of the turn’s deviations from otherwise straight trajectories — the turn
offers, before anything else, a figure of difference. And, often, the turn
may simply be assumed to have happened.

It also appears clear, or rather necessary, that these character-
istics will and should lead to a different kind of account of education and
of things in relation to education. Thinking education in relation to the
dispersal of knowledges, motivations, moments of use and their possi-
bilities, makes it less and less plausible to formalise ways of organising
and accounting for these educational processes. Thinking of education
in this way allows a form of heterogeneity to emerge which is not simply
opposed to formalised structures, but which disregards them as struct-
uring principles simply because there is no basis or regularity on, or,
against, which education’s effects and affects can be staked. Such heter-
ogeneity is not automatically a ‘non-structure’; the question of structure
only features as a backdrop, at best, to the effects and affects produced
through, in and around it. Instead of resorting to an oppositional account
of the supposed tensions between formal and informal structures, what
is required is a re-setting of how one might think about education, by
asking what it is about education that might actually be worth charting.
If the stake of such processes resides precisely in the unscripted conjunc-
tions and confusions between what is set up, what is produced and what
can be done, it becomes important to at least signal that some may turn
and some may not — and that what is triggered in the process matters to
education but is never part of its original set-up.

Modes and formats generate all sorts of productions under
these expanded terms, which cannot be mapped onto straightforward
accounts of knowledge production because they assert a whole range of
moves to the point at which the quest for a justifiable form (or direction
or reasoning) becomes less and less plausible. What is increasingly at
stake is a recognition of different types of processes (those of misun-
derstanding and ignorance and precision and indifference) crossing over
each other. These processes can be played out, they can even inhabit
formats, but they rarely respond to given questions. With this disasso-
ociation comes another one; these processes don’t respond to problems,
don’t aim at resolution but generate problematic instead.

This underlying misfit between what can be set up and what is
being produced — in, through, against and around the set-up — can be
deployed as an attitude, as a deliberate disregard which has implications
for structures and formats and for what to do about them, because it refuses to understand the relation between what is set up and what happens as scripted or linear. One way of playing this out is indifference, as indifference entertains a complicated relationship to remits and expectations through the ways in which it disregards, and thus levels, such supposed differences as those between effects and side-effects and those between that which is set up and that which simply happens. Furthermore, indifference allows itself, with equal ease, to inhabit not only the set-up but also its sites of dissatisfaction, and those sites with which the system only maintains a tangential relationship.

If, indeed, the slippage between frameworks and the situations emerging from them — between set-ups and what actually happens — allows for, or indeed fosters, constellations that can be inhabited outside the remit of a pre-programmed or pre-accounted-for education, then the accentuated alternative to indifference may well be to not only disregard frameworks but to enhance, trigger, force their inappropriateness and thus to increase the inherent slippage between set-up and effect to the point of productive tension. One operates with this attitude, not in order to destabilise, necessarily, but rather as a way of setting free the effects produced underneath, and beyond, the radar of systematic conditions (the set-up). In this way, Ella’s commitments to her lover and to the police, her orientations toward good and evil, can stand out as the mess these always already were and, indeed, should be. Heightening misfits to the point at which tensions between intention and effect open onto an inverted kind of programmatic-ness allows for appropriations and misuses in different directions, and turns education into a realm of potentialities to be actualised.

So, rather than inventing formats, as such, or recycling them or even necessarily abusing them, it seems much more urgent to start understanding how the paradoxical chemistry of educational processes and situations can be constituted outside of linear or programmatic models of accountability and assert this as a working horizon against which to (not) develop an argument around education. Pragmatically, this is achieved by playing on the slippage between set-up and take-up. Conceptually, it is often achieved by never really talking about ‘education’ at all in order to avoid the implicit linearity of formalised models, policies or indeed formats, and to bypass the ways in which such formalisation inevitably both fosters and illustrates consensualisation.\footnote{In the background, the fusion between the ways in which education is being written into institutional remits and the ubiquitous rhetoric of inclusion which functions as an administrative blanket justification for cultural practice, fosters ever new appearances of enlightened consensus, such that it is this consensual dimension itself which is increasingly not only articulated as a demand but also directly translated into and implemented as the directive horizon for cultural and educational policy. Goshka Macuga’s 2009 Whitechapel commission may be taken as a test case which charts precisely this terrain and the risk of consensualisation it carries. (This work entails a recreation, of sorts, of UN meetings, which are held on a roundtable against the backdrop of the Guernica tapestry.) The risk here lies not so much in the potentially controversial politics that may end up being articulated in the gallery and, to some extent, as part of what it, the gallery, now produces; rather, the risk lies in the consensualisation of precisely that range of discourse as material and institutional token, premised on and, in turn, promoting inclusivity as the default horizon of discourse, debate and experimentation.}

Where an arrangement of formats, modes and urgencies is paradoxical, and indeed dysfunctional, it opens a buffer against the demands for resolution and the expectation that any of this could, in turn, ever be translated into applicable models. It does not translate into a model but requires the model itself as part of its workings. The ‘anti-consensualist’ strategy (and, with it, the ethical demand it places on any conversation about education) relies on this.

Therefore, in relation to some of the questions at stake in what is currently being cohered into a unified tendency, by naming it an ‘educational turn’, it is probably more useful not to talk about education and to talk instead about projects that disregard education but make it possible to talk about ‘effects’ and ‘uses’, and how these may be triggered and opened up. The Dictionary of War\footnote{The ‘Dictionary of War’ was launched in Germany in 2006 and has been developed and curated by Annett Busch, Jan Gerber, Susanne Lang, Tom Lambert, Sebastian Lotgert, Florian Mätzcher, Anke and Heike Schleper, Florian Schneider and Bernhard Schröer. There have so far been editions in Frankfurt, Graz, Berlin, Novi Sad, Gwangju, Bolzano and Taipei, all following the same format of successive 20 on-stage presentations of entries into the dictionary. See www.dictionaryofwar.org.} is one such project, a line-up of ‘performed’ entries for a dictionary of war that urgently needs to be produced, yet whose overall modality is morphing in and out of focus because its use is yet to be invented. This project was never proposed to be ‘educational’ as such (to the best of my knowledge, it never claimed this function and operated instead as a preor proto-educational initiative), yet it makes sense to talk about it in terms of what it allowed for and opened up towards. Against this horizon, it becomes possible to think about the role that the format may have played in this regard, to understand forms and gradations of participation whilst all the time steering as clear as possible of descriptive and/or formulaic accounts of education. Inviting a sprawling line-up of ‘concept-personae’ to develop and perform entries for a dictionary of war that simultaneously, and discontinuously,
problematises, hijacks and/or invents concepts of war, the dictionary of war sets up a collection and an inventory directed toward a use, the conditions for which have, very explicitly, not yet been specified. Its explicit stake is to work with what is not available, to disregard the fact that something does not seem to fit established categorisations of knowledge or criticality and to work precisely with the confused awareness that this non-fit may, indeed, be productive, may cause concerns or problems.

What is at stake in this project is the potential for a broader vocabulary and the strategic advantage to be gained from more sophisticated conceptual machinery for the analysis and diagnosis of the present as ‘war’. The work attempts to generate a situation from which to enter not so much the discussion as the logic(s) of war, and for which war can be a milieu to enter and within which to work. This is not so much ‘setting up’ as facilitating a conversation on the back of a strict succession of monologues. Dictionary of War also presented an implosion of the category of the audience into multiplied monologues, a sort of feedback laboratory in which the hypertextual arrangement of concept-personae reverberates with its own echo. Dictionary of War brought into being many discussions on the side — with the foyer becoming the equivalent of the space under the bridge or by the school gate — through which the conversations, the misperceptions and missed bits of the project constitute their own loose set of relations to a framework that could have been called educational at some point.

If, as the ‘Dictionary of War’ suggests, it is indeed a matter of creating ‘not interdisciplinary but undisciplined’ (non)knowledge/situations, then this is also a question of negative determination and it may well be the case that ‘inappropriate’ or ‘useless’ formats can become stages with explicitly unclear notions of purpose or use. For these formats, academic self-sufficiency is as implausible a foil as those museum outreach gestures attempting to achieve credibility through audience measurement. It may well be useful to work under these terms of indifference and impropriety, and those terms only, in the milieu now codified within the perspective of an ‘educational turn’. (For Agamben, the proximity between indifference and impropriety is one of indifference’s most outstanding features and one of its most promising claims.) It may well be useful to work in a manner such that disregard, as a specific form of indifference, ceases to work in relation to what it may be turning away from, or what it may be turning toward, and can, instead, be played out, without or against the ‘turn’ that is supposedly upon us, just as education can work with, without or against the institutions, situations and programmes as well as rhetorics instrumental in cohering it.

Away from a rhetoric of dialogue, openness and exchange, this then allows for a move that is a turn only insofar as it is also a strong leaving behind, a no-longer-caring-about, opening onto a situation in which formats matter only as a way of eschewing scripted productions. So, in short, it may be most useful, not to take issue with notions of education and the turn, but to test what may be gained from talking about appropriations, formats and effects in such a way that they do not cohere into a programme. If mis-appropriation and disregard can figure as the opening of an attitudinal range, the question in relation to education and its situations is not one of appropriate, acceptable or productive formats. Rather, what needs to be worked out, again and again, is which formats are worth inhabiting under which terms, and how that inhabitation can possibly play out.
EXHIBITION TO SCHOOL: UNITEDNATIONSPLAZA

Anton Vidokle

It is self-evident that nothing concerning art is self-evident anymore.\(^1\)
Theodor Adorno

\emph{unitednationsplaza}, ‘the exhibition as school’ — I realise that this sounds somewhat paradoxical, yet it’s the only way to describe a project that was originally intended as a biennial (\emph{Manifesta 6}, scheduled to take place in Nicosia, Cyprus, in the autumn of 2006); but instead, after much turmoil, was realised as an independent temporary school in Berlin and then later crossed the Atlantic to continue under the name Night School at the New Museum in New York.\(^2\)

Despite being an artist, I was invited to join the curatorial team developing the concept for \emph{Manifesta 6}.\(^3\) Our thinking at the time was: Why do another biennial? We felt that the incredible proliferation and homogeneity of such events had rendered them largely meaningless. Once offering an alternative to the conservatism of art museums, in more recent years, biennials had begun to resemble white elephant type government projects, which drain local budgets for cultural production while offering a rather formulaic digest of participants and content from the international contemporary art field. We decided instead to use the budget, resources and network of the biennial to start a temporary art school. There were several reasons why we were interested in the model of an art school rather than an exhibition. Perhaps a rehearsal of this rationale will shed some light on the possibilities of both exhibitions and art schools for now and for the future.

It is sufficient to give the titles of some recent large-scale international art exhibitions — ‘The Production of Cultural Difference’ (\emph{3rd Istanbul Biennial}) or ‘Critical Confrontation with the Present’, (\emph{Documenta X}) — to demonstrate that there is a strong desire on the part of organisers and participants to see their work as transformative social projects rather than as merely symbolic gestures. Such rhetoric and positioning has become the norm, and it now seems that artistic practice is automatically expected to play an active part as a transformative agent in contemporary society. But is an exhibition, no matter how ambitious, the most effective vehicle for such engagement?

2. See [http://www.unitednationsplaza.org/]. See also [http://museumashub.org/node/48].
3. The curatorial team included Florian Waldvogel and Mai Abu ElDahab.
In 1937, it is believed André Breton and Leon Trotsky wrote the 
manifesto, For an Independent Revolutionary Art, although this was also
signed by Diego Rivera. They called for a ‘true art, which is not content
to play variations on ready-made models, but rather insists on expressing
the inner needs of man and mankind in its time — true art is unable not
to be revolutionary, not to aspire to a complete and radical reconstruc-
tion of society’. What may appear to be a naïve call for all-or-nothing
revolution includes a subtle and important justification of that demand
—that we, as artists, curators, writers need to engage with society in
order to create certain freedoms, to produce the conditions necessary
for creative activity to take place at all. But what precisely does it mean,
this desire that art and artists should engage with all aspects of social
life? Is it merely a democratic impulse to open up the places of art, a
desire to bring art out of rarefied and privileged spaces and into more
‘real’ contexts, or is it a move towards the further instrumentalisation
of art practice by assigning to it a concrete social use value?

Public exhibitions of art started at the time of the French Revolution.
What actually happened was that the King of France was evicted from his
home, the Louvre, and executed along with his Queen. Shortly there-
after, a part of the palace, the Salon Carré, was used for the first fully
public exhibition of painting and sculpture by contemporary artists.
The audience for this salon show was, in a sense, the first real ‘public’:
a group comprised of citizen-subjects who had just violently gained
political power and instituted the First Republic. The works in this exhibi-
tion did not contain any explicitly politically or socially engaged artworks,
but rather traditional paintings of landscapes, nudes, mythological and
religious motifs. Yet the actual experience of being able to enter the royal
palace to view art was surely ‘political’; it was intimately connected to
the revolutionary process taking place at the time. Perhaps attending
the exhibition was no different from voting or going to a public hospital
or visiting a state ministry for the first time — experienced as an integral part
of the new political agency that citizens experienced, which allowed them
to truly shape their communities and change them via political means.

What is of real importance here is that this situation perhaps
simultaneously created unprecedented positions and opportunities for
both artistic practice and art institutions. For the first time, the presence
of a ‘public’ offered artists the potential to transform their community
through art’s critical function, to engage groups and influence public
opinion, which can, in turn, result (and has resulted) in tangible social
and political change. It is in no way accidental that, several decades later,
we see the emergence of such figures as Courbet, Manet and others,
who helped to institute the paradigm of critically engaged art practice
that we are still pursuing today.

For art institutions, the move away from private collections and
the emergence of an art-viewing public implies a transition to a much
more meaningful social function. In this way, both the artist and the
art institution suddenly manage to obtain a very ‘sovereign’ position.
Interestingly, this was possible through a process of mere spectatorship:
looking at art objects and representations. However, there is a catch; the
spectators of art have largely lost their political agency as such. In the
early 1980s, Martha Rosler observed that the public — in the sense of
groups of engaged citizen-subjects — was being replaced by audiences.
The difference between these two terms — ‘public’ and ‘audience’ — is
easily imagined if you think of a situation like an opera house or a cinema,
in which audiences sit passively in a darkened room, rather than situa-
tions allowing people to participate in a more active way. In this sense,
audiences are groups of consumers of leisure and spectacle; they have
no political agency and no necessary means or particular interest in
affecting social change. Arguably, what Rosler had begun to observe in
the 1980s has now become a fait accompli; while the audiences for art
have become enormous, there is no ‘public’ as such among them.

Consequently, while it is still possible to produce a critical art
object, there would seem to be no public that could complete its trans-
formative function, rendering the very premise of critical contemporary
art practice effectively untenable or, at the very least, severely reducing
its agency. If the transformative function is what we are after, an exhibi-
tion may not be the best place to start. Perhaps the school as a model
can point the way to restoring the agency of art in the absence of an
effective public.

4. The text of the manifesto is available in Mary Ann Caws (ed.), Manifesto: A
Century of Isms, University of Nebraska Press. 2000. pp. 472–476. For a discussion
of Trotsky’s authorship, see Robin Adèle Greeley, For an Independent Revolutionary
Art: Breton, Trotsky and Mexico. Raymond Spiteri (ed.), Surrealism, Politics and
crit/works/rivera/manifesto.html].
5. See Andrew McChesney, Inventing the Louvre: Art, Politics, and the Origins of
1999. p. 15.
Art schools are one of the few places left where experimentation is, to some degree, encouraged, where emphasis is supposedly on process and learning rather than on product. Art schools are also multidisciplinary institutions by nature, where discourse, practice and presentation can co-exist without necessarily privileging one over the other. The actual activities that typically take place in an art school—experimentation, scholarship, research, discussion, criticism, collaboration, friendship—contribute to a continuous process of seeking out and redefining the potential in practice and theory. An art school is not concerned solely with the process of learning but it can, and often is, a super-active site of cultural production: books and magazines, exhibitions, new works, seminars and symposia, film screenings, concerts, performances, theatre productions, new fashion and product designs, architectural projects, resources such as libraries and archives of all kinds, outreach and organisation—these and many other activities and projects can all be triggered here.

However, unlike exhibitions, schools are most often closed to the public, with much of their programming and content available only to the body of registered students. Furthermore, with their insistence on compliance with previously established rules and standards, educational institutions often ensure that, for all their promise of experimentation and innovation, each successive generation of students evolves into a replica of the preceding generation—something which could be bypassed if the school was temporary. If the two models—temporary and publicly accessible exhibition; and potentially innovative and experimental but publicly restricted school—were combined, perhaps a new, radically open school could provide a viable alternative to exhibitions of contemporary art and could reinstate the agency of art by creating and educating a new public.

This, then, outlines some of the reasoning that led us to propose the substitution of a biennial exhibition with a temporary school. Initially, the proposal was met with much enthusiasm, both locally on Cyprus and internationally. The *Manifesta* school in Nicosia was intended to be structured into three departments, each semi-autonomous and deploying a different educational model, ranging from a largely online, independent study programme to a nomadic school with constantly shifting locations that would use existing spaces in the city from film theatres to bars. Nicosia, the capital of Cyprus, is a divided city. The southern part is populated mainly by Greek Cypriots, while the north is largely Turkish Cypriot. Following the end of Cyprus’ colonisation by Great Britain and a period of bloody ethnic tensions between the two groups, including a failed coup initiated by the military junta in Athens, Turkey moved its troops into the northern part of the island to protect ethnic Turkish Cypriots. The northern side declared independence from the Republic of Cyprus in the early 1980s and the two sides have since been separated by a UN administered buffer zone, which runs through the centre of the city.6 When we entered this complex political situation with our project in 2004, there was much talk about the unification of the island, but it did not come to pass. *Manifesta* 6 was to take place throughout the city and involve participation from both sides of the ethnic divide.

My part of the project, Department 2, was to take place in an old hotel building in the Turkish Cypriot neighbourhood, which would combine living quarters for participants with more public production/presentation spaces. Several thousand artists, curators, film makers, musicians, architects, designers and others from all parts of the world applied to take part in the school and approximately one hundred were selected to join the core group of the programme and stay on Cyprus for the one hundred days of the biennial. The school was intended to be free of charge and selected participants were to be offered financial assistance and modest production budgets from the biennial’s budget. This part of the programme was to be situated in the Turkish side of the city, which in itself was not meant to be controversial. However, as we moved closer to the opening of the biennial, despite assurances and agreements made with local officials, the progress stalled. Demands were made that the entire project be situated solely in the Greek Cypriot side of the city. Naturally, we refused, as it was inconceivable to us that a whole community be excluded from involvement in an international cultural event. After numerous attempts to negotiate a solution, when it became clear that our efforts were being blocked, we spoke to the local press and were immediately dismissed by the Greek municipality that had commissioned the project. The biennial was cancelled three months before the opening, numerous lawsuits ensued and any possibility of realising the project under the auspices of *Manifesta* dissolved into thin air.

For me, this was a very important turning point. The confrontation with the Cypriot officials left everyone involved completely exhausted

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and demoralised. Furthermore, the mere threat of legal action scared away virtually all the international funding institutions and other partners. However, I was really reluctant to let go of the project without finding out whether an experimental ‘exhibition as school’ would actually work. All of the artists and writers who had worked closely with me on developing this idea — Boris Groys, Martha Rosler, Liam Gillick, Walid Raad, Jalal Toufic, Nicolaus Hirsch, and Tirdad Zolghadr — were equally curious and so, after some discussion, we decided to attempt to realise this project independently as a self-organised initiative in Berlin.

I have found it increasingly important to find ways of doing things that do not involve complete reliance on existing institutions for audiences, funding or legitimacy. It is not at all coincidental that many of the most important art schools — such as the Bauhaus and Black Mountain College — were self-organised by groups of artists. Sometimes, I feel that it’s almost impossible to realise truly innovative ideas within a framework of already established institutions and networks, a framework of which an interantional biennial is, of course, a part. Some people have pointed out to me that, even if Manifesta 6 hadn’t been censored by local officials, the experimental nature of the project could well have led to last-minute opposition from the contemporary art market and establishment. After all, there are very specific expectations for what an international art show should offer — not least the spectacle of national representation and new commodities, neither of which would have been offered by our school. So, if we are interested in the kind of art projects that are not merely ‘variations on ready-made models’, it is urgent to think of situations in which the work can exist and circulate on its own, framed — in a sense — by itself.

After half a century of isolation and division, Berlin was a particularly interesting location for our school-in-exile. After the fall of the wall, many artists from Germany and Europe settled in the eastern part of the city. This huge migration of cultural producers moved and organised much faster than the development of any official art institutions. The result has been an incredible proliferation of self-organised exhibition spaces, collective venues and small independent institutions, which have dominated the cultural landscape of Berlin for nearly two decades now.

In effect, these self-organised projects enjoy the same and sometimes an even greater degree of cultural legitimacy than the official institutional culture of the city.

I came to Berlin and quickly found a small building on United Nations Plaza (formerly Lenin Platz) in the city’s eastern section. To avoid additional legal problems with Cyprus, and to reflect the radical transformation of the project, we decided to name the school after the address of the building: unitednationsplaza. The structure of the school project was very simple: a free, informal, university-type series of seminars, conferences, lectures, film screenings, and occasional performances. The focus was on contemporary art; the length of the project was one year. It was open to all who came and it disseminated its content through publications, a radio station, and an online presence. The project also operated the Salon Aleman, a functioning bar in the basement of the building put together by several of the artists involved in the project, and open for business sporadically. The programme was duration-based, which is to say that it was effectively meaningless to come to the school only once.

Repeated visits were necessary to gain any value from the discussions, for, unlike a normal artist’s talk or a lecture, the seminars were lengthy; sometimes they stretched for several weeks, bringing people together every night including weekends. In total, there were six of these seminars throughout the year. The topics ranged from the role of religion in a post-Communist situation to the history of video art as a social medium; from the viability of a discursive frame to the possibilities of art in the context of war; and from the production of images in a post-Enlightenment era to many other themes. unitednationsplaza also presented various film screenings and performances, hosted the Martha Rosler Library during the summer months and produced a film, entitled A Crime Against Art, based on an unusual conference staged in Madrid.  

Importantly, unitednationsplaza functioned very much as an artwork in its own setting: an art project that did not need anyone to display it or promote and bring audiences to it — it did all that for itself. Furthermore, unitednationsplaza demonstrated that this mode of practice can travel as it did to New York and Mexico City; this mode of critical practice can also engage effectively and integrally with an institution, as this particular project did with the New Museum in the form of the Night School, yet it does not completely depend on institutions to manifest itself. Of course, unitednationsplaza is not a unique example of such a practice; it fits within a long tradition of extra-institutional projects.

from Tina Girouard, Caroline Goodden and Gordon Matta-Clark’s *Food* (an informal cultural centre in the form of a pay-what-you-wish restaurant in New York’s SoHo, which lasted, in various incarnations, for more than a decade) to more recent examples, such as *The Land Foundation* in Chiang Mai.

Inevitably, the programme of *unitednationsplaza* demanded a lot of time from the audience and, even more importantly, it forced some members of the audience to articulate a position in relation to the project. Reciprocally, it offered all those who attended a stake in the project — a certain kind of ownership of the situation — in that everyone who came along could participate to the degree that they wished. I would argue that this enabled the kind of productive engagement that is still possible if spectatorship is bypassed and the traditional roles of institution/curator/artist/public are encouraged to take on a more hybrid complexity. For me, this means that given some changes to how art experience is conceived and constructed, the idea of ‘the public’ can be resurrected and the modality of critical art practice can be preserved.

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The editors’ invitation to contribute to this volume provided a concise and helpful brief, which invoked the ‘educational turn’ across a range of recent curatorial projects and artistic practices since the mid-1990s. Other turns notoriously include the linguistic and the visual, interpreted by many as an aggressive and frequently unfair language of stylistic breaks and ruptures but appreciated here as a constructive phenomenon. As a friend of mine pointed out, if we wholeheartedly accept spatial abstractions — such as cities, regions and biennials — why don’t we allow for similar abstractions in respect of time? This assertion holds even though, as in the linguistic turn, for example, these ‘turns’ seem perpetually on the verge of a kaleidoscopic collapse of competing definitions. Personally, I find the turn from philosophy to theory — as identified by Frederic Jameson1 and others — may be more useful than prioritising language, which is implicitly operative within both philosophy and theory but as only one factor among many.

As for the visual turn, here, too, anthropological, art historical, high theoretical and other definitions clash, especially with regard to the centrality of the issue at hand. Is this sudden embrace of the visual to be regarded as a dramatic U-turn at the edge of a precipice or as an incidental detour along a disused pavement somewhere? A number of scholars, of both the precipice and pavement varieties, seem to agree that this particular turn has much to do with the rising quantity of visual material being consumed within military and pop culture as well as in art. This is less a matter of, say, Jenny Holzer, Lawrence Weiner and all that stuff that makes you go ‘hmm’ and more a case of taking it all in with one big swoop. This may be true, if a little unsatisfying and pedestrian. In a manner similar to the Jamesonian re-contextualisation of the linguistic turn, the sudden primacy of the visual is more convincingly portrayed as part of something bigger. At the risk of generalisation, it seems that the contemporary art field is undergoing a process whereby the visual arts are gradually being institutionally legitimated as forms of knowledge.

The recent and wildly successful Visual Studies offensive within higher education has, among many other things, proven the rhetoric of art theory and criticism to be deeply scopophobic and helplessly indebted to a literary heritage. The success of Visual Studies has not led to more innovative critical or curatorial practices (indeed, the contrary may well be the case). However, it has opened the door to the most engaging thought experiment since early poststructuralism: i.e., the problem of how to institutionalise artistic research without killing off its strange potential and distinctive promise. Regarded in these terms, the educational turn does not form a third example in one long road but stands as something closely enmeshed with its predecessor, the visual turn, to the point of being indistinguishable from it.

Let’s consider the aforementioned setting of the mid-1990s, which introduced much of what we take for granted today by way of interdisciplinarity, mainstream haute couture, body culture and food culture. The 1990s was a decade in which, for example, basic Italian foodstuffs — such as mozzarella, cappuccino and balsamic vinegar — ceased being signs of effete distinction and became a mass marker of ‘good taste’. Things that used to impress your friends were now available everywhere, and I’d say a similar transfer and shift in signification haunts the game at hand in seeking to distinguish between the visual and the educational turns. Consider the art-rhetorical insistence on ‘smuggling’, ‘breaking boundaries’, the ‘xeno-epistemic’,2 ‘subversion’ and ‘queering’ when we all know that art world interdisciplinarity is de facto as transgressive as smuggling mozzarella into a supermarket. This misconstrual of the transgressive gesture is, in itself, very 1990s, very zeitgeist, very post-Fordist: the decentred subject, the creative imperative, Zooropa, Michael Bracewell, Hotmail, etc.

I’m not insisting on this merely for the sake of poking fun at the idealists among us, but rather to argue that high-flying aspirations tend to distract us from more modest, more realisable potentials tucked away in the art-educational endeavour. Ironically, education isn’t usually considered a transgressive activity. (We all know the phrase ‘those who can, do; those who cannot, teach’.) However, for many in the art field, it is the academy which offers the whiff of adventure and for good reason; the commercial sector has proven too cunning to outsmart but also too volatile to be reliable, while the curatorial alternative — clever group shows of various sizes — is looking pretty tired to say the least. Hence, Black Mountain College.

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Exhibition fatigue aside, if the visual-educational turn still holds value it’s because it questions how the distinctive features of pedagogy warp and transfigure when the setting is that of visual art and, vice versa, how art tends to change when the intention is pedagogical. Given that the readership of this volume will most likely be specialised, many of you will know how staggeringly difficult it is to approach this question concretely. It’s exceptionally hard to translate this particular turn into innovative curating, let alone innovative teaching. One of the reasons for this difficulty is our reluctance to define any form of art field specificity, any circumscription of what the particular necessities and interests of the arts might be. Dieter Lesage, who I’ll be quoting extensively below, and who in my opinion the most engaging researcher of the art-academic conundrum just now, argues that:

[V]ery often, the academic turn seems to be a way to turn away from the academy: indeed, if the art field becomes an academic one, then what an academy has to offer can also be found elsewhere, at other institutions and self-organized initiatives constituting the field of expanded academia. The suggestion seems clear: we don’t need the academy.[5]

With the desire to reinvent the art academy routinely premised on the idea of breaking down its barriers, the criteria for artists’ discourse and the specific contribution of the art academy to that discussion are habitually left to chance or intuition, i.e., left unspecified.

Lesage’s portrait of the artist as a researcher offers an articulate description of a field in which research is practice-based and practice is research-driven and hints at the double binds that plague any effort to transcend both Hollywood stereotypes and academic caricature:

You’re part of this little think tank, you walk around at your conference, you talk to people and ask if they want to contribute to your reader, you’re an editor and co-editor, you’re a research coordinator and co-coordinator, you co-edit and coordinate all the time. You want your readers to attend your lectures, you want your conference participants to read your texts, you invite those who contribute to your reader to come to your conference, you make installations with interview videos. You meet people in order to interview them and you interview people in order to meet them. [...] You participate in a group exhibition at Tate Modern: it’s like publishing an article in an A-journal. You have a solo exhibition at Tate Modern: it’s almost like presenting and defending a Ph.D. You participate in a group exhibition at Whitechapel: it’s like publishing an article in a B-journal.[4]

In terms of grappling with the above complications, Anton Vidokle’s unitednationsplaza project was an excellent start.[6] As you may know, unitednationsplaza sprang from the ashes of the cancelled Manifesta 6 in Nicosia, Cyprus.[6] What is perhaps the most bewildering thing about the story of Manifesta 6 is that the experimental format had nothing to do with its cancellation. The radically process-based, reflexive endeavour was utterly eclipsed by the political atmosphere on the island that led to the eventual fiasco. As I write this essay from the confines of the Venice Biennale (2009) — where literally thousands of artworks are being installed for the thousandth biennial triennial quadrennial quintennial — I mope around, wondering whether it’s ever going to end, whether they’ll ever stop piling up heaps of art like fair-trade sun-dried vegetables. And so, as I sit here, I find the Cyprus outcome all the more irritating.

The unitednationsplaza in Berlin, for which I was one of a good dozen ‘advisors’ (or tutors/collaborators), was significant in that it placed not only the question of art education but also that of art-education-as-art front and centre. The project, in and of itself, was discreetly framed as an Anton Vidokle artwork, and the institutional motto was ‘exhibition-as-school’. Moreover, as far as the content was concerned, it is undeniable that some excellent practitioners made some excellent contributions. But the strongest moments in this one-year project were those in which unconventional structures and methods bred small surprises, such as when star intellectuals were treated with relaxed irreverence in bar room colloquia (in artist Ethan Breckenridge’s functional bar/sculpture); or when a conference was reconfigured into a court trial accusing Vidokle and myself of collusion with the bourgeoisie, as occurred at the ARCO 4. Dieter Lesage, ‘A Portrait of the Artist as a Researcher’. Angelika Nollert and Irit Rogoff et al. (eds.), Academy. Revolver: Archiv für aktuelle Kunst. 2006. See also [http://summit.kein.org/node/233].
5. [http://www.unitednationsplaza.org/].


The Angry Middle Aged: Romance and the Possibilities of Adult Education in the Art World

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Madrid Art Fair; or in Walid Raad and Jalal Toufic’s seminars, inimitable Q&A sessions of almost proto-mystical concentration, including a moment when the audience suspected Toufic of being a Raadian invention, an actor impersonating a random intellectual. There was also a kitchen roundtable that was barricaded by the audience, which proceeded to hold a drunken inquisition into what was wrong with the unitednationsplaza in general and with Zolghadr in particular.

Incidentally, this last anecdote about my seminar was played up in the Artforum coverage of the project in Berlin and its Mexico City and New York spin-offs, to lend the whole thing an ‘anarchic’ feel when, in actuality, such situations of unpredictable tension were few and far between.  

The coverage also failed to mention that the evening event was initially structured by artist Chris Evans, as part of a piece entitled ‘I Don’t Know if I Explained Myself.’) For, if truth be told, by and large we did little to recombine, reformat and reinscribe our discourse in any persuasive, powerful manner. However, those momentary incommensurabilities which did unfold were precisely what I had hoped for. Other participants had grander ambitions, none of which were met. Martha Rosler and Vidokle himself lamented the disappearance of a ‘public’, and harboured a hope that art could move beyond mere ‘audience’. Boris Groys advocated total transfer of responsibility to the students/visitors. Many among the Agambenista audience expected, demanded, desired something that was ‘bare life’, ‘subversive’, ‘experimental’, ‘democratic’, ‘radical’.  

Inevitably, the appetite for some post-ambivalent yonder, beyond deconstruction and self-reflexivity, is self-defeating when the larger context offers little more than the weak politics of light green and pale pink reform. Even worse, grand ambitions are not conducive to a discussion of structure. This is probably why the more conservative formats — for example, lectures read aloud from Times New Roman printouts — when called into question usually flip over into the polar opposite, into that intellectualised boredom known as ‘Cage-ian’ aporia. You sit in a circle because it’s less formal, someone quotes Barthes, someone criticises ‘relational aesthetics’ and then you all agree on reading Rancière’s Ignorant Schoolmaster by next week. Geopolitical urgency, if needed, is supplied via writers such as Sarat Maharaj, who explain the threat of epistemic grids and enlightened tolerance, which treat different cultures by means of a single frame of reference that is more equal than others. So then you venture to search for a frame in which no one comes out on top.

Maharajian ‘xeno-epistemics’ can be helpful only when they introduce an eye for structural changes and an appetite for antagonism, a good sense of bottoming from the top, topping from the bottom. Not when they misleadingly conjure a level playing field in the room. As art schools across Euro-America are being pressured to produce results, to engage with wider audiences, to offer something visible, tangible, unambiguous — issues I expect other essays in this book will address with more due consideration than mine — the romance of workshop aporia as postcolonial politics is not particularly helpful.

If you consider the unitednationsplaza bar as artwork as classroom; the art fair as conference as courtroom; the kitchen table as panel as televised agora (the kitchen roundtable was filmed and projected live in the seminar room); or Raad and Toufic’s didactic yoga; these moments of incommensurability sprang not from an improvisational imperative, but rather from a concerted effort to carefully tweak the usual structures in some small way or another. There’s something to be said about the blind dates and forced marriages that constitute old-fashioned academia. Contrary to rhizomatic palaver, at least these are never mistaken for sheer agency. My own approach is strongly marked by the politicisation that unfolds in a setting as reactionary and dismal as the University of Geneva. This is not to argue for corporal punishment in schools, but to say that if art is no longer the effort to overcome the alienation of labour but the labour itself, then the academy shouldn’t offer a fluffy oasis of patient harmony, but rather it should make a strong stab at a realistic model, in which friction, agonism and antagonism are not necessarily bad things.

Lesage argues that there might come a time when art museums ‘will be run as the exhibition facilities of nearby academies, just as the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology, Zürich, runs Monte Verità as a conference facility. If museums of contemporary art desire to belong to

the field of expanded academia, as indeed they seem to, this scenario makes perfect sense. Such is the promise of the expanded-academic swerve, a reshuffling of institutionalised parameters regarding knowledge and non-knowledge, a romance to which I would gladly subscribe. This is not nearly as weird and wonderful as smuggling but, rather, a revisiting of the infrastructures and situations through which we discuss, teach, circulate and commemorate art.

10. Dieter Lesage, op. cit.
About the Text

This text is fragmented and is the result of the thinking, notes and discussions that surrounded the unitednationsplaza project which ran in Berlin during 2006 and 2007. It deploys some of the ideas that informed my five-part contribution to this quasi-educational structure, combined with a re-written segment of a short essay that was originally written for Art Monthly in response to their request for a short text on the subject of revised thinking around contemporary education. As the text here breaks down further, it reflects some of the content of a lengthy discussion, held in New York in 2008, between Julieta Aranda, Anton Vidokle and myself. The text ends with some rather opaque fragments from that conversation.

unitednationsplaza

Firstly, unitednationsplaza was an initiative conceived by Anton Vidokle with immediate contribution and input from others. His work as an artist and thinker is deeply embedded in structural examinations of contemporary culture and articulated via the establishment of temporary organisations and events. It is impossible to separate what appear to be the more collective and outreach aspects of his practice from anything that might be described in terms of the more traditional markers of an artist’s identity. In fact, many people are unaware that the unitednationsplaza project in Berlin, its later version in Mexico City and the subsequent Night School structure in New York should all be viewed simultaneously as both Vidokle’s ‘artwork’ and as a complex sequence of educational structures. In the context of thinking about the notion of the ‘educational turn’, we are, in this case, dealing with the merging of the artistic ego within a structure rather than the appropriation of a familiar set-up and its re-designation as art. However, it is arguable that the success of each event was dependent upon the lack of acknowledgment of Vidokle’s merging of artistic practice and structural re-imagining. Therefore, we are not looking at art as a form of service or as an abandonment of art as an activity. If anything, unitednationsplaza and its later iterations came to be a calling to account for a generation of artists which has assumed collective or discursive models of practice, and yet has spent very little time, until recently, examining what the implications of such revised structures might mean for the established models of art education.

A combination of artists, writers and curators were involved in each component of these projects. The key factor in each iteration of the project was the shared belief among participants that the apparent limits of artistic practice tend to exclude notions of education as a productive model or, more importantly, that they tend to leave such structures unexamined. It is notable that, in the case of both unitednationsplaza and Night School, participants examined the notion of education as a function within the formation of an artistic consciousness more than utilising the situation to produce ‘work’ and then respond to ‘work’. As such, both projects were marked by their self-sufficiency. They were both a critical self-awakening and a productive terrain of idea generation in their own right. There was no perceived gap between what was produced and how that produced was discussed. A melding of artistic work and collective outreach, an accounting for a participant’s position and an uneven sense of involvement or obligation marked these projects as important moments in the development of our understanding of who possesses critical authority, and of how the structures of artistic validation are developed, checked and driven forward. At the same time, these were exercises that, by default, exposed the weakness of the dominant educational models for critical fine art within established structures — models which have not demonstrated any dramatic or productive developments since the late 1960s. In fact, the models of higher education for critical fine art have remained primarily on the defensive since that time, generally operating in a manner designed to defend the apparent freedoms won during that earlier radicalised moment.

Both unitednationsplaza and the Night School were limited in what they could achieve during the time of their execution but quite radical in their articulation of how they differed from what remains the standard characteristics of higher education in art — artists being taught by artists, in a studio-centred environment where a process of verification and checking and discussion attempts to resolve the ‘work’ with reference to the intentions and desires of the artist. The origin of the potential of unitednationsplaza lay in the notion that languages of production, development, self-improvement and continual learning are contested. This was combined with the necessity of examining the idea of a discursive framework in order to seek out where such a framework might be relevant, valuable and — quite simply put — worth the bother. This was
further combined with an examination of continual learning — based on recognising that the notion of self-improvement is ideologically specific, it comes with a specific set of philosophies. It connects to certain power structures that rely on the notion of continual and permanent education as a way of perpetuating models of representative democracy and inclusivity. Continual learning is used in order to create a promise and a structure for inclusivity and access within cultures where there are much more naked, peculiar and clear political differences and exclusions to do with class and power.

Within the specific framework of artistic production, there has been a shift of attention towards the role of quasi-educational projects, a shift of focus onto situations in which education is removed from a ‘supporting role’ and no longer simply placed in addition to existing structures such as exhibitions and biennials. By default, this has exposed even more clearly the fact that we encounter an art school system today that generally does not reflect the potential of cultural practice. There are exceptions but these remain locked into certain standard models and remain frustrating at a structural level. Education in relation to artistic practice is a parallel zone of obligations, structures and projections. Things have shifted from the notion that every major exhibition should have its own, developed, parallel programme towards a situation in which educational structure has been developed as a semi-autonomous project in its own right. In conjunction with this, for at least fifteen years, the notion that artists need an individual space, need to be taught by older artists and produce degree exhibitions as a step into a broader community of singular practitioners has been insufficient to describe the increasing complexity and ‘non-resolvability’ of the art context.

When it worked well, unitednationsplaza produced discussions and disagreements within a structure built upon an ‘open door’ policy. The unitednationsplaza structure was not intended to be a place for all activities. It welcomed theorists, curators and artists. The project occupied the open space that exists between the completion of studies within a traditional model of art education and operating as a fully functional artistic persona — a space of supposedly smooth transition. Many of those involved were not artists. The project’s specific potential lay in its commitment to the notion of a free school with no formal obligations on any side. It produced no concrete moment of summation, as such, but it did employ a great deal of presentation. The key to this, as with other similar projects, was the sense that it is now necessary for artists and theorists to present and elaborate their ideas to a set of participants in long form, unrestricted by the pragmatism of the university or academy structure. This created a situation in which a group of people could come together and explicate various positions rather than always providing a commentary alongside an obligation to produce ‘work’ as conventionally construed.

In the past, revised models of education have often been predicated upon the notion of the takeover or the creation of new departmental rigour and direction. The Vidokle model has binned the idea of integration and accommodation in favour of shifting the engagement with educational structures — rapidly and completely — via the creation of new layers of interaction. This does not replace what exists; it supplements and problematises the ways in which formally developed art education is organised and expressed. Whether we are operating in a period during which the alternative education structure begins to take over the dynamic terrain of educational ‘production’ — in the same way that autonomous, independent art initiatives have done in relation to established exhibiting institutions — remains to be seen. Whatever happens, we know that some have already opted to skip the standard trajectory of art education in favour of a contingent, implicated model in which modes of assessment and potential are freely negotiated within a new ‘quaternary’ level of activity.

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**ASAP Futures Not Infinite Future**

It may be more functional if we mobilised these concepts of alternative education towards the day-after-tomorrow rather than towards the infinite future progression of self-improvement. It may be more useful to operate with short-term projections, without thinking about them within the ideology of pragmatism, a marked pragmatism, but operating more within the notion of intellectual ‘work’. This is a very subtle shift. Worrying about whether or not an artist can be good is not what should be at issue or in question. We should be curious about the quality of the work in the near future — the quality of its critical function. There should be a desire to transfer the critical dilemma into an imminent, temporal space rather than to defer it into the dysfunctional infinite.

You find that a lot of structures within the art world veer towards the idea that the default state will be an endlessness and infinite projection.
The suggestion here, then, is that ASAP is more positive and problematic than infinite projection. If you defer continually, nothing happens, nothing changes. Everything will be fine, but you will flounder within a state of permanent projection. The difference between projection and displacement is political. One model accepts things the way they appear to be and the other moves things around in order to find a better arrangement. Literally and philosophically, displacement always differs from projection. Projection is always either super negative or super positive, in the sense that it removes the subject from immediate action. It is the speculative tool of choice. So, we should be more interested in reclaiming the speculative as a critical problem and using displacement as a tool towards taking it apart. The speculative is a concrete version of projection. Foucault said that the 20th century would become known as the Deleuzian century. Dialectical positions have to be affected by pleasure and psychosis. There are necessarily some human qualities at play here that are not pure. Look at people’s behaviour in an educational environment and you can see that they often become psychotic and they become pleasure seekers, because of their desire to continue an endless dialectical relationship with their own projection. It’s extremely interesting to work out how there can be a route to a pursuit of happiness ASAP.

Fragments From a Conversation

We are clearly influenced by the struggle between the desire for some autonomy and the desire to say, ‘But, if it was us, we wouldn’t fight to retain power, or would we even know it if we did?’ Certain decisions involve doubling, mirroring, repeating, undermining, trying to lure or trap people with the surface and then turn them out again and then punish them and then contradict everything. Which displacements of power structures are necessary in order to produce something rather than consume something?

Somewhere in between, it might be possible to find a way to provide rhetoric alongside designing a rug, say. Work is never fundamentally utilitarian. It is a commentary on operating in the space between the idea of the diluted and the distracted. Because craft and applied art are always bound up with productive distraction; knitting a scarf is distracting while the guillotine works in the background but also takes place while the cat is playing on the rug. The act of knitting a scarf is different from working out what knitting a scarf means. The process of knitting produces a distracted confirmation of collapsed hierarchies. Most painters are craftspeople. They are engaged in a daily craft. It is a dysfunctional delusion rather than a functional displacement.

A lot of potential in applied modernism is to be located in the irresolvable conflict between people telling you how it should be and maintaining a permanent distraction. Knitting steel curtains for a building might be one result. Like trying to get off a boat when you are stuck between the dock and the boat and you know there’s a point at which you might fall in the water. Or you’re going to have to get stronger and try to pull the boat back to the shore with one leg. This is potential — there is a boat in the water and there’s a dock; they can work together, but there are moments at which you find yourself stuck between these functional frameworks — this shiny thing that glides on the water in relation to the dock, which is pragmatic and requires repair and has a simple function.

You used to able to buy kaolin and morphine, which was basically a chalk and morphine solution; it was for your stomach. But one option was NOT to mix it up and instead you could drink the morphine and eat the chalk and then shake yourself up. Of course, you’d throw up because the morphine was quite strong on its own. This is where displacement comes in. Changing the order of relationships and changing the location at which the suspension is mixed.

The space of potential is a very interesting zone in which to operate. Perhaps this necessarily leads to the idea of suspension. You become in control of some of the things that are rather fetishised within the ideas of people who believe in projection; they fetishise the fact that they’ve deconstructed, slowed things down, reconfigured and re-projected reality, projected into the future and so on.

Trying to reoccupy a place for the first time. Over the past ten years, you get moments of speculative explosion, with the implication that we are reoccupying some space but, in fact, it is happening for the first time. For example, a notional ‘Building A’ was never an authentic industrial space so it can never be reoccupied. The work involves art taking place, the apparent appropriation being made in the artwork that was only an appropriation ex nihilo. There was no authentic to be appropriated. This is actually a reoccupation for the first time, a sense of reoccupation that is actually an autonomous appropriation. When people talk about how maybe now we’ll get a return to reality, get rid of all this fluff, what they’re really describing is that having faced the idea of the
reoccupation of something for the first time it created displacement anxieties that they would like to be rid of. Go back to knitting while the cat plays on the rug.

The tragedy of the work is the feeling of trying to sustain the just-before or just-after quality of effects. There are parallel positions with a discursive potential. It’s not a belief that people should function in a certain way in an art context. Given a degree of autonomy within the structure, people spend a lot of time creating time to talk. And what they tend to talk about is how to work faster so they have more time to talk. Talk about how to work faster, and the whole thing becomes a kind of crisis of freedom. This might be the discursive component of the work. It’s not that you have to go and have a discussion but you have to deconstruct the ideology of discourse.

It was the Deleuzian century, not the Wittgensteinian century — the laminated quality of experience shows this. The Deleuzian deals with things that are broad and excessively de-laminated from one extreme to another — within a framework that is mediated through a self-conscious historical tension between the applied and the diluted. This is the dialectical as a route to madness — a way of getting around it is to be deeply steeped in the illusion of pragmatism, playing everyday structural games, displacements, suspensions, design and all these things. The idea is that discourse should also be the subject of work.

Lighthouses might be a good example here — weird lenses with a relatively normal light in the middle. People say, ‘Look at the lighthouse, isn’t it amazing?’ but the light bulb and the lenses are amazing, not the lighthouse structure alone and not the light alone. The two distinct objects are interesting in combination; they point in different directions simultaneously. Physically, nothing has changed. Wood is still wood, lead is still lead, and all these things are still just all these things. But, the barricade has become a checkpoint. It is important to shift the temporal scale or to re-assess the temporal scale in order to prevent two things. Firstly, there is a need to prevent the utopianisation of any progressive thought, which is always a problem — anyone who thinks about what to do, about how things could be better, risks becoming utopian, through the contingencies of the everyday; and, secondly, there is a need to prevent the idea that everything simply becomes what should we do tomorrow? Finding the gap between the utopian dismissal and the ‘what-should-we-do-tomorrow?’ problem — this is the space that is most productive. There should be a component of movement that is not to do with classical ideas of representation or how a person might be feeling, or what am I going to do today, but that has this connection to other people in other situations.

_Solaris_ is a story about the idea that a place exists in which people can re-animate people until they realise what’s going on, and then they die again, and then they reanimate, and then they die again, and it produces this very interesting temporal play, but this is not the most important moment. Earlier in the film, when Kelvin is sitting in his father’s _dacha_ and a horse walks past in the background, he’s thinking about the fact that he’ll never see any of these people ever again because it takes so long to get to Solaris; this is really a particularly interesting idea — a deeply embedded, temporal game within real time and in real life. There’s nothing exceptional about these characters at this point, no science fiction, no spaceship, no nothing. There’s just a person sitting in a country house in Russia, saying goodbye to everyone and everything because it’s going to take him years to get to Solaris and he’ll never see his dying brother, or father, or whoever it is, ever again.

Think of the airport in Guadalajara, Mexico. In the car park, they have pillars. And these pillars branch out into four supporting curves leading up to the floor they support. The person who keeps an eye on the cars in the car park throws his jacket up onto these branching pillars, which means his jacket is just out of reach. Of course he has a ladder. Now, if he just left it on the floor, you could just walk past it and steal his jacket. If you want to steal his jacket now, you actually have to get a ladder and do it, so it takes a bit of effort. So it’s not about grand gestures, it’s about leaving a trace for the future or a trace for the past, so the architect of that car park unwittingly left a place very conveniently for the guy who keeps an eye on the cars to keep his jacket safe, much safer than a box with a lock on it because that might be worth breaking into.
Education! Education! Education! This cry is heard, again and again, as a social need or as a vindicated right. The fact that educational and pedagogical programmes within art structures are in demand these days cannot conceal the fact that, at the same time, some old institutions committed to art education (such as universities and art schools) are undergoing a state of emergency, not only due to the Bologna Declaration and its various implications, but also because of a shift in the traditional teacher-student transference that provided the whole basis for the previous model of education.

Rather than consider the replacement of, let’s say, traditional art teaching with these new art-educational projects, what seems urgent is a re-assessment of both situations focusing simultaneously on their convergences and differences. We cannot look solely to the current range of art-educational projects without analysing and monitoring the educational system of art as a whole. To do so would be to risk remaining stuck in a self-absorbed conversation without exits, in which curators talk endlessly about their own and other curators’ practices.

The undeniable legitimate claim that there has been a displacement from the regular sites of art teaching to museums, art centres and related institutions still leaves ample room for an examination of the causes or reasons for such a shift. Facts speak for themselves; almost every cultural institution has incorporated an educational strand into its programme and has put resources in place to secure its continued operation. Very often within these educational programmes, cultural institutions search for collaboration with art schools, creating hybrid formats of lectures, seminars, etc.

Education has become one of the cornerstones of current curating, which pretends to a certain status as ‘critical curating’. Some of the earliest and strongest education-orientated initiatives have taken place (at least in Spain) within official structures and institutions, such as the Bilbao Guggenheim Museum, where education is a requirement created by new mass-scale art audiences and where the emphasis is placed on all that surrounds and contextualises the exhibitions (communication, mediation, branding and so on). These developments have had a collateral effect in the strengthening of educational and pedagogical departments within these institutions.

Considering these issues at another level, we recognise that university programmes have been launched within museums of contemporary art, such as the Independent Studies Program (PEI) at the
Museum of Contemporary Art in Barcelona (MACBA). In an international context, there is great demand for postgraduate courses and there is an expanding industry based on a global educational market. The city of Barcelona itself provides a good example of this global market and boom in educational services, with a thriving educational economy which draws students from all around the world.

If we are to speak of curating in general, and the turn to educational models in particular, the real novelty lies in those new models that attempt to cross the boundaries between education and critical, theoretical discourse, in order to disclose the economic dynamics of education (as an industry) within the art system. These models bring education and outreach systems to critical account, along with the other prevailing economic dynamics and sub-systems of the art world (the market and its galleries and dealers and economies of museums and institutions of all kinds).

Within these developments, a gap appears to open up between, on the one hand, those artists who combine their artistic practice with regular, permanent or visiting positions in art schools, and, on the other hand, a profound paradigm shift with respect to education as the result of curatorial innovation and re-positioning. Inevitably, the relationship between these two positions is organic, and it is difficult to establish a radical division between artists, on the one side, and curators on the other. However, the effects of change are most clearly visible in the field of curating; the insistence on education, as subject matter and theme, is clearly a key resource within recent curatorial discourse.

A significant distinction emerges here at the level of representation between a practice of talking about education and another practice, which sets education at its centre of action and engagement; this is the recognition that when someone actually starts talking about making a project on education then it ceases to be education and becomes something else, namely, discourse. Therefore, talk of ‘educational art’, or the so-called educational turn, operates as a discursive formation; viewed from another angle, this becomes a figure of speech and risks becoming mere rhetoric. In this sense, we all run the risk of making this emergent rhetoric more consistent (or making it ready for packaging and consumption), or just offering this discursive formation as yet another subject matter for the art world’s thematisation strategies. Such rhetorical strategies operate within art structures as engines of argumentation divorced from action and actual consequence in the world. In this sense, the dialectical turns of *art as education or education as art* are of little help because this dialectic remains one-dimensional meta-rhetoric without real consequence. Rather, what we should seek here is to draw a subtle distinction between the idea of art as experience and that of art as knowledge (and here I am not referring to widespread notions of ‘artistic research’ or ‘knowledge production’). In a similar way, there is a need to recognise the distance between education simply for the sake of educating (as a social responsibility or as an accepted social imperative) and those other educational ‘projects’ that have recently emerged onto the scene. The scare quotes around the term ‘projects’ are apposite because it is as if, in this context, the terms education and project are mutually exclusive. For my part, I cannot see these two terms working together in harmony. Project suggests a purpose or goal and, while it seems untenable (or at least curious), in our time, to talk of ‘art for art’s sake’, is it still possible to imagine education for education’s sake, for the pleasure of doing it, i.e. without a means-ends rationale, without taking any benefit from it? Obviously, what this seemingly simple question hides is the issue of economic profit and I do not mean the salary or the fees transacted from the art-education operation itself but the profitability of these projects in the symbolic economy of the cultural field, as art projects and not as education.

And if project and education seem, in this way, to mutually exclude each other, how should we approach the idea of education or the art school as an exhibitionary device? An exhibition on, or about, education is a ticklish issue; when, why, how and in what circumstances have learning, teaching or educational activity become submitted to the historically determined form of the exhibition? Thematisation always undermines the latent potential of critical concepts. In an exhibition, for instance, some works could *talk* about education, thereby making even more palpable the breach between education and *talk* about education. There is potential for misunderstanding here, in as much as this line of enquiry may appear to be yearning for a return to forms of territorial autonomy in education, but this is far from my intention. Rather, what is at stake is a questioning of some curatorial practices, rooted within contemporary discourse, which have become norms for the curatorial field to the point of making it difficult to make nuanced distinctions across a range of practices and models subsumed under the heading ‘educational’.

One of the problems here lies in the shift in contemporary art in recent decades, whereby the concept of ‘project’ is ubiquitous. Therefore,
instead of lecture series we have ‘discursive projects’, because the former is now construed as boring; instead of exhibitions, we have ‘multi-faceted’ events, because the former is now deemed visually hierarchical and one-dimensional; and now there are ‘readers’ instead of exhibition catalogues, since these latter are too bound up with the traditional role of exhibitions. To avoid a series of clichés, to avoid using what appear to be non-progressive formats — this, in itself, becomes a new cliché and these, in turn, have become established formulas that are now well digested and accepted.

Beyond these strategies, what one finds is the canonisation of discourse, or the enthronement of speech, as the sacred place from which everything is directed — via the commodification of theory or via the inevitable misappropriation and distortion of critical theory in the hands of various operational agents. Art always involves a system of mediations — a series of distances and gaps open up in the representation and mediation of art, and the term ‘project’ is there to fill these gaps. It is not a question of insincerity but, then again, nobody wishes to appear in this game as discursively weak. We are afraid of the kind of impoverishment that appears to arise whenever one attempts to avoid the discursive in order to focus on the experiential or the phenomenological or the affective or the cognitive. But, then, we also urgently need well developed and astutely applied critical theory in the arts.

The problem is that we might use the term ‘ignorance’, or even promote it, but, at the same time, we are extremely alert to the fact that, with this term, we refer to Jacques Rancière’s concept and we are anxious not to appear innocent of this theoretical nuance, not to be mistaken for the ignorant. A gap opens here between theory and practice, a void between what we extol and what we do. This, in itself, could serve as a good example of the institutionalisation of education and, indeed, of many other institutionalisations, from critical theory to institutional critique. Of course, the misapplication of critical theory will always be something to count on; examples are frequently to be observed in the habits practised within the arts. One such example is provided by the interpretation of theories of production and the role of the press in Walter Benjamin’s ‘The Author as Producer’. This text has prompted art centres and institutions to publish their own newsletters and newspapers as a feigned bridging of the presumed distance between the institution and its audience by means of these publications when, in fact, the motivation for the operation is nothing other than institutional self-promotion and advertising. There is no authentic correlation between theory (Benjamin’s) and the institution’s communication practice (70 years after the text was written) here. There is simply an instrumental deployment of an excuse, or pretext, which enables self-justification for courting public exposure; and this is all done in the name of education.

Art colonises everything. Its appetite is voracious. However, education resists the production of its own representation; you cannot represent education, since education is, in itself, an act of communication between several people in the process of exchanging their own skills, disabilities and dysfunctionalities. When a photographic camera is inserted into an educational setting, or when someone takes a step back to portray a learning scene, then all the invisible architecture that supports communication, transference, the corporality of the voice, or even just silence, is suddenly eradicated. (But, at the same time, it might be useful to focus on Bertolt Brecht’s didactic strategies, in which he didn’t only stress the pedagogical process but also made visible the gesture of showing, teaching and, in the same way, learning.) Of course, we can say that all art is educational or pedagogical or, in order to avoid these considerations, we can say that art is, in itself, education; however, these pronouncements operate differently once education is subjected to a confrontation with the problem of its own representability.

It is not so long ago that artists sought to actively and thoroughly reject what they thought of as the academic, the received education, the traditional education system and its teachers. They pursued this variously through the construction of ‘un-learning’ experiences, through auto-didacticism and through ‘aculturisation’. So, what is the ultimate reason for the current re-entry into the academy, this return to school? Is it too odd, in this context, to use, instead of the simple term, ‘education’, the Maoist term, ‘re-education’?

1. An interesting exception to this is offered in the film Chronique d’un été (Chronicle of a Summer), 1961, by Jean Rouch and Edgard Morin, where the cinematographic device and the relationship between camera and object (the young students) is made invisible to the point that its methodology is reflective of its education, and where the pedagogics remains in its own form as an ethnographic documentary or a film.
In autumn 2005, I co-directed a workshop-seminar in conjunction with Leire Vergara\(^2\) under the generic title of ‘We Rule the School: Conversations and Research’ at the art centre Arteleku, Donostia-San Sebastián. For a period of 15 days, a group of young, international artists and researchers were brought together within a programme of visits by a number of leading artists and critics. As a coincidence (or, rather, as an unconscious intuition of some forthcoming major projects using the word ‘school’), the workshop avoided worldwide communication in order to prioritise the immediate context.

Questions of method determined the adoption of a three-phase structure for the programme — educational, situational and discursive. However, we were reluctant to formulate a defined and precise theoretical framework within which to organise the workshop, beyond an introductory letter which called for improvisation and speculation while also inviting the participants to become active in the construction of meaning and to assume the slogan, ‘We Rule’.\(^3\) But, this lack of precise theoretical framework was partly intentional as well. The presence of all the participants — speakers and visitors — the process of selecting films to see together, the scheduling of activities to be undertaken by the group and others — all these elements combined to make the situation clearly provisional rather than pre-scripted. The slogan, ‘We Rule the School’, functioned rather as a declaration of intent or a motto.

We also tried to implement a method that could be described as the postponement of content. This required us to ‘forecast’ teaching and learning scenes, i.e. to project teaching scenes as possible ways of meeting, conversations, conflicts and other inputs and outputs. The workshop-seminar was primarily an opportunity for innovations in form rather than in content. This meant that we needed to imagine and shape a ‘space’. We needed to imagine its relationship with the autonomy of the site and in relation to other structures, to stay alert and to wait for knowledge to emerge as the product of an exchange process and not as something that existed \textit{a priori}.

In this way, a seminar or workshop is a time-space that needs to be filled, an open structure in which the unexpected can suddenly happen. This involves encouraging self-consciousness among the participants to question both passive and active roles. What comes from this situation is the reconsideration of discourse as something that arises spontaneously from the very educational experience, something which focuses on the forms of education or, in other words, on the methods of teaching.

The synthesis between enunciation and pedagogy can also be traced in different types of artistic practice. Ways of suturing the divisions between the artistic and the pedagogical are not new — consider the way in which Brecht found, in the Chinese parable, a mode to link both.\(^4\) In another text, Brecht’s call to revolutionise opera and radio as media gave rise to a heated polemic around innovations in form, as against speculations on possible content. His statement on the renovation of opera may meaningfully be transposed onto the current state of art education as an institution. Brecht wrote: ‘For some time past there has been a move to renovate the opera. Opera is to have its form modernised and its content brought up to date, but without its culinary character being changed’.\(^5\)

In 1929, he argued that ‘only a new purpose can lead to a new art. The new purpose is called pedagogics’.\(^6\) For Brecht, ‘pedagogics’ concerns attention to the content and form of a play (or artwork) but, even more urgently, to the play’s dialectical relationship to the productive apparatus.

A sub-heading near the conclusion of the text, ‘The Modern Theatre is the Epic Theatre’, stridently proclaims: ‘For Innovations —

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\(^2\) My curatorial partner for some years in the self-organised curatorial structure, Donostialko Artx Ekinbideak (DAE).
\(^3\) Some months before the realisation of ‘We Rule the School’, we were asked for a contribution to a poster entitled ‘Manifesto for an Independent Art Arena’, a project by the Norwegian artist and curator, Tone Hansen. We contributed a short statement, which is an early iteration of our educational proposal. We wrote a short fictional text: ‘We rule the school. Yes, we do. Don’t you believe us? It began as a game and now it’s getting serious. Earlier it was something in between; half high-school, half university. A kind of institute that we used to call ‘universitute’. But a new and modern institute was required from new emergent social forces. We are aware of that, yes, because we spent years going to the summer academy and to the winter school. But we realized from our earliest notebooks that we needed to destroy to start building again, as in an endless loop. That is why we like poetry. Then there was a melodic pop song by Belle and Sebastian with the same title. On a bus stop in town ‘We rule the school’ is written for everyone to see and read. Right now this is becoming a reality. We go there every day, and be sure; there is lots of fun. Come and see, let’s go dancing tonight. Peio Aguirre and Leire Vergara. 2005.’


\(^5\) Bertolt Brecht, On Form and Subject-Matter. Ibid. p. 30.
Against Renovation! What might he have meant by this? Whereas renovation simply means locally limited aesthetic variations, designed to update the ‘culinary’ value of the artwork or any other revival, ‘real innovations attack the roots’ of entrenched conservative social hegemony. In short, the innovations seek ‘to convert institutions from places of entertainment into organs of mass communication’. These claims for innovation were nothing less than strategies to re-function drama, to serve the purpose of a pedagogics aiming to change not only art but also society itself. Previously, with respect to the pedagogic component of an artwork, Brecht had enquired: ‘Why can’t Der Flug der Linberghs be used as an object of instruction and the radio be changed?’ For him, if education had a final goal this might be found in the revolution of the apparatus of production, in subverting these structures from within, by means of the educational process. What we can learn from all this is that, however much theoretical discourse is brought to bear within an educational structure (in terms of content), without a transformation of things at higher levels, including the level of form, then all that happens is the reproduction of the educational apparatus, whatever that may be.

Brecht’s advocacy of rethinking educational spaces is far removed from the reductive formalism frequently encountered in educational art projects, which equate the disordering of the chairs in a classroom or re-arranging them in informal groupings or in small circles with the production of more direct and transparent communication between participants. Any attempt at transforming hierarchies is in vain when structures remain unchanged at higher levels (both in terms of consciousness and aims) — that is, a change in both subject positions and objective forms. There is often a tendency towards circularity in these educational spaces, in which a tautological process keeps a discussion ‘live’ but entails revolving around its own conditions of possibility. Within education, there is always a move to define and delimit the roles, on one or other side of a table, in terms of who speaks and who listens.

One of the problems with the currently dominant models of the symposium and seminar is precisely that all weight and significance is placed on the speaker and not on the audience that listens. In this regard, the formats of these discursive events are fully correlated with the construction of the art ‘project’. In certain circumstances, there is also a demand that listeners, despite being anonymous, should participate — their function no longer being merely that of passive observers of a monologue or dialogue but rather of subjects invited to speak in order to increase the sheer quantity of the discourse produced. The discursive format itself complies with the demands of publicity so that communication about the project transforms any information on the content and nature of the seminars or symposia into ‘the struggle for publicity’. This potential for communication, within educational initiatives transformed into publicity, relocates this discourse within the established economy of the entire art structure.

I am deeply grateful to one of the visitors to ‘We Rule the School’, the artist and professor at the Manchester Metropolitan University, Pavel Büchler, who, after our encounter, sent me a Roland Barthes text which confirmed some intuitions in this area and helped to clarify the basis for the establishment of an ethics in education. In contrast to the current format of seminars, based on systems of communication and self-advertisement, Barthes conceived of the seminar as a place from which to build a community of listeners, rather than a community of speakers. The recognition that the classroom creates a space in which communities can be created was not new for Barthes, who gleaned the

7. Ibid. p. 41.
8. Ibid. p. 42.
10. One example here would be the conference called ‘The Madrid Trial’, which took place at the ARCO Art Fair in 2007 and was the basis for the documentary A Crime Against Art (directed by Hila Peleg, JRP/Ringier, 2007). This is a good example of self-parody, and indeed irony, with respect to the sophisticated discursivity of contemporary art. In this case, the instrumentalisation of the symposium format demonstrated the representational boundaries of public speech, in a sort of ‘anti-pedagogical turn’.
11. See again A Crime Against Art and particularly the role of the audience in relation to this event. Of special interest in this context are the audience’s interventions and the apparent ‘public’ contributions. An ambiguity prevails as to whether these are scripted or spontaneous.
12. The ‘struggle for publicity’ refers to the growing conflict of interests and competition among various art agents as clearly manifested in the ‘e-fluxification’ of the art world. This ‘e-fluxification’ extends to all operational agencies (curators, artists, critics, galleries and so on). These terms — ‘struggle for publicity’ and ‘e-fluxification’ — refer specifically to the current situation of art criticism in the public sphere as a field crossed by two major forces: on the one hand, the publishing industry (mainly national and international art magazines) needing to generate copy and, on the other hand, galleries, institutions and museums needing to achieve exposure and publicity in the magazines and journals either through advertisement or through critical reviews.
best from Brechtian pedagogical models. For Barthes, however, it is the inevitability of the seminar which shapes the content and not the other way round. He wrote:

Is this a real site or an imaginary one? Neither. An institution is treated in the utopian mode: I outline a space and call it: seminar. It is quite true that the gathering in question is held weekly in Paris, i.e. here and now; but these adverbs are also those of fantasy. Thus, no guarantee of reality, but also nothing gratuitous about the anecdote. One might put things differently: that the (real) seminar is for me the object of a (minor) delirium, and that my relations with this object are, literally, amorous.\(^{13}\)

Barthes presents the seminar as a corporeal and experiential situation. He also distinguishes at least three spaces. The first of these spaces is institutional (location, timing and schedule). The second is transferential — the space between the director of the seminar and its members. What matters here, he says, is the relationship between the members themselves and not the relationship between the teacher and the class: ‘Our gathering is small, to safeguard not its intimacy but its complexity: it is necessary that the crude geometry of big public lectures give way to a subtle topology of corporeal relations, of which knowledge is only the pre-text’.\(^{14}\) The third space is textual and should seek ‘the rarest text, one which does not appear in writing’. Here are writers without books (sans livres), he says, where texts are not products but practices; ‘it might even be said that the “glorious” text will someday be a pure practice’.\(^{15}\) The insights from Barthes text sheds light on ‘We Rule the School’, viewed retrospectively. It all starts with the inevitability of the seminar but it doesn’t end there, as the effects of the seminar or workshop entail duration.

What Barthes advocates is a reorientation of desire in education. He proposed a method of education that goes beyond the demands made by the student upon the teacher, and the impositions produced by the teacher upon the student, to generate a formation of desire that operates across a multiple field. The examples of Brecht and Barthes are key resources to attend to in the consideration of how educational formats within contemporary art could, and should, reflect upon their own forms of self-representation and how pedagogy can be embedded in art practices without the inevitability of merely producing statements ‘about’ education or pedagogy. Paraphrasing Godard’s dictum on cinema and politics — rather than making educational projects, as such, it may be more useful to make projects or exhibitions pedagogically and, in so doing, make visible the border that separates a project or an exhibition from education. Furthermore, the pre-eminence of speech within pedagogical settings should be diminished and, with it, the anxiety as to the profitability of education in terms of information richness or in terms of symbolic art market priorities: instead, we should refocus on the embodiment of experience and encounter.

There is no more fitting way to conclude this text than to cite Barthes’ sentence with respect to the seminar and those who are engaged in the ongoing process of research: ‘just as, for Brecht, reason is never anything but the sum total of reasonable people, for us, seminary people, research is never anything but the sum total of people who, in fact, search (for themselves?) […]’\(^{16}\)
When artists make art that involves people — either as collaborators, facilitators or active subjects — they pose complex questions, not least of which is the question of authorship. For art institutions, such ways of working often require a rethinking of the status of the artwork itself, as the ‘object’ or ‘work’ produced is often contingent and does not usually lend itself easily to traditional exhibition formats. Developing new models for the production and presentation of such work, however, provides an opportunity for galleries and museums to embrace the ways in which contemporary artists are increasingly operating beyond the studio and gallery and thereby to extend their reach and influence.

Traditionally, the work of museums and galleries is departmentalised into institutional functions, creating divisions of labour and expertise. Education, learning and public programmes are often seen as secondary to, or servicing, exhibitions, and this hierarchy has created disparities in the way that curators work together with artists across programme strands. Drawing on recent projects — the Park Nights series, Dis-assembly and Hearing Voices, Seeing Things — this essay examines the concept of integrated programming and the strategy of working with artists in a range of contexts to produce new work as developed by the Serpentine Gallery in London.

Employing a term borrowed from the social sciences, recent curatorial discussions have focused on ‘new institutionalism’, which proposes a transformation of the art institution from within. Characterised by openness and dialogue and leading to events and process-based work, this institutional approach utilises some of the strategies inherent in the ways in which many contemporary artists make work. Since the 1990s, many artists and curators have embraced the idea of creating flexible platforms for presenting work, extending the institution and its functions and absorbing aspects of the institutional critique proposed in the 1970s. The ‘new institution’ places equal emphasis on all programmes and creates spaces and modes of display that reflect this, including archives, reading rooms, residency schemes, talks and events as well as exhibitions. Writer and curator Alex Farquharson has noted:

‘New Institutionalism’, and much recent art, side steps the problem of the white cube altogether. If white-walled rooms are the site for exhibitions one week, a recording studio or political workshop the next, then it is no longer the container that defines the contents as art, but the contents that determine the identity of the container. (1)
The implications for the gallery, as a platform for experimentation and a laboratory for learning, have been embraced by curators and artists alike, with education and learning at the heart of this process of reinvention. What ‘new institutionalism’ demands is an integrated approach to public programming rather than the more traditional and territorial departmentalisation of these areas of work. This interdisciplinary approach engages a wide framework of timescales and the flexibility to work across strands of programming.

Whilst there have been a number of recent examples of curators and artists adopting the pedagogical frameworks of public programming and education, the impact and potential of these projects — specifically in relation to the function of education and learning within the institution — are only just beginning to be realised. These seemingly pedagogical projects raise complicated questions for curators, critics and educators. Questions of how this work should be evaluated and what it means when the mechanisms of programming are applied to the production of new institutional spaces are critical, and be addressed by those of us who work in and beyond the confines of the institution.

Lectures and conferences presented as projects by artists or curators focus on the production of knowledge and foreground criticality and discourse. For example, in Beautiful City for the 2007 Münster Sculpture Project, Maria Pask programmed a series of talks about belief and faith by a wide range of speakers, including religious and spiritual figures as well as teachers and gurus. The talks took place in a temporary canvas city and the ambience was reminiscent of a festival or village fête. Similarly, Thomas Hirschhorn’s 24hr Foucault — a multi-platform event that took place over 24 hours at the Palais de Tokyo, Paris, in 2004 — saw those who attended acting as both audience and witnesses to the event. The Serpentine Gallery’s Park Nights series — initiated in 2002 and now also including the ‘marathon’ events introduced by Hans Ulrich Obrist in 2005(2) — provides a discursive space which explores the intensive temporality associated with events rather than exhibitions. Specialist audiences come together for these events, creating a momentary critical mass which amplifies the intensity as well as the reach of the Serpentine’s programme. The positioning of these strands is critical; when part of an integrated programme of activity, the emphasis can oscillate between events, talks, screenings and exhibitions as appropriate, allowing the institution to reinvent itself through these different strands and across audiences.

Anton Vidokle’s Night School held at the New Museum, New York, in 2007–8, was presented as a curatorial project; although it mirrored the function of education and learning departments within galleries, it was given the same status as an exhibition. On the museum’s website, for example, it was marketed as a major strand of curatorial activity:

‘Night School is an artists’ project by Anton Vidokle in the form of a temporary School. A year-long programme of monthly seminars and workshops, Night School draws upon a group of local and international artists, writers and theorists to conceptualise and conduct the programme’.(3)

This was also true of the unrealised ‘Manifesta 6’ (the itinerant European biennial), which proposed a temporary art school as the framework for the exhibition. The curators wrote:

In its customary introversion, the arts community does not let well enough alone, but often extends itself just enough to instrumentalise the world around it as props for its own production. A prime example of this tokenism is the growing range of art projects based on a form of seemingly benevolent social science research. The research results (or works of art) are, more often than not, neither up to scratch academically nor do they imbue the information with any new artistic significance. They are forms of either pop information, inaccessible specialist data or, sadly, sensationalism. In contrast, a genuine form of awareness and constructive

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2. The Serpentine Gallery, located in Hyde Park in central London, invites an internationally renowned architect or designer to design a temporary pavilion in their grounds each summer. In 2006, a series of marathon interview events was initiated and takes place annually inside these temporary pavilions. The ‘24-Hour Interview Marathon’ events are high profile and attract a wide range of participants. In 2006, the marathon featured over 60 world-renowned artists, architects, writers, designers and theorists, among them David Adjaye, Damien Hirst, Gilbert and George, Hussein Chalayan and Doris Lessing, as well as the Director of the
3. See [http://www.newmuseum.org].
involvement necessitates commitment, erudition, confrontation and a recoiling from the superficiality of political correctness.\[4\]

Curatorial claims for these projects suggest a desire to distance themselves from the work of education and learning departments whilst still wanting to create an environment, even an ‘aesthetic’, of educational and/or academic engagement, but the overall outcome is often to produce a spectacular event rather than an educational experience. The experience for the participant is inherently different in each of these contexts; while a participant in an educational programme could expect to be involved in the pedagogical process, the participant in, or audience of, curatorial projects witnesses them not as a site of learning but rather as a spectacle. How might curators and educationalists develop curatorial strategies of convergence and collaboration? As these curatorial events begin to create a specific mode of learning and knowledge production, their visibility within institutions is beginning to map out a new set of possibilities for a collapse of terrain and mutual recognition of expertise. The combination of curatorial expertise — in terms of working with artists, staging performance or spectacle — and the expertise of educationalists, in terms of knowledge production and pedagogical process, might lead to genuinely new functions for the institution.\[5\]

Projects that extend beyond the gallery have long been the terrain of both artists and institutions. They are an opportunity to approach production in a way that can achieve a genuinely engaged but complex renegotiation of the operation of the gallery or museum. By undertaking external, place-based or locally-situated projects, it is possible to think about a renegotiation of the role of the gallery and museum as a site of production which operates beyond the demands of the market and in relation to wider socio-political concerns. The question of how and where the resulting work then resides, and the challenge of reading a work that simultaneously embraces and negates the notion of authorship, is crucial. These situations and interventions result in a collapse between politics and aesthetics and produce work both in the world and as social intervention.

Dis-assembly was one such project, which culminated in 2006 with exhibitions at North Westminster Community School (NWCS) and the Serpentine Gallery. Artists Faisal Abd'Allah, Christian Boltanski, Runa Islam and architect Yona Friedman were commissioned to make new artwork through conducting a period of research at the school. Established in the 1960s as a flagship comprehensive which aimed to offer a progressive integrated curriculum in a creative and dynamic learning environment, the school was facing closure. For both the students and the artists involved, the reality of the school’s imminent replacement by two new city academies gave the project a special urgency.

The classroom may be seen as a mirror of society, with nearly every aspect of the adult world replicated and amplified in the closed and confined space of the school, a space that is both physical and temporal. This is an extraordinary site for artists to have the opportunity to make art, and for the students and staff to encounter the transformative potential of art. Dis-assembly celebrated the history and achievements of the school with a series of ambitious residencies. Artists were invited to visit the school and propose a way in which they could work with, and alongside, the students and staff to produce artwork. Like many inner-city schools, NWCS had students from diverse national backgrounds (there were 73 different first languages spoken by the students there). The head teacher, Janet Morrison, described the school as ‘benefiting from a high percentage of refugee students, leading to an incredibly politicised and socially aware culture within the school’. Each artist had a different mode of engagement with the school; some worked as facilitators, focusing on the students and their creativity, or acted as collaborators, producing work that could not have been made without the students’ participation; others made work using the school’s situation as core material. Each invested the enormous amount of time essential to developing models of working that resist being formulaic and prescriptive.

Faisal Abd’Allah worked closely with the students as a collaborator and facilitator. As an artist in residence in 2005–6, he attended school for two days a week, establishing a close working relationship with the staff and students. The photographic work he produced is a testament to the time he invested in building relationships with the students. His project empowered the students to articulate their situation in relation to the school’s closure and wider political issues. Thinking and talking about

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5. At the same time, the new convergence of the academy and the gallery may be helpful here. See, for example, A.C.A.D.E.M.Y and ‘Summit’, both initiatives of the Department of Visual Culture at Goldsmiths, London: A.C.A.D.E.M.Y in collaboration with Kunstverein Hamburg and the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven; and ‘Summit’ in collaboration with the Witte de Witte in Rotterdam. The Städelische Schule in Frankfurt and its relationship to Portikus is also an interesting solution.

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making images inevitably raised issues of identity and politics and these discussions were as important to the project as the resulting images.

In 1992, Christian Boltanski operated as the school's photographer, photographing the entire intake of students that year and exhibiting the resulting 144 photographs in the school and, across the road, in the Lisson Gallery. The photographs were sold to students at cost price whereas through the gallery they were sold as artworks. For Boltanski, the work will only be completed by a second phase, which he has begun for Dis-assembly in collaboration with Abdu’Allah. Each of the original 144 students is being traced and re-photographed. While still incomplete, the new series was shown opposite the original series in the Serpentine Gallery exhibition. When completed, the project will stand as a memorial to the school community over the years.

By contrast, Runa Islam used interviews with students to make a 16mm film. Working with writers Georgia Fitch and Laurence Coriat to develop a script in a series of workshops, she spent two weeks on site shooting a film with the students as actors. The film drew upon the specificities of NWCS and, through its assembling and layering of the students’ experiences of growing up within an inner-city school, evoked aspects of contemporary cultural life.

Together, the three strands of Disassembly allowed artists, students and staff to articulate their experiences and lived realities through a series of artworks. For everyone, the project offered a way of testing the possibility of producing art in and through a period of programmed engagement with the world. Subsequently, the relationships established here formed the basis of a second long-term project, called Edgware Road, which involves a series of artists’ residencies at a new research centre in Edgware Road, London, due to end in 2010.

Hearing Voices, Seeing Things was a series of artists’ residencies that resulted in an exhibition and event at the Serpentine Gallery in 2006. The project began as a series of conversations, firstly with Jacqueline Ede, Lead Occupational Therapist for Arts and Rehab at North-East London Mental Health Trust (NELMHT). Her desire for an engagement with the gallery was matched by that of the Serpentine to create opportunities for artists to challenge conventional ideas about the places in which art can be seen and by whom. Following a year of visits to the gallery by Ede, which established the basis for a more sustained residency, the potential of the project became clear and it was apparent that there was a commitment and desire on the part of NELMHT to make such a resi-

dency possible. Artists Bob and Roberta Smith and Jessica Voorsanger were invited by the Serpentine to be artists-in-residence at NELMHT and together they founded The Leytonstone Centre of Contemporary Art (LCCA), which was, in fact, a garden shed. Bob and Jessica decided to invite more artists to participate and the LCCA Outreach Group (LOG) was formed.

Meetings and conversations were at the heart of the project and work was produced through these exchanges. The immediacy and intimacy, as well as conviviality of these sites of production, informed the resulting work, which asked secondary audiences (those who were not directly involved) to question their preconceptions about mental health and the stigmas associated with it. The normality and everyday nature of mental well-being resonated through the work, while the humility and humour that pervaded the project allowed experiences to be articulated with clarity. This is where the artists played a crucial role — not as therapists but as artists equipped with a vocabulary and language that could articulate the most fragile of realities. For some individuals, the barriers to communication were difficult to negotiate; memory dictates the way we define ourselves and how we negotiate the world. Working with people experiencing memory loss in the Petersfield Dementia Centre in Hampshire, Bob and Roberta Smith created signposts reminding us of who we are, where we are and what we need to remember to do in Reminder. Victor Mount worked with the Hearing Voices group, consisting of members who experience a polyphony of voices in auditory hallucination. For the artist, the challenge here was that of translating and making work from the experience of not hearing voices yet being part of this group.

Two of the groups involved young people. Brookside School is an adolescent unit which aims to provide a safe and therapeutic environment for young people. Karen Densham worked as artist-in-residence there, inviting the young people to create and then destroy ceramics. This legitimisation of a violent and destructive act was important for this particular group because they are so rarely trusted to destroy something. Young carers worked with artist Andy Lawson in their free time to create work that looked at their world outside of everyday responsibilities. The

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6. Ironically, in an early conversation, Bob indicated that the ‘real’ Roberta Smith was an art therapist.
images they created revealed beauty in the tiny details of their everyday environment.

The therapeutic role of art is an unavoidable and challenging subject for artists working in a Mental Health Trust. When art meets mental health, everything is possible and impossible at once. The rupture of everyday normality and the juxtaposition of two environments led to volatile and exciting possibilities. The question of who or what is ‘normal’ and what mental health might mean became key concerns. The artists were tasked with being artists, rather than therapists, and the therapists provided clinical and therapeutic support. On a fundamental level, the project entailed a meeting of people and was seen as an opportunity for everyone involved. The artists, health professionals and individual participants discovered what can be achieved by working together. The legacy of the project is an ongoing arts programme which is now established as part of the work of the Trust.

Whilst it is possible to commission artists and to create projects in which extraordinary learning can be produced, it is perhaps harder to find the time and institutional space to look critically at what is produced and to discuss the value of the work. This is necessarily a slow process within institutions. But in my view, the solution lies somewhere between the academy and the gallery, and we should continue to develop strategies to ensure that we can oscillate and operate with stealth across both and smuggle knowledge between the two.
The Paraeducation Department began as a way to use a platform provided by two institutions, Witte de With[1] and TENT,[2] in the form of an exhibition, Tracer[3] (2004). To celebrate TENT’s five year anniversary, six curators were invited to seek out the city of Rotterdam, to check its cultural pulse so to speak, and to convey these stats back through an exhibition or project that would also mark the first collaboration between the two institutions. We started faithfully following the remit we had been given: the word that resonated for us was ‘collaboration’.

In many ways, The Paraeducation Department performed a certain resistance in relation to how the institutions wanted us to participate in their exhibition as ‘artist’ and ‘curator’. We refused to engage aesthetically in the exhibition, and took on instead an experimental and ethical stance with respect to how we would restructure individualised ‘output’ as collective ‘input’ during the course of the project. This was a direct response to the overwhelmingly conservative agenda set out nationally in the Netherlands through the Cultuurnota[4] and the closure of spaces engaged with what might be understood as research-driven non-aesthetic processes.

From the outset, we were concerned not to replicate the rhetoric of participation and democracy as it is played out through many art installations, but instead to explicitly acknowledge that all invitations imply a set of exclusions and inclusions which affect how participation is understood and who feels inclined (empowered) to take part. Finding the works of Ivan Illich and Noam Chomsky led us to think about how we understood participation as a set of localised situations and non-localised involvements. Edward Said provided invaluable terms for negotiating this practice within institutional time/space. We could mark a particular moment in the Netherlands as being representative of certain circumstances involving space, real estate, power, money, etc. and Said’s work on audiences and the circulation of information allowed us to strategise a social praxis and to propose this process as an alternative mode of representation.

An appropriate response to any invitation to participate in another’s project might simply be: Why this invitation? Why now? The Paraeducation Department was set up in acute awareness of a present context, one that revealed real power (to echo Said: Who asks? For whom is the asking being done? In what circumstances?). We choose to participate by seeking out others to join us, to experiment with us, by activating a response as opposed to responding reactively.

In our conversations while developing the project, we discovered that, in this context, education is perceived in myriad ways: as a space of learning; a process of discussion; a means of instruction; even as indoctrination. It frequently operates as a process that relies upon a hierarchical imparting of knowledge from the knowledgeable to the unknowing. What seems overt, and constantly problematic, is how education connotes very particular power relations. We wanted to explore why and how models of schooling (the academy) are interesting for artists and to explore this potential for ourselves.

The experience and exploration of education is, of course, politically loaded, in some cases explicitly so. Here, proposing educational models suggests not only knowledge exchange and development, but also the notion of invested responsibility in, and critical reflection on, the contemporary and the local. Another important political aspect of this work is its communal nature (both formally and informally), which, in turn, calls into question the assumptions of a singular artistic or curatorial authorship and suggests collectivity as an example of empowerment as well as one of exploration. It was this aspect that appealed to us in forming the Paraeducation Department. However, the generation of autonomous, informal, uncontrolled and shared production, which acts against the demands of the art market and other professional expectations, is particularly complex to maintain and manage within an art space. Our project specifically attempted to look at these aspects, to think through what the minimum requirements to maintain such a space, or activity, within an active contemporary art institution would be, in the face of local and broader demands. We asked ourselves how we could support and expand on such developments beyond normative models, especially in

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1. Witte de With was established in 1990 as a centre for contemporary art with the mission of introducing contemporary art and theory in the context of the city of Rotterdam as well as the Netherlands as a whole. See [http://www.wdwnl.nl/]
2. TENT is an exhibition space in Rotterdam, which offers a programme of visual arts focused on the significance of location and context. See [http://www.tentrotterdam.nl/]
4. The Raad voor Cultuur (Council for Culture) is a legal body of the state that advises the government on cultural policy in general. Every four years the Council advises the government on the allocation of funds for cultural institutes through a Netherlands Cultural Policy Document or Cultuurnota. In 2003, the Raad voor Cultuur presented the Dutch government recommendations for the cultural policy agenda in the years 2005 to 2008 which subsequently became the subject of controversy when the new category of ‘supporting’ as opposed to ‘producing’ bodies was introduced as a means of hierarchically organising eligibility for funding: ‘supporting’ bodies were seen as less eligible than ‘producing’ ones. See [http://www.garyschwartzarthistorian.nl/schwartzlist/?id=60].
the light of much external pressure not to, because they simply don’t conform to traditional, visible ‘image-commodity-culture’.

This notion of participation became interesting for us to consider as a space to occupy or to develop (when thinking about the artistic community) from within an institutional setting like Witte de With or TENT. It suggested a dynamic that would differ from the hierarchical distribution of information outwards to the community associated with the programmed exhibition activity. Importantly, ‘community’ here does not denote a preordained, identifiable set; rather, it is initiated at the moment of being together and then disperses. We wondered what it would be like to initiate a kind of ‘paraeducation’ space, which would create the possibility of information and specialisation, with knowledge and skills being brought in at the local level. This would not only augment and extrapolate from the programme itself but also develop its own knowledge. It proposed a multi-directional dialogue, with various types of communities or audiences which might contribute their own knowledge. Who would that be? What would that make the art institution into? What kind of function would, in effect, develop for the art institution within the community? What would the acceptance of this information and its incorporation into programming say about artistic and curatorial authorship? It also asked, very simply, what are the ethics of practising locally as an artist? The discussion developed by Irit Rogoff about participation and community ? What would the acceptance of this information and its incorporation into programming say about artistic and curatorial authorship? It also asked, very simply, what are the ethics of practising locally as an artist? The discussion developed by Irit Rogoff about participation and collective practice is particularly interesting in this context:

Collectivity is something that takes place as we arbitrarily gather to take part in different forms of cultural activity such as looking at art. If we countenance that beyond all the roles that are allotted to us in culture – roles such as those of being viewers, listeners or audience members in one capacity or another – there are other emergent possibilities for the exchange of shared perspectives or insights or subjectivities – we allow for some form of emergent collectivity. Furthermore that performative collectivity, one that is produced in the very act of being together in the same space and compelled by similar edicts, might just alert us to a form of mutuality which cannot be recognized in the normative modes of shared beliefs, interests or kinship. To speak of collectivities is to de-nativize community, to argue it away from the numerous essential roots of place and race and kinship structures that have for so long been the glue that has held it together.5

If we choose to understand, and indeed nurture, collectivity as being formative of non-essentialising communities, then the shared site of an art space has extraordinary potential to produce affinities which might resonate locally, tapping into common interests and patterns of communication, shared histories and beliefs.

Marius Babias defined the issues of educational policies and knowledge production ‘as socio-politically explosive’ when discussing the project developed to explore these very questions at Campus (2002).6 He might be right. Writing with Florian Waldvogel in the introduction to the International Summer Academy in Frankfurt (2004), he explained the political motivation behind their idea of education, placing it firmly in the socio-political realm: ‘knowledge has always been closely associated with conventions of power, institutions, pedagogy, ethics, and politics. Consequentially modes of passing knowledge have to be the central theme for any reflective practice’.7 It is this potential that artists and curators are actively pursuing — something Babias and Waldvogel describe as political because it is ‘open knowledge production, contrary to the attempts of information service providers and multimedia-monopolists, who are eager for the privatisation of information, knowledge, culture, and training’.8 Where is the curatorial role within this equation? Surely one would hope it is in creating space and actively positioning oneself within the openness of such a process. This is not an easy demand to fulfil especially when a clearly demarcated and self-authored curatorial space makes for better career prospects and higher visibility.

At this point, we find ourselves looking at the ideas and structures particular to the project in Rotterdam. The reading group still meets, sometimes in Amsterdam where half its members live, sometimes to discuss each other’s work instead of a text. The Paraeducation Room continued in the joint custody of Witte de With and TENT. for about eight weeks after the exhibition, Tracer, ended. During that time, several

8. Ibid.
groups working in Rotterdam organised projects using the room. Now
the institutions have made a decision to change the room back to the way
it was, to remove Paraeducation in name, and in function. While we read
this closure as a loss, it interests us that other institutions in other cities
in the Netherlands have proposed setting up spaces for paraeducation.

‘PLEASE TEACH ME…’:
RAINER GANAHL AND THE
POLITICS OF LEARNING

William Kaizen
William Kaizen

I tell you — we have to start all over again from the beginning and assume that language is first and foremost a system of gestures. Animals after all have only gestures and tones of voice — and words were invented later. Much later. And after that they invented schoolmasters.¹

Gregory Bateson

Vulgar People

Two phrases caption a photograph² by Rainer Ganahl: in the upper left corner, ‘Aux yeux du peuple’ and, in the lower right corner, ‘In the eyes of the people’. The image is part of Ganahl’s ‘Basic Languages’ series which explores the connections between places and the local vernaculars spoken there. The series features snapshots taken while he studied the local languages, layered with texts taken from the books that he used to study them. These particular phrases come from a textbook designed for French-speaking Québécois students to learn English, but, given that he is Austrian and a native German speaker, which text translates the other is unclear. The two texts reinforce this ambiguity, both speaking languages of colonisation, speaking for two countries in which democracy, as the politics of a sovereign people, emerged almost simultaneously at the end of the eighteenth century. The image, to which they are attached, is of a makeshift signboard, like those used since antiquity to post messages in the commons. It is the modern equivalent of the site at which the social intersects with the linguistic; where law, news and other forms of community interest are fixed and held in common. Here, this site is decrepit and forlorn. The foundation of democracy in the public square as a place for contract and disagreement has been displaced. As the automobiles in the image suggest, democracy has been driven elsewhere by new forms of mobility and connected to new types of public and private space.

With the modern return to democracy in Europe, ‘the people’ were constituted as sovereign by holding a fundamental contradiction in suspension: that these people were sanctioned by universal human rights, on the one hand, and rival national identities on the other. The photograph shows, attached to the post, two identical flyers, reading, ‘La répression est un cauchemar. Il faut se réveiller!’ (Repression is a nightmare. Wake up!) Signed by the COBP, or the Collective Opposed to Police Brutality, this is a message against state power, as that which allows a people to cohere and keeps them in check. Just visible in the photograph, scrawled between the two flyers, is another, wilder text. Written in marker, directly on the post, are the words ‘Les Italiens contrôlent le Québec’: ‘Italians’ constituting a further threat to the already divided French-English community of Quebec. Here is yet another reversal of the consolidation of the people: nationalism as something that all communities seem to share as part of the ‘basic’ local language, where the vulgar ties that bind people together come undone through xenophobia and paranoia.

Contained within this image, in the connections that it puts on display among community, language and the common, is a kind of vulgar politics that informs all of Ganahl’s work. Vulgar politics works on the level of the sociolinguistic. It is a politics in which disagreement takes place between what is given in common in the constitution of a people, from what can be said to the spaces in which saying takes place and thus where selves and communities cohere. Vulgarity is the means by which doxa is both reproduced and undone. It is the vulgate in general, the vernacular in the broadest sense, as the partitioning of sense in general (both sensation and meaning) that shapes the sensual, sayable, and knowable for a community. There is the usual vulgarity, the kind that reproduces clichés and prejudices, and there is vulgar politics, which is political in the sense described by Jacques Rancière:

Politics [...] is that activity which turns on equality as its principle. And the principle of equality is transformed by the distribution of community shares as defined by a quandary: when is there and when is there not equality in things between who and who else? What are these “things” and who are these whos? How does equality come to consist of equality and inequality?³

Vulgar politics is a politics that raises these questions of equality, not from the position of a pre-given assumption of universal human rights but from a position that questions the meaning of a given discourse and the limits of the community where it takes place. It is an attempt to

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². For this image see [http://www.artandeducation.net/papers/view/1].
forge a new vernacular from the words given to the old, to shift the very foundations of what constitutes a people. Rancière takes the claim of modern democracy for the inclusion of all as based largely in a ‘regime of opinion’,[4] a consensus that eliminates from a given community any remainder. Against this, Rancière claims that politics stages the demand by the part with no part for its share of equality within the common. How this stage might be constructed and what might take place there, how police logic might meet egalitarian logic, ‘is never setup in advance’. [5]

Ganahl’s exploration of the vulgar undertakes this political doubling of reality. It both stages the institutions that constitute possibilities for knowledge in all their given vulgarity and suggests new possibilities for knowledge by building alternative means for teaching, learning and dialogue both inside and outside given ‘regimes of opinion’. The question of what is common, of how vulgarity is framed and what possibilities exist for producing new forms of sociolinguistic being in common, is posed on another level to that of universal rights or universal consumption — one more vulgar.

**Learning Communities**

In 1993, while attending his own exhibition at the Person’s Weekend Museum in Tokyo, Ganahl held what became the first of his ‘Readings’ series. It was an impromptu event that would change the direction of his work, as it was here that he produced his first ‘Library’. Entitled ‘A Portable (Not so Ideal) Imported Library or How to Reinvent the Coffee Table, 25 Books for Instant Use (Japanese version)’, it consisted of a selection of books sitting on a shelf, all of which swapped the coffee-table art book for critical theory. Available for the perusal of visitors to the gallery were books such as Henry Lewis Gates Jr.’s *Signifying Monkey*, Dan Graham’s *Rock My Religion*, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s *Outside in the Teaching Machine*, Antonio Gramsci’s *Prison Notebooks* and Edward W. Said’s *The World, the Text, and the Critic*.

Although realising that his role now might begin to ‘parody the cultural arrogance of the missionary’, [6] Ganahl meant the Library to be a small offering to facilitate cultural exchange and the kind of ‘instant use’ of textbooks that enabled his own study of Japanese culture. He went to the gallery on Saturdays and read some of his Library books with whoever chose to join him. Following this gesture toward active exchange, Ganahl’s work switched to a more subtle examination of the processes by which knowledge might be acquired and of the politics of learning in general. He moved from his earlier concern with the spaces constructed by tele-technologies and globalising media to a more developed focus on how these spaces are constrained by local conditions and how particular communities arise at the intersection of the global and local, in what he called the ‘glocal’.[7]

One of the texts from the Library read by Ganahl and his visitors was a chapter entitled ‘Travelling Theory’ from Said’s book *The World, the Text, and the Critic*. In it Said discusses two problems: (1) the reception of ideas over time and place, and (2) the function of the particular ideas grouped under the rubric of ‘critique’. [8] Said brings these problems together by tracing the reception of critical theory through successive generations, each of which resumes the incomplete project of critical theory according to its particular social circumstances.

For Ganahl, this text was an opportunity to take up critical theory in his own way, asking himself and his co-readers how it might be possible to produce critical artwork at a moment in the 1990s when the art world began to turn away from politics. [9] Ganahl answered this through the various forms his work would go on to take as it presented studying, learning, and teaching as artworks.

Upon returning to the United States from Tokyo, Ganahl attended a seminar taught by Said at Columbia University on representations of intellectuals. Said was concerned with the fate of the public intellectual and whether, through the uptake of critical theory, it was possible to ‘speak truth to power’. [10] In the series of published lectures upon which the seminar was based, Said raised the questions: ‘How does one speak the truth? What truth? For whom and where?’[11]

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4. Ibid. p.102.
5. Ibid. p.32.
7. He coined the term in a wall painting entitled ‘Glocal Language — A Portable Library’, 1999, which he designed for the Austrian Pavilion at the Venice Biennale.
9. The highly politicised 1993 Whitney Biennial marked this moment of transition, just before the return to beauty and its discourses widely took hold.
11. Ibid. p.88.
Despite Said’s dismissal of Foucault, these questions correspond with Foucault’s recognition that even where power is at its most disciplinary, such as in the academy, resistant counter discourses emerge, which speak against the institutions. Foucault proposes the ‘specific intellectual’ as one who produces a local counter-discourse, always from the inside, always with others, and always working against the power relations in which he or she is directly implicated, without recourse to some outside position,\(^\text{12}\)

Similarly, Nancy describes how selves ‘compear’ or appear together and in communication with particular communities, neither preceding the other.\(^\text{13}\) While these selves may develop the vulgarity of common sense, they can also produce counter-discourses and new forms of knowledge and so point the way toward new types of community. It is more in the spirit of Foucault and Nancy than of Said that Ganahl builds provisional learning communities.

His first Readings made Ganahl aware of how power circulates through a learning community. There were several problems involved with the Readings and, as Ganahl and his readers discovered (and I have been one of these readers on several occasions), discourse is constantly being rebuilt from the ground up, from every word chosen and each act of communication; mastery is never finished, resistances are unavoidable. Crucially, Ganahl does intellectual work together with his co-readers, with the text acting as a catalyst for group enquiry — an object to be worked through a learning community. There were several problems involved in the reading, but Ganahl decided to make his own representations of Said as an intellectual at work. As he sat at the table, reading along with the other students, he realised that photographs of this event would be a document of academia and of the production of knowledge from the inside. He could produce his own version of the very types of representation that Said was addressing.

Ganahl held a Reading as part of the first Summit of Intervenionist Art (SoIA), staged in opposition to the G8 Summit at Lake Geneva, Evian, France (2–3 June 2003). The SoIA took place on the other side of the lake, in Switzerland, at an art space called the Usine, a converted factory located in a relatively marginal area just outside downtown Geneva. During the Summit, the Usine was a hub for anti-G8 activism.

Ganahl contributed a Reading to the SoIA, of Frantz Fanon’s ‘Concerning Violence’, from The Wretched of the Earth, which took place outside on the street in front of the Usine.\(^\text{14}\) This Reading crystallised the potential of such works to act as counter discourse, in this case producing a learning community whose location applied directly to the theory being read. The Reading was held for two days, with a core of several readers and various passersby who joined and left, depending upon their interest.

Fanon’s text describes the violent struggle for freedom undertaken by the Algerians as they fought against French colonial oppression. To read Fanon’s analysis of colonial and postcolonial violence in a nonviolent way, in the midst of an event during which violent protests against capitalism were all around was to take a discourse originally produced as a counter discourse against violence and to receive it again in a new form, in an act of learning as resistance. The G8 Reading enacted vulgar politics by constructing a people, no matter how small, a learning community in the midst of mechanisms of domination that the Reading both reflected and staged anew.

Rhetorical Photography

While attending Said’s seminar on representations of the intellectual, Ganahl decided to make his own representations of Said as an intellectual at work. As he sat at the table, reading along with the other students, he realised that photographs of this event would be a document of academia and of the production of knowledge from the inside. He could produce his own version of the very types of representation that Said was addressing.

Returning to Said’s next seminar, ‘Last Works/Late Style’, Ganahl began producing photographic images that he would call his ‘S/L’ (Seminar/Lecture) series.\(^\text{15}\) S/L borrows its name not from Said but from the slash in the title of Roland Barthes’s book S/Z.\(^\text{16}\) As in S/Z, the slash indicates a gap in signification, but while S/Z symmetrically inverts

13. This is an ontological rather than an anthropological reading of community, Jean-Luc Nancy, The Inoperative Community; Peter Connor et al. (trans.) University of Minnesota Press. 1991. pp. 28–29.
15. There is an added poignancy to these images of Said, because it was one of the last seminars he would teach at Columbia after being diagnosed with leukaemia. It was Said’s own ‘last work/late style’. Said was the first of Ganahl’s subjects to die, the images becoming as much memorial as monuments with the passage of time.
the terms on either side of this divide, the balance of power in Ganahl’s images is lopsided. S/L brings together the event of learning as a whole, presenting a photographic archive of places of learning and the reception of critical theory, showing bodies in the midst of learning transmission. For the most part, S/L shows the speaker (or speakers) and listeners in separate images. Where listeners appear with the speaker in later images, they are usually seen from behind, only partially visible. Each side of the knowledge exchange is represented, but separated into individual frames, hung side by side but at a slight remove and so mirroring the original educational context that keeps teachers and students at arm’s length, even when bringing them together at a seminar table.

In taking these photographs, Ganahl does not speak from the position of schoolmaster. He depicts himself as a member of the audience, as a listener. The S/L images, as with his work in general, may seem superficially touristic in as much as they are mementoes in what he calls his ‘personal historiography’, but they are not biography per se. Rather, they recognise that any politics of representation begins at home, with one’s own vernacular and one’s local vulgarity. Like photographers Martha Rosler and Allan Sekula before him, Ganahl acknowledges that the self is not given but produced through the vulgarity of the various institutions that shape what can be said, where to look, and what is knowable. Like Sekula’s ‘School is a Factory’ in particular, S/L is especially sensitive to the problem of the immanence of the photographer to that which is photographed.

In S/L, as in his other work, Ganahl represents this institutionalisation as the ‘compearance’ of self and social structure, turning what would otherwise be only a series of portraits of intellectuals into an examination of an intellectual *habitus* and his own position within it. Although these are personal images, he follows the most rigorous formal framing conditions to catalogue a series of views of the educational divide between speakers and listeners, taken from the standpoint of the listener, in order to suggest the need for a repartitioning of this system.

What is missing from this catalogue is the speech that has gathered together these learning communities. Ganahl has silenced the voice of the master. In doing so, he splits this community down the middle, making the gap between speaker and listeners seem unbridgeable. Mastery, or better ‘schoolmastery’, is acknowledged by putting this act of educational speaking on display through photography’s silence, and thereby framing the institutional vulgarity of university-level education and how it takes place.

Although, in S/L, Ganahl shows that there is pleasure and often humour to be found in listening to those who know, he also shows that there is something horribly funny or just plain vulgar in both the symbolic slash between student and lecturer and the physical separation between the frames of the images.

**Ignorant Mastery**

The vulgar-as-vernacular is the basis of Ganahl’s notion of community and power: that we are born into a mother tongue and that it speaks for us as we speak through it. This sensitivity to language — to how it acts to frame possibilities for the self and for knowledge and power — was born from Ganahl’s own experience when he emigrated from Vorarlberg. Since then his motto has been ‘keep moving away from your mother tongue’. But even this movement away from the homely was complicated by the exigencies of the glocal.

Ganahl tells an anecdote that summarises his life’s work as a process of finding new vernaculars, both purposely and inevitably. Upon returning to Vorarlberg after some time away, he found that the dialect he had spoken while growing up was changing among the ‘ethnically’ Austrian people in the area. Besides himself, only secondand third-generation *Gästarbeiter* still spoke with the old, local accent. He had not, it seemed, moved as far away from his mother tongue as the citizens with whom he had been raised. The only other people speaking what had been his mother tongue were those who would have been radically other when he

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19. The problem of language and the common is pseudo-linguistic as well, based on emotional connection and nonverbal communication as much as linguistic communication.

was growing up. For Ganahl, the moral of this story is that the very weave of the linguistic fabric is embedded in mobile power relations, which contain both the homely and the uncanny. It demonstrates how languages travel and evolve as much as the ideas they shape, and that possibilities of identification are bound up together with those of dis-identification. In the age of the glocal, critical theory and the analysis of power return in the form that Ganahl calls ‘travelling linguistics’ in recognition of how vernaculars are produced and inevitably move around. Resistance is only possible in the recognition of this movement, in exploring its past and trying to influence its future while new discourses and resistances emerge.

Ganahl’s Readings are one means of exploring the production of vernaculars. They destabilise the existing systems of knowledge production by holding educational events outside traditional learning institutions, staging education in a dialogical way rather than through the passage of information from one who knows to those who are ignorant. He has found further ways of doing this in his other series, such as his Studies. Like the Libraries, Readings, and S/L, they also began in 1993 in Japan. While trying to learn Japanese, he decided to display his kanji study grids, a more personal update of the minimalist grids made by Dan Graham and Carl Andre in their early poetry works. Following this, he would display the sheets he wrote while learning Greek, Italian, Russian, Korean, Chinese and, most recently, Arabic. Ganahl’s attempt to acquire Japanese became the foundation for further Studies in other languages. As he saw it, those studies were a transformation of the paradigm of the ready-made into what he called the “trying-hard”.

In the Studies, the private practice of learning is made public. He displays the trying-hard of autodidacticism as a self-portrait of the artist as a learning machine, repeating catchphrases from language text books and writing them down on paper and this in his memory. Ganahl presents the difficulty of the production of the self through language, and shows himself returning to a state of linguistic inferiority in which he no longer has mastery over his words and his place in the world.

To paraphrase Jacques Lacan, language is that which, in being taken up, takes up the self as a subject. It is what allows the self to produce itself by giving it access to a reality (‘the real’) and so to others. In putting this process on display, Ganahl leads viewers to consider their own place in relation to the reality of their mother tongue. His Studies have become a kind of mania as he repeatedly stages the attempt to become a linguistic other. This linguistic excess is embodied in stacks of videotapes of himself studying various languages, hundreds of hours placed on top of, and next to, each other, replacing Warhol’s consumer-self with his own studying-self. As with much early video art, Ganahl uses the camera as a means of framing the decentring effects of his language studies while he conducts changes on his self.

The Study videotapes embody Ganahl’s interest in Bildung, the German word for education, which has, as he says, ‘a specific ideological touch’. It is an ideology of general education promoted in order to transcend the specialised skills of the trades combined with a national system of learning that was presumed to be universal. As such, Bildung encapsulates the ideological paradox, whereby the people have both universal ideals and a national identity. It is the kind of educational thinking that leads to both global educational standards, on the one hand, and nationalist racism based on cultural superiority on the other. Bildung was encapsulated artistically in Bildungsroman, like Charles Dickens’ Great Expectations, which transformed the picaresque into a morality play in which a young man (and occasionally a young woman) learned his (or her) place in the world. In the subgenre known as the Kunstlerroman, the young artist learned his or her place as well. In yet another subgenre — the Erziehungsroman — the focus was specifically on the educational processes in which this self-knowledge took place. Ganahl’s work can be taken as a kind of combination of these subgenres: as an artist’s-education-novel without end. If the supposition of the Bildungsroman is that the young hero finally reaches maturity through education, in Ganahl’s work maturity is always to come, and learning is an unfinished process. Having taken the lessons of Bildung to heart in making education his life’s work, he then turns Bildung against its nationalist origins towards a means of vernacular learning.

In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault addresses the question of who speaks and who does not in the halls of learning. Foucault describes education as a matter of making students docile, of training bodies to obey rules of behaviour that allow them to be ranked and classed in preparation for a future role in civil and industrial society. Written in dialogue with Foucault, Rancière’s book, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, recovered the story of the nineteenth century French educational reformer, Joseph Jacotot. Jacotot had developed a theory of universal teaching designed to operate against the established limits of intellectual inequality, inverting the drive toward universal education that was sweeping the post-revolutionary Western world.\(^2\) Whereas universal education had proposed that every child should become a student and so learn the national rhetoric, universal teaching proposed that every parent, no matter how ‘ignorant’, could become a teacher and that the student could learn whatever she or he wished. Jacotot developed a system whereby parents could teach children to read even when they themselves did not know how. His pedagogy was based on a principle of the radical equality of intelligences. School was not necessary and neither was the schoolmaster; all that was needed was the innate ability to communicate with another and the desire to learn. What was being learnt was of less importance than the fact that learning was taking place.

The key difference between Foucault’s position on counter discourse and the way this is received by Rancière hinges on the issue of mastery. Whereas Foucault says, ‘nothing is more foreign to me than the idea of a “master” who imposes his own law’, Rancière acknowledges that there are schoolmasters on one side of the *Bildung* slash (or in any institution) and those who are ignorant on the other.\(^3\) He does not deny that these roles are systematic and institutional, but he accepts that mechanisms of power depend on masters and non-masters, and so is able to locate the role of the police in maintaining politics-as-usual. Rancière makes Jacotot’s pedagogical theory travel and live again as a system for undoing the sociolinguistic politics-as-usual of education, the mechanisms of which differentiate between those who know and those who do not (yet) know.

Ganahl’s work to date has remarkable resonance with Jacotot’s method of producing a counter-discourse on *Bildung*. Without knowing

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27. Here, because of its resonance with Ganahl’s work, is the whole quote by Foucault, made in response to the critiques of his account of power as monolithic. Note that, unlike Rancière, he avoids the problem of mastery. “When I study the mechanisms of power, I try to analyze their specificity: nothing is more foreign to me than the idea of a ‘master’ who imposes his own law. Rather than indicating the presence of a ‘master’, I worry about comprehending the effective mechanisms of domination; and I do it so that those who are inserted in certain relations of power, who are implicated in them, might escape through their actions of resistance and rebellion, might transform them in order not to be subjugated any longer. And if I don’t ever say what must be done, it isn’t because I believe that there’s nothing to be done; on the contrary, it is because I think that there are a thousand things to do, to invent, to forge, on the part of those who, recognizing the relations of power in which they’re implicated, have decided to resist or escape them. From this point of view all of my investigations rest on a postulate of absolute optimism. I do not conduct my analyses in order to say: this is how things are, look how trapped you are, I say certain things only to the extent which I see them as capable of permitting the transformation of reality.” Michel Foucault, *Remarks on Marx*. Semiotext(e). 1991. pp. 173–74.

concentration camp, with particular focus on the connection between language and community in the legacy of the Holocaust. A local version of German, called Plattdeutsch or Low German, had been spoken in the region before 1945. Because of the various internal migrations that marked post-war Germany, Plattdeutsch has now largely disappeared, replaced by High German. In a dialogue with the local ethnologist, Dagmar Falazik, Ganahl discusses the relation between competing vernaculars in given societies, where one particular vernacular comes to dominate, marginalising others. However, the desire to preserve a minority language becomes less clear in the case of Plattdeutsch, as revealed in further interviews. In one, Friedrich Tödter, who was a German fighter pilot during the war, questions how many Jews died in the Holocaust and claims that no one from Neuenkirchen, where he had been mayor, knew that Bergen-Belsen was an extermination camp during the war. He defends his doubts about Jewish deaths by recourse to his own, local experience, saying that he knew of only a few Jewish families living in the area, all of whom escaped or were deported and so avoided the camps. Here a minor vernacular acts as a place for radical inequality to fester, demonstrating that one cannot value minority *tout court*, but must, as Ganahl does, explore the ways in which all vernaculars, major or minor, accumulate and disseminate knowledge.

In *Language of Emigration*, Ganahl interviews Holocaust survivors and forced emigrants living in the United States. One interviewee, Clara Ringel, asks to speak in English because, while she still speaks German, she has almost entirely left its use behind. Ringel had been deported from Germany to the Lodz ghetto, and then was briefly in Auschwitz before being sent to Bergen-Belsen. After her original relocation, she quickly learned Polish in order to survive. Her language studies, from German to Polish, were imposed upon her by necessity. Her acts of linguistic mastery were made under the duress of forced migration and the horrors of the ghettos and camps. For Ringel, language mastery was a supplement to war.

In his most recent Dialog work, Ganahl has begun to produce collaborative objects with people from Afghanistan and Iraq, engaging vernacular conflict in the midst of the current ‘war on terrorism’. For the Afghan Dialogs, Ganahl makes printouts of logos he has photographed from television news programmes, which he sends to Afghanistan to be embroidered. He instructs the embroiderers to add whatever commentary they wish to texts such as ‘Latest Developments’, ‘Most Wanted Terrorist’, and ‘America Strikes Back’. In response to ‘America Strikes Back’, an anonymous embroiderer wrote (according to Ganahl’s translation): ‘If America is hurting others, it should first find out how much of this pain it can take herself’. The response in another Afghan Dialog is more sanguine. Given the question ‘Next Target?’ the embroiderer responded, ‘G8 members should make their decisions wisely’. Here, two vernaculars rub shoulders and the other returns in an act of counter-discourse as translation.

A similar process has taken place in Ganahl’s Iraq Dialogs, made together with Iraqi exiles living in Europe and done with collaborative texts on tiles instead of cloth. Both the Afghan and Iraq Dialogs are a welling up of vernacular clash from below. They invert the claims of global culture clash made by Samuel Huntington, favouring instead those who are assigned the role of Islamic other to current U.S. foreign policy. In doing so, these dialogues are perhaps overly optimistic. Nevertheless, a stage is produced for the meeting of Western and Eastern vernaculars, and so make a direct call for the further, more thoughtful production of a community of equals based on forms of vernacular exchange.

The question I have been chasing by the tail throughout this essay is, whether critical theory, in art as well as politics? Has it stopped travelling? One answer is given by Said’s call for the necessity to receive critique in the midst of one’s own personal time and place, as Ganahl does. This is precisely in opposition to claims made today that we are living in an age of the obsolescence of theory. While inherited models of negation may rightly be seen as impoverished, Ganahl’s work demonstrates a positive and constructive strategy whereby critique opens onto new modes of being together. Along with putting vulgarity-as-usual on display, he proposes new stagings of the sociolinguistic in his vulgar politics, performing a repartitioning of common sense that opens onto new possibilities of equality. Ganahl’s work acknowledges the inevitability of power, but also that there is always, as Foucault said, ‘a thousand things to do, to invent, to forge’.

Basic Canadian: Je me souviens / Yours to Discover, Ganahl works again to undo vulgarity-as-usual. Against French, English and iMac, he asks from the back of a postcard, ‘Please, teach me Cree’. This is a gesture toward becoming other that the request to ‘Please, teach me…’ represents. It holds out the promise of mastery by choice and not duress, calling for communities based on more radical notions of sociolinguistics predicated on vernacular equality. The request to ‘Please, teach me…’ offers the hope of a society to come where ‘we, the people’, as any group of people, can keep moving away from our mother tongues and toward a community of equals.

This text is an edited version of ‘Please Teach Me…’:
Rainer Ganahl and the Politics of Learning.
French artist, Daniel Buren, gained prominence as one of the protagonists of what is now commonly known as ‘institutional critique’ — a form of artistic practice that critically questioned and exposed the conditions of production, distribution and reception of art. One of the many subjects of Buren’s vigilant works and writings has been the rise of the curator in the field of exhibition-making and the latter’s increasing profile as an educator of the larger public. Between 1988 and 1995, Buren associated himself with Pontus Hultén, arguably one of the most important curators of the second half of the 20th century, in setting up and running the Institut des Hautes Études en Arts Plastiques, an experimental art school after the model of Black Mountain College in Asheville and the Bauhaus in Weimar.

In the margins of the conference ‘Functions of the Museum: Art, Exhibitions and Audience Today’¹ — the title of which refers to Buren’s famous essay of 1970² — I asked Buren about the edifying vocation of the curator, the didactic impulse of institutionally critical art practice and the distinct challenges of art schooling.


Manifesta 6 into an experimental art school in 2006. I find it curious that the teaching model seems to remain interesting, even glamorous, for curators. Could it be that it grants their work some required legitimisation and credibility?

DB Funnily enough, that’s in a way what reinforced my very first reaction to your question. I think it has always been like that, even if it was not said or supposed to be like that. It is part of the job of a curator. When you select more than two people to make a show, you base that choice upon a specific idea — even if it’s stupid. Then you present this idea publicly and try to share it with other people. This is a priori an extremely didactic enterprise, since it involves the motivation or the ambition to offer people something they don’t know, something they have to learn in order to go further. What else are you doing when you are teaching? If we think of the necessity and meaning of teaching, it is definitely about sharing an experience and that logic is more or less present in the roots of any group exhibition.

WD When Harald Szeemann gave Documenta 5 the subtitle of ‘Bilderwelten’, you didn’t exactly critique him for the fact that he acted like a teacher. In the text ‘Exposition d’une Exposition’, published in the catalogue, you write that he became the master-artist who forced all the artworks into artificial categories and degraded them to postage stamps or mere illustrations of his particular story.

DB At that time, I noticed, albeit completely intuitively, something that was at its best. Many of the things I pinpointed were not yet really negative in that particular exhibition. From that point on, however, they became more and more visible in almost any group exhibition. The paradox is that I took that exhibition and Harald Szeemann as the object of my criticism, while, in fact, he was the best in that genre. What we came to see afterwards were all more or less imitators and pupils of Szeemann, who in fact never did as well as he did. Szeemann was certainly not only close to the sensibility of his time but also, first and foremost, close to the sensibility of his time but also, first and foremost, close to the sensibility of his time and I’m not saying that because, as you know, he started out as an artist himself. But he himself was engaged in a certain creativity, not only in the selection of the people he liked but also — which, to my opinion, is certainly one of the best positions a curator can take — in his taking control of the situation like an orchestra conductor. As a conductor, one occupies a clear position, since what one selects already entails a story in itself. Then it’s only a matter of conducting that thing as best as one can. But Szeemann already was doing more. He was at once advancing a set of categories and establishing within Documenta 5 how not to confuse an abstract painter with a figurative painter when, even at that time, it was already a retrograde phrase. In that respect, Documenta 5 was indeed very didactic. But, at the time, I neither used that term nor spoke about it. It would certainly serve as a good example of the truism that group shows are, by definition, didactic. The curator not only took control of the full exhibition, which is more or less normal since it depends on what you do with this power, but he was also trying to teach a large public about different tendencies in contemporary art, from hyperrealism, through conceptual art, to minimalism and so on. He framed everything so well that there was no way of getting out of this frame. Within a curatorial way of thinking, everything was trapped into a category, and when it was not possible to trap it too well he called it ‘mythologie personelle’.

The things I wrote in 1972, which were then very timely, have become something that everyone can see today. While I remember very well that when I spoke with Szeemann at that time, he told me that ‘your text’ — because I first wrote a text for the catalogue and then later did a full book on the topic, entitled Rebondissements [Reboundings] — was ‘very interesting and I agree with almost everything. But I am just against the fact you took it out on me, because my way of thinking is absolutely different and I am not at all behaving as if I was anything except someone who distributes the work’. But the funny thing is that, fifteen years later, as you know, Harald Szeemann no longer called himself a curator or director or whatever, but auteur d’exposition. So, let’s say I saw something that I think was already in existence. I did not invent anything. I was maybe touched by it more than any other people in the show at that time.

WD In Rebondissements you write about ‘le silence général’ or the ‘universal silence’ that the work met at the time of the exhibition. The silence you regretted, however, was not so much on behalf of the critics and curators, but of your own colleagues, the artists. Thus, not only did you put responsibility onto critics and curators but onto artists as well.

DB Absolutely, although, once again, it was not meant to be antagonistic. I always thought and I still think — since we are speaking about the art world, how it changes, how it moves, etcetera — that we have to realise that, for better or for worse, things are moving because artistic production does something. There are
hundreds of examples of when a production — since it comes from the artist to start with — pushes the institution by force to change itself. The institution is completely flexible, and not so much a monolith which has to be destroyed. No, the institution has to be flexible in order to survive. If not, it cannot even survive. But if artistic production in general, or the general fashion or mood, is, let's say, reactionary, even — for lack of a better word — 'regressive', the institution will be regressive. So, there's never one single person responsible while everyone else is not, but artists certainly have a priority. If the production of an artwork demands — to use a common metaphor — knocking down the walls of the institution, the latter will have to find a way to demolish its walls. Either the institution cannot resist and the artist will win and they will have to destroy the wall, or it resists and the produceur will give in and the institution will be able to keep the walls and so contain a lot of things inside itself. Over the short period of the last thirty or forty years, we witnessed the tendency that artworks either reinforce or question the institution, and subsequently a similar process has happened with the position of curators, critics, collectors and so on.

I'd like to return to your starting remark, that some works might have a pedagogical intention while others don't. I would like to know how you relate to the work of more recent generations of what is commonly called 'institutional critique'. What do you, as one of the widely acknowledged protagonists of institutionally critical art practice, think of those many contemporary artists who, for the nth time and most often in a highly didactic fashion, aim to 'reveal' the practice, think of those many contemporary artists who, for the nth time, aim to 'reveal' the institutional conditions and frameworks once again?

First of all, I would like to point out that usually, today, when people use the term 'institutional critique' — which, as you know, was not used when we, the artists of my generation, were critically relating to institutions, albeit all in a very different way — it is mostly in a critical — i.e. judgemental — fashion. By default almost, it implies a grave judgement on those artists who instigated the critique, as if everything that was done in the late 1960s and 1970s did not change anything in the end. I totally disagree with this implication because, for better or worse, that work did change the institution. Moreover, as I have pointed out already many times, the multiplication of museums, the multiplication of artists and the multiplication of the public has produced a situation that you cannot compare with the one we knew at the end of the 1960s. I am part of a generation that became more or less well known and — I know the word is stupid — 'famous', but never broke through the system into the market. When any earlier kind of avant-garde became successful, it immediately became economically successful as well. None of my generation, apart from one or two exceptions, really broke through. But we really caused a fantastic perturbation in the heads of many artists. And, most curiously, we produced a kind of antagonism with some others. When you look back at what has been written by some people, even very famous artists, it remains rather surprising. I am thinking, for example, of Antoni Tàpies, who argued in a full-page manifesto that we were forever destroying the work of a painter.

Isn't the parallel activity of producing material work and writing texts one of the exceptional qualities of your practice? It forcefully contradicts the romantic idea that an artist only creates and remains silent. Your position has always been that the artist must speak his mind and formulate. So, if you say that your essays are didactic, aren't you degrading them in some way?

You can indeed not dissociate the writings from my work, but it is nevertheless for the public to decide whether the texts are coherent with the work or not, whether the texts are saying something other than the work or not. This is open and I am not going to claim that they are the same. What is theoretical is my physical work itself and not what I try to explain — sometimes didactically — about it by writing.

So it's about a matter of different urgencies then?

As an artist you can have a brilliant idea and write it down in black and white. Maybe, some day, another artist will use it and translate it into a sculpture or a painting. It's only then that this idea will gain some substance. Before that, it will only remain a good,
brilliant idea. It can serve as a reference or as a matter of hope but it has no existence. I am speaking about the art world, of course, and not about philosophy. I am aware that if I now read my own work, for example a text like ‘Mise en Garde’ (Beware) of 1969–70, I see that it is both prospective and didactic. And you know why? Because I was trying to explain something and, by default, I then succumbed to the teaching mode, albeit not to impose but to describe something that did not yet exist. Especially at the beginning, I was trying in a certain way to convince people about the many ideas I was having about my work but which I knew were not yet visible. And, for that reason, I also recognised that, without wanting to sound pretentious, it was impossible for either art critics or art historians to speak about these ideas. I spoke about my work merely in terms of hope. To take an easy example, everything on the notion of context and working in situ, was formulated as a possibility way before I was actually doing it. I knew that it would need at least ten more years of active work to show and convince people about what I was really speaking. But my way of thinking about it was already very strong and precise back then, long before I was making the work itself. I was aware of both the interest and the consequences of working in situ, such as the fragile, the ephemeral, and the unsaleable nature of the work. But I knew that it would take another ten years, which amounted to some 200 or 300 works, in order for people to see whether the aims were coherent or contradictory, whether the works did what the texts promised, and what the impact would be for me and perhaps also for other artists.

I knew from the beginning that I could only go so far, if I was to be able to play inside as well as outside the institution. When I started, I was not immediately invited by an institution, of course, and thus I had to operate outside. I could have remained outside forever — which means a few years and maybe then I would have been obliged to do something else. But when the institution did start to invite me, I kept the same discourse. But then I had this very strong tool in addition which helped me to prove my position and to state it: writing. But such a thing was only possible because some people invited me.

I would now like to relate your understanding of the critical capacity of the artwork to your teaching experience. You have been teaching throughout your whole career, but in a very different fashion than, let’s say, someone like Michael Asher, an artist of your generation who you also know very well. There is somehow a very precise — and sometimes an annoyingly clear — legacy from the teaching of Michael Asher. You can point out quite a few students who work in his fashion, albeit in a sort of slimmed-down version.

Something you can read, you mean? He is indeed much better known as a teacher than I am. He’s not the only one to be a full-time teacher, but he is exceptional in the sense that he devoted all his life to teaching. I think that, for him, there is almost no disconnection between the teaching and his work.

Precisely. And, for that reason, Asher’s work somehow troubles me. I’ve always thought that it has a certain didactic quality. Many of his works can almost be read as an essay, as a manual for critically dismantling an institution or a building. I have always wondered what kind of effect the close bond between his work and his teaching has had on his students, many of whom seem to have made this critical dismantling into a mantra. In your case, however, things seem to be different. Can you say that you have a certain teaching legacy? For example, I am thinking of the institution that you founded together with Pontus Hultén in Paris in 1983, the famous — and yet rather little known about — Institut des Hautes Études en Arts Plastiques. Many of the institute’s students became very famous afterwards, but there’s not a single one that you can point out as ‘a student of Buren’.

It’s impossible, yes.

But how is that? What made your teaching or the school in Paris so different?

Pontus Hultén and I more or less wrote the plan of the Institut des Hautes Études en Arts Plastiques. When he asked me to help him develop his ideas, he first of all enquired whether I wished to state it: writing. But such a thing was only possible because some people invited me.
to collaborate. I replied that I didn’t know if I would be able to do anything like that with all my travelling. I didn’t want to just show my nose every once in a while. But we resolved that problem and, when the school existed, I was there almost all the time. There are two things that we can be really proud of, and I am not saying such a thing very often. The first thing to be proud of is the fact that we worked in an extremely concentrated manner. We had very few teachers. The stable consisted of Pontus Hultén and three people, so it was very small. But we invited almost a hundred different personalities from the art world, or people who were connected in one way or another to the art world, even if they were scientists or something like that. It certainly gave a lot to the people who were attending. It is rather incredible that so many artists from among this group belong today to the group of really active people that everyone speaks about. It’s very positive that they are not completely lost or doing something else besides art. It’s something not one of us could have ever dreamed of, or believed in, at the time. This is all the more unexpected given that we were only taking approximately 20 young people each year, which is a very small number. We only survived for seven years, so it’s not that thousands of young artists graduated; it’s actually a very short list. The second thing to be proud of is that you cannot find a trace of any teacher in the work of any of these people, or at least not in the work of those ones that everyone recognises today. Not a single one.

**WD** But what was there to teach then?

**DB** Maybe it’s because we did not want to teach anything. It somehow corresponded with my own experience. I have never been teaching in the same place for years and years, unlike someone like Michael Asher. I did a lot of things for one week, ten days or two weeks. Not only because I was absolutely against the idea of becoming fixed as a teacher at a particular place but also because I thought, and I still think, that, especially in teaching young artists, it is better to give them something like an electrical shock. I prefer to go to a place and really take my time, even if it’s only for four days, and work very intensively with the young people who are there. Then you really offer them a lot of things. In the case of the Institut des Hautes Études en Arts Plastiques, I was very impressed by the fact that if you have the possibility to invite as many people as possible to sit together for one or several days within the same group, you present them a fantastic thing without saying one word. They can encounter artists that are maybe well known but then appear to be not so different from them. Then they also start to understand that artists are completely at odds with each other. But it’s something you don’t have to explain. They can judge for themselves. So, in very little time, you give some kind of matière première to young people, right like that. I think that when, over a few weeks, some six or seven different artists from different backgrounds come and speak about their work, the students learn much more than they do in the many years that they spend at the academy of beaux-arts.

**WD** Was there any methodology behind this *modus operandi*?

**DB** Well, I would say it was more of a programme. But this programme, if you accept it and you can carry it out, has a fantastically positive effect because you are teaching without teaching. You don’t have to say, ‘look they are different’. I mean, the students already start to be puzzled after two visiting speakers, especially when they respond differently to the same question. If artists are antagonistic, they can make their own judgement. They start to notice this for themselves, which means that you don’t have to be the teacher who advises them (and they may not even believe you anyway). You know, you have to take care with these young artists. They are all different, and they do things that are good or bad. They understand very quickly what a young person cannot yet have. When you are twenty or even a little older, you know everything through the magazines and through your own experiences, but you know strictly nothing about who these people are. But even if you stay close to the people of your own generation, it takes a lot of time to connect with others artists, even with those one generation older, not to mention those who are already considered as ‘old masters’, or who are even forgotten. That is the opportunity we gave these people and it was very intense. It mostly lasted for three or four days a week, we met at least three times during these four days and we invited people as different as Michael Asher, Jean-François Lyotard, Benjamin Buchloh or Jean Nouvel. We really invited a lot of people; first the ones we were interested in, or the ones who were simply passing by in Paris — which allowed us to reduce the expenses — but then we also invited people that were suggested by the students themselves.

**WD** Did the student produce anything themselves? Were they obliged to?

**DB** We helped the students to find a place to stay and a studio in Paris. But the rule was that we never went to see what they were doing in their studio. Never. But we invited every participant to show their work in whatever way they wanted — photo, film, or directly — for a full day and under the critical eyes of all the others, including the teachers. Once a week, we had a session in which one of these young people had to defend their work against the challenges of all the others.

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7. Serge Fauchereau, Sarkis and Buren himself.
WD  Where did that happen? Not in the studio, I suppose?

DB  No, not in the studio, but at the Institut. Everyone had to present under the same conditions, but they were free to invent. Some came with incredible pieces, while others came with more traditional pieces and showed pictures, etcetera. But it was completely open to do that. It was the same situation that we were inviting the artists or philosophers to speak within. We were pushing them to be polite and respectful but not to be ashamed to ask questions when they discovered, even with the philosophers, a contradiction between what they had written and what they had said an hour earlier. There was no need to be afraid; one could just look and speak as long as one stayed polite, since we were not there to have a stupid fight. While for some artists, philosophers or musicians it was really beautiful, for others it was rather difficult.

WD  How did the selection of the students go?

DB  People were selected beforehand. They came from all over the world. We selected 40 to 50 people from the files that we received. These people were then invited for an interview. Out of these we selected the final 20 that we paid to be with us for one year or, in fact, for four months. But all of them had finished their studies at a beaux-arts academy or something similar, so the term ’student’ did not really apply. For us, they were young, engaged artists. A big part of the group became really professional — in both good and bad senses — while another part is certainly doing something else today. They were free to do that, since they were not ‘studying’ anymore. As you know, in any art school you have a large number of people who will never become artists; they don’t even know why they are there. So, my teaching experience at the Institut was really different to my experience at the Kunstakademie in Düsseldorf, for example, although there I worked with people in their final year, i.e. with students who were already more or less young artists. But when you work with people who are a little younger than this, you cannot use this method. I don’t even know what kind of method you can use with them. Somehow it doesn’t even interest me, since you can’t treat them like young artists; they are still beginners. So, you can’t push them into the practice of criticism. There are certain things you cannot speak about yet, since they have no idea and they still need to learn the basics.

WD  But what, then, do you personally think about the current wave of the so-called ’academicisation’ of art education, the modelling of art education after the academic model of the university? What do you think of the fact that graduating artists need to write a Masters thesis and that some might even start to obtain PhDs?

DB  It’s not a very interesting thing to say, but I am not only rather distant from but also somewhat afraid of this ’academicisation’, since I don’t think that it can really bring something about, even at the end of one’s study. There will certainly be exceptions — someone who will have gone through all these things and will then become a great artist — but I think, for the majority, it’s finished already. Because I think it’s not the way to set your mind. Again, it goes back to this idea of didacticism or ‘demonstration’. Perhaps this is very personal and perhaps I’m wrong, but I don’t think that ‘demonstration’ in art can bring you to something very innovative.
Dear Beaver Group

I am just going to write everything here that is currently on my mind... so my apologies if this letter appears unclear, chaotic and grammatically incorrect. I saw you both (Ayreen and Rene) for the first time a few months ago in Vienna at a symposium and I was ‘smashed up’ (of course, I mean this in a good way). My point is:

I saw you.
I heard you.

And, afterwards, when I was researching the background of 16 Beaver, the material I found wasn’t even close to matching my understanding of what you are up to; but the most interesting thing that was missing for me in the limited information available was how... how you go about doing what you do.

And, even if I lived in NY, I probably wouldn’t have time to come to your talk on Monday, maybe my kid would get sick or I would have to go to work (I’m being pragmatic here in involving my personal circumstances because there is no other way than this to get real). So, although I know that you are very, very busy, I think that it would be really great to see some of your discussions on youtube (?) or somewhere else in the netuniverse. It would be good to be able to ask some questions (there are always more questions to be asked after one has had a little sleep and a little time to consider things) and this would also provide an important opportunity for people (I’m sure that I’m not the only one who wants this) to be constantly informed and continuously involved, not to mention all your friends from former projects who would be glad to see what you are up to now.

On another issue, I couldn’t find any photo-documentation of the 16 Beaver projects online. Vienna is the city where I work; it is my primary work base (like any other student, in any other city, in any other part of the world). That ‘click’ – that online access to your material – would provide for the permanent possibility of extending and directing my own education, informed by my own sense of quality and value. Everyone knows that academic education is really more about luck than choice, so it’s important to have a way out of the local scene without having to travel all the time to each destination where something is happening. Even more importantly, your work has a greater and more serious potential to act as a mentor for informing others’ future approaches to constructing an activist-art-intellectual identity (but I don’t mean here to propose some
kind of ‘guru’ thing). Sorry if this message is too long and thank you for your time...

Love, respect & friendship
Nina

Dear Nina,

I am not sure if, by writing back, I can respond directly to what you are asking and describing in your letter. When I write ‘respond’, I want to acknowledge the responsibility implicit in a response. And, replying responsibly, I would write ‘no.’ It would be my responsibility to respond ‘no.' ‘No, I do not know.’ ‘No, it would not be responsible to respond.’ But, alternatively, like you, I could also start by writing everything that is on my mind.

I am not an artist and you are not young, and I could be younger than you and, anyway, we may both be swimming in the same sea. We could both be having similar problems paying the rent, hating capitalism, trying to discover or invent more interesting situations, with others, unafraid of loneliness, but more interested in things held in common, rejecting as politics what is normally called politics, believing that life... no! insisting that life, can be much more than what is generally referred to by that word.

But maybe I could try something more abridged. And so, if not everything, then at least I can say something.

My first problem would be to avoid assuming the tone, or position, of someone who knows.

So, I write to you, first and foremost, as an equal, not as the one who knows.

The first lesson I learned from reading Jacques Rancière’s Ignorant Schoolmaster is that the master is versed in the art of creating distance. So, I will admit that I am as distant as you, and as close as you. In The Ignorant Schoolmaster, the master (or explicator) is the one who initially establishes a distance, positioning the disciples as helpless, needing assistance, only to then bring them slowly nearer, abolishing that same distance she or he created. It is a game, or theatre, of exhibiting mastery, thus exerting power and influence and possibly inducing dependence. This theatre can also be connected with what Michel Foucault refers to as games of truth because this mastery and knowledge have an intrinsic relation to power; the one who establishes and determines a discourse on truth is one who vies for power.

So, on the one hand, I want to respond to your letter. And, on the other, I must contend with how not to reproduce the figure of the master-director-figure-truth-sooth-sayer-guru you refer to.

But, a truth does not have to be something that we can simply learn, nor something a ‘master’ transfers to a ‘disciple.’ It can be a process in which thought, sensation and activity connect, come together. In this sense, a truth is discovered, produced in our encounter with things, situations, relations, ideas, events which constitute, inform our subjectivity and, at the same time, gain in significance/profundity in our fidelity to them. A truth isn’t a view on the world; a truth is something that keeps us tied to it in an irreducible way.

I am not writing about the truth, but a truth, which remains singular and not at all relative.

I started this letter by expressing my ambivalence about responding and, ironically, in a short span, I am indicating what a relation to truth could be. But, maybe all of this is to say that the question of pedagogy must wrestle with a relation to truth. What kind of truth and what kind of knowledge? Where does one find it? What are the relations of power that this relation to truth produces? And how can one begin to imagine a communication of knowledge, of experience, of a truth that does not reproduce the same power relations that one finds in universities or academies of learning?

I will write more soon.

Sincerely,

Simone

Dear Nina,

As I mentioned a few days ago, I have been wrestling with a relation to truth which would be open, singular, not relative, and remain tied to the world.

In that regard, I have been reading more closely Walter Benjamin’s essay on the storyteller. At the beginning of the last century, Benjamin already identifies a depleting relation to the truth. He argues that the
language of information and the news replaced the less immediately verifiable truth accessible in storytelling. Storytelling, for Benjamin, is a form of communicating experience. I don’t want to assign any specific competence to myself or to artistic practice in general, but I am interested in the multiple forms of communicating experiences. No doubt, the pedagogical moment can be one such moment. One aspect of how the truth functions in the storyteller’s story is that the truth is not explicit and it remains open to the listener to find for herself.

I am interested in situations which bring us into contact with, and tie us to, the world in a more interesting way? Here, ‘tying us to the world’ would not be a process of bringing us down under the weight and rule of gravity. It would allow us, in our stead, in our creativity, to also touch the potentiality of a different life. Our ability to play and bring seemingly untouchable things (norms, rules, laws, values, traditions) into a sphere of our own making is necessary. It is one way to understand how things change.

The lightness that is not yet ours must become ours. But when this lightness is interesting, it is tied to the world, it plays with it, re-imagines it, un-hinges it.

Today, those situations which can connect sensation, experience, thought, work, activity are precisely what seem to be denied.

Extreme forms of privation still exist today. And every form of so-called ‘immaterial labour’ hides very material processes and regimes. At the same time as people are being removed from the land they occupy through various processes of speculation, there are still entire peoples who are denied the ability to travel freely, to be citizens with equal rights as others in a place of their choosing. And there are classes of people, living within the wealthiest countries, denied movement simply by economic limitations, by virtue of a poverty that is often linked to centuries of exploitation, dispossession and domination.

And yet, contemporary forms of control are not always experienced as denial of access. On the contrary, in the so-called free corners of the world, people are told: explore your sexuality, your liberation, your ethnicity, your education, your political convictions, your ecological concerns, as long as it remains confined to its place, not interfering with the pervading political-economic order, nor the logic of self-gain and consumption which increasingly pervades every sphere of life. Moreover, this would almost seem to be a strategy to make sure that:

What we learn is separated from what we experience.

What we do is separated from what we think.

What we subjectively feel is separated from collective and political questions.

Take, for example, feelings of apathy, of impotence, sadness or what is referred to as depression or generalised anxiety. Consistently, individuals are pathologised, their emotions and sensations separated from political and social causes and implications. The stresses of the cognitive work sphere are totally disconnected from the stresses deployed on the bodies of factory workers. In this way, a political question, a common question is privatised. Instead, the one who suffers is told that, even if millions feel the same way, it is within them; they are alone and the great solution is to consume their way out of it through products called medication.

Our very experience of sensations is compartmentalised into distinct zones of illness, entertainment, taste. Rather than seeing sensation as a zone of indiscernability between subject and object, a process of becoming, it is packaged as a moment of individuated pain (as in the earlier example) or pleasure, a diversion from the serious matters of ‘work’ and ‘productivity.’ Whether it be sex, a film, a voyage, a book, a meal – in each case, an opportunity to connect how we think, how we feel, how we live, and what we desire in this life remains set apart and disconnected. An opportunity to make use of something, to create a situation is channelled into a realm of consumption. It is a pervasive logic of separation which operates from the most intimate scales to those much larger ones, separating what happens in our everyday life from the various forms of violence and dispossession next door.

Instead, everything is channelled into simple refrains like, ‘did you or did you not get your money’s worth?’

Even what was previously referred to as our ‘marginal life’, the life after work, after our share of ‘productivity’, is today mobilised into the heart of the global economy. If generosity and the spirit of sharing can be commodified and exploited then they are to be championed (consider the endless web utilities that are privately owned, profess community, yet mobilise and channel people’s ‘non-productive’ time into new forms of labour extraction and productivity). And if this generosity takes place in a spirit of sharing freely, working against the privatisation and commodification of knowledge, against the production of a false scarcity, then it might be criminalised or vilified.
More disturbingly, these realms are never to be connected and seem only to take place individually; they are individuated, take place when one is on one’s own, in one’s own quarters, halves, fractions, divisions. This generates a kind of calculus that always leads to losses, minus signs proliferating, boom or bust, minus, minus, minus, minus.

Thinking of a different life, I am reminded of another conception of ‘truth game’ that Foucault would later take up and refer to as ‘Parrhesiastic Games.’ These would, indeed, be games in which a ‘master’ would encourage a ‘disciple’ to play with her/himself. But, instead of disclosing a truth to others, the student would be encouraged to disclose the truth to herself. Parrhesia would be an art, or technique, that would have ‘to be learned by mathesis and askesis – by theoretical knowledge and practical training.’ These exercises would be, in Foucault’s own terms, a kind of ‘aesthetics of the self. One can comport oneself towards oneself in the role of a technician, of a craftsman, of an artist, who – from time to time – stops working, examines what he is doing, reminds himself of the rule of his art, and compares these rules with what he has achieved thus far.’

This was the pedagogical relation as proposed by figures like Seneca, Serenus, and Epictetus. This problematisation of truth through the figure of the self is interesting especially when it appears that, today, it is precisely this self (isolated and disconnected from the widest sense of an ecology) which needs to be problematised.

I will write some more thoughts in the coming days.

For now, goodnight.

Simone

Dear Nina,

The sky is clear today here in Brooklyn, and it has been a very unusual morning for me since I got woken up at 6:00 by the heater in my apartment. This apartment, in a building that was recently sold to a new landlord (a term which retains the implicit violence of ownership and property, of lording over another, of being someone’s lord, associated with medieval serfdom, but also seen today as civil, acceptable, normal and commonplace) who is keen on getting me out of here. I live in a neighbourhood that

has increasingly become popular for young people and artists but also for real estate developers.

I have been reading the letters of Rainer Maria Rilke to a young poet. A friend who was visiting from Italy years ago gave it to me; the pages have already turned brown over time. I was impressed by the time and dedication that Rilke is giving to this young poet. In the first letter, he tells him to stop asking whether his verses are good enough, to stop seeking out magazines for publishing, to stop comparing his poems to others and, furthermore, to stop being upset when certain editors reject his work. He simply advises him to be himself.

But how can one be oneself. How can one ‘go into oneself’ as Rilke advises?

It seems to me, that such a journey into oneself would only be effective if one were to find a light at the end of that tunnel. It would be a light that would undo this self. And by submerging into this light, the self would look something like a surface upon which many different lines would be drawn, traces, movements made, orders imposed, cracks, fissures, ruptures, revolts even, explosions, gaping holes, infinite, occasional tremors, hiccups, whispers, screams, stutters, capable of forming various assemblages with other bodies, languages, machines... Here, the self would maintain a relation to a life that is always present and running parallel to the one we call ours, without subject or object, marked only by events, singular, yet tied to a world, material and immanent, open-ended, in the middle, in the process of becoming. It would be an impersonal, improper life (abstaining from the ‘proper’ of property), a life not quite ours, a body not properly ours, a life, a home, a thought, not the life, the home, the thought. A life of impropriety, a life without property.

Improperly yours,

Simone

Dear Nina,

I feel that, in my last letters, I might have risked going further away from the questions you are asking. I wanted to return to the question of schooling, of education, of pedagogy implicit in your letter because it is a critical point of reflection. I often ask myself: can’t schools and universities, for instance, be a place in which people can question this
shared world? Can’t they be places in which an engaged dialogue takes place between people with different backgrounds, classes, experiences, desires?

Clearly, the question of pedagogy cannot be separated from the most urgent ecological, social, cultural, political and economic questions we confront today. Any interrogation of these issues remains tied to the question of pedagogy. Indeed, pedagogy is at the heart of these questions.

One of the more illuminating texts for me in this regard has been an early essay by Walter Benjamin, written in 1914-1915 and entitled ‘The Life of Students.’ Benjamin introduces his text by arguing against a concept of history which puts its faith in the infinite extent of time. It is a concept of history marked by a certain rush, or speeding, towards the future. Within this logic, the future could not come any sooner, as far as this society is concerned. But the shape of this future is never in question; it is presented simply as an inevitability. And, in this conception of history, the present seems to be an afterthought or something merely to be digested or sacrificed for the sake of progress. The contradictions for our contemporary culture begin here, since co-existing with this call of progress is an irreversible short-sightedness in relation to the social and natural ecology of this earth. And, in this respect, it seems we are confronted with a sacrifice of both the present and the future. And it remains unclear; a sacrifice for what?

Analytically, however, as Benjamin argues, ‘this condition cannot be captured simply in pragmatic descriptions of details (the history of institutions, customs), and so on, in fact, it eludes them.’ It is in the desire to address this very condition that Benjamin begins his text on the life of students. He writes: ‘It is worth taking the trouble to describe the contemporary significance of students and the university, of the form of their present existence, only if they can be understood as a metaphor, as an image of the highest metaphysical state of history.’

But what is this image of the highest metaphysical state of history today? Is it an image of one day in which everyone will have equal access to knowledge, to the same technologies, to the same debt instruments, to the same holidays, to the same anti-depressants, to the same stores, the same gadgets, the same voluntary servitude...? Obviously, that day to come is in the not too distant, yet always elusive, future. Meanwhile, in this image, the present inequalities seem only an aberration, the price to be paid to reach that day of ‘equality.’ And, somehow, only the inequalities of the so-called market will provide this equality.

It is a farce and it would appear that at no time has that farce been more readily visible than today – the day which reveals that the economic forces which increasingly dictate and govern our movements and possibilities are in the hands of a very limited elite who speak in the language of a specialised knowledge and competence as fictitious as the capital with which they speculate. This is a lying, incompetent elite that does not even work in the interest of their stupid corporations, but only themselves and their richest benefactors.

It is within this context of lies, incompetence, deception and games of truth that I place myself and interrogate my actions. And I am not ready to sacrifice the present for some inarticulate ‘one day.’

In his letters, Rilke advises the young poet to ask himself in the stillest hour of his night: ‘must I write?’ And if the answer rings out in assent, I must, then his whole life must become a sign and witness to this impulse. And as if one had never tried before, to try to say what he sees, what he feels, what he loves and what he lacks. I am trying to write to you what I see, what I lack and possibly to infer what I love. Rilke also advises the young poet not to write love poems, but to rescue himself from the general themes and write about what his everyday experience offers him. If the everyday seems poor, he should not blame it but blame himself that he is not enough of a poet to call forth its riches. However, if out of all this going in and out of oneself, poems come, then he would see these as a piece of his life and as a voice coming from it. Thus, outside validations will not matter any more: ‘A work of art is good if it has arisen out of necessity. That is the only way you can judge it.’

I don’t know if you or I can reconcile Rilke’s advice with the questions I am raising, but it would seem to me that questions of necessity as well as desire are critical here. Whose desire and of what nature this necessity? Collectively, it would appear that one task of the coming political struggles will be to reorientate the very coordinates of necessity and desire.

Hope to write more soon,
Simone
Dear Nina,

What I wrote to you yesterday seemed to have a relation to how 16 Beaver came together, and I thought it might be interesting to share some fragments of that experience.

When several of us first started reading texts together and inviting people to share their research and questions, there was no need to call it a school, an artwork, an artists’ collective or anything in particular. It seemed that this act of naming would only throw people into a situation of identifying themselves as students/teachers, administrators/directors, artists/non-artists, spectators/lecturers, participant/audience, insider/outsider, invited/uninvited, etc. A name might have given it a certain legibility and sensibility, for people to more quickly identify or categorise it within a series of gestures, problematisations, discourses, institutions etc., possibly giving it a certain degree of immediate efficacy. But, for our purposes, it seemed that such an act would also risk delimiting what it could be or become for each participant. Schools and educational programmes are terminal. And the date of termination is often not of our choosing. One is a student then one becomes a ‘professional’ or maybe a ‘teacher’ or maybe unemployable. We wanted none of those titles. We cared for none of those ascriptions, descriptions or conscriptions.

We knew that there were things we could learn from each other across generations, across ‘disciplines.’ In fact, I personally felt a need to collectively discover ways of breaking those disciplinary constraints – constraints that were keeping experiences and research, which could have practical or useful implications, too easily confined in a rarefied, untouchable or unreachable place. These are the same constraints which effectively deny individuals the opportunity to see connections between struggles, between different practices, contexts and experiences. There was a sincere interest to embody our politics; to connect what we read to our lived reality; to compare what we thought against the reality we were being asked to live. How, for instance, could we continue to talk abstractly about political issues without also seeking to connect with individuals who could meet us, confront us with a lived experience and help us critique existing terminologies and constructions?

So, we shared books, shared our interests in them and this later evolved into sharing our work, our questions and our friends.

It felt necessary to make our space as open as we could, because everything around us was exclusive. We wanted an open place of learning, of sharing, but also a space which could potentially become something more. There would be no professors and no students. A study or residency programme continuous with life, which could become a theatre group, a filmmaking co-op, an autonomous place of learning, a commune, an infrastructure for developing dissident thought and for inspiring new forms of collective processes. It would become a horizontal space to give one another time, allowing different levels of engagement and involvement, a challenge to capitalist ideology, a revaluation of artistic practice toward an immeasurable horizon of a contestable present.

Even as I write this, I ask myself how to also assert that what we have done was nothing exceptional; this was a simple, modest, everyday practice, which took very little resources other than our time, labour, and thought. It may appear exceptional to some, simply because to be social today, to share time with strangers, to cultivate a collective, public intellectuality resists the dominant ideology, which asserts that each person is self-interested and that human relations are either of the order of exploitation or without value.

I have a friend visiting, so will have to resume later.

Best,

Simone

Dear Nina,

Today I was standing on the waterfront overlooking the city. I turned back toward Brooklyn where the new high rises are going up right beside me. I thought if only someone could hang a banner reading ‘greed kills’, I would be happy. I then doubted my desire, knowing full well that this gesture would not suffice. Then I looked at the sky and noticed that the clouds overhead were moving and began to think how clouds are always moving yet, often when we look at the sky, we tend to fix them, as if in stasis. There must be some lesson in that, I thought.

Somewhere within the questions you ask are questions I have been asking myself. What, exactly, was I learning in all those years of learning? If education is made to empower people, how is it that it seems to produce ever greater complicity in a mad world? And if the problem lays inherently in this explicative order, what exactly am I doing in these letters to you? And aren’t art and philosophy both equally versed in
making a viewer/reader take a distance on the things she thinks she knows too well? How is this distance, produced by philosophers or artists, different from the distance produced by the schoolmaster? And just what is this letter I am writing and has it not been written a million times before?

Soon,
Simone

Dear Nina,

Today I trace the blueprint of one, two, three, four, and many more letters that were written to a dear and a young artist. They may not be as useful to you as they were for me, in that they helped me to determine what this unease was that overtook me once I started writing this series of letters to you. As always, language is ahead of us and here is the result:

Dear Young Artist,
situation, succeed, courage, future, responsibilities, successful, outstanding, yourself, society, culture, survive, exchanged, society, repay, studio, exchanged, museums, collectors, purchased, value, valuable, thinking, expression, marketable, conversion key, talent, sensitivity, environment, restructures, translating thoughts, language of art, goals, lofty, market, results, commodity, acid, sell, self, sell, self, prefer, to be, broad, problems, experience, studied art, major, condition, knowledge, sensibility, financial, family, background, strengths, limitations, transformed, useful, transforms, strength, conservative, education, Western, America, linguistic, adaptation, naturally, predisposed, inadequacy, utilise, perspective, language, barriers, plight, problem, creation, majority, careers, mainstream, job, creative, living, wasting, time, creating, art, treasure, system, work, worry, talent, museums, curators, artists, anxious, interesting, good, exhibition.

Succeed.

Dear Young Artist,
lucid, envious, poetic, list, things, remember, path, yelling, urgency, drive, bus, forget, bottom, heap, victim, artist, studio, isolation, objects, imagination, nothing, critics, curators, historians, art, history departments, museums, libraries, magazines, auction, galleries, enterprise, creative, studio, arrogance, true, eponymous, illusions, business, businesses, character, changes, destroy, create, marketplace, spiritually, power, dance, wolves, door, familiar, fairs, museum, spent, centuries, rejuvenated, demoralised, support, fellow, peer, events, celebrate, marginalised, support, foundation, generosity, biographies, narratives, beyond, conditions, particular, great, fulfill, paraphrase, life, long, race, sprint, rich, life, measures, fame, financial, question, young, leg, yourself, career.

Best.

Dear Young Artist,
painter, school, museum, class, paintings, waiting, commercial, career, touch, motivation, process, becoming, feet, change, transformation, boss, control, good, requires, isolation, partner, family, life, well, eventually, selling, evil, natural, soul, earning, anything, wrong, many, attention, friends, envious, forgive, feelings, human, worlds, trends, money, fame.

You are already succeeding just by attempting.

Young artist to be,
should, grandiose, future, succeed, ambitions, goals, game, childhood, dreamt, collections, rigorous, prepare, way, left, felt, mysterious, authorities, forces, control, exercises, learned, anything, prayer, nothing, toward, shut, up, grade, unreliable, unacceptable, surrender, chance, alone, angry, bitter, important, concrete, lessons, learn, pass, information, reasons, particular, share, knowledge, identity, appeal, genuine, reservations, chance, barely, experiencing, symptoms, withdrawal, drugs, trip, reality, confusion, trauma, art, schools, creek, dens, hazy, fog, dialogue, critique, achievements, amplified, believe, value, friends, supportive, stuff, incessant, chatter, obsession, world, outside, cares, win, attention, open, ellotted, recognition, celebrity, narrow, inhale, bullshit, blow, out, rehabilitate, recognising, delusions, recovery, successful, career, artist, nobody, undersized, ego, game, everything, OK, subjects,
matter, magicians, shamans, prophets, seers, transfigure, eon-
place, recognizable, isolate, re-contextualise, shift, scale, shift, material,
invert, status, art, relationship, power, money, inherent, attribute, studio,
all, that, you, can, be, Mme, Duchamp, studio, laboratory, synthesise,
synthesise, synthesise, force, forms, incompatible, ambition, achieve,
domain, compare, sublime, privileged, status, distinguish, crowd,
social, political, economic, circumstances, makers, labour, African,
American, Whites, institutional, structure, artist, business, profes-
sional, accountant, longevity, achievement, timetable, career, success,
time, heart, integrity.

Sincerely,

Dear Young Artist,

New York, complex, beautiful, amazing, brutal, love, others,
guarantees, success, rewards, recognition, drawn, life, indifferent,
world, pleasure, sensual, kinetic, smell, sight, life, miraculous, contradic-
tion, all, New York, Los Angeles, Mexico City, community, inspire, inform,
fear, fear, fear, control, stop, erosion, human, rights, tool, oppressor,
fear, warning, veil, afraid, 1968, change, crossing, boundaries, breaking,
merging, turning, backward, dialogue, artists, musicians, dancers,
musicians, filmmakers, now, fantastic, communication, share, show, learn, others,
exchange, centre, shifted, Paris, New York, centre, New York, rush,
precarious, marketplace, find, time, take, chance, gamble, dangerous,
interesting, beautiful, playing, solo, repeating, gestures, thank, you,
answer, work, work, care, work.

Sincerely,

Dear Young Artist,

participate, integrity, success, relationship, art, Bard, College, desire,
Chelsea, shift, explore, world, culture, medium, self, communicate,
language, perception, observation, understanding, emotional, mental,
answer, answer, fun, talent, almost, convincing, motives, quest, ambition,
problem, adhere, money, market, influence, motives, decisions, voice,
self, finding, final, moral, dilemma.

Good luck and best wishes.
To Whom the Past No Longer, and Not Yet the Future, Belongs: A Response to a Letter

Dear Young Artist,

woman, students, female, decades, harder, rewards, guys, colour, difficulties, advice, instead, activist, artist, injustice, 1985, activists, artists, pie, over, women, artists, colour, say, galleries, white, males, ladder, museums, auctions, worse, fields, system, manufactures, scarcity, work, endures, calculate, embarrass, humiliate, necessary, ideas, diversity, toilet, stalls, museums, galleries, women, women, postcards, postcards, system, change, activism.

Go Ape with us.

Dear Young Artist,

painting, social, community, intuition, taste, high, art, read, obsolete, audience, energy, fail, learned.

Good luck.

Dear Young Artist,

friends, right, quality, work, China, Japan, United States, part-time, restaurant, goal, survival, creativity.

Yours.

Dear Young Artist,

confusing, armed, confidence, inflated, time, studio, art, life, inextricably, failure, avant-garde, free, discover, matters, exciting, challenging, invigorating, commerce, relations, among.

Love.

Dear Young Artist,

sad, difficult, New York, warn, into, studio, self-protective, shrewd, galleries, museums, auction, colour.

I wish you all the best. Be true to your work and try not to take the pith and valleys of the art world personally.

To a Young Artist,

48, 30, 50, magic, interesting, beautiful, mysterious, junk, junk, confusion, confusion, beautiful, beauty, relax, inspiration, decision, success.

I love you!

Dear Young Artist,

integrity, freedom, participate, integrity, freedom, integrity, freedom, integrity, freedom, integrity, freedom, integrity, kill, kill, everything, integrity, freedom, thought, integrity, lie, yourself, why, convictions, guide, action, coherence, harmony, beliefs, emotions, actions, conflict, intuition, integrity, freedom,

Good luck.

Dear Young Artist,
time, off, travel, university, education.

Sincerely.

Dear Young Artist,
possibilities, Shakespeare, Spencer, Milton, girl, no, wholeheartedly, wholeheartedly, Negative, Capability, uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, foreign, language, people.

With best wishes.

XB, GA, EM, KJM, JJ, SS, JB, YR, TN, JD, GG, AK, CGQ, JS, HP, JM, WPL, MLU, LW, YO, AP, JB, JG.

Dear Nina,
You write, and this shows that the space around you is beginning to grow vast. And if what is near you is far away, then your vastness is already among the stars and is very great; be happy about your growth, in which of course you can’t take anyone with you, and be gentle with those who stay behind...

There is the relation of thought and reality in the process of problematisation. And that is the reason why I think that it is possible to give an answer — the original, specific and singular answer of thought — to a certain situation.

But what is this certain situation? What are we to problematise? Maybe I am on the verge of truly problematising pedagogy...

‘I’ in these letters is me and another one or the other does not really matter. But I am definitely not exactly and not the only one addressed by, ‘Dear Beaver Group.’ I am part of the 16 Beaver Group, I identify with, and share a lot of time with, many others who are involved.

By chance you met me in Vienna and it was nice meeting you and I hope to meet and discuss more in this coming year.

Best,
Simone
I would like to briefly mention Annette’s project, *Hidden Curriculum*, in order to set a context for this discussion. This is particularly significant as the current conversation leads out of an earlier one that took place on the project. (1) *Hidden Curriculum* sought to investigate the kinds of learning that take place in schools, but which are not part of the official curriculum, by looking at unrecognised and unintended forms of knowledge. The project was realised at Casco in Utrecht, in 2007, through a series of workshops with two groups of 14 to 17 year old students from two schools in the city. The workshops took place both in the space at Casco and in the schools. In these workshops, students reflected upon their own actions and behaviours in school, in particular cheating tricks that they had developed in order to negotiate rule structures. The project involved forms of collective process for self-reflection and critical thinking. The students translated their investigations of these issues into various actions and interventions that happened in the school and in the city. These activities, in turn, attempted to reveal the invisible codes of conduct and rule systems in the public realm as another form of ‘hidden curriculum’.

In a broader sense, *Hidden Curriculum* looked at how institutional structures are negotiated in all areas of public life. Taking the school as one example, this entailed thinking about how people deal with rules and with imposed categories of thought, and how they both internalise, as well as subconsciously resist, these. The project looked for the grey areas where these kinds of actions are taking place — often even subconsciously — as forms of micro-resistance to institutional frameworks, and it looked at how these could be acknowledged as such. In this respect, the project also disclosed the different kinds of institutional formats that are being resisted, which, in this case, resulted in a direct comparison between the two schools — a more traditional school and a newer school that had been adapted to feed the ‘knowledge economy’ and had introduced ‘flexible’ working.

It now transpires that our ongoing conversation will take place in the context of a book which aims to look at what has been described as an ‘educational turn’ — a shift that the book’s editors have recognised in artistic and curatorial practices — towards pedagogical models, as exemplified through diverse projects. What seems key to me here is the difference (as highlighted in Annette’s project, *Hidden Curriculum*) between learning as a process that is encountered in all areas of life and the more top-down or institutionalised procedures of ‘education’. I would consider that a number of the projects we realised at Casco involved forms of

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Hidden Curriculum is an attempt to find points of interaction directly with this kind of social structures. In an initial discussion about the links between art and education, someone from the audience commented that ‘schools (universities, academies) are designed in order to foster subjects capable of acting in society’. This immediately raised a number of questions for me, such as: Which society are we talking about here — a past, present or future one? What forms of knowledge are communicated through schools, academies, etc.? Could this enquiry be expanded from institutionalised education towards everyday learning processes? It further raised questions as to: What do we do and do not know. What we don’t want to know and why. What are we not allowed to know? We can then take this further, by considering Simon Sheikh’s essay, ‘Spaces for Thinking’, in which he asks: ‘Which system are we educating people for?’

I would extend his question by asking ‘how could we learn not to be compliant, functioning agents of a dominant (hence contested) social and economic system?’ Knowledge and education are liberating but also restricting, so how can we deal with this ambiguity and paradox when it comes to actual practice?

What I am proposing here is attending to the continuous presence, production and revelation of blind spots. I am not interested primarily in revealing these blind spots but more in how a blind spot might function in a society in which, for example, the dominant paradigm is one of visibility. If I try to grapple with this from another perspective, this is a matter of accepting that whatever we do, say (in this very moment), write or read, will mean more than, and be different from, what we intend. How can we relate to this, theoretically but also very practically, in actions and movements?

Hidden Curriculum attempted to interact directly with this kind of phenomenon. One example of this was the attempt to physically (re-)appropriate spaces within the school building that are not part of the daily school processes, e.g. the top shelf in the classroom; the spaces between cupboards in the corridor; the spaces under one’s chair or behind stacks of chemistry equipment. These physical investigations were progressed through discussions about what these gaps — unused spaces or places that are not attended to — could mean when it came to actions and everyday practices in school; what specific knowledge is demanded in school and what happens if we put the focus on a whole range of unintended or unrecognised forms of knowledge, unofficial abilities and talents that are also generated in educational processes? For example, students learn to compare themselves with others or tolerate unfairness; they learn to anticipate what teachers want to hear or how far they can go in order to access their own interests during their school lives. Authority, dependency, pressure to perform, role models, and standardised thinking are taught and learned, without this necessarily being made explicit or noticed. These other forms of knowledge aren’t fixed, but they form a structural component of the school system. We tried to address the realm of communication within school, with its hidden niches and mute practices, and to develop forms of investigation in order to approach these spaces.

Maria do Mar Castro Varela describes an underlying interest of this project when she elaborates the question: ‘who benefits most from educational institutions?’ She identifies these beneficiaries as being the ones who have learnt (at home) how to learn, how to present what has been learned, those who know or — to use Bourdieu’s term — have the habitus that is necessary to assert oneself. The ones that are good learners also learn which forms of social inequity and which forms of violence are legitimate and why it is not a crime to take advantage of one’s own privileged position to construct a ‘good life’. Therefore, it is also important that someone else learns to look the other way. This is what works in schools.

Again, it seems to be a commonplace that (educational) institutions reinforce deep-seated hierarchies in society. What is, of course, more difficult to describe, or even to inhabit, are those existing processes which perpetuate social orders with their power relations and injustices. Hidden Curriculum is an attempt to find points of entry, together with the students, in an attempt to inhabit, or at least address, these processes.

When the students, for example, physically investigate their surroundings — an investigation which, on many levels, was a consistent preoccupation of the project — this directs attention towards the organisation of the classroom and the different body...
politics that are played out within educational environments. The body is always involved in learning processes; however, it is often neglected or simply forgotten in research discussions around education and learning. The flexible, open working structure, which can be observed in most educational settings nowadays, places an emphasis on activating and mobilising the learner and opposes the traditional model of sitting quietly in order to learn. But, still, the learner’s body is organised and socially regulated, as it always has been, but what is different now is the nature of the force and regulation at work. Examining the interaction between students and their learning environments, it becomes quite obvious that educational systems, academies, universities and schools are not independent of forces and ideologies in society. They respond to the forces, ideologies and structures of the larger society and adapt to them rather than oppose them. In this way, the flexible, open working structure described above addresses the requirements of the market and the demands for a flexible, mobile and efficient self-managing workforce. This, of course, relates back directly to the question posed earlier: ‘Which system are we educating people for?’

I would like to return to the ‘institutional’ aspect of this subject in order to examine what kind of institutional space ‘pedagogy’ or ‘education’ is assuming, both within the premises of this volume and Annette’s *Hidden Curriculum* project. I am interested in whether there might be an analogy — one that is as suggestive as it is potentially misleading — between ‘hidden’ or ‘folk’ knowledge, used by agents such as students in the institutional setting of a school (in order to expand their own room to manoeuvre), and the role that ‘education’ or ‘research’ or this idea of an ‘educational turn’ might be playing with respect to artistic practices (which are seeking some kind of sphere of operation not strictly bound to the marketplace, or as a way of engaging with people outside the remit of ‘audience’ or ‘public’). What is the traffic between the official and unofficial forms of knowledge in each of these cases? Furthermore, what is the nature of the fine line or hairline fracture that exists — and I think, in *Hidden Curriculum*’s case, is enacted — between a type of *de facto* knowledge that undermines the status quo and a type that also makes it more tolerable? That is to say, how do certain types of knowledge make the transition from, or oscillate between, an improvised set of practices, or a commons, to something sanctioned as a ‘turn’, which can then be institutionally affirmed, developed, and analysed? Further, with reference to Annette’s question as to ‘what are we being educated for?’ — it seems that this question might help us to situate the educational turn in a self-reflexive rather than self-referential field, so the enquiry would have to address the system of power relations such a turn could be naming, diagnosing or reproducing. Why has something like an educational turn in curatorial discourse or practice become necessary, or, symptomatic?

For instance, Annette’s work in schools brought her into very direct contact with the imperatives of the ‘knowledge economy’ that the educational system is geared towards. It seems hard to dispute that there might be more of a structural than a metaphorical correlation between the educational turn and the knowledge economy. This is especially so given changes in institutional remits and cultural funding related to neoliberal economic policies and the industrialisation of ‘creativity’. Perhaps these developments are rather more salient to the educational turn than the legacy of radical self-education, or radical pedagogy, even though the latter is more frequently invoked in descriptions of those art phenomena that get subsumed under this turn as it is usually narrated.

When we try to think of education and pedagogy as (im)possible spaces for social change, I also wonder about the extent to which the contests and conflicts surfacing around social control play a role here. Given that systems of commodities are, on the whole, controlled by private enterprises and given that the public control of mass media has, in many cases, been supplemented by, or replaced by, privately owned media, isn’t it more than likely that the educational systems — of which large parts (at least in Europe) remain under public control — have become the sites of conflict in a contest for control? This recent growth in interest in pedagogy and education seems to resonate in the field of art as well, where it is often connected to discussions of agency. Also, we must not forget that questions around educational ‘potentialities’ within art can affirm the social relevance of art itself.

In Germany, there has been a renewed focus on education in recent years in many fields, and politicians appear to have adopted much of the rhetoric of the ‘British model’, in which buzzwords — such as ‘social inclusion’, ‘regeneration’, ‘access’ and ‘diversity’ — have resulted in major changes in funding systems in the field of the arts. This model is about to be more or less copied — ‘cut and pasted’ — in Germany and it has become influential in the Netherlands as well.


On the other hand, I am curious about what this turn might bring to those who have been working and researching in the field of education (and art) for some time, apart from the danger of being subsumed by a self-referential maelstrom. Is it possible to avoid being bracketed within these themes and move more towards developing specific ideas, cases, alliances and practices? What could be learnt from pedagogical practices that are consciously considered and developed as political practice?

During a recent research trip in the US with the curator Claudia Hummel, I visited the Freedom School in Chicago. It is a school that is based on the ideas of the Freedom School campaign originating in the 1960s Southern Civil Rights Movement, with the goal of empowering African-Americans for full citizenship and working towards social change. It was interesting to see how this school took on that legacy nowadays and whether it is still possible to re-create the productive atmosphere of the former collective endeavour, in which aspects of the social, political and personal context were synergising. They are very aware that what was once, back in the 1960s, radical and progressive pedagogy might now be questionable, in the context of late capitalism, or — to put it in the words of Nora Sternfeld — ‘when the act of realizing a certain practice is haunted by the impossible’. I understand this not merely as a dismantling or resolution of the contradictions that are inscribed in the pedagogical, but rather as a way to bear them and to act on the basis of them.

Speaking from the position of directing a small-scale institution, which is presently preoccupied with trying to resist the forms of standardisation, institutionalisation, and instrumentalisation that are imposed by public funding agendas, working with contradictions is somewhat familiar. This is all the more difficult here in the UK than it was in the Netherlands due to the current British cultural policies touched upon earlier by Annette. While I have for some time been working with practices that involve forms of collaboration, participation and learning, these terms have become so heavily incorporated into political agendas one feels like it’s time to find a new vocabulary and a different, more critical, way of thinking about these practices that can separate them out again. Thus, jumping back to Marina’s question — ‘of what can a pedagogical turn be symptomatic’ — it seems that pedagogical practices that have political motivations are often situated within these highly conflicting terrains and often attempt to deal with this by building a critical practice from within. Some of the projects that are cited by the editors of this book as forming the so-called educational


7. See [http://www.copenhagenfreeuniversity.dk].


turn (such as the Copenhagen Free University, A.C.A.D.E.M.Y., The Paraeducation Department, Manifesta 6, Documenta 12, etc.) present a wide variety of models of learning/education/pedagogy, most of which are more focused on finding a new model of academy and, in some cases, actively rejecting the bureaucratisation and standardisation of the knowledge-economy — such as the Bologna Declaration. For example, the Copenhagen Free University describes itself as follows:

The Free University is an artist-run institution dedicated to the production of critical consciousness and poetic language. We do not accept the so-called new knowledge economy as the framing understanding of knowledge. We work with forms of knowledge that are fleeting, fluid, schizophrenic, uncompromising, subjective, uneconomic, acapitalist, produced in the kitchen, produced when asleep or arisen on a social excursion — collectively.

While here there is a displacement of the site of learning, in other cases there seems to be a drive towards opening the institution up to participation and collective learning, in order to create a site of potentiality. Irit Rogoff describes A.C.A.D.E.M.Y. at the Van Abbemuseum as exploring ‘whether an idea of an “academy” (as a moment of learning within a safe space of an academic institution) was a metaphor for a moment of speculation, expansion, and reflexivity without the constant demands for proven results’.

Rogoff further enquires, ‘if this was a space for experimentation and exploration, then how might we extract these vital principles and apply them to the rest of our lives? How might we also perhaps apply them to our institutions?’

These kinds of projects often propose other models for the spaces of art museums, galleries or biennials, but rarely manage to break out of, or disturb, the very un-malleable institutional frameworks within which they are often situated. While these projects often involve a temporary change of relations within the institution, after the project is concluded, the institution usually slips back into place as it was before, without leading to any sustainable, long-term initiatives that might actually effect change. I am interested in the potential of institutions to learn, or change, through what occurs within them. This is something that I attempted to start at Casco, where we would try to take the knowledge acquired in one project and feed it into others as well as into the way we worked as an organisation. Thus, one has to raise the question again as to who it is that is being educated, or is in need of education. Surely, it is also
the institution itself. In *Hidden Curriculum*, it was clearly noticeable that while the students were learning, through a period of critical self-reflection, it was also the institution of the school that was learning through their interventions into the school system, and the mixed reactions of the teachers to it, some of whom found it hard to accept the project’s attitude of permissiveness.

This also relates to a question of institutional certainty, which Sarah Pierce raised in her recent text, ‘They Spoke About Hippies’, in which she writes: ‘certain institutional work requires us to project a level of certitude, despite our doubts about how to proceed [...] The longer I remain stuck in my archipelago, the more I want to disown this type of certitude in favour of multifaceted, complex ways of knowing’. [9] Taking this further, one could suggest that if institutions projected less authority, perhaps they would be more open to learning, and change the kinds of things that arise through uncertainty.

Following up on what has been said about the partial success of projects that attempt to enact certain forms of pedagogical questioning within art institutions, as well as earlier thoughts about the purposes of this kind of education or the motivations for the educational turn, I wanted to consider the idea of ‘critique’ a little further. Critique is a priority for ‘educationist’ (in distinction from ‘educational’ as a description of a normal part of art institutional programming) initiatives, like the ones Emily describes above. These initiatives attempt to ‘smuggle’ into the museum a certain battery of activist practices, which are sceptical of the normalising and spectacular aspects of the museum’s social role but which also draw on the resources and credibility of that kind of site. I would agree with Emily’s observations on how many of these projects can be defeated by the solid patterns of institutional life and by their own ephemeral and experimental nature within that, but I would also see the problem here as the problem of institutional critique in general — critique of institutions, authorised by institutions, can only culminate in a harmonious dialectic between the goals of the institution and the goals of the critic, re-affirming the privilege of both actors; the institution sets the stage and the critic delivers the expected service while bolstering her own critical credentials. A mode of ultra-reflexivity is solicited from the agents of critique, but that reflexivity is structurally held at a distance from the material and ideological conditions for that reflexivity to appear in public. This generates a kind of textbook example of power producing the subject who can speak truth to power; and the fact that this is taking place in an art context lends it an element of indeterminacy or playfulness that makes everyone look even better.

On the other hand, institutional critique in general, and institutional critique that takes place with reference to the mechanisms of education, even autonomous education, rarely takes into account something I have recently heard discussed as the ‘desire for institutions’. The survival of institutions over time is dependent not only on the management and control of those working within and associated with them, i.e. coercion, but there is also a positive moment, or moments, of those institutions fulfilling or producing desires. They do this by making various types of resources available to their members; by providing an interface and platform for projects to the outside world; by establishing a shelter in which to develop and nurture ideas and practices, even counter-institutional ones; by supporting the feeling of being part of something, of making a contribution, etc. It is only by taking such desires seriously (which the Copenhagen Free University did through the notion of ‘self-institution’), rather than through increasingly formalist versions of critique, that we can ever hope to arrive at effective forms of self-organisation, especially in the current political and economic climate. This is also relevant for defending, or developing, emancipatory practices within institutions — practices which can respond to ever-tightening pressures from instrumental arts policies and quantification-obsessed corporate education management. In order for it not to be a purely defensive battle and rather than referring to a ‘political’ that is always happening elsewhere, the desires of the people who engage in these institutional structures must be integral to any politics that is rooted in these structures. An idea such as ‘academic freedom’, for example, which might have seemed a conservative notion thirty years ago, depending on the context, might nowadays create a space for the formulation of a new commons. When education has become one of the most highly commodified and instrumentalised sectors worldwide and debt slavery and ‘employability’ are the real products of most universities, academic freedom might become a basis upon which to decide what kind of ‘freedom’ might now be possible or desired.

The role of education in the current debates and developments around the ‘global economic crisis’ is also worth considering. As governments attempt to restore their bankrupt national treasuries with cuts, privatisation and rationalisation of social spending, university students are at the forefront of anti-crisis insurrections in various places in Europe. Education is again at the top of the agenda as the ‘crisis’ accelerates the roll-out of the neoliberal Bologna Process across the EU. There is a policy debate in the UK right now about lifting the caps on student fees, which are already, at their current levels, triggering unsustainable levels of

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individual and social indebtedness. So, education, with its relation to time and process, becomes a high stakes asset in economies which, over the past several decades, have become increasingly reliant on unrealisable claims upon future wealth generation. In my view, the role of education, or the educational turn in contemporary artistic practice, needs to reckon with this relationship — between how the emphasis on how education ‘keeps things open’ in art and how financialisation[10] ‘keeps things open’ in the economy — and how, when things take a turn for the worse, the old forms of closure re-assert themselves and the urgency of education as a component of political praxis becomes clear, especially in terms of historical awareness.

AK

Well, I would add here that socially engineered education as a European project, in the form of the Bologna Process, actuates nightmares from a (modernist) planner’s mentality. Against this backdrop, the tensions articulated in terms of the pedagogical resonate with a rather pessimistic undertone. Nevertheless, I believe in a certain process of ‘fragilisation’. This is how I would refer to the institutionally based, yet independent, artistic processes that you have both described. At best, the institution, or the idea of the institution, becomes, to some degree, permeable and amenable to the various practices and desires described. From the perspective of the one who might enter different institutional settings, I think that re-arranging desires is at the heart of any educationist practice. I would insist on education as an alternative practice, instead of a reinforcing practice, as a crucial basis from which to start. For example, I increasingly doubt the notion of learning as an end in itself. This construct should be radically challenged by asking: ‘Who develops what kind of motivations when engaging in learning, and when?’

Working within such contexts as the Hidden Curriculum project, I always feel that I become contaminated by the forces that could take an interest in the project, or by structural dispositions, whatever direction I take. Of course, what helps here is that form of critique that doesn’t exempt oneself: the agent of critique. But, I remain unsatisfied when trying to grapple with my own practice. Recently,

I stumbled across the term ‘Wit(h)nessing’, from Bracha Ettinger.[11]

With reference to my own practice, I would like to translate this term, to think of a form of solidarity which manages to amalgamate both aspects of the inside-outside position that I am trying to unfold, together with the students in the schools, in the collective research approach. ‘Wit(h)nessing’ addresses the question of personal responsibility, of direct witnessing, which is painful. It underlines how it is impossible to ignore one’s own participation in that gaze, at the same time as taking part in a shareable, resonating process. It describes a kind of temporal mutual affinity that takes on the question of agency and engages the social imagination towards the impossible.

10. ‘Financialisation’ is a complex construct, often articulated alongside the terms ‘globalisation’ and ‘neoliberalism’ as the overarching triumvirate of concepts shaping contemporary capitalism. In the simplest terms, it is used to define the vastly expanded role for financial markets, actors, institutions and instruments in the operation of domestic and international economies. One conservative economist, the Harvard professor Benjamin M. Friedman, has indicated a feature of the pre-eminence of ‘financialisation’ by observing that ‘in many […] firms the activity has become further and further divorced from actual economic activity’. See Benjamin M. Friedman, The moral consequences of economic growth. Alfred A. Knopf. 2005.

11. See Bracha Ettinger, ‘Wit(h)nessing Trauma and the matrixial gaze: from phantasm to trauma, from phallic structure to matrixial sphere’. Parallax. Vol. 7. No. 4. 2001.
Having been invited to contribute to this collection of essays on the ‘educational turn’ in curatorial practice, we thought it would be relevant to reflect on our unrealised proposal, *Art School* (1999), while charting a micro-history of our own practice in relation to a broader landscape of cultural, economic and political change. While the aim of *Art School* was to fuse or conflate categories, the purpose of this article is to expand and elucidate on the terms of a collaborative practice. Our practice includes making art, giving talks and working in art education, all of which are based on dialogue. So as to bring out the differences between our individual recollections and interpretations, this article takes the form of a discussion distilled from a number of recent conversations.

If it had been accepted, *Art School* would have occupied the Chisenhale Gallery, London, for one month, to facilitate an explicit and implicit enquiry into notions of the art school. With contributions from artists, writers and curators, the project would have encouraged participants to bring together rational and intuitive modes of thought across the widest range of activities. These activities would have been contextualised through presentations, debates and critiques.

One aim for the proposed project was to have established conditions for productive encounters of social difference, which we hoped would have carried over after class and beyond the event. Proposed as a brief respite from some of the problems which faced — and continue to face — art education in Britain, *Art School* would have combined high artistic and intellectual ambition with freedom from assessment criteria, managerialism, audit culture and marketing.

Participation in *Art School* would have been free; materials would have been basic and the contributors would have been paid a reasonable fee. In order to fund the project, we had intended to bid to the Research Committees of the ‘new universities’ in which we worked, for Research Assessment Exercise funds.

MATTHEW CORNFORD  We made the *Art School* proposal for the Chisenhale in response to the call for entries we had seen advertised in *Art Monthly* — as we hadn’t been invited or selected by a curator and we weren’t represented by a gallery, our proposal for *Art School* could be seen as an attempt at self-curating.

DAVID CROSS  We didn’t just aim to take on the intellectual aspect of the curator’s role, but the practical parts too. We are less
interested in making objects than staging projects and we’re closely concerned with the material properties of our works. Also, I enjoy a hands-on approach to the planning, organisation and co-ordination of our projects, because each one is different and involves learning from new interactions with people and places.

Of course, if Art School had been approved, we would have turned our critical attention to the interactions between the roles of artist, curator, educator and participant.

I remember our method or intention was to displace education from the art school to the art gallery, but what lay behind that gesture? In making the transition from students to practitioners, we followed the examples of those we admired, who had themselves combined the role of artist with that of educator, bringing aspects of the learning environment — specifically the critical, interrogative and discursive — into artistic practice.

Asher’s removal of a wall dividing the Claire Copley gallery from its office in 1974 was a key work in the evolution of institutional critique and one that became an enduring influence. Asher’s breakthrough went beyond minimalism; for me, it exemplified his project of ‘material subtraction’.

These included the political and psychoanalytic insights of Victor Burgin, the biting institutional critique of Hans Haacke, the critique of militarism undertaken by Terry Atkinson, and the political paintings of Sue Atkinson. Our interest in temporary interventions draws partly from the ‘happenings and environments’ of Allan Kaprow and the austere and elegant installations of Michael Asher.

Michael Asher’s removal of a wall dividing the Claire Copley gallery from its office in 1974 was a key work in the evolution of institutional critique and one that became an enduring influence. Asher’s breakthrough went beyond minimalism; for me, it exemplified his project of ‘material subtraction’.

Whereas Lucio Fontana’s slashed canvas invited me to think about the space behind the work, Asher’s installation asked me to think about the work behind the space. By deleting one division of architectural space, the installation showed the ideological function of concealment within the institution. Asher said of the work: ‘In the same way that gallery personnel seemed to become increasingly aware of their activities, viewers also became more aware of themselves as viewers’. For me, the work also revealed something of the reciprocal interactions between cultural producers and consumers, offering a moment in which heightened self-awareness can lead away from a condition of passivity towards a consciousness of individual agency as a key factor in social situations, including art.

We became interested in the relationship between Asher’s rigorous non-object-based, non-commercial practice and his famous post-studio art course at the California Institute of the Arts, in which group critique was central to the exchange of ideas about art and its contexts.

The group became highly renowned for their challenge to the status quo, their adversarial debates and, as John Roberts has put it, their ‘glacial’ work. However, as a student, I found their landscape of ideas inhospitable and rather intimidating. Later, as someone committed to both teaching and art practice, I took their categorisation of ‘university art’ along with Michael Baldwin’s characterisation of ‘senior-lecturer-style artists’ as too broadly dismissive.


The 1987 television series, State of the Art: Ideas and Images in the 1980s, had featured Atkinson teaching in the studio environment of Leeds University and Burgin holding a seminar at the Polytechnic of Central London. For me, this footage positioned their teaching on a level with their practice.

As a student, I saw Burgin’s work and commentary as an ideal of the integration of theory and practice and the role model for the artist/intellectual/teacher.

In State of the Art, Burgin referenced Louis Althusser’s identification of the school, university and polytechnic as primary sites of change: ‘you struggle for change within institutions that you’re in every day’. However, by 1999, when we formulated the Art School proposal, the balance of change taking place in UK art education represented the agenda of a government concerned with control and accountability: we found ourselves struggling not to bring about change, but to work around it.

I admired and respected Hans Haacke’s confrontations with the links between culture and power. In an art world characterised by social etiquette and politely nuanced discussion, Haacke named specific corporations and institutions in revealing critiques of their instrumental use of culture. I experienced that to be both a shock and stimulus.

Haacke was another artist known for a practice which included teaching (at Cooper Union in New York), writing and making art. I learned a great deal from Haacke’s critical essays and from his consciously didactic artworks.

My teaching has been informed by the way Haacke combined the roles of artist and researcher or investigative journalist, but it has also been influenced by the way Allan Kaprow combined the roles of artist and activist. I liked the transient quality of Kaprow’s ‘environments’ and ‘happenings’ and his argument that the boundary between art and life should be kept as fluid and perhaps indistinct as possible.

Kaprow’s engagement with play is present in our work Power to the People (1997). Though at the time we staged Power to the People, we didn’t know about Martha Rosler’s action Garage Sale (1973), in which she staged a garage sale in a gallery, we see it now as a clear precedent for our work.

At Saint Martins, we talked about how Tim Rollins’ Art of Knowledge Workshop with ‘the Kids of Survival’ (KOS) offered an example of how reading, discussing and making, as group activities could be a basis for a socially engaged art practice. Art School proposed ‘the widest range of activities’, which would have included engaging with language as art, which would, in turn, have been contextualised through presentations, debates and critiques.

Rollins referenced Paulo Freire’s book, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, which made us aware of both the ideological nature of education and its potential for emancipation.

For me, Freire’s seminal contribution was to circumvent the ‘banking’ concept of education, in which experts impart their knowledge, in favour of a problem-posing model of learning. Through Freire, I came to see that while art defers its moment of completion, in the work or the viewer, it keeps possibilities open.

What, in retrospect, has emerged as the most influential aspect of our art education was not the content — we had to seek that out — but the model of pedagogical practice itself: the work done through the seminar discussion and the group critique as a challenge and stimulus. That these were part of a ‘pedagogical lineage’, developed by people whose work we admired, was not something we were taught at art school, but rather something that we learned afterwards.

Art School did embody our interest as students in the critical work of the artist-educators described above, but it was not simply an homage to those who came before us — it stemmed from our own teaching experience.


6. In the work Power to the People (1997) we arranged for a one-day record fair to be held in the Bluecoat Gallery, Liverpool. This live art event set out to undermine the distinction between high and low cultural forms, and the spaces that house them. Some people came to the fair to buy records; others came to the gallery to see art.

Both groups participated in a ‘happening’.

7. KOS is a group of ‘at-risk’ students formed and led by Rollins in the South Bronx, New York. Their practice centres on a collaborative painting project in which the group reads classic literature, transfers the book pages onto canvas and paints images directly on top. For a history of the project, which began in 1981, see Ian Berry (ed.), Tim Rollins and K.O.S.: A History, MIT Press. 2009.

Given that we had left college during an economic recession and given the critical ambitions of our temporary interventions, we didn’t expect to make money selling work. Instead, we had recognised that, to sustain our art practice, we would need a particular combination of just enough economic security, plenty of cultural stimulation, and a great deal of intellectual freedom. So, after graduating from the RCA in 1991, we worked towards connecting and supporting our collaborative practice as artists with teaching in art school.

MC Working in higher education allowed us a platform from which to discuss new ideas, support critical thinking and influence debate. With a succession of completed art projects, we became recognised as ‘research active’ staff, which allowed us to apply to the research committees of our institutions for peer-reviewed funding to produce our projects. A condition of this support came in the form of a requirement that we show how our art, or ‘practice-based research’, articulated a contribution to knowledge and connected with the teaching and learning activity of the university.

DC A gradual process of change was beginning to accelerate in the institution. The assimilation of art schools into polytechnics had started under a Labour administration in the late 1960s, with the stated aim of promoting interdisciplinary practice and linking academic enquiry to the creative processes of making art. In the next phase of development, during the 1980s, the Conservative Party began to re-define education as a private good rather than a public service or political right. The terminology of business was introduced within higher education: students were to be treated as customers, lecturers became providers of educational services and polytechnics were re-branded as the ‘new universities’.

Under New Labour, further change was implemented within the rhetoric of empowerment and accountability. Students became ‘stakeholders’ in the ‘knowledge economy’; ‘student-centred learning’ gave students greater responsibility for their own choices; ‘widening participation’ increased educational opportunity for all sections of society. The numbers of students increased exponentially, but without a corresponding increase in teaching budgets.

MC Actually, the quantity of funds available to the new universities via the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) increased. Yet student numbers increased significantly beyond the level that the additional resources could support and academics were required to be more accountable. The quality management systems introduced to control expenditure and monitor academic activity produced expanding bureaucracies that came to absorb a disproportionate amount of the very time and money they sought to monitor, without guaranteeing the quality of the end product or service. The result, for artists and academics, was an increasing workload, consisting not only of extra teaching and research but also of management meetings, report writing, record keeping and co-ordination. The result, for students, was that intellectual and artistic development became codified into ‘learning outcomes’ and measured in terms of assessment grades.

DC What good came of these changes? Perhaps the new systems replaced a culture of chauvinism and gender inequality with greater equality and self-awareness. However, that improvement might equally be credited to the positive changes taking place in the wider society.

MC The advocates of neoliberal policy pushed for deregulation in financial markets, while massively increasing regulation in the public sector. Corresponding with the changes in higher education, government funding for the arts also increased, but again this came with conditions attached.

DC This latter instrumentalisation of culture included the dramatic expansion of gallery education and outreach programmes. So, Art School offered a dual proposition: to warn of an approaching crisis in education and to parody the demands being made of public galleries.

MC In Art School, the exhibition and education programme would have been one and the same. Although in our proposal text we said that Art School would have encouraged ‘the widest range of activities’, this needs some qualification. A working art school needs a library, workshop, darkroom, computer suite, canteen and office, but we did not propose to set up any of these for the duration of the project. This meant setting up studio spaces in the gallery, which for any London art students taking part would have been a chance to work in a studio space of the sort that was coming under increasing pressure in the art colleges. What interested me were the kinds of space that allow a range of different interactions, from reading to making to viewing to talking: i.e. low-budget, multi-purpose spaces that resist being categorised and assimilated.

MC The project would have been a context-specific art work to the extent that it engaged with the Chisenhale as a critical,
independent, non-commercial gallery and studio space in London’s East End, an area that had an exceptionally high concentration of artists.

It was also context-specific because it engaged with a particular period. This was a time of increased privatisation presented as ‘entrepreneurship’ culture, when the pursuit of moderate self-interest within the changing situation, and even well intentioned actions, contributed to a process of alienation. Ten years on, the recent bailout of the failed banks offers a pivotal moment to reconsider what society can afford. Is bureaucracy affordable? Do the benefits of centralised control justify the costs? The pedagogical models that I think should be preserved at all costs may actually be those that cost the least: the issue is not the price, but the value.

Curators identify, critically frame and promote what they see as ‘valuable’. In engaging with the ‘educational turn’, what curators and artists have focussed on is not the centralised, capital-intensive, professionalised model of pedagogy but the experimental, open-ended aspects of education pioneered in art schools.

Art and education are still the processes through which critical thinking can take place, not only to find fault but also to formulate different models and to imagine alternative possibilities. However, given the efficiency with which critical terminology and ideas become recuperated, it’s essential to keep in mind that the point of such imaginings and formulations is a transformation of consciousness.

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Marion von Osten & Eva Egermann

The editors of this volume have asserted, in their invitation to contribute, that pedagogy has turned into a leitmotif for the contemporary art field and that there ‘is a recognisable turn to pedagogical models across a range of recent curatorial projects, art practices and art writing as evidenced in a range of work’. Eva, you have been part of several collective art projects and activities in the past ten years, such as the Manoa Free University and the project ‘W...WirWissen’ (2005) in the Kunsthalle Exnergasse, Vienna and many more. What were the main motivations to create, for example, a collective that claimed to be a ‘Free University’ and to have it perform within the art field?

Eva Egermann

There were many different motivations to establish and engage in the Manoa Free University. The political context at that time was defined by the introduction of the new ‘Austrian University Act of 2002’, which had abolished student participation in decision-making processes. Among other things, it seemed therefore necessary to form autonomous structures. Similar informal, self-organised initiatives were created at that time including Keine Uni or K.U.U.G.E.L in Austria. The Manoa Free University was founded in 2003 as a sort of study circle, informed by discussions with Jakob Jakobsen and Henriette Heise at the Copenhagen Free University. Other collectives had recently come to an end and we hoped such a self-institution or context would enable us to continue to work collaboratively and to research within both art and activism. Around ten to fifteen people were engaged at that time.

Back then, I was also involved in the student movement against the coalition of the Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs (FPÖ) and the Österreichische Volkspartei (ÖVP) which came into power in Austria in 2000. This conservative/right-wing coalition introduced not only tuition fees but also a new law through which universities were to be transformed into public-private enterprises, equipped with quasi-autonomy in terms of finances. Confronted with this deprivation of space for action within the national student union, it seemed more promising to engage in something new, a form of self-organisation outside the regular university structures, a counter-public project departing from both the artists’ and students’ normal fields of action. For this reason, we understood the notion of a ‘free university’ as a challenge to the ongoing subordination of education policies within neoliberal discourse. Our ‘university’ project referred to historical examples of self-organised anti-institutions of the 1960s and 1970s. As soon as you claim that you are creating a ‘university’ and that you are working with ‘knowledge’, those very structures and notions are immediately subject to a process of reflection and discussion. This speech act made it possible to reflect upon the conditions of possibility for learning and knowledge production and to reflect upon the expectations established by these claims. How is a university defined? What is different if we define the university ourselves? And what might this mean in the context of the contemporary commercialisation of the educational system?

Marion VON Osten

If I remember correctly, you were a student of the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna at that time. Would you say that a coalition between the students of art and non-art related universities was also possible? Did such coalitions have the potential to produce a new field for intervention and action beyond the art field and/or the possible ground for the exhibition ‘W...WirWissen’? Universities and Academies of Fine Art in the German context have, over the past decade, developed a very specific critique of the Bologna Process and of the neoliberal vision of the university. The German academies have been engaged in establishing a certain Sonderweg by claiming that the Bachelor degree is not suitable for an education in art and only implementing the Masters degree. But this Sonderweg implies that the art academies are handled as exceptions and not yet as counter-models as such. In this way, students in the academies are no longer in a common struggle with students fighting in other institutions against the same transformation and against the same degree structures. This last reflection relates to my first question as to why you created the Manoa Free University within — or at least in relationship with — the art field. The self-organisation of knowledge production could have taken place anywhere. Is this because you were artists or would you say that there is a specificity to the art space that makes it more relevant, and better disposed, to the free university project?

1. See [http://manoafreeuniversity.org/]
2. The exhibition project, ‘W.WirWissen: learning emancipatory selfinstitution, socialised research and unlearning’, took place between 24 March and 2 April 2005 at the Kunsthalle Exnergasse in Vienna. See [http://manoafreeuniversity.org/w.../wirwissen/]
3. This was an initiative for the repoliticalisation of the social discourse on universities, at a local and global level. See [http://kuugel.redefreiheit.net/]
4. See [http://www.copenhagenfreeuniversity.dk/]
5. Those engaged in the project included Elke Auer, Ascan Breuer, Ursula Hansbauer, Phillip Haupt, Moira Hille, Wolfgang Konrad, Katharina Lampert, Christina Linortner, Ralf Mayer, Markus Novak, Clemens Stachel, Esther Straganz, Christian Töpfner, Julia Wieger and guests.
7. Austrian People’s Party.
8. Sonderweg is translated as a ‘special path’ and refers to the idea of national exceptionalism — i.e. not following the general European path of development. (Elsewhere, this term also has a specific salience within historiographic controversies about German exceptionalism and the emergence of the Nazi era.)
When I was studying at the Vienna Art Academy, the education and the curricula there were still relatively conventional, maintaining a rigid and non-transparent system of ‘master classes’. From 2000 onwards, the art academies were facing neoliberal reforms, introduced by the Lisbon strategy and by the aforementioned Austrian University Act. Nobody could really clearly imagine what these transformations would do to the art academies. It was quite tricky and hard to take a position, since, on the one hand, we as students of course criticised the specific traditional, hierarchical and patriarchal master class system (but we also recognised that this older system created a lot of open spaces beyond its own limits and that it generated in-between sites that enabled certain kinds of autonomy). On the other hand, we were fighting against the ongoing commercialisation of education.

The initial basis for the actions that I was involved in — and this included students from very different universities, including some art but mostly non-art students — was the critical debate in response to the General Agreement of Trade in Services (GATS). This was a binding contract, signed by the member states of the World Trade Organization, which essentially laid the foundations for the commercialisation and commodification of the educational system and other spheres that were formerly seen as common goods, such as water, healthcare, transport and culture. Then the structural changes came with the Austrian University Act in 2002. Whilst the introduction of the Academy Organisation Act (AOG) in 1988 had generated a major upgrade of student and employee participation in decision-making processes and structures in the universities, these predominantly democratic structures were undermined in the subsequent political backlash by the right-wing government. In spite of all the protests, weeks of huge demonstrations and public declarations from all universities, the Austrian University Act was passed. The implementation of the new system turned many existing structures around and created a huge challenge for students, staff and professors; everyone was kept busy in that sense. More activist-based, informal and self-organised student initiatives began to form and become active on a local level, such as K.U.U.G.E.L, Keine Uni, ManaMana from Budapest, the University of Openess from London, as well as local groups, that were mentioned before, activists, students engaged in the student union, zine makers and others. (This was, so to speak, interdisciplinary academic research beyond Bologna.) ‘W...WirWissen’ became a six-week long social experiment in the Kunsthalle Exnergasse in Vienna, which aimed to experiment with organisational forms and with ‘learning emancipatory self-institution, socialised research and unlearning’ (as the subtitle of the project declared).

Within that context, of course, the art field was seen as a place in which things could happen, a field of potential, a space of exchange between different models and concepts and, in the sense of learning and unlearning, a field of agency and transfer between different social and political fields and between different positions and subjectivities. In a way, the exhibition functioned as a pretext, a defined place for communication and action that would perhaps establish impulses for further transformations. So, the project functioned as an expanded field of practice from which to organise and network between many different groups, but also to question and experiment with methods of representation and distribution for collective artistic research. We wanted to disseminate our research for collective usage through various means, such as the study circle itself, a wiki, publications and readers and through the model of a free university.

Informal, ephemeral and implicit knowledge and its instantaneous post-Fordist valorisation, combined with the economisation of education and the role of artistic research, were placed at the centre of the enquiry in ‘W...WirWissen’. We used the metaphor of the theatre to create a discursive space, producing a rehearsal stage for a theatre production without premiere in order to generate ‘performative’ research. During the course of the exhibition, weekly events, lectures, workshops, rehearsals and meetings took place, sometimes with additional guests and friends. Every Friday, intermediate outputs of the process were presented in the form of theatre rehearsals. The use of a rehearsal plan (as research programme) and the use of a system of mobile spatial elements generated an arrangement of onand off-stage moments as well as
different spaces such as stage, backstage, canteen, etc. In this way, a merging of quasi-public and quasi-private spaces occurred, that framed a discursive process. The research was structured by focussing on a series of different topics, such as knowledge economy, feminist structures, forms of self-empowerment, organisation and networking and precarity.¹⁰ The statements produced were, in turn, discussed and reflected upon and then called into question again, through an inherent ‘stuttering’ process as indicated in the title of the project, ‘W...Wir Wissen’.

But, within the Manoa Free University, we also experienced some quite ambivalent situations, for example, in 2005, when we undertook a sublet in a former university building. The University of Music and Performatve Art (through the department of strategic project planning) had to rent out parts of their buildings in order to gain third party funding. Every day, we witnessed the process of privatisation as we passed the logos and commercial brands of the sponsors in the entrance lobby of the building.¹¹

One year later, the project ‘reformpause’ took place in the Kunstraum der Universität Lüneburg, for which you, Marion, made an extensive analysis of the Bologna Process and student struggles and their genealogies.

Yes, but for the ‘reformpause’ project, the conditions were quite different as I was invited by the Kunstraum Lüneburg for a show, or — if you prefer — for an artistic research project as an individual artist. The Kunstraum is situated directly on the university campus and all invited artists are asked to collaborate with the lecturers and students of the art and visual studies department, which is led by Ulf Wuggenig and Dietmar Stoller. The specific circumstances of this site have been engaged with by many other art and curators, as, for example, in the project Branding the Campus by Christian Phillip Müller and by exhibitions, publications and debates on educational topics generated by Roger M. Buergel, Ruth Noack, Thomas Locher and Peter Zimmermann. Because of the university reform process and the populist debate on the so-called state of emergency in education, I used the invitation from

10. ‘Precarity’ is derived from the terms ‘precariat’ and ‘precarious’. ‘Precarious’ has become a political term which refers to living and working conditions which are without any guarantees; for example, the precarious residence permission of migrants and refugees or the precarious working life of casualised day labourers or outsourced service workers. The term has been increasingly used in relation to labour. ‘Precarious’ work refers to the many varieties of flexible labour exploitation: from illegalised, seasonal and temporary employment to homework, flex- and temp-work to subcontractors, freelancers or the self employed. The ‘precariat’ thus functions, by analogy, with the term ‘proletariat’ and ‘precarity’ thus indicates this general theme and condition of precariousness.

11. This is described in the project Heterotopologie, Ähem. See [http://manoa.freeserver.org/projects/heterotopologie_aehem/].

the students and lecturers to generate a better understanding of this crisis in knowledge production and the education system.¹² I had experienced the effects of the reforms in Zürich where I was lecturing and researching at the time. At that very moment, we were all suffering from weird decision-making and requirements prompted by the Bologna Declaration and its national adaptations: the bureaucratic apparatus and new structures of control (quality management, etc.) expanded; the situation of knowledge workers was becoming increasingly precarious and pressure was put on students to adhere to new logics of time and efficiency. Research institutes at public universities had to organise and finance themselves and their research entirely through third party funding, while, at the same time, statements of achievement were published in glossy brochures. Elite study programmes were established and new staff employed to enforce the policies of reform, which was aimed at standardising the ways in which knowledge is imparted. This abolished study and research in the literal sense of the words, while certain fields of learning and knowledge production were outsourced and the slogan ‘Life Long Learning’ became a condition of one’s employability. When one reflects upon these shifts and ruptures, the educational turn in the art world also takes on a different taste.

Within the framework of ‘reformpause’, we began with an analysis of the Bologna Conference papers and the Bologna reform process alongside a consideration of the theses of The New Spirit of Capitalism by Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello. Students and scholars from the institution began to examine whether the reform models of the 1960s and 1970s could serve as a model (in particular, according to the inspirational Cité¹³ and the projects-oriented Cité in the sense of Boltanski and Chiapello) to legitimate the current restructuring of educational institutions. Further, the question was

¹². ‘reformpause’ was at the Kunstraum of the University of Lüneburg between 16 May and 18 June 2006 and involved Marion von Osten in collaboration with Christiane Autsch, Kristina Geertz, Ludmila Gerasimov, Julia Hammer, Rahel-Katharina Hermann, Katharina Looks, Jenny Nachtigall, Maria Petersen, Kathrin Rees, Stephanie Schneider, Frauke Schnoor, Stephanie Seidel, Valentina Seidel, Nike Thurn and Anna Till. See [http://kunstraum.uni-luebeck.de/projekte/e-reformpause.html].

¹³. Cité is a term used in Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, Le nouvel esprit du capitalisme, Gallimard, 1999. It is taken from Boltanski and Thévenot’s sociology of justification, a work which aims at identifying the principles of common good employed by individuals when they publicly argue that they have acted on behalf of justice. Boltanski and Thévenot identified these principles by comparing the justifications individuals use in litigious situations with classical political philosophies, whose object is to design a legitimate order based on a principle of justice. By co-analysing the justifications formulated by actors and the classical political philosophies, Boltanski and Thévenot identified six models they call Cité. Each Cité is based on a principle that composes common good. The Cité models defined by Boltanski and Thévenot comprise the Inspirational, the Domestic, the Market, the Civic, the Renown, the Civic, and the Market. See Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thévenot, De la justification, Gallimard, 1991.
raised, as to whether or not the changes are primarily based on economic considerations related to principles of the market and of efficiency (according to the industrial and market Cités) resulting in a re-disciplining of students and lecturers and a further bureaucratisation of structures? Also, the hypothesis was pursued that interprets the recent changes as a partial return to the hierarchical university of the 1960s, heavily dominated by professors and grounded in a neo-conservative world-view. (Indeed, this seems to be one of the major paradoxes of the neoliberal paradigm, which argues for liberation and generates ever more control systems and dispositifs.) Thus, we conducted research into the history of educational reforms from the 1960s until today, as well as research into the tradition of critique of university knowledge and the spaces of knowledge (wissensräume). We analysed both of these areas with regard to their possible relevance to present debates.

**EE** How were these reflections communicated to the public? Did they have an afterlife beyond the site of discussion and research?

**MVO** Due to the topicality of the debate and the nature of the site, I decided to prepare a show in the Kunstraum and to intervene into the campus during the course of the exhibition with film-screenings, posters and ‘wall newspaper’ production. The wall newspaper took the format and conventions of the popular PLAKAT newspaper of the student movement in the 1970s. This newspaper still circulates within the current student movement and is used as a tool of debate for various struggles. On the front of our PLAKAT newspaper, an image of a demonstration from 1968 was blown up — the banners depicted in the image said ‘No University Reform! The University for All!’ A series of screenings called ‘pausenkino’ was programmed to take place between lectures, in which the popular critique of educational institutions was brought back to the campus by showing historical and present-day films and also some art videos. These referred to popular knowledge and pleasure, issues which are of almost no importance within the academy but which are highly relevant to forms of resistance and subversion.14 (These reflections on popular learning and critique were, in turn, relevant to the development of Dos Erziehungsbild, the project I realised one year later, together with Tom Holert, as part of my new role at the Institute for Education in the Arts at the Academy in Vienna.) But, to return to ‘reformpause’, the exhibition examined the debates and strategies at work in the comprehensive mobilisation toward the ‘knowledge society’ from as early as the 1960s. One such example

14. Films shown on the campus included those of Claudia Alemann, Lindsay Anderson, Danielle Huillet and Jean-Marie Straub, MeineAkademie, Daniel Schmid, Gus van Sant, Cecilia Wendt and Friedrich Wiesmann. The film selection was compiled in collaboration with Madeleine Bernstorff.

15. ‘Making Worlds’ was an open workshop led by the ‘reformpause’ project group and members of the Institute for Cultural Theory. Participants included Madeleine Bernstorff, Julia Franz, MeineAkademie Berlin, Preclab Research Group Hamburg, Katja Reichard, Peter Spillmann and Axel John Wieder.
engaged with contemporary changes in the concepts of information and communication.

So, the main question seems to be: why do we face this massive educational turn, which also articulates itself in the art world, as this volume rightly suggests? I would propose to look at these developments as part of a bigger picture, and to analyse the social and economic transformations that lie behind them. The first educational reforms positioned themselves against the backdrop of the innovation crisis in the West in the late 1950s — one of the many crises of capitalist accumulation. But, at this moment, as the means of production changed and knowledge and information became central resources within the shift from manufacture and production to management and service, mass education was seen as the only possibility for addressing this crisis. Both my generation and yours, Eva, are the products of these changes; we are all highly sophisticated and willing to learn. We have learned that knowledge is important and we would always argue that everybody needs a good education. While this is true under the current conditions, it also has its effects; it always creates a hierarchy of relevant and irrelevant knowledges; it still reinforces social and class asymmetries endemic to the educational system itself.

Another problem I envisage here is that, on the one hand, knowledge is, by its nature, available for unrestricted use, while, on the other hand, it is increasingly constructed to generate value as a commodity. Today, knowledge-based on ownership rights is treated both nationally and internationally as a promising commodity. But, due to its immaterial form, knowledge — either as a 'use-value' or as a commodity — can never be completely controlled or measured. According to Yann Moulier Boutang, knowledge must possess two features to establish itself as an economic good or commodity; the principle of exclusivity and of rivalry in use. ([Exclusivity means that by belonging to one owner everyone else is prevented from utilising the rights on this economic good. Rivalry in use means that it is not compatible with another use.]) However, knowledge as a commodity is also dependent on cooperation and communication — its value is actualised only when it is used — and here the neoliberal paradigm faces a dilemma. This dilemma arises because the controlled access to knowledge goods and information not only creates new global differences in power, new forms of resistance and subversive practices, it also entails dependency on knowledge practices and forms of acquisition that cannot be generated and administered institutionally, nor can they be promoted or funded; rather, they are distinguished by the fact that they are self-organised. Thus, the much-hyped market of neoclassical theory becomes problematic in terms of providing the necessary resources for producing knowledge in order to gain competitiveness. But current European education policies cannot guarantee that they meet the requirements of new flexible labour markets — instead, privatisation has generated often dubious offers of 'advanced training' — nor do these policies provide the time and resources necessary to develop the social and communicative abilities that are today recognised as qualifications. The knowledge-based economy — or as some term it, cognitive capitalism — corrupts life and social interaction in a parasitic way. It ‘fucks up the commons’, as Massimo di Angelo would say; it transforms communality and sociability into commodity and competition.

It is at this point, I think, that we must be somewhat sceptical with regard to the ‘educational turn’ in the art world and our own practices. We must be sceptical not only in terms of the aesthetic outcome or in terms of the work’s status as ‘art’ (or not), but much more in terms of the role the work plays in displacing the real questions of knowledge economies and cognitive capitalism. These practices may do this by creating an informal, symbolic market in which surplus value generates no money as such — but instead generates the radical chic and informal structures of our easyjet-set of MA students, art professors, curators and other such ‘dignitaries’. Moreover, this educational turn in contemporary art engenders a rather strange concept of art itself; it somehow reduces art to an instrument — a utility — for generating a ‘better society’ and, furthermore, this instrumentalisation can readily be appropriated by neoliberal governments. One can already recognise this tendency whereby artists are increasingly required to do so-called community work projects, in which art is mainly deployed as a means to govern and mollify ‘marginalised groups’.

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EE  Taking account of the volume of exhibitions, events, and symposia addressed to education that have been and are currently taking place in the art field and the rather negligible effect of all this on the overall educational struggles in society, I totally agree (and not only in relation to what you have said about your scepticism about the educational turn and ‘displacing the real questions’). The contested expansion of artistic practice to embrace theoretical, curatorial and activist practices addressing the concept of (artistic) knowledge production is also of specific interest here. One author has described the problem in a recent text addressed ‘To the Knowledge Producers’, whereby ‘to posit knowledge as something that is produced is already to speak of knowledge in economic terms. Thus, knowledge production informs a range of terminology, such as knowledge producer/worker, products, education factory,
etc. Knowledge production has become an industry according to the claims of the World Trade Organization and the Lisbon Treaty, which seeks to establish Europe as the leading and most dynamic knowledge-based market by the year 2010. What happens if artistic research becomes an institutionalised, valorised and scientific factor within universities, appearing in research applications, Masters and PhD programmes and simply becomes at one with the emergence of the neoliberal University?

In articles like ‘Producing publics, making worlds!’ I have argued for a communal and transversal concept of knowledge production and the use of art as an alternative and contingent space, within which it is possible to take a position through the antagonisms the art field has produced and continues to produce. While I still think this is needed, I no longer really believe that this is enough. I do see a dilemma for these alternative and informal practices we have discussed, for the creation of free universities and for the use of art as a space of informal educational initiatives. This is because these projects operate in the symbolic, heavily under-funded space of the art world. They cannot claim any sustainable structures and cannot achieve a long term durational perspective or provide accessibility for more than the very few. Moreover, the precarious knowledge workers — the self-managers and self-organisers of alternate knowledges for limited publics — do they really alter or overcome the paradigms of Life Long Learning and the privatisation of the educational system? I have also recognised that the knowledge that is shared in these alternative circles does not really exist in the paradigms of Life Long Learning and the privatisation of the educational system? I have also recognised that the knowledge that is shared in these alternative circles does not really exist in opposition to the academic context I am working in right now; the boundaries between institutions and non-institutions are fluid.

I guess it is crucial to reflect on the intrinsic relationship between neoliberal politics and one’s own position and participation in it after the historiographic and ethnographic turn in the visual arts. This means that we need to engage with the present and we need to re-address what art and design might be capable of generating in terms of a counter-macro-political discourse and aesthetic practice. There is a demand to engage with the question of how things can change, how things can be other than they currently are. This must be thought through in relation to existing models, which include, on the one hand, the increased informality of education and, on the other hand, the strict formalisation and regulation of education and research through certification and constructs such as centres of excellence.

I agree with this. In order to develop and generate such a counter-macro-political discourse and practice, it is necessary to (amongst other things) develop and maintain sustainable structures and, most importantly, common spaces to accommodate this discourse and practice. However, these structures and spaces must neither be merely the instrumental and representational dimensions of an art field nor the incubators of the new ‘soft-skills’ for enhanced employability. Such spaces should not be subordinated to a system of bureaucratic rule of an academic context. Therefore, I believe that there is still a need for free spaces, such as the self-organised initiatives within educational structures, for the development of a critical consciousness, or even a counter-discourse, and for the continuing research into these conditions and ambivalences that we have discussed so far.

The current knowledge industry fucks up the commons — as you cited — therefore, it is important to foster the idea that knowledge is a common good and to develop and reclaim knowledge commons (as Silvia Federici and George Caffentzis put it). Since the art field is a significantly deregulated, informal, flexibilised and economised sphere, in which knowledge is highly codified, the question of commons seems especially important.

Within the projects I have described so far, we recognised the art arena as a field of potential for testing out different models and concepts, which also enables a collective, interdisciplinary approach or serves as a sort of pretext for communication and action, as I explained earlier. On the other hand, I also think that there is potential to negotiate and develop this kind of counter-macro-political discourse from within an art field and from within artistic production itself, as long as it is directed towards a public. Art is not an autonomous, de-contextualised space per se. People are not ‘decontaminated’ from the social, the economic and the political when they enter the art field or when they attend an exhibition — whether as artists or as audience — these contexts, conditions and experiences are still present. The art space, like other spaces, is highly controversial and a place of social, political, cultural and economic contest, negotiation and criticism; it is also a space where transgression of the given matrix — the horizon or conditions of a
social discourse — is possible, has relevance and has a public. However, these transgressions must not be contained within the art space but have to be put to work within a broader socio-political discourse and practice.

I also think that there is a potentiality in the ‘non-efficiency’ of artistic methods which seek to withdraw from, what may be termed, ‘the pedagogy of capital’. Such methods are interdisciplinary, fragmentary, discontinuous and unprofitable in their desire not to prove an opposite efficiency, seeking rather to demonstrate a critical potentiality, a local, situated and differentiated knowledge, as Michel Foucault describes it. (20) Foucault calls for the connecting of the disqualified knowledge of the everyday with the historical knowledge of specific struggles — connecting these in order to learn and produce effective contemporary strategies and tactics within actual ‘live’ struggles. I guess that this is an aspect of what both our projects were trying to do.

An edited transcript of a conversation that took place in July 2009.

Some years ago, I was short-listed for a teaching job and I can remember feeling that the interview process was going quite well until, in the formal grilling around the boardroom table, I was asked the question, ‘Do you think that teaching can be art?’ My answer, which I’m pretty sure cost me the job, was ‘No’. Unbeknownst to me at the time, the person who’d asked the question had been a student of Joseph Beuys.

It was my feeling then, as it still is now, that teaching should, first and foremost, be about enabling learning. As a student, I had observed first hand that when the singular force of the artist’s persona imposes itself too strongly, it is more likely to impede than facilitate learning. We’re all familiar with the desperate figure of the middle-aged artist-lecturer who terrorises his impressionable students as a way of compensating for his failures elsewhere in life. This kind of teaching performance serves only to empower the tutor at the expense of the pupil. An imbalanced power dynamic perverts and distorts the educational process.

Right. There is definitely a big difference between the tutor discussing models of performativity and actually acting them out. A certain degree of theatricality can be necessary to put your point over effectively, but when the meta level of performativity blocks the base level of information being conveyed, then that is unfair on the unsuspecting student.

The artist-performer has been a familiar cultural stereotype for many years. Since an artist’s image has always been synonymous with the work produced, perhaps the spectacle of the artist acting out his or her own role in this way should be expected, since the art world is part of the global entertainment industry after all. In design circles, this would be called ‘brand reinforcement’. But, as you suggest, this is separate from performance art or from teaching art because these are distinct, if not necessarily autonomous, fields.

In fact, the ‘grand master’ model in education is hardly even relevant these days, given that the artist’s audience within the academy has totally changed over the years; for example, at the Royal College where I teach, over half of our students are from overseas. Frankly, some of the more performative and combative Anglo Saxon approaches that we considered intellectually aerobic in the past no longer benefit more than a few students.

Partly to address this problem, you established the Critical Forum Programme within the Communication Art and Design Department at the RCA. How did this come about and how did it create a situation within which a process of critical reflexivity could be nurtured?

Back in 2003, the level of critical engagement in the department was alarmingly low. The problem was that our teaching methods had stagnated. There was too little attention paid to the relationship between thinking and making. Intellectual pursuits seemed confined to the separate parameters of Critical and Historical Studies and failed to merge with the production of the visual in a meaningful way. But this was in contrast to my experience of teaching “fine” art, in which history anchors practice and there seems to be a more widespread understanding of the individual’s position in relation to the collective. By contrast, the designers, film makers and illustrators that I was working with in a ‘commercial’ art context did not seem to be as concerned about how their practices engaged with each other or about the wider historical and theoretical fields within which they were expecting their work to be sited.

Inevitably, a small group of students also recognised this deficiency of critical engagement and they began to make their feelings known. This group was regarded as something of a menace, but the tone of their complaint not only chimed with my own interests, it was expressed with a cogency that became impossible to ignore. Together, we established a forum for more critical debate. Initially the programme was called ‘The George Hanson Critical Forum’ and our objective was to explore the relationship between what we were doing and the work of others in allied or parallel fields. As the specialisms within our area are unusually wide-ranging — graphic and digital design, drawing and illustration, experimental film and video — it was felt that language provided the most universal medium with which to address these concerns.

Did anyone notice that you were setting up a school within a school, or wasn’t it perceived like that?

I was aware that what we were doing was politically sensitive at that time and also that an ‘oxymoronic’ power dynamic can develop when something independent and oppositional expresses itself with the blessing of the organ that it sets out to critique. But the initiative was set up according to democratic principles and, as much as anything, we were just looking for an opportunity to disagree.

Needless to say, the key to the forum’s success was to pre-emptively disarm allegations of insurrection by making it an open resource. We

1. Named after Jack Nicholson’s character in the film Easy Rider, the George Hanson Critical Forum was launched in November 2003.
were collectively concerned that our actions weren’t interpreted as rebellious, and we hoped that fellow lecturers and students would be attracted by the quality of our work.

\textit{AC} The format you chose is very particular in structure — how did you arrive at it?

\textit{DB} Initially, the format comprised two halves: round table discussions and published documentary texts. As with the current incarnation, the terms of engagement were jointly agreed between the participants. The procedures we arrived at required that a student or a member of staff from within the department convened each discussion. The topics were identified in advance and outside contributors invited to attend. These contributors were all specialists within their relevant fields: writers, critics, artists, designers, curators, etc. Over the years, we’ve worked with Liam Gillick, Inventory, Jane Rendell, Brian Eno, Anthony Dunne, Airside, Gavin Wade, M/M (Paris) and Geoff Dyer, to name just a few. It was the convenor’s responsibility to provide advance reading material, so that the group was well informed prior to meeting, and to chair the proceedings. The convenors were then also responsible for transcribing a recording of their discussion and for writing a documentary commentary for publication in an annual anthology of critical forum texts. Students from each year group also edited and designed the books. Mostly, I saw the publications as a way ofengaging a resource of mixed perspectives. Working as a group like this has engendered a power equilibrium that allows a more critical discourse

\textit{AC} Did the process work? What were the results?

\textit{DB} The most pleasing outcome of this process was to see how expertly the students hosted their events. It was they who ultimately addressed the prevailing culture of silence — and in the most incontrovertible way. We understood as a group that, as long as we remained silent, we were basically in agreement with the most incontrovertible way. We understood as a group that, as long as resistance; our ‘star turns’ from the wider cultural sphere. But, through my experience as a participant in a number of the sessions, I perceived that although there was quite a literal attempt to put the students at the centre of learning — i.e. by allowing them to invite their own speakers to talk about subjects that were presumably relevant to them — it seemed that the spotlight quickly shifted from the student body onto yourself and the guests.

\textit{AC} What have been the results of this development right up to today?

\textit{DB} Although this was not the case with all the sessions, it did happen often enough for me to realise that there was something about the format that could be improved. This relates to what I was saying before, about the teacher-performer whose function switch is permanently set to ‘transmit’ instead of ‘receive’. You seem to have noticed, as I did, that conversation, like water, follows the path of least resistance; our ‘star turns’ from the wider cultural sphere sometimes dominated the proceedings so that the focus never came back to student needs. We have now inverted that mechanism, by bringing students into the centre and supporting them with opinion from the wider field. Student work is now the basis of all our discussions.

\textit{AC} That sounds too good to be true. What you are saying is that it really was a two-way street: you were learning too? Or you were just learning to teach better?

\textit{DB} What I’m saying is that, for me, the experience of teaching co-operatively in this way was closer to the way that I learn through making my own art. The distinction between the two realms became blurred and then ultimately obsolete. I guess you could say that I had something like an art experience from a teaching event. It does sound a bit utopian, I agree.

\textit{AC} The most recent development in the forum has happened during my two years away from London. Your original idea was to encourage students to be more analytical about their own work, by first building confidence through critiquing models from the wider cultural sphere. But, through my experience as a participant in a number of the sessions, I perceived that although there was quite a literal attempt to put the students at the centre of learning — i.e. by allowing them to invite their own speakers to talk about subjects that were presumably relevant to them — it seemed that the spotlight quickly shifted from the student body onto yourself and the guests.

\textit{DB} All the traditionally accepted hierarchies between disciplines and between students and lecturers have now been totally blown away. Instead of thinking in terms of difference, as defined by academic identity terminology, we have created a shared resource of mixed perspectives. Working as a group like this has engendered a power equilibrium that allows a more critical discourse...
to emerge. The tone of the conversation within this framework is more constructively critical because it is supportive too.

The fact that our group is now transnational as well as cross-disciplinary has been surprisingly beneficial as well. For example, it has been inspiring to observe international students gaining enough confidence from the supportive ethos to allow them to express themselves more forcefully and to note how challenging the cultural specificity of their views can be to the Eurocentric orthodoxy.

Something that has been important is the implementation of a simple strategy to respect others’ silence and not to misinterpret quiet reflection as non-participation. This was an idea suggested to the group by a teacher colleague, Debbie Cook, based on research she had undertaken into the benefits and effects of structured, cross-disciplinary group learning. Creating a more contemplative space around the conversation-carrier has proven ultimately able to draw out wider critical perspectives from students who have less confidence and therefore, by extension, has delivered more complex results.

How does all of this relate for you, Alex, to your experiences in LA? Explain what you’ve been doing there.

AC  What I attempted with Jorge Pardo, between LA and Mexico, was quite different but it ultimately shared some of the same aims. There was a specific problem at the private art college where I was teaching, which in many ways corresponds to the situation you found at the RCA, both concerning the relationship between theory and practice and the students gaining an awareness of how the contemporary practitioner actually operates today. As so often happens in LA, what we did may only be a pilot for something larger that never gets off the ground, but as a dynamic transdisciplinary model I think it provoked some interesting suggestions.

Both of us — Jorge and I — wanted to establish a series of flexible parameters for a class that was different. Out of our discussion about the ambitions and scope of the class came the idea to use it to focus on a site in a small town near the city of Merida, which Jorge and his benefactor (who was commissioning work from Jorge) had identified as a possible site for one of his future architectural projects. So the site was determined and, along with it, the issue of site-specificity. Since both Jorge and myself would be teaching the class, it almost went without saying that art’s relationship to design and architecture would also be key themes, but Jorge was keen that there should be a series of visitors to constantly disrupt any prevailing attitude which developed because of our prior dialogue and proximity to one another. As a result, two former members of Rem Koolhaas’ office came on board and also a number of visitors who could speak about specific issues, especially those pertaining to this particular site and its history.

We realised that there was no way to develop a syllabus, since we didn’t know how each week would be received and we were reluctant to predetermine what the content of the following week would be. Inevitably, this caused some frustrations in the students who were used to being given a full syllabus with ‘learning outcomes’ fully detailed.

In the first week, we made a rough outline of the project, established a date for the trip to the Yucatan, and set out the following scenario: the students would divide themselves into two different groups and develop responses to the site and the problems it raised for the artist. Possible problems included the inevitable issues arising from transplanting a principally North American cultural context into a Central American one (although the group was transnational in make-up), the problems of operating principally as fine artists but requiring resources of knowledge more closely associated with the fields of design and architecture in order to respond to the brief and so on.

A number of texts were circulated, including Robert Smithson’s ‘Incidents of Mirror-Travel in the Yucatan’ — an artwork consisting of a series of interventions documented through photography and then supplemented by a critical text — and Kenneth Frampton’s ‘Towards a Critical Regionalism’, an essay that provides a series of suggestions concerning the problem of location and locality.

The course ran for 15 weeks — the first five spent in LA discussing the initial details of the project and reading the set texts — this much we had decided by the end of the first session. Each meeting in LA took place somewhere different: one at a Milanese styled restaurant the Koolhaas architects had recently opened in Silverlake, another at Jorge’s studio in Alhambra and one at his infamous house in Mount Washington, where we staged a Skype lecture from an Italian archaeologist who had been working in the area. The sixth week would be spent in the Yucatan.

The week on site started with a lecture from an anthropologist on ethnographic method and, in the afternoon, the students visited the site. From then on, they were left to themselves, following their own noses, the two groups in their respective vans, as they each developed their responses in the form of a presentation that was to be aired at the end of the week. Each group was headed up by a student fluent in Spanish: one Argentinean and the other Chicano.

The results were interesting. One of the presentations was fairly formulaic — a series of decorative interventions, with Mayan overtones, proposed for the site — the other one was much more dynamic. The second group had decided to stage a football game with some of the local children who hung out at the site and were wary of losing their territory to a series of people with funny accents who came and went in large black Lexus vans. During the course of the week, this group purchased a set of football shirts and filmed a short game they played with the children, the rules of which they invented as they went along. What was interesting was the way members of the group passed the camera about between the children, thus losing some of the overpowering presence of their own, predominantly Western, vision.

Following the presentation, Jorge and I realised that there was a need for a greater degree of ‘density’ in our debates — the main point of the class had really been to get people talking. Thus, the next five weeks were spent reading more key texts, ranging from Claude Lévi-Strauss’s *Tristes Tropiques* to Rosalind Krauss’ ‘Sculpture in the Expanded Field’. The students were then given the remaining weeks to revise their ideas in preparation for a final presentation. The result was that the sharp ones in the first group abandoned ship and joined the interesting group, which together went on to make their final presentation in the form of a discussion of the key topics and problematics of participating in such an open ended and speculative class in the first place. They empowered themselves by inverting the whole class.

Given the energy that came from the class and the inevitable mistakes that arise from attempting to keep things so speculative, we had the idea to pursue things further and develop it into a model for a small art school, with one programme, to be sited in Merida, the capital of the Yucatan, in a building that the same benefactor already owned. However, that was as far as we got.

Given the energy that came from the class and the inevitable mistakes that arise from attempting to keep things so speculative, it is as if the system’s skewed glamour spots on the big stage. It’s as if the system’s skewed to Rosalind Krauss’ ‘Sculpture in the Expanded Field’. The students were then given the remaining weeks to revise their ideas in preparation for a final presentation. The result was that the sharp ones in the first group abandoned ship and joined the interesting group, which together went on to make their final presentation in the form of a discussion of the key topics and problematics of participating in such an open ended and speculative class in the first place. They empowered themselves by inverting the whole class.

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It came down to the fact that the institute wanted our course to become part of a larger community learning programme already located within the college. Doing this would have been subject to all kinds of constraints applied from a variety of directions that we felt would have taken the life out of the project. Rather than submit to this, we decided to take it elsewhere — perhaps outside of the college and directed towards artists who had already graduated — in the form of an occasional programme. At the present time, it’s up in the air.

When the independent curator of the 1990s emerged as the art world’s exciting new creative force, it was a development that flew in the face of both the public museum and the private gallery’s authority. At that time, the curatorial role was still conceived in terms of either caring for the museum artefact or organising private thematic shows. Curators were subordinate to their managers, in the same way that artists often were with their dealers too. With a nod in the direction of seminal figures, such as Seth Siegelaub, whose exhibitions in the 1960s positioned the exhibition-maker on an equal creative footing to the artist, the DIY artist-curators of the 1990s no longer bothered to wait obediently for an opportunity to come his or her way. They took control of their own fate, just as a few progressive pedagogical models are doing today. I can certainly see a parallel here and suggest that the motivating impulse might be the same.

Actually, I remember Richard Prince saying back in the mid-90s, ‘if the museum doesn’t offer you an exhibition, start your own museum’. History will show that, in the intervening years, artist-run spaces have had, and continue to have, a vital role in the cultural food chain. An interesting question to ponder over the same period, Michelangelo Pistoletto(8) notwithstanding, is: why haven’t more established artists started their own art schools?

The problem with academia is that new ideas have to be generated from within, somehow. But there is a possibility that, if it doesn’t go through the appropriate committees and meet with an adequate level of institutional support — thus possibly being both delayed and weighed down by corrective measures — the generation of such a creative platform may be difficult to continue. That worries me.

So, if neither guerrilla action nor working covertly from within the academy are feasible options, is all hope lost?

From your Yucatan project, my own explorations with group teaching and learning and the 1990s curator-creator model, I can see that one positive common denominator is the potential for engagement through social exchange. These shared, more demanding and deeply engaged, encounters seem to provide an interesting alternative to the go-it-alone template so long preferred by the institutional power structures of the art world and education alike.

Yes, what we are agreeing on — and this surprises me in many ways — is that pedagogical models based on active engagement and social exchange are the way forward.

But still there’s something that troubles me about this analysis. Surely we’re not suggesting a return to the values that Beuys or Gordon Matta-Clark advocated in the 70s, or artists like Rirkrit Tiravanija revisited in the 90s? Although I’m fully supportive of moves to devolve power that enable students and artists to take more control of their own prospects, I’m sceptical about the institutionalisation of social encounters in this way. When we all get together to play guitars and share a bowl of noodles under the benevolence of the academy or museum, how socially engaged is that? I worry that the contemporary model of social engagement in art and education is just a surrogate community experience. The result is something socially ‘staged’, not socially engaged.

Interestingly, one contributor to our discussions at the RCA reported that while working as an invigilator at the ICA during Rirkrit’s show in 1993, where the artist served Thai food as an art project, he noticed that the dutiful art crowd attending the gallery initially was soon replaced by a second wave of visitors primarily made up of genuinely hungry homeless people. (9) Somewhere in the production process an exquisite detour had taken place that enabled the cooking-as-art idea to be translated back into a cooking-as-food reality. I have no reason to doubt the authenticity of this story. If it’s true, this demonstrates the point that when regulatory power breaks down — and I include the artist’s creative parameters here too — good things can happen. It’s often the messy out-of-control element that fires the imagination, not the ritual of the planned event.

This is why official research done under the umbrella of the academy is hardly ever as dynamic as work done in the field. To simplify between ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ like this is dangerous, but I think it holds in this context. Historically speaking, the most engaging art, curating and criticism has rarely taken place within the terms established by the academy. For me, a schism has opened

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8. Part multi-disciplinary art school, part utopian community and part ideas factory, Pistoletto founded the Cittadellarte in Biella, northern Italy, in 1998.
between art, criticism and curating in practice on the one hand and art history and visual culture writing on the other. Both criticism and curating are, by principle, alive and operate in parallax with the objects of art and design. The spheres of art history and visual culture seldom have any direct tactile connection to their objects and so have little impact on them — other than, of course, the production of more writing within the academy on them.

There are other models to turn to. One is to attempt to be a ‘double agent’, as you suggested — situated within the academy and yet working tirelessly to transgress its organising principles in the hope of eventually transforming them. The central problem here though is that in time a new orthodoxy is formulated. Any ground made is thus quickly recuperated. A further possibility is trickier to both articulate and put into place: it involves operating in such a capacity that working within the academy is just part of a portfolio of activities. Perhaps this way the academy gets the best deal too — raw input from the field trafficked straight into the seminar room rather than being reworked and reformulated according to the rules of the academy’s current research regulations. Admittedly, this could be foolhardy in the current economic climate, but perhaps it’s one of the few models that have any real agency at the moment.

Again it reminds me of a form of practice piloted in the late 60s/early 70s, but rather than Beuys, it is the ‘non-sites’ of Robert Smithson. By bracketing the frame in such a way that simultaneously draws attention to it and yet discards it, Smithson’s non-sites articulated how there is no true place outside the institutional frame. By operating on the premise of the non-site as a practitioner today — whether as critic, artist, designer or curator — the individual is not just naively trying to recapture a moment from the past in the name of ‘social engagement’, but instead is drawing on a model that was itself premised on a paradox — one that is at the very crux of what we have been discussing. That seems like one way forward to me.
When I worked in a small space in South London, my colleague, who was coordinator for education, did a youth workshop about protest. It was themed around participation, speaking up, the right to self expression, and so on. The participants were about 10 years old and included a lot of kids with a tendency to misbehave, but the workshop went pretty well. At the end, they were asked to make protest placards, really nice wooden signs with their messages on them. Out of all of them, the best one was cryptic and seemed very ‘conceptual’. It said:

Stand I Don’t

My colleague hung it above her desk and we both admired it frequently. We liked its bold black writing — the vocabulary of emancipation and refusal — the simplicity of its emphatically stated self-contradiction.

A few months later, my colleague stopped what she was doing and cried: ‘I’ve just realised what that sign says’. I looked and I too suddenly read it like a Dingbats image, one of those lateral-thinking word/image puzzles, and it all made sense. Of course, the protest placard actually said: ‘I don’t understand’.

So, all that time, that kid had been pulling our leg. This statement, made at the epicentre of contemporary art’s most earnestly channelled conduit of understanding and participation, seems symptomatic of something fundamental to how education in art has been thought about (particularly as regards institutions and their targets). We had understood and lauded the placard purely within our own frames of reference, an example of a ‘successful’ workshop, when, in fact, it was far cleverer. I hesitate to over-interpret the girl’s intentions, but let’s say that some spectre of ‘understanding’ art had been dangled in front of her to no avail, that she was suspicious of our own frames of reference, an example of a ‘successful’ workshop, that person think that understanding would be satisfied? I think that when it comes to the phrase ‘I don’t understand’, at what point does that person think that understanding would be satisfied? I think that ‘I don’t understand’ is a displaced way of saying ‘I don’t think it’s very good,’ but not wanting to say so in case it is good and they’ve got it wrong. So, I don’t think education is about understanding. The response might be: ‘You don’t think it’s good. That’s fine’. And then you talk about that. ‘Understanding’ has become a kind of substitute for very simple good/bad assessments actually. We get that a lot in the Van Abbemuseum. If somebody thinks that something is interesting, they don’t use that phrase.

And if I didn’t understand something on a visit to an exhibition, I’m going to spot some new references when I go back; that’s the pleasure of working it out, of unfolding something. Of course, you have to be interested enough to want to do that and maybe you’re not, and that’s also fine.

If you want to see art that is specifically trying to be understandable — and this is not necessarily wrong — then we have to look at Socialist Realism as the art that is specifically driven by the statement ‘I don’t understand’. There probably isn’t any other answer, in the end, but an art that has to be absolutely transparently representative of its ideology. So, ‘The workers are in control,’ so what we do is we paint a big worker in the middle of the canvas, and that means the workers are in control. Then when someone says, ‘I don’t understand,’ you can say, ‘well you see that the worker is big and young and he’s pointing to the future, so he’s in control, while the capitalists are small people crawling around in the background’.

Before the interview, we had all met to identify a focus and Charles had suggested that we all think about a particular formative educational moment from our personal experiences, that might provide an expanded context for our discussion about his working, personal and political perspective on the educational turn in curating.

I would say there are two separate moments, but one led to the other. I was brought up politically; my parents were immigrants from Socialism who remained Communist in a certain way, so there wasn’t really a ‘moment’ that I got engaged. So I think the pivotal moments were around disillusionment with politics, rather than my entry into politics.

It was during this specific moment of the miners’ strike in the UK and there were a lot of speeches on the docks in Yorkshire, against Polish coal coming in and replacing the coal that wasn’t being dug because of the strike. The leaders would not tackle the absurdity of having supported the Solidarnosc workers two or three years earlier, and then now rejecting the coal they were digging up after they were defeated in quite difficult circumstances. They might claim to be acting in the interests of the Polish miners but there clearly wasn’t much of an attempt to do so.

That situation seemed to me to draw a limit around the so-called internationalism of Socialism. It made me think that if we want to
I was thinking of my grandmother who, in her teenage years, was a member of the Communist Party Youth in Montenegro. I was raised with this idea of emancipation. The thing that stuck with me was how organised they were there — education was given to museums. If someone who has uncertainty comes by, how then do institutions open up that possibility for them to ask their questions? And, so, then I started asking questions in the left of the Labour Party, in a small group called Socialist Organiser (that was later kicked out of the Labour Party), and I didn’t get the answers that I wanted. And I felt, as a result of that, that this was not a field where you could imagine the world otherwise. I remember asking, ‘Well, why couldn’t we find this connection of solidarity with this or that group?’ and they said, ‘Well, no, because they think this and this’. This tendency for ideological hair-splitting in the far left became really tedious.

I had been intending to, you know, be part of the revolution — and then I wasn’t part of the Labour movement any more.

At the same time as dealing with the humdrum institutional and regional politics occasioned by being a director of a museum, something that Esche takes everywhere with him is a sensibility influenced by Marxism. When he speaks of ‘understanding’, he does in relation to questions of emancipation and ethics as much as explaining aesthetic developments.

The role of making art comprehensible is usually given to museums. If someone who has uncertainty comes by, how then do institutions open up that possibility for them to ask their questions?

Within the Van Abbemuseum, I think it’s our job to ask questions in response — like that particular form of Freudian psychology where you only answer a question with a question. If someone says, ‘I’m sorry, I don’t understand,’ then you ask: ‘What don’t you understand?’ I think that’s the way you can work, because if you start to engage in answering someone, or providing a service for someone and saying, ‘let me explain,’ then you’re completely lost. Then the relationship with the artwork is already bounded by the institution. The possibility that artwork might have to change somebody’s way of imagining the world is devolved to the person who is explaining it. So, the work of art then disappears, in a sense, and it’s the explainer who is responsible for this transformation that the work of art should actually make happen.

So, you constantly have to throw back on some third party — don’t say, ‘Let me explain,’ but say, ‘Why do you want this thing to be explained to you?’ This is practised literally, at the moment, with the interpretation at the Van Abbe, where we will only ask questions and we won’t make any statements, which I think will really annoy people but it just seems important.

Also, there is this broader shift. Modernism is about providing answers and whatever world is emerging now — slowly, out of the wreckage — is not modernist, and is not going to be about answers, but more about how you formulate the questions.

I don’t think art is about asking questions. Maybe that’s where it is wrong, where the stereotype is given — it’s the job of the curator to ask the question. I have been thinking about this a bit in the past 10 years; if we need to start to describe what has emerged from the wreckage of modernism, which we don’t even have a name for... then it seems to be more related to the 18th century than to the 20th century. These developments really come from the pre-modern or the pre-modernist. Whether this is part of a moment or a set of conditions, this is something where there is no longer a horizon, where the Hegelian idea of history is no longer living in our actions. Whether or not this idea of history is wrong is another question, but the idea is no longer implemented in life as it was throughout the whole messianic 20th century. The 20th century thought in terms of finding this moment of utopian achievement, of the communist or national socialist revolutions or fascism or even of democracy in a certain sense, and even the utopian idea of freedom. All these ideas were wrapped up in the idea that the messiah will come and everything will be right. And I think that the Benjaminian idea of messianic time is absolutely and thoroughly connected to modernism. It is absolutely secularised. And it’s fading away, which is fucking hard. Whether it’s temporary or not, I don’t know. I think you can observe it, though, in the lack of messianic possibility, that there is no ‘future’. The future is already packed up.

I was thinking of my grandmother who, in her teenage years, was a member of the Communist Party Youth in Montenegro. I was raised with this idea of emancipation. The thing that stuck with me was how organised they were there — education was emancipation, a really important thing for them. So, they would meet every day after school and read, sitting in groups, talking and...
Charles Esche & de Appel CP  

exchanging their interpretations. So, I was thinking, in my time and context, how would I translate that?

I realised it’s the reading group, something that contemporary art is using and has accepted and transformed. This history is also something that answers the question ‘Why am I here, in the art world?’ Because both these activities — political self-organisation and contemporary art’s discursivity — allow an imaginative realm in which you can question things, which is perhaps the most political aspect of the educational turn in contemporary art.

**CE** I think this is true and so we are talking less about the art asking questions, and more about a space where you are allowed to ask questions and you can speculate about the answers without necessarily having them given to you. Party politics comes out of that structure or line — asking questions and thinking about the answer and then saying, ‘That’s the answer’ — well, the last step is where it all goes wrong, but the first two steps in that are actually fine.

If contemporary art is that which always postpones the idea of a fixed ideology, or at least tries to, it gives me the space to be able to try very hard to overthrow my Marxist Hegelian upbringing. This would mean trying to think about what happens when there isn’t a horizon of history any more, and asking how you go from avant-gardist to ‘gardist’, i.e. to live in the everyday world rather than being out there leading or saying ‘this way’.

How do you do that? This is something I have been confronted with personally, particularly in the past six months, and it has become a very big part of my thinking. That move from avant-gardist to ‘gardist’, that loss of horizon or direction is very hard to deal with, but at least contemporary art seems to have that structure of openness, or being able to remake itself without threatening itself or its survival, in the way that ideology is always threatened by any questioning.

**JI YOON YANG** There are plenty of other fields that are defined by this sort of fundamental openness to questioning — like critical theory or sociology or philosophy — yet contemporary art now seems to be at the centre. Why do you think this is?

**CE** The answer might be that we’re all involved in it and that’s why we think it is at the centre. Surprise — for all the people in contemporary art, contemporary art is the choice.

It’s possible that that’s true, but I’m not sure. I want to leave it as a possibility as otherwise you become hubristic. But, possibly, to try to answer, in contrast to philosophy, for instance, art has not only an academic side; it has a connection with the public.

**MJ** Or could it be that curating allows dilettantism? Although as a curator you’re often expected to be an expert in art history, or something of an expert of art mediation…

**CE** That’s the worst curating!

**MJ** … you’re also dabbling in a number of fields, like those JY mentioned, and there you have permission not to be an expert at all. One role I value that a curator might have (particularly as regards certain kind of artists) is to be the person who deregulates the idea of expertise; or who deregulates the forms and means of learning, about the work and about the world upon which the work draws.

**CE** I think another way of talking about it is through what Sarat Maharaj calls ‘non-knowledge’ production, this idea that you don’t have to conform to the disciplinary structures of knowledge, and that art is, perhaps, exceptional in having licence within our expectations. Within our social agreements, it doesn’t have to be ‘right’ or justified in the outside world in the same way. So we can say, ‘OK, as a philosopher this is totally wrong but it’s art so therefore I can accept it’.

I think, when he uses the term non-knowledge, Maharaj is trying to de-specify the disciplines of knowledge and that’s why it has enormous impact academically. In order to give what he’s doing some body, the person who’s declaring something not to be knowledge is confronted with the reality of this non-knowledge and can’t just come back and say, ‘No, I know the truth’. And remember that modernist academia — much like modernist art — is always concerned with knowing the truth.

**AN** ‘Knowledge exchange’ is one of the three postulates of the Van Abbe museum. The term feels like a conscious swap for the term ‘education’.

**CE** If you think of the Latin *educare*, which means ‘to lead out’, it has within it the idea that you are bringing something out of someone, rather than the idea that you are putting things in. This maxim that was used by Steiner is very old fashioned and anthroposophic but still a very good notion of education: ‘the mind is a fire to be kindled and not a vessel to be filled’. I really want nothing to do with the kind of education that thinks in terms of vessels to be filled.
I think that the more modest, or maybe more contemporary, mode of this is to understand education as knowledge exchange. At least knowledge exchange may offer a slight difference in that it suggests that the would-be ‘receiver’ also has knowledge. That way, you’re not only encouraging something out of them, but also acknowledging that they have something to offer whether you encourage it or not. It’s constructing a mode in which they can also leave something behind in a museum, whether that’s an experience or a memory or an anecdote or whatever. The reality of this is always disappointing, but we try to do it, we have it in mind — that should, then, inform our practice — that we should think about how to learn from the way that people use the museum. It’s a slow process because people aren’t used to that in the Van Abbemuseum. Museums were, for so many years, top-down institutions where the director determined what happened and the other people were there to be the extra arms. It’s very pragmatic and functional — almost a shareholder model — and that’s not what I’ve ever been interested in. When we go back to my political upbringing, that was precisely what I was taught that we didn’t do, which is to accept the world around us as it is.

Later, in conversation, AN put it a very simple way: that what the ‘educational turn’ has brought to contemporary art, is not only the extended use of terms such as ‘knowledge production’ and ‘research’, but also their implication in the current integration of art education in the future ‘knowledge society’. And this is what happens when institutional critique becomes the institution itself.

LILIAN ENGELMANN How do you separate the idea of informal knowledge exchange and other expanded means of education in museums, and other contexts, from the expectations of ‘life-long learning’? That growing neoliberal expectation of individual self-improvement, that you simply aren’t keeping up with the world unless you are self-sufficient and on top of things and that it is your lifelong responsibility.

CE I’m not sure you can draw a definitive line. That idea of ‘I don’t understand’ — that art is not really educationally effective because you don’t understand it — is really valuable in this situation. With strictly pre-specified educational expectations, it’s difficult to make art other than that which would follow Socialist Realist lines of development, although it doesn’t necessarily have to look like a figurative painting, as such, but rather has certain rules to it. It’s usually more in the field of ambiguity, of uncertainty, of paradox, in which this model of knowledge exchange works. I think that’s one way you try not to be totally instrumentalised.

MI Could it also be in collectivity? LE’s idea of life-long learning involves the individuation of responsibility for your fate, and an ultimate mindset of total self-sufficiency, even when it’s put across as an opportunity — who can criticise someone who wants to learn? But with knowledge exchange, maybe you have potential for collectivity as an end as well as a means?

CE I’m a great fan of collectivity, obviously, I’m convinced of its significance, even though it was abandoned. This has resulted in an extreme individualisation, which seems to me extraordinarily fundamentalist in its privileging of the individual and of autonomy, to the point that you can talk about institutional autonomy and you don’t talk about institutional responsibility, and you certainly talk about individual autonomy and not about individual responsibility. If we’re in a time of such fundamentalist individualisation, then how can we talk about collective ethics? How do we behave with each other at that moment when we can so easily be together? There isn’t, for example, a community or collectivity in the ‘Creative Industries’, even when they’re networked. It’s to do with the network and with being individually connected, but that’s nothing to do with collectivity.

And, so, my only objection to the idea of collectivity would be a pragmatic one: how, in this period of fundamentalist individualisation, can you institute the idea of an ethics of collectivity? I don’t know how to do that at the moment. I don’t know how to be in solidarity with people — certainly, in the Netherlands, where they hate the word solidarity, hate the word collective, where they resist any form of saying that we share more than divides us. It’s almost in that old way of the left, finding the most hair-splitting differences from each other. I’m sick of this fucking uniqueness in reality, it kills my spirit. You know, my uniqueness can easily suffer because of that; I can find uniqueness again, if I need it, but let’s not prize it as the most precious thing there is. It’s absurd. The basis of our humanity is the copy — we’re reproductions of our parents.

I don’t know how to fight it as the whole force of contemporary capitalism is geared towards declaring your uniqueness and the idea of consumer choice. There’s so much money invested in ensuring that you feel unique, and there’s so little money invested in the idea that you actually feel the same.

I don’t mean a kind of abandonment of the individual in terms of the group. I’m just talking about how we can construct an ethics of being together or, in Homi Bhabha’s terms, an ethics of being strange and close. The curatorial group ‘What, How and for Whom’ is about that, trying to build an ethics of collectivity, which is sometimes really
hard. And this Curatorial Programme at de Appel is still sitting round the same table and talking — that’s remarkable given the past record of the CP — and it does seem to me that its educational potential is in this building of an ethics of collectivity between you, which means knowledge exchange and a certain lack of absolute defence of individual rights and idea ownership.

I think it’s very hard, within the hierarchies of position in a museum, for me personally to insist on a collective ethics. This would mean us all being paid the same and working in the same conditions but also taking the same responsibilities and sharing the problems and not expecting to be led. I can abandon the director’s office, as I have, but it doesn’t shift the fundamental expectations of leadership. It is only a symbolic move to demonstrate the aesthetics of an idea that we can exchange without necessarily having a hierarchical power. Instead of saying ‘Now that I’m the director, you have to do these things that I do and if you happen to think the same thing, then great; but, if not, I’m going to stop you’, I would ideally like to think about an ethics of collectivity that would then say this is not the job of the director, which, of course, other people would say is a dereliction of responsibility. In business hierarchies, they’d say, ‘Well you’ve been given responsibility therefore you have to have the power’ — that’s the ethics of the individualist.

There is still this rather neoliberal way of saying, ‘Oh, everybody can be XYZ because you are each individuals, you can just do it your own way and it’ll be wonderful,’ despite the lack of support to do so. This question of supporting learning leads us to the problematic relationship between authority, expertise and hierarchy and the means of learning. In learning, how do we define the value of the greater experience that tends to lead to greater authority? A valid description of authority might be when it is not the value of the greater experience that tends to lead to greater hierarchy and the means of learning. In learning, how do we define the problematic relationship between authority, expertise and support to do so. This question of supporting learning leads us to just do it your own way and it’ll be wonderful, despite the lack of everybody can be XYZ because you are each individuals, you can just do it your own way and it’ll be wonderful, despite the lack of constraints. We weren’t as open as we wished, in the sense that a professor who was part of the college and who didn’t really like what we were doing would just come and sit there, not saying anything because he wanted to control it, then he’s really at the lowest level. According to the ethics of that table, he’s at the bottom, he’s first year; he has just come in.

That was a principle that I still think is worthwhile — that you can construct a kind of picture, or even a sculptural reality, to the education moment, which is the table and chairs and the sitting there, and that begins to give you some sort of ethics.

Still, at some point, you also said that protoacademy was somehow a parasite on the existing educational structure. In the translation of education into knowledge exchange, relative structures seem important.

Yes, the protoacademy was contingent on the fact that all the students had an institutional affiliation, which meant that we didn’t have to deal with any of that institutional infrastructural processing etc. When we travelled and did projects in the Staedelschule, Stuttgart, Gwangju 2002, or Malmö, those projects were organised in essence because of these organisations that already existed and provided the infrastructure. There were a few places where we performed the sculptural function of the table, and this was always parasitical. For example, Korea was probably the most independent but it was still attached to the Gwangju Biennale, and that allowed us to operate but it also gave you certain constraints. We weren’t as open as we wished, in the sense that anybody could come along. It would be unlikely that people would hear of it, and it would be unlikely that they would have the confidence to walk through the institutional structure to find us. So we were dependent on the people in the institution to join us.

I think the best times were when we mixed together the students and recent graduates from situations in Stuttgart and Staedelschule and in Edinburgh and Glasgow, when it was mixed and it felt like this manic construction of community. This is where the name made sense in a way, the ‘Proto’, meaning to be in the process of becoming an academy but never meaning to actually do so. It would always be prototypical or protean, a structure and process of becoming. That seems to be a nice way of naming it because, with a name, you fix something that is in process and you kind of restrict its possibility to grow. And, of course, ultimately, pragmatically, the un-fixity was fatal as it meant we could never anchor ourselves in a situation or actually become an academy.
AN  This sculptural place of tables and chairs as a metaphor of
the place within education, it’s interesting — is this more or less what
the educational turn in the art world is?

CE  The protoacademy very literally was that — put some chairs
in the room, there you go.

Quite often, it was empty — just as a meeting room in an office would
be. It was useful, everybody became very pragmatic. People asked:
‘I don’t understand it, why aren’t you having a meeting here?’ ‘Well,
it’s a meeting room; with meeting rooms you don’t always have a
meeting’. ‘But then why do you have it?’ ‘Well, because it’s a
meeting room’.

The metaphorical sculptural power of that statement was far
more interesting, I think, than the fact that people might wander in
and you’d be there having a meeting. You ended up with these
conversations where you had to ask a question back: ‘Well, why do
you think there should be a meeting here? Why, in your experience,
is there always a meeting in a meeting room?’

AN  So, can we say then that the place of education within
exhibition-making is symbolic?

CE  I never really want to get into signs and symbols to be
honest. ‘Is the place of education symbolic?’ If I cross out the silent
‘only’ in that sentence, then, yes, part of it is, I think. It’s also about a
gesture towards the idea that this education — in the sense of
knowledge exchange — is available to you.

I think the Viewing Depot work that we do at the Van Abbe has a
symbolic power, but it is also real. It has iconic status and it signifies,
but the actual act of doing it is also at play. I think of it as an icon for a
way of thinking about the collection as being ‘accessible’. It signifies
an idea of us trying to create a dialogue in which we want to know
people’s motivations as regards what to see in the collection. If it’s
not an education project, then I don’t know how you would define it.
It’s certainly a project that tries to engage in an exchange of
knowledge of the collection.

CLARE BUTCHER  You already told us one experience of yours that
changed your perspective or taught you something about learning
itself, yet you said there were two parts — what was the other half of
the story?

CE  I was in Manchester, and it was 1984, and one day I went to
an exhibition space called Cornerhouse and there was an exhibition
by Stephen Willats.

I didn’t know him at all, but he was making work in high-rise housing
schemes, in Manchester, Oxford, Edinburgh and London — and
he’d done a series of works around the punk movement. I was a
kind of fake punk, and it spoke to me about the conditions that I had
experienced and the speculative ways that you might address the
world. He seemed to be asking the questions that I couldn’t ask in
politics, like: How do we live together? How do we make symbols
that we can share, without those symbols being inherited from
somebody else and having no chance to influence them? He seemed
to be offering that possibility — so, not the hammer and sickle or the
red flag or the clenched fist, but giving life to one’s own symbols.
That was inspiring for me.

Nowadays, I would be more critical about the work because, as time
passes, you build a relationship and a different vocabulary. But I still
have a lot of respect for Stephen. Some time after that I thought:
‘OK, so this art thing is what it’s about then. Not politics. I’d better
find out something about it’.

This interview was conducted by the participants in de Appel
Curatorial Programme 2008/09 and edited by Mia Jankowicz.

The de Appel Curatorial Programme 2008/9 group is comprised
of Clare Butcher, Lilian Engelmann, Mia Jankowicz, Christina Li,
Ana Nikitovic and Ji Yoon Yang.
There are many paradoxes in art education, not least that the subject is in some sense unteachable or unlearnable. Modern art, the category we in the West have inherited from the Enlightenment, requires of its makers that they reinvent themselves and their definitions with every new piece of art that is made. Modern art was required to undo itself through its own products, and then stitch itself back together differently — a beautiful circular logic that is still part of its immense satisfaction. There have always been, at the same time, aspects of skill and artisanship that have required discipline and study. When contemporary art began, sometime in the 1960s, it adopted this desire for reinvention wholesale, though largely decoupled both from the demands for social or political change and from specific skills. Yet contemporary art also built up a canon of exclusively Western European and North American artists to whom it gave allegiance — all the while maintaining its rhetorical autonomy. Even after the great political and cultural changes of 1989, contemporary art has continued to build upon its Western traditions. Arguably, skills in craft manufacture were then replaced by learned sociability and the comprehension of certain codes of behaviour, though this switch was never made explicit in most academic curricula. The logic of teaching contemporary art remains one of making students unlearn their preconceptions and seek the new and the personal, even if the art that results often resembles the work of a particular professor under whom the student happens to be studying. In short, the idea of the art academy is a paradox that can only be reconciled if we keep contrary objectives and ideals in sight.

Most of what I know about art schools comes from functioning within them. Each has its own trajectory, and many have stopped at earlier stages along the chronology mapped out above. What they mostly have in common is a high degree of disappointment, populated by too many professors who feel that they should be out there participating in the art world rather than teaching students. It is very hard to combine careers as artist and teacher without becoming a name on a recruitment poster whom the student never encounters in reality. Again, there is a paradox whereby successful artists often fail to effectively feed their knowledge and experience back into the education system, while the system claims these artists as justifications for its continued existence. Students, too, are often distracted or unmotivated, higher education since 1989 having
become increasingly vocational and output driven. Of course, some academies avoid the worst excesses of this trap and provide a great experience, but in comparison with social science or other humanities university-level research units, the status of academic exchange in art is low. Contemporary art production — which, again, since 1989, has gone global along with the economy — is often more akin to niche marketing than to academic research. If new kinds of academic structures are to emerge in the near future, this issue of what academic knowledge is created and exchanged in the process of teaching, and its subsequent influence on students’ artistic production, needs to be clearly and explicitly addressed, not swept back under the carpet by construing art as a traditional academic discipline.

A Partial History

We only have to look at specific moments in art-school history to see that there have been pivotal academies in the renewal of our artistic heritage in Europe and North America. Consider Kazimir Malevich’s art group UNOVIS in Vitebsk and the Institute of Artistic Culture, called INKhUK, in Moscow; the Bauhaus in Weimar; the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design in Halifax and CalArts in Los Angeles in the 1970s; the Free International Universities of the 1970s and 1980s under the initiative of Joseph Beuys and Caroline Tisdall, among others; and more recently Goldsmiths in London and Jarosław Kołodziej’s class at the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw. In all of these places, something occurred between the energy of the students, the commitment and courage of the staff, and the external political and social circumstances that defined a new way of working with art and education that benefited all parties enormously. Unfortunately, none of these exemplars developed sufficiently similar structures for us to simply institute them in a programmatic way. Each was brought about by a confluence of individuals who shared certain ideals and were allowed to put them into effect by the intellectual and political climate (or simply weren’t stopped from doing so). In fact, many of these ‘great moments’ in art-school history only lasted a few years before they required external challenge and renewal or imploded under internal or political pressures. This pattern of development is probably the best we can expect from any new projects or pedagogical ideas that might be implemented in the near future.

In looking in more detail at various historical academies, I sought to discover if, despite their differences, there were certain points of consensus about structural and pedagogical issues that could be significant for contemporary art and for art schools in this new century. Much of the research that has fed my writing here is based on work that I did in the late 1990s, at the time of my _protoacademy_ project at the Edinburgh College of Art (more of which later). There are many remarkable documents in respect of the founding of the various vanguard art programmes already mentioned. These, along with other texts mostly written by artists from the late 1960s onwards, share an interesting degree of agreement about certain educational fundamentals — almost regardless of their espoused structures and philosophies. I’ve tried to corral these fundamentals under three headings that delimit what seems to be a consensus of opposition to certain pre-existing assumptions: anti-specialisation, anti-isolation/anti-autonomy and anti-hierarchy.

The first of these points is that artists shouldn’t be viewed as specialists or limited to activities defined by certain areas of specialty. In fact, they should oppose the philosophy of specialisation that is foisted onto art education either by scientific models or economic criteria of assessment. When, for instance, Walter Gropius wrote the original pamphlet in 1919 that articulated his vision for the Bauhaus, he saw the ‘complete building’ as the project around which to unite different art disciplines, handicrafts and manual skills. While Beuys wrote in the founding statement for his Free International University (FIU) in 1982: ‘The specialist’s insulated point of view places the arts and other kinds of work in sharp opposition, whereas it is crucial that the structural, formal, and thematic problems of the various work processes should be constantly compared to one another’. Further on, he argued: ‘The division of the disciplines for the training of experts, with no substantial comparative method, reinforces the idea that only specialists can contribute to the basic structures of society: economics, politics, law structure, etc.’ These ideas relate to a concern that art education should be directed to the whole human and that the significance of art’s role in the academy, university or broader society is as a synthesising agent crossing and combining mutually ignorant fields of specialisation.

A second point of consensus is a real commitment to opening dialogue with specific non-art constituencies, either with the ‘community’ (admittedly a vague term) or with certain industrial or intellectual environments — what I’ve called ‘anti-isolation’, or perhaps more poignantly ‘anti-autonomy’. In Vitebsk, UNOVIS organised urban decorations for three anniversary celebrations of the October Revolution, which included Suprematist designs by Malevich, proto-Constructivist banners and billboards by El Lissitzky, and Chagallian images of people flying through the air. These decorations were usually produced collectively without a unitary authorial voice and the artists appear to have been genuinely concerned with how the working class of Vitebsk received their works and whether they increased revolutionary consciousness or were rejected for being non-representational.

The new art educational initiatives, emerging after 1945, emphasised even more the need for contact with other academic disciplines, with commerce and with the immediate community. For example, Kasper König was responsible for an extraordinarily rich series of publications that came out of the Nova Scotia School of Art and Design in the 1970s — a programme that attracted the best artists of the period to a relatively isolated spot in Canada. There is a wonderful bureaucratic document for the Free International University written by Caroline Tisdall in 1975 as an application to the former European Economic Community for the proposed establishment of the FIU in Dublin (which never came to pass for lack of funding). It is the clearest possible statement of the aims for one of these programmes. Many of these aims speak directly to our current situation. She described the ambitions of the project and its difference from traditional universities, including the cross-fertilisation of disciplines toward the goal of exploring the ‘contribution that cultural and intellectual life can make to society’; its total independence from government bureaucracies of education; its transparency to the public; its freedom from age restrictions; its openness to cultural and political dialogue ‘as a basis for dialogue [without imposing] standardised opinion’; and its intention to ‘regard learning as a process not an end’. In the United States, Allan Kaprow had already proposed an even more radical admixture of art and society in his February, 1971 essay published in ARTnews, ‘The Education of the Un-artist, Part 1’. After describing the morbidity of what he termed ‘art-art’, he writes:

Seeing the situation as low comedy is a way out of the bind. I would propose that the first practical step towards laughter is to un-art ourselves, avoid all aesthetic roles, give up all references to being artists of any kind whatever. An un-artist is one who is engaged in changing jobs, in modernizing. It is quite possible to shift the whole un-artistic operation slyly away from where the arts customarily congregate. To become, for instance, an account executive, an ecologist, a stunt rider, a politician, a beach bum. In these different capacities, the several kinds of art discussed would operate indirectly as a stored code, which, instead of programming a specific course of behaviour, would facilitate an attitude of deliberate playfulness toward all professionalizing activities well beyond art.

Kaprow is the classic example of the artist who tries to undo art. But his engagement throughout his life with teaching shows that the idea of undoing was also connected to a subsequent reconstruction. The artist is as much a synthesising figure as a destructive one, taking art out into the world as a way to keep it alive and purposeful.

A third point of consensus for most academic models in the 1960s and afterwards is the desire to flatten or eradicate hierarchies between artist-teacher and artist-student. The FIU initiated this model to some extent with its appeal for ‘reciprocity between staff and students’ where there will be no director and all major policy decisions will be reached through student-staff discussion since the University itself must function as a model of democracy’. The Warsaw Academy of Fine Arts followed this idea, too, in requiring the students to perform and take an active role in their immediate educational environment. From this basis, artists such as Artur Żmijewski and Pavel Althamer have been able to develop radi-

2. In 1967, a new President, Garry Neill Kennedy, transformed the Nova Scotia College of Art & Design in Halifax, Canada, into an international centre for conceptual art. Actual production of projects and artworks with the students as participants became the teaching method of choice within the school. Kasper König worked at the famed Nova Scotia College of Art and Design Press (NSCAD) in the 1970s where he was an exceptionally active editor for the influential press which published artists’ books by Hans Haacke, Yvonne Rainer, Steve Reich, and Michael Snow, among numerous other artists.

3. Extract from the EEC application compiled by Caroline Tisdall, Edinburgh College of Art Library Archive.

cally new participatory practices that resemble a social studio, making use of society as a material in itself.

The protoacademy

There is always a great danger in self-historicisation and I have been somewhat hesitant in writing about the experiment that was protoacademy, feeling that it might be better left to others to do this. However, it was a four-year project that is now more than six years gone and, as it remains under-recorded, I think it is worth looking at some of its statements and propositions. The protoacademy was established in 1998 in Edinburgh with a very simple metaphor: the idea of an empty table or tabula rasa. Whoever came to the table was a member of the protoacademy, whether it was a teacher or a student or somebody from the outside. They demonstrated their qualifications to be part of the group by the information, the intelligence, the ideas, the questions or the confrontation they brought to that table. Toward the end of the project in 2002, we produced a short collective text that summed up the progress and paradoxes that emerged in the intervening years. It needs to be read as a plural text in which each textual format produces its own continuity:

protoacademy thinks on its feet, not on its seat. Situated just off Edinburgh’s Royal Mile in the Flag that up. But girls don’t write manifestos — except for that Russian Futurist Valentina — what’s her name... shadow of The Craggs and the Scottish Parliament, it is housed in a former Social Security we should just record this and run it through the text — in fact we should get a minidisc and record everything... porta-cabin called Weirsland. The protoacademy is not a tapestry department. In this secluded A dole office, really?... yeah, we like that pedigree — and reminding people of it. What was that reference to the pastoral? Well it’s to do with this mythical understanding of the protoacademy that other people have... spot, gentle herdspersons convene to exchange gifts and elevated thoughts in the noonday sun... but it’s just us, exchanging work and ideas between ourselves — and the people in Malmö, Stuttgart, Seoul, Trondheim Berlin, London... and it does work — like, say the Malmö show in May... But community comes at a price. The protoacademy is not its history. The facilities at Weirsland include 24hr multiple access, a landscaped garden with a historic fountain and a roof terrace with bar.

protoacademy consumes bureaucracy and produces community. Parking is free. protoacademy is not a research... and we could do with a course in feminist theory, maybe someone from the university could be pulled assessment exercise. (Contributions to this space invited). It is not run in accordance with in to handle that, or someone like Griselda Pollack. But what are we going to do with this, it sounds like conventional standards of success or failure. The interior includes floors by Jim Lambie, a skylight, a bunch of guys sitting in an old man’s bar off the Royal Mile?! We need to pep it up a bit for Christ’s sake. by James Turrell, filing systems by Donald Judd and a canteen by Jorge Pardo.

protoacademy Yeah, why don’t we use this space to hire out protoacademy’s services to other flagging art colleges? generates a vast number of research points. These are currently available for institutional What about this ‘tabula rasa’ thing? Let’s get this over with. What does it mean? Blank slate, empty page. assignation. Waste disposal and security systems by Gustav Metzger and Phil Niblock. Why does it sound like ‘table’? No, it’s to do with protoacademy being anything anyone wants to make out of it.

protoacademy is not a cult, a massage parlour or a post-graduate nursing home. It is not you mean like that issue of Metronome with our five blank pages in? Yeah, something like that... circumscribed by affirmative statements or disclaimers. The protoacademy’s structure Can we think of ‘use value here? I think use value lies exactly between those two terms, I mean changes in accordance with the activities of its members. We welcome and encourage... affirmation and negation. There’s a lot of contradiction inside that. There should be more contradiction. intermittent acts of artistic practice and research, and can accommodate overnight visitors.

After protoacademy

In writing this text, some of the competing voices of different members can be heard. The strength of protoacademy was in allowing an agonistic kind of existence to flourish. It sometimes produced stasis, but this was always temporary. The project concluded with the final removal of funding by the college in 2002, by which time many of the original participants had moved on. The protoacademy was, to some extent a process that led some to disillusionment with the priorities of a
product-orientated education system. There was a shared commitment
to collective activity and communal reading that probably influenced
some too strongly to continue with an individual art practice, but such a
result is to be expected, even admired. It seems likely that a project such as
protoacademy could only have had a short lifespan. It is important
to note that not all the participants built major careers in the existing art
world. It required enormous commitment from its members to generate
discussion and maintain activity without a formal administration. Such
supports and the consequent bureaucracy would have been necessary
in the longer term. Yet, having contributed to biennials and academies
across Europe and in Asia, and having organised reading groups that
established critical theory as a purposeful field at Edinburgh College of
Art, it did manage to administer itself fairly well without specific resources.
In terms of its longer-term effects, they will be seen in the individuals
who participated and perhaps reflected in such independent initiatives as
Clémentine Deliss’s subsequent Future Academy project that occupied
part of its intellectual space at the college.

Blueprints For the Next Experiment

The protoacademy was of its time and place. It responded to
particular realities in Edinburgh at the time — the lack of international
connections, absence of theory, and the need for a broader definition of
art and its relation to student activities. These issues were not unique to
Edinburgh but were expressed in specific forms. A second protoacademy
initiative would need to be configured differently for its environment.
Nevertheless, what we can learn from the (negative) principles of anti-
specialisation, anti-autonomy, and anti-hierarchy is that a rejection of
what has gone before, and a desire to undo the coordinates that locate
art at any given moment, must be key to any plan for an art school now.
Learning how not to take part, often through collective agency, can be
the basis for the reconstruction of the priorities of the art world. An
explicit rejection of the art market and an attempt to produce thinking
without the production of objects, for instance, would seem to be a way
of rejecting the contemporary status quo. Such a move would also call on
the research that has been done in the last 10 years around the produc-
tion of knowledge and could reshape the link between artistic works and
the acquisition or presentation of experimental results in universities.

This construction could perhaps only be anticipated within a state subsi-
dised European system, though the response to this challenge for the
academic marketplace to deliver such an outcome would be fascinating
to observe. At the very least, it would ask gallery owners to once again
get creative and figure out how to commodify such works and once again
renew their contract with collectors.

This is an abridged version of an article published in Steven Henry Madoff (ed.),
Your e-Flux Journal essay, ‘Art in the Knowledge-based Polis’, has repeatedly been cited in recent debates on educational models in contemporary art, art education, art and ‘knowledge production’ and ‘artistic research’. This text has clearly established itself as a key contribution to a range of debates in contemporary practice inside and outside the academy. In your essay, you cite Irit Rogoff’s work and her concern that the ‘slippage that currently exists between notions of “knowledge production”, “research”, “education”, “open-ended production”, and “self-organized pedagogies”’ obscures significant differences between these developments and renders these ‘part and parcel of a certain liberalizing shift within the world of contemporary art practices’.

You conclude your essay by asserting that what is needed is a ‘multifocal, multidisciplinary perspective with a fresh look at the interactions and constitutive relations between knowledge and the visual arts’. The questions that arise, then, are: How important is it to attend to the differences between a range of concerns, agendas and methods (knowledge production etc., as listed by Rogoff) and what are the risks of obscuring these differences? On a practical level, how might your proposed ‘multifocal, multidisciplinary perspective’ handle these differences?

I doubt it would make much sense to insist on a bureaucratic regulation of terms and names. However, the names attached to particular modes of material and/or intellectual activity are of great interest, exactly because the discursive-administrative nature of such terminological orders always entails a reality of practice. This said, the differences and relations between ‘research’ or ‘education’, ‘knowledge production’ or ‘open-ended production’ may even be considered to bear a productive potential, a potential productivity. Associated with artistic practices, institutional environments and practitioners’ subjectivities, the terms gain the functionality of — Jakobsonian or Lacanian — shifters which inevitably inform and change the practices, environments and subjectivities attached to them. I would propose a reading of such shifter attributes as historically and culturally specific ‘concept metaphors’, to use Gayatri Spivak’s term. I would further venture to organise such readings in the vein of (Derridean) deconstruction as well as of (Foucauldian) genealogy/archaeology, aiming at discerning the dynamics of the interrelationships and intersections of these terms.

‘Knowledge production’, for instance, is a strongly contested concept, needing qualification and contextualisation if used in relation to art practice, education and the like. Since knowledge

2. See Irit Rogoff’s contribution to this volume [pp. 32 – 46].
production readily connotes ‘knowledge economy’ and ‘cognitive capitalism’, its deployment within the art world appears problematic, to say the least. As Jean-François Lyotard wrote in his 1979 *The Postmodern Condition. A Report on Knowledge*, ‘Knowledge is and will be produced in order to be sold, it is and will be consumed in order to be valorised in a new production: in both cases, the goal is exchange’. Narrowing the gap between economic and aesthetic modes of production seems to advance ‘economisation’; in knowledge production, the post-Fordist interchangeability of creativity and innovation, of criticality and employability, has probably found its perfect discursive emblem. But knowledge production has also been deployed in a decidedly political and empowering sense, as the carving-out of self-organised and alternative modes of generating and disseminating knowledge(s).

*Documenta 11*, for instance, introduced the discourse of knowledge production to a large art audience. Furnishing this concept metaphor with a far-reaching, geo-aesthetic agenda, the curators attempted to shift critical perspectives on art from the mere retinal to the epistemic, from the aesthetic to the educational. Okwui Enwezor made a claim for ‘new multilateral networks of knowledge production’ and the re-orientation toward a view of ‘the practice of art in the broader network of knowledge production’ in a global(ised) world of post-colonialities; in support and extension of such considerations, Sarat Maharaj solemnised the ‘spasmic, interdisciplinary probes, transitive, haphazard cognitive investigations of contemporary art practices’, their ‘dissipating interactions, imaginary archiving; epidemiological statistics, questionnaires and proceedings; ructions and commotions that are not pre-scripted’. These modulations of the art/knowledge compound deliberately moved the shifter, knowledge production, away from capitalist nominalism to entail the poetic (neo-Feyerabend) potentials of non-knowledge and the refusal to explain; at the same time, such a semantic appropriation of knowledge production tends to disavow its difficult proximity to the realities of contemporary ‘edu-factories’ and their techno-ideologies of knowledge production.

In order to gain a positive, critical sense of knowledge production which is in sync with the epistemic and educational turn performed by *Documenta 11*’s discourse, a new kind of essentialism emerged. Art as knowledge production runs the risk of becoming an aestheticised epistemism when portrayed solely as the production of a ‘good’ (non)knowledge which, due to its alleged negative and and/or rhizomatic character, supposedly outperforms the ‘bad’ modes of knowledge production operating in the realm of the cultural and creative industries. Here, a discerning, critical handling of the shifters which are used to characterise the current moves towards the epistemic in contemporary art seems more than appropriate.

Pursuing such a discerning work, I have become particularly interested in (and annoyed at) the way in which the concept metaphor ‘research’ has recently been put to use, often without accounting for or acknowledging the many different appropriations and deployments of research within the history of the visual arts. This gives rise to a core aspect of the art research problematic. The place, status and function of any claim to ‘research’ — as a specific mode of operation, facilitating the production of artworks which contribute to the development and expansion of knowledge and experience in an analytical manner — are discursively and socially produced. Due to their constructed nature, they are ultimately contestable. In accordance with this assumption, albeit in a different context, insight into the ‘ubiquitous, taken-for-granted, and axiomatic quality of research’ has led cultural theorist Arjun Appadurai to question — not only historically, but also anthropologically — the ‘strange and wonderful practice’ that is known as research, its ‘cultural presumptions’ and its ‘ethic’. I consider it crucial to be aware of the very constructedness and historicity of research as a paradigmatic shifter, particularly as it occurs in the discourses engendered by artists, critics, theorists, curators and educators. In the current vogue for artistic research, the varying attitudes and strategies *vis-à-vis* research in the art histories of the 19th and 20th centuries need to be explored — as elements of a struggle for a de-essentialising conception of art.

To ignore, or forget, the role that research played in the avant-garde discourses of Soviet art of the 1920s or in the ‘expanding’ practices of 1960s neo-avantgardism and conceptualism would foster the kind of essentialist discourse that relentlessly celebrates a presupposed authenticity of art. Knowingly or unknowingly, this contributes to a discourse of ‘low autonomy’, i.e. a discourse in which ‘art’s’ unique selling point becomes its ‘creative’ participation in the kind of post-Fordist knowledge production that has been dubbed ‘mode 2’, which is quite tellingly defined as ‘a constant flow back and forth between the fundamental and the applied, between the theoretical and the practical […] by a shift away from the search for fundamental

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One of the consistent themes across many responses to our invitation to contribute to this volume on curating and the ‘educational turn’ has been a scepticism about the value of a construct like the educational turn. Many artists, curators and critics are anxious to avoid any suggestion of a single homogenous ‘style’, ‘movement’, ‘tendency’. Many regard this proposal to talk about an ‘educational turn’ as a cynical attempt to construct careers based on niche specialisms and to appropriate potentially open critical practices into the restrictive and controlling terms of an authoritative institutional space like higher education. In your essay, you note that: ‘The problem is, once you enter the academic power-knowledge system of accountability checks and evaluative supervision, you have either explicitly or implicitly accepted the parameters of this system’. In response to an earlier panel discussion, convened at the ICA in London as part of developing this project, Sarah Pierce challenged the rationale behind discussing the educational turn by declaring that: ‘The productive potential of this educational turn does not rest on moments when we stop to take account of it. Its relevance lies elsewhere, in other discussions. It’s not that we can’t recognise an educational turn; we can. It’s not that this educational turn doesn’t call for analysis; it does. It’s that when asked to account for its productive potential, we lose sight of our subject. We pivot our observations around formalised encounters like art education and we enlist what we know. We forget that this educational turn is not one thing. It is not one place or one time. In taking account, we circumvent what is at stake — other discussions, elsewhere’.\(^{(6)}\)

What response would you make to such expressions of concern? Could this be a form of special pleading for a critical noli me tangere\(^{(7)}\) or is this a fundamentally important demand to maintain extra-institutional agency and critical autonomy?

Again, I would like to respond to this question by taking a detour into history. The 1960s and 1970s witnessed a peculiar, very specific, expansion of the pedagogical. Not only did the rationalisation of politics in the West revitalize notions and strategies of revolutionary didactics and agitation; but the ‘Sputnik crisis’ also elicited an expansion of the pedagogical in a different, technocratic sense, a tendency that led to the kind of increased ‘pedagogisation’ of society deployed by critics such as Alexander Mitscherlich or Basil Bernstein, if on different grounds. Artists and art institutions did not abstain from this development and contributed, in various ways and different intensities, to the invention and articulation of pedagogies, many of which having been aligned with radical politics, new left discourse and social movements on a global scale. I am currently working on a couple of case studies on the intersections of intermedia art practice, visual communication, curatorial pedagogy and educational theories around 1970.\(^{(8)}\) The interrelated struggles of dissolving art in the revolutionary moment and of finding a place and function for it, as part of a revolutionary school of critique and the liberation of the senses, feature an astonishing range of techniques and tactics of teaching that were not necessarily at odds with an emerging post-Fordist collusion of the social and the pedagogical.

Today, the ‘pedagogisation of sex’ (Dan Colson), the ‘pedagogisation of social crises’ (Felicitas Thiel) or the ‘pedagogisation of social power relations’ (Thomas Höhne) are being theorised in the conceptual framework of, predominantly, governmentality studies. The emphasis on learning, schooling, training, education, socialisation etc., which characterises the rationality of power in contemporary societies, is to be considered in the context of a ‘dissolution of the boundaries of the pedagogical’ (‘Entgrenzung des Pädagogischen’).\(^{(9)}\)

In 1969, Theodor Adorno advised the listeners of a radio programme, on which he was interviewed, that discourse on education and pedagogy should transgress the institutional confines of the school, since the kind of Kantian ‘maturity’ (Mündigkeit) he was longing for ‘has to be in the first place produced at really every point of our life’.\(^{(10)}\) The ubiquitous nature of education — both as a technology of control of the everyday and as the realm of an ‘education to resistance’ (Adorno) — makes it difficult to single out any particular educational turn. Hence, I share Pierce’s plea to look beyond the institutional frameworks (school, museum, ‘culture’) which are assigned to organise and administer education.
The trope of ‘turn’, as in educational turn, could certainly garner the kind of academic attention that takes account, i.e. collects all the traces/evidences of the allegedly educational, without noticing what goes on beyond the chosen paradigm. Claims for turns (whether visual, pictorial, spatial) clearly tend to be reductive and exclusive. However, one could consider them to be of heuristic value as well. Their mere existence and career as tropes generate moments and constellations that make apparent the need for a more differentiating and discerning perspective.

In much of the discussion around art as knowledge production and artistic research, there is a tendency to posit a binary distinction between ‘scientific’ and ‘artistic’ work. Typically, the academic world and the university are presented as dealing in terms of ‘scientific’ knowledge. In the English speaking world, the term ‘science’ is used more narrowly than the German term ‘Wissenschaft’. In English, a construct like ‘human sciences’, somewhat equivalent to ‘Geisteswissenschaften’, is not always used. Indeed, this is a much less common construct; rather, in English, a spectrum of social sciences and humanities is usually proposed. Importantly, many people working in the humanities are anxious to avoid any use of the term ‘science’ for what they do. (These arguments are quite old and can be discerned in the 19th century debates on the German University system and even in the emergence of modern economics in the disputes between German and Austrian economists in the late 19th century ‘Methodenstreit’.)

The key point here is that science (although variously conceived) is not the only paradigm for formal knowledge work in the university — there are many disciplines that do not use science as the benchmark, appealing instead to various different notions of ‘Verstehen’, or ‘understanding’ or ‘textuality’ or ‘meaning’, which are not conventionally scientific in their conception and purpose. Many critical scholars in the humanities wish to resist the instrumental discourses of education as economy, enquiry as commerce, knowledge as property etc., seeking to operate as public, or engaged, intellectuals. Is there perhaps a way of cross-relating and connecting the debates about artistic research and knowledge production to broader debates about the nature and future of the critical humanities (history, philosophy, literature, hermeneutics, etc.) within the university and society at large? Is there any common ground for scholars in the critical humanities and artists, critics and curators seeking to grow critical cultural practices in the world? How might this relate to something like the Bologna Process?

Increasingly informed by the methodologies and languages of critical humanities in higher education and art school, artists and other cultural producers are trained to think and converse along the lines of a reasoning which generally holds a sceptical attitude towards the politics of truth and objectivity associated with science. One could argue that the critique of science and scientificity, as well as of research policies and economies, constitutes one of the key positioning of critical discourse. The hermeneutic and deconstructionist traditions you’re invoking have worked tirelessly to define (and refine) themselves as the ‘other’ of science. Almost naturally, this other entertains an intimate relationship with the methodologies and epistemologies of ‘art’ (Kunst). The confusion caused by the notion of Wissenschaft in German language contexts is certainly a parochial phenomenon and, unsurprisingly, many of the contributions to debates around artistic research attempt to highlight the very un-scientificity of art, its rejection of scientific claims to truth and objectivity, its refusal to ‘deliver’ a product — in favour of an emphasis on process, on non-linearity, idiosyncrasy and open-endedness. But to what avail? In a recently published German language reader on the ‘art of research’ (Die Kunst des Forschens), most contributors intone the gospel of art’s epistemological singularity, the incommensurability of its very ‘form of knowing’ (‘Wissensform’), its Nietzschean critique of representation in the name of the ‘event’ etc. In other words, art as a form of knowing and knowledge production maintains a strange (and rather normative) status of autonomy, thereby re-vamping modernist, if not idealist, notions of art that appear untouched by the work of Pierre Bourdieu or the traditions of institutional critique, not to speak of feminist or postcolonial criticisms of claims to aesthetic autonomy.\(^\text{11}\)

In the aforementioned reader as elsewhere, Wissenschaften are placed in opposition to ‘Wissen’ (knowledge), without taking much care of the sort of distinctions in the Anglophone world that you mention. I am convinced that real progress in the development of a critical mode of artistic research, within and outside the institutions of art education and the museum, depends on the criticality directed against the institutional dimension of art. It depends on the analysis of its functions and of the interests and speculations involved in art’s embedding into the research continuum.

One possible outcome of the current discussion on the viability and feasibility of practice-based research MAs and PhDs may be a change in the concept of art which would eventually entail a kind of endgame situation. I don’t know. The social and political environment of immaterial labour, the propaganda of creativity (and the critique of this very propaganda in the name of art’s independence), the downfall of artistic critique (Boltanski/Chiapello), the normalisation of criticality, the precarious material reality of most artists and
cultural producers ‘educated’ in the institutions etc., add up to a
gruesome panorama. I would thus venture a programme of artistic
research that is decidedly de-illusionist and methodologically wary
of the promise of ‘different’ or ‘genuine’ knowledges or modes of
cognition provided by this peculiar entity/institution variously called
art, visual art, fine art or contemporary art.

The critique of the Bologna Process and its managerial and
bureaucratic regime definitely needs to be integrated in such
a critical project which cannot be anything other than cross-
disciplinary — though I would advocate not remaining within the
field of art and the humanities but taking on board each willing
critical voice working within the ‘sciences’.
Biographies

Peio Aguirre


Ayreen Anastas

Ayreen Anastas is from Palestine and writes in fragments and makes films and videos. Her work has been shown internationally in festivals, museums and cinemas but not yet broadcast on television. Her primary interests include almost everything becoming. She often wonders: ‘how is it that everything continues as before?’

Dave Beech

Dave Beech is an artist in the collective Freee, teaches at Chelsea College of Art and writes regularly for Art Monthly. He is editor of the recent MIT/Whitechapel book, Beauty, and co-author of The Philistine Controversy published by Verso. Recent exhibitions include ‘Spin[Freee]za’ at SMART Project Space; V22 Presents: The Sculpture Show; and ‘Article 31’ for Land of Human Rights, Rotor.

David Blamey

Resisting confinement to a single medium, David Blamey works freely across photography, sculpture, installation, projection, publishing and performance. His recent exhibitions include: ‘Still/Moving/Still’ (2009), Knokke-Heist Cultural Centre, Belgium; ‘Quiet Please’ (2009) with Craig Richards at GSK Contemporary, Royal Academy of Arts, London; ‘Quiet Place’ (2009) at the Victoria & Albert Museum, London; and ‘Covet’ (2009), Plan 9, Bristol. Teaches Communication Art & Design at the Royal College of Art. Lives and works in London.

Daniel Buren

Daniel Buren was born in 1938 in Boulogne-Billancourt. He lives and works in situ.

Alex Coles

Alex Coles is an art critic and an editor. He is the author of DesignArt (Tate Publishing, 2005) and of numerous catalogue essays including texts produced for ’Jorge Pardo’ at K21, (2009); Artangel: Off Limits, (2002); and Tobias Rehberger. He is the editor of Design and Art (MIT Press/Whitechapel Gallery, 2007) and Site-Specificity: The Ethnographic Turn (BDP, 2001).

Cornford & Cross

Cornford & Cross is a collaboration between British artists Matthew Cornford and David Cross. Matthew Cornford is Professor of Fine Art at the University of Brighton, and David Cross is a Reader in Art and Design at the University of the Arts, London. The artists maintain that a key function of contemporary art is to test concepts, assumptions and boundaries. Each of their works has made a critical engagement with a particular context, which includes the site, the social situation and the historical moment. In London, they have exhibited at Camden Arts Centre, the ICA, Photographers’ Gallery and South London Gallery. In Europe, they have exhibited in Bologna, Brugge, Rome and Stockholm; in the USA, they have exhibited in San Fransisco, Philadelphia and New York. Black Dog London have published a book on their work, which includes artists’ texts, photographs and critical essays by John Roberts and Rachel Withers.

Wouter Davids

Wouter Davids is Senior Lecturer in Modern Art History at the Free University, Amsterdam. As a postdoctoral researcher, he was a associated with the ‘Architetuur & Stedenbouw’ research group at the University of Ghent until 2008. He was the British Academy Visiting Research Fellow to Goldsmiths in 2006, a Visiting Fellow at AKV/ST Joost, Hertogenbosch in 2007 and Visiting Research Fellow to the Henry Moore Institute, Leeds, in 2008. He is author of Bouwen voor de kunst? Museumparchitectuur van Centre Pompidou tot Tote Modern (A&S/books, 2006) and his writing has appeared in many journals including Afterall, Archis, De Witte Raaf, Footprint, Kritische Berichten, OASE and Parachute, as well as in many books and catalogues. Recent publications include texts in Arthorum, Camera Austria, Sculpture and OPEN. He curated Philippe Van Snick: Undisclosed Recipients in BKSM, Mechelen (2006, with Hilde Van Gelder) and Beginners & Begetters, Centrum voor Hedendaagse Kunst, Antwerp (2007). His current research interests concern questions of scale in contemporary art and architecture.

Eva Egermann

Eva Egermann is an artist and researcher based in Vienna. She works in various media and negotiates questions of collectivity, authorship, the construction of history, knowledge production or the public space. Egermann is currently working as an artistic–scientific staff member in the Department for Art & Communication at the Academy of Fine Arts, Vienna. Egermann is a member of several collectives including the ‘Manoa Free University’ (2003–2006); the group, GirlsOnHorses (2006–2009); the editorial collective, MALMOE (since 2002); a board member of the IG Bildende Kunst (since 2006); and many other individual collaborations. She has participated in exhibitions internationally at galleries including the Kontext Gallery, Belgrade (2007); the editorial collective, Kritische Berichten (since 2002); and the Graz Kunstverein (2009). The publications school works and class works, contributions to an educative, artistic and researching practice, co-edited with Anna Pritz, were published in 2009 by LÖcker Verlag, Vienna.
Charles Esche


Annie Fletcher


Rene Gabri

Rene Gabri is an artist from Tehran practising the fine art of non-specialisation. He works on both a solo basis and in collaboration with others, within the folds of cultural practice, social thought and politics.

Liam Gillick


Janna Graham

Janna Graham is a writer, organiser and educator. Working with the collectives Ultra-red and Micropolitics Research Group, she participates in ongoing projects on the conditions of cultural workers in London and pedagogies of anti-racism in England’s rural south-west. She has developed educational and curatorial initiatives at institutions such as the Art Gallery of Ontario, in Toronto, where, for many years, she collaborated on exhibitions and programmes with councils of social movement activism, youth and other groups; Project Arts Centre, Dublin and Plymouth Arts Centre. Graham is currently Projects Curator at the Serpentine Gallery where, working with visiting artists, researchers and local people in the Edgware Road neighbourhood of London, she initiated The Centre for Possible Studies: She is also a PhD candidate in visual cultures at Goldsmiths.

Tom Holert

Tom Holert is an art historian and cultural critic. A former editor of Texte zur Kunst and co-publisher of Spex magazine, Holert currently lives in Berlin and teaches and conducts research in the Institute of Art Theory and Cultural Studies at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna. He contributes to journals and newspapers such as Artpool, Texte zur Kunst, Camera Austria, Jungle World and Der Standard. Among his recent publications are a book on migration and tourism (Fliehkraft: Gesellschaft in Bewegung; von Migranten und Touristen, with Mark Terkessidis), a monograph on Marc Camille Chaimowicz’s 1972 installation ‘Celebration? Realife’ (2007) and a collection of chapters on visual culture and politics, Regierien im Bildraum (2008).

William Kaizen

William Kaizen is a writer and curator. He is an assistant professor of aesthetics and critical studies at the University of Massachusetts, Lowell.

Hassan Khan

Hassan Khan is an artist, musician and writer who lives and works in Cairo, Egypt. Selected solo shows include: Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris (2004); A Space Gallery, Toronto (2005); Gasworks, London (2006); Le Plateau, Paris (2007) and Uqbar, Berlin (2008). Khan has also participated in the Istanbul (2003), Seville (2006), Sydney (2006), Thessaloniki (2007) and Gwangju (2008) biennales as well as the Turin (2005) and Yokohama (2008) triennales, amongst other international group exhibitions. He has composed soundtracks for theatre and performed his music in venues around the world. His album tabla dubb was released on the 100copies label. Khan is also widely published in both Arabic and English; his latest book, Nine Lessons Learned from Sherif El-Azma, was published by the GIC (2009).

Annette Krauss

Annette Krauss works as an artist. In her conceptually-based work, she addresses the intersection of art, politics and everyday life, trying to explore the possibility of participatory practices, performativity and investigations in educational structures. She is particularly interested in questions of how norms and values control our perceptions and practices in everyday life and how this contributes towards the development of human relations within specific social contexts. She has participated in several programmes, including the postgraduate Critical Studies Course at Rooseum, Centre for Contempory Art Malmö and Art Academy Malmö, IASPIS Residency Programme and in exhibitions such as Becoming Dutch, Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven; Hidden Curriculum, Utrecht; Invisible Landscape, Lund Konsthall; Momentum Biennial, Moss; Soft Logics, Künstlerhaus Stuttgart; and Theatres of Memory, Kunsthaus Dresden. She was part of the conception team of the first youth programme of Documenta 12, Kassel.

Stewart Martin

Stewart Martin is senior lecturer in Modern European Philosophy, Aesthetics and Art Theory at Middlesex University and is Programme Leader for the BA in Fine Art
Ute Meta Bauer

Ute Meta Bauer has been an Associate Professor and Director of the Visual Arts Program School of Architecture and Planning at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Cambridge since 2005. Educated as an artist for more than two decades, Bauer has worked as a curator of exhibitions and presentations on contemporary art, film, video and sound, with a focus on transdisciplinary formats. She was a co-curator of Documenta XI (2001–2002) in the team of Okwui Enwezor, has been the Artistic Director of the Relational Aesthetics’ Political Radicality in Contemporary Art: Conferences and Lectures, and has also contributed to numerous catalogues and magazines including Art Monthly, Space & Culture, Everything, Contemporary, The Internationaler and OIRCA.

Marion von Osten

Marion von Osten works as an artist, author and curator. Her projects deal with the changed conditions of the production of cultural work in neoliberal societies, technologies of the self and the governance of mobility. She is a founding member of Labor k3000 Zürich, kleines postfordistisches Drama and the Centre for Post-colonial Knowledge and Culture Berlin. Among her latest projects are ‘In der Wüste der Moderne’, Haus der Kulturen der Welt Berlin (2008); ‘reformpause’ Kunstraum of the University of Lüneburg (2006); ‘Atelier Europa’, Kunstverein Munich and the film project Kamera Läuft! (2006). Her published writing can be found in Re-inventing Radio, Kunstradio.Vienna (2008); Curating Subjects, Open Editions (2007); Making Everything New, Book Works (2008); Looking Encountering Staging, Piet Zwart Institute (2005); Put About, Book Works (2005); meanwhile Somewhere Else, Gala Rekalde (2006); and Printed Project Issues 1 and 6.

Paul O’Neill

Paul O’Neill is a curator, artist and writer based in Bristol. He is a Research Fellow in Commissioning Contemporary Art with a focus on art and architecture at the University of the West of England, Bristol, where he is leading the international research project ‘Locating the Producers’. He has written extensively on curatorial practice past and present and edited the curatorial anthology Curating Subjects (Open Editions and de Appel, London & Amsterdam, 2007). He has curated or co-curated over 50 projects including, most recently, ‘Coalesce: Happenstance’, SMART, Amsterdam (2009). He has lectured on several curatorial programmes including those at Goldsmiths; de Appel, Amsterdam; and the Whitney ISP, New York. His writing has been published in many books, catalogues, journals and magazines including Art Monthly, Space & Culture, Everything, Contemporary, The Internationaler and OIRCA.

Emily Pethick

Emily Pethick is Director of The Showroom, London. From 2005 to 2008, she was Director of Casco, Office for Art, Design and Theory in Utrecht, The Netherlands. From 2003 to 2004, she was curator at Cubitt, London. She has contributed to numerous catalogues and magazines, including Artforum, frieze, dot dot dot, GAS, Texte zur Kunst, andUntitled and edited books such as Casco Issues X: The Great Method, with Peio Aguirre, and Casco Issues XI with Marina Vishmidt and Tanja Widmann.

Andrea Phillips

Andrea Phillips is Reader in Fine Art at the Department of Art, Goldsmiths and Director of the Doctoral Programmes. From 2006–2009, she was Director of Curating Architecture, a think tank based in the art department that investigated the aesthetic and political relationship between architecture, curating and concepts of public display [www.gold.ac.uk/virtual-art/curating-architecture]. Phillips publishes widely in art and architecture journals, artists’ monographs and collections on politics, philosophy and contemporary art practice, and speaks internationally on art, architecture, politics, institution-making and urban regeneration. Current research projects include the aesthetic formatting of transnational space and its relation to contemporary art, the future and implications of practice-based research and ‘Building Democracy’, a set of publications and discussions that foregrounds critiques of participation in contemporary art and architecture. Phillips is Chair of Research in the Department of Art, Goldsmiths.

Sarah Pierce

Since 2003, Sarah Pierce has used an umbrella term, ‘The Metropolitan Complex’, to describe her practice which uses archives, exhibitions and papers, often opening these structures up to the personal and the inciden. Currently, she is working with the Dutch platform ‘If I Can’t Dance I Don’t Want To Be Part Of Your Revolution’. Recent projects include: ‘It’s time man. It feels imminent’, at the ICA London (2008); ‘The question would be the answer to the question Are you happy?’ at Sala Rekalde Bilbao (2008); and ‘An artwork in the third person’ at Project, Dublin (2008). Her work has been included in group exhibitions including: ‘Feminist Legacies and Potentials’, MuHKA Antwerp (2007); ‘Left Pop’, 2nd Moscow Biennale (2007); ‘Coalesce’, Redux London (2005), SMART Amsterdam (2009); and ‘Romantic Detachment’, PS1 New York (2004). In 2006, she represented Ireland at the St. Venice Biennale. Her published writing can be found in Re-inventing Radio, Kunstradio.Vienna (2008); Curating Subjects, Open Editions (2007); Make Everything New, Book Works (2008); Looking Encountering Staging, Piet Zwart Institute (2005); Put About, Book Works (2005); Meanwhile Somewhere Else, Sala Rekalde (2006); and Printed Project Issues 1 and 6.

Raqs Media Collective

Raqs Media Collective members, Jeebesh Bagchi, Monica Narula and Shuddhabrata Sengupta, have been variously described as artists, media practitioners, curators,
Irit Rogoff

Simon Sheikh

Sally Tallant
Sally Tallant is Head of Programmes at the Serpentine Gallery where she is responsible for the delivery of an integrated programme of exhibitions, architecture, education and public programmes. Since 2001, she has developed an ambitious programme of artists’ projects and commissions, conferences, talks and events. Recent projects include ‘Edgware Road’, ‘Skill Exchange’, ‘Manifesto’, ‘Experiment and Interview Marathons: Hans Ulrich Obrist; ‘Disassembly’ with Runa Islam, Christian Boltanski, Yona Friedman and Faisal Al-Abdul’Allah; ‘Lets Twitch Again’; ‘Hearing Voices, Seeing Things: Art and Mental Health’, ‘Park Projects’ by Kathrin Böhm and Andreas Lang and residencies with Tomoko Takahashi, Toby Paterson and A Constructed World. She has curated and organised exhibitions in a wide range of contexts and lectured on graduate and postgraduate courses.

Jan Verwoert
Jan Verwoert lives in Berlin, likes to write and talk, is a contributing editor of frieze magazine, teaches at the Piet Zwart Institute, Rotterdam and co-curated the biannual citywide exhibition Art Sheffield 2008: ‘Yes No Other Options’.

Anton Vidokle
Anton Vidokle is a writer, artist and curator, founder of e-Flux, co-curator of Manifesta 6 and creator of a year-long project, united-nationsplaza in Berlin and Night School in New York. As an artist, Vidokle’s work has been exhibited at the Venice Biennale, Lyon Biennial and at Tate Modern, UCLA Hammer, Haus Der Kunst, PS1, among others.

Marina Vishmidt
Marina Vishmidt is a writer who works mainly on art, labour and value. She is currently doing a PhD at Queen Mary, University of London on ‘Speculation as a Mode of Production’. She has published in Mute, ephemera, Afterall, Texte zur Kunst and Vertigo among others.

Mick Wilson
Mick Wilson is Dean of the Graduate School of Creative Arts and Media, Dublin [www. gradcam.ie]. He is an artist, writer and educator who has exhibited and published his work widely. Recent published work includes: ‘Emergence’ (with Paul O’Neill, ICA, London, 2008); ‘Curatorial Moments and Discursive Turns’ in Curating Subjects (Open Editions and de Appel, London & Amsterdam, 2007); ‘Invasion of the Kiddyhiddens’ in Censoring Culture: Contemporary Threats to Free Expression (The New Press, 2006); and ‘Tricks of Trade and Terms of Art’ in Third Text, Vol. 19 No. 5 (2006).

Tirdad Zolghadr
Tirdad Zolghadr is a freelance writer and curator based in Berlin. He has curated events in a wide range of venues, most recently the United Arab Emirates national pavilion, at the 53rd Venice Biennale, and the long-term project ‘Lapodion de Bourgeoisie’ (with Nav Haq). He teaches at the Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College, NY, and is a curatorial advisor to the Artist Pension Trust and the Guggenheim Abu Dhabi. Zolghadr is a founding member of the Shahrazad collective, also filming and directing the documentaries Tehran 1380 (2002, with Solmaz Shahbazi) and Tropical Modernism (2006). His novel, Softcore (2007), has been translated into German, Italian and French.
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