Teaching Art in the Neoliberal Realm

Realism versus Cynicism

Pascal Gielen &
Paul De Bruyne (eds.)

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Introduction
The Catering Regime

Pascal Gielen &
Paul De Bruyne

The most important department at universities and academies these days is the general and technical services facility. It is not only the students who have to comply with the rules imposed on them by an army of service workers. Teachers also submit to being disciplined by security staff, copy services, IT people, roster makers, and waitresses serving coffee or organizing a reception. The scientific staff, artistic administration and teachers are being steered into this catering regime by the school's business administration. Of course, the service staff and supporting educational workers are not to blame, as they are not personally responsible for the bio-political discipline to which they submit the school's users on a daily basis. Responsibility lies foremost with the 'organizing forces', i.e. school boards and, at the end of the day, the authority or government that decides on educational policy.

Barring a few exceptions, most school boards and governments have come to believe that institutes should focus on their 'core business' and had best outsource all other activities. Sandwiches are no longer to be prepared by the mum of one of the teachers or students and the cleaner can no longer be some distant relative of one of the staff. Henceforth, everything is to be done in a professional manner. Within Europe, the notorious rule of 'European tenders' has been introduced to guarantee some level of objectivity in comparing price and quality. Michel Foucault, if he were still alive, would lick his fingers if confronted with such a regime. The French intellectual, who introduced the notion of 'biopolitics' in philosophy, would have described in glorious detail how this catering regime deeply affects daily life itself, hence '*bio*politics'.

It is not just the sandwiches and cups of coffee that go down our gullets — often dispensed by machines — that are firmly controlled by the general services troops, but also how we navigate the school building and how much time we're allowed to spend in a classroom or studio. Our use of some military jargon here is not unintentional. As far back as a century ago, Max Weber already pointed out how a bureaucracy's organization was directly inspired by the command structure of the military. Likewise, the disciplinary power of the catering regime is founded on a correctional system. Art academies and universities that have embraced this regime by now definitely realize that they have indeed let a powerful and very obstinate *Fremdkörper* (alien) in. Some heads of schools try to spare their students this regime by using alternative spaces far from the school building itself. Teachers and professors who wish to share their artistic and intellectual enthusiasm via book launches, symposiums and other extracurricular activities prefer to find cheaper accommodations with less rigid hours elsewhere. These days, the school building is often seen as a suffocating environment because the general services department has become the control department.

You may perhaps think that we are laying it on a bit too thick and are grossly exaggerating things. Okay, being art lovers, we confess that we are adept at exaggerating, but our seemingly overblown take may be not all that weird once we closely examine the principle of catering and define what catering is exactly, and especially what it actually *does*. Catering delivers food on demand, made-to-measure. Not just, hopefully, high-quality and tasty food, but — and this is the most important principle of catering — it delivers it on time, in the right quantity and in the right place. Catering therefore is all about short-term stock management, distribution, and timing (as it deals mostly in fresh food with a limited shelf life). It is essential to accurately estimate the potential demand. In other words, catering is a matter of continual calculation. A services company that doesn't calculate is doomed to fail. After all, if it doesn't deliver enough or not in time, the client will be dissatisfied. If it delivers too much, it is stuck with a surplus, which over time may lead to the company's demise. All in all, catering comes down to the *art of delivering on time and on demand*.

So, isn't education today also regarded as one big catering business? Academies and universities are after all expected to deliver knowledge that is made-to-measure and meets the demands of its clients or potential students. Even the contents of a discipline, however classic, nowadays have a limited shelf life, subjected as they are to quickly changing demands in the labour market. The transfer of knowledge and the learning process are literally custom-made to fit modules and competencies, which in turn are neatly divided into precisely calculated hours of contact. The students/consumers can then file a complaint when either the promised quality or quantity is not delivered at all or not in time. They are also subjected to consumer and satisfaction questionnaires in all sorts of interim educational assessments or audits. Education has indeed become a form of catering, and just like in catering, the client is well aware in advance of what to expect, which is never the sublime cuisine of a top-notch restaurant, but a well-calculated mediocrity. To the catering regime, after all, quality first and foremost means not delivering outside the norm. That is one guarantee the client at least has.

Neoliberalism or the Fundamentalism of Measurability

The bold thesis that this introduction proposes is that the catering regime is in fact the carrying out of a political ideology, i.e. that of neoliberalism. The catering regime is the actual everyday implementation of a political agenda. It is a form of 'governmentalism', to quote Foucault once again. It is a silent but active policy that both covers up explicitly articulated politics and implements them in everyday real life. The catering regime's starting point is a no-nonsense policy or a managerial realism that presumes to deal with reality because reality, supposedly, is objective because it is measurable. In doing so, this regime transforms a political ideology into a crypto-ideology, one that presents itself as the only possible option with any sense of reality. In other words, through the catering regime the neoliberal principles and creeds take on a 'natural', or at least 'normal', character: one that is supposedly intrinsic to human behaviour.

In previous publications by the Arts in Society research group, we have commented regularly on neoliberalism. All the issues that we have discussed so far in this series, ranging from globalisation, interculturality, and post-Fordism to community art, have links with this political agenda. In these publications, we have sufficiently explained how neoliberalism took shape during the 1970s and that it had everything to do with the privatization of hitherto collectively and/or state-managed resources. Neoliberalization also implies the dismantlement of the welfare state. In those earlier books, however, we did not really discuss the distinction between liberalism and neoliberalism. Yet the difference between these historically distinctive agendas is essential in understanding the notion of the catering regime proposed here. Whereas neoliberalism, just like its historic predecessor, firmly believes in the wholesome working of free competition and free markets, and while both proclaim that the state should take a step back and not interfere too much with the markets, neoliberalism has a fundamentally different approach to its guiding principle. This basic principle, as we all know, is simply called 'freedom'. Historically, liberalism does not only have individual freedom as a political and social goal, but also holds an optimistic view of mankind in which the world will be a better place if individuals are given full freedom. Freedom is not just the goal of liberalism, it is also the condition on which a better society can build and develop itself. Or, to put it differently: liberalism believes that freely acting individuals will lead to the best results for society. Therefore, the market must be allowed to function as freely as possible, which, if taken to its extreme, means a laissez-faire capitalism. Also, one should take the risk of giving individuals as much freedom as possible in order to realize progress in prosperity. This belief in the beneficial outcome of freely acting subjects means that liberalism gladly accommodates both adventurous entrepreneurs and the most idiosyncratic artists. Both, after all, are second to none at proclaiming the idea of individual freedom and autonomous creativity.

Neoliberalism, however, maintains a less optimistic view of mankind. Maybe it has learned a few lessons from some of the historical excesses that have resulted from blind faith in human freedom. In any case, neoliberalism is very suspicious when it comes to the free space that individuals should have. Do they make good and proper use of it? Because of this mistrust, the political agenda starts to efficiently direct or contain this proclaimed freedom. It develops all sorts of tools to make freedom measurable, controllable and manageable, and to keep it that way. And this is where the infamous catering regime comes in again, as it gives the customers the impression that they can choose anything they like, made to their own measure, while in fact it delivers mass-produced, standardized products. Which brings us back to education, which gives students/consumers the impression that they can choose and study highly individual programmes but in fact treats them to mass-produced competencies in increasingly comparable — within Europe — modules. Competency-driven education reduces the relationship between student and teacher or instructor to trading off practicably measurable skills. That which cannot be measured, or at least not within a foreseeable time span, will be more difficult to legitimize or honour. In other words, neoliberalism is a fundamentalism in that it proclaims the value of the number to be the foundation of our society. Numbers become the *only* foundation of living together, which makes neoliberalism essentially indistinguishable from other regimes that acknowledge only *one* foundation (be it a holy book, or the image of a God) and regard all other regimes as inferior, or worse.

Just like all fundamentalism, neoliberalism too is fuelled by fear. It is the fear of its own drive and utopian ideal: freedom. Neoliberalism is incapable of looking its own ideals in the eye. In fact, it creates a continuously expanding bureaucracy that serves to mask the fear of freedom, of one's own population, of one's own society and eventually the fear of oneself, of mankind. Bureaucracy is the expression of fundamentalism's fear of mankind's potential. And

because neoliberalism hides its profound distrust of man's virtuousness behind a discourse of usefulness and service, it is a deeply cynical ideology. In that sense, neoliberalism is an ideology that brings an echo of old-fashioned communism to mind. *Les extrêmes se touchent*. The extremes meet.

Just as neoliberalism doesn't fully trust the free individual, it is also wary of the potential free space between pupil and teacher in the classroom. By using miles of red tape and numerous assessments, the catering regime tries to keep the space between teacher and pupil as orderly and manageable as possible. In doing so, however, neoliberalism goes right in against the historical and etymological meaning of the word 'school'. In their contribution to this publication, Simons and Masschelein point out that the original Greek word *scholè* means 'free time', being the time when people don't have to act economically or politically. Within the domain of the school, neither accumulation and profit-seeking nor power games take centre stage, but only the subject matter, for which the tutor tries to create *inter*est. Therefore, what is most important in this ancient *scholè* is not the student, but the actual knowledge and skills. Good teachers of dance, music, theatre, or visual art are not primarily interested in the students, and most of all not in themselves, but speak only from their one true love for dance, music, theatre, or visual art. Students will only interest them when they in turn are interested in the subject matter. It is precisely this selfless love of a subject that the teacher is trying to evoke, putting the most immeasurable subjectivity into his efforts. The teacher shouts, is sometimes angry, laughs, and is enthusiastic. Sometimes he whispers, sometimes he loudly recites. He may be motionless for minutes at a time or suddenly start gesturing wildly. He may react very sympathetically to an unexpected idea or gesture from a student at one time and be unreasonably critical at another. Those who talk on a subject with heartfelt involvement need few pedagogic rules to evoke interest or to transfer knowledge and skills. It is precisely this subjectivity that is 'hated by capitalism', as Richard Sennett states rather emphatically in this book. Capitalism doesn't know how to deal with the immeasurability of the educational process. The catering regime, though, tries to deal with it anyway via all sorts of evaluation tools and stacks of forms that in fact miss the point entirely, as good teachers well know. Such measures actually distract from the subject matter and often dampen enthusiasm, thereby diminishing the likelihood of interest.

Bologna

In many essays in this book, an accusing finger is pointed at the Bologna Agreement. This is hardly surprising, as almost all the authors have worked or are still working in education in Europe. The European treaty signed by the ministers of education of all the European member states in 1999 can indeed be regarded as the official starting shot of the neoliberalization of education and therefore of the implementation of the catering regime. Certainly this is the first time that it was done on a large, international scale. Through the implementation of the well-known BAMA system (Bachelor and Master), Bologna aims at uniformity and comparability of educational institutes. In a ruthless struggle of survival to obtain students, these institutes are increasingly forced to take on a corporate identity.

Gielen, like many of the other authors in this book, places the blame on this agreement. According to him, it frustrates the integration and interaction of theory and practice that are essential to the development of an artistic praxis.

Sociologist Rudi Laermans, who teaches at a Belgian university as well as at a dance academy, does some comparative research on these institutes. The first falls under Bologna, the latter has, for now, managed to stay out of this framework. Laermans concludes that a certain way of teaching theory — beautifully coined by him as 'nimble thinking' — has become impossible at the university, as nowadays one is supposed to deliver formatted packages of knowledge.

Philosopher Dieter Lesage, however, points to a possibly positive side of the Bologna Agreement: it opens up the possibility of research in higher education. If art education can translate this into its own terms and use its own parameters, there is even some intellectual and artistic profit to be gained compared to traditional, nationally organized art education, Lesage believes. To artists or future artists, research time may come to mean *free time*, time to experiment to their hearts' desire. Indeed, Bologna doesn't have to spell only sorrow and misery, as much still depends on how national governments interpret and implement the agreement. In the Netherlands this is done quite differently from how it is done in neighbouring Belgium (Flanders), which also marks the difference within this publication between Gielen and Lesage.

Authors Tessa Overbeek, Daniel Muzyczuk and Marco Scotini, however, just like Laermans, Lesage and Gielen, agree that the Bologna Agreement declares the domain of the school to be a marketplace, regardless of whether we find ourselves in Swedish, Italian,

Polish, Dutch, or Belgian classrooms. Also, based on well-informed sources, we strongly suspect that in countries outside Europe, mechanisms such as international standardization, educational marketing, increase in scale, and centralization also hold sway. It is not only within the European educational domain that the catering regime rules, or rather, controls.

The Age of Entertainment

Art increasingly has to deal with neoliberalization in other areas besides education. Once students have left the classrooms, they enter a (professional) world where creativity and the market mix quite easily nowadays. Booming creative industries are eager to make use of the creative and artistic skills taught at art schools. The marriage between globalization and neoliberalization doesn't generate cultural homogeneity exclusively in the artistic domain. It also does so on a large scale in entertainment, which, by the way, *de facto* implies homogenization. Entertainment standardizes artistic and cultural expression into client-friendly formats. In this it is basically different from art, which time and again generates its own idiosyncratic formats. Putting it simply, entertainment is 'pre-packaged art', or made-to-measure artistry. This is not to say that there is no entertainment that has quality, only that this quality is measured in a completely different way. The quality of art is measured by the degree of transgression or 'dismeasure' it achieves. Over time, this dismeasure may become generally accepted and be repeated by others, made into a refrain. At that point, the dismeasure becomes measure, and soon becomes measurable entertainment. In other words, the distinction between art and entertainment makes clear that even great artists who keep repeating themselves, staying within their own measure, are in fact only entertaining their surroundings. Then again, entertainment that transgresses its own limits may come to be recognized as art.

We will not discuss the difference between art and entertainment in any more detail here, but within the context of this publication we will regard entertainment as made-to-measure art. After all, doesn't it also mean that, under the catering regime, made-to-measure art education results above all in teaching made-to-measure art, therefore entertainment? In his essay, Dieter Lesage states that within the entertainment regime, art research in education rather reduces itself to technical research. Ground-breaking research in

theory and art theory itself tends to get side-tracked. Nevertheless, art needs this type of research in order to push back its own boundaries. Or, as Rudi Laermans says, with art theorist Irit Rogoff: art education is in need of 'criticality' and of 'operating from an uncertain ground'. Criticality 'affirms the moment of not-knowing in the process of knowing'.[1]

'Particularly in respect to research', says Laermans, art schools 'must defend the at once illuminating and deconstructive moment of not-knowing as the proverbial truth of every quest for knowledge. This paradox forms the heart of both "doing theory" and genuine artistic research.' But isn't this also at the heart of art education as such? Various notions put forward by the authors in this publication, such as 'nimble thinking' (Laermans), 'escaping forward' (Muzyczuk) 'unpredictability' (Hertmans), 'indecency' (De Bruyne), 'thinking together' (Kreuger), 'dismeasure' (Gielen), 'dis-covery' and 'quality madness' (Overbeek), certainly refer to that which is unknown: the uncertain leap one takes when one wants to create art. Unlike catering, neoliberalism, and entertainment, good art education values uncertainty more than certainty.

Teaching Art in Three Parts

Teaching Art in the Neoliberal Realm is a collection of essays and one interview, divided up into three parts. The first, 'Neoliberalism and the Loss of School', offers a critical analysis of the effects of neoliberalism on art education. The contributions here show what education is in the process of losing under this political hegemony. Gielen, for instance, points to the loss of balance within a biotope that is needed to maintain a healthy artistic praxis. Richard Sennett next exposes, in an interview, the loss of craftsmanship as well as communality. De Bruyne offers an analysis of the master-mate relationship in theatre education. This relationship is not understood by the new administrators and this puts pressure on theatre education as well. Simons and Masschelein, finally, state that the original notion of the *scholè* itself is in danger of being lost.

The second part, 'Dealing with the Past, Opportunities of the Present', illustrates that we shouldn't romanticize the history of the art academy. Bert Taken and Jeroen Boomgaard, for instance, point out how the Romantic image of artists with their sublime art

1 **Irit Rogoff, 'Looking Away: Participations in Visual Culture', in** After Criticism: New Responses to Art and Performance, **ed. Gavin Butt (Malden: Blackwell, 2005), 119.**

has entered art education via Kant and Fichte. And although this is a completely obsolete image in the current globalized media landscape, it keeps cropping up in a nostalgic longing for a new elite and the training of artists in isolation. However, art education cannot isolate itself from the world, like the classical academies did. Daniel Muzyczuk illustrates how in Poland there is a gap between the old, traditional art academies plodding on in splendid isolation from the actual professional art world and neoliberal circles proposing a radically different educational programme. The gap there couldn't be wider, but isn't it one we recognize as opening up in so many other European countries as well? Still, Muzyczuk sees in this dilemma also an opportunity 'to escape forward'. Rounding off this second part, Dieter Lesage argues that 'Bologna' isn't all bad news. He regards the implementation of research in art education, as mentioned earlier, as an opportunity 'to go back to the academy'.

Finally, the third part, 'Teaching Art and the Essence of the Quest', focuses on effective escape routes. Stefan Hertmans thinks that art education should take matters more in its own hands by articulating open learning goals itself. Rudi Laermans and Anders Kreuger, both in their own way, point to the necessity of different ways of thinking within art education. If art education is to preserve its own identity and that of art, then it will have to maintain or fight for some measure of autonomy in this. Whereas Laermans takes the practice of theoretical thinking as a starting point, Kreuger, Marco Scotini and Tessa Overbeek base themselves on artistic practices to formulate proposals for education. Kreuger relies on the practice of curating in doing so, while Scotini mainly takes forms of activist theatre to learn about an 'antagonistic pedagogical discourse'. Overbeek, finally, starts from within the circus, taking the principle of 'quality madness' from the Swedish Cirkus Cirkör as a prelude in pointing out the duality of the creative and pedagogical process. The teaching of art loses its essence if it is not a quest.

The alternatives presented show, and not just in this last part, that all of the authors speak from experience in education, thereby implicitly underwriting the idea of pragmatic philosophy à la Sennett. If nothing else, this has saved *Teaching Art in the Neoliberal Realm* from being a sour rant or limiting itself to purely theoretical musings. Although none of the authors shun theory, their contributions first and foremost testify to the 'voice of experience', which also shows their commitment to art education. In *Teaching Art…* nobody simply resigns themselves to the catering cynicism. Idealism is still

alive. Or rather, realism is. A realistic analysis of the present situation shows that the neoliberalist educational model cannot fulfil its promises of flexible services to the market and of the efficient building of competencies. It simply doesn't understand the dynamics that are the basis of art and art education well enough. As a result, it creates a permanent state of crisis within art education, a crisis that neoliberalism can hardly manage, not even by cracking the severely disciplining whip of permanent organizational upheaval. This book claims to offer the elements for a more realistic analysis of reality in order to create a type of education that does justice to the tradition and potential of art, art teachers, future artists and the function of art education in the global community. In that regard, this publication is only part of a movement in art schools that is daily combating the dominating ideology in rehearsal rooms and studios, in a light-hearted, but intense and committed way. The undercurrent is already there. Disobedience is possible, desirable, and pleasant — and it is a very effective pedagogical tool.

Part I
Neoliberalism and the Loss of School

Artistic Praxis and the Neo-liberalization of the Educational Space

Pascal Gielen

Building with Loos or Wittgenstein

Towards the end of his monograph *The Craftsman* the American philosopher Richard Sennett describes two different ways of building a house.[1] The designer of the first house is the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein, and the designer of the second house is the architect Adolf Loos. Though both men embrace the same principles of New Realism — 'purity', 'simplicity' and 'honesty' — the results of both builders are fundamentally different. In the end, Wittgenstein is not satisfied at all with his abode. Though he says it has 'good manners', he accuses it of lacking a great deal of 'primordial life'. Therefore the Jewish philosopher will never build a house again, apart from his hut in Norway and his one house on the Kundmanngasse in Vienna. Loos on the other hand had already made himself a name as an architect at the time he built his Villa Moller in Vienna. Contrary to the 'sterility' of Wittgenstein's building, the Villa Moller is a very accomplished abode, thriving with life.

In his precise description of both building processes, Sennett clearly demonstrates how the difference between an accomplished and an unaccomplished work, whether art or not, depends to a great extent on the relation between theory and practice. Both Wittgenstein and Loos are accomplished theoreticians, while the latter was originally better known for his writings and 'projects on paper' than for his construction projects. According to Sennett, the fact that Loos, contrary to Wittgenstein, did manage to bring about satisfactory building results is all due to his 'material interest'. Loos is not only interested in theory, but also in how a building is constructed. He therefore regularly visits his building sites to engage in a 'dialogue with the concrete building circumstances'. The result is that his designs are realized in a more organic manner. His theory is constantly put to the test of practice and adjusted when necessary. Sennett:

> In Wittgenstein's house, the windows rigidly obey a formal rule, whereas at the Villa Moller they are more playful. One reason for the difference is that Loos spent a lot of time at the site, sketching it in drawings that charted the varying play of light on the surface during the passage of the day, redrawing again and again.[2]

In short, Wittgenstein's house could be described as being a mere illustration of a theory, whereas Loos' buildings are thriving with theory. The theory as such may well be adjusted during the concrete building practice, by the practical resistance of the material, the environment, the play of the light and so on. Loos thus almost literally illustrates what it means to 'mould something to one's will'. His theoretical insights are moulded on the site through his sketches. His hand, through practical experience, builds its own wisdom and resistance. One could compare this to the process of writing. You may start off with a clear concept and a good blueprint for a book or essay in mind, but during the process of writing your fingers seem to take over and lead you associatively in other directions. Of course not the fingers as such, but rather the brain linked to these fingers in the process of thinking through the nervous system is confronted with the materiality of written letters, words and sentences. In confrontation with the domain of writing as such — we could call it empiricism — another reality than a mere theoretical one comes into being. Contrary to a neatly balanced theory, materiality constantly offers resistance through its contingencies. This resistance, however, provided one is gifted with a good material consciousness, is not only experienced as a hindrance, but also as an opportunity. Clearly, Wittgenstein lacked such material consciousness when it came to building a house, whereas Loos obviously had it.

In other words, an accomplished work, be it a work of art, a good design, or a persuasive essay calls for a good relationship and interaction between theory and practice. What matters is not only the correct balance between theory and practice, but also the way in which they interact. Ideally, material reality is explored through theoretical knowledge and theoretical insights are, when necessary, corrected in a tactile way. In marxist jargon such correct interaction may also be referred to as *praxis*. Though it is not necessary to copy or subscribe to Marx's ideological backdrop as such, praxis can be considered to be a sort of embodied knowledge. However, the term also refers to a bilateral relationship between theory and *act*ing which may be referred to as acting *through* theoretical knowledge and through an acting theory. It is a relation of continuous interpenetration of theory and practice. In what follows it will be argued that within the current political and economic context this essential rela-

1 **Richard Sennett,** The Craftsman **(Yale: Yale University Press, 2008), 252-267.**
2 **Ibid., 259.**

tion is disturbed, both within and outside the domain of education, and because of this the artistic biotope of the artist loses its balance. Prior to this, however, the necessity of both theory and practice in realizing an accomplished work of art will be discussed.

A well-known adage of the French cultural sociologist Pierre Bourdieu is that theory without empirical data is empty, and empirical research without theoretical insights is blind.[3] Possibly this adage can also be applied to the practice of art. Anyone who makes a creative work or executes it without historical and conceptual know-how may well reach a remarkable virtuosity, but will never know if it is indeed art, for ever since modernity self-reflectivity has become a necessary condition for accomplishing a work of art. Authenticity, even transgression, which is demanded of each modern work of art nowadays, not only presupposes a good knowledge of both the history and theory of one's discipline, but also that this knowledge is incorporated. It is exactly this incorporated knowledge or praxis that distinguishes the artist from the theoretician. Anyone who does not incorporate theory in his work can only arrive at a mere illustration of a concept or an idea, as was the case with Wittgenstein's house. His building literally remains hand-i-capt. His theoretical position, as it where, has the upper hand over the artistic practice. As mentioned earlier, nowadays the relation between theory and practice is also disturbed and the artistic biotope of the artist thus loses balance. Then what does the ideal artistic biotope consist of?

Artists and Their Biotopes

Our own research showed that *in abstracto* the practice of artists can be divided into four domains, through which they alternatively pass and where they reside.[4] In all these domains a specific relation and interaction between theory and practice is built. These spaces are defined as the domestic space, the communal space (*peers*), the market, and the civil space.

The domestic domain is a space directed at development, the one in which artists are raised in all intimacy or in which they educate themselves. In this space parents play an important role, but also close friends to whom one dares to disclose one's creativity, and wants to reveal oneself. It is the space in which people still dare to act ridiculous in jest. It is the domain of the improvised clubhouse where people play on imaginary guitars or sing together, even out of tune; where they dance and perform plays for one another. The prototype of the domestic space within the professional art world would probably correspond with the Romantic image of the artist

meditating over his work in his attic room. The domestic space also offers the familiar atmosphere of the home where artists or artists-to-be can interact with the works of art or reproductions around them in all tranquillity, concentration and intimacy. It is also the space in which one may leaf through a catalogue or where the most theoretical dissertations about art and society are read thoroughly. The domestic space guarantees a certain 'slowability', which is necessary in order to incorporate complex theoretical insights. Anyone staying in this zone control their own rhythm. However, let it be clear that the domestic space is not necessarily identical to a 'home'. Domesticity may as well be experienced in semi-public spaces such as a library, a museum, or a train. Whenever an artist reads a book in all tranquillity and intimacy or writes on his computer while on a train, the circumstances may be similar to a home, even in crowded circumstances. Whenever the artist develops himself and his work in all intimacy, for example by reading an essay or a detailed analysis of an image, he finds the concentration for theory, which only the intimacy of the domestic space offers. Whereas in this domain the artistic practice still belongs to the level of innocent games as well as that of more serious experiments, it also offers all the tranquillity necessary for building theoretical knowledge.

The above space is quite different from the classroom, the workshop or rehearsal room in an art academy, for within these communal spaces there is room for interaction with fellow students, teachers, visiting artists and other professionals. Reflectivity is stimulated, not through isolated meditation or uncomplicated try-outs in front of family and friends, but through exchange of ideas between fellow students and professionals. The acquisition of theoretical insights then acquires a social quality, which also makes it easier (compared to the domestic space) to disagree and to confront. In the best case, this space generates a climate conducive to research, enlarging the scope of what is artistically possible. At the same time, however, it is the space where the first professional networks between *peers* come into being or the artistic *Gemeinschaft*. Within the community, social interactions centre on the 'entire personality' of an artist and

3 **Pierre Bourdieu,** Réponses: Pour une anthropologie réflexive **(Paris: Seuil, 1992).**

4 **For a more theoretical and empirical explanation of this biotope, see Pascal Gielen and Rudi Laermans,** Een omgeving voor actuele kunst: Een toekomstperspectief voor het beeldende-kunstenlandschap in Vlaanderen **(Tielt: Lannoo, 2004); and Pascal Gielen,** The Murmuring of the Artistic Multitude: Global Art, Memory and Post-Fordism **(Amsterdam: Valiz, 2009).**

face-to-face relationships. What matters is not only the one specific thing one is good at, but also one's character, communicative skills, 'empathic ability', and in some cases even one's appearance, scent, manner of speech and movement. The relationships are only temporary, but intimate enough to enable the confidential exchange of ideas and experimenting with theories. Through social interaction an artistic oeuvre can ripen within this space, and be tried out in an early stage within a social context. The reflectivity which is gained is professional, and in this respect it differs from solitary meditation or try-outs in front of non-professionals within a domestic space. Much like the domestic space, the place of the community is a relatively 'free' space, in the sense that it is not yet governed by the conditions of a critical public or by market laws. For example, the domestic domain offers the artist the possibility of not developing ideas or of simply being lazy. Moreover, he can develop very good insights which he refuses to sell out elsewhere or to translate into works of art or objects. And he can also thoughtlessly just play around without anyone demanding any artistic justification. The space of the *Gemeinschaft* on the other hand, offers the possibility of endless talk and theorizing without ever leading to a finished product. Both the domestic domain and the sphere of the community, in other words, offer space for *trial and error*, experiment and thus for 'loss' — something the following two spaces are far less likely to tolerate.

The third space is called the market space. Characteristic for a market is that here it is possible to become totally alienated from one's products, without any problem. One of the central principles of the free market and competition is that *de facto* any creative good can be exchanged for money. In other words, the social relationships can be limited to a mere economical transaction. A prototypical actor within the world of visual arts, for example, is the auction market. There artistic products can be purchased anonymously without having any social relationship with the artist or intermediary. The same goes for the mass media, which offer cultural goods to consumers without providing any context. In professional art galleries that trade in contemporary art or artists who are still alive such uncomplicated commercialization of creative goods is far less evident. In these galleries social interactions usually are also important and one does not just sell anything to anybody. In general however, the market space allows the artist to trade his creativity for money. It simply enables the artist to make a living. Theory on the one hand, may well gain the status of marketing, and concepts serve to gain or keep a distinguished position on the market. The

practice on the other hand, is only interesting when the product is finished, for only then can it be traded. The process of making the product has little value in this domain.

Finally, there is the civil space, where works of art are displayed before an audience and where arguments with a *public* take place. Such public argumentation is not only a matter of attention and rhetoric. Since modernity, the demand to cross boundaries or to transgress has become the core of art. Those who cross the line constantly have to legitimize their actions in public and theorizing is an important aspect of this defence. An individual defending a case in civil space also transcends himself. In this domain an architect may defend his urban plan in the name of improving social interaction or an artist may defend his artistic vision against what is considered to be common sense. The civil space then can also be a place of true confrontation or *dissensus*. For the art world it is the space of art theory, art criticism, debate and public policy evaluations of subsidy cases or political discussions. However, this space may coincide with the space of a foyer or, in general, a museum. The civil zone is closely linked to the artistic community through artistic communication and theoretical discourse, yet at the same time it is linked to other actors (politicians, policymakers, company leaders) who may be interested in art. Consequently, in this space theory becomes a public good. This also implies that commercial spaces such as galleries, art fairs or the mass media may partially belong to the civil space. Obviously these are institutions where creative ideas and products are first and foremost given monetary value. Therefore their main domain is the market space. Yet on the other hand, galleries, art fairs and the mass media may also be important meeting places for professionals, contrasting ideas, critics and other interested parties. Theatres, museums, festivals and broadcasting companies, especially when they are subsidized by public funds, even go a step further in that civil direction. These institutions primarily aim at showing finished products. However, this often goes hand in hand with public legitimization — if only in a catalogue, a programme or a policy dossier, for within the civil domain public legitimization is crucial. A museum director working with public funds has to legitimize his purchases or his selection of works. The civil space is therefore also especially suited for art theory, but also for political legitimization. Publicly communicated arguments, whether based on sound theories or not, certainly generate a social basis, at the very least a public debate, which is superfluous and may even be experienced as a

hindrance in the domain of the pure market. So anyone buying a work of art within the civil domain will, in other words, have to defend himself publicly and anyone purchasing one within the logic of the market, had best keep silent.

What matters to actors, dancers, visual artists or musicians if they want to survive nowadays in a sustainable manner, is that they need all four of the spaces mentioned above. A 'healthy' biotope for an artist demands a good balance between the four spaces. Creative people who only stay in the market space or civil space (or stay there too long) finally end up with a status quo in terms of work, because they are barely able to develop themselves any further. For example, they may only be selling the same works — variations on a barely innovating theoretical concept — because it works well on the market, or they only show and legitimize a status quo in public. So the domestic space and the space of a critical peer group in the artistic community remain important for further development, both theoretically and in terms of practical execution. On the other hand, artists who retreat into the domestic space will only be dealing with creative ideas for private satisfaction or perhaps for mere therapeutic reasons. Finally, those who only stay in the space of the creative *peers*, threaten to get lost in endless theoretical discussions or purposeless talk, without it leading to any creative work. Consequently, artists who want to develop a sustainable creative practice have to find a good balance between the four domains described above. Any art educational programme aiming at sustainability has to take this into account.

Praxis in the Biotope

Within the four domains described above, theory and practice now act in a specific manner. The domestic space, on the one hand, offers all the necessary time, informality and intimacy for trying out theoretical insights in practice. As mentioned above, this is a space with a certain 'slowability', which is necessary in order to almost organically incorporate a theory and translate it into action thriving with life. On the other hand, this space is rather non-committal with regard to the relationship between theory and practice. In the domestic space theory and practice may happily exist totally alongside each other. There are well-known examples of excellent art theoreticians who, far from the public eye, venture to produce a work of art. In the domestic sphere, however, such artistic practices barely reach the standards and criteria they themselves use when they write about professional artists. As was the case with Wittgenstein — of course

with a few talented exceptions — at best their artistic accomplishments offer a fine illustration of their theoretical position. In short, the domestic space may be necessary to incorporate theory in an almost 'natural' manner, but contains nothing that obliges the artist to achieve real 'embodiment'. Moreover, it is the space in which one may bricolate endlessly, play around and even make the most unique pieces without any theoretical knowledge or self-reflectivity. Perhaps the work one produces is exceptionally virtuoso, but terribly dated. A painter may well develop a better and more precise impressionistic style than Monet, but unfortunately these works may never gain him a foothold in the professional art world of today. Of course this does not imply that he cannot sell his work at a relatively good price.

This almost automatically leads us to the market space, where it is indeed possible to buy and sell works of art without having the least historical or theoretical insight. As soon as money is available for auctions, artistic artefacts can function on the market. This does not need a lot of explanation and theory. A well-functioning market may certainly encourage craftsmanship and virtuosity, but the domain usually lacks a connection with theory, which is necessary in order to at least enable artistic innovation. Yet theory may play a role within the contemporary professional art market and even generate economic value. Within the current art biennale circuit theory almost functions as a market strategy, not only to convince other professionals but also to enhance art tourism. However, for this purpose complex theories are easily reduced to catchy slogans and mission statements that can be communicated easily. Often this is precisely what is taught to future artistic and cultural entrepreneurs. Theory, in other words, becomes a part of the 'branding' of artistic events by the marketing machine. Because the cultural industry is quite sensitive to fashions and trends, one theory is easily disposed of in favour of another, and so barely any real incorporation takes place anymore. Roughly, it comes down to this: in the market space alienation from the artistic product of the maker and his social context becomes possible and also it becomes possible for theory and practice to function independently of one another, without any interaction. In terms of being non-committal, and in this respect only, the market does not differ that much from the domestic space.

In this respect, the market and the domestic domain differ fundamentally from the civil space, where the use of idiom, concepts, theory and mostly their derivatives, is further enhanced because artists constantly have to legitimize themselves publicly. But even during

selection processes, when programme makers, curators, museum directors or subsidizers give artists or works of art access to a public or semi-public space or offer them a grant, historical and theoretical knowledge is taken into consideration.[5] In any case theoretical insights will permeate their arguments for choosing one particular artist and not another. This implies that even in the work of an artist itself, historical and theoretical positions already need to be recognized and untangled. Ideally a work of art stimulates new theoretical insights and legitimizations. However, these are always related to previous or different theories or they would remain unrecognizable. In short, in the civil space theory and practice interpenetrate each other precisely because of the supposed argumentation and legitimization. This does not mean that it is impossible to detach theoretical substrates from artistic practice, which may happen in the case of excessive bureaucracy. Well-known examples of this are artists and artistic entrepreneurs who are remarkably good at applying for subsidies and compiling application files. Theoretically and on paper everything seems highly interesting and beautiful, while the final artistic creation hardly lives up to it. The next domain, however, can see to it that such theoretical illusions don't make it to the finish line.

It is no coincidence that the domain of the community or peers was saved for last, for this is the domain where art education plays an important role. Notwithstanding the fact that in art educational programmes theoretical subjects are separated meticulously from practical subjects, and the fact that in workshops practice teachers regularly refer to theoreticians with a certain lack of understanding, whereas professors of theory look down on the practice with a certain amount of disdain, it is exactly in art education that theory and practice come very close to one another. Often it is the locus where future artists are confronted with theoretical insights for the first time. Contrary to the domestic space and the market, in the domain of the community the relationship between theory and practice can hardly remain non-committal, if only because of the fact that the work of students is judged by both theoretical and practical staff members. In the worst case the art academy or conservatory enforces, and in the best case it encourages, interpenetration and incorporation. Whether this always leads to the desired result or whether it leads to a good embodiment is of course an entirely different matter. As teachers well know there will always be students whose artistic practice will remain a mere illustration of the theory,

whereas others may well live an exceptionally virtuoso life, without ever making a work of art. While the first category may find work in art and cultural education, the second category finds more and more opportunities in the growing entertainment industry. Art production, however, presupposes that theory and practice organically mesh with each other, and art education is one of the few places that offer time and space to enable such a praxis to succeed. This does however entail an especially labour and time intensive approach within a particular educational model.

The Bologna agreement, which was signed in 1999 by all the Ministers of Education of the EU member states, with one of the purposes being the enhancement of uniformity (comparability of diploma's) of higher education, nowadays leaves only little space for such a model. It should come as no surprise that educational programmes seek refuge in art academies under the flag of art or claim to be able to educate the growing cultural industry in virtuoso entertainment. Both options are the result of a short-circuit between theory and practice. The increasing reluctance or inability to enable a good integration of both theory and practice within education has a lot to do with current educational policy. Finally, therefore, we will take a look at a number of evolutions within art education over the last decades that are a direct or indirect consequence of policy decisions. Moreover, only those evolutions will be discussed that have an effect on the relationship between theory and practice. From this survey it will become clear which ingredients art education needs in order to at least be able to stimulate a successful interaction between theory and practice.

Intimacy, Informality and Dismeasure

Art is only possible through praxis. This was stipulated above. It means that theory and artistic practice mesh with each other and interpenetrate each other organically. When this does not occur, one can only refer to it as art education or entertainment. Each art educational programme worthy of its name should at least have the ambition to let theory and practice mesh with and influence each other. Of course this is not an easy undertaking. One need only look at the abovementioned mistrust between theory and practice

5 **See also: Pascal Gielen,** Kunst in netwerken: Artistieke selecties in de hedendaagse dans en de beeldende kunst **(Leuven: LannooCampus, 2003) and Quirijn van den Hoogen,** Performing Arts and the City: Dutch Municipal Cultural Policy in the Brave New World of Evidence-Based Policy **(Groningen: RUG, 2010).**

teachers that has been taking place for quite some years in art schools. The wish of Bologna to academize higher education may be seen as an undertaking bridging both camps. The attention art schools nowadays give to research and doctoral degrees in the arts at least points at an attempt to attain a good praxis. However, currently many of these programmes find themselves in an experimental phase or in the midst of a quest for the right proportions. The numerous symposiums and workshops on research and doctoral degrees in the arts are living proof of this situation.

Only the future will tell if academization will indeed weigh on the curriculum and on the organization of education structurally, for there are quite a few obstacles on the way towards a good integration of theory and art practice. Moreover, most of the measures taken in EU member states, explicitly or not in the wake of the Bologna-agreement, seem to thwart good interaction rather than encourage it. One of these measures is the increase in scale of art educational institutions through mergers. It is an open secret that such master operations mainly serve economic purposes. Notwithstanding the fact that throwing together the most diverging training programmes is nowadays (and mostly after the fact) defended by arguing in favour of the expected redemption of interdisciplinarity, usually it is just a cover-up for a financial reconstruction.

As such there is nothing wrong with a certain degree of thriftiness. Hiring a bookkeeper, an IT-specialist, a schedule maker, a beadle and a secretary for every 50 to 100 students, is perhaps a little bit over the top. Perhaps everything could be organized slightly more efficiently. The monster coalitions between the most heterogeneous educational programmes, however, do make each well-meaning labour sociologist or business expert frown. During the heydays of Fordism, the effects fusions had, such as centralization, increased bureaucracy, standardization and increased uniformity may well have yielded some fruit, but in the current network economy these efforts completely destabilize companies. In addition, abstraction needs to make use of the fact that Henri Ford delivered cars rolling off a conveyer belt, while education delivers human beings of flesh and blood.

This increase in scale ran remarkably parallel to another evolution, namely the neoliberalization of Europe's educational market. In their critical book 'Global Immunity' Belgian pedagogues Jan Masschelein and Maarten Simons make a remarkably clear analysis of the European educational space after Bologna.[6] These scholars describe how educational programmes reinvent themselves into competing enterprises, and how students are increasingly being treated as independent entrepreneurs. Social relationships between teacher and student are given the status of exchange and service relationships which can be written down in a contract. Moreover, educational programmes competing with one another on the market are very much geared to the environment. This approach calls for permanent alertness and constant anticipation of changes. Such an educational enterprise is therefore best led by a permanent change-management, which, say, every five years rattles the entire organization structure. Time and again reorganizations are needed and teachers as well as students constantly need to improve and reinvent themselves, and innovate, in order to be of use to the labour market, for the only thing that matters is survival. Masschelein and Simons refer to this phenomenon as 'the capitalising of our lives':

> For to survive implies leading a volatile life in a market environment, a life consisting of taking chances, investing human capital and doing this before anyone else does. What is constantly at stake is survival (the right to exist), and in this condition the adequate attitude is one of continuously gearing one's actions towards 'creatively persisting of new combinations'. This attitude in which knowledge and skills appear as a form of capital is the only chance at preventing annihilation. Indeed, whoever is not willing to take on the battle, has already lost it.[7]

Art education's embrace of artistic and cultural entrepreneurship, complemented by the implementation of talent scouting agencies within educational institutions, only confirm the analysis put forth by Masschelein and Simons. In doing so, the educational space shifts from the domain of the community in the direction of the market, if the abovementioned biotope is taken into account. In line with the attention to and distinguishing principle of free competition every art educational college nowadays has a mission statement, not because it has a particular calling or ideal, but because it has to profile

6 **Jan Masschelein and Maarten Simons,** Globale immuniteit: Een kleine cartografie van de Europese ruimte voor onderwijs **(Leuven: ACCO, 2006).**
7 **Ibid., p. 21.**

itself vis-à-vis other enterprising schools. Moreover, this very profile changes with the wind of the market and new trends, whereas a (pedagogical) calling is for life.

Within schools, these market workings have an effect on the relationship between theory and practice. Given the fact that there is always a limit to the amount of contact hours for students, theoretical lessons but also some practice hours are easily replaced in favour of management and marketing sessions. Because of their close connection with the professional practice, some agencies are driving students to the market while they are still in school, which threatens the space to ask questions, to reflect, or to deal with difficult questions at great length. In addition, the labour market is under pressure, because in this artificial manner ever younger and cheaper talent — including badly paid apprentices — are ousting their older colleagues. Both within and outside educational space creative labourers run from one project to the other. There is barely space left for reflectivity, let alone for art. However, in the opinion of Sennett, this rush of the new capitalism, as he calls it, does not even leave enough time for acquiring a certain traditional method or craft:

> people are meant to deploy a portfolio of skills rather than nurture a single ability in the course of their working histories; this succession of projects or tasks erodes the belief that one is meant to do just one thing well. Craftsmanship seems particularly vulnerable to this possibility, since craftsmanship is based on slow learning and on habit.[8]

Yet even more fascinating is the manner in which increased bureaucracy and neoliberalism mesh with each other and influence each other and in an even more subtle way disturb the relationship between theory and practice within education. Increased scale and neoliberalism share the same obsession with measurability. It is a well-known fact that neoliberalism redefines the social field as a productive space in which one lives and learns in an investing, calculating manner. This fact, combined with the management problems that always go hand in hand with an increase in scale, only goes to increase the obsession with measure even further, because if you wish to know from a distance if pedagogical talent is being delivered on the work floor

you are at the mercy of quantitative measuring instruments. Competences, evaluations, indicators and output measurements are put down in readable tables and graphs, in the same way credit schemes and the availability of college rooms are meticulously calculated by computer. In individual interviews regarding the way in which one functions in the institution and evaluative one-on-one meetings, the micromanagement determines personal goals that subsequently are calculated in terms of achievement within the next half year or so. Education is preferably organized in modules, objectivised in study time and study burden, so it can address students as calculating, enterprising individuals. The organization of education in modules not only enables students to make enterprising choices, in the opinion of Masschelein and Simons it also makes it possible to control the movements of these enterprising students on learning platforms.[9]

At the same time, the healthy neoliberal spirit sees to it that the catering, security, cleaning services, book orders and other support facilities are farmed out to the best company through the European supplies network. So within the school walls almost everything is being calculated, from the number of sandwiches needed for a meeting, the optimal read 'profitable' opening hours of a cafeteria, to the square meters of an office and the number of plants needed to embellish the work space.

Meanwhile the reader may be wondering how all this weighs on education and, more specifically, why this affects the relationship between theory and practice. All these facilitating actions do not belong to the core business of education after all, or do they? Perhaps I may be allowed to relate a modest number of anecdotes from contemporary art education to help answer this question: Whereas the entire visual arts world and design world works with Apple computers, after the merger of educational institutions this was forbidden by the central management because of the need for uniformity of computer programmes; students having to change to a another class room with a theatre setting three times because the person in charge of scheduling the classrooms counts in class hours and not in rehearsal hours; having to pay a extra 630 euros to security for opening up the school building a few times very early in the morning for exceptional theatre performances; students thrown out of the school cafeteria (it is closing time) in the midst of a discussion on

8 Sennett, op. cit., 268.
9 Masschelein and Simons, op. cit., 56, 57.

the rehearsal which just took place; teachers and students who can no longer continue their work in the school's workshops after 8 PM because these are being let to external organizations; in a course in visual arts it is not permitted to hang anything on the walls because of an agreement with the building management, and so on.

Looking back on what was said above about the ideal biotope for an artist, it may be concluded that the laws and especially the ethics of the market are not only introduced into the educational space through management courses and agencies. In a far more subtle way the market's calculating logic also threatens the development-oriented space of the community and the domestic domain. A good integration of theory and practice presupposes not only that theoretical subjects are programmed, but also that organic interaction can take place. It is exactly the informal spaces (amongst which the cafeteria) and moments (between and after courses, at night,…) that stimulate such 'natural' incorporation, for in those spaces and instances endless discussions are possible, and students and teachers can win each other's trust, exchanging provocative ideas in a necessarily intimate atmosphere. In these spaces difficult questions with regard to both a person, their art, and their relationship with society may be addressed.

More and more, the new bureaucracy of the neo- and micro-management cuts out these informal spaces from education based on purpose-rational considerations. Yet, in doing so it affects the fundamental condition for achieving both good art and craft, namely *dismeasure*. The artist who is passionately working on an artistic production or is in the midst of rehearsal has to be able to go on endlessly. Neither the rhythm of scheduled time nor the amount of contact hours, but the time necessary for artistic praxis provides the right measure. To reach good craftsmanship or virtuosity demands immeasurable attention and concentration are needed. Sennett mentions the true obsession of a craftsmen who empirically and very slowly repeats the same action in order to reach perfection. Anyone who makes an artefact by hand or plays an instrument needs to continuously try out things, and 'to dig deep', till they physically and mentally almost fall to pieces.[10] Yet this 'slow craft time' or the aforementioned 'slowability' is also necessary to guarantee space for reflection and imagination. It is the minimum condition for bringing about art. This 'dismeasure' of art, however, runs contrary to the aforementioned need for calculation and control. In short, the welding together of theory and practice to an excellent artistic praxis

relies on intimacy, informality and dismeasure. The current (re)organization of educational space with its obsession with measure, on the other hand, tends more towards formality and calculable art.

10 Sennett, op. cit.

A Plea for Communalist Teaching

An Interview with Richard Sennett

Pascal Gielen &
Barend van Heusden

Richard Sennett can pride himself on a sizeable and much-read body of work. Although the American philosopher already gained an excellent reputation among his peers in the social sciences in the 1970s with books like *The Uses of Disorder* (1970) and especially *The Fall of the Public Man* (1974), it probably wasn't until 2008, with the publication of *The Craftsman*, that he caught the attention of people in art and art education. In this book he demonstrates how the pressure of neoliberal market principles such as competition and the pursuit of profit erodes an important aspect of our daily labour: 'the desire to do a job well for its own sake'. According to Sennett, it is especially this desire that constitutes the core of craftsmanship. To illustrate this point, the learned philosopher — who himself has mastered the craft of narration like few others — takes the reader on a journey to glassblowers and via the workshop of violin maker Stradivari to an advanced laboratory. And everywhere he finds people who still find the time to 'dig deep', who surrender themselves with dedication to the materiality of an object and who, at least temporarily, suspend their own individuality to drink in the collective knowledge that their working environment offers. Sennett doesn't really believe in the individual as the source of creativity and inventiveness, let alone geniality. Rather, he sees all these human capacities as belonging to collectivity, to a dialogue with others, or to what the philosophers Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri have called 'the commons'.[1] Sennett even interprets this directly in a political sense: 'Good craftsmanship implies socialism'.[2]

In *The Craftsman* there is very little mention of either art or 'creativity'. Sennett even consciously avoids that fashionable term, which makes it even more remarkable that the book is so embraced by art circles. Is this a symptom then of a nostalgic desire for craftsmanship, perhaps even virtuosity? The attentive reader of *The Craftsman* will conclude that Sennett is not concerned with the contrast between art and craft and is even less interested in lamenting the destructive revolutionary efforts of the historical avant-garde. It transpires from the interview below that, according to Sennett, pure theoretical work can also be art and that even the most conceptual art requires craftsmanship as well. After all, even conceptual artists need time to 'dig deep' and if they do not wish to surrender to the cynicism of the art market and stardom, 'the desire to do a job well for its own sake' is of vital importance. In saying that something is at stake, that something is under threat of being lost forever, this is what Sennett means. We are in danger of losing a certain attitude to life

and this loss, as he has argued in one of his other books, also erodes our character.[3] Just as craft, even the most conceptual or virtual art is based on the possibility of gaining experience, on 'digging deep', and on 'communality'. In this interview we asked him what consequences this may have for art education. Sennett answers according to the rules of pragmatic philosophy, of which he is an advocate. He speaks from experience.

Pascal Gielen & Barend van Heusden

Many people have read your book The Craftsman *and it is also used in art education. Though you refer to various examples of art in your book — especially the performing arts — you barely mention art as such. On the other hand, you do explicitly claim that art is an individual enterprise, whereas craft is supported by a collective basis. What then in your opinion is the difference between art and craft, and, are there important similarities between the two? From modernity onwards, art has let go of a certain 'craftiness', in order to be able to innovate. In* The Craftsman *you explicitly claim that art is an individual enterprise, while craft is a collective one.*

Richard Sennett

Not exactly. Well, it's about the importance of how young artists get trained and how they enable themselves through what they do outside a classroom as well as inside. And that really is a matter of learning both the discipline of practicing a craft and also certain ways of being self-critical in an economist way. For musicians this is all important, as we can't always have a teacher beside us saying whether we play correctly, or incorrectly. We can't improve that way. So we have to find a dynamic inside ourselves when we're not in a classroom, when we're alone. That's when we are able to organize what we're doing and self-critically expand our repertoire. Self-expression really isn't the point at that stage for young musicians or for young dancers. Without the craft there will be no self-expression. And I have to say, in that regard, that I think one of the reasons that artists have taken up my book so much is that, in the last decades, many art schools have privileged self-expression and neglected collective craftsmanship. You can't neglect it in the performing arts, in music, dance or theatre.

1 **Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri,** CommonWealth **(Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009).**
2 **Richard Sennett,** The Craftsman **(London: Penguin, 2008), 288.**
3 **Richard Sennett,** The Corrosion of Character: The Personal Consequences of Work in the New Capitalism **(New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1998).**

In the visual arts there is a kind of neglect of that and many of the young visual artists feel the lack of that, that they didn't learn how to work with materials.

P.G. & B.v.H.

In the visual arts field they call this evolution 'deskilling'. For in making art you still relate skills or craftsmanship to self-expression. But nowadays in the visual arts it is not self-expression that counts, but theory and conceptualizing.

R.S.

That can have its good sides, but it can also have a very bad side, because as I'm trying to explain in this book, in the rhythm of developing any craft, the end of that rhythm is losing self-consciousness about what you're doing. You need theory at a certain point, but it's set in a context where in the end you're focused on *it* rather than *you*. I am a theorist myself, but I think it has to be handled with great care, it is not a *via regia* to learning how to do something. It solves one particular issue, which is that by using theory you become more aware of your own practice, but theory in itself won't generate practice, and that to me is a very important issue. I'll give you an example. I think a great deal about theories of performance crafts and over the years I've learned a lot about these theories. But as a working musician I have to absorb those theories and then put them out of mind. I can never say to myself, this is what Schenker would say about the last moments of the Brahms double concerto and then play it like that. I can't do that. I have to take it inside.

And we do that more easily in the performing arts than in the visual arts. I don't know if your experiences are the same, that's why this whole question of cognition is so important to me. This is the domain of enriched passive knowledge.

P.G. & B.v.H.

Absolutely, but this learning of a craft, this practicing endlessly to get something fine-tuned, you can almost think about this as a Zen practice: the fact that you coincide completely with what you are doing in the end always also functions in a wider context in the sense that the music you make expresses some personal or collective experience or feeling. Does this moment of self-critical reflection also have to do with that aspect?

R.S.

Of course it does. 'Why am I doing this?' is just one of the questions you can ask. I mean, in most performing arts you have to ask 'What are other people doing?' because you're performing with them. It is always a collective project, and again that is the difference between performing arts and visual arts. I mean, even with soloists, we're always thinking of the audience, that's another dyadic social collective relationship. But in my view craftsmanship is not a problem of fine-tuning, it's a dialectic between mastery and exploration, and oftentimes when we are able to master one technique, that mastery enables us to do more explorations. It's a kind of rhythm between problem-solving and problem-finding. There is very little closure in the development of this skill. Otherwise it would always remain primitive.

P.G. & B.v.H.

What we had in mind was a jazz musician who is so skilled that he can almost forget about the skills and think about what he is exploring with his music. It's the mastery which makes it almost subconscious.

R.S.

Exactly. To improvise you need an enormous amount of practice. You need to have a great deal of technical skill so that you can respond to others immediately without having to search for the note. There's also a psychological dimension to it, which is a feeling of self-confidence. Contrary to teachers in the visual arts, for teachers in the performing arts this whole notion of the centrality of the dyad between teacher and student will be less central, and the more important will be how the teacher can enable the student or students to work more autonomously outside the classroom, as equals.

My greatest teacher was a man named Claus Adam, who was the cellist in the Juilliard Quartet, which is a very fine string quartet in America. He was the original cellist and I'll tell you how he taught me. I came in and I played for him, I did all the Bach suites for him, and he'd say, 'interesting, very interesting. Now, I do it like this'. You take a particular passage and he'd say 'but your way is better', and sometimes he would say 'awful, just awful, you have to find out why'. I was a fourteen-year old boy, so, this isn't advanced level. So those kinds of comments, rather phlegmatic, while not telling me what to do, were enormously enabling to me. My agency was strengthened by his indirection. And that's how it works. When we get students who need stimulation or need to imitate us, it's not so good. We often think early education is going to be very boring, learning how to play, how to move properly. If you're a dancer, how to make the basic turns.

Teachers nowadays sometimes work with disrespect for students. The teacher of my grandson, who's just beginning with cello, never says to him

'what fun that was'. She says, 'I don't know whether you're going to be able to do this, I'll show you what it looks like, give it a try, it's very difficult'. It is a seductive thing to say, but what she's showing him is difficult. So you always worry too much, in training the arts, about making it interesting. The teacher has to be interested in the student, even with small children. How can you lead them into a labyrinth of difficulties and complexities? They'll follow you, they might not get it all, but when they see that you're involved in it, you know they want to be involved too. They see it's serious, that an adult really cares and to me that's really the heart of teaching.

P.G. & B.v.H.

Would you say that this has become more difficult in a contemporary educational situation or do you think that it is in the end something which is of all times, that good teachers are of all times?

R.S.

I can't judge. My suspicion is that, again, there is a divide between performing arts and visual arts, that the visual arts are worried about seducing students in a way that we aren't used to so much. And that's again where this whole theoretical thing comes in. You can have teachers, I know many at Saint Martins College of Art up here, who have never had an exhibition. They're not always jetted, as we say in English, in the making. So it's hard for them to present a model of the teacher's own struggle, the teacher's own questions and so on. What they can present is a model of criticism, whereas this just doesn't work in performing arts.

P.G. & B.v.H.

One has to be able to show something…

R.S.

…or to have had that experience and if you don't, the little kids very quickly pick up on that. How well their teachers play or dance, or how to play or dance. And it's not necessarily that they disbelieve the ones who have not been virtuosos. They need to know that the teacher has been involved in the practice the teacher wants them to be involved in. Many practicing architects can evoke in architectural students what it's like to be an architect, also when they're not too analytic about what they themselves think they're doing. And many architectural teachers have built nothing, so they can't evoke it at all and yet that tension between a practitioner and a theorist is a very uneasy one. So the way we solved it within our educational model is that we always have a critic and a practitioner teaching together. We always team-teach and when we have students together we teach them in small groups. The groups always mix social-scientists, economists, with people who have actually practiced engineering or architecture. The little I know about architectural teaching in Europe is that it tends to be much more focused on a single teacher with a relatively large group of students. We have to correct this.

P.G. & B.v.H.

What do you think about the influence of theory in art schools? Today we talk a lot about PhDs and research in the arts. Art students have to theorize and think theory together with their work. Maybe not theory, but a rigid form of academic thinking has been gaining ground in art schools. How can it be related to art practice in a good sense? By teaching together, putting an artist and a theoretician in the same classroom?

R.S.

Well, that's a practical way to do it, but here I would say something that may seem to contradict what I just said. I think really great theoreticians are artists in themselves, but the art that they're inviting their students to — I mean somebody like Roland Barthes or Michel Foucault — you know, this is theory made into art itself. But what they're inviting students to, the art they're inviting people to practice is more theory, and you have to decide if that's what you want. There aren't going to be very many Foucaults. You may have an art school with a thousand students, but the chances of finding a Foucault are one in, say, a hundred thousand. Oftentimes people are *very* theoretical and don't worry about applications of the arts. It'll prove more useful to artists, because artists are thinking laterally about what they are doing. Artists can hear very good theory which they make a kind of intuitive leap to and never do the theories themselves. But it becomes a stimulus and they make something out of it that the theoretician couldn't imagine. This happened with Foucault's idea of the panopticon, for instance. Some artists that he and I knew, they took it in directions he never thought of. They weren't Foucauldians, you know. He was very surprised by what they did.

P.G. & B.v.H.

We would like to finalize the first question. How do you see the relationship between craftsmanship and innovation? A lot of people in the art field relate craftsmanship to tradition and they want to break with it for the sake of evolution. How do you see this relation? How can craftsmanship be innovative, or what is your proof that it is, in a sense, always innovative?

R.S.

Every time you pick up an iPhone you answer your own question. I mean, we're constantly innovating crafts. I mean, this is a very silly notion to evoke, to equate technical skills with traditional artistic skills.

P.G. & B.v.H.

Traditions are never fixed.

R.S.

Never, never, even in a traditional hand-craft like glass-blowing. It looks nothing today like it looked even a century ago. I'm often asked this question and I am so surprised by it. I mean, inspiration alone did not produce the iPhone. But I think what lies behind that question is something else, which is, 'what is inspiration?' Often people cue to this notion that inspiration is a matter of individual genius, which it isn't. Innovation is collective activity.

P.G. & B.v.H.

We understand what you hint at but on the other hand isn't every single innovation made or done by an individual? You need an individual who is behind his desk or in his atelier and who says 'hey, this is interesting' and then it gets corroborated or enhanced by others, or rejected, or…

R.S.

I don't think that's true, and I think so for two reasons: If you look at a scientific laboratory, the modern version of the workshop, often things that are innovative happen by accident rather than by the will of someone who goes 'eureka'. And even new things need to be discussed as to what they mean. In good laboratories lots of people will be involved in the discussion. Even if one person has an idea about how something should be done, the social structure is such that other people have to accept that the idea is worth pursuing. Particularly in the conditions of a modern laboratory where things cost money. It's not an alchemist locked up in it. When we put names to innovative work in science there will be a lead researcher, but there will also be a long list of people who were involved. So I would say that what this notion of innovation slights, is conversation, particularly dialogic conversation where you're trying to find out what's all this about. How did this happen? What does it mean? And at that point you're not talking about an isolated individual. That's why I said it's important, particularly in education, to avoid this Romantic notion of the little genius who pushes through his innovation.

P.G. & B.v.H.

But on the other hand there is something like style, personal style, that exists for some. The way in which, for example, you narrate or in the way you make things. Like the idea of the signature, that you can see that somebody did it.

R.S.

Well, it's like different voices in the conversation. But a huge issue here is that technical work prospers through collaboration. And oftentimes, it withers, it gets weak, because nobody has a social setting of interlocutors who respond.

P.G. & B.v.H.

Many of your books centre on an implicit theme of 'loss'. Obviously this is the case with The Fall of the Public Man *and* The Corrosion of Character*, but also in* The Craftsman*,* Respect*, and* The Culture of New Capitalism*, where you indicate that certain values, habits, and customs are being lost. What is lost in* The Fall *is public space and public personality, in The Corrosion it is the sustainable self or character, in* The Craftsman *it is durability and the possibility of in-depth delving into matters, etc. Your social analysis is often exceptionally sharp and often with rather pessimistic overtones.*

After reading these books we had the feeling, 'are we still at a loss?' and 'how should we go on?' You mentioned pragmatism at the end of one of the books as 'a way out'. We would very much like to know how you see further developments. How should we go on? This has implications for education too. How should we react to this loss?

R.S.

Well, it's not all across society. But I think modern capitalism at the workplace is a disaster for both craftsmanship and collaboration. It privileges what I call endogenous skills, skills that are inside you, that you can take anywhere, that are not context dependent, they're not dialogic, they don't react to other people. This is also an era of incredible scientific and technological innovation. When I was studying Silicon Valley that conflict often struck me. Those innovators felt great conflict. Between the things they knew, that encouraged them to innovate in their relations with each other, the discussions and exchange of ideas, and the things that would convert these creations into cash. There were very specific moments where that conflict appeared. When a small business gets large enough to sell, to go public, then it's to sell shares itself. This often has a disastrous effect on the creativeness of the company. I just think it's very important to find out what are the forms of technical, craftsman-like innovation that require the collective, and try to

imagine those in the classroom. In art schools, you don't want children to think about being entrepreneurs, which a lot of this link between the creative industries and arts education does. It makes little kids imagine that they should behave like entrepreneurs in order to make it.

P.G. & B.v.H.

In art schools nowadays courses in theory and art practice are exchanged for courses in management skills and in cultural entrepreneurship. That's also an effect of the creative and cultural industries affecting art schools.

R.S.

That is capitalism, and a very misplaced form of it.

P.G. & B.v.H.

Going back to the question of 'loss' in your books. I always feel for a second, what then? Is there also a solution? Sometimes you come up with solutions. For example in The Craftsman *but also in* The Corrosion of Character *you come up with a kind of communalist way of thinking and sometimes we see a socialist scenario somewhere. But it's always a very small part in those books. It's always at the end, in the last ten pages or so…*

R.S.

I also came to that point in my thinking. I have a hatred for modern capitalism, and it's corrosive to me. So, when I started doing this trilogy of books on craftsmanship, cooperation and the one still to come on urban design, I tried to suggest what could be instead. I think there are some solutions. For example, the way we teach here, that's just a little thing — to teach in teams and teach small groups. But it is a much more, I would say, creative way to teach than the accountant's way, which wants to measure outcomes and results. Often you've done your best job with an art student just as with a scientist when he or she comes out asking questions, rather than saying 'I know how to do this'. The difference between a mediocre scientist and a good scientist is that the mediocre scientist is an eminently testable creature. A good scientist must have curiosity. But these counting regimes that we suffer from, they privilege only a mediocre sort of skill. 'Here's what I know', 'Here's how I demonstrate it', 'Here's what I can do'; and that's all very static.

P.G. & B.v.H.

One of the problems we have especially in art education is related to this. It is the problem of evaluation, because you have to put forward quantitative measures for such a system. That's what the policymakers want, they want evaluations.

R.S.

Do you know what they have to do? They have to trust teachers rather than distrust them. And that's what lurks in the background of it. If a teacher says 'I think this kid is making progress', the policymaker says, 'Well how do I know? How can I trust your judgment?'

P.G. & B.v.H.

So, a communalist way of working could be an alternative? Do you have good examples of a communalist way? You already mentioned team working, but for example, are there nation states or organizations still promoting communalist programmes?

R.S.

I think this is a divide between performing arts and the visual arts. If you go into a music conservatory, or an acting school, you are evaluating. It's not communist, but it's communalist behaviour all the time. In acting schools little kids who want to steal the stage, get out in front, are evaluated to be poor actors. Actors that support each other are evaluated positively. With music it's nothing but that. These aren't arcane judgments. And not in the sciences either. If you set up a scientific laboratory and somebody doesn't want to contribute to it, that's a judgment on their value. Once we get into the kind of regime you're talking about, neoliberalism prevails. And then all of this stuff goes missing, the teachers are suspected of being subjective. Capitalists hate subjectivity. They seem never to have heard of Comte's famous dictum that judgment is a matter of experience rather than counting. It's just something to resist. I'll tell you what's happening in Britain. The more these kind of capitalist-minded regulators of schools have taken over, the more people, when they really want their kids to learn something, are doing it outside the framework of the school itself. We're seeing it in arts education, we're even seeing it in science and math education for young people. The ways of educating people in schools are so rigid that many parents have figured out that this is not practical. It tends towards this mediocre mean of multiple choice tests and so on. There's a huge industry of afterschool teaching in London, and maybe you'll see that happening in the Netherlands as well.

P.G. & B.v.H.

There's still one question related to this whole point of where we are going and how we could react to this absence of craftsmanship. Would you say that we should strive, if possible, for a kind of communal craftsmanship-based attitude in general? Do you think it's a good attitude to try and take, in whatever situation you are?

R.S.
I do, I believe that, without believing that collaboration and community means sameness. It is interaction.

P.G. & B.v.H.
It's dialogue.

R.S.
Absolutely. I believe that on those terms.

P.G. & B.v.H.
And that would relate very well to this pragmatist idea? If a situation is taken as something different, which has to be solved together. That's something you can teach, or at least you can try to teach it.

R.S.
You can help, but again, it's something that has to be a practice rather than… It has to be experienced. You can't just tell little kids, 'you cooperate'. Although we try to tell our kids that all the time, 'behave better, cooperate!'

P.G. & B.v.H.
But then you need very small art schools to make this concept work.

R.S.
Well, think about sports. Every child learns this in sports, and the more skilled they become in a sport, oftentimes the better they are at coordination, dealing with each other and so on. I mean rather than accountancy, maybe your art school should take sports teams as a better model.

But it's a doomed thing. I think in the Netherlands, something that strikes me about it — my wife is Dutch so we're there a lot — is that curiously the competitive and entrepreneurial aspects of neoliberalism in the last ten years have been absorbed in the bloodstream of many Dutch.

Here in Britain, finally, after years of Thatcher and Labour, people say: 'No!' Maybe we are in the beginning of this, this poisoned process we were trying to recover from.

P.G. & B.v.H.
Let's ask a very practical question. What should be taught in art schools or in art education, in your opinion?

R.S.
First of all, I think you have to begin very young, long before the age of 18. This is very important. One of the things we know about early arts education, for six to nine-year olds, is its cognitive stimulation. So, personally — and it's also because musicians and dancers start so early — but in general, I think the real emphasis and the money should go on six to twelve-year olds, rather than worrying about arts education in universities. Money could be spent much further down the line. We have

a lot of good data by now about the cognitive and also sociological effects of children doing the arts when they're young. But you shouldn't learn it at home, it should be collective.

P.G. & B.v.H.
Yes, but then what do you suggest for a school where eighteen-year olds come who want to be artists, composers or dancers, whatever…

R.S.
I wouldn't worry so much about that, that's their problem, they're already adults. Society's problem is how to get to them when they are younger. Then they can make and form a judgment about whether they want to do that, whether they know about what it's like to practice an art, rather than to have the fantasy, 'Oh I'm so creative, I want to be an artist, it's part of my growing up'.

That's fine, but that's not society's most important business. They should be thinking about children, not adolescents, as a matter of social policy. If you can, use what you know about the cognitive process in the arts. It's too late by eighteen.

P.G. & B.v.H.
Another question is, why should the government for example do this, stimulate art in school, why should they have to stimulate art at all?

R.S.
Because it's stimulating for children, their creative capacities and their discipline in the arts. You're getting benefits across the board in their capacity to learn. Not just about the arts, but also the capacities to do mathematics, to use language,… I mean it's a vehicle into developing basic cognitive skills.

P.G. & B.v.H.
Which cognitive skills then? Basic cognitive skills are perception, perceiving. Secondly, manipulation of objects in different ways, either musical instruments or painting. Third, linguistic skills, very important, conceptualizing, and fourth analytical skills. These are the four basic skills that are learned through arts education.

R.S.
That's what I think too. What happens in each of those, is that for instance the manipulation of an object, turning it around, for a child, going back to a child's process, can be linked to the notion in mathematics, that there's more than one way to solve a problem. But if you're in a system which is depriving small children of this chance, what happens to later adolescents? How much money should we spend on them? I mean, if you have a system with scarce resources, my practical suggestion to you is spend it in primary school, rather than

in university. You shouldn't be worrying about arts education at university, if there's no arts education before it.

P.G. & B.v.H.

We are also very much interested in this whole idea of the narrative. In The Corrosion of Character *you develop this idea that people should be able to make their own narratives, to create a narrative identity. That's in fact basic. It is comparable with the essay of Walter Benjamin about storytelling. What is interesting about that, is that he distinguishes different kinds of narratives in connection with different kinds of societies.*

R.S.

It's just incredible. It's wonderful, this is a very interesting phenomenon today. As children are less and less read to by their parents, their own ability to think creatively declines. I have a grandson who is six years old. I was talking to his teacher about this. She said: 'People ask why do I spend so much time reading the same stories again and again'. She said, 'Because these children, when they see that stories can come out in different ways, they're able to think that also experience can come out in different ways'. And at that age children want to hear the same story over and over again, and she'll often tell it with a different denouement. The purpose of that is that they go, 'But wait a minute that wasn't what it was like before', and then she'll say, 'Well isn't this equally possible?' That's learning.

Students, Teachers and Their Managers in the Drama School

Paul De Bruyne

Drama schools are not like any other schools. They are more exclusive, more elitist and more unique than other public educational institutes. And rightly so. This is the opinion of most teachers who work in them, and they have several arguments in support of their view. First, there is the rigid selection of students. Less than 30% of the students who enter the audition process are actually admitted to the first year of study. Second, there is the huge student dropout rate (over 50%) during the course of study, which enhances the exclusive character of this type of education even more. Third, there is the financing, which is supposedly much better than that of other public higher education, allowing for less students per teacher and more 'square metres' of building per student. And last, but definitely not least, the study programme's content (the learning of the artistic process) is supposedly of a different order than that of the training of, for instance, nurses or engineers. Not all of these arguments can be substantiated with the same degree of objectivity: the last in particular comes across more as an 'article of faith' than as an objective fact. In debates about art education it is therefore often regarded as a weak argument by outsiders or relative outsiders such as administrators, and in the eyes of the public.

The more 'objective' parameters concerning the elitist character of theatre education find themselves increasingly under pressure. The exclusive character of drama schools is being eroded by mounting political pressure to actively steer students towards a diploma. The financing of theatre education, which, by the way, probably has a tradition of being higher than in other higher professional education only in the Netherlands, has been downsized to an average level. So it seems that only the first argument still stands. Very remarkably, the huge number of potential students by far exceeds the number of available places.

Before getting back to the elitist idiosyncrasies of drama schools and how these are handled, I'd like to address the deeply rooted faith that especially teachers of acting, directing and designing have in this 'unique' character of theatre education, based on the idea that this schooling communicates a unique artistic content. As a teacher of theatre directing and designing in Holland and Belgium, I happen to believe that theatre education is indeed of a special nature, and I would like to substantiate this more extensively than usual. I wish to understand the foundations of 'our' 'belief'. Although my account is certainly biased by my personal experience in the Netherlands and Belgium, I often notice in literature and during meetings

with colleagues that there are striking similarities with theatre education in other European and non-European countries, especially Asian ones.

Is Theatre Education a Unique Type of Schooling?

Teachers in theatre education often use the metaphor of the 'master-apprentice relationship' to describe the, according to them, unique character of this type of education. They claim that the master-apprentice relationship as developed by the late mediaeval guilds is carried on within the walls of the drama school. In theatre education, a residue of late mediaeval and early modern practice has survived in a post-modern society, like a resistant bacteria.

In the master-apprentice relationship, the student (the apprentice) is admitted to the technical, aesthetic and economic practice of the teacher (the master). Step by step, the apprentice learns the details of his craft. The 'secrets', the finer points of the craft, are only revealed very late in the training process. Apprentices thus have to fully commit themselves to a master for a long time before they are actually admitted to the profession. Over the years, apprentices are initiated in the artistic ways of the master, learning and finally adopting that style. In a sense, apprentices obliterate themselves in order to rediscover themselves in the master in a kind of non-spiritual rebirth. The initial invisibility of an apprentice also has an economic component: he is a cog in the machinery of the master's output, a cheap source of labour adding to both turnover and profit. The master-apprentice relationship probably was more common in trades that produced artefacts (paintings, altar pieces, carpets, sculptures, glass, the silversmith's trade, etc.) than in the world of performing practices (storytelling, theatre, the circus, conjuring, music), which were usually taught in the framework of the extended family. The artistic and economic relationships between family members are both slightly different: the tricks of the trade are passed on quicker, the obliteration of the ego is less radical, and within a family context the idea of rebirth has a softer ring to it.

The fact that the master-apprentice metaphor is still being used in the teaching of contemporary European theatre at first doesn't sound very logical, since the economic foundation of contemporary higher education is incomparable to that of the guild system. Also, the technical and artistic model of the master has been made obsolete by the notion of autonomy in Western art. The switch from

'craft' to 'art' implies that students distance themselves from ruling conventions — the techniques and styles of the master, for instance — and work on developing their own originality. And contemporary art education facilitates developing a *different* style from that of the master, and *not* being part of an economic system but going your own way in freedom. At least, until recently. The latest trend in art education is an increasing instrumentalization. Contemporary, post-avant-gardist education however serves, if only for a little while longer, to break the master-apprentice logic.

In theatre education a lot of technique, style and taste in acting, design and directing is still being taught and learned by means of the teacher and student *doing* things together. In working together (nearly always without unifying theoretical concepts or meticulously formulated educational trajectories as a basis) both craft and art are taught and learned. Teachers and students form bonds that last for years, with students having their favourite teacher, and vice versa. These privileged relationships, although absolutely at odds with most contemporary educational theories, are tolerated, albeit mostly tacitly, in theatre education.

All in all, it is hardly surprising that the master-apprentice metaphor still plays an important role in theatre education (more so than in visual art education, where the notion of autonomy has taken root much more firmly). At first sight, this seems to testify to a rather nostalgic longing for a type of education where a teacher, like the old masters, teaches techniques, artistic style, and artistic attitude by example. In a form of osmotic surrender, students are filled with and enveloped by the master's aura. It is no coincidence that the term 'master class' is used internationally as a label for the highest level of performance education.

The notion of surrender reminds us of the fact that the concept of the 'master' also refers to another reality than that of the late-feudal, early-modern crafts system, namely that of religious initiation.[1] It is a reference that leads us to a deeper level of understanding of the uniqueness of theatre education. In non-Western religions, but also in more esoteric forms of Christianity, the hierarchal distance between teacher and student is intentionally enormous. The notion of (fatherly) authority is unassailable here. The spiritual leader, or guru, often rebuffs his eager students who hunger for knowledge:

> In this tradition, the novice is always rebuffed multiple times when he first approaches the guru. Then the guru stops saying no, but doesn't say yes either; he suffers the presence of the students. When he starts acknowledging him, he assigns a series of menial tasks, meant to drive him away. Only if the disciple sticks it out through all these stages of rejection and ill treatment is he considered worthy of the sublime knowledge.[2]

In this educational system, students are not automatically granted access to the teacher. They cannot claim the teacher. They have no 'right' to knowledge. Even more extremely than in the master-apprentice system, the student must be humble and must be humiliated — preferably reduced to nothing — before being granted access to the spiritual knowledge, precisely because this knowledge is sacred and sublime and can and should be accessed only by the annihilated, absent ego of one who is thirsty for knowledge. This type of education requires — no, it demands — absolute trust on the part of the students. It obliterates their previous cultural conditioning. And all this because the type of knowledge that is passed on here (also known under its collective name of 'enlightenment') transcends conceptual thinking. It is about creating the possibility of direct experience, of freeing the all-encompassing intuitive level of being. This type of training assumes that conceptual knowledge and conceptual knowing are harmful if they have no impact on one's being. The opposition between object and subject must be removed. At the same time, the body, although required for obtaining the desired knowledge, must itself be sacrificed, be given away. In religious initiation, the technical master-apprentice relationship is elaborated on a spiritual level.

It is the praxis of religious initiation which offers us a glimpse of and provides us with the words for the relation between the teacher and student in theatre education. Even for those in mainstream education in the West. In theatre education, the association with religion

1 **Erik Bruijn,** Ontmoetingen met meesters en dwazen: Achter de schermen van de oosterse spiritualiteit **(Deventer: Ankh-Hermes, 1996).**
2 **Suketu Mehta,** Maximum City: Bombay Lost & Found **([New Delhi]: Penguin Books India, 2004).**

is easily made, especially in certain more radical types of training (Grotowski's 'poor and para theatre' being the best-known example) that are associated with religious jargon and training practices (meditation techniques and bodily discipline).[3] The echo of these more radical schools resounds unexpectedly strong in mainstream theatre education, albeit more so in theoretical courses (where Grotowski is one of the 'classics') than in the practice of acting and directing. The problematization of the dominant relationship between thought, perception, and experience does not only feature prominently in Eastern religion but in the creation of theatre as well. The mantra that the actor should aim 'to be in the moment' — a central goal in all Western theatre education, be it according to Stanislavski, Meisner, Barba or anyone else — is clearly linked to the quest for enlightenment. The power of intuition and of not-knowing is a central feature of both worlds. The struggle with the ego and especially the 'surrender' to the world of the artwork, in order to be inspired by the gods, the muse, etc. is just as characteristic of theatre education as it is of Eastern religious practices. But perhaps the biggest similarity is in the fact that drama students must overcome their conditioned mental and physical attitudes in order to open themselves up to the potential of the human body and mind, which must express a multitude of characters and types of performance on stage.

The endurance of the master-apprentice metaphor in theatre education is not just an expression of an authoritarian attitude by a teacher who wishes to dominate the educational process, nor is it a veiled form of spirituality in a culture devoid of religion. It is not the nostalgic longing for a social model from days gone by. Rather, it is the logical consequence of the quintessence of the theatrical learning process, which is that of a necessary transgression of the norms in mental and physical behaviour, the search for the 'dismeasure' of things in order to introduce a new measure, that of the artistic fact. Theatre education is indeed unique compared to other vocational education in that it has teachers and students crossing the boundaries of common decency together, not from a hierarchical equality but from a hierarchal difference. It is an un-modern, obsolete, and actually indecent activity. In this respect, theatre education undoubtedly has a lot in common with other types of professional art education, priesthood training, or athletic training. Still, theatre education (and by extension all performance education) is unique in that it mostly ignores the notion of autonomy that prevails in the visual arts and visual art education. It differs from priesthood training in the sense

that no 'true' knowledge is passed on and it differs from athletic training because it has no element of competition.

The relationship between drama teacher and student is therefore quite special and in many respects completely at odds with the expectations that pedagogues and contemporary public opinion have of education. I will attempt to clarify this in a more concrete way below.

A Matter of Delicate Trust

Shakespeare must have been around thirty years old when he wrote *Romeo and Juliet*, letting out all of his light-hearted as well as darker fantasies, hopes, ambitions, doubts and uncertainties in the play. Some of his sources were men of forty, fifty, and sixty years old, who had themselves written down their life experiences. With each new production of the script, these heartfelt pieces of wisdom are put through the wringer by directors and designers who inevitably inject their own little worlds into that of Romeo and Juliet. How should the 18-year-old girl playing Juliet deal with all these strands of experience? She can't know about the relationships which Shakespeare and the director are familiar with. She is a 21st-century girl, but her text is imbued with the energy of older men from a bygone age with a completely different culture in terms of dating and the social intercourse between boys and girls, men and women, the rich and the poor, and between competing families. How is an 18-year-old actress, probably the daughter of a protective middle-class family, to bridge the historic, social and gender gaps? How must she act, what must she think? How to portray her character?

This example may help us to understand the drastic impact of theatre education on the boys and girls starting out. They are required to demonstrate, even make up, both physical and mental behaviour that they themselves have not had the slightest experience of. The essence of the educational project of the drama school is dealing with the gap between known and unknown behaviour, between existing and yet to be created behaviour, between trite and brand-new behaviour. The drama school will sometimes attempt to fill that gap, sometimes to bridge it, and sometimes it will radically deny the very existence of the gap. Whatever the case may be, that gap is the basis of the theatrical profession.

To put it even more concretely: all cultures have do's and don'ts regarding the physical and mental distances between people.

3 **Jerzy Grotowski,** Towards a Poor Theatre **(London: Methuen, 1969).**

What amount of distance between men do we regard as intimate, or too intimate? And between women? Between men and women? Between the young and the old? Like everyone else, students have internalized the do's and don'ts of the culture they live in. The rehearsal room — as both the architectural and conceptual core of the drama school — is the place where the culturally defined 'naturalness' of that distance (and the rhythms, life's pace, dealing with sounds and smells) is prised open. Indecent distances are explored here, both physically and mentally. In the rehearsal room, gender-bending is the norm, not the deviation. In the rehearsal room, people shout too loudly and whisper too softly. In the rehearsal room there is weeping and jeering, drinking and leering, teasing and flirting. You name it, it happens. Any taboo becomes material for the rehearsal room.

It's obvious (isn't it?) that some intimacy, a certain amount of closeness and secrecy, is required to develop this alternative behaviour and to want to develop it. And for various reasons: the right to fail, the need to concentrate, to create conditions for transgression, the possibility of allowing dissent and argument without external forces moving in to hush things or, heaven forbid, 'evaluate' them, to create an optimum sense of security. Obviously, the breaking of physical and mental habits is a non-obvious and dangerous exercise, one that involves fear, like any transgressive and necessarily traumatic experience involves fear. It takes trust to make this exercise succeed, as there is no 'truth' that can be handed on. The teachers don't know what they are looking for either. They too enter partly unchartered territory. Of course they are more experienced in the practice of searching, but in this search, experience isn't enough of a compass. There is also a power imbalance (based on age differences, the social and artistic accomplishments of the teachers, the hierarchy within an institute, the social and artistic ambitions and fears of the students) that makes any bond of trust inherently delicate.

In the rehearsal room there needs to be a climate of trust because the essence of the theatrical profession implies cultivating a certain dissatisfaction with existing forms and thoughts. 'I hope that you will be unhappy in the profession', the well-known Belgian theatre teacher Damiaan De Schrijver tells his students. Discontent is the motivation behind the search for otherness. This climate of trust is not evident: it is no coincidence that many theatre professionals exclusively keep their own theatre class as the touchstone for their entire career and that they often collaborate with these people for many years.

So, the relationship between teacher and student in theatre education is a special one because the essence of the knowledge that is created (rather than handed on) within theatre education is also special. It is an attitude of searching beyond prevailing concepts and behaviour. What makes the essence of theatre education unique is that the transfer of knowledge takes place in an informal, intuitive way, in an atmosphere of great trust and surrender that requires a certain degree of intimacy and even secrecy. Points of reference are the religious initiation and the pre-modern master-apprentice model rather than teaching models based on transparency, student-orientation, hierarchical equality, sequential education, continuous learning and pedagogical self-expression. The essence of the drama school is teacher-orientated, has distinctive hierarchical differences between teachers and students, is characterized by a certain closeness and is founded on joint activities and on the submission of reflexivity to intuitiveness. So: dream on, teacher.

Those who have read the above and appreciate it, know that the theatre teacher has no place in post-modernity, whether defined by neoliberalism or otherwise. In any case, the metaphor of 'the master' cannot, in this day and age, exist in art education or indeed in education in general. First of all because of the iconic figure of 'the administrator'. The administrator is the function and metaphor that embodies the new age in theatre education. Although administrators honour the theatre master in public discourse as 'the heart of education', their entire praxis (including the differences in salary) demonstrates that they regard the master at best as tolerable, but mostly as completely obsolete and even as 'strange' or 'dangerous'. Not that this is a major problem, because within the new theatre educational system, administrators are so obviously higher up in the hierarchy than teachers that they can easily counter or channel the teachers' dreams and ambitions in the name of a new era, democratically decided policies, the taxpayer, and above all in the name of the demands of the market. Administrators represent the social legitimacy of art and art education. Whether the growth of the administrative class in theatre education is an indication of the crisis of that legitimacy remains unclear. But the growth is unmistakable.

The Administrator

The increase in the number of 'managers' in theatre education goes hand in hand with the increase in scale of institutes of higher

education, which are now offering all types of education. This expansion, which has dragged the drama school along in its wake (initially in a conglomerate of art schools and later more and more in joint ventures with other academies and universities, making theatre just one more discipline beside many others and a marginal one at that, being so small) is defended on economic and educational-political grounds.

Politicians and educational project developers maintain that an increase in scale in education results in more efficient and cheaper administration. In the debates surrounding this issue, they rarely or never come up with any proof of this, and perhaps they can't, because the system-wide implementation of this increase in scale means that it is very difficult, if not impossible, to make comparisons between large and small school systems. The truth is that there is no clear evidence in practice that both goals — efficiency and cost control in educational content and organization — are being realized. What does stand out in these mammoth schools is the rise of a top layer of governors who effortlessly switch from one economic sector to another. From bicycle racing to education to construction, from oil companies to education and back again. After all, it's not about the contents of education but about the ability to administrate. Whether this upper layer helps to keep down the cost of education with their conspicuous salaries is unclear. The growth of middle management, of bureaucracy, and of the bureaucratic duties of the artistic staff also seems at odds with the argument of efficiency and cost control. Indeed, support facilities for teachers are being reduced, but for new tasks (building management, catering, security, cleaning, fire hazard control, etc.) the sky is the limit. Duties that in small institutes were often delegated to students and teaching staff have now become part of a complex and growing, bureaucratically monitored system. Artistic staff members are bombarded with assessment forms, schedules in which to indicate their educational targets, and questionnaires from both inside and outside the institute. It is mostly driving artistic teachers nuts, and what is worse: the energy that goes into this bureaucracy is inevitably drained from the rehearsal room. Under the direction of the administration, the rehearsal room becomes a marginal space in brand-new buildings that often look like posh offices or museums of contemporary art. (Just like Sun Kings, top administrators tend to want to leave behind their own Versailles to show that they were vigorous, smart, and visionary people.) The transparency of the architecture is in sharp contrast with the closed, somewhat

secretive logic of theatre education. These buildings cry out that the arts belong to society and will serve it. It is no coincidence that the artistic forces in theatre education are trying to flee this new type of school building in droves. They take refuge in old buildings or start working in public spaces. The successes of site-specific theatre, theatre of the real, and experience theatre are based, among other things, on a dislike of the new theatre school buildings.

An unchallenged effect of this increase in scale is the growing power of the heads of the school system to enforce decisions top-down, and these decisions are often aimed at making everything uniform. The 'super school' that is being created out of a pedagogical void and without there being any content-driven need for it, needs a common identity, which is forcibly assigned, just like with the creation of a nation state or an overseas colony. The school conglomerate must be presentable to the outside (the market) in a single catchphrase that covers the missions of all institutes that comprise it. The IT system must be the same across the entire institute and the same goes for security systems and the development and management of school buildings. Individual institutes must be comparable in numerous ways and students must be able to switch effortlessly from one institute to another, at the level of individual courses or in a broader sense. Students must remain generalists for as long as possible and teachers must become that as soon as possible. The teacher as a theatre guru is a bizarre dream from a fortunately obsolete past. The drama school leader of old, the *primes inter pares*, has completely disappeared in the fog created by the new times. Under the direction of the administrator, the unique, elitist, and exclusive character of the drama school is rapidly being demolished. The top administration usually couldn't care less about the idiosyncrasies of dwarf departments like the drama school. The fact that the drama school itself has more applicants than places fits ill with a picture in which attracting new students is considered the prerogative of the central administration. The high incidence of dropouts among drama school students is not linked to supporting top talent or the risky relationship between teachers and students. It is discouraged simply because the greatest possible number of admitted students should graduate. This is because the school's government funding depends on it; this funding policy is based on the idea that the number of knowledge workers should grow because the knowledge economy must flourish. Special funding of the drama school doesn't make sense, seen from above. The increase in scale and the growing power of the

top people in education — which, by the way, fits in very well with national education policy: a large education conglomerate cannot possibly adopt an active anti-government policy — therefore leads to a downgrading of the elitist, exclusive drama school to the status of just another school in higher education. Especially in terms of organization and administration, but also by marginalizing the artistic core element of the drama school: the quality of the rehearsal room and of what happens there.

The ability to implement top-down decisions also affects the educational contents of the drama school. Everything that the theatre teacher dreams of as being the essence of his teaching doesn't sit well with top administrators, who see the position of every branch of the super school in relation to its social legitimacy and market success. Society really has no time for sect-like education. And as the markets are volatile, all elements of the institute must keep up with that volatility. Concepts such as cultural entrepreneurship, despecialization of art institutes, and cross-over education are but a few of the numerous novelties that have come to the fore over the past decade. The subject matter and ideas about what kind of knowledge should be transferred, and in what way, are guided by how the top administration assesses the whims of the labour market. Here the management of the educational institute displays the cynical morale of the successful general. The set-up was already described by the Chinese strategist-philosopher Sun Tzu more than two thousand years ago.[4] A continuous wave of changes in organization and tactics is a very effective strategy: 'The successful general constantly changes his actions and revises his plans, so that people … cannot anticipate him'. Around the year 1000, Zhang Yu added a comment saying that to begin with, one should mislead one's *own* organization (not the enemy's) with a barrage of changes: 'The reason constant change is valued in military organisation… is for deceiving one's own troops, to get them to follow unknowingly'. All top administrators are inclined to follow the cynical logic of these successful Chinese generals.

The artistic workers within drama schools are rarely, if ever, in direct contact with the top-level administrators. They hear about decisions through the mid-level administrators of their own school and try to implement them as best they can in the name of the students' needs, the new times, their own insecurity, and their mortgage payments. The people at the middle administrative level are not to be envied, as they find themselves between a rock and a hard place.

They were hired to implement the flood of changes in organization, operation, finances, pedagogy, and educational policy decreed from above. At the same time, they have much more insight than do people at the top level of administration into the artistic needs of the artistic staff and the students. Their task is to connect the market-orientated forces from 'upstairs' with the artistic needs of 'downstairs'. The result of this quandary is that they are constantly compromising on the implementation of new rules and arrangements by almost immediately moderating them under pressure of especially the artistic workers. ('You mustn't take these new regulations too seriously', is a surprisingly often heard comment from middle administration directed at the artistic staff and students). The unrest in theatre education stems not only from the continuous introduction of change by the top administration, but has just as much to do with the middle administration always trying to take the edge off things. This creates a permanent climate of insecurity. The middle administration tries very hard to hide the image of the mammoth school by creating increasingly smaller sub-departments, and with every change, they promise that it is being implemented in order to increase the influence of the artistic staff. Time and again, this turns out to be untrue. It is a rather exhausting and not very uplifting spectacle. Indeed, the transfer of knowledge as envisioned by the hard-core theatre master cannot be reconciled with the type of knowledge transfer that is being developed in a supermarket school. The theatre master, hiding in his sanctuary, doesn't give a hoot about the market, the new times, the employability of students, or the legitimacy of the arts in society. And that is exactly why the top administration also doesn't give a hoot about the theatre master.

The impossibility of a dialogue between artistic teachers and administrators has resulted in the appointment of a growing number of mediators over the past few decades. This is the deeper cause of the growth of middle administration and the total bureaucratization of the drama school. The top administration has the determination and the power to impose its hyperkinetic views on education against the wishes of the artistic teachers, but it needs an army of controlling civil servants and regulations to achieve this. The impossibility of a dialogue between artistic teachers and managers also explains the embedding of the hard-core rehearsal periods (the very essence of theatre education) in a series of courses that function as a buffer

4 **Sun Tzu**, The Art of War **(Boston: Shambhala, 2005)**.

between the pre-modern rehearsal room and the hyper-modern supermarket school and art market. The introduction of management courses, the encouragement to take extra courses at other institutes, the creation of multimedia study programmes ('because the professional field demands it'), even the implementation of the entire study programme in art-teacher education can be understood in this light. The same goes for the artistic and pedagogic mission statements that are intended to keep both sides happy and in balance. In any case, the assimilation of the drama school within a national, European, and global educational system implies that the position of the artistic teacher is being marginalized and that the position of the administrators of the system is being upgraded.

Where does this leave the students? They find themselves, often without realizing it, torn between the icon of the post-modern age — the manager — and that icon of the pre-modern age, the master.

The Students

Students expect a lot from the drama school, perhaps too much. In this they are not very different from the masters and the administrators who also, each in their own way, want too much. Students go to drama school in order to acquire professional skills. Of course. After all, they want to perform well in the labour market. Therefore, they accept the artistic and pedagogical choices made by the school administration, as it claims to know (the future of) that market and which theatrical skills may lead to an acceptable income in the foreseeable future. However, this need of the students seems to be at odds with another deep need: to connect to an artistic source of inspiration, which is why most of them embark on this career path in the first place.[5] And the only way to connect to that source is via the inspired teacher.

Now, administrators and managers have a lot to offer. In the administration's discourse, students are the central actors in the educational system. Many institutes continually monitor student satisfaction, always asking them to evaluate the classes, the teachers, the study programmes, the organization, ICT support, the quality of the catering, and what have you. The administrator at the top takes their answers very seriously indeed and uses them to put a lot of pressure on especially the middle administration and teachers. In the next poll, student satisfaction should be up by at least 0.1 point or else…. The students, being savvy consumers, happily accept what the administrators have to offer. They feel that they are entitled to all the

goodies that the administrators — smiling presidentially — claim they can provide: clean toilets, clear study goals, physical security, friendly attendants and caretakers, fair assessments, motivated teachers, valuable diplomas, and techniques they can use in the market.

Student satisfaction is the carrot that the top-level administration uses to keep the organization moving, which is not all that strange within the contemporary vision on education. Students are clients of a knowledge industry and they have to be served as best as their tuition fees and political decisions on budgets allow. Consumer satisfaction is the touchstone of policy and of the political thinking behind that policy. It is what students want. The only problem they have is when the administrators can't live up to their promises, which is almost always the case. This leads to constant frustration.

The problem for students is, however, a deeper one than the fact that the management simply doesn't deliver. Deep down inside, students want something else besides satisfaction. After all, is student satisfaction the same thing as students' interests? Theatre students are quite uncertain when filling out the satisfaction questionnaires. Perhaps this is because students do feel the complexity of their own longings but cannot truly understand them. Deep down inside they know it is not just about contentment and student satisfaction, social success and the need for applause, but also about discontent and student dissatisfaction. The famous music pedagogue and Baroque musician Sigiswald Kuyken phrased it like this: 'One cannot overestimate the positive power of a bad school.' Though perhaps overly provocative, the statement in itself is a sign of the deep-rooted conviction among artistic people that art is more about discomfort than about wellness.

Students want the very opposite of what managers and market-orientated education have to offer. They want danger, discomfort, trauma, grime, spirituality, intuitive surrender, and all that. In short, students want the master. Though it may be on a very unconscious level, they think of master-apprentice relationships, of intense work in rehearsal rooms, of exploratory behaviour, of artistic and art educational innovations that are rooted in a centuries-old tradition, of meaningful encounters with teachers. They think of old school, not of new school. Of the pre-modern age, not of the neoliberal age.

But by god, how can the drama school offer both at the same

5 **Pascal Gielen and Paul De Bruyne,** Being an Artist in Post-Fordist Times **(Rotterdam: NAi Publishers, 2009).**

time? Can one paint both within and over the lines when colouring? Be both pre-modern and post-modern? Be a demanding consumer and a humble acolyte? The students don't know — and how should they? Their teachers don't know either and nor do the administrators, although they, obeying the demands of their function, put up a big pretence that they do. Teachers, administrators, and students alike are in a precarious situation. The teachers find themselves at the wrong juncture, the administrators are bluffing themselves into the abyss, and the students want to have their cake and eat it too. It is almost a description of the present juncture, the post-Fordist state of being.[6]

A Better Drama School

In order to realize a better drama school, the principal parties should begin with acquiring a deeper insight into their own positions within education. At the moment they all seem to be stranded in their own logic and in their feeling of being right. This leads to a culture of continual change (directed by the administrators) in an atmosphere of complaints and despair (among the artistically aware teachers) and of insecurity (among the students). An experiment in thinking beyond one's own beliefs may lead to a sharing of insights among the principal parties, for the sake of creating the best possible theatre school in this day and age.

I assume, or rather hope, that all parties may come to realize that the drama school should get away from the scaling-up in education, in order to more fully realize its core task, which implies uniqueness and an enlightened degree of exclusivity. The drama school should also get away from the power of curriculum experts and social engineering prophets who proclaim that the instrumentalization of art will save it. Education is important in its own right and so is theatre education. What is really at stake here is the quality of what goes on in the rehearsal room — the quality of the encounter between teacher and student. Nothing more and nothing less. The authority of drama teachers must be restored. Or, better, students must be given the opportunity to recognize the authority of the teacher, and teachers must retain the opportunity to establish and confirm their authority. The authority of administrators must be reduced to its proper proportions: that of facilitators, and not that of politicians or cynical generals driven by personal ambitions.

Having said that, the principal parties should also take a critical look at their own wishes and ambitions. Theatre teachers who

demand that their core business be granted an absolute status (think of Grotowski) should consider leaving mainstream education and start attracting students that are open to an old-school relationship. Students will have to decide whether or not to follow their masters. Administrators should have the courage to look beyond their personal ambitions and ask themselves what they actually are managing. Is it perhaps their own wishful thinking? Aren't they administering a totally absurd belief in the malleability of the world? What do they really know about the market? About what the market needs? And why should theatre education follow the market, if that were possible at all?

All parties concerned should ask themselves what kind of knowledge should be handed down from one generation to the next. They should all ask themselves which balance of power among them leads to the best *educational* results, which type of organization optimizes the quality of the rehearsal room experience, which balance of power best safeguards the self-respect of all concerned and which type of organization optimizes communication. Theatre education cannot save the world, but it should save the theatre, theatre makers and theatre art.

Those who think that the questions listed above are too philosophical or even pathetic but still agree that the present situation presents a deadlock and wish to find a solution to break it, should not forget that mainstream education offers quite a few possibilities for teachers, students, and their administrators to interact in a more productive manner than we see at present. All they have to do to see these opportunities is to position themselves in the margins of their super institutes. For example, in the margins of the prevailing time frame. In late evening, at night and in the small hours, those transparent, cold, un-theatrical drama school buildings transform themselves into temples with shady nooks and crannies where the Muses are easily seduced and vice versa. Within the walls of the rehearsal rooms one can still create the most amazing things if only one is a little creative with timetables, rosters, assessment schemes, etc.

Is this a call to anarchy? Not at all. It is merely a gentle suggestion to make life nicer. In my opinion it would be helpful to remind ourselves of an old notion. Theatre and theatre education only exist by the grace of the gods and the muses. Overblown egos should

6 **Frank Furedi,** Wasted: Why Education Isn't Educating **(London and New York: Continuum, 2009); David Harvey,** The Enigma of Capital and the Crisis of Capitalism **(London: Profile Books, 2010).**

redefine themselves in an attitude of service and loss of ego. Only if all those involved submit themselves to the need to connect with the world of inspiration will the veils be lifted from their eyes. If not, the mental exhaustion and senseless anger that are demonstrably and even measurably corrupting our culture will continue unchecked.[7]

7 **Mark Fisher,** Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative? **([Portage, MI]: Zero Books, 2009.**

School – A Matter of Form

Maarten Simons &
Jan Masschelein

'There is no time. We have no time'

We hear that all the time, and many of us probably often find themselves uttering these or similar words. Perhaps this is more than just a pathetic excuse for how busy we all are or a polite reminder of our other priorities. Is it possible that we indeed do not have time? Maybe we are not just living busy lives, but our lives have become businesses; enterprises that actually never close. Even when on holiday or while sleeping and eating we are busy producing new energy and, like everything else, this is an issue of calculation, of optimal balance. It seems as if life itself has become an enterprise, and we have become entrepreneurial selves and entrepreneurs of the self.[1] Who we are — employee, husband or wife, friend, student, teacher — should be regarded as the result of a production process that seeks to meet our own needs or the needs of others. The self, then, is a product; the result of a productive use of human and other resources. And as entrepreneurs — that is, as artists of capitalist societies — we embrace the virtues of flexibility, innovation and productive creativity. One of the most valuable production forces of the entrepreneurial self is its learning ability; a force that produces new competencies, adds value to the self and fuels the accumulation of one's human capital.

For the entrepreneurial self, the present is the possibly productive gap between past and future — the past being the available resources and the future the estimated returns. For the entrepreneurial self, the past and the future are always virtually present in a calculative frame. Time here is productive time or, more precisely, time of investment, a permanent calculation in view of future returns and useful resources. For the entrepreneurial student, for instance, the activity of studying — or, more precisely, learning as the accumulation of human capital or building credits — is one of investment, thinking in rates of return. And therefore any pedagogy, or any form of instruction nowadays comes very close to the provision of incentives. It is through incentives that students become willing and teachers have the impression they still have something to say. For entrepreneurial selves, and certainly for students and teachers, time is thus always occupied, a condition articulated very clearly today in the notions 'permanent' or 'permanence'. Time for the entrepreneurial self is a resource, or even a product, and therefore it is something that can and should be managed. Time management becomes indispensable in an *age of permanency*. It is the managerial art of setting new priorities by calculating possible gains and estimating needs. Entrepreneurial parents, for instance, seek to manage their time, or

even produce time; quality time for their children, whereby quality is defined as satisfying the children's and/or their own needs. It is a time of priorities, of investment and rates of return. And that is also what the hidden curriculum of the current organization of education — which stresses individual learning trajectories, modules, choice and permanent/formative (portfolio) assessment — teaches young people: time is not something you receive, nor something that you are given, but a resource that can and should be managed, something that you produce by setting priorities. In that sense, indeed, there is no time and we have no time. And the same probably holds true for places and things.

Entrepreneurial selves are not occasionally entering marketplaces, but actually inhabiting markets, it is their home. Entrepreneurship is the ethos of the market-place, and it includes the extraordinary imaginary force to see everything outside as a possible new market. Perhaps the current use of the notions 'global' or 'globalized' articulates that actually there are no places or that all places are marketized, occupied. A sensitivity for niches and productive innovation is indispensable in a *globalized world*. And therefore students, or teachers — in their entrepreneurial brilliance — are not just producers but at the same time global marketing agents; there can be no production of new competencies, no construction of identities without market studies and without marketing the produced self. Entrepreneurship means the self is to be produced, advertised and sold. In other words, in a globalized world employability becomes the challenge and that is exactly what the transformed educational institutions are teaching young people: get used to take care of the ongoing capitalization and marketization of your life.

In relation to this specific spatial and temporal mindset everything is either a resource or a product, that is, the input or output of a production process. Even more, for entrepreneurs each product is a new resource and a possible new input — they understand the art of sampling, recycling, pop-art. Perhaps students today, inhabiting a globalized world, are trained in these arts, they have to be. For them, in their entrepreneurial imagination, what is available is a resource, and a resource is available. Plagiarism for instance, is not an issue. It is

1 **For a detailed elaboration of Michel Foucault's inspiring studies on 'entrepreneurship' (Michel Foucault,** Naissance de la biopolitique: Cours au Collège de France (1978–1979) **(Paris: Gallimard/Le seuil, 2004), see: Maarten Simons and Jan Masschelein, 'The governmentalization of learning and the assemblage of a learning apparatus',** Educational Theory **58, no. 4 (2008): 391-415.**

an accusation by those who believe there is such a thing as an author that precedes the work and can be linked to that work. But these accusers know nothing about copy-paste. For the entrepreneurial student, the author's name, just like the work itself, is a product and, being available, it becomes at once also a resource for new products, including new 'author' names. There is no time, no need for discussion on moral grounds and intellectual honesty. Reframing plagiarism in the language of intellectual property rights might be effective in times of entrepreneurship — the issue becomes part of the logic of exchange and compensation. And patents are clearly even more effective. For by celebrating the invention and protecting the investment, patents immediately intervene at the level of availability and temporarily disrupt the connection between product and available resource. However, the point of departure, and that is perhaps the most important thing that students teach us very clearly every day, remains: it is all a *matter of resources*.

But then what does it mean to say: there is no time, no place, not a thing, we no longer have time, places or things. According to us, statements such as these not only signal that every-thing and every time and space tends to be occupied, but also that there is or can be time, space and matter that are not occupied. And for that we simply want to reserve the notion 'school'. Perhaps today, especially today when it seems to be disappearing, we still remember what it is to have free time.

Once Upon a Time There Was School

School is literally a place of *scholè*, that is the space of 'free time'.[2] Originated in the Greek world, school was not a place and time organized to reproduce social order or the life style of its elites. Disconnected from both the *oikos* and *polis*, and hence freed from daily, economic and political occupations, the school was a real space with a real inner place and time, where people were exposed to real things. Our thesis is that school time, place and matter are actually an invention, including a particular form that does certain things and actually creates a particular time, space and matter. As a form, school includes at least three components.

First, a typical feature of the school is *suspension*. Economic, social, cultural, political or private time are suspended, as well as the tasks and roles connected to specific places. Suspension here could be regarded as an act of de-privatization or de-appropriation. The school offers students, for instance, the opportunity to leave their

past and family background behind and indeed become students like all the others. And a similar suspension occurs on the side of teachers (a profession that is not really a serious profession) and on the side of subject matter (knowledge and other things that are not for real). We are not claiming that this is what happens in education today — quite the contrary: there is an ongoing tendency to link students to their background for instance, to professionalize teaching and make subject matter more relevant. The point, however, is that a school implies an act of suspension or setting free, and indeed, perhaps, that suspension is no longer part of education today.

However, the term 'free' not only has the negative connotation of suspension (free from), but also a positive one, that is, 'free to'. Drawing upon the terminology of Giorgio Agamben, we wish to introduce the term *profanation* to describe this kind of freedom as the second feature of the school form. According to Agamben: 'Pure, profane, freed from sacred names is that thing that is being replaced in view of the common use by people.'[3] A condition of profane time, space and material thus is not being a place of emptiness, but being a condition where time, space and things are disconnected from their regular use, no longer sacred or occupied in that sense, and therefore referring to a condition where something of the world is open for common use. Knowledge, for example, but also skills that have a particular function in society become free for common use; disconnected from the usages of the older generations in society but not yet appropriated by students as representatives of the younger generation. More importantly, it is in front of common things — open for free and therefore new use — that the younger generation is given the opportunity to experience itself as a new generation, i.e. the experience of potentiality in front of something. For that reason, schools are always in part about knowledge for the sake of knowledge (what could be called 'study'), or skills for the sake of skills (what could be called 'exercise'), and thought for the sake of thought (what could be called 'thinking'). And the consequence is not that the school is disconnected from society (an 'ivory tower', 'island', 'unworldly'). The knowledge, skills and any other materials

2 **The Greek word 'scholè' means first of all 'free time' (other related meanings are: delay, rest, study, school, school building). Free time, however, is not so much leisure time, but rather the time of study and exercise, the time separated from the time of production. See: Jan Masschelein and Maarten Simons, 'The Hatred of Public Schooling: The School as the Mark of Democracy',** Educational Philosophy and Theory **42 no. 5-6 (2010): 666-82.**

3 **Giorgio Agamben,** Profanations **(Paris: Payot, 2005), 96.**

are of course derived from society, but there are the simple but far-reaching acts of suspension and profanation. And that perhaps makes the school not a societal institution, but a worldly space and time.

The school (through the teacher, school discipline and architecture) makes it possible for the new generation to become attentive to some-thing, that is, to the world. Therefore, the third feature we wish to mention here is that the school *makes attentive.* In that sense, subject matter or things — disconnected from particular usages and positions — become very real at school. Of course not as a kind of resource, product or any other object that is occupied by and part of a particular economy. The magical event of the school is that it turns matter into some-thing, that is, something to study or to exercise.[4] School then becomes a space and time of *inter-esse*, and thereby a place where the young generation is not approached as persons who have (specific, individual) needs and wish to choose, but as persons who are exposed to the world and are given the opportunity to become interested in some-thing. The school is not about calculation and choice, but about attention and becoming interested in some-thing.

In sum, the school could be regarded as a particular medium, a means without ends, that is a free place and time where something is being offered without establishing a particular destination or orientation.[5] *Scholè*, then, is not simply a time/space of passage (*from* past *to* future), project time or initiation time (*from* family *to* society). It is the time and space of attention, which is the time of regard for the world, of being present to it (or being in its presence), attending it, a time of surrendering to the experience of the world, of exposure and effacing social subjectivities and orientations, a time filled with encounters and opportunities to study and exercise. Taking as an example the swimmer who traverses a stream, it may look like the swimmer simply goes from one shore to the other (from the land of ignorance to that of knowledge, for example), as if the medium would be simply a point without dimensions, like when we jump.[6] Of course, the swimmer 'arrives' in a second world, but more importantly, the swimmer did not only change river banks, but has known the trait that binds them and that is in fact a 'place' that integrates all directions, a 'milieu' that has no orientation itself or, vice versa, opens up to all directions and orientations.

School Morphology

Entrepreneurial students do not like to go to school. They feel more at ease in a learning environment with plenty of resources and flexible learning trajectories. It is the place and time of learning, a production process — whether creative or standardized — with specific results that require calculation and investment. In line with school not being in the first place that time and space of learning but of 'free time' i.e. unproductive time, we can conceive of education as the art and technology to make that time happen: to spatialize and materialize school as free time. It is about the tracing of spaces and the aesthetical arranging of and dealing with matter that sets things free, makes students attentive, places them in the silence of the beginning and offers the experience of potentiality in front of something that is made present. School forms, then, are forms of suspension, profanation and attention, and education is the art and technology to shape these forms. They include particular architectures, particular pedagogic disciplines (intellectual and material technologies of mind and body, gestures) and pedagogical figures (persona characterized by a particular ethos, i.e. an attitude, disposition or 'stance' e.g. the figure of the teacher, professor, student) that constitute the happening of 'free time'. Let us very briefly point to some examples of school forms, and each of them, in order to make them real or 'work', implies a particular architecture and requires a particular ethos which can be worked upon.

There is first the lecture and the lecture hall. Of course, one could object that lecturing in lecture halls is just a symptom of archaism, but we maintain that this form (including a particular arrangement of space and a particular stance or ethos from its participants), when well-formed and not de-formed, constitutes an event where people are transformed into 'students' who become attentive and inter-ested in some-thing that is made present (i.e. some-thing comes to speak) in front of someone who becomes 'professor' (i.e. people who, out of an experimental ethos and a dedication, make things public, bring some-thing to light, or call it into existence). That magical event of lecturing — magical in the sense, indeed, that something is called into existence — is very different from a productive learning environment where learners are looking for resources

4 **See Isabelle Stengers, 'The Cosmopolitical Proposal', in** Making Things Public: Atmospheres of Democracy, **ed. Bruno Latour and Peter Wiebel (Karlsruhe and Cambridge: ZKM and MIT Press, 2005), 994-1003.**

5 **Giorgio Agamben,** Means Without Ends: Notes on Politics, **trans. Vincenzo Binetti and Cesaro Casarino (Minneapolis: University of Minessota Press, 2000).**

6 **See Michel Serres,** The Troubadour of Knowledge **(Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1997), 5.**

pointed at or made available by facilitators and their instructions and incentives. As a school form, the lecture gathers people in a position of exposure, as students, slowed down by a provocation to think that finds (its) place with the professor. The professor is the one who presents a subject and then turns it into an issue or some-thing to think about by undoing its protection and appropriation — that is, the sacredness of words, object, theories, works…

In this sense, students and professors do not pre-exist before the event of lecturing that is constituted by the form: the event makes the professor and the audience 'happen'. Perhaps the magic of lecturing comes close to what Bruno Latour calls a '*collective* experiment'.[7] During a lecture, and in the face of the issue that is present, who we are and what we think is put to the test. It is not an experimental situation in the sense that the professor and students are detached observers. They are part of it, or more precisely, one becomes a professor or student precisely by participating in the collective gathering around something of concern. In this sense, the lecture hall can be described as a heterotopia; a 'place without place', a 'lieu sans lieu', a place that in a way escapes the usual order of places and sites, although it is still a concrete 'place' or 'location' with its own order, its own technologies, rituals, ways of speaking and discipline. According to Michel Foucault, it is a place where we are exposed, that is to say 'drawn out of ourselves, in which the erosion of our lives, our time and our history occurs'.[8] It is a place where we are exposed to a thing-in-common and are engaged in public thinking.

The lecture hall is not only an 'other space' but also an 'other time'. As a heterochronia it is an event-space, a place where something happens, takes/finds (its) place. This heterotopic and heterochronic form contains a very particular architecture, and a very particular aesthetic arrangement of bodies and material. Lecture halls are often designed to gather people around some*thing*, to make things public and allow for a public to come into existence. Lecture halls, however, are not like theatres or parliaments. They have no stage, are no arena, no half-round. They are not designed to make a performance visible or to concentrate on the speaker's position (in front of a chairman). As a pedagogic form they seem to be designed to gather equally (as a public) around something by someone who makes his or her thoughts on something public.

The second example could be the seminar. Similar to the lecture, the seminar is a public gathering. But the number of students is usually much lower and the arrangement of the room is different, as is the relation between students (who are positioned differently). Roland Barthes calls the seminar 'a pure form of floating', a form that is not destroying anything but is dis-orienting the 'law';[9] it traces a space of floating that constantly disrupts or re- or dis-orientates the three spaces that are present: the institutional one (fixing the frequency, schedule, location, syllabus), the space of teaching (indicating a transfer between the director of the seminar and the audience), which becomes a horizontal relation between students, and the space of inscription (inscribing the way of gathering). The seminar produces differences: slowly, the originality or singularity of the bodies taken one by one appears, the reproduction of roles and affirmations of discourses is broken, destinations and objectives are 'undone'. And what happens at that point is that something, a text for instance, becomes a matter of inter-est. By putting a text on the table, discussing that text on an equal basis — institutional positions and personal opinions being suspended — the text becomes real. It changes into some-thing to talk about, a thing to refer to, something that provokes thinking and discussion. The magic of the seminar disappears the very moment when the text no longer is a something, and thinking in public becomes a ritual of exchanging personal opinions and impressions. It then stops being a collective experiment where something is at stake, and turns into a pathetic therapeutic session.

The third example is the workshop ('atelier'), for instance a dance or drawing workshop. Here we also have a particular architecture and particular relationship between students and teacher, which include a profanation and suspension, and make attentive. The acts of seeing or the acts of drawing and moving are disconnected from particular usages, from common interpretations and other intellectual games (such as contextualization) and are no longer part of productive practices.[10] The look, body, and hand are set free, and gazes, movements, shapes, colors, and textures become inter-esting in themselves, open to common use and common things become open to new use. The event that takes place in the workshop — when

7 **Bruno Latour,** Politics of Nature: How to Bring the Sciences into Democracy **(London: Harvard University Press, 2004).**

8 **Michel Foucault, 'Des espaces autres', in** Dits et écrits IV 1980–1988**, ed. Daniel Defert, François Ewald, and Jacques Lagrange (Paris: Gallimard, 1967/1984), 752-62.**

9 **Roland Barthes, 'Au séminaire', in** Essais critiques IV: Le bruissement de la langue **(Paris: Seuil, 1984), 369-79.**

10 **See also Susan Sonntag,** Against Interpretation, and other essays **(New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1966).**

the place actually becomes a workshop — is perhaps not bringing into existence a thinking public, but a gesturing public in front of a model. A model, of course, is just a model, but at the same time and precisely for that reason the model can suspend something and bring reality or something of the world into the workshop. The model de-contextualizes, and in that sense brings reality to light. The workshop is not a production site, and not even just a place to work. In the workshop people are offered the possibility to make some-thing or do some-thing in front of. The experience of that possibility — to experience that one is able to use one's eyes, hands, body, etc. — implies a particular attentiveness or conversion toward the self, toward others, toward the world. It is a collective experiment in gestures and experiencing the body as a means without end and therefore open to new usages.

In all three examples, as we have indicated before, the realization of the form is also related to particular pedagogical figures that make 'free time' happen, i.e. persona characterized by a particular ethos or stance such as the professor, teacher or director. Although each of them clearly manifests particular features, all of them share what we want to call school-*mastery.* This kind of mastery is to be distinguished from expertise and even to some extent from craftsmanship, although it shares a lot of its features. Indeed, like the mastery of the craftsman, school-mastery not only involves knowledge of the matter at hand but most importantly rests on a caring relationship with the subject/matter and with oneself. Whilst expertise implies a relationship of knowledge with the world, a relationship of care is characteristic of mastery. To the expert the world is something that can be known. Expertise and knowledge constitute the basis for fashioning, shaping and inhabiting the world. The master, on the other hand, is the one who perceives the world, or something in the world, as something that requires care. He or she is someone who takes up responsibility for the world, to use the words of Hannah Arendt.[11] In this care for the world, the aspects *respect*, *devotion*, *passion* come together in what we might describe as 'embodied love' or 'amateurism' in its literal sense. It is precisely because of this mastery (care for the world, and care for oneself in relation to that world) that the master 'opens' up a world, offers the opportunity to get inter-ested, and hence invites others to care for the world and for themselves. Here we should note that although school-mastery indeed includes a love for the craft (the subject matter) — testified in gestures while dealing with the matter at hand (the text, the virus,

the proof, the wood, the…) — it also includes a love for the students. Not in the sense of an emotional bond or of a particular interest in the needs of the students, but in the sense of suspending any want or aim concerning what is done with what he or she offers. School-masters suspend the productive context in order to make inter-est for something possible. They make things present, bring them to live, bring students literally near to them (make them forget time) in such a way that the students can and wish to study or exercise. The master does not want followers or apprentices, but creates an event where people can become students, that is, people inter-ested in something, and in such a way that they can show and present themselves as a *new* generation in the world.

De-Formations: The Dis-Appearance of the School

Our thesis is that what is disappearing today is 'school' and what we are facing is the challenge to reinvent or shape a school form, that is, to make free time, space and matter. For that to happen it is probably not enough to recall traditional school forms in order to prepare future inventions. It is just as important to explore how and even why today the school form tends to disappear in more detail. According to us, its disappearance is neither a historical accident nor the natural outcome of something like the logic of capital. It is the consequence of perhaps not intentional but all the same deliberate options of policymakers, of experts, and perhaps even of students and teachers themselves. A form that organizes free time, offers free space and exposes people to things open for common use could be dangerous, and is therefore to be avoided or at least strictly regulated or controlled from the perspective of all those who preserve or protect specific knowledge, skills, norms, values… What the school form does is that it suspends what is appropriate and appropriated and includes a profanation of what is perceived sacred, that is, regarded to be accessible to or owned by a cultural or economic elite. The school form thus offers the radical, even potentially revolutionary opportunity to renew the world. What the school form makes present belongs to everyone and no one in particular, it is some-thing common, and for that reason the school has a communist dimension. 'Communist' is used here not in reference to a political doctrine. On the contrary,

11 Hannah Arendt, 'The Crisis in Education' (1968), in Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought **(New York: Penguin (1983), 170-93.**

one could argue that communism is a political attempt to recuperate the school and to institutionalize it socially — at a high price. Communist, as far as it refers to the radical act of de-privatization, perhaps is foremost an educational and not a political term.

Hence, if we look for causes of the disappearance of school, we have to consider that it could be about the fear or even hatred of that particular form of communism, of profanation and suspension, and think of it as a matter of taming, pacification and neutralization, or, perhaps less overt but equally effective, banalization. There is still a history to be told of that fear or hatred, of the enemies of school, their weaponry and their tactics.[12] That history is probably still different from the known histories of religion (education and Christianization), capitalism (education and reproduction) and bureaucracy (education and formalism/officialdom). Perhaps these critical histories are instructive, but they target education, not the school form and its de-formation. Some concluding comments on current tendencies of school deformation offer a point of departure to understand that fear and hatred of the school form.

Clearly, we notice a strong *politicization* of education today. Education is made responsible for offering solutions to several problems in society. Social, cultural and economic problems are translated into 'learning problems' and education becomes the place to come up with solutions. Our concern here is not only that the 'learning solution' turns political issues into individual responsibilities. An additional concern is how a new generation can experience itself as a new generation if it is to partake immediately in the old society and its problems. There is no longer time for issues in society to become school matter, and therefore no time for study and exercise. And this de-formation of the school form is perhaps most clearly visible in the current focus on employability and more broadly in the tendency to reframe the aims of education in terms of (employable) competencies — including creative competencies and competencies for cultural participation. These competencies orient education toward society, that is, to a field of application or civic, economic, social, cultural, etc. employability. This is not just about taming the school form in education, but about making it productive.

There is also a tendency to *naturalization*, as signalled by the current focus on talent and talent development in education. The adagio is: everyone's talents should be developed into competencies and those competencies should lead to qualifications. Underlying this is not only the agenda of equal opportunities, but also and perhaps foremost a strategy to mobilize all available talents as resources in view of international competitiveness: every(one's) talent counts! The hope is that all students will choose productive learning trajectories in line with their talents and natural abilities. This means linking each student to his or her talent and, from the assumption that students differ, that each student should be offered different or even 'personalized' learning trajectories. Talent and choice seem to replace the idea of becoming 'inter-ested' regardless of ability or talent. From the perspective of the school form one could actually ask whether 'talent' is an educational term at all. The school assumption that everyone can be inter-ested is actually replaced with the idea that education is an efficient way to help students find their natural place in society, in line with their talents.

This is closely related to the tendency toward *psychologization*. It shows itself in the increasing attention for talent-based and competency-oriented education, and in the proposals for differentiation in teaching in order to meet individual learning needs. It is the psyche of the learners, their individuality, personality and foremost their well-being that become important. In line with Frank Furedi one could wonder whether this focus on the learner (instead of on the student and the school matter) does not lead to a kind of 'psychopedagogy'.[13] The attention is no longer toward the subject matter and what is needed in order to let the students 'meet' the subject matter. The focus is on psychological learning assistance under the banner of individual choices and needs and on avoiding unpleasant tensions. But what remains of the features of the school in this almost exclusive focus on 'the learner'? The learners are increasingly enclosed in their own safe world and therefore there seems to be no longer any opportunity for the school to get students out of that world, that is, to incite relationships between the students and something outside their own world. Even worse, all thresholds and exposures come to be regarded as potentially traumatizing, and of course to be avoided. Precisely in view of making attention and exposure possible it is difficult to imagine a school form without thresholds.

Connected to this intensive psychologization we are confronted with an increasing interest in *entertainment*. This tendency

12 See also Maarten Simons and Jan Masschelein, 'Hatred of Democracy... and of the Public Role of Education? Introduction to the Special Issue on Jacques Rancière', Educational Philosophy and Theory 42, no. 5-6 (2010): 509-22.

13 Frank Furedi, Wasted: Why Education isn't Educating (London: Continuum, 2009).

implies an emphasis on 'feeling good', on amusement and fun at schools, and on avoiding anything that may be boring. Furedi reports on initiatives in the UK to implement techniques from the entertainment industry (e.g. popular television formats) in order to fight boredom in education. But is glueing learners to the screen the same as keeping students' minds on the lesson? The latter implies a particular effort, and some form of attention.

Another tendency is that students are increasingly treated as clients. This *consumerism* has various expressions, from taking into account all kinds of needs up to aggressive marketing in education. One striking aspect being the 'process of choice' of the learner. Choice is everywhere in education today. It seems education's organizing principle and it culminates in the entrepreneurial student who chooses on the basis of talent and by taking into account possible returns. The entrepreneurial student has needs and has to run a business, and getting inter-ested or deeply involved only slows down production. Student's needs are indeed different from the inter-est of the student who evolves slowly by studying and exercising.

The final tendency we wish to mention relates to the banalization of the teacher and lecturer through the increased emphasis on their *expertise* and *professionalism*. Indeed, at all levels teachers are supposed to first of all develop their expertise based on evidence or knowledge of what 'works' (that is, what increases learning outcomes and well-being or adds value). They should start to think of themselves as the experts that manage the learning ability of the student population in view of the production of learning outcomes. As a consequence, they have to embrace the professional virtues of calculation and target-setting and become accountable for their added value (in relation to the students' learning outcomes). The emphasis at all levels on (learning) outcomes or products threatens any possibility of 'free time'. And, foremost, productive professional teachers and their logic of accounting seem to replace the amateur-teachers or school-masters who act out of love and responsibility for the world and new generations.

Time to Conclude

The dis-appearance of the school-form and the acts of suspension, profanation and attention that create 'free time' is not just a far-flung hypothesis but a real challenge, which we have illustrated by pointing at striking tendencies of de-formation. As we stated in the beginning, we increasingly feel that there is no (free) time (and no place,

no matter), or, to put it differently, that we are facing the challenge to reinvent or shape a school form, that is, to make free time, space and matter. There is maybe one more development, besides the tendencies we already mentioned, that strongly challenges this reinvention: ICT and the related creation of so-called digital learning environments and technology-enhanced learning. Indeed the question is becoming a poignant one: whether and how to make or sustain *scholè* in an age of information and communication technologies, of digital technologization and of globalization and prevalence of the instant? What about, to draw on Zygmunt Bauman,[14] the school form in a liquid time? What about attention to things and the world in cyberspace? Perhaps the virtual can function as a new way of making things real, of letting them speak, of provoking thinking. At this point we should be careful not to look for instance at the WWW as a new world — a cyberspace — and to project educational ideas in that world. That is exactly what often happens in the construction of virtual learning environments and the search for even more productive time and space for learning. It is often missionary work aimed at the taming of the wild web and the 'digital natives'. Clearly, there are numerous other attempts to tame the internet, ranging from privatization and identification (user ID, password) to marketing (electronic customer relationship management) and localisation (IP-address). But it would be interesting instead to approach ICT (and the internet, for instance) itself as a school technology, i.e. as a technological and architectural form that makes free time, space and matter possible. As far as these new technologies and architectural forms provoke thinking about 'community', 'friendship', 'communication' or 'corporality', what is at stake is a moment of suspension, profanation and making attentive. Or take the example of hacking. Shouldn't we look at hacking, as far as it seeks to make the grammar of the internet public, as a school example? Maybe there are new school forms today, but if there are, they are outside the field of education and learning as we know it.

14 Zygmunt Bauman, Liquid Times: Living in an Age of Uncertainty **(Cambridge, MA: Polity Press, 2007).**

Part II
Dealing with the Past, Opportunities of the Present

Between Romantic Isolation and Avant-Gardist Adaptation

Bert Taken & Jeroen Boomgaard

In the current debate on the social role of art and the position of the artist, the notion of an elite plays an important part. While there is a tendency to regard the elitist exception as obsolete — a view that seems to legitimize the radical cut-backs in the field of art — there are also those who long for a return of the elite. In such circles people feel, for instance, that the present-day media society has silenced the cultural elites. The success of the democratization movement of the 1960s and 70s supposedly introduced an anti-elitist attitude that can be summed up as 'everyone has an equal voice with the rest'. This is one of the reasons for the disappearance of the distinction between high and low culture. Artists started using elements from popular culture and, aided by new media, have been able to target new audiences that traditionally were not regarded as consumers of culture. According to the same view, our increasing compulsion to consume, and the associated short-term thinking of present-day capitalism, has also influenced the world of the arts, culture, and media. The well-established set of convictions, knowledge, and opinions propagated by the old elite has been undermined and undone by fashionable trends. Also, the digital revolution has immensely increased the speed of communications and greatly diminished the distance between social groups. Whereas the elite symbolised distance, nowadays everyone uses the same social media and anyone's opinion or analysis is just one among many others. We are living in an egalitarian society where elites are mistrusted and challenged. The 'man-in-the-street' has become the norm.[1] This line of thinking presupposes the evident necessity of an elite that leads the various sectors of social life in every aspect and sets the tone in matters of taste. However, it is less evident how this privileged group might be reconstituted. In general, though, the prevailing idea is that isolation is an essential part of it. On their own, isolated from the levelling and mind-numbing influence of the commercially controlled media society, the cultural guides of the future must be prepared for their role as leaders.

This is a familiar reaction, which doesn't make it any less disputable, especially with regard to the present social role and position of visual artists and of art and design education. If we expect artists and designers to be leaders and trendsetters, will they be better able to do so by staying far away from the hype- and commerce-driven media society while preparing themselves for their serious task? In other words, should we start thinking of the 'academy' again in the ancient sense of the word, when it referred to the walled-in garden near Athens where Plato taught his students about the ephemeral

and treacherous nature of everyday reality? The solid education to be given to the new elite in isolation should not only enable them to skilfully produce persuasive images, but also teach them to keep their distance from fashionable trends and assume responsibility as cultural guides. The question, however, is whether a distant elite is the only or most desirable model if we expect more cultural guidance from artists.

The call for a resurrection of the elite may be an obsolete one, but it does confront us with the question of exactly what it is that we expect from artists and how we train them to meet these expectations. Over the last decades, much has changed in the field of visual art. Artists are increasingly involved in many sectors of society and it is impossible to tell what the professional practice of future artists will look like. This makes it difficult to decide what content, skills, and insights are essential in contemporary visual art education. There are no longer clearly defined disciplines and media. Various forms of cross-disciplinary approaches have become routine and even the distinction between art and design is no longer obvious. The new media have produced and are still producing new art forms, continually widening the field of application of visual art. The distinction between art and popular culture has become very blurred as artists combine images and strategies from both areas. The same goes for the sharp distinction between art and science: artistic research has become an accepted domain for artistic activities aimed at acquiring knowledge. Also, as the art world is internationally orientated, it must ask itself for what reality it wishes to train its students. Are they still also being prepared for a role as critical observer of current social developments in a world that is dominated by the commercial market of biennials and art fairs?

The social position of visual art has changed a lot as well. Labelled the 'creative industry', the arts are expected to make a tangible contribution to society, and their success is increasingly being measured in figures and numbers. The special position of the arts definitely seems to be a thing of the past now. All these changes have consequences for how art academies define their task. Not that anyone is clear about what that task is – on the contrary. Art academies still largely seem to rely on the elite model, where the education of artists takes place in social isolation and they simply take the Romantic

1 **For this view, see for instance Henri Beunders, 'Eenzame grazers',** De Groene Amsterdammer **24 February 2011.**

connotations of this model in their stride. When it comes to the arts, the Romantic heritage is obviously still alive and kicking. Therefore, we will first take a closer look at the historical background of visual art education before turning our attention back to the present situation. In doing so, we will concentrate on certain philosophical notions that gave rise to the Romantic view of art and its consequences for art education. Then we will briefly discuss Bauhaus and how Romantic notions influenced the educational philosophy its adherents developed.

The Romantic Revolution

The Romantic revolution of the late 18th century created a new kind of subjectivity. Inspired by the philosophers Kant and Fichte, the Romantics developed an ideal of humanity that had imagination at its core. The gap between the harsh reality of everyday life and the desire to shape life according to one's own feelings and convictions could, according to them, only be bridged by the imagination. This new image of man stressed that each individual is unique, and in doing so it emphatically placed each individual opposite the world in which he or she had to prove their worth. These unique individuals could prove their uniqueness by manifesting themselves in reality in their own, authentic way.

In his philosophy, Kant had placed moral man opposite man as a natural being. On the one hand, man is free to choose for or against good, while on the other hand the concept of 'freedom' is meaningless with regard to establishing knowledge and the truth. In searching for scientific explanations, the process of thinking in causal relationships simply excludes the notion of freedom. In his analysis of the aesthetic, Kant then attempted to link the domain of morale to that of knowledge. In aesthetic perception, we experience the world as having a purpose; and this experience contains the promise that nature and freedom may in the end be reconciled, because the discerning capacity of man enables us to see nature as if it were a purposeful and harmonious whole. Therefore, by analogy, we may assume that there is also an umbrella entity that includes morale. Kant's reconciliation of nature and freedom followed the path of the aesthetic, assigning art a special position in fathoming mankind's destiny.[2]

Fichte radicalizes Kant's notion of subjectivity. He takes the 'I' as an absolute starting point and places it opposite the objective world, the 'Non-I'. Fichte views the 'I' as an activity, a motion that

in the very moment of understanding itself as self-consciousness simultaneously becomes aware of its opposite, the objective reality. In its reflexive activity, the 'I' produces the world as a result of its own mental efforts. In other words, in the very moment that the 'I' thinks of itself as a spiritual being, it also becomes aware of the world as *its* world, as the creation of its own mind. To Fichte, self-consciousness is the foundation of the world and the 'I' is the basic principle of life. The 'I' is freedom and this freedom is unlimited, as everything that presents itself as an objective hindrance to the self-creation of the 'I' ultimately has been produced by the 'I' itself. Fichte's radical subjectivism posits the world as a makeable world. It is only a matter of freeing creative freedom from its chains.[3]

Fichte's ideas were especially embraced by many young intellectuals at the time. Although well-educated, their chances of a social career in the rigid society of Germany were slim, and their hopes for change were shattered when the French Revolution failed. Fichte's ideas offered a philosophical translation of their revolutionary zeal. The Romantics created an alternative reality in their minds, carrying out an imaginary revolution. They withdrew into reflection and contemplation, making art the vehicle of their urge for change. As Novalis said: 'If you cannot turn thoughts into external things, then turn external things into thoughts.'[4] Art was thus endowed with a special, sublime mission. Its task was to articulate the freedom of the individual opposite the limitations of existing reality. What's more, art was thought to be able to bring about a reconciliation between man's creative powers and oppressive conventions, between sensuality and rationality. This reconciliation would bring mankind closer to the essence of life.

All this meant that artists were assigned a special role. They were not only regarded as the geniuses who point the way to an escape from a repressive and inauthentic existence, but their special mission in a sense lent them the status of 'chosen' people. In the words of Friedrich Schlegel, their relationship with mankind was like that of mankind with the rest of creation.[5] Therefore, artists were above society or at least stood to one side of it. In this light,

2 **Kant sets out his art philosophy in** Kritik der Urteilskraft **(Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1974).**
3 **Johann Gottlieb Fichte,** Grundlage der gesammten Wissenschaftslehre 1794 **(Hamburg: Philosophische Bibliothek Felix Meiner Verlag, 1997).**
4 **Novalis, quoted in Rüdiger Safranski,** Romantik: Eine deutsche Affäre **(Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag, 2007), 83.**
5 **See Hugh Honour,** Romanticism **(London: Penguin, 1979), 246.**

the idea that their genius is best developed in solitude is not all that strange. The training of artists — insofar as they needed training at all — had therefore also better take place in isolation.

The ideas of the Romantics at first had no impact at all on the practice of visual art education. In the early 19th century, nearly all of the art academies in Europe adhered to classical principles, meaning that art students spent nearly all of their time copying the works of masters. Only later in the course of that century were some changes made under the influence of Romantic notions, but these did not affect the basic principles of art education. Only much later, in the 1960s, did visual art education become 'Romanticized' and only then did Romantically derived ideas start to largely define educational practice, both in terms of what art was and how art education should be organized.

In the 19th century, the Romantic influence on education manifested itself after the 1820s in the introduction of 'master classes', first in Germany, but later in other countries as well. To overcome the impersonal character of academic schooling, advanced students were given the opportunity of choosing a master and completing the rest of their studies in a personal work relationship with an artist. This change in the educational system was brought about by the influence of the Nazarenes,[6] a group of students at the Vienna Academy who reacted against the classicist view of art and retreated to the Italian countryside to discover true art. True art had its foundation in the depths of the human spirit, where the religious truth of life also manifested itself. Isolated from the world, living in a community that was based on strong personal bonds, artists could learn to express a universal truth in a personal way.

The work of the Nazarenes was greatly appreciated in Germany. Also, their views on art and society fitted in very well with post-Napoleonic endeavours to develop a new national consciousness. As a result, after 1820, most Nazarenes were offered positions at various academies throughout Germany. Their ideas, originating in the Romantic movement and harking back to mediaeval views on the relationship between art and life, led to the large-scale introduction of master classes. This did not change the fundamental organization of art education, but the notion that education — at least for advanced students — should be orientated more towards personal talents was accepted almost everywhere.

From Bauhaus to the 1960s

A true revolution in visual art education did not take place until after the First World War. The debate about the necessity of organizing art education differently and bringing it in line with arts and crafts education had been going on for some time already. The World Fairs had demonstrated that product design was definitely in need of an artistic impulse. After the war, this open attitude toward new initiatives led to the establishing of the Bauhaus school in Weimar in 1919.

Led by initiator and director Walter Gropius, Bauhaus strove to overcome the social isolation of modern artists. Artists should be freed from their 'complacent individuality', in the words of Gropius.[7] Bauhaus wanted to give future artists a broad technical training and make them familiar with the latest industrial developments. The basic idea was that artists could play a truly social role if they applied their artistic qualities to designing people's actual living environments. This required them to work together with industry. By designing new products that could be cheaply manufactured and marketed, the population could be sensitized to aesthetic values. That such an aesthetic education would have positive effects on the community was taken for granted. It also came as no surprise that Gropius considered architecture — that pre-eminent designer of the living environment — to be the mother of all art. This view coincided with the principles of the avant-garde of that era. To them, being an elite no longer meant isolation and distance, but rather assuming a leading role in social developments.

Gropius' aims are not immediately apparent from the Bauhaus founding manifesto, which is still phrased in a language with a strong Romantic flavour. According to Gropius, this was done for tactical reasons.[8] Immediately after the war, young people were full of an idealism that was suspicious of business and of the importance of industry and technology. The manifesto therefore emphasizes the creation of a tightly-knit working community in the sense of the mediaeval *Bauhütte* (workshop) and stresses the general formative

6 **On the Nazarenes, see Herbert Schindler,** Nazarener: Romantischer Geist und christliche Kunst im 19. Jahrhundert **(Regensburg: Pustet, 1982) and Christa Steinle and Max Hollein,** Religion, Macht, Kunst: Die Nazarener **(Cologne: Verlag der Buchhandlung König, 2005).**

7 **See Walter Gropius, 'Manifest und Programm des Staatlichen Bauhauses in Weimar', in Hans M. Wingler,** Das Bauhaus 1919–1933: Weimar, Dessau, Berlin, Dokumente **(Cologne: DuMont, 1975).**

8 **Walter Gropius in a letter to Tomás Madonado, quoted in Rainer Wick,** Bauhaus Pädagogik **(Cologne: DuMont, 1982), 29.**

aspects of the educational programme. It states that what is most important is not art, nor the work, but mankind. The manifesto implicitly rejects a society that places greater value on material goods than on moral development.

Despite Gropius' later explanation for the Romantic tone of the founding manifesto, these views definitely did play an important part in the history of Bauhaus. Some of the avant-garde artists associated with the Institute, among them Johannes Itten, Paul Klee and Wassily Kandinsky, held decidedly Romantic views on art. In their eyes, art was directed at the mental and spiritual side of human life and its most important mission was to reveal the transcendental order. This line of thinking will, however, have hardly any influence on the way in which education is organized, as it is structured around workplaces focused on practical training in the handling of materials and the mastering of technical work processes. The ultimate goal of the training programme is to design new products, and to achieve this, the mental and spiritual possibilities of art are not really a necessity. The contradiction that this brings to light is characteristic of the new role that art wishes to take on. Artists want to be part of social reality and bridge the gap between art and life, but at the same time this mission cannot originate in society itself. A true vanguard advances towards a better world, and it's the artists who know where to find it.

Bauhaus has had a profound influence. Especially in the United States and Northern Europe after World War II, art education at many academies was restructured according to the basic principles of Bauhaus. The main idea was that the gaze of artists-in-training should be directed at current design problems. In an interdisciplinary-orientated study programme in which the guiding principles are a general formative first year for all students and a curriculum that is interrelated with the current social context, the final goal is improvement of the visual culture. The institutes that are inspired by Bauhaus regard artists in the first place as designers of the visual environment, a task they should carry out together with industry and government.

In that same period, however, artists themselves took an increasingly radical turn away from the current society. Horrified by the mass destruction that had taken place and disappointed by the lack of true social change, many artists once more turned to the Romantic ideas at their most extreme. During the 1950s and 1960s, the debate on art and culture was dominated by a strongly Romantic-orientated vocabulary. It was only now that the Romantic revolution in art education firmly took hold. Although this tendency was manifested in many other countries as well, we will discuss only the Dutch situation here.

In the 1950s, the Dutch government found that there was a gap between art and the people, and proposed to bridge this gap by offering 'artistic education' to everyone and persuading artists to descend from their 'ivory towers'. The notion of 'free expression' now dominated the thinking about art by both the government and the artists. The idea was that civil society suppresses people's creative powers. If there was to be a free society and a New Man, we had to call upon the 'unspoiled souls of children and artists', as Willem Sandberg said.[9] All forms of education should focus on the free development of the individual, and naturally this especially applied to art education. After all, artists were pre-eminently capable of breaking out of established frameworks of perception and diagnosing the current social order. Their independent outlook and free creativity could lead the way in establishing social change. Art education should therefore take place in the margins of society. To prevent the corruption of their 'innocence', artists-to-be should not be overly confronted with the reality outside the academy. And the study programme itself should contain as few obstacles as possible, in order not to frustrate the process of free self-fulfilment. The academy was seen as a sanctuary and the artist as a freely creating individual.

Art as Criticism

Since the 1970s, society has undergone profound changes. We now live in a media society – or rather, we have become 'mediatized' beings. This means that we view and experience the world to a great extent through the agency of technical media. The advent of the Internet has not only greatly speeded up and globalized all means of communication – which has far-reaching consequences in and of itself – but in a more fundamental way, we have become part of a computer-driven complex that envelops us like an ecosystem. In today's world, no factory would function and not a single plane would take off anymore if worldwide communications networks were to fail. As W. Daniel Hillis says: 'Welcome to the Age of Entanglement.'[10]

9 **Willem Sandberg, quoted in Roel Pots,** Cultuur, koningen en democraten: Overheid en cultuur in Nederland **(Nijmegen: SUN, 2000), 534, note 180.**

10 **See W. Daniel Hillis, 'Het tijdperk van verstrengeling',** Hoe verandert internet je manier van denken? **ed. John Brockman, trans. Tijmen Roozenboom (Amsterdam/Utrecht: Maven Publishing, 2011), 19-22**

The art students of today have grown up in this age. They feel connected with the global world of art and do not regard art as a separate segment of life in which higher values and insights are being articulated. For them, visual art is about images; and never before have so many images been so universally accessible. This raises the question of what the specific significance of an artistic image is within the context of the present-day media society, and of course also what the specific significance of the makers of those images, the artists, is. And how do the academies deal with this new reality? How do they define their relationship with and attitude towards the media world and the entertainment industry?

The prevailing theoretical discourse on art education is still largely determined by a Romantic notion of art, typically regarding art as a separate domain from other social activities. Art is autonomous, which literally means that it makes its own laws; and this autonomy is interpreted in a radical way. Especially Romantic is the notion that art has a higher truth to announce, and that revealing this truth is its core nature. Art is criticism, criticism from 'beyond'. Direct involvement with social activities would corrupt the role that art has to play and would annihilate the special value of the artistic image.

However, the developments that we mentioned earlier and that define the current situation in the field of visual art demonstrate that we need a different notion of art to do justice to these developments. Art education is still focusing too much on the individual work and not enough on the prevailing image culture, or, in other words, it is focusing too much on the makers and their personal musings and not enough on the spectator and the context in which the image is functioning. Each new image is dropped into an ocean of other images of all kinds: artistic, journalistic, advertising, and hobbyist images. There is no longer any hierarchy among images and the distinction between 'high' and popular culture has been lifted. Nowadays all images are 'material', lending themselves to reproduction, processing and rearrangement. Within this framework, Romantic insights have lost their meaning.

The above shows that the call to have the education of this presumably essential cultural elite take place in isolation and seclusion fits remarkably well within the Romantic discourse on art. The argument has three elements: the old cultural elite has gone, and we suffer from this loss; an elite should play a critical and guiding role; and a new elite should be educated in isolation. All of these elements correspond with fundamental Romantic principles. The question is

what exactly is meant by 'elite', 'isolation' and 'critical' and whether these concepts can be defined differently and more adequately.

The concept of a 'cultural elite' is rather broad. It throws together people who are active or have expertise in very different domains of culture. They are specialists and professionals that are well informed about the most current developments and problems in specific areas within the cultural field. However, the idea of a 'cultural elite' is mainly associated with some sort of moral authority. It does not primarily refer to the knowledge and experience of those involved, but to their implied status and aura, which reach far beyond the boundaries of the profession. It is the moral aspect of the concept that has lost meaning. Within an egalitarian society such as ours, that moral authority is no longer accepted at face value, especially not if it claims status with regard to fields outside of its own profession. The question is whether this is regrettable. From a professional perspective, cultural elites still exist: there will always be people who, based on insight and professionalism, take up special and authoritative positions in their particular field, and these elites will always be there. They will not, however, be guiding to society as a whole but at most within their own specialism, and even then, probably only for a limited time.

The idea of wanting to educate new specialists in isolation does sound — especially in view of the current, rapidly developing media world — rather like a contradiction in terms. Of course it may be useful to withdraw from the turmoil of social life for shorter or longer periods in order to concentrate or reflect, but that is not what this is about. The intended isolation, 'far away from the media', is not only an illusion nowadays, it also demonstrates a nostalgia for the 'high' culture that was so lamentably lost and for the pretension of being able to prescribe from the sidelines what course society should take.

The notion that artists should play a critical role in society is certainly still defensible, but it is very important to consider the nature of such criticism. In itself, the fact that visual art has become part of an overall visual culture does not imply that it would no longer have a critical function. However, such criticism should then not be seen as commentary coming from a neutral or detached, let alone exalted position. Artists can most certainly be the critical conscience of the current visual culture. Their critical contribution can be to show or make tangible that which is excluded by the prevailing perspective on the world. Not by basing themselves on grand ideals, but by being practical, involved, and focused, and by visualising what is

not being mentioned in common reality. Criticism should be given from within, and as image specialists, artists can assume this role from their relatively autonomous position.

Redefining the guiding role of the arts seems to go more in the direction of an ideal of the avant-gardes than back to the Romantic notions that still prevail in art education. More of a vanguard that is fully aware of social developments and from there tries to find the best way forward. And yet, this position also has its drawbacks. Art that emphatically commits itself to progress and 'the best possible solution' is not only prone to be hijacked by goals it never intended, but can also be easily called to account when the effect it predicts does not occur. In other words, while the self-selected instrumentalization of art does free artists from their isolation, at the same time it neatly places them in the category of the 'creative industry', where criticism has become a commodity. Art academies ought to be places where the function of artistic production is discussed within the framework of wider cultural developments. In this debate, the academies must ask themselves which values they regard as central, while they cannot escape from extensively paying attention to the growing influence and significance of the art market, the entertainment industry, and popular culture. A critical reflection on these phenomena should be part of the curriculum – not to haughtily dismiss them, but to understand their mechanisms and attraction. Only then does a critical approach to the visual products of mass culture become possible. But first, the last vestiges of the Romantic notion of art have to be cleared out. Handed-down remnants from the Romantic discourse can only play a role in this as long as they are not copied indiscriminately. They do represent a striving towards 'a different world', and this endeavour must keep acting as a counterbalance against an overdose of social reality. This will not produce a new elite. But then again, that notion is now definitely obsolete.

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Chain Reactions

Stepping Backwards or Escaping Forward?

Daniel Muzyczuk

More than two years have passed since the Congress of Polish Culture, which took place in Cracow in September 2009. The event's name alluded to similar past gatherings of people actively involved in shaping the landscape of Polish cultural life, including the original Congress, held in 1910, as well as the most famous one, organized by Solidarity in December 1981 and subsequently interrupted by the introduction of martial law. The changes that had taken place since those times had an obvious impact on the recent event's agenda, as well as influencing the Polish government to initiate the congress in order to streamline cultural management. The importance of the event was stressed by its organizers: 'Five Congresses of Polish Culture have taken place so far. Each of them occurred in unique historical circumstances and was convened on the initiative of moral and intellectual authority figures. Each referred to the most important issues contemporarily at hand, acknowledging the growing role of culture and its value, which a nation needs not only to develop, but also to change and enrich itself.'

The real reason for convening the sixth Congress, as observed later by commentators, was an attempt to introduce a document known as the 'Hausner plan for culture'. Drawn up by Jerzy Hausner, a politician and economist, former Minister of Economy and Labour, the document was to diagnose the condition of Polish culture and suggest recommendations for future improvements. Mr Hausner described the existing situation as being stuck in the past and the approach as generally out-dated. According to him, 'Generally speaking, the original principles of the socialist workplace are still in place, though there are exceptions. Some museums, theatres and galleries are managed in a modern way, trying to meet the public's needs and to raise their own funds. However, most continue to function as in the old days, idly waiting for the viewer to kindly turn up. Our culture suffers from a split-personality syndrome, with some institutions functioning according to free-market principles, and others being publicly funded as during the socialist era. This creates adverse situations where, on the one hand, people work at public institutions for next to nothing while, on the other hand, they have to work for TV, film or other clients on the side to earn an extra income'.

Mr Hausner came up with a very simple remedy for this: cultural institutions should have the same fund-raising possibilities as non-governmental organizations. The treatment, therefore, is the same for culture as it is for other segments of the economy, namely, a neoliberal policy of removing all obstacles that hinder the development of the free market. These conclusions were found revolutionary and divided the cultural community. The main point of contention was that Mr Hausner was a professor of economics, who did not necessarily take into account the specificity of contemporary culture and the sector's organizational and funding models that had been time-proven in many European countries. For this reason, due to the lack of unanimous acceptance for the 'Hausner plan', the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage abandoned plans for a quick and thorough reform and returned to consultations on the matter.

A competition-oriented strategy for culture is also present in recommendations for artistic education, creating an interesting blend of economic and artistic terminology:

> In the complex architecture of the modern economy, market segments functioning in the sectors of culture and art become a unique laboratory for innovation. Reflections on leisure-time economy underline the importance of market segments that aim to satisfy cultural and educational needs. The 'leisure-time industry' serves all those human activities that are not classified as professional work or housekeeping – from tourism and leisure, through book and magazine reading, to computer games. Artistic education can be viewed primarily in the context of the state's duty to ensure the development of national culture, and the active protection and popularisation of national heritage. There exists, however, a complementary perspective (whose significance will continually keep growing) according to which artistic education becomes a basis for the development of many areas of the 'leisure-time industry' and its condition affects a country's overall economic growth. In the next few years we will see huge advances in TV and related technologies due to the transition to a digital format, which, combined with the ongoing

> progress in the development of sound and image recording technologies and their rapidly growing price availability, will see an accelerated rise in the number of available applications. A significant increase in demand for employees with art-related skills can be expected, especially in music and the visual arts. The software designer is already one of the most sought-after professionals on the market and his or her ideal background should combine a comprehensive artistic and IT-related education.... It is therefore necessary not only to popularize artistic education but also to connect it more closely with related environments, as well as with segments of the modern economy and the third sector. It seems that artists can autonomously draw a lot of satisfaction from this kind of work while achieving sound results in their artistic work. Developing artistic sensitivity is not a goal solely for professional artists. In the above context, art gains yet another dimension, translating into the success or failure of whole nations in their confrontation with the challenges of the global economy.[1]

The above quotation from the Report on the Condition of Culture in Artistic Education harmonizes with the words of Łukasz Gorczyca and Michał Kaczyński, owners of Raster Gallery, who in the late 1990s keenly watched the work of Warsaw Academy of Fine Arts students. Gorczyca and Kaczyński's critique of the teaching methods and their effects was almost as ruthless as the Futurists' manifestoes:

> A year ago we shouted: Burn the academy! Now we are saying: Don't burn it, privatize it! Let the professors save it. Let them create the same kindergarten for dozens of snobbish, asocial, thoughtless, degenerate young people − but let

> us not pay for it! Such an institution should be wholly commercial and − like other types of entertainment − heavily taxed. Let them pay for those who have a great time for five years (until they eventually develop cirrhosis of the liver).[2]

This strange coincidence of not so much the tone as the direction of expressing disappointment, marks two moments meaningful to artistic education: the moment before the introduction of the Bologna Process, and the point when — ten years later — it seems that further efforts need to be made for artistic education to become effective.

The planned reform of artistic education is part of a larger overhaul of higher education in Poland. The report's conclusions about the condition of art schools and its recommendations will become clearer when we look at the situation in a wider context.

Barbara Kudrycka, the Minister of Science and Higher Education, is convinced that the practice of science and higher education as a whole has to become part of the productive forces. The first to benefit from the planned reforms will be scientists, whose research results can be measured according to objective criteria. They will be able to convert their research results into commercial success. The universities they represent will receive more public funding, which will result in the abuse of the process of generating innovation, as well as the marginalization of many other disciplines, not only within the humanities or social sciences but among abstract fields as well.

Another proposition that has been gaining ground recently, and for obvious reasons, is the constantly recurring idea of introducing a form of payment for tertiary studies. Allegedly, guidelines are being issued stipulating that sooner or later — depending on how intense the protests are — all students will be paying tuition fees covering at least partially the cost of their education. In order to help them pay the fees, students will be eligible to apply for scholarships or loans. The first step towards introducing co-payment is the idea of making students pay if they enter a dual degree programme. This would be particularly harmful for the humanities, where the lines

1 **Krzysztof Pawłowski et al.,** Raport o stanie kultury w obszarze szkolnictwa artystycznego, **w www.kongreskultury.pl/library/File/RaportSzkolnictwo/szkolnictwo_art_raport_w.pelna%281%29.pdf (accessed 26 Sep 2011).**

2 **Raster, 'Mali profesorowie, mali studenci, mała sztuka', in Jakub Banasiak, ed.,** Raster. Macie swoich krytyków: Antologia tekstów, **Warsaw 2009.**

of division between faculties are quite blurry. The argumentation used to back the idea of co-payment is extremely hypocritical. It is claimed, for instance, that tuition fees should be introduced because most students come from higher-income families.

As we can see, neoliberal ideology reigns supreme not only in faculties related to economics or exact-sciences — the humanities too are becoming an attractive prey for the knowledge-based economy. The art school seems less susceptible to this trend owing to two things: its conservative structure and the fact that it is usually split into at least two sub-structures: the faculties of Painting and Sculpture, which comprise the school's traditional foundations. The weakness of these is well known and can, of course, be described simply with the word 'conservative', but some professors like to use more poetic terms, such as 'genius', 'skill', 'artistry', 'mastery' or the 'master-student relationship'. Let us, however, examine more closely the traditional art school's shortcomings in order to be able to reflect on the necessary remedies.

Firstly, there exists no effective replacement mechanism for the teaching staff — the lecturers and professors. Moreover, students are not allowed to grade their educators. It is clear, therefore, that for the benefit of artistic education a procedure should be introduced to replace professors and lecturers employed for a specific period of time and to facilitate genuine competition for academic posts that would also include a staff appraisal system. Another weakness, stemming from the concept that art schools should only teach talented candidates, is a recruitment system based on appraising pre-exam works and testing the candidates' manual skills. This obviously favours those with manual skills without appreciating such attributes as intellect, knowledge or even creativity. We should note at this point that such a situation is not exclusive to art schools, for they are but a small part of a much larger system.

The prospective art school student is expected to attend a fine arts secondary school. There are a total of 67 of those in Poland, including 22 fine arts high schools, 41 fine arts lyceums, and four non-public schools. When we add the existing seven academies of fine arts,[3] we will have an almost complete image of artistic education in Poland. And when we also include the Association of Polish Fine Artists (ZPAP) and its galleries scattered throughout the country, the picture of the conservative Polish art system is complete. This network lives its own parallel life, far from the more established art system focused around big-city public galleries and museums, as well

as commercial galleries. In fact, it is a hermetic structure, in which the fine arts high schools' teaching staff is comprised mainly of academy graduates, who show their work in ZPAP galleries.

The purpose of this digression is to show that, in reality, the way would-be students are eliminated is a result of several factors but at the same time the academy often does not search at all for those we would expect to become major international artists. This does not mean, of course, that the old art system and the one that has developed since 1989 do not intertwine — and the academy is a perfect example of that. Equipped even with such an outlined and very general knowledge of the selection process, we should not be surprised that the faculties are dominated by a conservative, theoretical/scholastic teaching model, based chiefly on training manual and memory skills. Moreover, few among the teaching staff see any need for teaching disciplines unrelated to art, such as sociology, anthropology, modern philosophy or political thought.

We should take into account that the authors of the report quoted above have created a document devoted to artistic education as a whole, covering secondary and tertiary schools of fine arts, but also the whole structure of music and theatre education. Such an approach is understandable if we remember that all those schools ultimately report to the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage. Even if the entire seventy-page document was drawn up to recommend ways of reforming artistic schooling, the recommendations are essentially highly general and not tailored to the specificity of the different fields of so-called 'artistic education'.

The problem becomes even more apparent when we consider the differences between the different academy departments. Those devoted to painting and sculpture, which stress the importance of traditional skills, remain most influential and their functioning has a very significant impact on the Ministry of Culture's employees' general perception of artistic education as such. It is the sculpture departments, however, where the new media 'disease' is usually born. Creating a small chair of intermedia within the sculpture department and waiting for the number of applicants to rise high enough to justify establishing a separate department is a frequent practice. Chairs of intermedia have been created within sculpture departments in Cracow, Gdańsk, and Poznań. The latter has now been transformed into the Multimedia Communications Department, which encom-

3 Plus the Poznań University of Arts (editor's note).

passes the chairs of intermedia, animation, and photography.

Leon Tarasewicz, as he says himself, has built the identity of his Guest Studio at the Warsaw Academy of Fine Arts (WASP) in opposition to the academy itself. Mr Tarasewicz strives to go beyond the routine patterns of art education. Still lifes are arranged in such a way in his studio that students have to change their way of thinking in order to be able to paint them at all. There is, for instance, a palm tree surrounded by a pond with live ducks, or a blonde woman in a white dress lying in a white coffin filled with white flowers. While the studio's curriculum does include references to tradition, this is more in the way of background knowledge. Mr Tarasewicz encourages his students to search within themselves, tradition, and culture.

Prof Grzegorz Kowalski's Audiovisual Space Studio curriculum at the Warsaw academy's Faculty of Sculpture, in turn, is inspired by the pedagogical practices of Jerzy Jarnuszkiewicz and Oskar Hansen, and the writings of Mieczysław Porębski (especially those on the audio-visual civilization). The main postulates here include an individual approach to each student, freedom of thought, and learning together with the students. At the Kowalnia (the 'smithy', a popular moniker referring to both the professor's last name and to a blacksmith's shop), one of the primary goals of the teaching process is for the student to actually become independent of the teacher. The studio became genuinely significant in the mid-1990s, when it bred a whole generation of artists interested in critical practices, such as Artur Żmijewski, Katarzyna Kozyra or Paweł Althamer. Moreover, the freedom of form characteristic to Kowalski's work as well as his students' has proved a powerful inspiration for other artists.

The most significant changes have taken place at the Poznań Academy of Fine Arts, which in 2010 was renamed the Poznań University of Arts. The reason for the name change was pretty straightforward: an 'academy' ranks lowest in the hierarchy of graduate schools, whereas the Poznań school has 102 full professors and grants doctoral titles in six disciplines, thus meeting all criteria for being officially recognised as a 'university'. One of the more startling aspects of this situation is that the Polish Sejm (parliament), when evaluating the proposed name change, studied its potential impact on the area of 'economic competitiveness and business activity, including the functioning of companies'.[4] The parliamentary experts concluded that these areas would not be significantly affected by the name change, which, in the context of the recommendations for artistic education drawn up by the Congress of Culture and a general trend towards

analysing all creative disciplines in market terms, sounds slightly out of place. We should not, however, be deceived by this apparent paradox. Evaluating the name change's potential impact was hardly possible at all. An evaluation like that would need to be conducted in a highly detailed manner, whereas the insignificance of the change doesn't seem to justify the carrying out of such a precise assessment.

The Poznań University of Arts is an example of the neoliberal principle at work in the culture sector. We would be right to say the same of the general transition we are undergoing but, as usual with generalizations, such an approach would be too narrow-minded. On the other hand, the advance towards an academy that is the site of knowledge production aids the proliferation of cracks resulting from the creation of intermedia departments, and only changes the predisposition of the general conservative distortion present in most of the schools and departments. Marek Wasilewski, head of the Video and Installation Studio in the Faculty of Visual Communication, told me that the step can be viewed as an escape forward, meaning that every academy in Poland is bound to move towards the knowledge-production model, with Poznań having chosen a path that will allow its University of Arts to pave the way and participate in the creation of the necessary framework for all other academies that would like to join the elite 'university club'.

The transition, of course, has been made possible by the introduction of the Bologna Process with all its consequences, but is also a visible sign of the twists and turns occurring within the structure of the academy itself. The reforms initiated by the Poznań University of Arts may seem slight and insignificant, but in fact they are responsible for the students' artistic successes. Above all though, it is the student/professor relationship that has changed significantly; the conservative system in which the student functioned in the studio as a guest, hosted by the hospitable professor, had to give way to the model in which the student is the host and the professor only visits the studio to check on the work progress. This approach to the art school studio helps to produce a far more responsible attitude towards work.

A slow, yet noticeable change can be observed in the way artistic education is being pushed forward, even though the forces behind this process are very much varied. One of those forces

4 Draft bill on renaming the Poznań Academy of Fine Arts of 4 February 2010, after: http://bip.mkidn.gov.pl/media/docs/proj_us_asp_proj.pdf (accessed 26 Sep 2011).

becomes evident when we read official statements and analyses. The picture of artistic education they convey is of a cluster of institutions that are obviously a relic of the socialist era, but can be transformed into one of the main driving engines of a neoliberal economy and knowledge-based society. This is a language capable of attracting large investors who could support artistic work. The reform's potential long-term effects are evident: the commercialization of artistic education with all its consequences, such as the introduction of tuition fees (today still prevented by the constitutional provision that guarantees free education), and the discrimination against fine arts faculties in favour of graphic design as well as interior design departments. The second force responsible for the transformation at hand can still be found in intermedia departments. The focus is more on structural changes within the art school, where the emphasis is on strengthening its own field of study, which, with the structure being ever-shifting as it is, affects the academy's functioning as a whole. Even if the reasons, methods, and goals of each of these forces are completely different, both strive to turn Polish art schools into modern educational facilities significant for the cultural landscape and competitive towards fine arts academies abroad. We should be aware that the alliance — as reflected in the language used by both sides — is at best temporary and sooner or later will sever. This is quite obvious given the actors' goals. Officials representing the Polish neoliberal government are planning for it to gradually withdraw from its traditional role in culture production and leave the regulatory function to the market itself, which will support disciplines such as computer-aided design, advertising, marketing and media. The 'intra-system' reformers, in turn, are more interested in responding to the students' needs and fostering in them the kinds of skills and ways of thinking that will help them enter the world of professional art. The only point where the two sides' goals converge is where the conservative fraction of the academy opposes them both. It has taken ten years of the Bologna Process to change the way public officials perceive and talk about artistic education. Until recently, this point of convergence was not evident at all and now, suddenly, we all feel astonished when hearing a certain harmony in these typically differing voices.

Art, Research, Entertainment

Dieter Lesage

When speaking about an 'age of entertainment' in which we supposedly live and when addressing the question of what it means to teach art in this age of entertainment, the assumption seems to be that there is a clash, or at least some friction, between art and entertainment, and/or between teaching and entertainment. The issue that will not be addressed here — which doesn't mean it isn't an issue — is whether there isn't also a clash, or at least some friction, between teaching and art. Teaching art is implicitly presented as a solidly established institution that seems to be encountering specific problems in this age of entertainment. Although one may also want to question whether 'teaching art' as such isn't a problematic undertaking in any age, our focus here will be on the relationship between the contemporary art academy as an established institutional context for the teaching of art, and entertainment. More specifically, I will address the institutional implications of the emerging discourse about artistic research on the relationship between teaching art and entertainment. We will have to confront the bitter truth that the research paradigm, as it has been embraced willy-nilly by art academies all over post-Bologna Europe and beyond, does not necessarily guarantee a reflective art practice that is both politically and socially aware. Quite to the contrary, the research paradigm risks being hijacked by an agenda that wants the art academies to become an unthinking part of the creative industries sector.

It could be argued that the major challenge for those who teach art in the age of entertainment is not how to make serious matters popular, but how to see the seriousness of popular matters. However, both challenges may, in the end, come down to the same thing and that is that they actually confirm the hegemony of entertainment, both as form and content. Indeed, what else does it mean to say that we should see the seriousness of popular matters than that entertainment today is hegemonic as far as the production of 'content' is concerned? Moreover, we can no longer think of research as such as a guarantee for seriousness, simply because entertainment today is as much, if not more so, based on research as is teaching. While teaching based on research is seen as a guarantee of its academic character and level, chances are high that the production of entertainment, as it is also based on research, will be considered an academically legitimate way of teaching art. All this implies that teaching art in our age of entertainment is, among other things, characterized by a struggle between two different concepts of research.

The ways in which the age of entertainment affects the teaching of art tend to be quite varied, depending on the specific art fields involved. For example, the research paradigm as it has been introduced in European higher art education together with the Bologna Process tends to be embraced rather differently in a media arts study course than in a visual arts study course, although both types of study courses are commonly seen as belonging to the realm of higher arts education. While media arts study courses tend to focus on technology-driven research, visual arts study courses tend to focus on content-driven research. Whereas, if we adopt a classical distinction, media arts study courses commit themselves mainly to practice-based research, visual arts study courses commit themselves mainly to practice-led research. Whereas in media arts study courses, teachers and students explore the artistic possibilities of the latest media, both software and hardware, in visual arts study courses teachers and students explore the artistic implications of the latest theories. Of course this is just a scheme in order to be able to begin to address certain issues, a scheme that is only there to be immediately deconstructed. Indeed, depending on specific power struggles between different types of actors at the level of the individual institutions of higher art education offering one or both of these types of study courses, one may also see exceptions, hybrid situations, or even quite the opposite of what is stated above. For instance, precisely because Hollywood is the marketing model in the world out there, there is more than one film school that teaches according to a model that is anti-Hollywood. Therefore, a focus on content-driven research can be observed in many audio-visual arts study courses that are trying to break away from the representational hegemony of the Hollywood model. It would be quite erroneous to describe teaching in film schools in general as succumbing to the rules of entertainment. Often, quite the contrary seems to be the case. On the other hand, some visual arts study courses seem to be focussed not so much on content, but rather on the fastest way to succeed as an artist in the market. One could very well argue that a sound artistic education needs both types of research, but it seems very difficult to strike the right balance. The age of entertainment is a less comfortable context for content-driven research than for technology-driven research, and therefore technology-driven research seems to thrive better today.

In the early years of the so-called Bologna Process, which was launched in 1999 with the Bologna Declaration by European Ministers of Higher Education, the primary interest lay with the introduction of the bachelor and master cycles in the higher

education institutions of all the participating countries in Europe. One of the official reasons for launching the Bologna Process was the heterogeneous organization of European higher education, as it used to be structured in very different ways in each European country. Not only were there almost as many titles or degrees as there were European countries, there were also considerable differences in workload between similar studies in different countries. In order to enhance the transnational mobility of students, teachers, researchers and academic workers throughout Europe, a basic common structure for higher education study courses in Europe seemed called for that would allow for the transnational comparability, acceptability and validity of university degrees. It would allow academics with a degree obtained in Sweden or Finland to apply for a job in France. It would allow students with a Spanish Bachelor's Degree to continue their Master Studies in the Netherlands. It would allow people with an Italian Master's Degree to apply for a doctoral grant in the UK. It was even said that transnational mobility would become an integral part of the study path of a European student, according to the slogan 'Bachelor at home, Master abroad': after having obtained a Bachelor's Degree in one's home country, the typical European student would go abroad for at least one year in order to obtain a Master's Degree in another country.[1] Through its philosophy of enhanced mobility the Bologna Process presented itself as a tool for improving international relations and strengthening intercultural understanding. In its choice for the titles 'Bachelor' and 'Master' for the first two cycles of university studies throughout Europe, continental European higher education was obviously also conforming itself to the existing structure of Anglo-American higher education. European policymakers must have thought that imitating some of the features of its main competitor was the best way for Europe to become the world's largest knowledge economy in 2010, as the so-called Lisbon Strategy calls for.

Like the German sociologist Richard Münch, and against the self-promoting narrative of mobility and multiculturalism of the Bologna Process, I hold the idea that the Bologna Process was launched mainly to serve capitalist interests, rather than meet intrinsic academic or scientific needs.[2] However, I also believe that it is possible to redirect the Bologna Process away from capitalist interests. If Karl Marx could say that capitalism is better than feudalism, if Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt in their worldwide communist bestseller *Empire* can say that Empire is better than the nation-state, then one

can say that Bologna's 'academic capitalism', as Richard Münch calls it, is better than Europe's former academic feudalism.[3] By saying – in a way that is intentionally as provocative as Marx' 'plea' for capitalism – that Bologna's academic capitalism is better than pre-Bologna academic feudalism, one can regard Bologna as a machine that destroys idiosyncratic national educational structures that do not necessarily serve the interests of either students, teachers or researchers. It is true that the Bologna Process establishes a kind of academic Empire, constituted by a growing transnational network of academic institutions and its sub-networks. Nevertheless, the best way to defeat Bologna is to allow it to try to establish itself. The transnational multitude of students, teachers and researchers who since a few years find themselves in similar situations and have been provided by the Bologna newspeak with a whole vocabulary with which they can share their experiences beyond national boundaries, may at one point or another redirect the capitalist orientation of the Bologna Process. As a matter of fact, the pressure of transnational students bodies has already been effective in pushing European higher education policymakers to adopt a more social implementation of the whole Process.[4]

The main reason why I do not endorse the total refusal to engage in the Bologna Process is that besides the maddening bureaucratic e-work that makes Bologna so infamous, it also meant the long-due introduction of research into the mission of art academies all over Europe. Whereas in pre-Bologna times, art academies had been mainly places of teaching, the Bologna Process opens up a discursive space in which art academies can begin to understand themselves also as laboratories of artistic research. Of course, as the sciences lay claim to the definition of research, many people working at art academies sincerely thought that introducing research at art academies meant that academies had to become more scientific. This is still a very widespread and persistent misunderstanding of the so-called academization process in which the art academies

1 **See e.g. Klaus Jung, 'Was fordert Kunsthochschulen heraus?', in** Who is Afraid of Master of Arts? **ed. Annette Hollywood and Barbara Wille (Berlin: Internationale Gesellschaft der Bildenden Künste, 2007), 36-37.**

2 **See Richard Münch,** Globale Eliten, lokale Autoritäten: Bildung und Wissenschaft unter dem Regime von PISA, McKinsey & Co **(Frankfurt, Suhrkamp, 2009).**

3 **See: Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt,** Empire **(Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000).**

4 **For a quite different version of my argument, see my essay 'Who's Afraid of Artistic Research?', in** A Portrait of the Artist as a Researcher: The Academy and the Bologna Process**, ed. Dieter Lesage and Kathrin Busch, AS no. 179 (Antwerp, MuHKA, 2007), 84-93.**

have engaged themselves. I would like to be very clear about this: for art academies, the academization process is absolutely not about becoming more scientific; it is about becoming more... artistic. Indeed, the academization process should be seen as a thorough reflexion on the mission of art academies. Just as most universities consider it an important part of their mission to engage in top scientific research, art academies should be the places of the most advanced artistic research.

In a very basic sense, to portray the artist as a researcher is one way among many to problematize a still widespread popular understanding of art as merely irreflective, spontaneous, intuitive, etc. This shouldn't lead us to think that intuition or spontaneity are not constitutive of research, whether scientific or artistic. Rather it should remind us of the fact that decisive moments of intuition that may lead to scientific discoveries or artistic creations only occur across a long horizon of time spent on careful reflection, patient investigation, and rigorous experimentation. There is no doubt that flashes of insight, moments of vision or whatever one wishes to call them, occasionally may lead to a dazzling acceleration of artistic or scientific processes. It is understandable that the spectacular character of these moments captures the imagination of outsiders more than the boring rituals of the artistic or scientific profession that they may interrupt. There is no doubt either, however, that a popular fixation on these moments, no matter how constitutive and important they may be, has led to a considerably distorted portrait of the artist as well as of the scientist in popular imagination. As far as the artist is concerned the prevalence of this popular misconception may well explain why until some years ago a doctorate in the arts seemed something foolish. Indeed, a wide horizon of time — which is what the doctorate is in an abstract sense — seemed incompatible with the idea of art as something non-reflective, spontaneous, intuitive, etc. Even today, it is a real political challenge to give artists time: most people seem to believe that to give artists time can only mean allowing them to spend even more time in bars.

Our understanding of the artist as a researcher is not a definition we try to impose on the artist. Rather, it is how many artists over the last fifty years have been describing themselves, either implicitly or explicitly. Over the last five decades, artists have been describing their work as involving an investigation into..., as a research on..., even to the point where they argued that the investigation or the research process as such was artistically much more important than all its even-

tual output in the form of performances, exhibitions, or art works. For those who know — and we all do — under how much pressure researchers today are to produce output, it may be quite ironic to be reminded of the fact that the self-description of artists as researchers was usually accompanied by a strong opposition against tendencies to evaluate the usefulness of artistic funding through output evaluation.[5] It seems as if artists must have thought that the image of the researcher would be helpful in order to explain that art is primarily about a process of reflection, of questioning, of thinking, not about its eventual output. The self-description of the artist as researcher may have been nurtured by a Romantic image of the researcher, who, entirely divested of any material interest, has all the time of the world to struggle with problems or questions just for the sake of intellectual struggle and the little intrinsic pleasures that come with it. Of course as a researcher or as someone who knows about the actual unromantic state of research today, one could take quite some cynical pleasure from unmasking the poor naiveté of the artist who still believes that researchers are primarily driven by an intrinsic interest in the questions and problems they are dealing with. However, one could also adopt a very different attitude: to be thankful that artists, through their naive pre- or anti-neoliberal self-description as researchers, have in fact been trying to save the idea of the autonomous researcher. In the same vein, the institution of the doctorate in the arts should be welcomed and applauded as an incredible chance to reinstall at academies and universities a space of autonomous reflection, which seems under threat, if it is not already lost, in the science departments of many universities. Often, scientists are supposed to subscribe to the idea that they are only good scientists if they are able to develop an idea that can be valorised and sold as a product on the market, ideally by spin-off firms, which will then be happy to welcome the scientist as a well-earning member of its executive board. In our view, the doctorate in the arts is to be defended as a space of autonomy within an institution whose autonomy is severely under threat. To portray the artist as a researcher is nothing more, but certainly nothing less either, than a plea to give the artist the unproductive time needed to become productive in an innovative way. Innovative production can only emerge across a long horizon of time.

5 On the question of measuring artistic research output, see my essay 'Who's Afraid of Artistic Research? On Measuring Artistic Research Output', Art & Research: A Journal of Ideas, Contexts and Methods **2, no. 2 (2009) online journal: www.artandresearch.org.uk/v2n2/lesage.html.**

Although academics involved in the establishment of the rules for the doctorate in the arts did pay attention to the demand that the new doctorate should respect the specificity of an artistic education — to the extent that they accepted the idea that artists present a portfolio of their work as a doctorate — many of them have fiercely defended and still defend the idea that a doctorate in the arts would be inconceivable without a written supplement. As a result, the format of the doctorate in the arts almost always requires both an artistic portfolio and a 'written supplement'. The insistence on the obligation to produce a written supplement appears to demonstrate a lack of confidence, either in the capacity of the arts to speak in a meaningful, complex, and critical way in their own medium, or in the academics' own capability to make sound judgments about the meaning, complexity and criticality of artistic output as such. For this reason, I hold the idea that the presentation of the results of artistic research in general — of which the doctorate in the arts is only one particular example — does not necessarily require an explanatory text as a supplement. For an evaluation by peers, the art work itself (be it theatre, dance or musical performance, an installation, a film, a video, or a fashion show), which is the result of artistic research, should be and is sufficient for evaluating its originality and relevance. Although there are notable exceptions, in most cases the demand for a supplement is voiced in the most insistent way, not by peers, but by non-peers, that is by people who are not acquainted with the arts and understandably feel insecure about its evaluation. In my experience, peers have mostly been able to evaluate artistic research in a competent and convincing way, even if there wasn't any supplementary text explaining anything. Artists, as peers, see and hear in a way non-artists cannot. Their audio-visual literacy enables them to read the artistic research that is to be evaluated, even if, in a certain sense, there is nothing to read.

Now that this mentality of requiring a supplement, which I would like to refer to as 'supplementality', is imposing itself as constitutive of the format of the presentation of artistic research, what might happen and is in fact already happening is that because it complies with the long-standing format of the doctorate, juries of a doctorate in the arts will base their assessments primarily on a reading of the written supplement, as if it were the doctorate itself, at the same time being tempted to consider the artistic portfolio as merely its supplementary illustration.

The evaluation of a doctorate in the arts, or of a master of arts

for that matter, should focus on the capacity of doctoral or master students to speak in the medium of their choice. And if this medium is film, or video, or painting, or sculpture, or sound, or fashion, or if the doctoral or master student wants to mix media, it will obviously require of a jury ways of reading, interpretation, and discussion other than those required by an academic text. To impose a medium on the artist is to fail to recognize the artist as an artist. Artists who wish to obtain a doctorate in the arts or a master of arts should be given the academic freedom to choose their own medium. Even then it would still be possible that they choose text as we ordinarily understand it as the most appropriate medium for their artistic purposes.

Lately, some of those who defend the idea that a doctorate in the arts should not only consist of an artistic portfolio but also of a textual supplement have been modifying their position by claiming that this textual supplement should of course not necessarily take an academic form. As we are speaking of a doctorate in the arts, we should adopt a pluralist attitude towards the demand of a text as a supplement to the artistic portfolio as part of the doctorate in the arts and therefore could accept textual supplements that take a very artistic form. As long as it looks like text, it could be a literary text, a diary, maybe even a theatre play or a series of poems. Artists who want to obtain a doctorate in the arts should not be frightened by the requirement to write an academic text. It could also be an artistic text.

While trying to save the requirement of the textual supplement, its defenders are in fact proving that their requirement has never been anything but a form of bureaucratic conformism. At first we were told that the demand for a textual supplement was prompted by fear that it would be impossible to judge an artistic portfolio, not because it is a portfolio, but because it is artistic. Therefore a textual supplement was needed that could be judged more easily, because it would be more articulate. But if now the supplement itself also becomes artistic, why would it be easier to judge than an artistic portfolio? The idea seems to be that artistic output can only be adequately judged if there is some form of text, academic or not, to supplement it. So we are led to believe that we need some form of text in order to decipher the artistic work of the artist who wants to become a doctor in the arts in order to know whether that work deserves a doctorate in the arts at all.

Defenders of the textual supplement as a necessary part of the format of the doctorate in the arts may claim that they take a more intellectual or reflective approach to the arts. Obvious as this claim

may seem, I nevertheless would like to contest it. Indeed, I would say, this claim cherishes a notion of text that is uninformed by the major intellectual reflections on text and therefore isn't that reflective or intellectual at all. The major contribution to the philosophy of text in the last five decades has been the philosophy of Jacques Derrida and it seems to me that the defenders of the textual supplement as necessary part of a presentation of the results of artistic research, such as the doctorate in the arts, haven't understood one word of his philosophy. It is quite interesting to note that Derrida's philosophy of text was in fact born out of a pragmatic reflection on how to write... a doctoral thesis. For Derrida as a philosopher it was inconceivable to write a philosophical thesis without ever asking the philosophical question 'what is writing?'. For Derrida, the project of writing a doctor's thesis led him to an impressive intellectual struggle with the question of writing. Derrida strongly resisted traditional academic standards and expectations concerning writing.[6] Only in 1980, at the age of 50, did Jacques Derrida obtain the so-called *Doctorat d'Etat*, a special type of doctorat that until 1985 existed in France and was awarded not on the basis of a conventional doctoral thesis, but on the basis of one's.... 'work'. Indeed, for his *doctorat d'état*, Derrida presented and defended — in a long oral examination by a jury — three books, which all deal with the question of writing in one way or another. In a sense, one can say that Derrida's doctorate merely consisted of a philosophical portfolio, without an academic supplement. One of the main reasons for this is that Derrida simply couldn't accept that a traditional doctorate in philosophy would not reflect a fundamental thinking on the question of writing in the way it was written.

Derrida's philosophy of writing, as he developed it in the books that constituted the portfolio which he finally presented as his doctorate, is very helpful in discussing the sense or nonsense of the format of the doctorate in the arts. The idea that an artistic portfolio should be supplemented with a text in order to obtain a meaning which can be discussed inter-subjectively misses the point that the artistic portfolio itself is always already text. This is a consequence of the famous Derridian dictum that says *'il n'y a pas de hors-texte'*, there is no outside to text. A firmly established and quite ridiculous misunderstanding of his philosophy that there is nothing but text is to say that Derrida would have claimed that there is no outside world. Derrida's idea that there is nothing but text means that the outside world is itself text too. Not: text is everything, but everything is text. In an interview at the end of a book in which he discusses,

among others things, J.L. Austin's and John Searle's philosophies of language, Derrida said, angry at the way in which some American philosophers had been trying to ridicule his philosophy as an absurd form of scepticism:

> I wanted to recall that the concept of text I propose is limited neither to the graphic, nor to the book, nor even to discourse, and even less to the semantic, representational, symbolic, ideal, or ideological sphere. What I call 'text' implies all the structures called 'real', 'economic', 'historical', 'socio-institutional', in short: all possible referents. Another way of recalling once again that 'there is nothing outside the text'... It does mean that every referent, all reality has the structure of a differential trace, and that one cannot refer to this 'real' except in an interpretive experience. The latter neither yields meaning nor assumes it except in a movement of differential referring.[7]

So a portfolio which is a selection of art works is definitely always already text in itself. As a matter of fact, a portfolio will most likely be a presentation and/or a documentation of art works, rather than the works themselves, which means that it is, in its presentation or documentation, already differentially mediating and reflecting the art works, and that text in the narrow sense of the word is even already part of it. The artistic portfolio as a documenting and representing form already speaks of the work, rather than that it would be the work itself. At the same time it is also work done by the artist, an artistic work that represents and documents other artistic work by the artist. The portfolio itself has to be qualified as text, both in the expanded and in the narrow sense of the term.

Derrida's expanded concept of 'text' implies the need for an expanded notion of 'reading' as well as for an expanded notion of 'writing'. As Derrida wrote in *Of Grammatology*:

6 **Derrida beautifully described this struggle in the presentation of his doctorate: Jacques Derrida, 'Ponctuations: Le temps de la thèse', in** Du droit à la philosophie **(Paris: Galilée, 1991), 439-59.**

7 **Jacques Derrida,** Limited Inc. **(Evenston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1988), 148.**

> And thus we say 'writing' for all that gives rise to an inscription in general, whether it is literal or not and even if what it distributes in space is alien to the order of the voice: cinematography, choreography, of course, but also pictorial, musical, sculptural 'writing'.[8]

Here, Derrida's examples of writing are (still) all artistic. Later, Derrida would expand the concept of writing even more, but the first and self-evident move in his expansion of the concept of writing was to include all art forms. Film, dance, music, painting, sculpture: all of them are in themselves forms of writing. Art is writing and is therefore to be read. Reading however is not just about decoding the meaning of signs. Reading has to come to terms with the fact that it will never be possible to determine the meaning of the world once and for all. The demand for a textual supplement to the artistic portfolio may be explained by fear for the constitutive abysmal character of meaning. But it also reveals a presentist philosophy of text, which since Derrida, has long been proven unsatisfactory. To ask for a textual supplement is obviously not going to save us from the problem of interpretation. As if text would allow us to avoid the annoying possibility of interpretation. Instead of asking for an explanatory supplement, juries should confront their own fear and have the courage to try to read what is already written. The argument that I hold against the textual supplement should not be understood as the idea that the art work in itself is already full of meaning, but rather that there is no way to remedy the abysmal structure of meaning inherent in the art work itself. The demand for the supplement suggests that there might be a way to fill the gap. What is at work in this demand is one particular logic of 'supplementality', which one might define as the fiction that the open meaning of the art work can and should be revealed by a supplementary explanation.

However, one should stress the difference between the supplement to the art work as an academic requirement for having the right explanation on the one hand and a certain aesthetics of the supplement which is inherent in the work of many artists on the other hand, where the supplement is not seen as the explanation of the work, but rather as constitutive of the work itself. This artist's supplement is not what gives us the solution, the answer, the right interpretation, but rather postpones the solution, the answer, the right interpretation even more. So 'supplementality' can also be defined as

an artistic strategy to escape the closure of interpretation, to leave all interpretations open, or to make interpretation an even more complex issue than it always already is.

In the actual state of the discussion on the format of the presentation of the results of artistic research in general and of the doctorate in the arts in particular, one may observe a tendency to gratefully appropriate the artist's supplement as if it were conforming to the spirit of the required academic supplement, while in fact its logic is quite the opposite. Of course there are art works that involve certain kinds of supplements and there are aspects of art works that could be considered as supplements. One could argue, for instance, that the title of a painting is already a supplement to the painting. The question then becomes at what point exactly a supplement to an art work, which may be considered by the artist as inherent to the art work, becomes the kind of supplement that is considered a necessary requirement in order to present the results of artistic research in an academic way. What is annoying about this 'academic' requirement of a textual supplement to the art work if it is to be considered a legitimate presentation of the results of artistic research, is that it doesn't take serious the art work itself and all the writing that is involved in the production of the art work. In other words, the academic requirement of a textual supplement to an art work seriously lacks seriousness. In most cases, it seems more like a bureaucratic attempt at 'keeping up appearances'.

Artistic research can involve many different things: avidly reading about a specific subject matter, randomly visiting exhibitions and confronting oneself with other artistic positions, trying out the visual, acoustic, or haptic impressions of different materials, or even ritually going to the flea market in search of nothing in particular, as Eran Schaerf once described, beautifully and convincingly, one aspect of his practice of 'artistic research'.[9] What all these different practices have in common, is the need for time, time to think, time to see, time to waste. As time is money, time is never given to anyone for free, and certainly not to the artist. As a consequence, everybody is under extreme pressure to explain why they need this much time for such and such. Therefore one cannot rule

8 **Jacques Derrida,** Of Grammatology, **trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore and London, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 9.**

9 **Eran Schaerf, 'Unsubstantiated Investigation',** A Portrait of the Artist as a Researcher: The Academy and the Bologna Process, **ed. Dieter Lesage and Kathrin Busch, AS no. 179 (Antwerp, MuHKA, 2007), 108-12.**

out that part of the actual discourse on artistic research is in fact rhetoric that is used, needed or devised in order to convince funding authorities that are known to subscribe to the dogma of research and development, that the artistic practice that is to be funded is in fact also research. In a few European countries, part of the research budget is now specifically allocated to artistic research. This is a great strike for the academies in these countries, because it allows them to become major sites of artistic production and to establish themselves more self-consciously *within* the arts field, not on its doorstep. It was in this sense that, in my 2009 *e-flux* essay 'The Academy is Back', I meant to say that the academy is back.[10] The Academy is back as a credible partner in the arts world, as a site of artistic production, of artistic research. However, the comeback of the Academy, which one should admit has only just started, is already in a precarious state. The greatest vigilance will be necessary to prevent that this strike for the Academy doesn't turn out to be a Pyrrhic victory.

Quite some anti-Imperial rebellion will be needed for the Academy to stay on the light side of the Force. If we prefer to think of the Academy as part of the Rebellious Alliance to Restore the Republic, as space opera movie maker George Lucas called the resistance against the Empire light-years before the release of Negri and Hardt's *Empire*, then there is an urgent battle to be fought against a discourse which tends to slip into the Academy in the wake of the discourse on artistic research. Whereas I am convinced that the discourse on artistic research allows people working in art academies to reinvent the Academy as an autonomous site of production, we should refuse a supplementary rhetoric that presents itself as an inevitable corollary to the discourse on artistic research. Wherever art academies get funded for their artistic research, there is also an increasingly insistent discourse about the need of a 'return on investment', of 'research output assessment', of 'matching funds', etc. It is an attempt to use the research mission of the art academies as a means to capitalistically discipline the art academies. It won't be long before professors at academies will be expected to establish spin-off firms in order to valorise their artistic output. As art academies have been producers or co-producers of artistic work that became successful out there, it might become a prime 'academic' preoccupation to get one's money back, if not to make more money.

However, succumbing to this way of reasoning leads to seeing research exclusively from the perspective of valorisation. Against these capitalistic tendencies, we should see artistic research as a way

of recognizing artistic labour time. The discourse on artistic research seems an adequate way to explain why artists need time, and therefore money, in order to create, and to consider the art academy as an excellent site of artistic production. Artistic creation is not just about materials to buy or spaces to rent, it is also about time needed to dedicate oneself to reflection, to study, to thinking. As a matter of fact, the notion of artistic research is quite subversive for a field that got used to pay high prices for art works, completely independent from the amount of labour involved. The concept of artistic research is also about the recognition of artists as workers, as people who work so many hours, so many days, and who might want to get some money for all the things they do. The concept of artistic research is not at all about an attempt to conform the arts to the sciences, to become more methodological, to become more discursive, or to become more technological. It is about the recognition of art as a form of cognitive labour and about a wage struggle for artists, who no longer accept that they work for an exhibition and get production money for works, but almost never get any fee for all the work they do in preparing that exhibition. All the time, artists are told to invest in their work, to speculate on the future value of their work. The discourse which presents artists as researchers should be an empowering discursive force, which values the artist as a worker and which contributes to the recognition of the need to pay for artistic labour.

10 Dieter Lesage, 'The Academy is Back: On Education, the Bologna Process and the Doctorate in the Arts': www.e-flux.com/journal/view/45 (last accessed 2010/11/13).

Part III
Teaching Art and the Essence of the Quest

Masters of Unpredictability
Academies and Art Education

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Nowadays, artists are educated to become 'masters of visual art'. They can even obtain a Ph.D. in it, which implies that artistic processes can be valorised through an academic title, assuming that this offers guarantees for high-quality training. For now, no one knows what practical implications this may have for the field, but academies and universities pretend otherwise. What's more, they often demand that art education come up with a bureaucratically digestible educational strategy that only complicates matters even more. After all, how does one establish criteria for masters and doctorates of art if one cannot even define what contemporary art is?

It is well-known that this question about art is unanswerable. Martin Heidegger has already given an amazingly simple answer to the question of where a work of art comes from: works of art have their origin in art. In other words, there is no primal basis that can explain why works of art exist. They simply are here because art exists. Heidegger seems to suggest that works of art can only be produced because art itself already exists. That is its historicity, its *Geschichtlichkeit*: art is developed in and by a historical process that sustains itself by mimetic mechanisms. However, we know that for Heidegger this art exists primarily as an ontological, existential thing, an activity that is characteristic of the 'music-making animal', as Nietzsche has labelled man. Heidegger's tautological reasoning (there are artworks because there is art) is unsatisfactory, because we would like a more concrete explanation of the role of art, and of its often contrary, difficult and yet irrepressible dynamics, in society.

There are of course many semiotic, philosophical, and sociological theories that illustrate how this works and why certain things have the effect that they have, but the question of where art comes from or what purpose it serves has yet to be answered in a way that can withstand a hefty dose of philosophical criticism. Some say art should serve society; others maintain it should castigate society. Some think it logical that art only speaks to a minority; others scream blue murder if it is not immediately understandable to everyone. So, if we are to philosophize about art education in general terms, we must first humbly bow our heads: none of us is able to put forward any sound legitimizations, explanations or principles that apply to everyone. The ground on which we walk is far from solid.

'So what?' replies the artist. 'It works, doesn't it? I don't have to know all that, now do I? Look at what I've made. All you need is your intuition. It works.' The artist has an irrefutable point, as long as we don't start thinking too much about things like Duchamp's infamous urinal. After all, wasn't that thrown into the museum precisely to provoke a debate about the general/theoretical nature of art? What else appeals to us in much post-conceptual art but precisely this critical debate about society? Surely not some cultic, ontological or other deeply existential experience? It seems that we have strayed quite far from Nietzsche's call for a heroic art. And yet, even the entire post-conceptual tradition invokes all sorts of complex associations with our own perceptions, principles and worldviews. Otherwise it would not have caused so much debate in the past. If art is no longer *religio*, no longer a binding activity, then surely it still is *aesthesis* (the Greek word for 'behold'). Ways of seeing, as John Berger used to say, can become contributing factors to views of society. This is why art time and again sears its wings when it flies into this paradox: wanting to be a maverick and at the same time display social responsibility. Artists find themselves alone in the middle of the market square, under the pitying looks of busy craftspeople and market vendors.

Perhaps art 'works', simply and incomprehensibly at the same time, precisely because we do not know what it is and cannot predict it. Because artists create art, they can afford to sidestep the question about its essence: it is clear from what they do. They embody its essence in their practice. Even any object that presents itself as anti-art is immediately called art. Art, as Duchamp said, is what you show in a space that is so designated. This makes art one of those things that is hardest to describe, a concept that is open to any interpretation. At the very moment that art, in the wake of the avant-garde, freed itself from the demand of objectively measurable technique and beauty it had only one call left: that of existential sincerity, authenticity or basic research, whatever that may be. From that moment on, technique was a resultant of the concept the artist had envisioned. This means that since that pivotal moment, technique can also mean: abandon all technique. The entire catalogue of techniques from art history became optional, without any guarantee of a valuable art production, because valuable art production has been defined since modernism as symbolic and semiotically charged objects that invite critical reflection on what is being shown. Preciously little is left for teachers who would like to educate their students backed by the authority of a quantitatively measurable processing of a tradition.

The endpoint of this evolution is the attitude of Joseph Beuys, who showed us that art is simply everything that an artist does. Including putting shit in a can, sleeping beside a coyote, sawing a cow in half (Damien Hirst) or displaying a stained bed (Tracy Emin).

Technique becomes invention, the traces of an existence. Art becomes thinking in action, no longer a matter of sensual *aesthesis* but of reflective insight into our way of living in the contemporary world. So far so good, including all the debates this invites.

Things are quite different, however, when it comes to art *education*, which aspires to teach and define art, and put it in various wordings to which students are then subjected. This requires a very well-defined goal, in other words: art education owes it to itself to pretend to have a correct definition of art and to know precisely what should be taught. Perhaps not so much in the studio itself, where the activity in this sanctum already demonstrates what art is: a human method of getting through life by combining symbols and materials. It gets much harder when it comes to formulating principles and defending our budgets on a bureaucratic level, and especially in dealing with evaluation, such an integral part of education: who can say with 100% certainty that a particular work of a student is a failure? Or is pointless? Or the work of a genius? What are the criteria for this kind of endlessly repeated verdict? These are poignant questions, usually answered with our fingers crossed, as best we can, and often while losing sleep over painful deliberations.

After all, combining the words 'art' and 'education' is a bit like comparing apples and oranges. Deliberations in art education are perhaps the most painful ones in the entire field of education. Our terms, definitions, and values change constantly, and it is no use to try and pin them down once and for all. But as art education, like all education, has to comply with generalized educational principles, we are faced with a very practical problem: we have to comply with educational models that are forced upon us in terms of social purpose, functionality and benefit. How do we capture such a complex activity as making art in normative evaluations that will decide the fates of the adolescents who have put their lot in our hands? And how are we to define final attainment levels if we do not even have clear *starting* terms, as we saw earlier? And how do we avoid the danger of unrightfully laying claim to the future of young people and of forms of art that we don't even know yet, by defending, explaining, promoting, et cetera contemporary art — or any art, for that matter? Isn't its unpredictability the very *raison d'être* of art? Isn't art the epitome of experimental thinking based on existing patterns, or, to put it fashionably: Isn't art the epitome of serendipity?

The philosopher Kant already gave a sound definition of the creative process: it is *purposiveness without purpose*, meaning that it mobilizes all rational and emotional human thinking and therefore constitutes purposive and hence conscious and enlightened behaviour. However, the paradox is that it doesn't know beforehand where this purposive behaviour will lead to. With art, this enlightenment leads to a new, unsuspected darkness full of tempting meanings, luring us like Eurydice in the underworld. Art is the constantly repeated death of classical meaning and at the same time it is the resurrection of Lazarus — with a whole new semiotics.

This first, fairly innocent question as to the nature of art and the nature of education already leads to the conclusion that there is nothing for it but to invent standards that apply only to art education. Or, to bring it to a head: we have to invent standards for something that cannot be standardized, a type of education that incorporates serendipity in its didactic methods. Try and explain that to the Department of Education, where our budgets are decided.

The fact that the question about the nature of art cannot be answered not only has philosophical implications, but very practical ones as well. Anyone who has ever attended a symposium about art education can testify to the confusion of tongues at such gatherings. Speakers continuously speak of 'art', but never specify which art they mean. This leads to perfectly contradictory conclusions: practice, discipline and mimetic skills are of the utmost importance, says one person (it turns out he's referring to musicians). No, states another, what we need is free and open thinking. It is of no use to bombard young people with examples from the past, as art is creativity and imagination; let these people be, only make suggestions — if at all — and just let them carry on (this person teaches conceptually-oriented sculptors). A third takes to the floor and proclaims that artists should have at least two years of rigorous technical training before being allowed to do something with the technical basis they have acquired (this person teaches video-makers and photographers). It is obvious: everyone who speaks about artists always refers to the type of artists they themselves teach and are familiar with, and then simply extrapolate their view to the entire field. Hence the Babel-like confusion and the horrendous futility of most symposiums about art. Meanwhile both education administrators and the Department of Education cry out in exasperation: with engineers, all this works flawlessly; why are these artists giving us such a hard time?

A flummoxed school bureaucrat once asked me what, in the end, I provided my students with. A diploma and a personality crisis, I replied. She didn't haul me before a disciplinary board, but actually

I'm quite serious: after twenty years of thinking, discussing, looking at work, and telling myself how painful, unpredictable but also fascinating it is to see students evolve from blank high school teenagers into adolescents burning with ideas and intentions, I can do little more than give them my blessing, hope things will work out for them (as they have only just started) and especially advise them to keep thinking about the permanent crisis situation that creativity is.

Really, things would already be much clearer if we would frankly say: none of us really know what art is, so let's not speak about it anymore in general terms, but only in terms of our actual activities. When asked pressingly by his superiors about what exactly he envisioned doing with his students next year — preferably by filling out the appropriate form in black ink to facilitate photocopying — a poetically inclined teacher of sculpture answered by tearing a page from his pocket diary, on which he wrote with a pencil stump: we work with earth, water, air and fire. Nietzsche himself could not have put it better. This teacher hoped that this would keep the meddling authorities at bay for a while and that he would not be pestered by people who wanted to convert art into quantifiable units. It didn't work for very long, though. Early retirement.

What to do then, when they ask us for the umpteenth time what we are going to do next year, how much it is going to cost, which principles we use for evaluation, and other similar questions that are neither here nor there when it comes to art? Some may say: just tell them what you're doing, very practically. All the rest, to borrow a phrase from Wittgenstein, are things that we cannot speak of. But perhaps this is where the greatest danger lies: that we leave art to the realm of the indefinable and retreat to our own small territory, doing our own thing.

And there we are faced with another pitfall, that of the defensive attitude and particularity: painters, filmmakers, actors, they all inhabit their own planet, understanding only each other, doing things that are specifically linked to their material and their own art historical tradition. And please, let's not bother these young people too much with all this pep talk about interdisciplinarity and art philosophy — that sort of self-protective argument. Although I personally do believe that some respite from the world of ideas is of vital importance to students at certain times, we shouldn't take this to extremes. Many academic studios use the focus on their own practical activities as an excuse to isolate themselves from problematic current events in art. Here too we must find a balance: we mustn't

hysterically chase the *dernier cri*, but neither must we foster nostalgia for old-fashioned craftsmanship, as we still see so often at weekend academies. On the one hand there is the tendency towards craftsmanship, more easily translatable into facts and figures, on the other hand there is the utopian call for the philosophical meaning, unpredictability and interdisciplinarity of art. The term interdisciplinarity itself is however more sophisticated than its practice: to many people nowadays, working in an interdisciplinary way means little more than mixing everything up and hoping for the miracle of originality. It usually ends in going to the pub or some such agreeable activity.

However, neither originality nor meaning are easily achieved. What to do then? Does art elude us as soon as we try to define it? This elusiveness of art, often coquettishly used as an argument nowadays, causes chronic difficulties for art education. As soon as definitions are put forward, the mayhem starts and territorial lines are drawn. Since the Bologna agreements, the academies have become culture enterprises, each with their own budget, and every discipline wants a piece of the cake instead of creating a haven for thinking, living, and, especially, postponing things. What's more, the problems accumulate: art is associated with culture, with cultural work (or even regarded as upgraded community work) and is held hostage by a post-modern sociology that keeps telling it that it is free, that there are no criteria, that anything goes, but also burdens it with ridiculous public expectations: that art is for everyone, that it should be radically accessible, also and especially for 'stragglers'. In short, we hold this unknown entity, art, hostage with all sorts of wild expectations and if the picture doesn't 'compute' we blame art for it.

As anyone involved in art education knows, talent doesn't have any democratic scruples. This is already a problematic issue, making it very different from other disciplines. The more that free creativity is required, the bigger the chance that democratic education with an egalitarian structure becomes impossible. Art education's aim is not to elevate stragglers, nor does it wish to fetishize loudmouths. Development, insight, and results are too complex to predict. This in itself is a rather painful, if not ludicrous situation that does however have the peculiar quality of producing inexhaustible amounts of energy. Caught between the two poles of these paradoxes and constantly oscillating between changing meanings, art in education is like a hunted, panicky animal, alternately expected to do tricks, lay dead, be the poster child for the PR department, or it gets smacked in the face because it is too expensive a pet. In short,

our educational practice makes such contradictory demands on art that by now it is eligible for a protective campaign by animal rights organizations. A campaign with the slogan: for God's sake, leave the poor beast alone.

As far back as 6 February 1872, in one of his lectures on education, Nietzsche pointed to the mediocrity of the teaching staff as the main cause of all these problems. He felt that people who taught art should not first and foremost be educators, or people tamers, but rather be thoughtful artists themselves. This may sound good, but we all know that a few modest educators can be most beneficial to the development of innocent students with grand theories. This type of democratic and even humbling education of course did not suit the tempestuous Nietzsche: it only diminished people by teaching them art as a therapeutic activity and he himself dreamt of art as a stormy revolutionary process that was mindful of the tragedy of the human condition by making it almost physically palpable to society. Nietzsche swept away any attempt to domesticate art, stating that it had only one task: to transcend the meaninglessness of life by a daring gesture. Anyone who would dare to say something like that nowadays would immediately be dismissed as an elitist jerk. We have wandered far astray here from the terms used by educational institutes to define their task. They speak of learning a profession, acquiring skills, finishing assignments, keeping up one's end of the bargain, getting a job — in fact, the entire range of qualities respectable citizens are supposed to possess. I sometimes visit academic studios where one can cut the tension with a knife because students are mentally exhausted by the contradictory demands 'Be original!' and 'Obey!' Many teachers don't even realize how perverse and psychologically damaging it is to hold students in such a stranglehold of indecision.

And yet there is little we can do but humbly acknowledge the fact that in art education we make paradoxical demands. On the one hand we are confronting students with a Romantic wish list: creative power, imagination, creativity, originality, and even genius, while on the other hand undoing this formless demand — when it comes to juries and evaluations — by confronting them with exactly the historical opposite, the wish list of classicism: finish your work, look before you leap, comply with rules and regulations, honour your predecessors, and don't be silly.

Why must we act in such a painfully paradoxical way? Because art itself is that paradoxical. It demands discipline, asceticism, and a certain logic, but also complete freedom. Even more: its completely

unspecified nature produces its own form of discipline, a personal asceticism which all students have to discover for themselves. Those who can think through these working conditions intelligently and critically are already well on their way to becoming a master, in my opinion, for one rarely meets individuals who have managed to overcome this paradox in a practical way. What we should do therefore is create working conditions that guarantee both maximum concentration and maximum mental freedom. An almost impossible task that is at odds with the demand for end goals, qualifications, competition between art academies, the courting of media and all sorts of repressive bureaucratic excesses. Yet we do know that the famous decrees about education indeed leave room for rewriting art education in a more dynamic, open, easy, and client-oriented way. A couple of years ago the new magic word was 'modules', which meant block classes in the form of seminars, preferably led by guest teachers with some VIP value, so that some of the glory from their famous faces would rub off on the organizing 'emporium'. We will go modular or perish, apparently. Modules have the advantage that students can shop around and choose either your seminar or mine, but the downside is that some educators will continue to jealously guard partitions to make sure that students don't get off too easily by choosing a study career that consists of jumping from one fun seminar to the next as soon as the going gets a little bit tough. To this objection I would reply: why would you want to stop students who adopt this strategy? Shopping as avoidance behaviour will not keep them from the inner emptiness they are trying to escape. Learning to deal with art is to a great extent learning to deal with human experience and with oneself. If there is one specific thing about art education, it is that one day every student will have to stare straight into the mirror of his or her own ambitions. Those ambitions are vague, often narcissistic (and why not, nothing wrong with that per se), but this mainly means that the students themselves don't know what they are looking for either. In fact, they are searching for meaning that is much more sensitive than looking for a profession. To put it in an old-fashioned way, they want to turn their *souls* into a profession, but they pay a high price for this: total personal commitment. For that reason alone, I now believe that training to become a master in the arts is one of the most tricky, delicate, and perhaps most personality-threatening courses in the entire educational field. Art students are almost inevitably confronted with questions about the how, the why and the whereto of the thing they have so diligently or timidly conceived. They actually should

regard their studies as a painful process of self-discovery, a search for reasons where reasons can hardly be given, and if there are reasons, these often destroy the meaning of the activity. And yet year in, year out, I myself have seen how students, at least the real searchers among them, have to go through very painful self-analyses in which intimate existential motives go hand-in-hand with all sorts of theories from art history. The relationship between empathy and logic is a permanently strained one. This is the specific intellectuality of the student who is evolving both intuitively and rationally.

We often ask a lot of art students, sometimes even more than we could handle ourselves. There's nothing wrong with that in itself, but it does require a lot of responsibility from us with regard to the intimate dramas we provoke. It requires our commitment, guidance, and determination to unhinge these students and then help them in rearranging themselves into a workable configuration. It requires from us that we take an open enough intellectual position for the students to be able to still conclude their serendipity-driven 'search without purpose' in some sort of goal-oriented fashion.

How in God's name do we explain this to people who stare at computer screens, waiting for our budgets, our professional profiles and our employment scores? As to the latter: in answering the often pityingly posed question about the percentage of employment of students from art schools — often accompanied by vaguely threatening budget considerations — we cannot be clear enough. On the one hand we should refuse to give such professional guarantees, as we are not training butchers, carpenters, or engineers. We cater to a very unpredictable market. On the other hand there is an answer that renders unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's: I think that art schools today have a very decent score when it comes to their students' later employment. It's just that this score cannot be calculated in a standard way, because where the students end up is quite unpredictable. One student may have studied painting and literature, but become a great theatre director — for example, Jan Lauwers. Another may have studied to become a window dresser but end up as a successful Wagnerian artist: Jan Fabre. A third packs in his study of photography because he is disillusioned, and becomes a leading photographer: Dirk Braeckman. A fourth studies painting and now makes astonishing sculptures: Thierry De Cordier. And the same goes for numerous students who may study graphic design and end up in the theatre, study new media and suddenly start making wonderful paintings, or train as an actor and end up working as a journalist. In

the current complex culture market, one simply cannot tell what use students may make of their training. Economic serendipity, sure. Mobility within the field, sure.

Against the guild-like model of art institutes I usually oppose my own dream of an art school structure: instead of jealously guarded little turfs, we should perhaps first and foremost create a kind of central communications studios, where all the teachers and all the students who wish to do so may begin or end their day or even spend the entire day; a conceptual studio where all cross-references are being practiced through a dialogue that starts afresh each day. I sometimes call this a 'reference studio', a space where we can find out amicably and indiscriminately how to kick-start, for instance, a student who makes wonderful photographs but is suddenly completely stuck. A kind of pre-modular, philosophical laboratory where anything can be said and is taken seriously. Where no starting requirements or end terms loom heavily above the searching heads but where light can freely enter. Where one can decide in the morning to take students to the museum in the afternoon without having to deal with a lot of red tape or repressive surveillance. Where a student may be given an extra month, if necessary, or be allowed to change his or her mind three times a year about which direction to take. Studios would then become open spaces where any student from any discipline can go to any time to find information, learn something, and exchange ideas, but also a space where all the colleagues can meet, an extension of the central philosophical studio where practice-oriented and theory-oriented people can join forces. Unfortunately, many studios still desperately resist such a nomadic school culture.

As to employment, I can't help saying that by now we are delivering workers to a sector that has seen one of the largest economic booms of the last few decades: the arts and cultural sector. Wherever graduates from art education end up, they must always first learn to define the criteria for what they intend to do. What we teach them in terms of crafts and skills should serve this fundamental question that they have to formulate themselves, and not the other way around: first learn the skill and then see what you can do with it, a static form of education that no longer fits the present dynamics of the artistic field. The first task for art students is to find their own problem and then spend half a lifetime trying to find solutions or possible answers.

Still, didn't I have a certain art form in mind all the time, one that I have been tacitly generalizing? Yes, I must confess. I have been thinking mainly of students of visual art who have to find their way

nowadays in a hectic industry of images and ideas. I do realize that those who wish to become great cello players or pianists may have little use for serendipity as an educational principle. But still, but still… Even in training that requires stringent forms, a fundamental questioning of the material is of the utmost importance, and hence a study trajectory that is as open as possible and does not shrink from fundamental philosophical questions.

Personally, I have taught art agogics for more than a decade at the teacher training course of the University College Ghent, Royal Academy of Fine Arts, a course that I have often described as a critical deconstruction of merry art goals and associated pep talk. By this 'sabotage', I mean fighting the inclination of art education to try and seamlessly adopt traditional educational techniques and obsolete economic ideas. It is not only senseless, but also a gross underestimation of the value of an experimental art education that is by nature unpredictable. Let's not forget how the exact sciences have been claiming vehemently for a few generations now that they too have obtained their best results through experimental cognition, random theories and serendipity. One only has to look at the most common denominators in the philosophy of the last hundred and fifty years to demonstrate that unpredictability and serendipity are the most striking characteristics of art philosophy.

Well then, let's have a little bit more class consciousness when the administrators sternly demand all sorts of figures and guarantees from us. Even the creative scientists *and* managers have by now firmly embraced the cognitive model of unpredictability. There is nothing wrong with trying to capture unpredictability within a structure, however paradoxical this may sound to the Department of Education. While both science and economy learn and benefit from creative unpredictability models, everywhere in art education we see people still trying hard to capture art according to obsolete educational definitions. But they should think just the other way around. Serendipity is now the mantra of all contemporary thought, whether it concerns economics, science or the arts. This is not where the gap lies. The gap is created when the old, not very dynamic and often patronizing version of economically based management and bureaucracy raises its head again through rationalization, efficiency thinking and optimization fervour in relation to an almost elusive form of education. This is where this education collides with so-called innovative ideas about purpose, society, and knowledge, wielded by people who want to regulate and predict everything. What goes for

all fundamental values in society also goes for art education: give them the budget and the trust that they need, and leave the rest to them. Precisely because they know very well how difficult it is.

Other than that, art education has the credentials of a contemporary, adapted theory of knowledge that neatly concurs with the findings of the latest generation of international thinkers. In that sense, art education could do with less modesty and suggest to the employability checkers that they could learn something from its experimental cognition, instead of being intimidated by them. It is up to art education itself to define open educational goals, i.e. open goals without finality.

It is not art that is faced with a major challenge in the light of education. It is the educational bureaucracy that is faced with a major challenge in the light of art.

Oh yes, what about that first question then, the one I asked at the start of these reflections: What is someone who obtains a Ph.D. in visual art? Besides all the other things that they are, they are in any case people that mustn't let themselves be confused by the imperatives of popular culture.

Disciplining Thought vs. Nimble Thinking

Possible Stakes of Teaching Theory

Rudi Laermans

> There are times in life when the question of knowing if one can think differently than one thinks, and perceive differently than one sees, is absolutely necessary if one is to go on looking and reflecting at all.[1]

'Doing Theory'

This is a first-hand story of two educational settings and how they bring along two distinct ways of teaching theory. Somewhat preposterously, it could be called an exercise in reflexive autobiographical anthropology — yet that is just a posh expression that can hardly legitimate my questionable generalization of the invoked anecdotic evidence. I will indeed contrast my personal experiences in instructing social theory within a social sciences faculty at an average West European university with my guest teaching of theory classes, this time without further specification, at the Brussels based international dance school PARTS. The most important lesson to be had from this double story pertains to the primary stakes of 'doing theory' within an art school. Two main differences are actually at play. On the one hand, when teaching theory classes one may be rather strongly bound by a disciplinary context or enjoy the freedom to think outside the box of one's certified competencies. On the other hand, everyone working in the realm of higher education has to face the consequences of the Bologna Process that took off in 1999. Whereas my home university did effectively undergo profound changes after the recent turn of the century, PARTS has succeeded up until today in staying outside the Bologna framework.

'Theory' is for sure not one but several things. Explanatory theorizing, commonly associated with the formulation of testable models, differs from the kind of hermeneutical or interpretive conceptualizing that finds its prototype in the deciphering of texts. Moreover, critical modes of theorizing commit themselves to quite different axioms and goals than the analytical forging of abstract concepts. In one of his older works, Jürgen Habermas therefore discerns three main interests guiding the development of knowledge: instrumental manipulation (thanks to the knowledge of causes), the enhancement of mutual understanding (via the putting into perspective of cultural differences), and individual or social emancipation (thanks to the critical exposure of ideological premises).[2] Partly in line with these well-known epistemological differences, yet not reducible to them, there exist at least two general ways of teaching theory in a higher education curriculum. In the first version, the word 'theory' points to a well-defined and rather uncontested, canonical body of knowledge that, whatever its more particular nature, is transmitted in a systematic fashion to the newcomers within an academic discipline. Several pedagogical methods can be deployed in view of this goal, varying from the traditional lecture format to more interactive forms of instruction. What however matters most is the guided initiation to the basic questions of a discipline such as sociology and the various answers these receive within divergent established traditions of theorizing.

In the alternative approach, the notion of theory still involves bits and pieces of codified knowledge and the quasi-sacrosanct texts of for instance Max Weber, Niklas Luhmann and Michel Foucault (or in art theory: of Immanuel Kant, Theodor W. Adorno and Jacques Rancière). Yet 'doing theory' differs from just learning or instructing and acquires a particular meaning in relation to a practice that both affirms and transcends the prevailing notion of teaching. For the accent now decisively shifts to the living encounter between theoretical concepts or insights and the students' co-thinking. Theory thus changes from a firm body of knowledge into a verb, an open dialogical practice that at once subscribes to and exceeds the emancipatory goal of critical theorizing. The corresponding activity of 'thinking aloud together', with or against particular ideas, primarily aims at a heightened awareness of the socially constructed (and thus: principally re-fashionable) and intrinsically complex (or many-layered) character of phenomena such as the exercise of power or art's current modes of being. A theory class then first and foremost opens up *a space for possible reflection that never closes off the sense for 'the possible'*. The often meandering nature of the resulting discourse acts as an invitation to think differently in a genuine post-foundational mode: no definitive 'truth', including the enlightenment idea of emancipation itself, can stop the process of inquisitive questioning. 'Doing theory' beyond the self-understanding of a discipline or a cultural practice, such as the making of art, thus comes down to the continually rehearsed enactment of the appeal to engage in a shared thinking and communication process — and eventually also a collective text reading — that again and again faces

1 **Michel Foucault,** The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France 1978–1979 **(Hampshire and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 8.**
2 **Jürgen Habermas,** Knowledge and Human Interests **(Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1972).**

its own contingency. It therefore does not matter that much that the presentation of a theoretical framework is highly selective, remains overall under-contextualized, and is incessantly destabilized, detoured or de-emphasised by seemingly inappropriate questions or derivative remarks. Decisive is the publicly observable attempt to theorize in an unbounded mode — to think through the assumptions of a familiar problem, to reframe the terms of an evident question, to put into perspective an experience that turns language into a meaningless void. It is all done at the deliberate risk of ending up in a zone where 'the will to know' reaches its internal limit and the experience of not-knowing is openly affirmed.

Specific institutional conditions and arrangements further, or on the contrary discourage, the one or the other style of teaching theory. Pedagogical regimes differ in the way they deal with the act of thinking or 'the will to know' and, ultimately, the chances for an informed criticality and dialogically articulated (self-)reflexivity. Schools or universities unavoidably enrol and position students in a particular mode, thus literally producing an always specific pedagogical subject. Art students as well may be either framed as future professionals who are first and foremost in need of a practical baggage, or addressed as individuals who do not know yet what they are actually capable of but are in any case equipped with the generic human faculties of thinking, speaking and imagining. The neoliberal regime clearly opts for the first possibility: it seriously hampers the practice of thinking as an in principle limitless public act of collab orative reflexivity that links 'doing theory', in the genuine sense, with 'doing democracy'.[3]

Higher Education, Neoliberal Style

My professional home basis is the Faculty of Social Sciences of the Catholic University of Leuven, which is situated in Belgium and funded and regulated by the regional Flemish government. This institution caters for the masses — it currently has more than 38,000 students — but at the same time strives for international excellence in several research areas. Apart from just a few exceptions, such as engineering and medicine, one can start in Flanders an academic bachelor without any form of entrance exam or advisory test for a modest tuition fee (at Leuven university, the highest fee Belgian residents have to pay for initial bachelor and master programmes amounts to less than 600 euro). Since most courses are taught in Dutch, the overall majority of the bachelor students are Flemings. Many first

years actually just try out their personal capacities for an academic training and when they fail switch to a college education. Teaching the basics of social theory to four hundred or more newcomers in sociology, political science and communication science is therefore quite a task. To initiate young people in abstract modes of conceiving society and social life is per definition a pedagogical challenge; and one must also deal with the presence of a considerable group of students who experience the course as an annoying stumbling block in their personal attempt to survive the first year. The situation improves from the second year onwards, yet as a theory teacher one continues to face the primary motivation of the bulk of those present in the lecture hall. Most students do not aspire a research career but are eager to acquire practical skills or competencies valued by the labour market. Social theory does not exactly fit this demand, which rather asks for facts, insights and methods that are easily applicable within the various spheres of policy making. And although the official discourse on higher education still stresses the difference between an academic and professional bachelor, the combination of a growing market competition for students and neoliberal funding modalities or evaluation procedures promotes a 'student friendly' teaching attitude tending to give in on intellectual standards once taken for granted.

Except for some bits and bites of critical theory, such as the Frankfurt School's bleak analysis of the culture industry, the contents of a standard social sciences curriculum have no direct links with current education in the arts. However, things look different when the general framework is taken into account. In the wake of the Bologna Process, both university and non-university higher education have become streamlined according to the bachelor-master scheme, the system of transferable ECTS credits and, most crucially, neoliberal management principles. The Bologna Process has indeed brought along a vast standardization of European higher education that undoes the historical difference between academic and professional training, university and college education. As Michel Foucault[4] already pointed out in the visionary analysis he delivered at the end of the 1970s, two basic trends stand out within the neoliberal regime of governmentality.[5] On the one hand, funding bodies explicitly regard

3 **Cf. Martha Nussbaum,** Not For Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities **(Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010).**
4 **Foucault, op. cit.**
5 **Cf. Rudi Laermans, 'The Condition of Neoliberalism',** A-Prior **19 (2009): 6-17.**

and regulate the realm of higher education as a market of particular services or products on which organizations compete for potential customers. For the buyer-student, the goods on offer should be both mutually comparable and easily combinable into packages that suit one's personal interest. Hence the urge for flexible curricula that present a vast array of choices, the demand for transparent examination rules and, not least, the requirement of well-defined courses or — in the telling official language of my university — 'training units'. Since the consumers must know in advance what they are opting for, it is mandatory that courses clearly state their general learning objectives and intended competencies, have contents neatly fitting the outlined goals, and make use of the most appropriate instruction methods and teaching materials. This imperative framing is monitored by faculty staff, educational experts, and peer reviewers (in Flanders, each curriculum is screened every eight years by a so-called visitation commission made up of foreign professors). The customer-students also have their say on the delivered services since they co-monitor and personally evaluate the quality of every course and examination, for instance through regular web surveys.

On the other hand, the potential learner is not only consistently addressed as a consumer looking for maximal customer satisfaction on the educational market. Within the neoliberal regime, that very same student is also positioned as an active self-developer who wants to improve personal abilities or competencies in view of his or her employability. Gone are therefore the days that the average student in the humanities or the arts was viewed as an intellectually curious individual who was keen to give shape to a usually vague but personally fuelled interest in a particular topic, discipline or practice. According to the now dominant approach, the learner is first and foremost a 'self-capitalist': they possess a human capital in need of development for a possible professional position. Studying equals buying educational goods, yet the choice and acquisition of these commodities equals a durable investment in oneself. In the end, the student is presumed to act as a 'Me, Inc.', as individual entrepreneurs who make rational, future-oriented decisions on the educational market with regard to their human capital on the labour market.[6] This new subject position no longer fits the traditional notion of the student, or someone who studies under the guidance of authoritative teachers in order to master a certain body of knowledge or a specific array of skills.[7] What are its consequences for the teaching of theory within and outside the humanities?

Teaching as Disciplinary Instruction

You enter the vast lecture hall, which is populated by hundreds of students. After all these years it can still be a curious experience that the murmuring gradually recedes once you start lecturing. To explain this enigma of a not explicitly agreed upon, quasi-automatic social regulation is precisely one of the main themes of sociology: how is social order possible? The discipline has its standard answers, ranging from institutionalized roles, or the complementary expectations coming with different social positions, to the notion of a general situation definition in need of a temporary working consensus between all involved parties. Teaching these basics of general sociology is precisely what you intend. You thus try to clarify the main differences between the traditions going back to Durkheim, Weber and Marx. By means of countless examples, you explain that in studying the social, one can emphasize the hard to escape grip of collective factors, or the constitutive role of individual motives and personal agency, or the existence of power differences and interest conflicts, respectively. All in all, you play a prescribed game with well-defined cards: you greatly reduce the options in thinking about the possibilities of social order. You discipline thought because you represent, through your teaching, an established scientific discipline whose different theoretical approaches are solidly codified in numerous handbooks. Although you now and then raise a personal doubt with regard to this concept or that insight, it is imperatively expected that you stick to this canonized framework and its threefold classification of sociological theorizing. Because the students entering the second bachelor year are supposed to know the difference between a Durkheimian, a Weberian and a Marxist approach. Your course is indeed just a building block in a more encompassing, predefined curriculum: you are a humble servant of Sociology.

The 'neoliberalization' of the university in the wake of the Bologna Process has vastly confirmed this status through enhanced internal and external monitoring. Every course, whatever its stakes, has become a teaching unit with a rather standardized content whose 'quality', 'learning objectives' and 'ability to study' by the 'norm student' are regularly assessed by its different 'stakeholders' (read: by

6 **See also Jan Masschelein and Maarten Simons,** Globale immuniteit: Een kleine cartografie van de Europese ruimte voor onderwijs **(Leuven and Leusden: Acco, 2003).**

7 **Frank Furedi,** Wasted: Why Education Isn't Educating **(London and New York: Continuum, 2009).**

colleagues, student representatives or pedagogical experts).

Although the way you can play the imposed game slightly changes in later years, the basic rule stating that *learning equals instruction or the mediation of validated information* continues to prevail. In the final bachelor year and in the master phase, the number of students considerably shrinks, which offers per definition more room for direct interaction and discussion. Moreover, concepts are no longer just exposed and illustrated but critically scrutinized, compared in depth, and put to work in relation to societal issues such as the consequences of individualization or globalization. Ideas that were previously professed as difficult to contest sociological truths are now sometimes profoundly questioned. Seemingly evident ideas, such as the notion that society is made up of human beings interacting with each other, are knocked down and more adventurous insights are broached. However, one still has to act first and foremost as an intermediary, a mouth-piece for theories and critiques already having amassed a minimum of disciplinary recognition or symbolic capital. Moreover, notwithstanding the conceptual perspectivism informing even the most solid piece of empirical social research, sociology's original quest for a true knowledge of the social and its underlying reform-orientation remain the framing horizon. Exposing in a Foucault-inspired mode the modern entanglement of 'the will to know' and 'the will to power' is the ultimate deconstructive gesture one can legitimately produce without transgressing the discipline's identity and entering, in the eyes of both colleagues and students, the realm of pure speculation (or, as it is often called, 'philosophy'). You may produce critical displacements within a defined field, but you are not allowed to de-define this knowledge regime.

Critical marginal exercises of self-reflexivity are the maximum you can put forward within a teaching context when a 'will to know' has become firmly condensed into a disciplinary body of knowledge and a corresponding curriculum. You thus create momentary folds, which some students experience as a genuine *mise en abyme* of what they have already learned but which most of those present regard as a sometimes interesting intellectual meta-game and more often as a straightforward annoyance: 'why bother us with thoughts that have no practical utility and only undermine what we know?' In the end, your deconstructive asides are rather marginal exercises in a *parasitic criticality* whose presumed profundity is no match for the institutional solidity of the challenged 'will to know'. The rare moments — I am tempted to speak of 'states of exception' — when the teaching of

theory transforms from the instruction of certified knowledge into the 'obstruction' of the underlying longing for truth only ratify the curriculum's general axioms. This is all the more true in the light of the overall neoliberal setting, which positions teaching as an act of mediating validated information to individuals who are supposed to be both consumers and 'self-capitalists' investing in their employability. The official pedagogical credo therefore urges to activate the students as much as possible. Their personal powers must be continually challenged: every student should be stimulated to show what he or she is capable of. In line with the ethos of the post-Fordist worker, the student is already expected to behave as a productive capacity, an always particular combination of the generic faculties of thinking and communication that immaterial labour sets to work.[8] Neoliberal pedagogy indeed addresses the individual students as the competitive labourers they have to become.

However, the average student who keenly monitors his or her educational investments tends to act as a strategic learner. Overall, the effective display of what one is capable of remains limited to the moments that one's activity appears to be a genuine short-term investment because it is effectively rewarded. Papers and written or oral exams were of course always decisive moments in a personal learning trajectory. Yet according to the neoliberal rhetoric, an evaluation equals both the traditional testing of a student's knowledge and the validation of their more general individual capacities in the light of a course's particular content. Some students have strongly internalized this new double objective and experience an unsuccessful examination as a personal setback. Others start to develop an authentic personal interest in social theorizing, including its deconstructive fringes. But a considerable number of students just behave opportunistically and go for a minimal or medium effort. They do not regard higher education as a self-investment in their own capacities in view of future returns and act as a 'Me, Inc.' that is mainly interested in an immediate break-even. The neoliberal regime of education is indeed characterized by a profound tension. Whereas this dispositive or set-up officially premises the existence of a self-enlightened, at once rational and entrepreneurial subject that values long-term profits higher than immediate gains, it in fact produces *en masse* consumers who balance their accounts on a narrow day-to-day basis. Assumed

8 **Cf. Paul Virno**, A Grammar of the Multitude: For an Analysis of Contemporary Forms of Life **(New York: Semiotext[e], 2004).**

long-term calculations turn out to be short-term assessments of costs and gains — and it is up to the teacher-examiner to deal with the notable gap between the pedagogically supposed subjectivity and the actual 'Me, Inc.' one is confronted with.

The tension in question points to the two basic tenets of neoliberal governmentality, which do not go together very well. The 'marketization' of education stimulates a consumerist attitude that is indeed difficult to reconcile with the positioning of the very same individual as a self-capitalist whose investments will only pay off later. Yet in one crucial respect the difference between long- and short-term investors does not matter much. Together with the reigning norms informing the numerous monitoring and evaluation procedures, both subject-positions contribute to a pedagogical atmosphere that blocks the possibility to turn teaching into a dialogical activity of radical questioning. In this latter practice, thought is tested to its uttermost limit, up to the point where 'the will to know' does not produce a new truth but a profound experience of not-knowing. Like every general human capacity, knowing actually includes its negation, so not-knowing. The full affirmation of this potential therefore implies moments of impotentiality, or the realization of the ability to know through its un-realization. An important ethical lesson is implied, as Giorgio Agamben rightly stresses:

> To be free is not simply to have the power to do this or that thing, nor is it simply to have the power to refuse to do this or that thing. To be free is, in the sense we have seen, to be capable of one's own impotentiality, to be in relation to one's own privation.[9]

(Not-)Knowing Contemporary Dance

In 1992, Flemish choreographer Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker, internationally renowned for the many acclaimed productions with her Rosas company, decided to create a new dance school in Brussels. Without any guarantee of structural financial support by Belgian or Flemish authorities, PARTS — actually the acronym of 'Performing Arts Research and Training Studios' — effectively took off in 1995.[10] The curriculum never was and is not now grounded in a specific disciplinary approach to dance. PARTS is rather a continually adjusted project that tries to give shape to one main idea: contemporary dancers or choreographers should not just be well-trained, technically skilled persons but must know and be able to articulate *what* they are up to and *why* they are doing it. The 'what' for instance explains the school's attention to theatre training and musical analysis. For although they regularly act on a stage before an audience, dancers usually lack a basic knowledge of the different forms of theatricality, or the possible loops between presence and representation, doing and its public observation. And notwithstanding the fact that they often move in relation to music, most dancers cannot read a score and have only a faint idea of musical forms, compositional techniques, or the physical working of sound. The PARTS curriculum, however, wants to train 'thinking dancers' — an expression often used in the school's founding documents — whose versatility not only fits the conceptual de-definition of dance in contemporary performing practices but first and foremost testifies to a capacity to build up and maintain a reflexive relationship with the always specific activity they are engaged in or preparing for. The 'why'-aspect situates this ability within a more explicit discursive dimension: the 'thinking dancer' is also a knowledgeable individual who does not just move, act or decide intuitively. They can firmly articulate choreographic choices and frame their practice by means of general ideas or theoretical insights as well as informed references to dance history or the principal stakes of contemporary art.

Notwithstanding the prevailing informal atmosphere in PARTS, the school is not exactly hyper-democratic in spirit. Every two years, several hundreds, sometimes even over a thousand candidates audition worldwide during Rosas tours; about two hundred of them can come over for the final audition week in Brussels, which ends with the final selection of maximum forty students. Once students are admitted, at a relatively modest tuition fee or even almost for free thanks to a scholarship, they are subjected to a demanding educational regime. Except on Wednesdays, weekdays last from 9.15 till 17.15 or even 18.00; moreover, students are also confronted with the implicit expectation that they explore personal ideas or projects further after school hours and over the weekend. Up until today, PARTS has succeeded in staying out of the Bologna framework and

9 **Giorgio Agamben, 'On Potentiality', in** Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy **(Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), 177-184, 183.**

10 **For testimonies by staff, students and graduates on the first PARTS decade, see Steven De Belder and Theo Van Rompay, eds.,** P.A.R.T.S: Documenting Ten Years of Contemporary Dance Education **(Brussels: PARTS, 2006).**

its binding bachelor-master structure (but this may change in a not too distant future). Quite a few students drop out after the first two years of the training cycle and do not continue their studies in the research cycle, which also lasts two years and gives ample room to students with choreographic ambitions (a vast selection of their works are presented during an international school tour). Those who deliberately leave often do so out of a personal urge to take up a position in a dance company. Given the relative shortness of a dancer's career, every additional year of education may indeed be experienced as a difficult to remediate reduction of professional opportunities. For various reasons, some students who do actually wish to stay in the school are barred from entering the research cycle. Upon finishing the first cycle, all interested students actually have to re-apply; newcomers can enter after the submission of a personal dossier, which ensures a different group dynamic among the 20 up to 25 students of the second cycle.

The basic educational stance informing the PARTS project acknowledges the constitutive role of self-discovery and self-mastery for an 'artist in the making'. However, the curriculum and teaching methods particularly stimulate the development of both qualities through the confrontation with 'strong others' — read: with strong-minded individuals who do not refrain from acting as artistic, intellectual and/or personal masters during classes, workshops or the coaching of personal projects. Taking up the role of 'the one who is supposed to know' does not usually come down to the affirmation of an authoritative position. PARTS rather frames the open dialogue between master and student as an artistic project in its own right, as Pieter T'Jonck rightly observes: 'In the confrontation with masters, the student learns to clear away all the debris of preconceived conceptions, to create mental space.'[11] Hence the overall rule 'that emancipation is obtained via intense confrontation', which markedly differs from the prevailing neoliberal educational credo. The students are indeed not addressed as self-capitalists who are offered investment opportunities within a consumerist context, quite the contrary. At first sight, the PARTS regime even testifies to a traditional view on arts education, one that sticks to the idea of '*Bildung* through the dialogue with exemplary masters'. Yet PARTS' hidden curriculum aims at not creating clones: promoting an at once self-reflexive and self-assured artistic individuality is the school's main objective. Thus, the supposed masters propagate very different 'truths'. Whereas some for instance still defend the necessity of a minimum of craftsmanship

as articulated within the traditions of ballet and modern dance, others wholeheartedly embrace post-postmodernist conceptual dance. Likewise, the professed artistic views range from vintage avant-gardism to considerably less experimental approaches that emphasize the value of, for instance, compositional logic.

Within this heterogeneous environment, students are expected to find their own artistic stance and formulate an individualized poetics. Through the repeated confrontation with various 'strong others', who may come to include older students, they must develop – with ups and downs – a personal voice that is able to stand the test of a multi-faceted critical dialogue. All in all, PARTS commits itself to a plural Oedipus-model: successful students affirm their personal qualities through the gradual symbolic 'murder' of several masters. When these farewell gestures possess a genuinely individual nature, they mostly suggest a new — not necessarily historically original — answer to the axiomatic question 'what may dance be today?' Precisely this issue is the main framework of most activity within PARTS and keeps on motivating the staff's continual re-articulation of the curriculum. Not unlike the situation in the fine arts, for which Thierry De Duve[12] has coined the fitting expression 'art in general', dance's contemporaneity has everything to do with the conspicuous lack of an imperative identity and, concomitantly, a nowadays institutionalized absence of binding standards or valuation criteria.[13] PARTS affirms this seemingly anomic state of affairs neither with nostalgia for the imaginary certainties of the past nor with clear-cut artistic propositions for the immediate future. Not knowing what contemporary dance actually is but nevertheless offer supposedly helpful building blocks for its possible definition: this paradox forms the heartbeat of PARTS' pedagogical project. What does this imply for the teaching of theory?

Nimble Thinking

Ten past two, the last students are queuing up for three hours of theory class. I am waiting for them in a plain classroom with brick walls

11 **Pieter T'Jonck, 'The dialogue between master and student as an artistic project', in** P.A.R.T.S: Documenting Ten Years of Contemporary Dance Education**, ed. Steven De Belder and Theo Van Rompay (Brussels: PARTS, 2006), 99-109, 104.**

12 **Thierry De Duve, 'The Post-Duchamp Deal. Remarks on a Few Specifications of the Word "Art"',** A-Prior **6 (2001): 141-147.**

13 **Cf. Rudi Laermans,** Moving Together: Making and Theorizing Contemporary Dance **(Amsterdam: Valiz, forthcoming).**

and cheap tables and chairs arranged in a U around the small table, chair and whiteboard at the front. Silence descends, a little more fidgeting here and there, a few bodies already struggling against fatigue… The overall effect is one of a settling collective attention, not unlike what happens in the theatre when the lights go down. The performance — 'the lesson' — can begin. It partly complies with a preordained scenario: someone speaks while others listen; and someone is supposed to know, whereas all the others assume that they know less. The theory classes at PARTS also have clearly-defined topics. So in the first year I teach the basics of social systems theory in order to sensitize the students to the paradoxes of communication in general and the peculiarities of artistic communication in particular. During the second year, I read some key texts on 20th-century art with the students; my classes in the research cycle are mostly optional and devoted to an author or subject I am momentarily interested in. However, the theory lessons' chief purpose is not to pass on sociological information or knowledge of art history, preferably in an educationally sound manner, or to enhance the students' interpretative capacities. These evident objectives only serve as a legitimate alibi for ending up, time and again, at the point where, as the teacher, you first go off at a tangent at some student's instigation, then lapse into improvisation and an intense exchange that brings you even further from the initially discussed topic, ultimately rounding things off in a closing staccato or — more common — a silence bursting with unknowingness.

'Doing theory' is thinking or reflecting hard and out loud: it implies a specific sort of performativity. At PARTS, theory lessons in the first place mean action, partly just by the teacher but mainly together with the students. It is often an alternation of a tactically dosed and playful 'doing with' (critically scrutinizing the consecrated insights of others, discussing actual facts, etc.), but when the teaching really goes well it is dominated by nimble action with/by words and concepts — something like linguistic choreography, minus any poetic slant. What matters most is the creation of a collective situation, sustained by a difficult to articulate intellectual solidarity, in which something genuine can happen because the thinking takes risks, becomes uncertain, enters unstable zones. Definable results become trivial: since there are no formal moments of evaluation — a rule that greatly contributes to the positive teaching climate — it is of no importance if at the end of a week of teaching only half of the reading material has effectively been discussed.

In this situation, theory just becomes another word for a collective process and individual practice of reflection. The created reflexiveness is however well-informed, even formatted, by books as well as works of art (we regularly end up referring to recently attended dance performances). Yet the invoked bits and pieces of objectified intellectual culture do not act as information units validated by an academic discipline. They are primarily valued as complex resources whose unravelling always contains the promise of both knowing and not-knowing. 'Doing theory' is — to borrow Roland Barthes'[14] famous distinction — taking the 'studium' (the Canon, Theory, Art, History…) seriously in the hope that it will be momentarily punctuated by a thought movement whose unpredictable particularity remains external to its very condition of possibility. This is also the primary reason for the absence of theory exams. To transform a contingent collective event into subject matter that could be assessed individually would just be sheer nonsense. What happens in the classroom can at best increase the awareness of the necessity of books, works of art or thought encounters as inspiring resources for the ability to reflect beyond platitudes such as 'art is self-expression'.

The theory lessons in PARTS aim at an uncontrollable *'conceptual receptivity'* that profoundly questions everything that seems normal, obvious or natural, whether the topic is communication and social systems (sociology), the notion of the subject (philosophy), or the political dimension of baroque dance (art history). Theory in the active mode does not only mediate validated information but also transforms ostensible obviousness into enigmas that have to be clarified in greater detail, thus bringing with it the invitation to think differently. We discuss for instance the notion of language; someone formulates a remark — and suddenly there is no longer a Fact but a Problem: an idea or category that has always been experienced as a matter-of-course ('language is an instrument of communication') changes into a contingent notion that is open to discussion and no longer excludes alternative ways of thinking. 'Doing theory' does not add any unshakable Truths but indeed continually hints at the sometimes openly professed maxim that 'everything that is can also be otherwise'. The intertwined capacities to discern virtual realities in existing ones and to realize previously unobserved potentialities of thought or representation are both fêted and put to work in a self-critical way. New conceptual possibilities are

14 Roland Barthes, Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography **(New York: Hill and Wang, 1982).**

therefore collectively tried out without making strong claims to truth. The disciplinary 'will to know' underlying academism is exchanged for the kind of experimental prudence that finds it most succinct expression in the word *'maybe'*. Hence the frequency of statements like 'maybe contemporary dance is nothing but a failing name for an impossible object'. The 'maybe' indicates a possibility that should not be guarded off against other virtual thoughts but, on the contrary, contains the appeal to open up — in Deleuzian parlance — other 'flight lines' that 'deterritorialize' thought.

In marked contrast with the discourse informing the neoliberal educational regime, the eventual utility of theory is never an explicit topic during a class or staff meeting. Nearly everybody at PARTS takes it for granted that 'doing theory' is a practice that helps to sharpen the reflective capacities of the 'thinking dancer' (there is of course always a minority of students who doubt this). This may be true in at least two respects. On the one hand, active theorizing surely gives no one, not even artists-to-be, a recipe for acting this way or that. Nor are there any themes, let alone artistic practices, that would provide the perfect argument for working on a theoretically informed basis. Yet contemporary artists often do start from a question or problem in exactly the same way as a 'thinking theorist': What is an emotion? How does an image work? What is communication? They articulate them in a medium that is not language, such as movement and stillness (the medium of dance), or they use language in different ways than a theorist does. Nevertheless, it may be a help that one has observed — every learner is in the first place a witness — how an issue is handled when 'doing theory'. The 'maybe' is, again, highly appropriate: familiarity with the practice of theorizing aloud in the classroom in an unbounded, open mode is never more than a possible aid to the artistic exploration of one or more topics. An artist can always open up different sets of tools, such as the body (or so-called intuition: the idiosyncratic condensation of a life history in impulse decisions) or the dialogue with others (or collaboration: creating together on the basis of the uncontrollable dynamic of an in-between, an interaction which, like an insensible third partner, touches upon subjectivity and puts it on the line).

On the other hand, 'doing theory' may instil a relatively durable sensitivity for that peculiar borderline experience in which not-knowing appears to be a genuine form of knowledge, particularly when one is — perhaps desperately and on the verge of panic — looking for a plausible answer or arguable solution. This

receptiveness implies a notion of criticality that goes beyond the established ideas of critique, as Irit Rogoff has rightly pointed out. Whereas critical analysis tends to indulge in 'illuminating flaws, locating elisions, allocating blames', criticality is 'operating from an uncertain ground': it affirms the moment of not-knowing in the process of knowing.[15] For doubting artists, it may be of help that they have repeatedly co-experienced during their education this borderline event in the company of someone who is supposed to know. In fact, the experience co-defines every genuine act of research that implies the exercise of thought. One looks for a different perspective or idea, and one ends up nowhere, in a sheer void where none of the spontaneously emerging thoughts fit the theme at hand. Like all researchers, contemporary artists should not just be able to endure and stand this criticality: they trust it as a possible new beginning that may never start.

Coda

No definitive conclusions can be drawn from the above story about two quite different educational settings. However, it does suggest at least one line of inspiration for the near future pertaining to the institutional relationship between art academies and academic education. The Bologna framework has furthered the bringing into line of both spaces, yet with a clear preference for the model of the university and its disciplining of thought. Art academies should resist this hegemony. Particularly in respect to research, they must defend the at once illuminating and deconstructive moment of not-knowing as the proverbial truth of every quest for knowledge. This paradox forms the heart of both 'doing theory' and genuine artistic research. Criticality should therefore not be cut back but given a more prominent role in every art academy. Ideally, it becomes an active force transversally informing all courses, thus superseding the traditional difference between theory and practice. Not only in the on-going discussion on the nature of the Ph.D. in the Arts but also in a more general way, art academies can indeed act as critical supplements to higher education that demonstrate — rather than teach — university based education and research that the act of knowing reaches its apex in the capacity to raise questions bordering on the limit of not-knowing. Artistic practice and theorizing meet each other in this zone of criticality

15 Irit Rogoff, 'Looking Away: Participations in Visual Culture', in After Criticism: New Responses to Art and Performance**, ed. Gavin Butt (Malden: Blackwell, 2005), 117-134, 119.**

where a gesture indicates the possibility of its own impossibility within the realm of whatever medium. Art academies resist 'neoliberalization' when they defend the contingent 'maybe' of both critical theory and critical art.

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Thinking about Thinking Together

Anders Kreuger

The invitation to write about art teaching made me think, which is almost invariably a good thing. I have twenty-five years of work experience, much of it related to pedagogy in some sense, if only because I always, in all the roles I assumed, had to address other people in a clear, lively and though-provoking way. I have had many opportunities to reflect on the pros and cons of what is commonly referred to as 'communication' and 'mediation'. These activities are problematic, I find, because they too often use language in predictable and flattening ways and therefore suspend the curiosity and unfettered thinking they were supposed to promote. But here I will look more specifically at my experience of teaching and what it might teach us.

Since the mid-1980s I have made my living in the following fields, in rough chronological order: language teaching at university level; art mediation in a conservative art museum; translating and interpreting in a foreign policy environment; cultural diplomacy and arts administration for an international organization; freelance curating of small and large contemporary art exhibitions; freelance writing about art and related topics for catalogues and journals; freelance lecturing, moderating, translating and book editing in a contemporary art environment; academic research about curating; teaching curatorial practice and art theory; institutional curating in a Kunsthalle; academic administration; teaching fine art studio practice; institutional curating in a contemporary art museum.

My trajectory is not an unbroken line of ascent or descent, nor is it a haphazard zigzag. At least that is how it looks to me now. It all started with a strong interest in art, language and history, which made me study art history, political science, comparative linguistics and modern languages (Lithuanian, Russian and Finnish) at Stockholm University. I have travelled in different directions with this luggage, and I have been able to convert all my objects of study into action and results in the different chapters of my professional biography. So many of my curator colleagues have similarly speckled backgrounds that I rarely have to defend or even explain mine. One of the greatest attractions of working with contemporary art, I always thought, is that it accommodates such a great variety of interests. More than most other fields, contemporary art allows for a generalist approach. At the same time, of course, the art world is a highly specialized context. This balancing between the open and the closed also has implications for teaching art.

Teaching

The first time I was asked to teach I was still a student. For two years, in fact, I had been the only student of my unusual subject. Lithuanian is a notoriously difficult language, and because of my two teachers' almost total lack of interest in the process and protocol of learning I had to find my own way through a thicket of obtusely formulated grammatical rules, which had to be extrapolated from hard-to-find books. How inspiring, how *emancipating*, to be left to one's own devices like that! This was my first encounter with non-pedagogy after twelve years of well-intended but overly pedagogical schooling.[1]

Some other people wanted to start with Lithuanian in September 1986, and I was put in charge of them since no one else could or wanted to do the job. I was already a convert to the non-method of 'theoretical' philological study, as opposed to the drip-feeding of 'practical' knowledge that was, and still is, the pedagogical norm for learning a new language. I decided that going through the textbook chapter by chapter was fine, but only after I had given my students an outline of the basic construction of Lithuanian and its meaning in a global linguistic perspective. This sounds ambitious, and it was, but my counter-intuitive undertaking to base the first month of teaching entirely on my own hand-written illustrative plates of the language's deep structure proved reasonably successful. The usefulness of these posters strengthened my resolve to treat theory as the foundation for practice rather than vice versa. They also showed me that almost anything could be visualised without over-simplification, which was a good reminder of the need for precision in teaching.

After doing things more or less directly related to politics for more than ten years I found myself teaching again in the early 2000s. I had just assumed a new identity, that of the freelance curator, and besides getting my first commissions for exhibitions and essays I was being invited to give occasional lectures in Scandinavian art academies. As a matter of both principle and convenience I would speak of subjects that intrigued me at the time. This simple rule is, I have found, also true of institutional programming: do not try to guess

1 **I have often thought of my encounter with the Department of Baltic and Slavic Languages at Stockholm University as a somewhat uncanny parallel to the interview, in the cellar of the University, with Dr. Uzzi-Tuzii, Professor of Bothno-Ugrian languages, in Italo Calvino's** If on a Winter's Night a Traveller **(51–58 in my copy of the Swedish translation by Viceca Melander,** Om en vinternatt en resande **(Stockholm: Bonniers, 1983). After all, a three-week course in Old Prussian grammar and text fragments was part of the MA degree I earned in 1990...**

what interests other people; try instead to share your own interests with them. I lectured, for instance, on the topic of 'contemporary bureaucracy as art' at the Malmö Art Academy, on 'the unfinished sentence' at the Royal University College of Art in Stockholm and on Walter Benjamin's phrase 'to read what was never written' at the Finnish Academy of Fine Arts in Helsinki.[2] Obviously, preparing for such lectures helped me to shape and deepen my own reading and curatorial research.

The next stage in my development as a teacher was when I was invited by some of the same academies, and others like the Royal Academy of Fine Art in Copenhagen or the Trondheim Art Academy, to give week-long seminars. I developed yet another non-pedagogical method (or perhaps it was a pedagogical non-method): reading original texts aloud to students, with frequent breaks for explanation and commentary, rather than offering 'applied' versions of Benjamin, Deleuze, Arendt, Heidegger, Freud and Bergson (these were the authors I focused on in 2002–2007).

I am not ranting, but simply stating a fact, if I note that young people's reading skills have changed since the mid-1980s when I was a student. It is partly to do with a general decline in teaching arts and letters at school, but more significantly with the institutionalization of the short attention span by clickable hypertext and real-time online feedback. Urbane, intelligent art students know better than losing time with books when they are alone in the studio or at home, where they cannot immediately weave their newfound knowledge into a social web involving their peers, a figure of authority and the collectively sustained sense of possible future gain. This is unsurprising. Like most people today, art students need to feel secure that what they are doing is *important*, and preferably all the time. They have been taught that knowledge is useless unless you can use it. Curiosity for curiosity's sake is something many of them have 'unlearned'. (A too fashionable word, but appropriate in this context.)

The reading seminar without homework is one way of addressing this contemporary psychological reality. First, an adapted rendering of the concept of time as duration, or the idea that the past is preserved in the past, can never substitute the sheer intellectual shock and aesthetic pleasure that Bergson's concise and unpredictable verbal images offer us when we read them or listen to someone reading them to us. Second, the collective reading of *The Life of the Mind*, *What Is Called Thinking?* or *The Logic of Sensation*

becomes a performance.[3] This is recognizable as an art format and therefore more pleasurable, and important, than an individual act of reading, which is associated with everything art students are supposed to be less good at: wrestling with language, following a thread from beginning to end… Finally, the possibility to monitor whether the seminar participants actually understand the text is a crucial element of this pedagogical experiment. Explanatory digressions are an efficient tool if they are precise and well timed.

Students of curating have an even shorter attention span than fine art students. At least that is what conventional wisdom tells us. They are even more focused on the instant gratification of converting knowledge into networking benefits or concrete results. Of course there are different kinds of curating students and different kinds of study programmes. The MA Curating Contemporary Art at the Royal College of Art in London, where I taught in 2003–2004, was at the time known for not neglecting the technical and social skills of exhibition-making. I was called in to supervise a group of twelve graduating students as they were collectively putting together an exhibition and a documentary film programme, so I appreciated that they had been trained in the fundamentals of making things happen. I continued in the same fashion, giving small workshops on topics such as how to write letters to commercial galleries or how to edit an artist's CV, and I supervised the students as they renovated the run-down gallery spaces of the RCA. This methodology of learning-by-doing was, I thought, a suitable way to share my experience of being a curator.

None of these four teaching roles (conveying synthesized insight into a complex system, formatting specific aspects of discourse into lectures, performing text for a small collective and supervising a classic apprenticeship) was uncomplicated. They all required experimental approaches and solutions. Yet they were directly related to my own expertise as a philologist, writer and exhibition curator. My latest teaching job, as Visiting External Tutor at the Malmö Art Academy in 2010–2011, was by far the most difficult and the most

2 **This is an important phrase in Walter Benjamin's essay 'On the Mimetic Faculty' from 1933. English translation by Edmund Jephcott and Kingsley Shorter in the volume** One-Way Street **(London and New York: Verso, 1979), 162.**

3 **Hannah Arendt,** The Life of the Mind **(San Diego, New York and London: Harcourt, 1971). Martin Heidegger,** What Is Called Thinking?**, trans. J. Glenn Gray (New York: Prennial, 1976). Gilles Deleuze,** Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation**, trans. Daniel W. Smith (London and New York: Continuum, 2003).**

worthy of thought. How could I, as an active curator and writer and former administrator (I had been Director of this academy in 2007–2010) use my own experience in the one-to-one studio conversation with a student who is becoming a practising visual artist? I, who do not define myself as an artist? Which were my advantages in this predicament? My disadvantages?

Every studio visit is a delicate and sensitive situation. Work is underway, and the teacher is invited (always invited by the student, never inviting himself) to respond to it and to help steer the ongoing process. I decided to stay true to my non-pedagogical approach, making it clear to the students that I would always respond very directly to whatever they showed me, without censoring my impulses to verbalize what I saw or trying to make it fit into any 'learning strategy'. But before I say more about my experience of studio teaching I will allow myself a few digressions.

Curating

First some very basic reflections. Having worked in a few different capacities, I have developed some attitudes that I think are suitable for all kinds of work. I always try to do things that are a little bit too difficult for me, to avoid getting bored and to make sure I keep learning new things. I have discovered, sometimes the hard way, that it may be good to put your own 'personality' (which of course is forever changing and developing) into your work, but that it is bad to take your work personally. Getting angry with others, or really feeling sorry when you apologize for your mistakes, is rather unhelpful. And perhaps most pertinently: the result of your own work will always, if you are lucky, become material for someone else. It means that we should not be offended when others cannibalize our thoughts and misquote us for their own purposes. All these self-help wisdoms can be quite important to remember when you are teaching.

My question to myself is how I can best use my experiences as a curator in the studio visit situation. To answer it I need to clarify, and at the same time complicate, how I view my profession. This is also known as 'problematizing' (another sadly over-used word). There are different approaches to curating, and curators usually subscribe to several of those in their practice. As we have seen, curating may be regarded as a technique or a set of skills that can be taught and learned: the things you have to know to make good exhibitions or be an efficient 'art mediator' in other ways.[4] Alternatively, it can

be described as an attitude or awareness of quality or mark of cultural sophistication, which is more difficult to acquire through training. Such contemporary and highly specialized connoisseurship is, I sometimes suspect, the actual connotation of *the curatorial*, a recent coinage in the growing literature on curating.

Curating is in fact increasingly recognized as a mode of operation reflecting what drives contemporary capitalism: the 'art of choosing'.[5] In an economy no longer characterized by scarcity and need, knowing how to select from an abundance of offers is what creates visibility and status. The *good choice* is perhaps the only act that consumerist society accepts as meaningful and 'personal'. Seen in this light, the curator's role as an arbiter of taste (a taste that aims to transcend the merely aesthetic and embrace the psychological, the social and the political) is perfectly designed for a networked world that privileges the relational over the substantial and reference over interpretation.

It is healthy to remind ourselves of another possible understanding of curating, as a mode of thinking that cannot function if it is too far removed from the practice of animating objects and ideas (making them come alive in three-dimensional and social space) or if it excludes the other (the object, the author, the viewer) from its operations. This, in fact, is how the failure of exhibitions can often be explained: that the curator decided to do all the thinking himself, disregarding interesting things that did not fit with his 'concept'. At the same time, curating must have enough confidence in its own methods and goals to avoid being reduced to mediation. Rather than assuming the role of the go-between, the curator should aim to produce situations where people can *think together.*

This was my tentative conclusion when I sat down to scrutinize curating one and a half years ago, after being invited to submit a proposal for a biennial. I even entitled my exhibition outline *Thinking Together.* The starting point was a rather straightforward understanding of the phrase: that an exhibition is an event designed to bring people together to think rather than to 'do something'. The 'think tank' is sometimes brought up as a model for both exhibition-making and academic research in visual art, with the motivation

4 I am currently employed by M HKA, the Museum of Contemporary Art Antwerp, as a 'presentation specialist'. My colleagues from Romania tell me that a museum curator there is officially a muzeograf.

5 See Dorothea von Hantelmann, 'The Curatorial Paradigm', The Exhibitionist 4, ed. Jens Hoffmann (Berlin and Turin: Archive Books, 2011), 8.

that a group of like-minded curators or doctoral candidates working informally together will challenge each other's assumptions and deliver more innovative results. Yet this analogy, inspiring as it is, will mislead us if we ignore the actual purpose and functioning of established think tanks. More often than not, these are ideologically and commercially motivated purveyors of partisan views for the political marketplace. We may want to play a curatorial game with the overtones of kitsch enthusiasm that resonate in 'thinking together',[6] but do we really want contemporary art to make itself useful as a lobbying instrument?

When I thought more about these two words I remembered another way to connect and interpret them. They may point us in a direction that is less ambitious than a gathering of minds but perhaps more pregnant with meaning for the practice (and theory) of curating. People can think together, but things can also be thought together. In contemporary academia the latter interpretation of thinking-together (the hyphen is optional) is gradually winning acceptance as an experimental methodology for combining various forms of knowledge into new speculative ensembles.[7] This allows academic writers to look for unexpected similarities or analogies between seemingly disparate phenomena, which could be seen as a return to the foundational moment of comparative science (linguistics, archaeology, anthropology) in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. The thinking-together of different thoughts is the equivalent of a comparison that deserves to be made even if we do not know what knowledge it might produce.

The common practice of thinking-together is therefore no less ambitious than the utopian ideal of thinking together. The two can also be combined. I recently failed in an interesting way when I wanted to do precisely this at an informal gathering of artists and theoreticians in Oslo. What I tried was to put an array of inspirations and interpretations 'on the table', so that my listeners might combine them into new constellations. I wanted them to do this 'together', which is never self-evident. Together with me? Together as a group? It is difficult either way, and might not even work. In a sense the Oslo talk was a perfect illustration of the core difficulties in this proposition. Although I enhanced my lack of coherence with performative awkwardness, the presentation remained too open-ended, too scattered.

Yet I believe that *Thinking Together* (my as yet unrealised exhibition plan) reveals a hidden need that should be made explicit

and converted into concrete curatorial and pedagogical work.

True to my non-method for teaching theory, I read out short passages from original texts that had helped me to configure a *semantic field* for my idea, a 'fuzzy set' of meanings presenting a multi-dimensional mental image rather than a concise verbal definition.[8] The most important of these sources are Gilles Deleuze's elusive notion of the *noosign* or 'thinking image',[9] Jacques Rancière's no less ambiguous parsing of the 'pensive image'[10] and, above all, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin's overtly speculative but more accessible description of the *noosphere*, a 'sphere of thought' postulated

6 **To exemplify, I will just mention William Isaac's book** Dialogue and the Art of Thinking Together: A Pioneering Approach to Communicating in Business and in Life **(New York: Bantam and Dell, 1999), and the working congress on the 'municipal transition system' organised by the city of Cologne 3–4 June 2008 under the title** Zusammen denken, gemeinsam handeln **('Thinking Together, Acting as One').**

7 **See for example Gordon G. Globus,** Quantum Closures and Disclosures: Thinking-Together Postphenomenology and Quantum Brain Dynamics **(Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2003). Quantum Brain Dynamics in itself is a fine example of thinking-together. It was launched in the late 1960s when the Japanese physicist Hiroomi Umezawa first used Quantum Field Theory to try and explain the sub-neuronal functioning of the human brain, and it has produced the intriguing theory that memory relies on non-localizable macroscopic quantum operations involving the quasi-crystalline behaviour of the brain's water molecules.**

8 **On this topic one of the best writers is Vasily Nalimov, a dissident Soviet philosopher of science whose grandfather was a Komi shaman: 'Thus, if human consciousness operates with fuzzy, probabilistically weighted sets of concepts, is it possible to introduce this system of concepts directly into our language? The experience of statisticians, representatives of the subjective probability interpretation, shows that it is extremely difficult, if at all possible, to extract from people prior, probabilistically given ideas of some familiar phenomenon. Though such fuzzy knowledge almost certainly exists, people for some reason or other will not, or perhaps cannot, transfer it to others. This barrier is erected by our culture: it is not customary to reveal the process of thinking; hence, communication goes on at the discrete level.' Vasily Nalimov,** Realms of the Unconscious: The Enchanted Frontier, **transl. A.V. Yarkho (Philadelphia: ISI Press, 1982), 16.**

9 **Here is an important but typically non-exhaustive quote from Deleuze: 'The image had to free itself from sensory-motor links; it had to stop being action-image in order to become a pure optical, sound (and tactile) image. But the latter was not enough: it had to enter into relation with yet other forces, so that it could itself escape from a world of clichés. It had to open up to powerful and direct revelations, those of the time-image, of the readable image and the thinking image.' Gilles Deleuze,** Cinema 2: The Time-Image, **trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (London: The Athlone Press, 1989), 23.**

10 **'I have attempted to give some content to this notion of the pensive which signals, in the image, something that resists thought, the thought of those who produce it and of those who try to identify it. Exploring various forms of this resistance I wanted to show that it is not a quality constitutive of the nature of certain images, but instead a gap between several image functions presented on the same surface.' Jacques Rancière,** L'image pensive, **in** Le spectateur émancipé **(Paris: La fabrique, 2008), 139.**

in analogy with the biosphere or 'sphere of life'.[11] I find all of them very relevant for thinking about curating and, in the context of this essay, for thinking about teaching.

It is perhaps paradoxical that I, who think of myself as an only moderately social person, should insist on speaking in such terms of 'togetherness' and on trying to grasp what unites the connection of people with the connection of ideas. I do tend to avoid togetherness whenever I can, and particularly larger groups of people, but on the other hand I am also not interested in going it alone and thereby imposing my own attitudes on others. At least for now, before I have had time to over-elaborate my idea, I find it meaningful to identify curating as a mode of thinking that will not thrive in splendid and dictatorial isolation. It is this vision of the curator's role that I tried to carry over into my parallel activities as an art teacher.

Teaching Art as a Curator

Teaching studio practice to young aspiring artists offers a minimal model for thinking together: the meeting of two individuals within the format of the educational studio visit. Yet it must be acknowledged that this is an abstract and idealized view of the institutional reality that constitutes life in the art academy. The two individuals are under different kinds of pressure: one being weighed down with the task of turning the other into a student, the other saddled with the task of becoming an artist by using himself and others as material.

On the one hand, there are good reasons why teachers should not fraternize with students. The effects on the microcosmic world of the academy might be devastating if things get too personal between the two categories. Inter-generational affairs are, as we all know, not unheard of, but I side with those who condemn them while the teacher–student relationship is still in place. While I was at Malmö I even decided to not accept any offers of Facebook friendship (a common ritual for expressing satisfaction with a lecture or a studio visit, and not a very personal act at all) until the counterpart had graduated from the academy. On the other hand, Rancière's observation that the teaching situation produces ignorance in order to perpetuate itself is relevant also in the ostensibly democratic contemporary art academy.[12] The potentially emancipating educational studio visit is embedded in a hierarchical order that threatens to compromise it. It is always difficult to make thinking-together work when the parties to the situation are unequal.

So there are some difficulties with the institutional frame-

work and psychological realities of teaching fine art. Presumably, similar problems occur across the whole educational sector, but what makes the art academy particularly challenging is that it offers comparatively little curriculum-based education and instead focuses on students' individual processes of becoming-artist under the supervision of older and more accomplished colleagues. Such continuous personalized tutoring is the most important component of a degree in fine arts. Usually this is an affair between artists. Only those who are themselves practising (and successful) artists are entrusted with looking at, understanding and responding to the work that is emerging in the studios.

But surely there are also ways of making curators' knowledge useful to fine art students? First of all, curators must know how to put their experience of art into words. This is what 'mediation' is all about. Good curators should be able to write concise and expressive prose, which is one way of converting functional mediation into something more creative and challenging. A clear and precise verbal response to students' work is important for the quality of the studio visit. Curators must also be good at gathering information, creating associative links across vast stretches of data and, crucially, retaining names and dates and other details that make communication more accurate and efficient. One important task for fine art teachers is to make students aware of the context of their work, to show them

11 **'[...] I am first of all dreaming of the extraordinary network of radiophonic and televisual communication which, in anticipation perhaps of a direct tuning-together of brains through the as yet mysterious forces of telepathy, is already connecting us, at this very moment, in a kind of "etherised" common consciousness.' Pierre Teilhard de Chardin,** La formation de la Noosphère: Une interpretation biologique plausible de l'histoire humaine, **1947, in** L'avenir de l'homme **(Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1959), 190. And another quote: 'It is clear that research, yesterday still a luxury occupation, is now becoming the primary, and even principle function of humanity. – What does this great event tell us? I, for my part, can only see one explanation. It is that the enormous excess of free energy, released by the establishment of the Noosphere, is naturally, as a matter of evolution, destined to pass into the construction and functioning of what I have called its "brain". In this the Noosphere is similar to the organisms that preceded it. Humanity is progressively becoming "brainier". In order to fill what is called our leisure time, we must therefore devote it to new work of a higher nature. This is a biological necessity, and it leads to a general and collective effort of vision. The Noosphere is an immense thinking machine.' Ibid., 195. (My translation.)**

12 **'To explain something to someone is first of all to prove that he cannot understand it by himself. Before being the act of the pedagogue, the explanation is the myth of pedagogy, the parable of a world divided into learned spirits and ignorant spirits, mature and immature spirits, capable and incapable, intelligent and stupid.' Jacques Rancière,** Le maître ignorant: Cinq leçons sur l'émancipation intellectuelle **(Paris: Fayard, 1987), 15–16.**

what has already been done: how, why, by whom, where and when. I have often used the internet as a reference tool during studio visits, but for this I must be able to recall names and feed them into the search engine. I dare say that curators, in general, are better at this than artists. Name-dropping is simply part of the curatorial *déformation professionelle*.

Finally, curators must always pay attention to the pragmatic details that can enhance art-making if students learn to master them. Thinking ahead about possible solutions for presentation is one way to trouble-shoot an idea. Both artists and curators are skilled in this, but curators have the advantage of having worked with different artists who have different needs. They are trained to see things from both inside and outside the individual artist's perspective. Curators participate in the production of art but are also detached from it. In my experience, one of the best questions to ask art students is: 'How would you yourself react if you were confronted with this work in an exhibition?' This serves as an introduction to discussing the need for some basic clarity in the structure of a work. Art students are quite often anxious about showing work that is 'too obvious'. While 'communication' may not the purpose of art-making (at least I do not think it is), it often contributes to the success or failure of a presentation. Curators who teach fine art should be uncompromising in their emphasis on critical seeing, but they should also unambiguously stress the importance of using language as a tool.

When I was Director of the Malmö Art Academy I initiated a one-week workshop to address this issue of language and writing in relation to studio practice. I invited my experienced colleague Helena Holmberg, curator at Index in Stockholm, to teach it together with me. We decided to call the workshop *Curating for Artists* and to focus on the notion of the 'art project' (with its deliberately 'logistical' overtones) and to coach students in three different ways to use text: as part of a work (a vehicle for self-expression), in a project description (to attract interest and possible support for a project in the making) and in a press release (to advertise a finished project). We wanted the students to grasp the meaning and basic method of the 'functional writing' that curators have to master, believing that practising artists would also benefit from such skills.

The workshop was part of the obligatory course package for second-year BFA students, along with a course in basic accounting, tax and copyright law and a workshop in grant application writing. Feedback from the participants was overwhelmingly positive

(all courses at the Malmö Art Academy are evaluated in writing by the students), but after half a year or so I was already hearing complaints from faculty members. The students had, I heard, become too complacent about developing their studio practice and planning their BFA graduation essays, thinking that this had already been taken care of in the project descriptions Helena and I made them write for the workshop.[13] The curatorial approach to 'projects', I also heard, was derailing the more insecure students who were struggling to develop their actual work. The gist of the critique against *Curating for Artists* was that it is unsuitable to teach the 'too instrumental' curatorial approach to language when the process of becoming-artist is still in such a delicate stage.

I accepted these objections as credible, because I knew that transferring the curator-artist relationship to the teaching situation would always be problematic and difficult, and as a result of discussions with faculty the workshop was suspended. Yet in retrospect I believe that the risks were overstated, and that Helena and I were making a valid point with *Curating for Artists*. The mission of the art academy, as I formulated it, was threefold: to educate new artists, to provide proper employment for accomplished artists and to produce new knowledge. I maintain that new artists need to know not only how to produce work, but also how to situate their work in the world at large so that it can be received as new knowledge. Now that I have withdrawn from the academy and from teaching and instead meet younger artists in my capacity as a museum curator, I am strengthened in my conviction that success comes to those who have both sets of skills.

The main problem of the art academy, as I see it from my different vantage points, is that it too often becomes a power base in itself, serving the interests of those who operate within the academic system rather than the students or even the teachers. Too much of what the academy does to renew itself and be future-orientated is actually to do with securing funding. This is, as far as I understand, true of the doctoral research programmes as well as of the international exchange projects, the special publishing projects and the high-flying seminars with invited guest speakers… All this is fine and well, as

13 This is how we introduced the workshop to prospective participants: 'Introduction to the project format: delimitating and developing a project; different stages of carrying out a project; different kinds of texts for presenting and marketing a project: project descriptions, texts being part of a project, press releases.' Course Description, Curating for Artists. Malmö Art Academy, spring semester 2009.

long as the everyday routine of studio visits and technical and theoretical courses (these were the basic teaching formats at Malmö) is not allowed to fall into neglect. I am convinced that the academy has the potential to be a site for the production of something new and for thinking-together in the two senses I have tried to elaborate. Therefore I resent it becoming a machine that turns potential partners for innovation into 'students' or, even worse, into the 'pupils' of the pre-Bologna tradition. I resent becoming authoritarian in my role as a teacher, which is partly a result of pressure from 'the system' and partly a tendency in my own personality that I have to resist. To strike the right balance between the professional and the personal is, I think, the challenge that makes teaching continuously interesting.

Nevertheless, the reason I stopped teaching is simple: I no longer have time for it. When you are fully dedicated to institutional curating, everything you do should be geared towards creating a maximum of art world visibility for your institution and for yourself. Sadly, teaching does not do that; it is too long-term and low-key to register as a curatorial achievement. In this sense 'the system' takes care to preserve a traditional division of labour between artists and curators. Teaching studio practice is a good career move for artists and less so for curators. Yet I hope that I will have the opportunity, in the not-too-distant future, to take up this kind of teaching again, and to push it further into the territory of curating so that the studio visit really becomes an arena for thinking-together.

The Disobedient Class

Bottom-up Academies and Affirmative Education

Marco Scotini

Soviets of Mass Intellectuality

'We call for everybody to establish their own free universities in their homes or in their workplace, in the square or in the wilderness. All power to the free universities of the future.' On the one hand, the de-territorializing and centrifugal forces of the production of knowledge and, on the other, the assumption of the intrinsically social nature of this production. These are the fundamental parameters on which possible 'soviets' of mass intellectuality can currently be based. They are a sort of molecular organisms of self-government based on a preliminary social sharing of intellectual faculties which utilize cognitive and artistic resources as well as semiotic production in general without any form of mediation. This occurs when these resources emerge as the primary productive force of the current socio-economic situation.

In times of cognitive capitalism, this means re-appropriating the potential for emancipation that has been suffocated by market forms and liberating the educational and cultural resources that have been subjected to the parasitical logic of contemporary neoliberal exploitation. However, it is not only the fight against commoditization that is at stake, especially if this takes place within the classic coordinates of production: material goods, exchange rates, profits and consumption. Rather, it is necessary to identify new methods and different conditions of considering the nature of contemporary production, the nature of creation (or co-creation) of common goods, new forms of distribution and social re-composition. A concentration on traditional work categories (with all their tried and tested associated functions) would prevent us from grasping the real process of life that is directly implicated — and, in the same way, would prevent us from recognizing the associated methods of control and power that govern them.

It is no coincidence that the slogan quoted at the beginning is a recent declaration by a group of artists who, between 2001 and 2007, decided to lead a self-managed and experimental training project that placed central importance on the inseparably linked production of knowledge and production tools, as well as on the production methods themselves. This took place in Copenhagen, in a normal apartment where the development of research projects was combined with the precarious and unexpected procedures of daily life. The private space of Henriette Heise and Jakob Jakobsen was opened up as a public function in the shape of a self-institution. Instead of setting up didactic areas, it was decided not to alter the

apartment, allowing the typical domestic environment of a normal home to host the various functions. The living room became an area for the presentation of themes and research, the bedroom a space for film screenings, the work-room became a library and archive and, finally, the kitchen became a canteen and meeting place. When it was decided to form a class, as occurred in 2005–2006, they chose the urban platform as a temporary classroom or, in other words, those areas of resistance and protest of the city where it was possible to have direct contact with concrete experiences, where it was not so much a question of teaching or learning but rather of taking decisions in relation to an objective that was not fixed in any time or place.

Thus, in spring 2001, the Copenhagen Free University was founded in the Nørrebro area as one of the devices of self-government that can be identified with the name of 'soviet of mass intellectuality', non-representative institutions that create conditions for politics as an experiment, as empowerment, as openness and difference. The mission is that of allowing the conditions of the profoundly rich and complex cooperation that exists in the processes of the production of knowledge and that is frozen in the administrative apparatus of the state or is subordinated to private capital, to emerge and assert themselves.

Previous theoretical reference models are the Spontaneous University suggested by Alex Trocchi in 1963 in the pages of the *Internationale situationniste* and the experiences of the self-managed structure of the first American Free Universities that were generated by the Free Speech Movement. However, the immediate starting point is the unequivocal opposition to the forms of the economy of knowledge, to the cognitive capitalism used for the financing of subjectivity, to the invasion of individual lives by the abstract calculations of market valorisations. As the members of the Copenhagen Free University wrote in their first manifesto of 2001:

> Our point of departure is now and here: The circulation in and the consequences of the present day political knowledge economy and the desires distributed, accumulated, redirected or blocked in the flows and networks of that landscape. The fact that higher education is no longer the exclusive domain of the bourgeoisie and its children and that the workforce of today

> is generally highly skilled has brought us 'mass intellectuality'. The mass intellectuality and today's immaterial mode of production that demands a workforce that is able to work in an environment producing abstract products characterised by knowledge and subjectivity, has, in particular, caught our interest. Not that we would like a job, but we recognize that this development is influencing our emotional lives.[1]

Thus, if the entire Copenhagen Free University programme, beginning with this first official communication, is an attempt to find a response to these problems, a very similar soviet of radical pedagogy, despite the differences, can be found during the same period in Lower Manhattan, in an apartment at 16 Beaver Street. This was an open and flexible reading group composed of artists, theorists and activists who, every Monday evening from 1999 onwards, came together in the same space to initiate a permanent 'on-going conference' in which the participants shared and discussed the reading of texts. The self-managed activities and the informal programme were based on impellent artistic and political subjects such as the Iraq war or Palestinian culture, corporate cultures and the increasing privatization in the fields of art, media and politics, accompanied by weekly parties, happenings and film screenings. Gregory Sholette provides us with a description of the apartment.

> Like the group's stripped-down organizational structure its meeting space is spare and uncluttered, as if it were a tabula rasa awaiting inscription. Other than a few dented track lights, some randomly placed metal eyehooks, and a corridor leading back to a small kitchen, little else occupies the space where several spires of tubular steel and plastic stacking chairs are stored between meetings. On the Southwest wall rippled glass windows look towards Battery Park, except that a nearby industrial building stands in the way, its valves and ductwork

> glowing milky green both day and night. Against an opposing wall sits a heavy wooden table. Above the table is a mirror with a faux gilt frame.[2]

Both 16 Beaver and the Copenhagen Free University, despite many years of activity and programming, have refused to take on any stable identity over time or, in other words, to be transformed into legally recognized institutions, in not-for-profit associations or anything else. The Copenhagen Free University even decided to close down its activities when, in 2007, having achieved a degree of 'visibility', it feared a double crystallization: that of those who referred to the Danish institution in a reformist sense, limiting its reality to the environment of the artistic circuit, and those who applied as a student or researcher, erroneously considering it as a classic education service. This withdrawal from the active scene was marked with the public announcement: 'We have won!', precisely because this was not a defeat but the continuation of the efficacy of an action that has been achieved if, and only if, it manages to avoid being established as a codifiable model. Thus, for the Copenhagen Free University, the redistribution of power was the only way to carry on developing its formative design.

If the task of cognitive capitalism is that of leading the production of knowledge and common goods back into the realm of a producer-consumer relationship, what artistic practices, in contrast, attempt to inaugurate is a new creation-public relationship in accordance with a vast variety of alternative practices and empowerment strategies in which consumption is seen as a form of co-realization and collaboration. In the end, is it not precisely within educational processes rather than within the organizations of salaried labour that, beginning in the 1970s, the new forms of social antagonism took form? Is it not, as Maurizio Lazzarato says, that the 'truth' of the new composition of classes appears more clearly at this level because subjective development has not yet been taken over by the articulations of power? Is it precisely because 'subjectivity as an element of absolute undetermination here becomes, as such, an element of absolute

1 **Statement in relation to the Committee of 15th July, 2001, Henriette Heise and Jakob Jakobsen, Copenhagen Free University,** All power to the Copenhagen Free University **(www.copenhagenfreeuniversity.dk/allpow).**
2 **Gregory Sholette,** Dark Matter: Art and Politics in the Age of Enterprise Culture **(London and New York: Pluto Press, 2011), 181-85.**

potential'?[3] But what happens when such forms of the production of subjectivity become social hegemony and the forms of contemporary power are structured around a regime of life-long learning?

Herein lies the paradoxical nature of the relationship between devices of power, institutional authorities and experimental, transformational movements of which the Copenhagen Free University has become an exemplar. The forms of capture and valorisation of contemporary capitalism lead the possible openings, variations and multiplicities that artistic and activist movements produce back to predefined social models, to areas of codified politics. The power identifies the Copenhagen Free University only with something that it refuses to be. In 2010, three years after the closure of the school, a parliamentary regulation on Danish universities issued by the Department for Science, Technology and Innovation, announced not only the prohibition of opening any educational institutions not authorized by the state but also the very use of the term 'university' in any instances other than those legally defined. The notification was also sent to the members of the Copenhagen Free University, should they have nurtured any intention of restarting their activities. At exactly the same time as the new wave of student demonstrations emerged, from London to Vienna, from New York to Santiago de Chile, to protest against the deep financial cuts being made to education and the right to study, new policing and security policies intervened in a repressive way and with exceptional measures. However, that which the law prohibits and represses was precisely the institutional character that the Copenhagen Free University had wished to avoid by the dynamics of its disbanding. The Danish school's intention had certainly not been that of acting within a process of social distribution, requesting the inclusion of a part or a minority within the hegemonic majority. Neither was it that of bringing together or planning for the potential of the alternative forces that were multiplying at the time with the aim of assuming any position in their name. The fundamental aim of the Copenhagen Free University was rather that of providing a voice for the proliferation of decentralized initiatives, each valid in its own right and opening up the possibility for anyone to establish their own 'university', to define the methods of their own education. This form of temporary education and redistribution of power was defined by its authors as a 'starburst' strategy.[4] 'The drive to self-determination', they wrote in the final, closing manifesto,

> despite the neoliberal knowledge economy was also demonstrated by all our sister self-organized universities that have mushroomed everywhere in parallel to our own development. It has never been about joining the Copenhagen Free University, or any other university, but about opening your own university.[5]

In a control society like the present one, the processes of subjugation and the alternatives available are even more radical and dramatic than those offered by disciplinarian societies. If the Danish state sees the possible institutional establishment of unusual methods of producing knowledge as a threat and is afraid that they may transform into competing models within a neoliberal market, then what the artistic and activist movements undermine through their practices is, by contrast, the very concept of an institution as a means of identification and assignment. This is a destructuralizing tactic that attempts to tackle the control promoted by the capitalist design as a primary resource of power.

Although it is true that the state of permanent exception manifests itself today, above all, as the indefinite extension of the preliminary pact of obedience, it is equally true that the chronic state of the exception negatively reveals the possibility of objecting to the sovereignty devices as a whole by eliminating all the roles and representative bodies that codify the area of political action. For this reason, just a few months ago, the Copenhagen Free University decided to temporarily reopen a new Free University in Copenhagen.[6]

Growth Regimes

There is fundamental comment made by Marx in his *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* of 1844 that opens up the entire discussion.

3 **Maurizio Lazzarato,** Lavoro immateriale: Forme di vita e produzione di soggettività **(Verona: Ombre Corte, 1997), 32.**

4 **Henriette Heise and Jakob Jakobsen,** The ABZ of the Copenhagen Free University, **Copenhagen Free University, 2002, www.copenhagenfreeuniversity.dk/abz.html.**

5 **Copenhagen Free University, 'We have won', in** On Knowledge Production: A Critical Reader in Contemporary Art**, ed. Maria Hlavajova, Jill Winder and Binna Choi (Utrecht and Frankfurt am Main: Bak and Revolver, 2008), 38-43.**

6 **The Free U Resistance Committee of June 18 2011, Statement in relation to the outlawing of the Copenhagen Free University:** All power to the free universities of the future!**, www.copenhagenfreeuniversity.dk/.**

'We see how the history of *industry* and the established *objective* existence of industry are the *open* book of *man's essential powers*, the perceptibly existing human *psychology*.' If this phrase had a radical sense within a production system where mankind (the worker) was estranged, above all, from the object of its labour, it acquires much more value today when it is precisely 'human nature' — life put to work — that is at the centre of current methods of capitalist production. There is now a new process of exploitation and accumulation that is based on the use of all human faculties, from relational to affective functions, from linguistic to communication resources and that, above all, tends to identify the main economic resource in knowledge. Contemporary industry, by now far removed from being something that transforms human life from outside, subsumes within itself life as such until it is inseparably embodied in the production of capital.

It does this by using the intellectual and creative forces of work: faculties that, in the Fordist model of growth, were not only at the basis of the division of labour (planning/execution) but also the cause of a necessary emptying of the latter of its cognitive dimension in order to progressively reduce labour to a mechanical and repetitive activity.

Without entering into the merits of the contemporary debate on cognitive capitalism — that is already extensive — what interests us here is the possible shape that the relationship capital-knowledge can take on or already has taken on.[7] In other words, in what way can (or can't) an economy based on knowledge coincide with the forms of cognitive capitalism? How can capital absorb or subject to its own logic the production conditions of knowledge that are never individual but always collective and open-sourced? How this assimilation with the requirements of post-Fordist industry can be an inevitable factor in the new social relationships of intellectual production. Or whether, on the contrary, these relationships are able to develop a potential for emancipation capable of removing themselves from the private sphere of enterprise and inaugurate novel forms of collaboration. In this case, what specific weight should political action assume within the dynamics of the entire relationship?

First of all, however, what do we mean by knowledge? To what kind of knowledge are we referring? To what production regime of knowledge are we alluding? If we assume that knowledge is the direct expression of the bios, then we do not see it so much as a determinate collection of competencies and codified knowledge but rather as the generic potential for producing learning. This is a faculty that, based on versatility and flexibility, is capable of

developing the capacity for learning, innovation and adaptation in relation to the dynamics of continuous change. It was Paolo Virno who provided one of the most pertinent analyses of the phenomenon, using the phylogenetic categories of the natural sciences and tracing the relationships of capital-labour (knowledge) back to an antagonistic relationship between the new socio-psychological order that precedes subordination to capitalist valorisation and the new forms of capture and exploitation of this order.[8] When post-Fordist society encourages and promotes, in terms of innovation, experimentation and autonomy, it is then captured by the valorisation and accumulation exercised by capitalist industry. The knowledge produced at a social level is effectively not controlled by the work-force, by the cultural producer.

When discussing the knowledge factor as the principal source for the creation of value, the main role taken on by the social function of education in the new order becomes clear. Nonetheless, however necessary, it is not sufficient to only discuss the most evident aspects of the economic colonization of the educational space and, therefore, of the very object of the social battles in course: from the increase in the privatization of education costs to the precarious position of cognitive workers, from the cuts to public financing to the claims for a right to study, from tuition fee hikes to the lowering of the quality of basic university teaching, from life-long learning to intellectual property, through to the quantitative criteria for the measurement of learning and the enterprising of the production of knowledge and of innovation. In effect, cognitive work is relational and communicative by definition and, in order for it to be commercialized and organized into an entrepreneurial activity it must be both hierarchized and financed, with the consequent removal and regulation of widespread knowledge. Before becoming the servile requisite of current neoliberal work processes, the consequence is, therefore, a complexity of approaches, of forms of life, with which human beings attempt

7 **On this topic see: Andrea Fumagalli,** Bioeconomia e capitalismo cognitivo **(Rome: Carocci Editore, 2007); Carlo Vercellone, 'Lavoro, distribuzione del reddito e valore nel capitalismo cognitivo: Una prospettiva storica e teorica',** Sociologia del lavoro **115, ed. Federico Chicchi and Gigi Roggero (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2009): 31-54; Enzo Rullani, 'La produzione di valore a mezzo conoscenza: Il manuale che non c'è',** Sociologia del Lavoro **115, ed. Federico Chicchi and Gigi Roggero (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2009): ivi, 55-85; Maurizio Lazzarato,** La politica dell'evento **(Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2004).**

8 **See Paolo Virno,** E così via all'infinito: Logica e antropologia **(Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2010); Paolo Virno,** Scienze sociali e 'natura umana': Facoltà di linguaggio, invariante biologico, rapporti di produzione **(Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2003).**

to tackle their own scarce instinctive specializations. For knowledge of this sort it is not so much that which is gradually learnt, but the continuous possibility of learning or, rather, the generic power of learning. Through a series of endless adaptation processes, the potential of the cognitive faculty is not exhausted in a determinate number of defined realizations that become the depository of techniques, of known objects, uses and certain data. It persists as such, as a source of continuing further manifestations. It could be said, according to the refrain of the educationalist Paulo Freire, that humans are not beings of pure 'doing' but are always beings of 'what to do'.

However, this is not the place for proposing an abstract anthropology. The current historic-social conditions require this regime with flexibility and uncertainty as fundamental parameters.

For Virno, indeterminate potential in post-Fordist society becomes a virtue of production. On the one hand, culture renounces building 'protective pseudo-environments or stable social niches in which behavioural repetition predominates' the stereotype and the defined norm. On the other hand, current historic conditions place the greatest economic and social emphasis 'on disorientation and non-specialisation' which are no longer, as in the past, held at bay or attenuated by social or cultural devices but are exhibited and valorised.

'Neoteny', as chronic infancy and uninterrupted education on the one hand, and production sector on the other, are examples of distinctive and complementary growth regimes, both required and encouraged by the same post-Fordist society. It is not possible to tackle the question of the current education sector from a capitalist production point of view without posing the problem that, in contemporary capitalism, permanent education is no longer a circumscribed biographical episode that is concluded as a premise to the working life of the adult.

> In contemporary capitalism, on the other hand, education has no end. It accompanies, as an explicit counterpoint, all the stages of productive activity. If anything, it is an integral part of the latter. To work means, to some degree, reforming oneself. [9]

This does not mean that work loses its centrality but that, on the contrary, with the crumbling of the boundaries between work and

non-work, the latter increasingly coincides with 'the time of life' itself. The need for continuous learning is the counter-logic to the progressive and constitutional deterioration of stable, safe and unambiguous 'environments' capable of guaranteeing habits, rules, institutions and consistent elements.

What comes into play here is the dismantling of another fundamental concept of the educational process: obedience to the rules. If education as a practice of domination does nothing more than reiterate the bonds between a will that commands and an intelligence that obeys, what disobediences does not accept is the primordial norm on which this authority is based, giving it the right to command and be obeyed.

'The work process based on knowledge and linguistic communication, just as the forms of life subjected to perpetual innovation, presuppose the capacity to move from well-defined rules to bio-anthropological regularities and then from these to those.'[10] Both obedience and the application of the civil rules typical of traditional social education no longer provide any effective protection from the implicit risks of disorientation and indetermination in post-Fordist societies.

On the contrary, it is precisely 'disobedience' that becomes the paradigm of the contemporary subject's political and social activity. In this sense, disobedience is not only (and not so much) opposition to repetitive norms or unambiguous rules that, by now, have no validation in the absence of any determinate 'environment'. Disobedience is then not the deliberate violation of the law, not even merely as a social context of opposition. Rather, it is an autonomous process of creating alternative subjectivities and of independent, innovative organization, which are no more than the same requisites on which current production activities are based. This is very different to previous ideas about civil disobedience or those forms of disobedience that oppose normative deficits that need to be corrected with respect to the fundamental principles of the idea of the law.[11]

9 **See Virno,** Scienze sociali e 'natura umana', **op. cit., 52.**
10 **See Paolo Virno,** E così via all'infinito**, op. cit., 171.**
11 **See Marco Scotini, 'Il dissenso: Modi d'esposizione: Il caso dell'archivio Disobedience', in** L'arte della sovversione**, ed. Marco Baravalle (Rome: Manifesto libri, 2009), 94-105; Marco Scotini, 'Exodus, Uniqueness, and Multitude' [interview with Paolo Virno], in** Going Public: Politics, Subjects and Places **(Milan: Silvana Editore, 2003); Marco Scotini, 'Collecting Disobedience: An Archive of Art and Political Action', in 'Archive: Memory of the Show',** MJ Manifesta Journal, Journal of contemporary curatorship **6 (Autumn/Winter 2005), (reprint Milan: Silvana Editore, 2008, 454-59); Mario Scotini, 'Druga '68 s drugačijim oružjem/Another '68 with other weapons',** ŽIVOT UMJETNOSTI magazine for contemporary visual arts **83 (2008): 36-43.**

In substance, cognitive capitalism's 'criticism of the political economy' also means, at one and the same time, working on a pedagogy of the post-Fordist public sphere a pedagogy with which to measure the role of political action in defining the economic-social conditions of an autonomous scenario alternative to work. What kind of resource is knowledge? How do we know what we know? When and where do we learn? What is valid knowledge? Who decides this? What is intellectual property? Nothing is more political than epistemological battles.

The Student and the Spectator

It is no coincidence that John Dewey, in looking for a model of knowledge that is relevant to action, negatively defined the forms of classical learning as a 'theory of spectator knowledge'. A knowledge that, detached from experience, does not aspire to act within the world but is limited to contemplating it. However, Jacques Rancière more recently highlighted the anything but obvious implications between theatrical and pedagogical devices — even if he does this from a perspective that is decisively in contrast to the previous one.[12]

The concept that places the actor on the stage in opposition to the passive audience is the same that places the teacher's knowledge in contrast to the ignorance of the apprentice-student. In both cases, it is assumed that is there is a 'vanishing mediation' which, while it attempts to remove the distance between the two poles, actually does nothing other than establish it, recreating it anew each time. For Rancière, behind the attempt to transform the spectator into an agent of an active practice as much as behind the plan to change ignorance into knowledge, lies the unquestionable assumption of an a priori distribution of social positions and roles. Equally, as a consequence of this distribution, there is the precautionary acknow-ledgement of suitability and unsuitability, capacity and incapacity for these assigned roles. Therefore, at the origins of a world divided into the knowledgeable and the ignorant lies the hegemonic principle of the inequality of intelligences. Likewise, this inequality is the basis for the idea of a passive spectator who must be made active. Holding on to the oppositions between reality and appearance, activity and passiveness, knowledge and ignorance, etc., established as the postulates of a hegemonic structure of domination, means continuously denying the equality of intelligences. These, inversely, can be verified as reality only by the principle of intellectual emancipation.

Nonetheless, the overcoming of dualisms, built around the principle of demonstrating equality, however necessary, ends up becoming an insufficient tool for the appreciation of the power relationships of capitalism, for understanding the historic processes of the subjugation of knowledge and the uprising of knowledge against the institutions. It is also incapable of providing a sufficient idea of the relationship between the logic of representation and the delegation to be represented that lies behind the concept of political representation: in other words, of the establishment of a representative whole. Rancière's equality of intelligences, basically, does not equate to the intellect as general, social power, with that contemporary, productive resource that has previously been identified as General Intellect. If, for the latter, the equality of faculties is a starting point on which to graft the politics of difference, for Rancière, on the contrary, it is a point of arrival and, as such, in contrast to the constitutional multiplicities of difference.

However, it is precisely Rancière's theory that prevents us from capturing the indiscernible relationship between language (or semiotic production) and performativity that lies behind so much current, radical pedagogical research. It is a relationship in which performance and the processes of self-formation can be found to be fused in the moment in which the very forms of learning are no longer a phase preparatory to work but actually coincide with it. It is precisely the debate around the student-spectator relationship that was at the centre of so much artistic and activist production over the past decade. If the Recombinant theater is the American group Critical Art Ensemble's intervention model, The Escrache is that of the Argentinean artistic collective Etcetera. If the 'street debate' is the public education procedure of the Saint Petersburg Street University, the recovery of the urban 'built situation' is the same for the Copenhagen Free University.[13] It is symptomatic that a proliferation of these centres of enunciation, at the origins of an

12 **Jacques Rancière**, The Emancipated Spectator **(London and New York: Verso, 2009), 1-23; see Jacques Rancière,** The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons on Intellectual Emancipation **(Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1991).**

13 **See Newspaper of the platform Chto Delat?/What is to be done?** Knowledge in Action**, special issue September 2008, www.chtodelat.org/images/pdfs/si_knowledge.pdf; Blog of Etceterà group, grupoetcetera.wordpress.com; Gregory Sholette, 'Academy from Below', in** Dark Matter: Art and Politics in the Age of Enterprise Culture **(London and New York: Pluto Press, 2011), 181-85; Colectivo Situaciones,** Piqueteros: La rivolta argentina contro il neoliberismo **(Rome: Derive Approdi, 2003).**

antagonistic pedagogical discourse, has come into being when the classical (illuminist) forms of education have exhausted their emancipatory potential and the process of capitalist capture has focussed on their ruins. These new educational forms with an artistic matrix not only reject the idea of abstract and neutral knowledge but end up simultaneously overlaying struggles and knowledge, the production of critical knowledge and the promotion of immediate communicative actions. The Escrache was created at the end of the 1990s within the context of Buenos Aires as a political-artistic response to the removal of all memory of the Desparecidos and, metaphorically, to the denial of peculiarities imposed, in this case, not by the military regime but by the entrance on the scene of the neoliberal machine. It is a performative process of symbolic production aimed at revealing a situation of generalized impunity with regard to state genocide by means of surprise theatrical activities. 'The Escrache seeks a kind of justice based on "social blame"' — the Etcetera collective claims — 'which will make the people living in the area aware that they share their everyday life with a criminal.' This is a strongly pedagogical device whose value is derived from the situational production of significance and which, without being developed within explicit educational processes, has now been incorporated into the more experimental Argentinean education institutions.

The Recombinant Theater is one of the devices used by the Critical Art Ensemble to intervene in the division of cognitive work (in the capitalist principle of specialization) and the conditions of access to learning resources. These are the central elements of the Critical Art Ensemble's whole artistic project that tries to deconstruct the prevailing paradigms of scientific discourse and the dominant semiotic regimes through forms of intervention that the group defines as 'digital', not so much because of their use of electronic technologies but for the types of practices pursued. It is precisely because these practices aim at the appropriation, the recombination, the replication and semiotic imitation of the signs of which the given representations and codified systems are made. The intervention tactics proposed by the Critical Art Ensemble always have an interdisciplinary cultural participation nature and have a performative — ephemeral and event-based — matrix in which the subjects in question have direct experience of an object or a situation, or of data, that from being opaque becomes transparent. The model is always experiential, involving collective knowledge and behaviour by means of which its pedagogical nature is defined. The Recombinant

Theater consists in the definition of various performative platforms (physical or digital) that are activated in such a way as to reveal the power structures hidden in everyday life that we ordinarily avoid. However, the un-predetermined nature of the experience does not guarantee the outcome of the gnoseological situation in advance: whether knowledge or a known object will or will not be achieved. There is no pre-established, educational programme content, but the Critical Art Ensemble defines the conditions for a trans-active knowledge from which temporary public relations can emerge based on interaction and dialogue around a specific subject. As the group members claim:

> Recombinant theater begins by eliminating the privileged position of the director, auteur, genius, or any other reductive, privatizing category. It undermines that analogic moment in which unique, complex order manifesting in human form, separates itself from the chaotic rabble, and one voice speaks for the betterment of all.[14]

In contrast, this theatre sets itself the aim of creating not so much forms of temporary community as forms of coalition within which the actuator subject is assimilated.

> Within the relatively horizontalized space of recombinant theater, individuals are reassembled into an analogic form. Multiple lines of desire as well as numerous forms of social interaction can find expression. Under these conditions, a loose-knit ephemeral public can emerge. An actual construction of a public (temporary though it may be) through an open field of performative practice makes possible a productive pedagogy not found in the unilateral didacticism of reactive or reactionary politicized art. [...] while the instigators of

14 **Critical Art Ensemble,** Digital Resistance: Exploration in Tactical Media **(New York: Automedia, 2001), 97–98.**

> this process do have an empowered position because they choose the topic and launch the event, this discrepancy in power between performer and audience dissolves when the two come in contact, and thus the power functions in a generative manner rather than as one of domination. When the process functions properly, the instigators of the event immediately fall into a mode of deterritorialization, and the process drifts into a multiplicity of unknown directions.[15]

Many other forms of performative knowledge could be cited as examples, such as the temporary establishment of the Saint Petersburg Street University in 2008, immediately following the closure of the European University due to a supposed violation of security regulations. The Street University is organized by unemployed European University academics, by the same school's students and by the Russian artistic collective Chto Delat/What is to be done? who decided to go into the streets to hold their lessons. They are all united by the desire to define an alternative field of production and distribution of critical knowledge. Also, given the insurrectional character of the circumstances, they have retrieved the street debate and theatrical protest action as forms of learning and cognitive production.[16] In this case, yet again — as in the preceding cases or as in the case of the didactic interventions on the part of the Brazilian group Contrafilè — we find a situational production of knowledge that derives from the concrete nature of situations and in a self-organizing form in which each person is simultaneously student, teacher and administrator. Thus, just as there are no assigned roles, neither are there any specified spaces or privileged moments for this type of performative knowledge. As Augusto Boal claimed for the theatre: 'Just as everyone is potentially a "theatre artist", so also all spaces are potentially "dramatic spaces" and all subjects are potentially "theatrical subjects".' As many as there are types of these recent, radical, pedagogical forms, so equally manifold, in Boal, are the possible forms of popular theatre — forum-theatre, myth-theatre, journalism-theatre, picture-story-theatre, invisible theatre, trial-theatre, etc. These are all forms deriving from the need for each person to tackle or discuss determinate subjects or to experience particular situations.

It is a theatre where it is not a question of representing but of living, experiencing situations.

Behind the radical, pedagogical practices of the last decade or the soviets of mass intellectuality — as initially defined — there is not so much Rancière's criticism of the paradox of the 'vanishing mediation' between knowledge and ignorance, but rather the complex gnoseological relationship between the oppressed and the oppressor elaborated by Augusto Boal and Paulo Freire as a form of emancipation that stands at the crossroads of performativity and education. For these two, both the dramaturgical and the educational space are experiences of which the beginning but not the outcome is known, because the spectator/student is free of any limitations or acts and transforms his/herself into the protagonist. For Boal, the 'poetics of the oppressor' is at its height in Aristotle: the world is known and is perfect and all its values are imposed on the spectators. There is a passive delegation of powers to the characters so that they can think and act in their place. The spectacle in Brecht is, in contrast, a preparation for action: if there is no longer any delegation at a conscious level, it remains at a representational level, at an action level. Ultimately, in the theatre of oppression, there is evidence-theatre where the spectator no longer delegates powers to the characters so that they can think and represent for them. The theatre coincides exactly with the action. So, in Paulo Freire, there is no 'known object' as a possession of the educator to be deposited in the conscience of the educated but there is always a 'knowable object' for both, which is also their mediator.[17]

However, if it is possible to identify a common origin for all current, radical criticism of the forms of cognitive capitalism and the creative industries, just as for the antagonistic and emancipatory proposal of new forms of social cooperation, these can be found on the worksite which, for the first time, was opened by the Situationists against 'cultural merchandise'. Was it not Debord, with extraordinary foresight, who claimed that culture that has entirely become

15 **See chapter 'Recombinant Theater and Digital Resistance', in Critical Art Ensemble,** Digital Resistance: Exploration in Tactical Media **(New York: Autonomedia, 2001), 83-112.**

16 **See articles: 'Declaration of the Street University' and 'The Street University: A Brief History',** Knowledge in Action, **newspaper of the platform** Chto Delat?/ What is to be done?, **special issue September 2008, www.chtodelat.org/images/pdfs/si_knowledge.pdf**

17 **See Paulo Freire,** La pedagogia degli oppressi **(Turin: EGA, 2004); Augusto Boal,** Il teatro degli oppressi: Teoria e tecnica del teatro latinoamericano **(Milan: Feltrinelli, 1977).**

merchandise would turn into nothing other than merchandise par excellence, the protagonist (merchandise vedette) of a spectacular society? Debord's analysis of the servitude of the spectator is punctually countered by Khayati's invective about student poverty. Guy Debord's image of the spectators is that of those who

> the more they contemplate, the less they live; the more they accept recognition of themselves in the prevailing image of need, the less they understand their existence and own desires. The exterior nature of the spectacle in relationship with the human agent manifests itself in this, that its gestures are no longer its own but those of another who represents it.[18]

In the same way, for Mustapha Khayati:

> The poverty of the student remains on this side of the poverty of the society of the spectacle, of the new poverty of the new proletarian. [...] The real poverty of the student's daily life finds an immediate fantastical compensation in its main drug: cultural merchandise. In cultural spectacle the student naturally finds a role as a respectful disciple: alongside the role of production without being able to penetrate it – access to the sanctuary is denied him – the student discovers 'modern culture' with an approach of passive admiration.[19]

The Situationists respond to a capitalism that materially organizes spaces and events to reduce the power of life, with a behavioural plan that is equally concrete but turned upside down represented by the 'built situation': an authentic self-established theatre of indifference between art and life. The proposal, as is well known, is that of a temporary environment created to be experienced by its own creators as the free construction of daily life since, as Debord wrote:

> the revolution does not consist of 'showing' life to people but in allowing them to live it. A

> revolutionary organization must always bear in mind that its purpose is not that of making its followers listen to the convincing arguments of expert leaders but that of making them speak themselves in order to arrive at, or at least reach out for, the same level of participation.[20]

But now, in the times of a fully realized spectacle and the domination of cognitive capitalism, how can we still reclaim the knowledge that has been, and continues to be, consistently expropriated? It would seem that, for the first time, we can genuinely experience not this or that specific content, not this or that linguistic communication, not a particular knowledge but indeterminate potential, a disposition towards learning, and linguistic and cognitive faculties in themselves. Contemporary politics are nothing more than an attempt at this.

The disobedient class, therefore, is not that which demands a right to study without calling into question the nature of capitalism. Neither is it that which opposes the knowledge of the educator in the name of the concrete needs of the educated, as in the case of Pelagia Vlassova who wants to learn 'the words that are needed' in Bertolt Brecht's 'The Mother'. The disobedient class is that which frees itself of the fundamental limitations that fuse all the others when establishing educational conditions: those of educating and being educated.[21] It is this connection of singularities that act directly on the production methods of knowledge. Disobedient is, ultimately, the class that occupies the space of a situation-limit which consistently threatens it: prepared to identify new possibilities for action, ready to access a never-ending theatre of becoming.

18 **Guy Debord,** La società dello spettacolo **(Milan: Baldini&Castoldi, 1997), 63.**
19 **Mustapha Khayati,** De la misère en milieu étudiant: considérée sous ses aspects économique, politique, psychologique, sexuel et notamment intellectuel et de quelques moyens pour y remédier/par des membres de l'Internationale Situationniste et des etudiants de Strasbourg **(Paris: Champ Libre, 1976).**
20 **Guy Debord, 'Pour un jugement révolutionnaire de l'art' (1962), in Guy Debord, Enrico Ghezzi and Roberto Turigliatto,** Guy Debord: (contro) il cinema **(Milan: Il Castoro, 2001), 60.**
21 **In respect to this, it's very interesting to observe that also the form of student occupations that arose in 2010–2011 has shown 'the growing irrelevance of student leaders and old style mass-organizing. [...] There is a widening recognition of a need to self-organize and continually push at the borders of the possible.' See** Don't panic, Organize!: A Mute Magazine Pamphlet on Recent Struggles in Education **(London: Mute Books, 2011).**

Extremes Embodied Contemporary Circus and Education in Sweden

Tessa Overbeek

What do circus artists know? And what can we learn from them? Since meeting a few circus artists in Paris in 1993, Tilde Björfors has been asking these questions continually. Her own first lesson was that everything is possible. She learned this through experience, after being challenged by an acrobat to let herself fall off a high pile of cubes and doing so despite being frightened. Björfors has been learning ever since, and has found out that circus artists have a special kind of knowledge about life, accumulated by feeling their way through space and time, by pushing their own boundaries and monitoring their own learning processes, and by interacting with each other, audiences and objects.

From 1995 on, Björfors has tried to make as many people as possible benefit from this special type of knowledge by starting the company Cirkus Cirkör, which was aimed at developing contemporary circus by creating performances but also pedagogical programmes for all types of people, from amateurs to (aspiring) professionals, from children to adults, and even seniors and people with disabilities. Today, Cirkus Cirkör is the largest contemporary circus organization in Sweden, with an impressive variety of activities and networks. But the specialized knowledge of circus artists still drives all of their practices. Their core values: cocky commitment, collective individualism and quality madness, are based on it. They are about being critical but engaged, singular but social and sensible but experimental.

With their related ways of running an organization, creating performances and teaching people they are clearly part of a larger movement within the circus world that is relatively unknown outside of it: that of new or contemporary circus. As Jean-Michel Guy points out in his introduction to *Avant-Garde, Cirque! Les Arts de la Piste en Révolution*, it is not always easy to define this new type of circus, which arose in France from the 1970s on, or to distinguish it from its more 'traditional' form. However, it can generally be recognized by the absence of animal acts; the smaller scale of the organizations, and especially their performances; the emancipation of the circus arts (disciplines such as juggling, clowning and acrobatics) from the circus ring; a more critical perspective on the world, and companies and artists that show a greater singularity (than before).[1]

In his description of certain values or attitudes that he sees as more or less representative for contemporary circus artists and companies, Guy mentions qualities such as a form of individualism that is neither egoistic nor 'autistic', that flourishes best in collective endeavours and also shows itself in a very open and amicable attitude and commitment towards the audience and the surroundings.[2] These features seem very similar to those of Cirkör, who mention on their website that these types of values can be found in many other contemporary circus organizations as well.[3]

An even more remarkable development within the context of this book is that nowadays most contemporary circus artists are no longer 'born into' the circus, but are educated at art schools at college or university level — be it a Bac+2/3 in France and Canada, where contemporary circus education has developed soonest and most, or a bachelor level in countries such as the Netherlands and Sweden. This 'academization' or 'institutionalization' of circus education is spreading throughout Europe as well as to other continents. FEDEC, the European Federation of Professional Circus Schools, which is sponsored by the European Union to support this development, has been growing beyond its borders and also has members in for instance Australia, Colombia and Tunisia.[4]

A bachelor degree in contemporary circus can now also be gained in Stockholm, at the University of Dance and Circus, or DOCH.[5] The programme started in 2005, after years of lobbying by the people behind Cirkus Cirkör, who felt that their country should have a three-year, full-time programme for young circus artists aspiring to become professionals and contribute to the development of the art form. Wondering if and how this programme was affected by the changes in education that are the main topic of this book, I went to Stockholm to find out. I had long conversations with six people who are all connected to Cirkör and/or DOCH, and who cannot be thanked enough for their time and openness.[6] In these conversations the Cirkör values kept coming up, either explicitly or implicitly, and

1 **Jean-Michel Guy, ed.,** Avant-Garde, Cirque! Les Arts de la Piste en Révolution**, (Paris: Les Éditions Autrement, 2001) 10.**
2 **Idem, 21-22.**
3 **www.cirkör.se.**
4 **www.fedec.eu/**
5 **Dans och Cirkushögskolan.**
6 **Tilde Björfors, founder, artistic director and researcher at Cirkör, who has also taught at DOCH; Kajsa Balkfors Lind, vice-president and head of research and development of Cirkör, also organizer and teacher of 'circus transfer' courses in for instance business schools; Mia Crusoë, head of courses and training at Cirkör; Walter Ferrero, head of the circus department at DOCH, head of the contemporary circus programme at S:t Bodvid's Gymnasium and board member of FEDEC; Olle Strandberg, graduate of 'Cirkuspiloterna' and now artistic director at Cirkör, and Quim Giron, student at DOCH, teacher of Cirkör circus courses and performer for Cirkör Event.**

I was struck by their incompatibility with those of neoliberalism, which also seems to have influenced Swedish education in general. My visit was therefore followed by a period of trying to understand this intuitive sense of a 'clash of values', which led me through a wide range of topics, from extremes and balance to dogma and control, risk and failure, to art and entertainment, politics and science, skill and creativity, thinking and perception, and much more. As a result, I learned a lot. This essay is an attempt to put all of these extremes together and show their interdependence, which was quite a challenge. However, I believe it might possibly give some answers, or at least raise some important questions, about the future of education, so it is worth a try. Fortunately, I have also learned how to juggle.

Cirkus Cirkör – Activities and Core Values

> The art form hovers between two extremes. Contrasts of high and low. On the one hand glitter, glamour and palatial venues, and on the other: wandering sideshows living on the margins of society. Cirkus Cirkör's language and core values [...] originate from the clashes between these extremes and from our continuous choice to expose ourselves to unconventional meetings.[7]

As mentioned, the roots of Cirkus Cirkör lay in France. In fact, Cirkör is a 'Swede-ish' version of 'cirque cœur', or 'circus heart'. Founder Tilde Björfors lost her heart to this art form because to her it epitomized what human beings are capable of. She soon realized that this was the artistic language she wanted to use to make a change in the world. It was also in France that she met fellow Swedes who were working there as contemporary circus artists, something that was hard to do in their own country at the time. In fact, contemporary circus was practically non-existent in Sweden, both performance-wise and in education. There were some youth programmes, but anybody who wanted to continue their studies and become a professional circus artist had to go abroad for further education. Because Björfors and the artists wanted to change this, they founded the non-profit organization Cirkus Cirkör in 1995. Their main objective was to develop contemporary circus in Sweden, both artistically and

pedagogically. As a result, making good shows and setting up circus trainings were immediately on their agenda.

Although Cirkus Cirkör currently receives subsidies, the company didn't at first. They just started creating shows, doing performances and showing trailers of their shows wherever they could. They very soon discovered that despite the danger and/or difficulty of the acts, the spectators were very eager to try practising circus themselves. As a result, many different activities in the form of courses, training and education were set up by Cirkör between 1995 and 2000, including summer courses, circus courses in primary schools and even circus training for people with disabilities. With each new performance, training or community project[8] more and more Swedes got acquainted with the art form.

This sudden rise of a considerable audience for contemporary circus in Sweden led to a shortage of advanced artists. As this threatened to nip the growth of the art form in the bud, Cirkus Cirkör decided to start *Cirkuspiloterna*, a circus programme for young and talented enthusiasts who aspired to become professionals. This quickly evolved from a one-year programme to a three-year programme, with students from all over the world. In 2000, Cirkör started a collaboration with the municipality of Botkyrka, south of Stockholm, and moved its operation there. They also started their first three-year circus programme on an upper-secondary level (ages 16-19) there, at S:t Bodvids Gymnasium. In 2005, the *Cirkuspiloterna* programme was replaced by a bachelor programme at the University of Dance, a necessary merger since this institute had examination rights in the arts. Some aspects of the dance and circus programmes were fused, although the specific nature and needs of the circus arts and the students remain the circus programme's main focus.

This is in line with Cirkör's approach in general, which is completely inspired by the embodied knowledge of circus artists. Their experiences are also what the core values of the organization were based on: dealing with the clashes of extremes that make circus what it is, and finding the special balance between them. Cirkör's core values were formulated in a period when rapid growth and collaborations with all kinds of people and institutions made it neces-

7 **From Tilde Björfors' introduction to the programme of Circus Cirkör's** Inside Out. **(English version).**

8 **Cirkus Cirkör's community work is discussed at length in Tessa Overbeek, 'Out of Order: Cirkus Cirkör: An Interview with Tilde Björfors', in** Community Art: The Politics of Trespassing **(Antennae 5), ed. Paul De Bruyne and Pascal Gielen (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2011), 299-323.**

sary to 'verbalize' the values that were embodied in the experience and practices of the people behind Cirkör, to make it easier to communicate them to others.

That these values come in the form of pairs means not only that the people at Cirkör believe that clashes of extremes define them, or that they are simply contradictions that they need to accept: to them, the opposites that make up each pair need and complement each other, and the clashes are absolutely necessary for the type of growth and development that they want to achieve in the world. The pairing of extremes does not mean that Cirkör aims to find a safe middle ground between them, or let them cancel each other out. The dynamic between the opposites may be best described by the type of balance that wire walkers need to maintain in order to prevent from falling off: they are moving all the time, especially with their arms. Staying on the wire requires 'a constant movement in and out' of balance.[9]

One of the most important dynamics of circus is that between the individual and the collective. Even a single performance is made up of performers with very different skills, depending on their discipline, which can be anything from juggling and clowning to all kinds of acrobatics, and then there are of course many different styles and personalities involved. Whereas in the traditional circus the different disciplines were often shown one after another in different 'numbers', in contemporary circus they are usually more integrated into a coherent whole (often by a director or choreographer).

Generalized as the core value 'collective individualism', this means that 'Everyone should have the right to be as special, unique and peculiar as they are'.[10] At the same time, working together has many benefits, even though it may require large investments of time and energy when the collaborating partners are diverse and individualistic. However, continuing to try can result in a partnership where the whole is much greater than the sum of its part(ner)s. Which is why the people from Cirkör have worked with for instance scientists, politicians, and artists from other art forms and schools.

When striving for collaboration with others from different spheres of life, misunderstandings and prejudices need to be overcome constantly. This is where the value 'cocky commitment' comes in. Cockiness is the 'Cirkörer' way to describe a critical attitude toward one's environment. This 'brain of the core value' is about questioning and investigating and implies a certain detachment. Commitment, or 'the heart of the core value', represents passion and

perseverance. It is about being 'invested'. The latter needs the first to prevent getting 'lost in someone else's vision' and forgetting about your own goals and needs, or 'to burn out because you keep on fighting although you have reached a dead end'. The 'distance' and clear-headed rationality of its opposite can prevent that, but on its own risks creating an attitude that turns people into 'opinion machines' who claim to know the best way to achieve something but lack the 'spark' and investment to actually make it happen.'[11]

The third pair of extremes seems to be the most important one in the context of this essay: that of quality madness. Quality is about a certain amount of 'knowing what you are doing' and 'thinking before you act' in order to try and construct something more or less stable and durable. This structure however needs to leave room for creativity that can suddenly and unexpectedly arise. That is what the madness stands for: it is instinctive and/or intuitive, but also very powerful: it is about going beyond what is already thought or done and is therefore unpredictable. In their book, Björfors and Balkfors Lind claim that for them, 'it is not possible to achieve quality without room for madness.'[12]

Like their values, Cirkör's type of commitment is very 'hands on' and connected more to practice than to theory. It can probably also be called more social than political, although they have on occasion spoken up explicitly about certain political issues, especially those regarding changes in the Swedish education system.

Swedish Education Policy, Neoliberalism and the Role of Quality

When I interviewed founder Tilde Björfors for the book *Community Art: The Politics of Trespassing*, we talked about the orderliness of Swedish culture and the chaos that is often associated with the circus. She said that many changes were being made in schools that she interpreted as ways to prevent chaos, like focusing on skills such as reading and writing more and at a younger age, while reducing the role of play. At the same time, she talked about how stricter rules and punishments were implemented and said that it was like Swedish education was 'going back to the fifties'.[13] During the conversations

9 **Tilde Björfors and Kajsa Lind,** Inuti ett Cirkus Hjärta/Inside a Circus Heart **(Norsborg: Cirkus Cirkör, 2009), 58-61.**
10 **Idem, 55.**
11 **Idem, 47.**
12 **Idem, 51.**
13 **Overbeek, op. cit., 309.**

I had with the people at Cirkör for this essay, several of them mentioned that since this year, gymnastic and aesthetic programmes were cut out of the core curriculum of the compulsory education, while entrepreneurial programmes had been implemented. This made me wonder about the motivation behind these policy changes.

When I started looking at the recent reforms in the Swedish education system it seemed like many of them were related to the rise of neoliberalism. Sweden used to be known as a welfare state run by an expansive central government that regulated many public services, including education. This meant that children between seven and sixteen went to public schools, where they all received the same, tuition-free education: no distinctions were being made between schools or programmes nor, more importantly, between students. Equality was seen as a very important value, so even though some children did better in school than others, they all received the same education. The idea behind this was that the stronger students would be a positive influence on the others. Tests to measure achievements of students in specific subjects in order to separate the stronger students from the rest were not even allowed, especially not in the lower grades.[14]

But since the early 1990s there have been many reforms in Swedish education that were the result of applying market principles. In their book *The Market Comes to Education in Sweden: An Evaluation of Sweden's Surprising School Reforms*, economists Anders Björklund et al. aim to evaluate the first effects of what they call 'a radical ideological shift.[15] Some of the results of this change in direction are the decentralization of public education, which has become the responsibility of municipalities, 'goal steering' (where municipalities are given a broad set of goals to meet, and the freedom to evaluate themselves) and a focus on increasing accountability, parental choice (of schools) and competition (among schools). In order to achieve this last goal, privately run, publicly funded schools were allowed to be founded, alongside the existing public schools. The authors mention that the decentralization itself was also a way of increasing competition between municipalities, since they suggest that people 'vote with their feet',[16] which means they choose the municipality they want to live in based on the quality of the education there, and more residents means more tax income for municipalities.

The clearest aspects of neoliberalism that can be found in Swedish education since the early 1990s are the insistence on efficiency and the focus on measuring and communicating results. Björklund et al. link this development to the stimulation of competition between schools and municipalities and the choice that parents now have. The authors state that parents need information to distinguish one from the other, especially in terms of the quality of the education. One way of measuring that quality is the introduction of standardized tests and grade point averages. Björklund et al. state that '[…] the availability of such information at the school level has increased dramatically in recent years.'[17]

They mention for instance that the National Agency for Education in Sweden has developed a database that supplies information about average test scores and grade point averages of not only schools within a certain municipality, but sometimes also of specific schools. Apart from that, more and more schools have started to communicate this information on their websites, sometimes even going as far as to compare their results with those of the competition.[18]

This development encourages associating the quality of education with grades and test results. However, as Björklund et al. rightfully (but not very forcefully) state, these types of quantitative measures[19] have their limitations: not all aspects of the quality of a school can be measured in this way. Nation-wide tests are seen as more reliable indicators of results, since grades can be biased by individual teachers and schools. But these tests only focus on Swedish and mathematics, sometimes adding English in secondary education, but nothing else. Yet the authors mention that education has other goals as well, such as contributing to the moral development of students, something which cannot be measured, at least not as easily.[20] Presumably, the same goes for the benefits of aesthetic programmes.

The current centre-right government has liberal party leader Jan Björklund (not to be mistaken for Anders Björklund, the economist who was mentioned above) as its education minister. He was responsible for the decision to cut aesthetic programmes out of the core

14 **'Pressure is on – elite classes for younger students',** The Local **26 May 2011, accessed 13 August 2011, www.thelocal.se/33930/20110526/.**
15 **Anders Björklund et al.,** The Market Comes to Education in Sweden: An Evaluation of Sweden's Surprising School Reforms **(New York: Russel Sage Foundation, 2005), 5.**
16 **Ibid.**
17 **Idem, 98.**
18 **Ibid.**
19 **Which focus on aspects that can be objectified, standardized and expressed in numbers or grades, instead of qualitative measures, such as in-depth interviews which leave room for more subjectivity and nuance (but are admittedly less efficient as they are more labour intensive).**
20 **Björklund, op. cit., 100.**

curriculum of schools and replacing them with entrepreneurial ones and seems to have a penchant for measuring and improving 'quality' as well. On the one hand, he has admitted that implementing market processes into the education system has had some negative effects, such as a dramatic decrease in the wages of teachers (in general) and private schools that have taken advantage of their liberties to save money on essential school resources such as libraries and counsellors,[21] and he has even talked about renationalizing schools.[22] On the other hand, many of his own statements and plans are very much in line with the market-driven thinking of neoliberalism.

When he introduced the new curriculum in 2010, he stated that 'The requirements of the school should be clear and concrete. Teachers, parents and students should understand what is expected in class' and that 'it is time to upgrade the teacher and teaching in schools'. He said that the previous curriculum 'left too much scope for choice and decentralization', which is why he wanted to increase the control of the government over education.[23] Apart from that, grades and knowledge requirements will also be introduced at younger ages. Even since he was a vice mayor for schools in Stockholm in 2002, he has been focused on sifting out promising students with standardized tests. More recently, he has started the implementation of elite classes, first for students in the gymnasium (ages 16-19), but soon also in part of compulsory education, more precisely, for students between 12 and 16. Of course strict tests and exams are needed to determine which of the youngsters will be admitted to this 'academically advanced education'.[24]

This focus reinforces the notion that grades and standards, and those subjects that can be easily graded and standardized, are most important. They become things that children are encouraged to worry about at a young age, and if they don't, their parents probably will, since they of course want 'the best' for their children, which is suggested to be admittance to these elite classes to ensure their future success. When looking at the uncertainties about being able to find and keep a job, their worries are understandable. It is a well-known effect of anxieties about the uncertain futures of children, which are also (at least partly) the result of neoliberal policies, such as 'job outsourcing, corporate downsizing, and international trade agreements that benefit only a few.'[25]

It has been suggested that 'in the neoliberal risk society, young people have to "chase credentials" to gain security in future education or

workplaces'. Failure to achieve is one's own fault, and 'human beings are made accountable for their predicaments'.[26] This development is also an issue in Sweden, and was discussed in my interview with Björfors for the *Community Art* book. As a result, 'parents are easily attracted to schemes that appear to satisfy multiple objectives, such as discipline, protection, and greater academic achievement'.[27] At least two of these objectives are also very clearly sought after in the current education reforms in Sweden.

What Björfors and others in Cirkör have suggested as a way of dealing with these types of fears and uncertainties, is using imagination and creativity, which are related to the 'madness' in the 'quality madness' core value, to think of alternative ways of dealing with problems than just focusing on known and the 'safe'. Of course, one of the ways in which this type of thinking can be encouraged is precisely through the aesthetic programmes that were just removed from the core curriculum. The clearer the developments and strategies that have resulted from the rise of neoliberalism in the public sector become, the more they show an obsession with quality, with 'the safe before the uncertain'.

In their article about neoliberalism and higher education, Mark Olssen and Michael A. Peters even state that under neoliberalism, knowledge is the new form of global capital. Many of the measures that are introduced in education reforms in various countries have to do with improving 'quality' to keep up with the competition from other nations. This can also be seen in some of Sweden's reforms, one of which is introducing tuition for students from outside the European Union, which was motivated with the following statement from one of Jan Björklund's advisors:'We believe that Sweden should compete on the global market for education by offering higher education with excellent quality — not by being free of charge.'[28]

21 'Sweden's Free School Profits Debate Heats Up', The Local 30 May 2011, accessed 13 August 2011, www.thelocal.se/34070/20110530/.
22 'Renationalise Sweden's Schools': Minister', The Local 15 March 2011, accessed 13 August 2011, www.thelocal.se/32596/20110315/.
23 'Sweden Unveils New School Curriculum', The Local 11 October 2010, accessed 13 August 2011, www.thelocal.se/29540/20101011/.
24 'Pressure Is On: Elite Classes for Younger Students', The Local 26 May 2011, accessed 13 August 2011, www.thelocal.se/33930/20110526/.
25 Richard D. Lakes and Patricia A. Carter, 'Neoliberalism and Education: An Introduction', Educational Studies 47, no. 2 (2011): 107-10.
26 Idem, 107-8.
27 Ibid.
28 'Swedish Universities Prep for Tuition Fee Fallout', The Local 1 December 2010, accessed 13 August 2011, www.thelocal.se/30544/20101201/.

All these policies around grades, tests and elite classes are meant to contribute to the development of promising young students who can become a form of 'knowledge capital' in the 'knowledge economy'. Even if Swedish education would be renationalized, the competition on an international scale (and the related focus on standards and narrow conceptions of quality and knowledge that come with it) would remain. But there are good reasons to assume that the academic excellence and success that these policies strive to create, cannot be achieved without creativity and imagination. The idea that quality needs madness can apply here as well.

About Excellence and Creativity

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi is a Professor in Psychology who has led an elaborate research project in which in-depth interviews were conducted with 'ninety-one exceptional individuals' […] who 'have made a difference to a major domain of culture; one of the sciences, the arts, business, government, or human well-being in general' in different cultures.[29] These weren't just any people, but very successful ones, including fourteen Nobel Prize winners, so presumably people that have achieved the kind of excellence that 'knowledge-economies' strive to 'produce'. What all of these people have in common, is that they are creative in the most fundamental sense of the word. They are not only personally creative or 'brilliant' in a performative sense: these people have all created something that wasn't there before and was accepted by their field as a valuable contribution. Since neoliberalism has a strong focus on *results*, these people should qualify as successful even in neoliberal terms.

Csikszentmihalyi analysed these interviews to find out how creativity 'works' and under what circumstances it arises. He devoted an entire book to describing and attempting to explain the results, which are very interesting for this essay, since the psychologist also defines creativity as a balance between opposites that comes quite close to the 'quality-madness' pair:

> Each of us is born with two contradictory sets of instructions: a conservative tendency, made up of instincts for self-preservation, self-aggrandizement, and saving energy, and an expansive tendency made up of instincts for exploring, for enjoying novelty and risk – the

> curiosity that leads to creativity belongs to this set. We need both of these programs. But whereas the first tendency requires little encouragement or support from outside to motivate behavior, the second can wilt if it is not cultivated. If too few opportunities for curiosity are available, if too many obstacles are placed in the way of risk and exploration, the motivation to engage in creative behavior is easily distinguished.[30]

I think it is not unreasonable to say that the first tendency is stimulated much more heavily by neoliberal policies than the second. Sure, there is room for some novelty, but preferably a moderate form of it, which does not involve too much risk and investments of time and energy. Csikszentmihalyi mentions in his book that 'basic scientific research is minimized in favour of immediate practical applications', while 'the arts are increasingly seen as dispensable luxuries that must prove their worth in the impersonal mass market'.[31] The first remark complies with the observations of Olssen and Peters, who state that research is more often than before related to practice and 'linked directly to the functional imperatives of the world of work'.[32] What the psychologist says about art is one of the issues that brought forth this essay.

One could claim that this tendency does leave some room for creativity, but more for a kind that is closer to the innovation of some existing way of thinking than of discovering an entirely new one. This last type of activity, which he calls creativity with a capital C, is the subject of Csikszentmihalyi's book, which also shows how the people who contributed to the development of their field and culture in general have managed to do so. Their way comes quite close to that of Cirkör. First of all, quality and madness are balanced in the sense that each and every one of these people had to become an expert at something first, whatever the field they were working in, be it sculpting, astronomy or mathematics. As the psychologist

29 **Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi,** Creativity: Flow and the Psychology of Discovery and Invention **(New York: Harper Perennial, 1997), 12.**
30 **Idem, 11.**
31 **Ibid.**
32 **Idem, 330.**

reminds us: you have to know a tradition first to be able to change it. So the people who have managed to do so are at once conservative and rebellious.[33]

The first is the quality part of the equation, and it is important to keep in mind that creative insights are both preceded and followed by a lot of hard work. But in between them are moments where curiosity, fantasy and imagination take centre stage. Csikszentmihalyi quotes Albert Einstein, who has written that 'art and science are two of the greatest forms of escape from reality that humans have devised'. The psychologist agrees that both require a 'leap of imagination into a world that is different from the present'. So even though both artists and scientists can sometimes seem to be working on something that seems to bear no relation whatsoever to real and current problems, this is part of this fundamental level of creation. The point is 'to go beyond what we now consider real, and create a new reality'. Many ideas that changed the way we see the world started out that way, and after a while were found out to be a valuable contribution to what was already there.[34]

The balance between quality and madness can also be seen as a combination of divergent and convergent thinking. The first is about solving 'well-defined, rational problems that have one correct answer', while 'divergent thinking leads to no agreed-upon solution' and 'involves fluency, or the ability to generate a great quantity of ideas; flexibility, or the ability to switch from one perspective to another; and originality in picking unusual associations of ideas'.[35] Csikszentmihalyi also mentions that this last feat is often achieved by crossing boundaries of fields. Again, both ways of thinking are needed in the creative process, which is therefore not just the 'madness' part, but the right balance between quality and madness.

Csikszentmihalyi's account of personality traits that many of the interviewees had in common is interesting to discuss by itself, but since space is limited, mentioning that they form pairs between contradictory characteristics will have to suffice. In these people, extremes such as being smart and naïve, introverted and extroverted, ambitious and selfless are embodied as well.

But the author mentions that his list is 'to a certain extent arbitrary'. What matters is not so much the names attributed to the poles, but the dynamic between them that needs to be able to occur within the same person, who 'can operate at both ends of these polarities'.

The last combination of extremes that needs mentioning is that of playfulness and discipline, or responsibility and irresponsibility. The examples show that many good ideas come up when they are being explored in a light and playful way. But, as Csikszentmihalyi reminds us, 'playfulness doesn't go very far without its antithesis, a quality of doggedness, endurance, perseverance'. He also quotes physicist Hans Bethe, who describes what is needed in solving the problems of his field as follows: 'Two things are required. One is a brain. And second is the willingness to spend long times in thinking, with a definite possibility that you come out with nothing.'[36]

This is one of the main things that is remarkable about the accounts of the people that were interviewed. They know very well that their work involves a lot of time, energy, overcoming obstacles and the need to deal with risk and failure. It can take years of hard work to achieve something: according to Csikszentmihalyi, many of the subjects in the study only had two or three really good ideas in their career, but these were so 'generative that it kept them busy for a lifetime of testing, filling out, elaborating, and applying'.[37]

So what keeps these people going, despite the difficulty of what they are trying to do and the relatively small chance at success? Where does the willingness come from? First of all, the people that were interviewed often talked about feeling a strong interest for their subject or the field they were working in, and a 'calling' to use it to make a change in the world. Secondly, they were what Csikszentmihalyi calls 'intrinsically' motivated: they want to keep doing whatever it is they are doing for its own sake, regardless of the small chances at success or other rewards, including financial ones.[38] If this all seems a little too vague and general, or 'too good to be true', know that the book supplies plenty of real life examples.

However, the example that is the point of discussion here, is Cirkus Cirkör and the people behind it, who seem to fit the above description remarkably well. They have succeeded in bringing contemporary circus to Sweden and making it grow, thereby making a valuable contribution to their culture. They have even won prizes and after years of risky investments and near-bankruptcy at times, are now quite 'steady' as an organization. Not only are the results there, but more importantly, the sense of 'calling' and intrinsic motivation are clear as well, especially when you meet them face to face. Most

33 Idem, 71.
34 Idem, 63.
35 Idem, 60.
36 Idem, 61.
37 Idem, 60.
38 Idem, 123.

people there, be it at the office or on the stage, exude a genuine joy to be doing what they are doing. They have accumulated a certain amount of know-how, expertise and skill, and aim to make smart, constructive decisions. At the same time, play and fun are never far away and are a great source of creativity in all of their activities.

Because of this, they provide an alternative way of thinking to the one that is implied in neoliberal policies, which are so focused on striving for results, discipline and control. Not only children in Swedish schools are affected by these changes, but their teachers just as much (or maybe more), but also school managements, ministries of education, and even national governments. It is often hard to locate power in these globalized times (although Olssen and Peters mention institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund), but it seems as if almost everybody is subjected to it, in part because of the increase in neoliberal control mechanisms such as auditing, accounting and management. These have led to a newly reinforced hierarchy in the distribution of power, compared to more classical forms of liberalism.

Olssen and Peters argue that while classical liberalism saw the individual as someone who had an 'autonomous human nature' and could 'practice freedom', neoliberalism is based on the idea that the state should *create* an individual who is an enterprising and competitive entrepreneur, which is exactly the change that is reflected in the Swedish curriculum. So '[…] for neoliberal perspectives, the end goals of freedom, choice, consumer sovereignty, competition and individual initiative, as well as those of compliance and obedience, must be constructions of the state […]'.[39] This rather cynical logic implies that people cannot be 'useful' or 'valuable' by and of themselves, but need to be reconstructed and reinstructed. This way of turning people into products supposedly serves efficiency, but from a circus logic there is no way that one could be more wasteful.

At Cirkör, they assume that everybody comes into this world with an innate source of curiosity, creativity and motivation, and even a sense of entrepreneurship, which is, however, seen by them as nothing other than the drive to create something, in whatever field. In all of their activities, they aim to take 'what is already there' in a person as their starting point, and are not easily stopped by obstacles, restrictions or standards that are applied from outside or above. The most pertinent example would be their trainings for people with disabilities, given by — sometimes retired — circus artists who refuse to see

the trainee's file beforehand, because they are not interested in what a person cannot do according to others. From their own experiences of feeling 'disabled' to reach a goal before they have created a new possibility of achieving it, they only focus on what a person can do, often with results that are very surprising,[40] especially to the professional practitioners who had written the files. The people with disabilities in turn become great sources of inspiration for the circus people.

In the courses they do in schools in different municipalities, Cirkör's teachers also invite children to trust what they can do themselves, letting them choose what their own input in a performance will be, letting them imagine what a story is about, and letting them decide where their boundaries are, which stimulates their trust in others, but especially in themselves. Although the children need to practice a lot and learn plenty of skills in the process, the circus people always make sure to leave room for fun and madness, so the pupils are motivated, not forced, to invest their time, energy and creativity. Fortunately, the people at Cirkör were imaginative enough themselves to not restrict their lessons to aesthetics programmes: they also use circus and creativity in the 'measurable' courses, such as mathematics and Swedish. Children often find that these subjects do not only become more fun because of it, but also easier to understand.

The older students at the upper-secondary and tertiary level who aspire to become professional circus artists have hardly been discussed in this essay, but that is only because the conversations I've had did not give much reason to worry about them (at least not in the near future), or about the possibilities they can find to develop themselves and their art form in this neoliberal age. Both programmes are built on the needs and values of the art form as much as possible, which means that students learn to create in groups and collaborate with others within and outside of their own art form, such as engineers who help them construct their acts, but also to develop their own style, vision and vocabulary of movement. At DOCH, part of this is done through one-on-one teaching in a mentor-pupil type of relationship.

Maybe owing to the fact that the art form and the higher education dedicated to it are still relatively 'young', but maybe also because it is in line with the collaborative tendencies of the

39 Idem, 315.

40 Like teaching a child who usually needs a wheelchair, or a 99-year old retirement home resident, to walk on a wire, as is reported in Björfors and Lind, op. cit., 107 and 117.

contemporary circus milieu, there does not seem to be that much competition between institutes. Of course, each university/college has its own profile, methods and focus: some favour the technical over the theoretical, or the artistic over the technical, et cetera. Differences can also occur because one teaching staff may be more specialized in certain disciplines and less in others. But those that are members of FEDEC (and possibly the ones that are not) also share a lot of expertise and support each other in their development. Walter Ferrero, the head of the secondary and tertiary programme, usually advises his gymnasium students to think about their drive and goals and what direction they want to take, to find out where teaching in their specific discipline is most advanced and base their choice for a tertiary programme on that, regardless of whether this programme is nearby or not, since international experience is fruitful in a profession that is still very much based on travelling and adapting to different circumstances.

Of course, students aspiring to become professionals need time to find the right balance between their own quality and madness and, like everybody else, they need to find it again and again — since balance isn't something you can hold on to. More practically, this means that they need to learn a lot about their discipline, both in practice, through their skills, and more theoretically, to be able to get to know the tradition that they are becoming part of and possibly may want to change. But they also need to tap into their individuality, their imagination and their playfulness to come up with new and creative possibilities.

At the same time, even they can sometimes start to focus on 'doing things right' and meeting the standards of others a little too much, especially the students at DOCH, who are preparing to enter the professional field and venture into a world filled with uncertainties. It is very important for them to improve their technique, and once this is in place, it can be hard to temporarily let go of it again in order to find new possibilities. One example mentioned in one of the interviews was: 'Why would I make an ugly cartwheel when I can also make a really good and beautiful one?' But like many art academy programmes, the circus bachelor includes methods to encourage students to free themselves of the constraints of standards and traditions and find their own way of doing things as well. At DOCH, one is artistic research,[41] the other is improvisation, which is also done in the upper-secondary programme. This quote by Walter Ferrero illustrates this issue nicely:

> The teenagers [upper-secondary students] attack these artistic adventures in crazy ways, they don't think: 'I have to be a great artist in three years.' So when I give them assignments, they just take off. They just trust, they don't pass judgement, they just want to go for it and do it and have fun. And they don't stop to question too fast. I see that sometimes in the university. And that's what they have to learn: keep your freedom, don't question too much. So we have to do some exercises where they don't have a choice. Some things just have to come out for you to discover and learn them. If you will it to come out, it won't come out. Sometimes they can really be thinking too much. And then you see the ones that just suddenly go and do the exercise for fun. How do you negotiate that freedom?

The answer to this question is not exactly clear and may differ from person to person, but it is clear that 'madness' and fun are crucial to it. This is in line with what was said earlier about creativity by Csikszentmihalyi. When they come out of the DOCH programme, the students will have to decide for themselves where their motivation lies. They learn how to work together and to make technically advanced, skilled contributions to ensemble performances under the direction of others, such as directors or composers, in the second year. The third year is devoted to artistic research, in which they can develop their own artistic vocabulary and their discipline, and to creating their own act. Both of these ways of working can be used to create either artful or entertaining performances and it is up to the student to decide what he or she wants to do, or wants to do first, since they could also be combined or alternated. If anybody can balance art and entertainment, it must be circus artists.

Those that I've talked to seemed to have a clear conception of the possibilities and limitations of both and to be sufficiently in

41 A longer process of individual experimentation with the discipline(s) the student is specialized in. The process is more important than the product here, and documentation, for instance in writing or by filming it, is part of it.

touch with their motivation to make decisions that suit them as individuals. This motivational aspect also becomes clear from what Kajsa Balkfors Lind told me about her 'circus transfer' courses, which are organized as a series of lectures and workshops in which business students from the Stockholm School of Economics and circus artists taking this course at DOCH participate and collaborate. The circus students were interested in using their skills and art in a broader market or context and the business students were invited to help them with their expertise in this area, whereas the circus students allowed their counterparts from the business school to experience concepts such as balance or trust by putting their expertise into practice through the circus disciplines.

An example would be to let business students feel the difference between carrying a circus artist who trusts them and carrying each other, to experience the powerful feeling that comes with being trusted. This seems like an important lesson these days. There was also room for debate and discussion, for instance about drive. Two circus students organized a philosophy café which was dedicated to the question of how it is possible to have 'getting good grades' as a drive — something the circus students really could not understand, as grades cannot be a goal in themselves, right? It is safe to say that circus people don't necessarily need theories about neoliberalism to recognize its problems.

Balkfors Lind also told me that the circus students and artists sometimes even needed to play the role of therapists, as thinking and talking about the issue of drive could create a sense of 'crisis' for business students, who reported having forgotten that they had one and didn't know what to do now that they were reminded of it. The circus people then consoled them by saying that they had so much to offer with all their knowledge.

However, as becomes clear from the interviews in Csikszentmihalyi's book, knowledge in itself is not enough to really make a difference in the world: intrinsic motivation and fun are equally important to be creative and need to be stimulated as well.

One last thing that needs to be mentioned here is that the psychologist defines creativity not as an individual trait, but as a 'systemic' phenomenon: it can occur only when the individual is rooted in a field that has a certain structure or tradition and when he or she is surrounded by peers and others who can provide feedback and inspiration, but also help determine whether a contribution is really new and valuable. So creativity needs the right environment to arise through the individual. Let's hope that enough of the artistic and scientific fields remain areas in which young people can find their drive, their voice, and 'negotiate their freedom'. It can only be hoped that contemporary circus continues to grow and spread, so circus artists can contribute their boundary-crossing skills and special sense of balance between extremes to help find new possibilities of achieving this.

Bodies, Brains and Dis-covery

Of all the Cirkör core values, it is quality madness that fascinates me most: especially in the context of this book. It is because I think any dogma, neoliberal or otherwise, suffers from some type of quality fetish: it is about believing that a way of doing things becomes the only way of doing things, in any situation. This leads to closing off the mind's ability to conceive of alternative possibilities. Art, which, maybe always, needs a considerable dose of madness, is about disrupting this way of approaching the world, about reminding you that what you think you know is not necessarily the whole truth.

And even though human beings can probably never reach that final truth: art and science (deep down) are their ways of trying to anyway. But it is a quest for truth, not a search: it never really ends.[42] Art may be closer to madness and science closer to quality, but those who are involved in a quest for truth should also visit the place(s) where they intersect. We now know that both have the contradictory nature of creativity at their core. In her introduction to *Inside Out*, the first Cirkör performance that I saw, Tilde Björfors cites Leonardo da Vinci, who wrote that 'Art and science are two sides of the same coin, and both widen the world'.[43]

Perhaps this is why Da Vinci's 'Vitruvian man' being painted onto the floor of the set of *Inside Out* filled me with such a faraway but deep sense of watching a quest, although I didn't know why. But at one point the on-stage live band's vocalist was singing

42 In The Murmuring of the Artistic Multitude: Global Art, Memory and Post-Fordism **(Amsterdam: Valiz, 2009) Pascal Gielen also evokes the concept of a quest when discussing Cittadellarte and its activities and quotes Barbara Czarniawska (** Narrating the Organization: Dramas of Institutional Identity. **Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1997), who describes a quest as something which '[...] alternates between striving for resolution and immediate relaunching, between the certainty required for action and the demolition of certainty [...]' (226).**

43 Programme Inside Out.

her heart out while an acrobat in a 'cyr wheel'[44] gracefully put powerfully turned and turned with a complementary dynamic in the centre of the stage. He was not only mirroring the image on the stage that he was turning on, but also evoking the movement of a coin, spinning on its edge, alternately showing each of its different sides, not yet ready to be determined. After a few minutes I realized with surprise that not only was my mouth open, but there were tears in my eyes, something I had never before thought a circus (!) could accomplish. That was the death of what I thought I knew about circus: expectations were thwarted and a new truth or possibility was born.

One thing that I think I know about art education is that the processes it uses to make students understand the artistic process, is to try and make them forget about their own preconceptions. The best known example is probably the one of the teacher telling his students in drawing class to stop looking with their minds and start looking with their eyes. The human mind is a very efficient thing and repeated perception of a certain object leads to some form of categorization, be it in the form of concepts in the mind or algorithms in the brain, or something else that we may not know about. It is thought that these categories or concepts also start to lead perception up to a certain point: the mind more or less takes over from the eye and you really do start to see what you think you see, and to even base your actions on these perceptions.[45]

What art teachers are doing, and what artists need to keep doing, is try and disrupt this process of acting according to what they think they know or perceive. This is not easy, because art students and artists have usually built up a high level of skill in order to become what they are. Since skill comes from repetition, it risks becoming a mechanism that leads to a dominance of 'quality' over madness, of believing that what you think you see is really there, or that there is only one right way to act. By somehow disrupting this process art teachers are trying to 'open their students' minds' and make them look with their eyes instead of their minds again. This is one of the reasons why the gaze of new-borns is so fascinating for so many visual artists: through their lack of experience with the world and their lack of concepts of it, they can do little else than look with their eyes.

Circus artists are obviously highly skilled as well and also very focused on their 'technique'. The processes that Walter Ferrero described were aimed at disrupting this fixed belief in skill and tech-

nique up to a certain point, or to de-automatize actions that were ingrained in students' bodies through years and years of practice and make them realize that it is in fact possible to act in a different way. Making skilled students do an ugly cartwheel for a change or letting them play with each other, new objects or materials, can be ways of doing that. Once this difficult feat is achieved, the next challenge is to bring in the skill again and put it at the service of this newly discovered or rediscovered possibility. That is how art can be research.

If art can be seen as a form of disrupting patterns of perception, thought and action to, at least temporarily, reinstall the dominance of the senses and the physical, be it the eye, the ear, or in this case the whole body and its movements, over that of the mind/brain, then we are talking about a type of empiricism. After the disruption, the skill comes back in to turn this empirical input into an output. This is how it is a 'moving in and out of' truth(s). It is both body and mind; skill, the disruption of it and then skill again, but different from before. This process of discovery is guided by imagination. Quite possibly there also needs to be a constant feedback process between the input, the mind and the material output, whether that is written language or a movement of the body. And maybe if this 'translation' from outside, inside, to outside again is done well, some of the 'newness' of the discovery is still perceivable to an outsider or spectator. However, this spectator probably needs to find his or her own way to be 'open-minded' too in order to see or realize it, but then we are talking about reception instead of creation, which may or may not have a logic of its own.

I think art and science are involved in the same quest for new possible truths. If the truths are physical or natural, then maybe they can be 'found' someday, although the ways in which they are then represented or 'materialized' can probably always be changed. But if the truths are mental or cultural, they might be endless. Maybe when the process is more 'conceptual' than 'sensual', in art or in thinking, the senses are a little less important and concepts can be completely re-viewed in the imagination, but the necessity for some sort of 'materialization' to complete it seems obvious, because of the need for 'feedback' between inside and out, to really be confronted

44 A type of 'hoop' which the acrobat stands in, in a pose similar to the Vitruvian man, making it turn and spin, while making different poses or figures with his body and alternating the motion/angle of the hoop, for instance, between vertical and more diagonal.

45 See for instance Robert L. Solso's The Psychology of Art and the Evolution of the Conscious Brain **(Cambridge and London: The MIT Press, 2003) 3.**

with the newness yourself. That is why both art and the domains of science that focus on the cultural are able to always show new possibilities of perceiving, thinking and acting.

This way, they can work as an antidote to anything that becomes ingrained too much, any moment where repetition overtakes perception and action to a point where it is conceived of as true, as the only possible reality. That is when quality needs to be 'balanced' by a little madness, when order needs to be disrupted by chaos, when politics and economics need circus. Sometimes a little innovation is enough, but if the perceived truth is very dominant and heavily ingrained and threatens to cover too many aspects of life, it may need to be countered with a stronger opposite or alternative. Then 'discovery' is needed. There is innovation in entertainment, but it is safe, moderate, so it does not disrupt too much. This makes it corruptible, able to be colonized by whatever is dominant. Artistic discovery seems like a stronger alternative.[46]

At the same time, at some point art can probably lose its disruptive potential through repetition as well. Then a new form of artistic discovery is called for. That is why culture keeps developing. Of course, this type of counter-perceiving, counter-thinking or counter-acting comes with many risks: it is difficult to achieve and takes time to take shape. Even when the artist or thinker has the feeling that a new possibility has been discovered *and* (more or less) successfully materialized after all this investment of time and effort, there is still the risk that nobody will see or understand it. If the potential audience is closed-minded, distracted or not ready to see the new possibility, then all this time and effort goes to waste, at least, in neoliberal thinking. But it seems more reasonable to think that at the very least, the artist has learned something, has opened up his own mind to a new possibility, and has made his own conception of the world and, in the best case, his own conception of himself, grow.

Maybe the fact that circus is based on very fundamental patterns of human action and interaction, be it with (other) bodies or objects,[47] patterns that all of us are still continuously connected to, explains its potential to speak to a large audience. From the examples of Cirkus Cirkör, it is also very clear that it is a good way of showing that art involves learning, since it opens up new possibilities of perceiving, thinking and acting, and relating it to other forms of learning. The fact that the practices of Cirkör also show that nobody is too old or too weak to learn, since even some 99-year olds and children in wheelchairs can learn to walk on the wire, can be a great source of hope.

In line with their way of approaching the world, through learning and understanding from physical experience while making sure to leave room for the unexpected, I decided to complement all the thinking involved in writing this essay with a little 'materiality' in the form of body movement and object manipulation. I taught myself the basics of a skill almost anybody can master with enough practice: juggling. The results do not only show in my brand new skill, but also in my body (there was some development in the biceps area) and possibly also in my brain, although I don't have the technology to prove it.[48]

Of course I also looked to others for inspiration, and that is how I stumbled upon the TED-talk of master juggler Michael Moschen.[49] He confirmed what I had learned through experience, that juggling is a way of learning about learning. Like many other skills, you learn step by step: first through learning to throw one ball the right way, then to throw two in the right rhythm, and so on. Learning such a physical, material skill makes this very clear. Moschen also showed how much insecurity was involved in this learning process. This too I had experienced when trying it myself: I hadn't felt so clumsy and not in control of my body in a long time.

Most people, especially adults, don't much like insecurity. They don't like not knowing what to do: they are no longer used to it like children are, who learn all the time. Adults have all that experience, start thinking that there is nothing left to learn, and get a little rusty. Maybe religious, aesthetic, economic, political, and other

46 However, as soon as art is materialized into an object or a form of registration, such as a painting, a cd or a dvd, it becomes corruptible to abuse from whatever is dominant as well, whether it is political, religious or commercial. There is of course also an art market, where even the most radical ideas in their materialized form can be 'commodified'. More 'ephemeral arts' such as theatre and circus have a different quality, although those can be 'registered' as well.

47 Communication/cooperation and object manipulation, both very fundamental in the evolution and development of the human mind. See for instance Merlin Donald, 'Art and Cognitive Evolution', in The Artful Mind: Cognitive Science and the Riddle of Human Creativity, **ed. Mark Turner (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006) or Timothy Taylor,** The Artificial Ape: How Technology Changed the Course of Human Evolution **(New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).**

48 Jan Scholtz et al., 'Training Induces Changes in White-matter Architecture', Nature Neuroscience **12 (2009): 1370-71. This article reports experiments where test subjects were taught to juggle, resulting in changes in brain structure. Juggling has also been mentioned as a way of increasing concentration and creativity.**

49 See www.ted.com/talks/lang/eng/michael_moschen_juggles_rhythm_and_motion.html

dogmas are the product of inflexible minds and maybe adhering to them is an — perhaps unconscious — attempt to rule out that unpleasant feeling of insecurity that comes with learning something new. It seems to be an attempt at efficiency in itself in a way, since learning involves effort and sometimes risk. I am not saying that every individual needs to constantly reinvent the wheel: relying on existing knowledge is also a very useful and necessary human capability. But maybe this needs to be balanced once in a while, wire walker style, by learning through enlarging your own experience: from the bottom up, from the inside out. I think learning a skill is one and learning to make and/or be open to art is another way of doing this. The circus seems a good place to start.

Which brings me back to Michael Moschen, who may not even be a circus artist, but one of those 'emancipated' jugglers that have come up since the 1970s. There is one other thing he said that was both puzzling and recognizable from my own experience: juggling is about learning to see with your hands and feel with your eyes. Try it and you may find the truth in this.

Now the reason why I see a source of hope in circus or the circus arts: if this can be learned from juggling, similar possibilities for using human features for undiscovered purposes may be learned as well. Just like the people at Cirkör, I believe that under the right circumstances human beings can learn almost anything. I am hoping that someone will soon find out how to think with the heart, or maybe somebody already has, and is afraid to show it. Or maybe we are just not perceiving with the right parts. Either way, there is still a lot to learn.

Afterword

Rien van der Vleuten

Afterword

As General Director of Fontys College for the Arts – an institute with 1500 students in four sectors of art – I know very well what it is like to deal with the catering regime. As manager of an art college, one is constantly mediating between governments, the board of governors and other interested parties. It is an on-going struggle to explain the specific nature of both art and art education and effectively defend the free space both deserve. It is a continuous negotiation between administrative demands and teachers' wishes, between facts & figures and art gurus, between government, the professional field, and education. This tenth publication by the Arts in Society research group tackles the question head-on with a very sharp analysis of the European educational domain. In art education the fight can only be won by radically choosing the side of art. In large-scale art education this comes down to *being of service*. Not just the administration, but teachers and even students must mutually dedicate themselves to what art education is and should be about, i.e. artistic creation. This is the core, the 'matter' of what it should be about, as Maarten Simons and Jan Masschelein say in their contribution. Only artistic knowledge and skills form the drive that keeps an art school dynamic. Though it may sound obvious that an art school concerns itself with art, I can assure you this is no easy task in the current political and economic context. This book is helpful in clearly defining a number of problems by laying out some of the 'diversions' from this crucial focus. The catering regime, and the underlying neoliberalism as described in this book, is one development that can lead art education, and in fact all good education, astray. The authors of this collection of essays perhaps paint a somewhat 'exaggerated' or grotesque picture of this, but as an art lover I know that such a strategy work as an eye-opener. That in itself is also an art.

Rien van der Vleuten
General Director

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— De Bruyne, Paul (2009). *Een stoet van kleur en klanken: De muziek van Luc Mishalle & Co.* Ghent: Academia Press.
— Gielen, Pascal (2003, 2005, 2008 and 2011, 4th edition). *Kunst in Netwerken: Artistieke selecties in de hedendaagse dans en de beeldende kunst*. Leuven: LannooCampus.
— Gielen, Pascal (2008). *Het gemurmel van de artistieke menigte: Over kunst en postfordisme.* Tilburg: Fontys.
— Gielen, Pascal (2007). *De Kunstinstitutie: De identiteit en maatschappelijke positie van de artistieke instellingen van de Vlaamse Gemeenschap.* Antwerp: OIV.

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Colophon

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