

ONCURATING.org

Issue 24 / December 2014

Notes on Curating, freely distributed, non-commercial

After the turn: art education

beyond the museum

With Contributions by

Amanda Cachia

Lena Seik

Megan Johnston

Dan Perjovschi

Vagabond Reviews

WochenKlausur

Yet Chor Sunshine Wong

Contents

02

Sponsor, 2005

Artwork by Dan Perjovschi

03

Editorial

Michael Birchall and Philipp Sack

08

More Bite in the Real World: Usership in Arts-Based Research Practice

Vagabond Review

(Alibhe Murphy and Ciaran Smyth)

22

Press Is Gone, 1999

Artwork by Dan Perjovschi

23

Slow Curating: Re-thinking and Extending Socially Engaged Art in the context of Northern Ireland

Essay by Megan Johnston

34

Art You Can Buy This, 2014

Artwork by Dan Perjovschi

35

What does it have to do with me? The learning Museum, or how the principle of aesthetic research makes cultural education more accessible

Essay by Lena Seik

50

Artist, 2008

Artwork by Dan Perjovschi

51

Disability, Curating and the Educational Turn: The Contemporary Condition of Access in the Museum

Essay by Amanda Cachia

67

Artist Citizen, 2008

Artwork by Dan Perjovschi

68

Let's Talk About Another Concept

Essay by WochenKlausur

77

Citizen–Consumer, 2004

Artwork by Dan Perjovschi

78

Building, dismantling: community orientations and counterpublic art in Hong Kong

Essay by Yet Chor Sunshine Wong

90

Imprint



"Sponsor", 2005
Artwork by Dan Perjovschi

Editorial

Michael Birchall and Philipp Sack

Dan Perjovschi's 2005 drawing that precedes these pages laconically addresses the hierarchies operative in an art institution's value chains, and it does so on the basis of an inventory of whoever holds agency in this context. Strikingly, this list doesn't at a first glance seem to be in any way exhaustive, as it apparently lacks a varied range of other roles and functions at play in art institutions, such as security guards, visitor and technical services staff—as well as gallery educators. Is their absence from the work due to their evanescent significance within the hierarchy Dan establishes in his diagram, causing the size of their denominations to be way too tiny to be perceived? Or does the hierarchy as proposed in the work just stem from an erroneous observation biased by an artist's point of view?

As editors, we have chosen the drawing as an initial impulse to this issue, because we would like to argue that it is not a superficial interpretation, but a profound insight that the work expresses not only regarding the elements of the hierarchy, but also in hindsight to what is excluded from it. Isn't it that in everyday museum practice, the aforementioned roles and functions that do not appear in the diagram are actually conceived of as not only being gradually, but categorically different from the roles and functions featured in the diagram? That education, together with security, the maintenance of technical infrastructure, or the bookshop, if you will, are not just negligible parts in the continuum of sponsor-director-curator-artist; but actually exist outside of it? If we address this continuum as the classical cast in the process of what came to be called "knowledge production", education doesn't seem to have any claims in it. While those involved in it are granted being "practitioners" invested with agency, education is most of times considered belonging to another sphere, that of "services".

Conspicuously, the work in question dates from a time when the tendency in the art world to turn towards experiments with methodologies taken from pedagogical practices that was first perceivable in the 1990s had undergone such a raise in profile that shortly afterwards led to its identification as a "turn" in contemporary art.¹ For the first time prominently theorized by Irit Rogoff in 2008², the potentialities of implementing education in curatorial and artistic practice have since been the subject of a plethora of projects and publications. One could argue that Rogoff's essay, despite her intention of scrutinizing the pertinence of the term, has produced a turn itself: the notion of an "educational turn" has now become available as a label, as style, exposing educational strategies to the risk of again being co-opted by mere commodification (a fear already expressed by Rogoff)—resulting in what could be called a turn on education, perpetuating its status as a service to whichever policy. Having, as curators, theorists and facilitators in the field of art education, experienced pedagogical methodologies and models being elevated to the heights of self-evidence in current art-related practices, we came to wonder how this new paradigm actually conditions the work in this field. Whether we believe in its sincerity or not, what is labeled as the "educational turn" has become a reality in the art world. The moment of critique since having passed, we must now look at the actual ways in which education is pragmatically dealt with.

We witness that curators increasingly make attempts to attract new audiences, by commissioning artists to engage new publics. Yet this trend has also led to curators initiating their own projects, and this has been facilitated by educational models, or, as has been said, the so-called "educational turn"³ in curating. Educational

models are used as mechanisms for facilitating curatorial agendas to a wide audience, and this includes, alternative schools, reading groups, lecture series and so on. As Kristina Lee Podesva argues, “Educational formats, methods, programs, models, terms, processes and procedures have become pervasive in the praxes of both curating and the production of art and in their attendant critical frameworks.”⁴ This transition has enabled curators to produce participatory and pedagogical projects that can run in the short and long term. Participatory schools and free schools have emerged as a prevailing model for both the artistic and non-artistic community, examples include *Open School East*, London, (2012-), an open school platform that provides residencies for artists as well as regular weekly events; *Momentary Academy*, a temporary school realized at the Yerba Buena Centre for Arts during the Bay Area Now 4 festival in 2005; *Playshop*, an open-access laboratory for the free flow of ideas, also at the Yerba Buena Centre for the Arts (2004); the itinerant projects’ *School of Panamerican Unrest* (2006–2007) and the *United Nations Plaza*, the latter which presented a 12-month series of seminars in Berlin (2006–2007), initiated by Anton Vidokle.

Throughout the last decade these projects have received international attention and are thus encouraged by governments as it removes the need for state funding, and often makes them reliant on private foundations. The proliferation of self-organized structures that exist outside of mainstream institutions have convened themselves as sites of learning, perhaps inadvertently collapsing the divisions between sites of formal education and those of creative practice, performance and activism. When knowledge production becomes the focus of activities in the art world, it becomes a field of potential and a place for exchange. As Eva Egermann notes: “the exhibition functioned as a pretext, a defined place for communication and action that would perhaps establish impulse for further transformations.”⁵

Due to the varied fields in which the contributors to this issue inscribe their practice, they all refer in their texts to specific modes of legitimacy,⁶ publicity,⁷ agency,⁸ and temporality⁹ when speaking about pedagogical practices in the art world. Nevertheless, what the different approaches related in the respective contributions do seem to share is a stance of ‘venturing into the public realm’. Hannah Arendt referred to this concept by Karl Jaspers in a famous 1964 interview¹⁰ to describe the particular potentialities of exposing oneself not only as a philosopher, but as a person: In the public realm, a person’s activities (including speaking) are charged with significance. But neither of the protagonists involved in this publicly performed act (be it as performers themselves or as the public) can tell what the eventual outcome of it is going to be, whether it will produce the consequences desired for by either party. Arendt stresses that for any consequence to materialize, it is a prerequisite for both the performer and the public to have trust in the capacity of the act to produce them, a “fundamental” trust in, as Arendt puts it, “what is human in all people.”¹¹ It is this venture that the practices discussed here undertake: acting upon a given reality without knowing to a full extent what the effects will be, and accepting the conditions shaping this reality on the basis of a fundamental trust that they can just as well be overcome. As Oliver Marchart has argued in a recent talk¹² this very act of ‘pretending to have hit the target’ only enables us to meaningfully aim at it, the act of ‘speaking clearly’ precedes the act of ‘speaking truly’.

Instead of merely sticking to traditional curatorial and artistic practices that are now merely re-labeled as “education”, the authors describe how new, experimental routes can be embarked upon, even though—or because—their point of departure is obscured by the vagueness of the “educational turn” as a concept. The case studies provided in this issue remind us that not in being right, but in exposing oneself to the risk of being wrong lies the key for criticality.¹³ The conflicting interests education is currently exposed to thus prove to be less an inhibition than a catalyst for the potentialities of those practices to unfold. Which of these interests will finally become hegemonic still seems to be decided, but the mere fact that there are projects and initiatives (together with the questions they raise, not least about

themselves) such as the ones featured in this issue, provides for an optimistic outlook: the future, precisely because it cannot be known, holds nothing to worry about.

The **Vagabond Reviews (Ailbhe Murphy & Ciaran Smyth)** discuss their Rialto Youth Project in Dublin, Ireland. Their texts presents this project in the context of Stephen Wright's notion "Usership", which creates a different kind of curatorial line, from user-generated content to displays as "content validation and refinement". The users of art are indeed questioned in this text, as the artists remain critical of their practice as both the producer and enactor of socially engaged art; one in which the content-display-spectator sequence has been dissolved along the lines of a different mode of knowledge production. Their discussion derives from direct experience with a diverse group of participants and institutions, and questions the pedagogical logic within which the educational function of the contemporary museum must operate.

The role of the curator as a facilitator, mediator, organizer and perhaps educationist is often over-looked, as the curatorial function becomes a merging of all these roles, the division of labour becomes an arduous task. **Megan Johnston's** text explores the notion of "slow curating" in a term she coined herself to apply to hers, as well as other curators who find themselves balancing education and mediation in their practices. In the context of Northern Ireland where Johnston has previously worked, her projects seek to question and tackle the social and political contexts, and being embedded as a curator in this process led to her re-thinking the curatorial function and consider how this may operate differently in the future.

Another case study of education practices in an institutional context is then provided by **Lena Seik**, who discusses the commitment of the Galerie für Zeitgenössische Kunst (GfZK) Leipzig to being a „learning museum“ in the light of long-term project work with school, and kindergarten children. This particular self-conception entails an inversion of the roles and competences as they are usually distributed: The notion of education has in this case been granted increased legitimacy not (exclusively) by curators assuming pedagogical functions, but also by education professionals taking on curatorial tasks, thus opening up fruitful new relations between publicity as the principle of the former, and relationality as the principle of the latter. Speaking from an experienced practitioner's point of view, Lena analyses the circumstances determining art education practices in Germany, specifically addressing how contemporary school and funding structures condition project work—and how this could be dealt with on the ground as well as on the level of policy-making.

Amanda Cachia's text documents how the educational turn in curatorial practice is actually reflected in institutions by interviewing a range of education and public program curators across North America. Her argument considers how curators engage participants in their programs with a particular emphasis on access. Cachia discusses how disability is being addressed in museums, and what debates, mechanisms and practices are excluded when the disabilities studies framework is omitted from the dialogue. This text provides a compelling argument and uses empirical research to comment on the state of public programs in prominent institutions.

Beyond the intricacies of how agency is negotiated for education and curatorial work in institutional settings, the Vienna-based artist collective **WochenKlausur** then traces back the controversies around the legitimacy of socially engaged practice in the discourse on what qualifies as art, taking the projects they have been developing and implementing since 1993 as a reference for their contribution. They argue that the concept of art as a fundamentally aesthetic practice need be historicized in order to show that this characteristic usually put forward as being timeless in hegemonic art theory arises from a specific historical constellation of interests, and can thus be at least relativized in its validity for contemporary art practices.

Drawing upon examples of their work spanning more than two decades, the collective discuss the specific responsibilities that arise from an artistic practice thus conceived, addressing the common criticism according to which their practice would comply in the abolition of the welfare state. WochenKlausur seem to defy one of the criteria currently referred to when qualifying artistic practices as figuring under the paradigm of the “educational turn”: even though their actions comprise participatory elements, their projects have been from the very outset just as much oriented on a concrete outcome as on the process leading there.

Yet Chor Sunshine Wong’s texts discusses three artist run projects in Hong Kong, that have responded to the rapidly disappearing notions of belonging, intimacy and neighbourliness. Her text maps out some of the counters of a community or socially engaged orientated art practice, which differs from the dominant Euro-American discourse. Wong refers to Michael Warner’s concept of counterpublics in the context of Hong Kong where the pressures are generated by relentless urban encroachment and political anxiety; and argues that counterpublics do not “mark off” their identification with citizens- as Warner suggests- but rather refine and reclaim the fundamentals of personhood and citizenship through what he calls “alternative dispositions or protocols”.

Lastly, **Dan Perjovschi** responded to the call with a selection of works that he generously allowed us to reproduce in this issue. Out of the concern not to reduce them in any way to a function of mere illustration, we chose to insert them in between texts, and are happy with how they not only concisely comment and thus link the preceding and subsequent contributions, but also form a visual argument in its own right that the texts resonate to.

Notes

1 For a concise account of artistic and discursive practices engendering what came to be known as the educational turn, see Eszter Lázár, “Educational Turn”, in: *tranzit.org Curatorial Dictionary*, 2012; <<http://tranzit.org/curatorialdictionary/index.php/dictionary/educational-turn/>>; retrieved Nov 28, 2014.

2 Irit Rogoff, “Turning”, in: *e-flux Journal* 0 (11/2008); <www.e-flux.com/journal/turning/>, retrieved Nov 28, 2014.

3 See Paul O’Neill and Mick Wilson (eds.), “Curating and the educational turn”, London/Amsterdam: Open Editions/De Appel 2010.

4 Kristina Lee Podesva, “A Pedagogical Turn: Brief Notes on Education as Art”, *Fillip*, Vol. 6, 2007.

5 Eva Egermann, “Twist and Shout: On Free Universities, Educational Reforms and Twists and Turns Inside and Outside the Art World” in O’Neill and Wilson (cf. 3), pp. 271–284.

6 Questions of legitimacy primarily arise from the tension between the notions of education as a practice and education as a service, crystallized in the factual semipermeability of the boundary separating the role of the curator from that of the educator: The former will in the light of the „educational turn“ be invested with the power to employ pedagogical models and methodologies, while the latter may not assume curatorial functions. It is interesting to note in this context that, according to German artist health and social insurance legislation, neither activity qualifies as „art“.

7 It is the question of who is or should be affected by the practices detailed in this issue that forms the axis along which the respective authors position themselves; it ranges from notions of the „disinterested spectator“ to those of the „user“.

8 The projects described can all be characterized by an active involvement of educators/artists/curators, who are thus part of the conditions in which their respective practice is ensnared. A wide array of tactics how to face the risk of

perpetuating those very conditions is offered by the different protagonists in this issue.

9 Here the question of what (if anything) could be considered a point of closure to a project is of crucial importance. While it is argued by some that the possibility to conduct continuous work in a given context over an extended period of time is a prerequisite for genuine education practice (process over product), others deliberately opt for a more outcome-oriented approach—often however consisting in the desire to create long-term, self-sustainable structures.

10 Günter Gaus, "Zur Person: Hannah Arendt", ZDF, Oct 28 1964; <www.youtube.com/watch?v=J9SyTEUi6Kw>, retrieved Nov 25 2014.

11 Ibid., 1:10:45–1:11:35.

12 Oliver Marchart, "Kritik und Klarheit. Zur subversiven Kraft des Klarsprechens", talk at the conference "Die Kunst zu kritisieren", Braunschweig University of Art, Jun 20 2014.

13 Both Rogoff and Marchart refer to the Foucauldian understanding of the Greco-Roman term 'parrhesia' as a genealogic precursor to modern concepts of critique: In his Berkeley lectures, Foucault pointed at the specific dialectics of 'telling the truth' and 'taking a risk' that are at the core of what translates as 'free speech'. Joseph Pearson (ed.), "Michel Foucault. Diskurs und Wahrheit: die Problematisierung der Parrhesia; 6 Vorlesungen, gehalten im Herbst 1983 an der Universität von Berkeley/Kalifornien", Berlin: Merve 1996.

Michael G. Birchall is a curator, writer and PhD candidate in Art, Critique & Social Practice at the University of Wolverhampton where he is researching the role of the curator as a producer in socially engaged practices. He has held curatorial appointments at The Western Front, Vancouver, Canada, The Banff Centre, Banff, Canada, and Künstlerhaus Stuttgart, Germany. His writing has appeared in *Frieze*, *Frieze d/e*, *thisistomorrow*, *C-Magazine*, and various monographs and catalogues. Michael's recent curatorial projects include *Wie geht's dir Stuttgart?/How are you doing Stuttgart? - at Künstlerhaus Stuttgart*. Since 2012 he has been lecturing on the Curating Program at the Zurich University of the Arts, and is the co-publisher of the journal *On Curating*. In 2015 he will curate an exhibition on socially engaged art, at the Exhibition Research Centre (ERC), at Liverpool John Moores University's School of Art and Design. He lives and works in Berlin.

Philipp Sack is a writer, educator and PhD candidate in the postgraduate programme 'The Photographic Dispositif' at Braunschweig University of Arts, Germany, where he is working on a thesis on the political economy of visual content. He has been working in art education since 2007, and has been conceiving and conducting projects with groups of all ages and backgrounds for ZKM | Centre for Art and Media Karlsruhe, MAC/VAL Musée d'Art Contemporain du Val-de-Marne, Museum MARTa Herford, and Heidelberger Kunstverein, among others. In 2012, he co-founded *fort-da*, an independent art education collective that has since been extensively collaborating with the municipal youth committee of the city of Karlsruhe. For further information, see www.fort-da.eu (in German).

More Bite in the Real World: Usership in Arts-Based Research Practice by Vagabond Reviews

*...What if the museum made way for usership, actually embedding it in its *modus operandi*? A museum where usership, not spectatorship, is the key form of relationality; where the content and value it engenders are mutualised for the community of users themselves?¹*

In India, near the town of Munnar in the southwestern state of Kerala, there is a viewing point of the Western Ghats mountain range. As the spectator approaches this viewing point it becomes apparent that a small café has inserted itself between the viewer and the panoramic spectacle of the mountains and the valley below. Undaunted, the spectator continues on to the café terrace and there discovers that the view has been further obscured by the planting of a line of trees. Beyond those trees, a second terrace can be glimpsed. The steps leading down to that second terrace are amicably guarded by a café worker charging ten rupees to anyone who wishes to move beyond the line of trees to enjoy an uninterrupted view of the valley.

The beauty of this doubly constructed barrier is that it contains within the logic of its own internal structure both the fabrication of the problem, in this case *the view obscured by the trees*, and the solution, *the fee* to get beyond the trees. Is this not precisely the structure of the pedagogical logic within which the educational function of the contemporary art museum must operate? That is to say, the museum curatorially constructs the mystery that its educational function must then solve for the audience.

Decoding Invitations

Every so often an invitation comes along to enter into that institutional process of decoding art for audience. In January this year a member of *Vagabond Reviews* received such an invitation. In this instance it was a request to chair a public talk by an architect who had been asked to respond to an exhibition at the Irish Museum of Modern Art entitled *One Foot in the Real World*. The exhibition was itself a curatorial response to other exhibitions at the Irish Museum of Modern Art, in particular *Eileen Gray: Architect, Designer, Painter*. Following the first curatorial process that brought together the Eileen Gray exhibition, a second curatorial process drew on the Eileen Gray show to assemble and display content from the IMMA collection:

"Drawing on IMMA's Collection, One Foot in the Real World includes works that explore the urban environment, the everyday or the domestic. Prompted by the recent Eileen Gray, Leonora Carrington and Klara Lidén exhibitions; the exhibition One Foot in the Real World addresses the psychology of

space; scale and the body gravity and transformation. Elements of architecture and design recur as points of departure in the works; such as bricks; the keyhole; the window; the door and the table."²

In that sense the architect's public talk represented the third move in a hermeneutic sequence: the curatorial interpretation of Eileen Gray, the curatorial interpretation of the IMMA collection in the light of the Eileen Gray exhibition, and the architectural interpretation of those two interpretations. In any case, the public talk was situated at the conclusion of this self-contained semiotic system, the fee, as it were, for an uninterrupted view of the valley.

Looking back over the preparatory notes for chairing the public talk, they read as an attempt to embody the role of an interdisciplinary decoder of that curatorial sequence. In the discussions leading up to the talk, there was a gentle but persistent prompting of the chair to inhabit his long since past background as a psychologist. It was as though the interdisciplinary interplay being imagined here was a triangulation of psychological knowledge with architectural and curatorial knowledge in a three-pronged enactment of an inter-disciplinary decoding. The preparatory notes bear witness to an attempt to circumvent this corralling into the production of psychological knowledge. Instead, Deleuze and Guattari are invoked as a first defense against "unifying impulses." Earlier formulations in the preparatory notes for a mode of address are symptomatic of a resistance to embrace the decoding function:

"A quote from *A Thousand Plateaus* comes to mind, where Deleuze and Guattari say, and I paraphrase here, that unity is always an obscene supplement to the system considered. As 'the system considered' here it is therefore important to resist any attempt to unify *One Foot in the Real World* into some kind of synthesis."³

No doubt the exhibition contained within it [a sense of] domestic terror, in *Kitchen Table* (1991) by Dorothy Cross and the *Untitled* (2001) stuffed head by Louise Bourgeois. And certainly there were site-specific responses, such as the installation *Still Falling I* (1991) by Anthony Gormley, which brought together the space of the museum, the body, and the self into a unity of some kind. However, even the acknowledgement of those possible links was already a breaking with that self-imposed prohibition on unification, an attempt to connect it all. Instead, in a not entirely unfamiliar move, the curatorial framework is sacrificed on the altar of the authentic subjective experience of the spectator:

"Of course there is a curatorial lens that strictly speaking unifies according to certain principles. For example, the curatorial decisions here have responded to the idea of the keyhole, door and the window. But that's a kind of expert coding that produces its own form of exhaustion. So as not to be bound by it we bring our own pleasures, prejudices and aversions to bear, making our encounter with the work a highly subjective journey."⁴

In the event, few of these preoccupations were aired at the architect's talk. But it serves nonetheless as an illustration of a certain recognisable pedagogical operation, something in the order of a decoding of the already enacted curatorial sequence of selection, presentation and encounter.

In our own practice in the field of socially engaged art, we have also found ourselves on the site of the gallery-museum where we have enacted a different mode of pedagogical operations and procedures. It is one in which the content-display-spectator sequence has been deliberately dissolved along the lines of a different mode of knowledge production. In terms of a conceptual armature to describe those pedagogical processes, we turn to recent work by the Paris-based art writer and theorist Stephen Wright and his insertion of usership into the conceptual lexicon for new processes of production within the field of cultural life.

The Rise of the User

“Usership represents a radical challenge to at least three stalwart conceptual institutions in contemporary culture: spectatorship, expert culture and ownership.”⁵

In his recent book *Toward a Lexicon of Usership*, commissioned by the Van Abbemuseum⁶, Wright set himself the task of retooling the conceptual lexicon that dominates our contemporary institutional repertoire. He suggests that this task “requires both retiring seemingly self-evident terms, while at the same time introducing a set of emergent concepts.”⁷ Among those terms that should be retired are *expert culture*, *ownership* and the *disinterested spectator* while *loopholes*, *deactivate (art’s aesthetic function)* and *museum 3.0* are among the “emergent concepts.” For Wright, these emergent concepts underpin a new form of both artistic and political subjectivity – that of “usership.” While the practice of usership per se is not new, Wright makes the point that with the rise of networked cultures, “Users have come to play a key role as producers of information, meaning and value, breaking down the long-standing opposition between consumption and production.”⁸ Within the field of culture, there has also been a shift:

“Turning away from pursuing art’s aesthetic function, many practitioners are redefining their engagement with art, less in terms of authorship than as users of artistic competence, insisting that art foster more robust use values and gain more bite in the real world.”⁹

Specifically, he opposes the traditional curatorial arc of content selection, display, and spectatorship with the culturally ascendant concept of usership, which presents a particular challenge for the contemporary art museum:

“Museums these days find themselves in the throes of a crisis of self-understanding, hesitating between irreconcilable museological paradigms and userships. On the one hand, their physical architecture of display is very much top down: curatorship determines content which is oriented towards spectatorship. On the other hand, while concerned about protecting their ‘vertical dignity,’ to the degree that they have tried to keep pace with the usological turn in the field of culture, museums have embraced elements of 2.0 culture.”¹⁰

In usership, we generate content. We make a playlist, we accumulate contacts, we construct image banks, we “like.” In the field of culture, we are the content generators until we encounter the space of the museum where we collapse into spectatorship.¹¹

In this essay we use a case study from our own practice to explore how the notion of usership creates a different kind of curatorial line: from user-generated content to display as “content validation and refinement.” Our own effort, if you will, to get more bite in the real world. But in order to properly describe and understand the case study we present here, namely the Arcade Project, we must first give an account of the project which preceded it.

Cultural Archaeology

“How can images and objects be brought together in a manner that helps etch a lingering doubt onto the heart of amnesia? How can concepts and experiences that sustain an attitude of vigilance against the impulse of erasure be expressed as tools to think and feel with, to work with in the present?”¹²

The project *Cultural Archaeology* was our first opportunity to elaborate a significant community-based mode of inquiry that harnessed the potential of the studio and the gallery as sites for the collective generation of narratives of place. And of course, it was through that process of collective learning that the relations of trust and collaborative styles were established for the case study, which we will subsequently describe.

Based in Rialto in Dublin’s southwest inner city, Fatima Groups United (FGU) is a community development organisation comprised of elected representatives for a number of community-based initiatives in the area. The organisation was established in the late 1980s in response to the deteriorating economic and social conditions of residents living in the public housing flat complex known then as Fatima Mansions. From the mid-1990s onwards, FGU was in protracted and intense negotiations with the city council, planners, architects, and private developers for an equitable regeneration of their area. Against the odds, they succeeded in their arguments for better living and working conditions for residents.¹³ Fatima Mansions became the only public housing complex in the inner city to have their promised regeneration realised.¹⁴ Working closely with the Rialto Youth Project, one of the longest established youth projects in the city, FGU harnessed arts and cultural practices very effectively during this period as a means to articulate and make visible the communities’ perspective.

In 2008, Vagabond Reviews and Fatima Groups United began working together to formulate a collaborative, arts-based research initiative focused on securing and representing that rich history of arts and cultural practice in Rialto. As well as investing in significant arts education programmes for young people, Fatima Groups United and the Rialto Youth Project spearheaded a number of significant arts-based events marking key moments of transition in the urban regeneration process. Specialising in large-scale street theatre events, they engaged hundreds of local residents over a decade-long process of infrastructural and social regeneration.

Over the course of 2008, the commitment to re-present the story of how arts-based processes combined with the struggle for agency in the urban regeneration process crystallized into a community-based inquiry entitled *Cultural Archaeology*. The project set out to capture that history while maintaining a strategic focus on future provisions for arts-based pedagogy for young people and adults in Rialto. The *Cultural Archaeology* was organised into two strands of inquiry. The first took

the form of a studio-based archival process in a community centre in the heart of community development culture in Rialto.

Cultural Archaeology at Studio 468

Studio 468 is a dedicated studio space housed in the St. Andrew's Community Resource Centre in Rialto¹⁵. The Studio 468 residency programme is structured to encourage artists to combine the experience of an autonomous studio residency with the experience of direct engagement with the Rialto community.¹⁶ Vagabond Reviews and Fatima Groups United secured a six-month residency at the studio where the *Cultural Archaeology* process was initiated. Taking the form of community-based ethnography towards capturing the history of artistic and cultural practices in Fatima / Rialto from 1949 to 2010, Studio 468 became an open site of (re)collection, a space for inviting in, gathering, reviewing, and representing narrative seams on a community history with community and youth leaders, representative residents groups, artists, and community activists. As more storytellers passed through the studio, the recollections spanned through the decades but focused most intensively on more recent times when arts and cultural practice were brought into play by the community and its leadership in the struggle to secure meaningful agency within the urban regeneration process.



Cultural Archaeology 2009. Photograph courtesy of NCAD

As the residency progressed, those accumulated narratives were organised thematically into a timeline, which went back to the first tenants in Fatima Mansions in the 1950s to contemporary narratives of regeneration up to 2010. The timeline was organised into four strands: *Creative Coalitions* related to arts and cultural practice in Rialto; *Famous Stories* related to interwoven anecdotes of community life; *Dispatches* related to the media trail; and *Transmissions* related to the significant body of photographic and film material held by Fatima Groups United.

Cultural Archaeology at the National College of Art and Design Gallery

In the second month of the Studio 468 residency, Fatima Groups United was invited to exhibit *Cultural Archaeology* as a work in progress at the recently established public gallery at the National College of Art and Design. In partnership with

Fatima Groups United, Vagabond Reviews presented first findings from the Studio 468 residency at the NCAD Gallery, but more importantly, the possibility of user interface with the content was built into the architecture of the gallery-based programme. The construction of a modular, event-based timeline in the gallery allowed specific groups, and the public more generally, to contest, add, edit, and bring new material, textual or photographic, into a process of content generation and revision.

The opportunity to access the gallery space was an example of the creative tension between the notion of the gallery as a fixed sanctuary of stable content as opposed to content with a user interface. We faced this challenge most forcefully when working through the transition from Studio 468 to the NCAD gallery, where we felt the pressure to present finished work. Instead, we transposed the ethnographic process, which began at Studio 468, into the gallery space and reformulated the exhibition as a residency. The gallery was transformed into a participatory space for the production of local, embodied knowledge of a particular neighbourhood.



Fatima, A Cultural Archaeology,
NCAD Gallery, 2009. Photograph
courtesy of NCAD

Over the two weeks of the residency, we continued to develop and extend the *Cultural Archaeology* research process, hosting a series of dedicated sessions with community leaders in the gallery space and continuing to build the *Cultural Archaeology* Timeline. We designed a modular structure in the space of the gallery, where text and photographic content could be added and the content already there could be rearranged, contested, and edited, thus breaking the idea of the fixed, “do not touch” element of representation in the space of the gallery.



above: *Fatima, A Cultural Archaeology*, Timeline Wall NCAD Gallery, 2009. Photographs courtesy of NCAD



left: *S Block Fatima Mansions*, Photographic Banner Chris Maguire, photograph courtesy of NCAD

In keeping with the idea of developing a locally-based provision for learning in visual and performing arts in Rialto, we also used the residency as an opportunity to focus on the question of pedagogy and urban regeneration. For this we established a series of structured and informal dialogues between artists, students, architects, youth and community development workers, and activists, writers, and academics as a seminar series based in the gallery space.

On completion of the gallery-based residency, we returned to Studio 468 to continue working on the *Cultural Archaeology*. Once we completed the Studio 468 Residency, the Timeline Wall was installed in the newly built F2 Neighbourhood Centre where for over a year and a half it operated as a discursive platform between key community workers and a range of external stakeholders.

Emboldened by this community-based experiment on user-generated content, we readily accepted the invitation from the Rialto Youth Project to extend our art-based modes of inquiry into their internal organisational space. In 2011, Vagabond Reviews embarked on the Arcade Project with the Rialto Youth Project.

Arcade Project: A Case Study in Usership

As we have already asserted, it was precisely the shared experience of that ethnographic process for securing community narratives of place and struggle that

created the conditions of possibility for taking the process further. The Arcade Project built on that collaborative experience of knowledge production and representation to co-elaborate an arts-based inquiry between Vagabond Reviews and the Rialto Youth Project. Now moving towards a publication, the Arcade Project has explored the shared pedagogical foundations underpinning the Rialto Youth Project's approach to arts-based youth work.

Project Context

Based in the southwest inner city, the Rialto Youth Project (RYP) is one of the longest established youth projects in Dublin. Rialto Youth Project works with disadvantaged and at-risk young people in Rialto. Since the 1980s, the Rialto Youth Project has pioneered an arts-based approach to youth work. From early initiatives in community-led drama and film, it currently incorporates weekly arts programming in music, street theatre, visual arts, and dance and provides a foundational arts programme for younger children called ArtSparks. In addition to those weekly, programme-driven arts initiatives, the Rialto Youth Project collaborates with artists on longer term, socially engaged art projects.¹⁷ Those issue-based projects have focussed on a range of themes that have affected young people's lives in Rialto. Such projects have embraced a range of art forms, such as earlier work in the 1980s in the area of drama and film that explored young people's experience of the justice system and unemployment. Large-scale street theatre events addressed issues like the drugs epidemic in the 1990s (*Burning the Demons*), music and visual arts were employed to explore young people's response to urban regeneration (*Tower Songs*, 2005 – 2007), and most recently an arts-based research and performance process explored equality issues for local women (*The Natural History of Hope*, 2012 - ongoing).

Project Objectives

The Arcade Project set out firstly to explore and describe the organisation's core values and principles of practice, and secondly to explore and describe the shared pedagogical foundations underpinning the organisation's approach to arts-based youth work.

We called the first line of inquiry into Rialto Youth Project's core values, Arcade One. Arcade One began as a five-month, arts-based research process that set out to evoke organisational values by drawing on the shared perspectives of the total ecology of practice that makes up the Rialto Youth Project. As such, we engaged with the RYP in its entirety, including its Board of Governance, its management, youth workers, and volunteers. The Arcade One process was based in the Fifth Block Studio, a converted flat situated in Dolphin House, the largest public housing flat complex in inner city Dublin.

Art Studio as Notebook

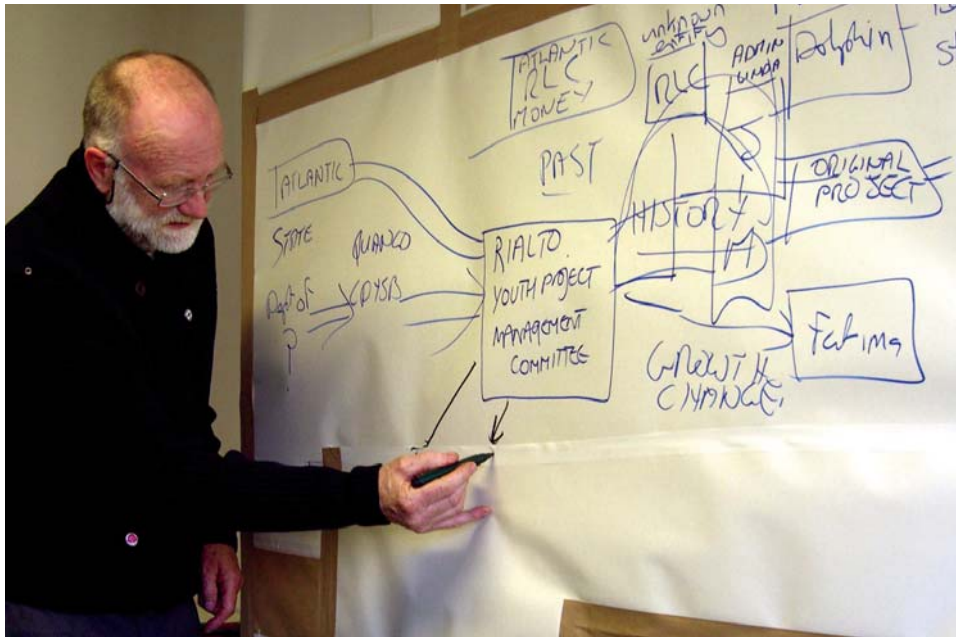
In our practice we invariably look at the possibilities in each project situation for appropriating and transforming spaces into an accumulative research base. We seek out spaces where visual representation and knowledge production come together with modes of conversational inquiry.¹⁸ Working from the Fifth Block Studio opened up exciting possibilities for introducing a range of bespoke arts-based research strategies and approaches. In our work we like to diagrammatically reveal and make visible the research process. As illustrated via the 2009 *Cultural*

Archaeology project, that process involves the creation of layered textual traces, imagery, diary-like narratives, and photographic traces.

For the Arcade One workshop series, the Fifth Block Studio was transformed into a walk-in notebook. All of the available wall surface and table surfaces were covered with paper, thereby transforming the room into a writable space. Our aim was to animate the possibilities of the studio space as a place of exchange, social encounter and dialogue for key constituent groups within the organisation.

As a research base, the Fifth Block Studio changed fluidly. It developed its own visual culture as we moved through the inquiry process. The art production space was transformed into a content generator. The studio was conceived of as a space for hosting quasi-formalised conversations and more structured workshops aimed over the course of the Arcade process towards gathering information and engaging in qualitative analysis with a view to ultimately sharing findings.

A workshop series was conducted at Fifth Block Studio between March and May 2011 with the seven constituent groups that together make up the Rialto Youth Project. Over the course of those workshops, thirty-six participants generated fourteen multi-layered sketches of their organisational territories.



Arcade 1 Organisational Maps, RYP Management Committee fifth block studio, 2011. Photograph by Vagabond Reviews

In the second part of each workshop, participants were asked to consider the core organisational values and principles of practice underpinning their work with the Rialto Youth Project. Using arts-based techniques combined with strategies borrowed from projective testing, participants generated 476 value statements. Also exploiting the space of the studio, *Vagabond Reviews* engaged in a qualitative analysis of those statements as well as rendering the hand-drawn maps generated in the workshops into diagrammatic representations of the social constructions of the structure of the Rialto Youth Project.

Validation Event May 2011

Working with those 476 value statements, a Values Framework was constructed as a way of organising the emergent themes into a synthesis of Principles of Practice for the Rialto Youth Project. The generation of those Values culminated in a Validation Event at the F2 Neighbourhood Centre in Rialto. The Validation event borrowed the exhibition display function to decode and critique the content. The room was organised as part exhibition and part workshop space. The refined maps of organisational structures and territories were installed along the available wall and window space.



Arcade 1 Validation Event F2
Neighbourhood Centre, 2011.
Photograph by Vagabond Reviews

Over the course of a two-and-a-half-hour workshop, the forty or so workers, management, and the board of the RYP were invited to re-visit the text content generated over the workshop series, to revise their original, workshop-based value statements and critically engage with the Values framework in an open forum. Following the validation event, we produced a document entitled *Arcade One: Mapping the Principles of Practice for the Rialto Youth Project*. This document presented an overview of the values inquiry process along with the emergent organisational values framework.

Arcade Two

Arcade Two went on to explore how the values framework generated in Arcade One could be harnessed to describe the structure and pedagogical features that the Rialto Youth Project has developed in relation to its distinctive, arts-based approach to youth work. In May 2011, we began working with Rialto Youth Project's Arts Team Coordinators towards mapping out and describing their distinct pedagogical approach to arts-based youth work. Using the Values Framework as a foundation, work focused on:

- documenting the histories of practice for each art form in the youth project
- developing the Programme Architecture for each of the five areas of arts programming
- mapping the organisational values for each of the programme areas

Using a collaborative workshop process of content generation, revision, and descriptive refinement, Arcade Two evolved into an organisationally self-generated construction of their arts-based pedagogy.



*Arcade 1 Validation Event F2
Neighbourhood Centre, 2011.
Photograph by Chris Maguire*



*Arcade 2 Revision and Refinement, Rialto
Youth Project room F2, 2013.
Photograph by Vagabond Reviews*

Most recently, Models of Practice for each of the five arts-based programmes in visual arts, dance, music, street theatre, and early childhood foundation have been produced. Each Model of Practice outlines:

- a definition of the art form
- a description of the pedagogical approach
- the key organisational values underpinning the work in that art form
- an overview of the programme architecture, including components and outcomes

Those arts-based Models of Practice are now being extended as templates for generating descriptions of other areas of youth work within the organisation.

More Bite in the Real World

Drawing on Stephen Wright's analysis of usership in the field of cultural production, the Arcade Project has been described here as an illustration of a curatorial process with usership as the driver of knowledge production. We explored the play between user-generated content and display as a creative refinement process in the production of user-generated knowledge. Specifically, the studio-based phase of the Arcade Project (Arcade One) was considered as an example of transforming the space of art production into a "content generator." The consideration of this phase of the project concluded with an example of an organisation-wide validation event which borrowed the exhibition-display function to decode and critique user content. Finally, the second, and ongoing, phase of the project (Arcade Two) considered how the Values Framework collectively generated in the first phase of the project was used to collaboratively craft a pedagogy for the organisation's arts-based approach to youth work.

We must return then to our point of departure and ask ourselves in this durational sequence of socially constructed knowledge, what is the fee for a clear view of the valley below? What are the costs, if you will, for more bite in the real world outside of the strict confines of the art world? There are indeed some interesting consequences that arise once the traditional content selection, display, and spectatorship sequence is surrendered.

Of course, it is self-evident that authorship is beyond re-purposing in such a co-constructive *modus operandi*. In any case that simple relation between the author and the work can no longer be replicated. In Wright's new politics of the user, ownership is no longer coextensive with content. It is in that sense, for example, that the music industry has already been unwillingly precipitated into this new political economy where the relation between content and remuneration has dissolved. It is also necessary in such content-generating practices to abandon the role of the cultural expert in favour of a more engaged, relational mode. An epistemological encounter is called for with social fields that may demand entirely new modes of knowledge production and representation.

Certainly the space of the studio as the site of a singular, contemplative production is abandoned for a socialised, conversational space of inquiry, content gathering, conversational encounter, and the meeting of contesting narratives. The studio in its usological mode of operations is rendered into a site of assemblage for co-constructions and re-workings of collective experience.

There are also transformations required in the notion of the exhibition as a point of closure for the material transformation of the means of representation. Instead, the gallery can become an extension of the content-generating space of the studio. The shift of the ethnographic ground into a quasi-public arena brings into play new possibilities for dialogue, content validation practices, and encounters with new publics beyond the immediate field of the cultural and social interest orbiting within the micro-political economy of the project itself.

And finally, in our own practice where the arc of a project has had a manifestation in the gallery space, we have observed a transformation of the disinterested spectator into an invested user who already has high stakes in both the means of representation and distribution. It is in this way that the educational function within the discourse and practice of the contemporary art museum will have to reconsider (has already reconsidered) the terms of engagement. The challenge is to create new terms of engagement where the museum becomes one of the agents in the co-construction of the process of knowledge production rather than decoders for an audience always already on the outside of a self-contained curatorial sequence.

Notes

1 Stephen Wright, *Toward a Lexicon of Usership*, Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, 2013. pg. 40

2 Irish Museum of Modern Art online, 2014 <http://www.imma.ie/en/page_236730.htm>

3 Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis: London, 1987, in Preparatory Notes for *The Spatial Self* Public Talk.

4 Preparatory Notes for *The Spatial Self* Public Talk

5 Stephen Wright, *Toward a Lexicon of Usership*, pg. 66

6 The Van Abbemuseum commissioned *Toward a Lexicon of Usership* on the occasion of the exhibition *Museum of Arte Útil*, which ran from 7 December 2013 to 30 March 2014.

7 Stephen Wright, *Toward a Lexicon of Usership*, pg. 1.

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid, pg. 39.

11 Symptomatically, we have art critics writing books about how to navigate that transition from user to spectator. Most recently, Ossian Ward's *Ways of Looking: How to Experience Contemporary Art* (Ward, 2014). And if you liked that, you might also like *How to Read Contemporary Art* by Michael Wilson (2013) or *Your Everyday Art World* by Lane Relyea (2013), and so on.

12 Raqs Media Collective, *The Rest of Now*, Curatorial Essay for *Manifesta 7*, 2008 Available from: <http://www.raqsmediacollective.net/images/pdf/0cda929c-8256-458c-99de-6bfd512b9c1d.pdf>

13 John Whyte, *Eight Great Expectations: A Landmark and Unique Social Regeneration Plan for Fatima Mansions*, The Fatima Regeneration Board, Dublin, 2005.

14 In the early to mid 2000s, at the height of Ireland's economic boom, a number of public housing flat complexes in Dublin were earmarked for regeneration. Public Private Partnership became the primary mechanism for the delivery of these proposed regenerations. At one point, a total of twelve contracts were in the pipeline. Despite the protracted and in many cases difficult negotiations between Dublin City Council and residents of the flat complexes to advance these extensive

social and infrastructural changes, with the demise of the Celtic Tiger from 2008 onwards, these regeneration projects were summarily abandoned. See: John Bissett, *Regeneration: public good or private profit?*, Tasc at New Island, 2008.

15 The impetus for studio provision in Rialto came from the Rialto Development Association (RDA) who owns St. Andrew's Community Centre. The Studio team that manages Studio 468 includes representation from the RDA, Dublin City Council and Common Ground, a locally-based arts developmental agency.

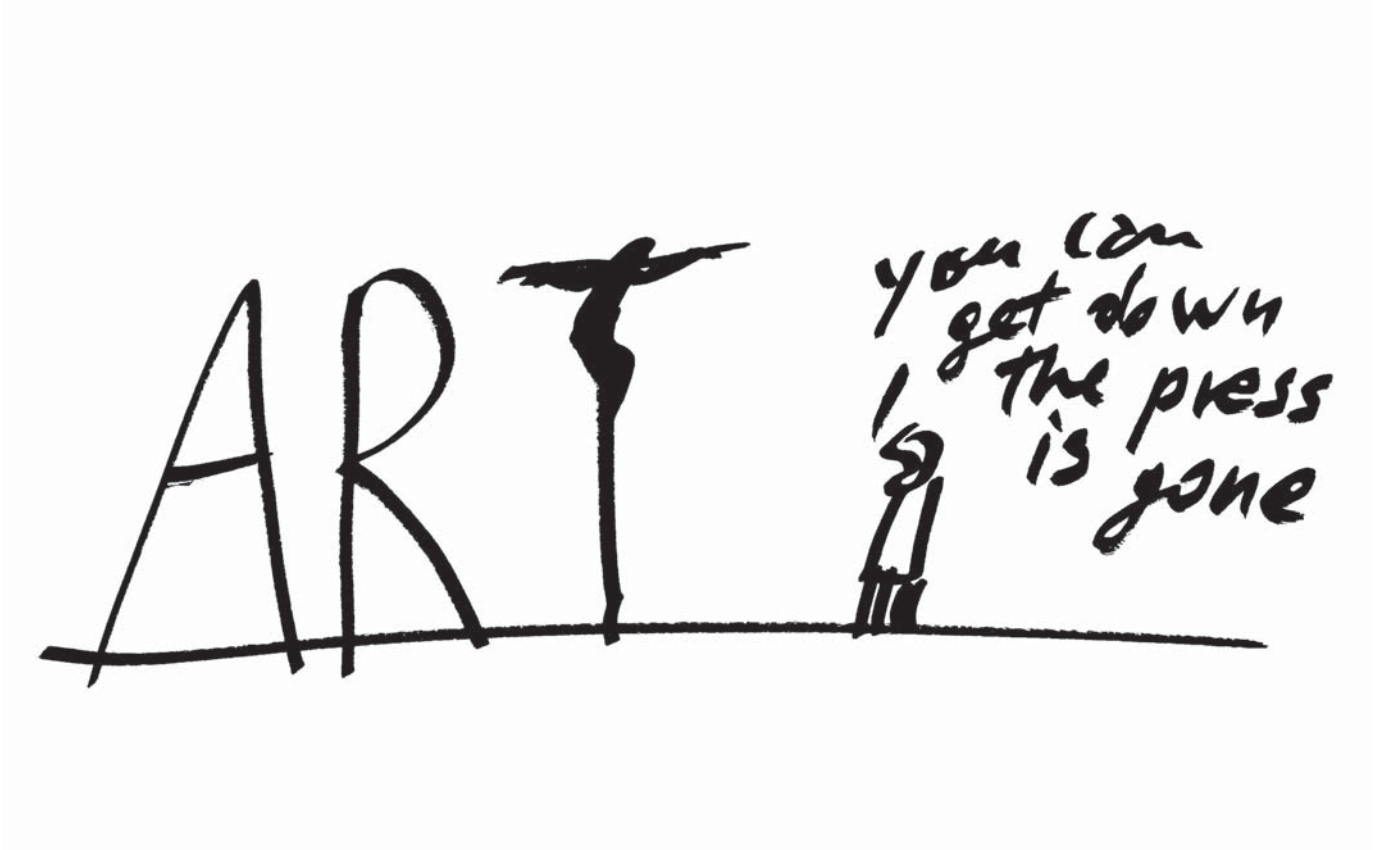
16 Ailbhe Murphy, "Contextualising the Artist: Studio 468 and the Request to Engage" in Logan Sisley and Siobhan Geoghan eds., *Studio 468: A Working Space in Rialto*, Studio 468 and Common Ground, Dublin, 2010.

17 Artists who have worked long-term with the Rialto Youth Project include musicians Sean Millar and Mark Ellison, filmmaker Enda O'Brien, and visual artist Fiona Whelan.

18 These kinds of appropriations are usually re-workings of the spaces we encounter within the spatio-temporal arc of a project. They have included, a house in a neighbourhood, a range of gallery settings, and most recently, a mobile home at a seaside resort.

Vagabond Reviews is an interdisciplinary platform combining socially engaged art and research practice. As artists and researchers we are interested in engaging broader publics in alternative forms of cultural participation and knowledge production. Current projects include *Scientia Civitatis: Missing Titles for the exhibition Phoenix Rising*, *Art and the Civic Imagination* curated by Logan Sisley at the Hugh Lane, Dublin's Municipal Gallery and the *Arcade Project*, which explores arts-based pedagogy in youth work with the Rialto Youth Project in Dublin. Other projects include *(In)Visible Labour Factorium* for the National Women's Council of Ireland's *Legacy Project*, curated by Valerie Connor. The *Legacy project* exhibition 'Still, We Work' was exhibited at the *Gallery of Photography and 126 Gallery, Galway* as part of the *Tulca Visual Arts Festival* in November in 2013 and in *Cork City Hall* and *EU House Dublin* in 2014. Also the *Sliabh Bán Art House* (2011-2012) a participatory public art project commissioned by *Galway City Council's Arts Office* in the west of Ireland and *City (Re)Searches Experiences of Being Public* (2012-2013) an interdisciplinary arts-based research initiative which engaged with questions of community-based culture. Extending over four cities in Ireland, Lithuania and the Netherlands, *City (Re)Searches* was produced by *Blue Drum, Community Arts Partnership Belfast* and the *Kaunas Biennial, Lithuania*.

Dr. Ailbhe Murphy & Dr. Ciaran Smyth, *Vagabond Reviews*
www.vagabondreviews.org



"Press Is Gone", 1999
Artwork by Dan Perjovschi

Slow Curating: Re-thinking and Extending Socially Engaged Art in the Context of Northern Ireland

by Megan Johnston

In the past ten years, the definitions of a curator have been complicated, mis-used, appropriated, and re-contextualised. But as someone who has spent nearly twenty-five years working with artists, curating shows, producing creative interventions, while also being a political activist, a mother and partner, and employed as an arts worker within varying institutions—the notion of the curatorial has always been problematic. I did not adhere to the fixed mentality between departments, and specifically between curatorial and education.¹ So when the educational turn in curating came into our lexicon, I felt comfortable in that territory. In fact, I embraced it even more. It felt good to be working in varied formats, disciplines and opened up space to mediate a site where socio-political and historical issues and creativity converge with visual culture and civil engagement. I believe if we really examine what is happening in our field of curating, in museology as a whole, in contemporary art practice, and in our own social and political lives, the nuances of being a reflective and engaged curator have been evolving for some time. The role of the curator is not dead, but it is changing and we can no longer be the alleged standard bearer of authority and expertise.

What began as curatorial curiosity—in artists responding to context and the use of educational approaches to unpack issues found in the work—quickly became a practice: an approach and method within which the curatorial premise and the institutional vision became intertwined. While this is commonplace now with curators in museums and galleries responding to the changing nuances of art practice, communitarian discourse, and the politics of contemporary society; the question of knowledge production comes to the fore—for artists and audiences. In our quest for knowing more, feeling more deeply, responding more relevantly, I wonder what became of the space of knowing that we don't know it all or the idea that we don't have to understand it all. Curators have become cultural producers and exhibition makers—does this then mean we create knowledge? For whom? And to what ends? I argue that it is within this place—inside the institution—where we find a simulacrum of the production of knowledge within curatorial practice. And it is this space where we find ourselves re-thinking our curatorial practice. This essay attempts to unpack various ways of curating space that facilitates “knowing” and “not-knowing” for artists and audiences—a permeable space that offers more questions than answers—produced by artist, curator, educator, participant, and audience.

It may be useful to note areas that contextualise this practice: the social turn/curatorial turn/educational turn in curating; the socio-political context (interest in non-hierarchical methods, the DIY/Occupy Movements, and the financial/

funding structures); and the role of museums today.² Socially engaged curating is a type of curatorial work and is part of what has been called the “social turn,” where curators employ pedagogical methodologies and approaches as part of the curatorial premise and process. These new curatorial processes and approaches have now gone beyond institutional critique to notions such as Caroline Christov-Bakargiev’s “locational turn,” the popularist art activism, Paul O’Neill and Mick Wilson’s “educational turn,” or Jens Hoffman’s “paracuratorial.”³ With so many “turns” how are we to know where we stand?⁴ Arguably, these new approaches build on the development of curatorial practice, the changing face of museology, and reflect the socio-political context within which curators find themselves.

Socially engaged curatorial practice is an approach that focuses on the production, distribution, and consumption of art through multiple platforms with an emphasis on process and connecting with audiences. It is an intentional process of collaboration, context, and engaging within communities—working with artists who employ social practice methods as well as with artists who have more of a traditional studio practice. This is somewhat different than an artistic social practice because, as curators, we often also deal with institutional accountability and other practicalities, as well as the weight of art history, curatorial practice, museology, and the art market. However, the biggest difference is that socially engaged curatorial practice focuses on the role of the curator, the production of the exhibition or project, knowledge, memory, and understanding, as well as innovative methods and approaches to mediation—which is often from the inception of a project to production and presentation.

In contemporary art we can see that the notion of “the curatorial” is a discourse that is responsive to the artistic, political, and communitarian practices of the 1960s and 1970s; the development of curatorial professionalization in the late 1980s and 1990s; and the dramatic growth via dominant yet competing perspectives of post-institutional critique since 2000 as found in both theory and museology. And socially engaged curating is part of that discourse that prioritises the experience as much as the object while attempting to activate the space between object and audiences.

Curating in Contested Spaces: Portadown, Northern Ireland

Inspired by the work of Declan McGonagle in Ireland, I was one of a number of curators who began working with artists who wanted to engage with the multifarious, post-conflict context of Northern Ireland. The site was Portadown, which has been a contested site for more than 800 years. In 1998, after decades of town centre bombs and decimated trade due to The Troubles,⁵ the town centre management company Portadown 2000 embarked on a mission to rebuild the middle of Portadown. Central to that regeneration was a new art centre.⁶ Engaging in ideas of cultural tourism, community development, and a real interest by artists in the area, the company—made up of a broad cross-section of the divided communities—facilitated a grassroots initiative to fund a contemporary art space led by the visual arts.

In 2003, I was appointed by Portadown 2000 as the Arts Manager of a newly designed Millennium Court Arts Centre in the historically politically tensioned town. For seven years we carried out experiments, some of which were successful and others not, that began to develop a more permeable approach to curating. The method was to commission new work by artists, create space in the institution for discourse through multiple avenues of entry such as artist’s talks, panels, tours, workshops, and symposia, and reach audiences.

We wanted to reach widely and deeply for audiences as collaborators to engage in the issues presented in the artwork. So for the first four years we produced many significant projects, including Shane Cullen's *The Agreement* (2004), which was a hotly debated touring project on the Good Friday Agreement. In a region that voted in its majority against the peace process Agreement, we organized a panel discussion with all of the Northern Irish parties to allow space for them to develop and present their nascent official platforms on culture. We presented two exhibitions on the culture of the Orange Order, unpacking the concept of Orangeism—positing questions about a Protestant / Unionist / Loyalist culture in the North.⁷ In the first exhibition we worked with the Orange Order, LOL 1 located around the corner from MCAC, co-curating with them the presentation of Orange Order artefacts drawn from their archives and local collections. The second show highlighted contemporary artists' response to Orange Order symbolism. We also hosted the first public discussion about Orange Culture and we carried out primary research into the nuances of 'orangeism' as a culture, a subculture, or a so-called imagined community.⁸

In a third example, my colleagues and I set forth to collaborate with a local historical society to present an exhibition within a framework of community curating. The project took place in 2007 and entailed an excavation of the local Wades ceramic factory, a cross-community oral archive of local people who worked there, and the production of new academic knowledge on Wades ceramics. The show was entitled: *Wades Ceramics: Irish Kitsch or Regional Vernacular?* (2007), which posited several unflattering dichotomies and provocative potential narratives. The show was in juxtaposition to a show on contemporary Irish craft. We often considered the dialogue between gallery spaces as much as more immediate discussions found within the exhibitions site. The public loved the shows and our numbers soared.



Installation view of exhibition 'Wade Ceramics: Irish Kitsch or Regional Vernacular?', Millennium Court Arts Centre, 2007

Slow Curating

It was during the later years in Portadown that my approach to socially engaged curation was developed into an approach that I have called *slow curating*. It is a framework that enables, explores, and expands museum and exhibition experi-

ences for more relevant audience engagement. Inspired by the Slow Movement, it intentionally and directly connects to context and specifically notions of the local, employs relational and collaborative processes, and reaches out to diverse communities. It is not necessarily about time, though it is temporal in a relational way. Indeed, the process includes a meaningful and deep understanding of one's immediate context, working with local experts to learn the cultural politics, the poetics of place, and to investigate issues (conscious and unconscious) that affect everyday lives. The notion of taking time is important, as is working in collaboration with a sense of place and alongside working artists and the community. It means promoting reciprocal relationships, open-ended proposals, and outcomes that can be decided by different people and at different times in the process. The element of control and power ebbs and flows, and self-reflection and self-evaluation are continual and an important part of the process. The slow method also connects directly to pedagogical models and does not recognize the institutional division between the notions of curatorial and educational processes and methods employed in the process.

One example of this approach was a solo project with Belfast-born artist Andre Stitt who is based in Wales. Known as a performance artist, Stitt was a central figure in the political art scene in Belfast in the late 1970s, in London from 1980 to 1999, and then in Wales for more than two decades. We invited Stitt to come to Portadown to create a new body of work that was developed through a series of site visits and explorations in Craigavon.

Central Craigavon was a planned city, in the vein of Milton Keynes in Great Britain and was conceived as a linear city linking the smaller towns of Lurgan and Portadown to create a single urban, progressive, nearly utopian place. Cash incentives were offered to draw families from Belfast down the M1, and planners embraced new ideas of personal and leisure space, including separate paths for traffic and cyclists. But when the Goodyear factory, the largest European factory at the time, closed down and the Troubles broke in the late 1960s, the planners left and around 50% of the city of Craigavon was never built. It was locally known as Little Beirut.⁹ By 2008 there was a renewed spirit post-peace process and a Celtic Tiger thirst for housing. Craigavon began to see a gentrification on the grounds of a dystopian site.

Stitt responded to the context by: walking and biking the territory and various sites, talking to locals, researching public records, and creating a new series of paintings. The end result was an exhibition and catalogue. The artworks in the end, arguably, had deeper and more relevant connections—sometimes literally in relation to a fact, a person, or a place, and sometimes conceptual as traces of human relations and memories.

During that time my curatorial process began to include working with artists to create space for meaningful and deep understandings of local context, working with local experts in the community to investigate issues that affect everyday lives. Here is where the dramatic break from art as objects alone began for me as a curator. The process became just as important; the authorship was blurred, and the expertise of place, context, and even of making was highly and intentionally complicated. Our organisation (and the people within it) developed an expertise in socially engaged practice with artists whose work engages with socioeconomic and political context and issues. We worked with artists who create dialogical projects unfolding through a process of performative interaction. Imperative to this process was the

role of the audience and the community, and often outside art workers, community activists, politicians, and others became a central part of the process.

Guerrilla Girls All-Ireland Tour

A final example is a project carried out in Ireland—both North and South. In late 2008–2009, MCAC co-commissioned new work by the internationally known feminist arts group, the Guerrilla Girls, based on site visits and research material. Importantly, I wanted to have an all-Ireland investigation—rarely seen in Irish visual art / Irish museums—due to the divided country. We also wanted the project to be open-ended and extremely collaborative, with four key commissioners. The project became a collaboration between Millennium Court Arts Centre in Portadown, the Glucksman Gallery in Cork, the University of Ulster in Belfast, University College in Dublin, and the National College of Art & Design in Dublin. We met regularly to collaboratively guide (not manage or push) the process of the project.

The research carried out included: “gigs” by the Guerrilla Girls to hear from artists, creative workers, collectors, and museum administrators; statistical research by arts activists⁹; and online comments from the Guerrilla Girls All-Ireland Project website. The research was about listening to others, gathering stories and experiences, and counting—literally a quantitative element that focused on how many female artists were in the collections of the major museums in Ireland—the Ulster Museum in the North, the Irish Museum of Modern Art and the National Gallery—both in Dublin, and the Cork-based Glucksman Museum. Other quantitative research included statistics from the Arts Councils in the Republic of Ireland and the North of Ireland, as well as statistics on female students and outcomes after graduation from the National College of Art & Design and Ulster University. Far from being off put, the museums, the universities and the Arts Councils happily participated in the process. All of this research was then sent to the Guerrilla Girls, who responded to the statistics, the oral archives, and their own instinctual creative processes to create the new work.



Guerrilla Girls meet young audiences in Cork, Ireland, in 2009, as part of the all-Ireland tour and new work project.



'I'm not a Feminist, but if I was, this is what I would complain about', 2009. New work commissioned as part of the all-Ireland Guerrilla Girl project.

The Guerrilla Girls gigs were held in Portadown, Ulster University in Belfast, NCAD in Dublin, and the Glucksman Gallery in Cork. The gigs attracted young women who responded well to the events. Questions were posed, such as, "Do we really need Feminism?" and "Aren't we past that?" As one of the Commissioners, I felt that what was important was the creation of new work but also facilitating the space for dialogue and debate on a subject often not discussed. And many of the participants said that to experience the Guerrilla Girls in person and see the new work was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to see art history in the making.

With four new works, the all-Ireland Guerrilla Girls Tour was then exhibited in Portadown, Cork, Dublin, and Kilkenny. I feel the project was historic and significant in relation to artists and the museums of Ireland—both North and South. These artists had something very important to reveal to those of us in the visual arts in Ireland, as they commented on the status not only of artists who are female but also on gender, race, nationality and religion in contemporary society. An important aspect of the overall project was continuing the dialogue about the issues raised by the Guerrilla Girls. At all venues, with Gigs in early 2009 and then on the tour in 2009-2010, the hosting organizations hosted public discussions.

In relation to the curatorial process, there was an intentionality of openness and transparency in organizing, a collaborative curatorial premise or premises, an open-ended artistic process that focused on the dialogical method of mediation both before and after the artwork was created, and highly political yet poetic potential outcomes. Whether at meetings or at the gigs, workshops or getting dinner after events, it felt like a sit-in demonstration at university with an unruly bunch of potential agitators. What happened was a multi-site, cross-disciplinary approach to making and interpreting new visual research and artwork. The new work was informed by this new type of visual art research. The Girls were supported by a small, working group of feminists who carried out «boots on the ground» research to send back to the Guerrilla Girls. The "gigs" effectively demarcated the status of women artists in Ireland. New work was made and the Girls returned to start the tour of the new work, which resulted in an exhibition, a public intervention, public debates, and ongoing feminist-led work by artists, curators, and

others in Ireland. In the end, we employed a social process and a working framework that created a lens through which power and powerlessness were identified, gender examined, and issues about women in contemporary Irish society could be discussed.

Activating Potentialities

This curatorial process is rhizomatic, organic, and non-linear. In that respect, noted philosopher Rudi Laermans's notion of "activating potentialities" in curatorial projects is useful. Within the Slow Curating framework, authorship and expertise is continually challenged and the role of participant and audience becomes *a priori* in the process. The emphasis is about activating: the process, the space between art and audience, and the epistemological nuances found in knowing and not-knowing. The main aim of Slow Curating is to open up space for dialogue and discourse. Can we embrace the idea of "not-knowing" or reject the notion that art is about educating? This idea is important in breaking down outdated notions of curating, as well as the figure of the curator as an expert. How do we know what we know? Obviously via years of learning, but do we know it all? Taking this stance then, authorship and expertise culminates as a contested space where the curator and the audience / community engage in a reciprocal relationship of mutual respect and admiration of what is brought to the table in relation to the specific artwork or project.

There are numerous examples of evaluations and assessments—educational outputs and knowledge demarcations—set into both public and private funding. This has been fairly standard, and contested, within art milieus in both the USA and Europe. My curatorial experience has gleaned knowledge of exhibition and event production that can be framed to provide such statistics but the structure of current models leaves the artistic and creative processes lacking for effective and nuanced evaluation. How can we know what we know, and worse yet, how do we know we've taught it? It is, and has often been, difficult to quantify or even qualify statistics or knowledge production within the current framework.

I am not alone. Many curators and educators have found the current framework not only lacking but also quite inept. Mary Jane Jacobs clearly explains that we are using "the wrong framework" to assess socially engaged art and she calls for more connection and emotion.¹⁰ If we are to measure our engagement, McGonagle asks us to reject "wide and shallow [engagement] rather than narrow and deep—sightseeing rather than insight."¹¹ Furthermore, curator and social practice advocate Claire Doherty asks us to support creating situations "in wrong places...with flexible time-frames and emerging from different kinds of motivations than a group exhibition rationale."¹² It is also about taking time and about creating criticality in creative space. As a curator I hope to create a space for dialogue—often finding myself presenting projects that ask more questions than provide answers. But it is this space where knowledge production may be created as a site for "not-knowing" and accepting that.

These approaches have at their foundation the aim of re-articulating and re-framing curatorial epistemologies. Some are overtly and openly antagonistic to historical curatorial models. Other times, and most commonly found in my practice, the approach is more parasitical. Parasites harbour the potential to affect their hosts in profound ways. I am interested in exploring artistic, curatorial, and creative practices that foster and flourish in parasitical relationships. Following Michel Serres' understanding of the parasite, I aim to uncover beneficent parasites: artists

and curators whose practices parasitize existing structures, whether academic, architectural, or administrative. Vito Acconci has described this *modus operandi* as art “under cover,” a parasitical practice that insinuates rather than professes, that relies more on stealth and less on a well-oiled public relations machine.¹³

Therefore, we cannot take a critical position regarding “not-knowing” based on current models, or at least not that I have found in my work. However, it is important to consider debates from key scholars, such as Laermans, Antonio Gramsci, and Paulo Freire. I reference these critical positions on not-knowing as examples and point to “activating potentialities” of not-knowing as an epistemological goal in socially engaged curating. As Laermans explains:

“The self-enlightened teacher of course knows this: s/he knows that s/he actually doesn’t know what s/he is really doing when transferring knowledge or instructing a skill. Notwithstanding the existence of didactics, teaching therefore remains a form of art, in the pre-modern sense of the word, which cannot be rationalized according to mere technical precepts. It is a craft, a *métier* whose very skilfulness rests on the paradoxical capacity to transform the not-knowing that the activity necessarily implies into a workable delusion of knowledge or expertise. With this simulacrum there will always correspond a particular mode of addressing the learner, an assumed identity that vastly co-structures the educational relationship.”¹⁴

So, like curating, Laermans’ essay on teaching theory and the art of not-knowing discusses the notion of theory as a learned knowledge—through various pedagogical approaches such as “the traditional lecture format to the more interactive forms of learning.”¹⁵ Laermans points to the “alternative approach, the notion of theory still involves bits and pieces of codified knowledge and the quasi-sacrosanct texts”¹⁶ of the canon such as Weber, Foucault, Kant, Adorno, or Rancière. In turn, can we take this “learned knowledge” from curatorial practice and involve other bits and pieces? Curators are influenced by many sources, ideas, and fields. Why limit ourselves by “knowing”?

Yet, what is most interesting is Laermans’ polemic of “doing theory” and the “intrinsic political dimension...[found within doing theory]...such as ‘heteropia,’ ‘public,’ and ‘intellectual common.’”¹⁷ Conversely, can we polemicise that curators are “doing curating,” or are they attempting something more? By breaking from curating to notions of the curatorial, can we facilitate knowing and not-knowing? Noted curator Maria Lind explains eloquently the difference:

“‘Curating’ is ‘business as usual’ in terms of putting together an exhibition, organizing a commission, programming a screening series, et cetera. ‘The curatorial’ goes further, implying a methodology that takes art as its starting point but then situates it in relation to specific contexts, times, and questions in order to challenge the status quo. And it does so from various positions, such as that of a curator, an editor, an educator, a communications person, and so on. This means that the curatorial can be employed, or performed, by people in a number of different capacities within the ecosystem of art. For me there is a qualitative difference between curating and the curatorial.”¹⁸

Throughout my curatorial practice, what I have come to embrace and define in my work could be aligned with what Laermans calls “activating potentialities.” Simply put, I do not under-estimate audiences. Socially engaged curating does not adhere to a watered-down curatorial premise or an intentionally populist media-

tion, but it does pose activating possibilities where audiences may learn something now or later, may learn much or little, or may be moved to love or hate. As Laermans describes:

“Learning thus unavoidably includes the simultaneous hurtful yet instructive experience of failure, of falling through or not-understanding. To learn, momentarily or structurally, that one is not able to grasp something is indeed part and parcel of every genuine learning process.”¹⁹

Curator as Educator?

In small to mid-size museums and galleries, curators often work closely with educators; increasingly, we see the divisions between departments in museum/gallery/art spaces being blurred. In the case of larger organizations, there have been more decisive and more divisive attempts (see the attempts by the V&A and Brooklyn Museum at curatorial teams). Lessons can be learned from these examples. My experience has been in smaller organizations, where individuals wear many hats, and there is less importance put on specific roles and departmentalised mentalities. Examples of blended techniques used in my curatorial practice include Visual Thinking Strategies, curatorial teams, curators of education, community projects, interactive exhibition design, alternative language in labels, the use of technology and social media within the curatorial process, using crowdsourcing or online voting for curating, community curating, and many others.

With a clear curatorial commitment to slowness in both its temporal and conceptual definitions, my Slow Curating method was and is continually and reflectively adapted and altered to the socio-political and historical contexts of additional appointments in LaGrange, Georgia (USA), Fargo, North Dakota (USA), and most recently at The Model: Home of the Niland Collection in Sligo, Ireland. Slow Curating attempts to articulate a curated space that is dialogical and dialectical. By embracing a framework of Slow Curating, we find a dialectical approach that is an open model for knowledge production; a site for many people and not just the few; and a true simulacrum of the production of knowledge within curatorial practice.

Notes

1 Arguably, those of us working in small and medium-size institutions never could—we wore many hats, including curatorial, producer, installer, registrar, education, outreach, marketing, and floor sweeper. Rarely did we have the opportunity to say something like: “That’s not my job.”

2 This is a brief description of the overarching areas of influence on my practice in particular, but that others have also noted as influential. They are not a definitive list of areas that have shaped socially engaged curation, but they are among the most important. Other writers who have delineated influences of social practice include Mary Jane Jacob, Tom Finkelppearl, Claire Bishop, Terry Smith, Paul O’Neill, Claire Doherty, Michael Brenson, Charles Esche, Teresa Gleadowe, Lucy Lippard, and Shannon Jackson to name only a few.

3 Caroline Christov-Bakargiev discussed this term in her *DOCUMENTA 13* curatorial statement in June 2012; the popularist art activism is a commonly used term for artists who employ direct political tactics as part of their practice. It is a term embraced, embodied, and transferred by noted art activists Stephen Dumcombe and Steve Lambert in the USA who run the Center for Artistic Activism; the term “educational turn” was explored in Paul O’Neill and Mic Wilson’s book eds, *Curating and the Educational Turn*, Open Editions with De Appel Arts Center, Lon-

don, 2010; Jens Hoffman's "paracuratorial" is often cited, and one source can be found tranzit.org/curatorialdictionary/index.php/dictionary/curatorial/.

4 Irit Rogoff cleverly articulates some early criticism of "turning" in her essay for *e-flux* in 2006 entitled "Turning."

5 "The Troubles" is a colloquial term to describe the politics and warfare in Northern Ireland from 1968 – 1998 between the Irish Republican Army and the British State. It ended with a peace process and The "Good Friday" Agreement, which was voted upon in Ireland both North and South.

6 Art centres were an important regeneration tool in the Celtic Tiger of Ireland north and south in the late 1990s and early 2000s. The idea of cultural tourism, the "build it and they will come" mentality, and the Bilbao Effect were also influential to the leadership and vision of Portadown 2000 at the time. I feel that it is important to note that these notions reflected a can-do attitude and a near-obsessive positivism in a town that was continually attempting to re-imagine a life post-Troubles while still being anchored with one of the most the quintessential signposts of the war, the walking of the Orange Order down Garvaghy Road. It is to their credit that Portadown 2000 was one of the first town redevelopment companies in the North of Ireland to see the potential of art and culture.

7 The Loyal Orange Institution, more commonly known as the Orange Order, is a fraternal organization loosely organized in a similar way to the Masonic orders. They are an anti-Catholic, anti-Irish Republican organisation, with close ties to all of the Unionist and Loyalist political parties in Northern Ireland. There are many parts to the Orange Family—from other sub-groups to a women's group. Their origins come from the need of the British ruling class to have supporters in Ireland loyal to the crown. Their origin and subsequent growth can be traced to the Crown's need to fight the United Irishmen and to defeat Home Rule in Ireland. They take their name from the Dutch-born British Protestant King William of Orange who defeated Catholic King James at the Battle of the Boyne in 1690. Each year, on July 12, supporters of the Orange Order celebrate this victory with parades, family festivals, and contentious parades through Catholic areas. More than 40,000 people attend the events each year. See: Johnston, M. 2005 *Seeing Orange*, Masters of Arts Dissertation, University of Ulster.

8 The term "imagined communities" was coined by Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* Revised and extended. ed., Verso, London, 1983. It presents the notion of community as a social construction. His primary example is the nation-state.

9 Local narratives confirmed by the documentary film "The 'lost' city of Craigavon to be unearthed in BBC documentary," which was also reported in the *Portadown Times*. 30 November 2007.

9 This included myself and a young curator, Geraldine Boyle, in the North, Dublin-based art historian Kate Parsons and Catherine Marshall, then Head of Collections at the Irish Museum of Modern Art in Dublin.

10 Mary Jane Jacobs, Public Talk, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, and interview with the author, May 2014.

11 McGonagle, Declan, "Terrible Beauty," International 04. Ed. Paul Domela. Liverpool: Liverpool Biennial, 2004.

12 Claire Doherty, "Curating Wrong Places...Or Where Have All the Penguins Gone", Paul O'Neill, ed., *Curating Subjects*, De Appel, Amsterdam and London, 2007.

13 Michael Serres, *The Parasite*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, MD, [1980] 1982a, and Vito Acconci "Public Space in Private Time," Lecture for International Symposium *Andere Orte. Öffentliche Räume und Kunst*, 1997. This idea was formulated and crystallized with my colleague Christina Schmid in preparation for a proposed conference panel.

14 Laermans, Rudi. "Teaching Theory and the Art of Not-Knowing: Notes on Pedagogical Commonalism," *Krisis: Journal for Contemporary Philosophy* Issue 1, 2012, p. 63.

15 *ibid.*, p. 64.

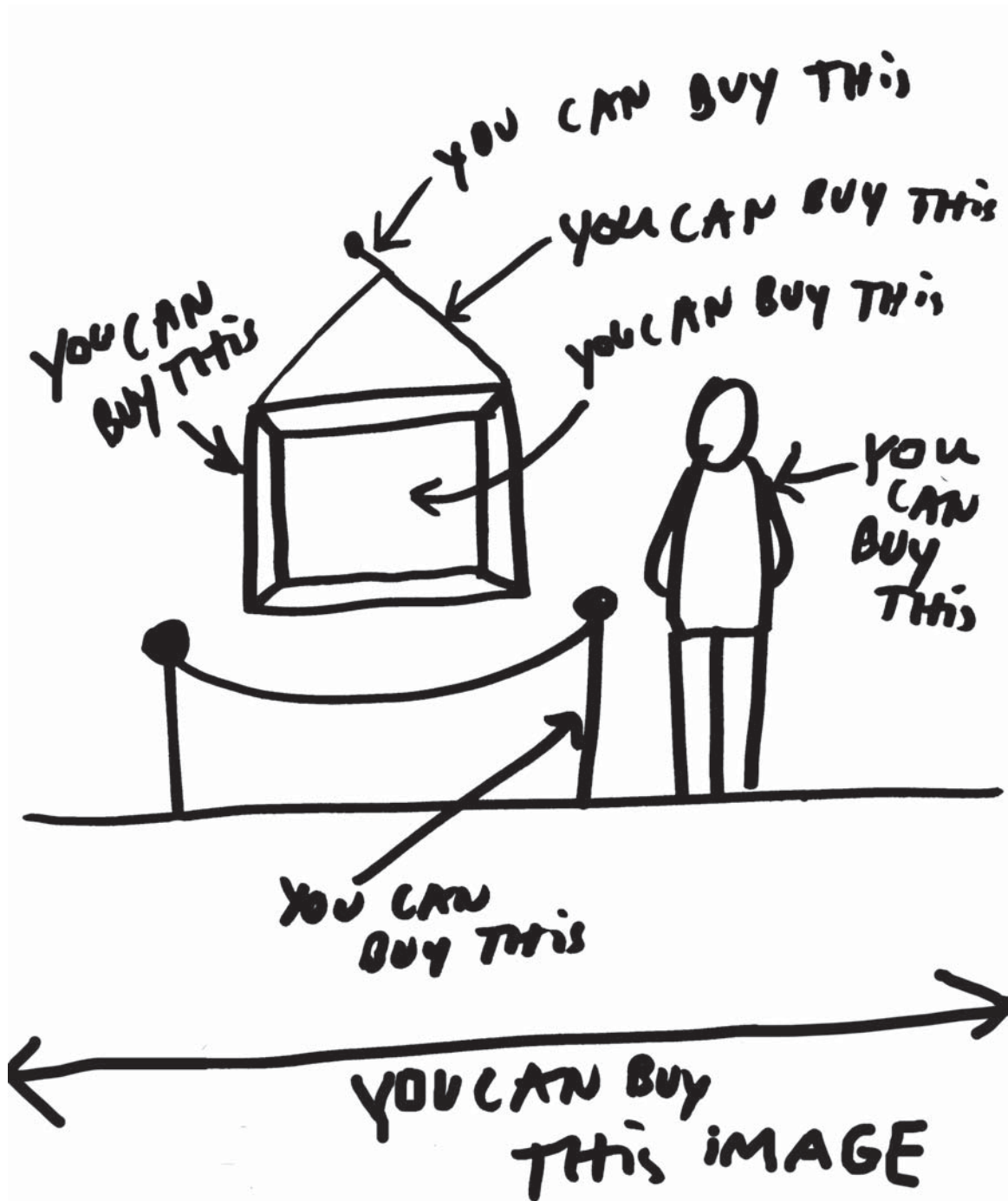
16 *ibid.*

17 *ibid.* p. 65.

18 Hoffmann, Jens and Maria Lind. "To Show or Not To Show," *Mousse* Issue #31.

19 Laermans, Rudi. "Teaching Theory and the Art of Not-Knowing: Notes on Pedagogical Commonalism," *Krisis: Journal for Contemporary Philosophy* Issue 1, 2012, p. 63.

Megan Johnston is a curator and educator and is currently Director at *The Model: Home of the Niland Collection* in Sligo, Ireland. She is an arts activist who utilizes a socially engaged curatorial practice centering on fundamental questions about art, its display, and mediation. She is interested in where sociopolitical/historical issues and creativity converge with visual culture and civil engagement. Johnston has curated more than 300 artists' projects in museums and galleries in Ireland and the United States. She received her BA in Art History from the University of Minnesota on Art of the Paris Commune with Gabriel Weisberg and Modernism and Feminism with Griselda Pollock. Johnston's MA in Visual Culture investigated the Orange Order subculture in Northern Ireland and is a benchmark in conflict resolution techniques. She is currently finalizing a PhD socially engaged curatorial practice and new approaches to contemporary museology.



"Art You Can Buy This", 2014
Artwork by Dan Perjovschi

“What does it have to do with me?”

The Learning Museum, or How the Principle of Aesthetic Research Makes Cultural Education More Accessible by Lena Seik

The work of the Art Mediation Department at the Museum of Contemporary Art Leipzig is directed towards children, young people, and adults. In creative, project-related learning modules designed to stimulate exchange and interaction between the members of groups, urgent questions are addressed concerning the society in which we live. The GfZK understands itself as a “learning museum,” entering into a dialogue with its visitors and constantly reflecting on and expanding its working methods. As well as developing participatory concepts to accompany its current exhibitions, the GfZK opens itself up to the world outside of the spatial boundaries of the institution. On site, in the districts concerned, themes and contents are developed and new areas of activity created, either on a temporary or permanent basis. The GfZK acts as a partner, a driving force or the initiator of such projects. The principle of aesthetic research is always the methodological basis used. In the following, the conceptual and working approach is illustrated by the example of two projects.

Focus: Self-empowerment

Art mediation activities at the GfZK focus on breaking down hierarchies, encouraging people to actively participate and collectively experience processes of knowledge and activity. This applies both to events and activities that are directly connected with exhibitions and to the varied project work undertaken with various target groups inside and outside of the museum building. Mediator concepts and participative activities are, of course, an integral factor in the planning and design of exhibitions. They enable visitors to acquire the skills needed to assimilate the contents in an independent way. In addition to dialogue-style tours, specially developed formats play an important role in formal and content-based mediation work. Here a special mention should be made of Julia Schäfer, a curator at the museum, who views her curatorial tasks as an integral part of art mediation processes.¹ On the other hand, a team of art mediators prepares specific mediation tools for each exhibition, enabling visitors to develop an independent approach to the contents under discussion.

At this point, the Pick-Box is particularly worthy of mention. For several years now this box on wheels, containing material, tasks, and background information, has been a constant companion at every exhibition. Its primary function is to help children to experience exhibitions in an active way. However, it can also be used by adults, or by old and young together, to make new discoveries and associations. The tasks it contains are openly formulated, animating people to link the contents of the artistic positions with their own living environment, rather than imparting knowledge and facts.

Visitors are motivated to take their first step towards an independent approach to works of art by asking them questions such as: “Where have I seen something like this before?” “Does this work of art remind me of anything?” and – the key question, which is given the highest priority in art mediation at the GfZK – “What does it have to do with me?” The materials in the Pick-Box inspire visitors to ask questions and to reflect. They empower people to develop a personal approach to the contents presented, which are intended to be discussed and applied to daily life.



Pick-Box for exhibition *Appropriation of the Present*, ©GfZK 2012

Museum versus public space

The Pick-Box is one possible mediation tool that can be applied to the contents of an exhibition. In this case, it is directly linked with the museum space.

The spectrum of art mediation as an aspect of cultural education is, as we know, diverse, and operates in a number of various ways. It takes place in all kinds of different areas of education and culture. It encompasses art lessons at school and participative local projects. Cultural education is a key concept used to describe educational projects with an artistic, creative, or general cultural focus. Cultural education, and hence art mediation, should be made accessible to everyone. Just recently, in its new publication “SCHÖN, DASS IHR DA SEID (GLAD YOU ARE HERE),”² the *Rat für Kulturelle Bildung* (German Council for Cultural Education) makes a plea for the establishment of a legal right to cultural participation, and at the same time speaks of a human right to cultural education. We can only agree, assuming that cultural education is meant not in the sense of a transfer of knowl-

edge through learning facts, but as something that can only be achieved through trying out, experimenting, and participating, enriching the wealth of experience of the individual concerned and strengthening his or her own autonomy and maturity in social processes.

The Museum of Contemporary Art is, naturally, a place of cultural education. The exhibitions and collection form the basis of the museum institution, and may in themselves be seen as a kind of art mediation. They confront people with current topics relating to society, and invite them to take part in personal and public discussions. The third pillar is the educational mandate, i.e. art or cultural mediation. It is defined primarily through the contents addressed by the museum in its exhibitions and programmes. Some of these educational activities take place within the institution in an altogether classic sense, in that they are developed specifically for the exhibitions and carried out in the exhibition space, for example the Pick-Box mentioned above. Dialogue-based tours or short projects in the exhibition rooms also belong to this category. The activities of the GfZK Art Mediation Department are always on view in the presentation room, where project documentation and results are displayed. The workshop rooms are also continually accessible to visitors to the exhibition – even when they are being used by project groups.

Since 2005, when the department first opened, one thing has been confirmed again and again: art mediation is justified within the rooms of the museum. It can provide insight into questions concerning our society. It can raise such issues in the immediate vicinity of the work of art, trigger discussions and animate us to collectively search for solutions to problems. However, in order for this to happen, visitors have to come to the institution. We must work on the assumption that they will find their way to the museum, which everyone knows as a place of learning, experience, and action.

Why should the museum expand?

The museum sees itself as an educational establishment that is open to everyone. But what if certain obstacles prevent people from observing the educational opportunities available within the rooms of the museum? How can free access to cultural education be guaranteed if the personal, infrastructural, spatial, social, or cultural situation of children, young people, or adults stands in the way?

Our answer is that the museum must move away from its fixed rooms and go to the target groups concerned. The institution expands, no longer confining itself to the museum space. It leaves the building and works on site, anywhere where it might need to be. From this point forward, the exhibition space is just one aspect of many in the large sphere of art mediation, which expands to cover the entire city. The institution travels to city districts and rural areas, or operates internationally and digitally. It expands beyond the circle of people who visit the exhibitions and members of the mediation team and becomes a group of people who work, participate, and address social problems together in the outside world. They do this in a way that one would expect of (contemporary) artist practitioners: in an inquiring, process-oriented way, from an aesthetic point of view, in public, involving others. These active people analyse their environment, directly intervene, provoke irritation, confront the community, and incite controversies. A commitment to contemporary art on a local scale provides an awareness of methods and approaches in the same way as it would in an exhibition space. In this case, however, the transfer path is possibly shorter and the scope of action more direct. The outside activities may be linked with specific exhibition contents found in the rooms of

the museum, but this is not necessarily the case. This also belongs to the idea of opening up or ease of accessibility, and incorporates all the current questions of the group, community, society, and related discussions.

The learning museum

In this process of opening up and extending its radius of action, the mediation team acts as a representative of the museum, as an agent of the institution. By constantly relocating to new sites and being confronted with new situations, each one of which being completely different from the last, the team must be extremely flexible in its way of thinking and acting. No situation, no location, no community is the same as another. Thus, the institution must learn. It must adapt to existing circumstances and react accordingly.

Each mediation project is new and different – from the starting point right up to the finish. Target groups differ in age, background, subject orientation, and previous knowledge. A kindergarten group in the town centre is faced with a different set of circumstances in its immediate environment than young people from a school in the surrounding villages. Middle school students from a prefabricated housing estate on the outskirts, living in difficult social situations, have different future prospects and motivation levels than grammar school pupils from the Montessori school complex in the same area. Clients at an establishment for the rehabilitation of the mentally ill devote their attention to the personal concept of "work" whilst pursuing creative activities, whereas the employees of a company producing bathroom fixtures look for opportunities for the further development of their products.

The mediation team must adjust to each situation and react individually. As a result, one might think that each project starts from scratch and runs in a radically different way, each process being completely unpredictable. This is of course not the case. Naturally, no project is the same as another. Nevertheless, the procedure and structure always follow a certain plan or method.

The method of aesthetic research

(Gohlis Space Pioneers)

This method can be illustrated using the example of a long-term project with kindergarten and primary school children. The project, entitled "*Raumpioniere Gohlis* (Gohlis Space Pioneers)," was concerned with Georg-Schumann-Straße in the north of Leipzig. At the beginning of the 20th century, this street was a magnificent main thoroughfare, lined with imposing *Gründerzeit* and Art Nouveau houses and numerous shops. Following the destruction of the Second World War and the GDR era, several sections were redeveloped. However, the street was never returned to its former glory. Today it is faced with various problems: heavy traffic, dense development, high levels of air and noise pollution, the endangerment of existing structures, a large number of unrenovated, partly disused buildings and shops, few green spaces, and scarcely any children's playgrounds.

Both the kindergarten and the school are situated on a side street, in the immediate vicinity of Georg-Schumann-Straße. A distance of around 500 metres separates the two. This section of the street was to be examined over a period of two years. At the same time, both groups were to be given the opportunity of working together during certain phases of the project.

Based on this project, a principle can be identified that is applied to all projects organised by the GfZK Art Mediation Department: the principle of aesthetic research.³

At the beginning of the entire process, a theme is established. Participants identify questions they find particularly interesting about this theme. Then they search for paths that might help them to answer their questions. Under the supervision of an alliance consisting of teachers and experts such as art mediators or designers, artists, etc., they are encouraged to find forms of their own. They are introduced to new methods and techniques which will help them to make their personal process transparent, and to archive, collect, and collate their results. These include scientific methods such as the interview or the statistical survey. But the procedure alone, the search for a possible answer, has similarities with research processes from science and art. The reward is the journey and the journey is the reward. The attempt to answer the initial question remains simply an attempt, one possibility amongst many.

The method is therefore wholly directed at the process, at the activity of experimenting and researching. What happens within a group during this process can take many different forms: related to the examination of a street, for example, the result could be a collection of portraits of the people who live there. Real or imagined stories could be told and recorded in writing. The information could be based on interviews or memories of one's own. Old and new maps could be compared and set in relation to one another, and so on.

The end result is the outcome of an individual journey, and for this reason it is rarely predictable. This makes this type of work extremely interesting and varied; however, it also demands a high level of flexibility on the part of the experts, to ensure that processes run smoothly in a technical sense. They must also have a fundamental understanding of the procedure, allowing for mistakes and failure along the way. At the same time, it is necessary to ensure that each participant experiences personal development, taking previous knowledge and interests into account and recognising these as resources. Working on the principle of aesthetic research or research-based learning provides unlimited possibilities for liberal, self-determined learning, encouraging, and supporting people to develop and utilise their creative abilities.

The outcome is often portrayed in the form of process documentation or creative design. It can be presented in the form of a newspaper, a weblog or an exhibition. A staged performance is also possible, summarising the process documentation in a small production. Again, anything is allowed here. The members of the group decide which form of presentation is the most suitable.

In the case of the "Gohlis Space Pioneers,"⁴ the basic research theme was Georg-Schumann-Straße. The children were introduced to the theme in the form of an initial question: "Is Georg-Schumann-Straße a place for children?" The school-children wrote down their thoughts on this topic, each of them having the opportunity to contribute their previous knowledge from the very beginning. The answer was a unanimous "No!" The main reason given for this was the heavy traffic and the related risk of accidents. Additionally, the pavement was considered too narrow for playing. In an opening event, the participants prepared a large drawing of the street. Here again it became apparent that traffic and air pollution were major issues. In the ensuing period, the groups of children began to do research on the street, taking various aspects into account. The children from the kindergarten

went for walks along the street and side streets. In a kind of searching game, they photographed numbers and characters. The discoveries they made were subsequently evaluated and discussed at kindergarten.



Space Pioneers Gohlis, *Exploring Georg-Schumann-Street*, ©GfZK, 2012



Space Pioneers Gohlis, *Exhibition Opening at Georg-Schumann-Street*, ©GfZK, 2012

The primary school children explored the area in their way. They examined certain aspects, for example particular types of doors and entranceways, which they drew and made up stories about. Through various different types of approaches, the groups came closer to the surface and substance of the street in a formal and creative sense. One could say that they drew up an inventory, including doors, houses, street corners, animals, building sites, etc. The artistic media used to do this were photography, models, painting and drawing, collages, and texts. The many individual aspects were put together in a presentation designed in collaboration with adults, which was displayed directly on the street. The participants were successful in securing the local authorities as a cooperation partner, and part of the presentation was held in their rooms. Contact was also made with a local shop-owner. As two of his shops were empty at the time of the project, the shop windows could be used as an exhibition display. The children curated exhibition areas themselves. At this point in the proceedings, the museum came to the fore as an exhibition venue, serving as an example of possible types of exhibition design. Here, certain types of space and aspects of public relations work were analysed with the children. The design of posters for the street exhibition was also a part of the process for which the children were responsible.

In the process of aesthetic research, active co-determination and decision-making with regards to the further course of events plays a vital role. In this way, the children were able to consciously observe the various processes involved in the project. This aspect was continuously encouraged by means of reflection and evaluation.

In the second year of the project, the Space Pioneers decided to examine the street with regard to its inhabitants. This confronted the children with people who had their own opinions on the state of the street and life in general. They visited people at their workplaces, e.g. a baker, a pharmacist, or a librarian, and whilst hearing their stories, they also learned how to conduct an interview. Finally, the project resulted in the children formulating visions of their own: groups from the kindergarten and the school created models in order to express their wishes for a lively, more hospitable street. These featured limited traffic zones, playgrounds and gardens, fruit and vegetable stores, a swimming pool, and a football field, above which traffic was redirected over a bridge.



Space Pioneers Gohlis, *Future models on Georg-Scumann-Street*, ©GfZK, 2013

The process of aesthetic research allows all involved parties to make new discoveries. They are actors in a constant, dynamic series of procedures. Work on such projects is experienced as extremely lively, multi-faceted, and sometimes surprising. Project supervisors and participants work together and are required to react in a flexible manner. There is more than one way of achieving the same goal. Sometimes the path is stony, and research can lead to a dead end. In such cases it is necessary to stop and think, look for solutions, run through alternatives, and remain curious. The joint approach of the project group must remain optimistic, open and process-oriented at all times. The research expedition can be successful only if this is accomplished.

UEBEL&NEISS

Aesthetic research is an open process that brings the previous knowledge, personal interests, and infrastructural conditions of each of the participants together under one roof. In this way, project work can be adapted to any situation – an essential prerequisite for working with the pupils in the following project. *UEBEL&NEISS* is the name of the first fashion label from Leipzig/Grünau. It was founded in 2013 as a school project. Since then, the label has increasingly func-

tioned as a flagship and identification feature for the district culture of the young people of Leipzig Grünau. It began in a cooperative process of aesthetic research.⁵

The district of Grünau is one of the largest prefabricated housing estates constructed in the former GDR, situated in the west part of Leipzig. Once conceived and built as a living area for thousands of working people, we can now only speak of Grünau as being a dismal satellite area on the outskirts of the cultural metropolis. Following the political and social changes after 1989 and the associated redevelopment of Leipzig's *Gründerzeit* houses, which are typical for the city, living in Grünau became an unattractive alternative. The new buildings, which had formerly been highly sought after, now became council housing. Cultural institutions, restaurants, and cafés closed. Only a very small number of these still exist today, alongside a few newly founded initiatives (including a young people's theatre and a skating arena). The picture of Grünau is dominated by prefabricated buildings and green spaces. The inhabitants mainly belong to low-income households. The centre of the district consists of two shopping malls, which function as a centre of commerce and communication for the residents.

At the 94th School, students can attain a secondary or comprehensive school certificate. Social problems affecting the families, along with poor future prospects, result in a grave lack of positive learning attitudes. Linked with this, there is an increased risk of frustration, lack of respect amongst the pupils, and a refusal to attend school.

The idea of the label arose in a collaboration between the 94th School and the GfZK, assisted by experts from the fields of communication and fashion design. Since 2011, the school and the cultural institution have formed a partnership within the framework of the nationwide programme "Kultur.Forscher! (Culture.Researchers!)" This programme has taken on the task of bringing to life and consolidating alliances between schools and cultural institutions. The principle of aesthetic research was the method used. Alongside other projects aimed at forging links between culture and schools, in the school year 2012/13 the project team developed the idea of founding a fashion label. The starting point was for the pupils to perform an analysis of their immediate living, learning, and acting environment: Leipzig Grünau – first as regards contents, and later in an aesthetic sense.

This analysis began with the observation of a central public area not far away from the school, featuring a traditional supermarket, a Russian food store, a hairdresser's, a clothing shop selling merchandise from China and Vietnam, a pub, and a physiotherapy practice. In spite of the shops, the whole area appears deserted. In an initial examination of this location, striking details were recorded using photographs and drawings. Back in the classroom, the area was analysed on the basis of this material, and conclusions drawn regarding the district. Further ideas arose on how the examination could be continued: the pupils pointed out a group of adults drinking alcohol, referring to them as "bums." A discussion ensued concerning the use and meaning of this word, during the course of which it was described as negative and discriminating. The group agreed that no one knew exactly what caused the adults to meet up during the daytime and drink alcohol. If they wished to find out, the individuals concerned would have to be asked. Several students said that they would not dare to do this, but one pupil agreed to conduct an interview. Unfortunately, this undertaking never materialised. But the picture of the empty, bleak area with the drinking adults remained, as a prominent image of the district.

Another picture of the district, however, is that of a home and a place of residence. The young people spend most of their time in their local neighbourhood. Few of them make their way to the attractive town centre, which is considered too far away and too expensive. They feel at home in Grünau where they know the ropes; furthermore, it is where their friends live. This is quite clearly seen as a positive aspect, and was articulated as such again and again. Other advantages are a nearby lake and the wasteland areas between the prefabricated blocks, which have now been made into green spaces.



UEBELE&NEISS, Image of Grünau, ©GfZK, 2012

The label name UEBELE&NEISS arose from these two contrasting pictures. Common language codes played a role: the words "übel" (nasty) and "nice" often being used in the young people's everyday language to express rejection or acceptance.

Divided into two groups, the students turned their attention towards different aspects of the project: one being the development of the outer appearance, and the other the background of the theme of fashion and clothing. Research was done into the following questions: Where do I buy the fashion items I like? How much does the clothing cost? Where is it made? To this end, pupils went on excursions to clothing shops in the district, questioned and photographed fellow students and combed through the internet. During this process, the group discovered that most clothing is not made in Germany, as they had expected, but in Asia. As a means of comparison, students visited the Leipzig fashion designer Franziska Eichhorn in her studio. She explained the process of creating a piece of clothing, from the initial idea to the finished item, and demonstrated just how lengthy, time-consuming, and expensive it is.

In brainstorming sessions, the group responsible for creative development came up with the name and colour scheme. In cooperation with the interaction designer Tristan Schulze, the style of lettering was then developed, which was to be the distinguishing feature of the label from then onwards.



UEBEL&NEISS, Developing Corporate Identity, ©GfZK, 2013



left: UEBEL&NEISS, Silk screen printing Session, ©GfZK, 2013
right: UEBEL&NEISS, Photo Shooting, ©GfZK, 2013

The first t-shirt collection was printed using a screen printing process. The first overall appearance of the label was captured in a photo session. This shoot took place on site in the young people’s residential area. The final activity in the project, and at the same time the starting signal for a new phase, was the development of a video. The young people worked with a dance teacher to develop a series of choreographic movements, which were then put together in a dance video. The celebratory opening took place in July 2014, at a one-day event in the district’s shopping centre, where the Grünau label was presented for the first time.

The activities involved in the project took place in various different locations – in and around the school, in the district, at the workplaces of the experts (screen

printing workshop and studio), and also in the museum, whose rooms were used as a "design office" for the label's name and appearance. In reference to the description of the "learning museum," it should be mentioned that the institution was required to show a maximum degree of flexibility. Not only did the project locations gradually spread out over the entire city, but the team was continually expanding. The initial cooperation between a teacher and a mediator grew to become a network of experts, including the two designers, the people from the screen printing workshop, the dance teacher, and all those responsible for structural district and school affairs. The group of young people also expanded: fellow pupils, approved by the group, were recruited for the photo shoot. The publicity gained by wearing the t-shirts and publishing the video roused the interest of other young people. The number of people involved in the project increased, along with the level of motivation for a new chapter of UEBEL&NEISS.

In the current school year, 2014/2015, the pupils are starting up a student company. A new collection is going to be created, consisting of printed t-shirts and specially sewn items, which will be promoted publicly. The label attracted the attention of a well-known musician and rapper, who expressed an interest in working in collaboration with the young people. All processes related to the label are now going to become more professional and more structured within the framework of the company. In this way, different procedures become more tangible and make sense to the young people, for example the fact that it is important to attract attention so that the clothing is sold, in order to be in a position to invest in new fabrics. They are gaining the experience that public attention makes it easier to gain potential sponsors, who in turn help with the realisation of ideas, for example by enabling them to rent a shop at an affordable price. These experiences also generate motivating impulses concerning the future career prospects of the students.

Does it all sound too good to be true? Dampeners and downers

The two above project examples are described in detail, with the focus on their feasibility. They are intended to encourage people to get involved in open processes, to cooperate and to explore new territory. However, they should not detract from the fact that integrated project work can require a tremendous amount of effort. In some cases, a project can fail due to various factors, or a well thought-out, excellent project idea is never put into practice. The projects "Space Pioneers" and "UEBEL&NEISS" are, or were, also sometimes affected and disrupted by unfavourable influences. The GfZK art mediation team has experienced failed project ideas or unproductive co-operations. Mention is made below of some unfavourable factors that can be encountered – both of a general nature and directly related to a project. No pretence is made of trying to solve the problems, for in most cases the circumstances are so complex that only individual solutions are viable.

Education system

Using the German school system as an example: in the year 2014, the school day at most schools, especially state-run schools, will again consist of 45-minute units of specialised teaching. The various different subjects, following one another in quick succession, are treated by all concerned as though they had nothing whatsoever to do with one another. Teaching staff work alone. One school class follows the next, hour after hour. Teachers do their best to communicate as much factual knowledge as possible - on the one hand to cover the curriculum, and on the other to give students the chance of obtaining a high performance evaluation. Students

require measurable results, dictating which kind of personal future can be expected in the best case, or which goals are completely out of the question ("You'll never manage that!"). Within this system, the personal interests, previous knowledge, and living situation of the pupils and the teachers are rarely taken into consideration, due to their diversity and the difficulty of achieving comparative measurability. As a consequence, teaching material is often far removed from the actual lives of the individuals, and is often perceived as such. In favour of the measurability of teaching results, on which the future of the pupils relies, the system is rarely challenged. A further problem is (and teachers who give versatile lessons and continually develop new ideas and possibilities should please not feel under fire at this point) that a seemingly proven method is simply adopted from one school year to the next – sometimes over generations. The motto seems to be: "If it's worked long enough, it will carry on working."

However, it need not be stressed that, especially in the sensitive situation of growing up and being confronted with social demands – particularly true of children and young people at school – the most important basic approach should be that of openness, flexibility, and improvisational talent. And most people are aware of this. Yet collaborative project work incorporating partners in and outside of school is hindered and even severely impaired by rigid, system-related factors. Here are a few examples:

- A teacher has problems introducing flexible teaching times, because it would mean pooling lesson times with another teacher. However, although the subjects they both teach are predestined to be treated in an interdisciplinary way, the colleague is not interested in cooperating. Consequently, project time has to take place between two teaching units, and the opportunity of free, process-oriented work is limited.
- The "classroom" setting has proved unfavourable for project work, but the structure of the school day does not allow students to go to another place of learning. For some projects it would certainly prove useful to leave the usual learning location – to work in a quiet atmosphere, to gain new impulses, or simply to introduce a change in routine.
- Pupils are unwilling to move to another learning location since, during the course of their school days, they have developed the attitude of "consumers" of education. This situation arises when all the initiative comes from teaching staff, whilst pupils absorb information without actively participating. Unfortunately, this kind of practice is widespread. Breaking out of such a vicious circle requires time and energy, and this process is often unrelated to the actual project contents. It can sometimes be extremely useful to regard it as a part of the project – otherwise, it can make project work extremely difficult.

The problems involved in cooperating with schools could be completely avoided by allowing project work to take place in the afternoons, after lessons. On the one hand, external partners would not be affected by the circumstances governing school and lessons. On the other hand, far more financial possibilities would be available, as most funding sources in Germany only support projects that take place outside of schools, due to the fact that Federal States are responsible for teaching development and school structures.

However, I believe that this is not the way forward, especially considering the individual's right to the accessibility of cultural education, as mentioned above. The school is an institution through which everyone passes, and as such it offers the opportunity of reaching as many children and young people as possible. As well as providing learning strategies and knowledge, schools should be a place that encourages personal development and reflection. Rather than being regulated and sanctioned, mistakes and failure should be seen as necessary aspects of acquiring knowledge and experience. This could be achieved in open processes such as research-based learning or aesthetic research, with flexible supervision and varied learning activities – even for children and young people who, for whatever reasons, do not experience cultural diversity in their everyday lives outside of school. Precisely *this* is what I consider fundamental in the call for the legal right to cultural education.

The practice of funding allocation

A further factor that should be mentioned within this context is the general dependency on third-party funds. A project can certainly be successful with a minimum amount of funding. It all depends on the structural orientation, i.e. what kind of institutional infrastructure already exists in terms of space, personnel, or material resources. In an ideal case, these conditions will suffice to provide the basis of a successful cooperation. It becomes more difficult if the character of the project demands an additional budget, e.g. for the payment of artists or designers to provide special expertise and valuable outside impulses, as was the case in "UEBEL&NEISS." A workshop is currently needed for this project, situated outside of the school but not too far away. In this specific case, the project team is encountering huge problems due to an extremely limited budget. The idea of a project room arises from the following situation: since the beginning of the school year, the project group has been meeting once a week in the school art room, during lesson times. The difficulties described above are encountered: the students do not have time to leave the school building and travel to the museum, although this would enable them to work in a relaxed atmosphere. Working in the classroom causes unpleasant dynamics to arise within the group. Pupils behave "in school mode," displaying low levels of self-organisation and motivation, although it was their own choice to take part in the project. In the school building, the above-mentioned mechanism of "educational consumerism" sets in. An external location for regular meetings would help the project group to organise itself more efficiently. A room designed especially for the project could be created, at the same time symbolising the opening up of the school institution. Initial discussions have been carried out with local officials, with the idea of taking over a vacant shop that would function as a studio and display workshop, at the same time being used for publicity activities and selling clothes. These discussions resulted in the statement that the borough sees the project in a very favourable light and is happy to support it, but that no one can be expected to provide a room free of charge. The project management considered raising funds, and submitted applications for financial support. Up until now, no positive decisions have been made as far as the funding of this part of the project is concerned, and some applications were not able to be submitted. There are various reasons for this, all of which are linked with current funding allocation practices:

- Applications can be made only to third-party funding sources, which allow for the compatibility of teaching and cooperation partners outside of schools. However, most sponsors cannot or do not wish to provide this kind of funding.
- Sponsors have certain orientations and guidelines with regard to content,

with which the project must comply. Many options do not apply to "UEBEL&NEISS," which already has a very clear content.

- Most sponsors expect the project to have a prototype function, to be innovative and unique. In many cases, funding can only be applied for before the project has begun.

This is the dilemma with which "UEBEL&NEISS" is confronted at the present time. It is a project that takes place during school hours, was started up two years ago, and whose participants are pupils who – for all of the above-mentioned reasons – are not 100% self-motivated and self-organised. Thus, it is virtually impossible to apply for third-party funding.

This is just one example of many experienced by cultural workers in their daily working lives. The difficulties are augmented by the enormous administrative tasks involved in the allocation of funding.

All of these obstacles culminate in cooperation partners making the decision not to submit applications, which means that available funding is not utilised to the fullest. This, on the other hand, can result in project teams cutting back on their workload, so that opportunities cannot be further developed. Finally, the cooperation and the character of a project suffer as a result of the difficult conditions: even successful projects can only be carried out for limited periods of time, after which they cannot be developed any further. They are classified as having already taken place, and thus not innovative enough to be funded. Even state-funded programmes such as the programme "Kultur(t)räume □ Frühkindliche Bildung kreativ (Cultural spaces, cultural dreams – creative education in early childhood)," within the framework of which "Gohlis Space Pioneers" ran for a period of two years, are limited, with no follow-up options. Why? What purpose does the call for prototype and uniqueness serve, if no further development is wished for once the project term has elapsed? In my opinion, the constant invention of new projects cannot be the key to a functioning and constantly developing educational structure or socio-culture; furthermore, it does not meet the needs of the target groups.

Closing remarks

The open process of aesthetic research and its experimental character, which allows for highly personal points of contact, is extremely well suited to individual approaches to cultural education projects. People of all ages can participate and become actively involved. The museum, in our case the Museum of Contemporary Art and its team of art mediators, can make an important contribution by functioning as a starting point, a think-tank, or simply a source of inspiration. By behaving flexibly and constantly adapting its contributions to the given conditions, it remains a reliable partner in processes of cultural education, both inside the museum building and at outside locations. This role of the museum should be an integral feature of its self-image. Teachers should be able to approach the museum in the secure knowledge that it is a reliable partner with a rich network at its disposal, as well as a passionate attitude. This should apply equally the other way round. And even if the infusion of financial support from promotion funds dries up, this should not be to the detriment of joint project work! Setting processes in motion, learning through research, participation and involvement, taking over public spaces – all of this can be successful on a small scale, opening up new vistas for all parties involved. This should be our main objective.

Translated by Louise Bromby

1 For an example of this, please see the exhibitions "Puzzle", "Kunst Kunst" or "Hausgemeinschaft (Family Affairs)". <http://gfzk.de/>

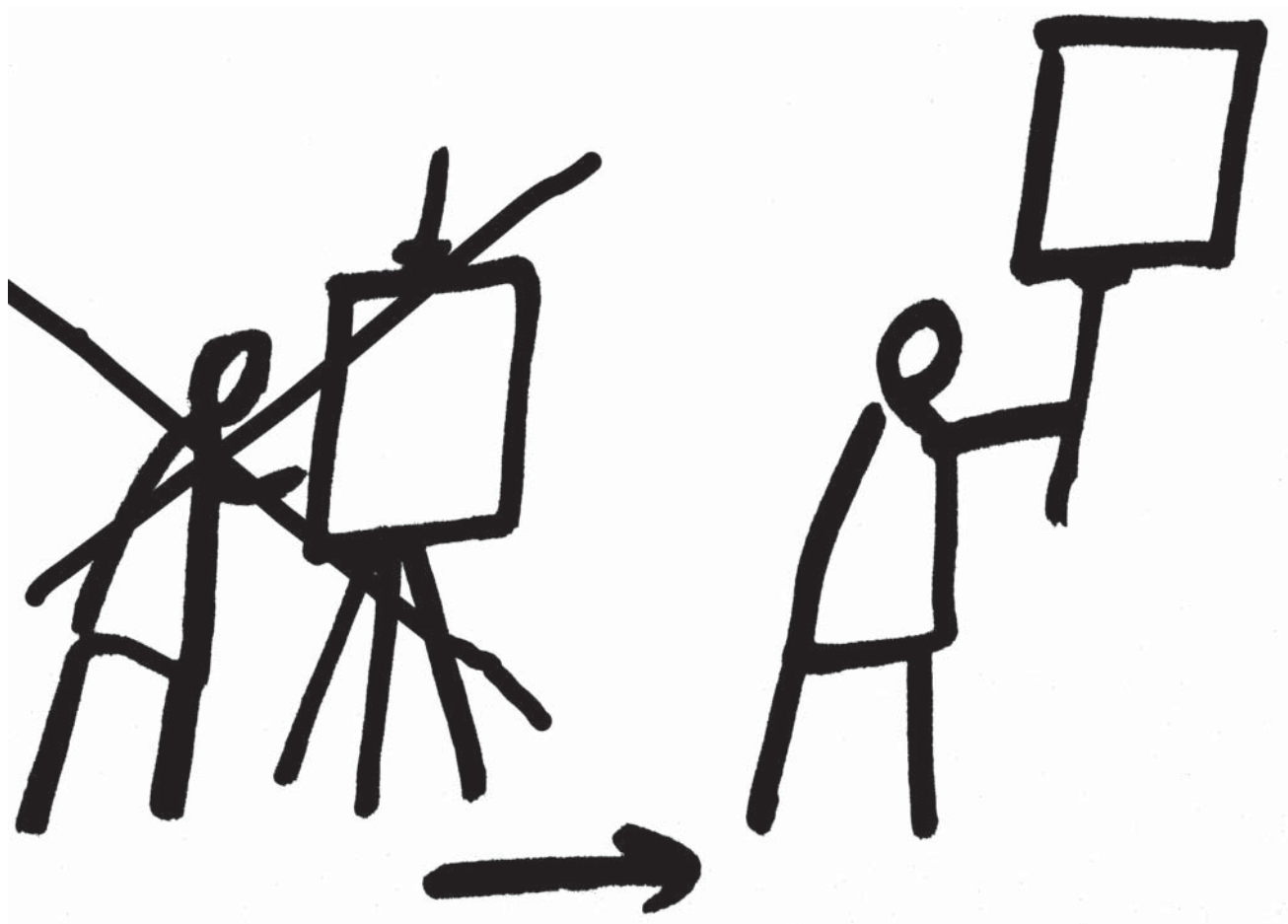
2 Rat für Kulturelle Bildung. 2014. "SCHÖN, DASS IHR DA SEID" Accessed 27.09.2014. <http://www.rat-kulturelle-bildung.de/index.php?id=59>

3 Helga Kämpf-Jansen, *Ästhetische Forschung*, Salon Verlag, 2004.

4 See "Raumpioniere Gohlis": <http://www.gfzk.de/foryou/?p=2623>

5 See "Kultur.Forscher!" and "UEBELØNEISS": <http://www.gfzk.de/foryou/?p=1652>

Lena Seik has been in charge of the art mediation programme at the Museum of Contemporary Art Leipzig since 2005. She develops urban art mediation projects always connected to local communities and cultural and educational institutions. She has initiated international exchanges and programmes, e.g. in Hirosaki/Japan (2005), Rabat/Salé/Kénitra/Morocco (2008, 2009, 2013), Olsztyn/Poland (2007), Brno/Czech Republic (2012) and Istanbul/Turkey (2012), Amsterdam/Netherlands (2013). Her main focus lays on cultural education based on the principles of aesthetical research and process-oriented work with target groups of all ages.



"Artist", 2008
Artwork by Dan Perjovschi

Disability, Curating, and the Educational Turn: The Contemporary Condition of Access in the Museum

by Amanda Cachia

The “educational turn” has successfully theorized how curators are now more and more embroiled in implementing educational strategies as part of their work in museums, departing from their more traditional and material orientations to objects. This turn might controversially suggest that those who work in the public programs and education departments of museums must, too, be considered as curators. Certainly, many museums are recognizing that it is beneficial to combine and merge the two roles of curator and educator, as witnessed by the creation of such new positions as the Curator of Public Engagement at the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles. If museums foresee how curators are playing a more critical role in working with their publics, rather than with objects, and if educators, too, are always already doing this kind of work, how can curators and educators work together to create meaningful and accessible experiences about disability in museums that serve a wide range of audiences? What work is currently being done and what kind of work still needs to be addressed? Certainly, disability has found a place in the museum, but why have museum education and public program departments been the instigators of actively bringing in artists with disabilities? How do invitations to do public or educational programming with artists with disabilities interface with curatorial invitations to participate in exhibitions, if at all? I am interested in how disability and access are being addressed in the museum because I identify as a curator and as a disabled person, and I continue to see a gap in curatorial practice and the educational turn that often misses the generative complexities that a disability studies framework offers art criticism, theory, and praxis.

In order to answer these complex questions, I conducted in-depth interviews with a range of people working in prominent museums across the United States in August 2014. I wanted to interview people that worked at the intersections of the following fields: (a) curating and social engagement; (b) access services and education; (c) curating and education. Within each of these matrices, I was hoping to discover where the work of disability and access might be located. In some cases, I already knew in advance that disability was the central or partial concern of a particular position and job title, whilst in others, I was hoping to find an unusual or radical stance towards disability within a department that might not otherwise consider it so deeply. So while many of the roles of the people I interviewed strive to exclusively enable people with disabilities to access cultural facilities of all types, other positions work more broadly with education-based initiatives and a plethora of community groups. One position focuses especially on socially-engaged art practices and works directly with artists. The five interviewees include Allison Agsten, Curator of Public Engagement at the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles,

Georgia Krantz, former Senior Education Manager for Adult and Access Programs at the Guggenheim Museum in New York, Danielle Linzer, Director of Access and Community Programs at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York, Francesca Rosenberg, Director of Community, Access, and School Programs for the Museum of Modern Art in New York, and Sarah Schultz, former Director of Education and Curator of Public Practice at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis.

“Disabling” the Educational Turn

The educational turn has never sufficiently addressed access, or access as it applies specifically to disability and disabled audiences. In her article, “Turning,” (2008) Irit Rogoff mentions “education in terms of the places to which we have access. I understand this access as the ability to formulate one’s own questions, as opposed to simply answering those that are posed to you in the name of an open and participatory democratic process.”¹ Rogoff’s general (and very typical) application of the word “access” within a museum context is rooted in a philosophy premised on the visitor’s ability to participate in knowledge production. But what if we rearticulate Rogoff’s understanding of access to a more specialized and political construction, where we might think about the *equal* ability of audiences to participate in knowledge production, or more effectively, how to *enable* the equal participation of all visitors to the museum within the process of producing this knowledge?

It might be useful to first outline the existing polemics within, or to at least “disable” or dismantle, the educational turn: this will shed light on some of the outcomes from my interviews, to be discussed in detail further on. In her Introduction to the book, *It’s all Mediating: Outlining and Incorporating the Roles of Curating and Education in the Exhibition Context*, Kaija Kaitavuori argues that the labour of the curator and that of the educator might be traditionally and crudely divided by thinking about curating as caring for objects, as opposed to the role of the educator who cares for people. We might also think of the curator as the one who focuses on aesthetic outcomes rather than educational goals, and the person who focuses on scholarship rather than on service.² Indeed, the curator inherits a most powerful position within the museum because the curator is considered the producer of knowledge who transmits his/her ideas through catalogue essays, didactic texts and labels, and guided tours. More often than not, the curator expects or anticipates that the educator will transmit this knowledge to the audience without “dumbing down” the quality of the initial research. Thus, what is exciting about the educational turn is that it implies that the curator is no longer the harbinger of knowledge. Their authority is now dispersed and shared with an audience, because it is the audience that interacts and engages with objects and with people in the museum who not only answer questions but also produce cultural capital, as Rogoff implies. Ideally, the curator will now also collaborate with educators to develop unique programming and services together for the benefit of a wide array of audience members.

But the source of some of the tensions that now exist between curators and educators is that while it might be trendy and even critical for the curator to adopt pedagogical practices in the work they execute in the museum so as to meet the evolving changes in society on a macro level, according to curators, it is not acceptable for the educator to suddenly become a curator. While the curator pretends to know how to organize a pedagogical experience in a museum, usually because an artist he/she is working with requests to work within this framework, the marginalized “mere” educator is skilled at producing these experiences but will never be

given equal billing or acknowledgement for helping with such a project, nor will they usually be invited to lead its development. Carmen Mörsch says, "In reflections on pedagogy currently undertaken by curators and artists, gallery education does not appear as an independent practice with its own history and controversial discourses, but is treated instead—if at all—in casual asides."³ The educational turn within curatorial practice is seen as quite distinct, and still separate from, the traditional work carried out by gallery education and interpretation departments.

Such a distinction will become most obvious once I begin discussing the sensitivities and intricacies of the various positions and roles of my interviewees, who are the subject of this article. Naturally, all of this highlights the deeply embedded hierarchies between curators and educators in the museum. Mörsch advocates that gallery education must become a powerful contributor to the discourse on institutional critique, because the curator's lack of knowledge regarding pedagogy and education involves a sanctioned ignorance that only reifies their position of power in the museum, and I would have to agree with this claim. This points to not only a certain level of hypocrisy within the educational turn, but it also really suggests that the educational turn is not a "turn" at all, but rather just a "new chapter in an old book."⁴ However, artist and Director of Adult and Academic programs at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, Pablo Helguera, says that such a division between pedagogy within the curatorial world and pedagogy within the educational world should be disrupted, because both realms have an "emphasis on the embodiment of the process, on the dialogue, on the exchange, on intersubjective communication, and on human relationships."⁵ It makes sense for these worlds to intersect.

While many educators, curators and scholars espouse the virtues of a more critical and reflexive curatorial practice, along with the newfound parallel idea of critical educational practice as articulated by Mörsch, I am left wondering where access might fit within the educational turn as it applies to disabled audiences. The educational turn has and continues to overlook the question of disability. If a turn is by nature about shifting territories, stabilities, and normative positions, this would seem perfectly compatible with the objective of creating new discourse around disability itself. If the discursive turn wants to make good on its emancipatory promises, then it needs to turn towards questions of access for the widest possible range of audiences. Even further, if an educational turn is about curators who are now expected to work with people, and employ pedagogical strategies in which to generatively activate the engagement of their museum visitors for the benefit of real social change, then surely their pedagogy might also encompass disabled audiences? Where might I find curators who are actively thinking about their disabled audiences through the framework of the educational turn, and who also work with educators to ensure their programming is effective? Helguera admits that it might be very easy for the curator who practices an educational turn to "fake it" and give lip service to how they address diversity or "multiculturalism," when in reality, their work is grounded on little substance.⁶ If an artist comes along who just so happens to adopt pedagogical strategies in their practices, such as experiential learning, then it is through the artist that the curator might justify that they work within the rubric of the educational turn. Mörsch talks about the irony of curators who might organize an event under the guise of education, when in reality, those in attendance actually reflect and perpetuate the same interests of the curator. This reveals that the curator hasn't really given much thought into their audiences at all, which goes against the point of pedagogical practices.⁷ Additionally, if the curator happens to end up working with an artist who is disabled, this is usually by accident rather than on purpose, and thus the curator finds him or herself forced to address disability. In

this instance, they might turn to the education or access department for advice because they admit they don't have the expertise to deal with such an issue.

Traditionally, issues of access have been housed in education departments because education departments have always been visitor-oriented. Danielle Linzer at the Whitney Museum believes that thinking about disabled audiences should be a shared responsibility, ranging from exhibition designers, web designers, security, and visitor services (and indeed, at the Whitney, all of these departments are touched by the importance of access in some shape or form), and it seems that it is the curators that have the least to do with disability and access issues in the museum. Access can find a home in many different spaces of the museum, thus I turn to the potential of the educational turn in curatorial practice, hoping critical issues pertaining to disability and access might find an exciting new outlet—a release, where disability is no longer considered a mere practical conundrum. Instead, within the educational turn, disability and access might also be treated as a cognitive and intellectual issue by curators; where access might be creatively employed by artists in order to challenge our ideas of what it means to engage with a work of art in very complex multi-sensorial ways.

I was also particularly interested in interviewing several people who inhabit positions that are very new and thus sparse in museums across North America, and these include the Curator of Public Engagement at the Hammer Museum, and the former Director of Education and Curator of Public Practice at the Walker Art Center. Like the educational turn with the imperative to instigate social change, socially engaged art has a supposedly similar focus. I believe that social practice as an evolving art genre holds much potential for artists with impairments, or for artists who identify as disabled, because it is new and can be molded according to the individual needs of the artist. Social practice is also embedded with an urgency to consider the lived experiences around us as art is called into life. While this type of artistic practice commonly has a performative, discursive, and spatial dimension, often taking place outside the traditional white walls of an art gallery or museum, it also possesses a judicial and governmental dimension as well. This is useful for the political cause of the disabled artist's integration into mainstream contemporary art discourse and life itself. We might begin to think about the myriad forms of social practices that could be transformative for the disabled identity through these interpersonal human relationships, through conference discussions, and so on. Most importantly, the typical lens of artistic analysis— aesthetics—is replaced as a methodology by how a work approaches the social, as opposed to simply what it looks like.⁸ This characteristic seems to resonate most profoundly with the notion of complex embodiment, because the disabled artist might be given access to think beyond body politics, in order to focus on larger philosophical and political issues as they pertain to disability. Thus, I was very excited to ascertain if the curators who inhabit public practice positions in museums see the potential for how disability might become a key part of their portfolios.

New York State of Mind

Disability and access issues are very well addressed at some of New York City's most major and influential museums. Francesca Rosenberg is the Director of Community, Access and School Programs and has been working in the Department of Education at MoMA for twenty years. Rosenberg was the first full-time accessibility coordinator at MoMA, but now she also oversees School Programs and Community Programs. While Rosenberg's position has grown, access programs and accessibility at the institution have been under her purview. The mandate of her

Department is engagement and thinking about MoMA's full spectrum of visitors.⁹ Rosenberg said that even though there are higher numbers of visibly disabled visitors who frequent MoMA, there still seemed to be a lingering misperception of disability amongst some of the staff, and certainly in the public eye. Thus, it became one of Rosenberg's imperatives to ensure that disabled people were given a voice during all manner of training programs at the Museum, along with giving disabled people the opportunity to act as advisors for disability-related programming and beyond. Rosenberg is particularly proud of MoMA's programming for people with Alzheimer's disease.¹⁰ They received generous funding from the MetLife Foundation starting in 2007 and were able to develop extensive offerings including programs, a book, a website, and in-person and on-line workshops. This impacted many other museums across the country and around the world. Now over one hundred museums especially target programming for people affected by Alzheimer's disease.



Meet Me: MoMA Alzheimer's Project.
Copyright The Museum of Modern
Art, New York.

Given the size and scale of MoMA, I was especially interested in learning from Rosenberg if there were ever any instances of other departments, especially curatorial, that initiated working with artists with disabilities, or were especially focused on ideas of creative access through collaborations with Rosenberg and her team. Rosenberg felt that she couldn't speak for the curators, but that there had been a few recent examples of where disability popped up because the curators felt that the art itself merited inclusion in their exhibitions. Rosenberg recounted how former video curator Barbara London curated the group show *Soundings: A Contemporary Score* (2013), which included deaf artist Christine Sun Kim. London had never worked with a deaf artist before, and spoke with Francesca's team about how to make Sun Kim's workshop more accessible for both Sun Kim and her workshop participants through the provision of American Sign Language interpreters.

Rosenberg then discussed how Chuck Close was given a major retrospective in 1998, and given that he is a wheelchair user, this led the curators working with him to adjust their normative habits of curating in order to make his experience at the museum more accessible. The curators had consulted with Rosenberg and her colleagues for advice. Rosenberg said that while there has been significant interest in engagement and using multi-modal approaches in curatorial practice currently, the staff in the education department had already been doing this kind of work for

years. There does seem to be more curatorial interest in engagement, where curators do come to the education department and ask for advice, but that this is usually driven by artist projects and requests, rather than the other way around. In her experience, she has found that one of the biggest incentives for curators to work on disability and engagement is because of their personal encounter with a disabled person, such as the curator whose mother has dementia, or the curator who breaks their leg and must use a temporary crutch to move through the gallery space.



Artist Workshop: *A Choir of Glances* with Christine Sun Kim, November 2013. Copyright The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Photo by Susannah Brown.

Danielle Linzer's position at the Whitney Museum in New York encompasses community and access programs, as well as research projects about educational impact.¹¹ Her community work entails a lot of work related to the Whitney's new building project (research, outreach, programming, relationship-building), and access is one of several hats that she wears. Linzer described her job as overseeing all aspects of access and inclusion at the Whitney, including institutional compliance of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and a lot of collaboration with her colleagues in education, visitor services, and digital media to ensure access is addressed. Linzer stated that one of the most challenging parts of her job, from a philosophical perspective, was the constant challenge of making contemporary art accessible. She says that the issue of access is never resolved because there is never any one-size-fits-all solution. Linzer stated that her approach is often experimental, and given this open, dynamic process, sometimes particular strategies cannot always be effective at the service of disabled audiences. Linzer said she is always responsive to her audience, though, as often they will take evaluations from their disabled visitors to ensure her team can adapt and transform programming according to this high-quality feedback.

Similar to MoMA, the Whitney also has expertise in programming for a particular disabled audience or group, and in the Whitney's case, the Museum has long had a strong historical connection to the deaf community. Linzer reported that it started when deaf staff members led gallery tours of the exhibitions, but then eventually this evolved into the innovative and high-profile Whitney Vlog Project, as Deaf Museum educators on staff at the Whitney reported that there was very limited access to live tours in ASL.¹² Linzer said that culturally Deaf audi-

ences were quickly embracing technology like video sharing sites to build community, so it made sense to transition the live ASL tours into a video blog, with the same feeling and language of tours, but now within the digital medium. Hence, the vlogs are short original videos featuring Deaf Museum educators communicating in ASL, accompanied by captions in English. The vlogs focus on topics in contemporary art or exhibitions on view at the museum. The goal of these vlogs is to increase cultural opportunities for Deaf and hard of hearing audiences and create a communications laboratory to expand the ASL vocabulary of contemporary art terms. The Vlog Project has been critically recognized through awards and mentions in the *New York Times*, but Linzer is especially proud of the huge number of hits the vlogs have received (45,000 as of August 2014), and while it has been challenging to be able to track how many hard of hearing as opposed to hearing audiences are actually accessing the vlogs, Linzer believes that the high levels of traffic through the vlog is indicative of how, in reality, this technology is for everyone, deaf or not.



Videographer Pierce Jackson and art director Jeremy Lee Sanchez discuss the Whitney Vlog shoot with the assistance of an interpreter. Photo by Danielle Linzer.

Linzer noted that curators and educators collaborating over disability-based art projects happened infrequently, and when opportunities did arise, the circumstances often had surprising results. For example, when the educators recently learned that the deaf artist Joseph Grigely had been selected to participate in the 2014 Whitney Biennial, they invited him to work with their access programs and partner with schools for the deaf so he could give lectures in ASL and even participate in a vlog. He declined the invitation because he wasn't interested in addressing disability, and he also did not want that to be the lens through which people addressed his work—the reason for this, I am not sure. At other times, artists with disabilities such as Carmen Papalia and Park McArthur have worked on particular educational programmes at the Whitney, but the artists may not always address issues of disability so explicitly, as it all depends on how the artist wants to be framed, similar to Grigely's response.

Linzer acknowledges that lines are blurring more and more between the roles of the curator and the educator, which is often a topic of discussion amongst her colleagues, but despite this trend, everyone feels they need to be respectful of each other's domains, and yet simultaneously work with the needs and interests of contemporary artists, especially given the increasingly social participatory nature of

their practices. Artists might think that the educator and curator are the same, but Linzer senses that a distinction about the differences in the role between the educator and the curator is one that her colleagues still value, and that a certain territory must still be maintained about who can do what. Linzer does not consider herself a curator, because she is simply trying to foster connections between artists and audiences.



Deaf museum educator Christin Sun Kim records commentary for an upcoming vlog. Photograph by Danielle Linzer.

The final subject of my study from New York-based museums is Georgia Krantz, who is the former Senior Education Manager for Adult and Access Programs at the Guggenheim Museum.¹³ “Access” was added to Krantz’s title in 2011 after she had been working on access across departments for four years. With the title change, she was able to work more “officially” on access matters and, of course, subsequently had much better response from her colleagues. Krantz especially introduced accessible programming through the *Mind’s Eye* program in 2008.¹⁴ This program focused on the needs of low vision and blind visitors. The *Mind’s Eye* program is one that Krantz is particularly proud of, given how it evolved over the years based mainly on the feedback she received from visitors.

Krantz said that the dialogic art practices of artists were being addressed by the Guggenheim curators, but she could only think of one instance where disability and socially engaged art intersected, and this was through the work of guest artist Carmen Papalia. Even then, it was Krantz who hosted Papalia, rather than any of the museum’s curators. Papalia had developed a workshop called *The Touchy Subject: A Sensory Tour* (2013), where he provided exercises that enabled visitors to the museum to engage with the famous Frank Lloyd Wright architecture of the museum with their eyes closed.¹⁵ After training with Papalia, Guggenheim educators offered participants an opportunity to engage with the art through touch, and to create a vocabulary of tactility from this experience. While it is not very common to find a disabled artist working within a mode of socially engaged art practice in the first instance, it would be interesting to see if artists who don’t necessarily identify as disabled might utilize access more creatively and conceptually in their art practices, regardless if that practice is with objects or with people.

Before Krantz’s departure from the museum, the Guggenheim launched a new mobile app, which covers the whole museum. Krantz had pushed to include

verbal description tours on the app, which she wrote and edited with a low vision and blind community member, and then recorded. The verbal descriptions for the permanent collection cover a selection of the works, and it also includes customized VoiceOver for iOS devices. Krantz acknowledges that technology is critical in order to engage a variety of disabled visitors, and like the Whitney Vlog Project, also has a way of appealing to everyone, regardless of ability/disability. For instance, the verbal descriptions are being uploaded to the Guggenheim SoundCloud account, with an explanatory text about how they were designed for people who are blind or have low vision, but are useful for anyone seeking a “closer look” at a work of art. They have had thousands of hits on the verbal descriptions on the SoundCloud account but, like with the vlog, they don’t know how many of the users are disabled.



Mind’s Eye: Art-Making Workshop with Jessica Jones, Wednesday, August 14, 2013. Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum. Photo by Filip Wolak.

In the end, however, it is all about funding, and technology is particularly expensive, so the constant limitation or challenge for any of these museums is how to attract funding for projects that should be considered a must, instead of merely an option. Often, it will come down to the preferences of the corporate funders or the private philanthropists, and this is why programming towards one group over another can seem unequal or biased at times. Apart from attracting the interests of the funders, again, curators must also invest an interest in the topic of disability and access. Krantz commented on how she had been consulted about how best to accommodate an artist who uses a wheelchair who is participating in the upcoming exhibition entitled *Zero: Countdown to Tomorrow, 1950s-60s* (2014). It seems that unintentional encounters with disabled artists are the norm, rather than any specific intentional and political outreach.

Abstract Education vs. Actual Education/Abstract Disability vs. Actual Disability

In Helguera’s book, *Education for Socially Engaged Art* (2011), he develops the term “abstract education” to distinguish between symbolic versus actual practice.¹⁶ Helguera defines symbolic art as that belonging mostly within the world of representation, whereas a practice of socially engaged art is active—it is the “here-and-now” and must be critiqued and evaluated for what actually occurred. He alludes to how an “abstract education”—or a symbolic gesture like representation—might be

those projects that keep a safe distance from truly working on the ground and making a difference through their practice. Actual practice is much different according to Helguera, where the artist and especially the curator will get their hands dirty and make a more sincere effort at engagement. I use Helguera's terms to guide my thinking regarding the outcomes of my interviews with Allison Agsten and Sarah Schultz.



Carmen Papalia (above) leading *A Touchy Subject* at the Guggenheim on Saturday November 16, 2013. On the bottom, a participant closes her eyes and touches the various architectural shapes of the iconic, spiral-shaped Frank Lloyd Wright architecture of the Guggenheim, led by a guide.

Allison Agsten was initially hired as the Curator of Public Engagement and Director of Visitor Services for the Hammer Museum at UCLA in 2010.¹⁷ During the interview, Agsten talked about how the world is now a different place, where social media and dialogical practices ranging from artist and curator talks and other

interactive-based events are leading the way in artistic and museum practices in the USA, and that her museum recognized the need to fuse the work of the curator with visitor services through this role, particularly the Hammer's pioneering Director, Ann Philbin. Agsten's job was one of the first of its kind in the United States, and since the time of its inception, many other museums have followed suit, having developed similar positions. Agsten acknowledged that her new job was very challenging at first because there was no template for what she was meant to do. Instead she had to figure it out for herself, and she often had to deal with attitudes from people that were characterized by puzzlement and confusion around the basis of her role. They would make comments like, "Isn't public engagement just another fancy word for education?" Indeed, Agsten admitted that, if there was ever any template for her work, it was, and is, the educators who show the curators of public engagement what to do, because they were always already doing this kind of work, even though her job was initially meant to be a hybrid of curating and visitor services, and not curating and education services.¹⁸

The Hammer Museum does not have an Education Department, but they do have an area for academic programs, given their relationship with UCLA. Agsten elaborated that she is mostly "treated like a curator," despite the confusion around the nature of her job. Agsten attends all curatorial meetings because it is vital that she is part of that dialogue in order to complete her new job well, and that she is seen as a curator on equal footing to that of her curatorial colleagues. Agsten continues to develop and refine what her role is meant to be as it applies to public engagement, and tries to remain open to new opportunities whilst also remaining firm about establishing boundaries. She insists that her role is not about marketing, nor is it about community outreach. She doesn't feel that public engagement should become an all-encompassing word for all these myriad functions in the museum. At the same time, Agsten admits that at the end of the day, the Curator of Public Engagement (not unlike other curatorial positions) is really about the cult of personality, and how the likes and dislikes of the curator themselves are what ultimately drives the nature and disposition of programming at large. Importantly, Agsten recognizes that there is a power attached to the title and role of "curator" and having that title attached to her name gives her a certain privilege and authority that she may not have been able to attain had she remained an educator of public engagement. This perhaps highlights the nature of the struggle that Agsten speaks of when she talks of how people dismissed her role as a mask for something else less lucrative, implying that she was actually dressing up as a curator, when underneath, all that is really there is a "simple" educator.

When the time came round to asking Agsten questions about her role in working with disabled artists and audiences, Agsten said she had never done so, and that disability was an issue or a topic that was typically addressed in the visitor services department of the museum. While Agsten expressed interest in exploring this area, she said she had put issues of disability and access on the backburner, and it was only upon my visit and my interview that she felt reminded that disability and access is an important matter that should become more central to her curatorial thinking in public engagement. I almost idealistically wish that Agsten's role had not been split into two in the early stages of her starting the position, because perhaps disability would not have slipped off the radar quite so much if visitor services were still under her purview.

My final interview was with the former Director of Education and Curator of Public Practice at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis. Sarah Schultz said that she held a dual title, and that it arose both because of the new trend in forging amalgamated roles, especially using Agsten's job title at the Hammer as a key influence,

and owing to all of the work she put into *Open Field* which started four years ago. This program was a key moment in the Center when her work became organically hybridized, and it became obvious to everyone that she was straddling both the educational and curatorial realms.¹⁹ *Open Field* is one of the Walker Art Center's most recent major accomplishments. From June to August, *Open Field* transforms the Walker Art Center's big, green yard into a cultural commons.²⁰ The space is designed to explore what happens when people get together to share and exchange skills and interests, to create something new, or to delve into the unknown.



Walker Open Field. Photo by Cameron Wittig, Courtesy Walker Art Center.

When our conversation moved into my questioning around (and admiring of) how Schultz had managed to be both an educator and a curator so effectively, she said that she was in the rare position to have been working for the Walker for twenty-two years, and that because of her longevity and wisdom, she was a rightly respected figure at the Center, and was able to obtain a very special and unique role that she might not have been able to obtain otherwise. Part of Schultz's goal has been to change the perception and sense of value and understanding of education, and that education can also be an intellectual, creative, knowledge-producing critical practice, and not merely a service department. Schultz's personal philosophy might find a parallel in the idea of Mörsch's critical educational practice that I discussed briefly in an earlier section. There is more to education than meets the eye, and this is an important political, radical position for Schultz to take. Of course, Schultz also wanted to broaden the definitions of what it means to curate. Schultz very eloquently described how the current museum model is very much holistically about relationality, whether it be about somebody who is learning (the educator), how we get people's attention (the marketer), what we are making (the artist), what we care for (the curator) or how we entertain them (the public programmer). It made sense to Schultz to take on the dual title, given this is the direction of society as a whole, where relationships are so central in all our lives.

Despite Schultz's impressive leadership around shifting the definitions and perceptions of the educator/curator, I did appreciate how forthright she was in our interview regarding how, despite the seeming fluidity of her two combined roles, tensions remained amongst her colleagues, regarding how much she was allowed to

dip her toes into curating. Schultz might be the only person I interviewed who was attempting to put the theory of the educational turn as a utopian transformational gesture into practice, but typically, if Schultz ventured “too far” into curating, then this is when the turf battles would start and jealousies would rear their ugly head. Schultz is constantly reminded of traditional boundaries that must not be overstepped. It is only when Schultz both curated and educated simultaneously that she was left alone. It seems obvious then, that everyone has his or her own definition of what counts as ostensibly “proper” curating and what does not. When it came time to question Schultz about her exposure to and engagement with disabled audiences, Schultz said that the Walker has and does address these audiences through various more traditional programs and tours for vision impaired, blind and hearing impaired and deaf audiences. While Schultz did not actively participate in these programs herself, she did express great awe for those who worked with the Walker’s disabled visitors; she felt these staff members were very qualified and skilled at the activities they engaged in with at times what she imagined to be demanding audiences. Schultz also described access more broadly, beyond just disabled audiences, given that it is the educators’ task, after all, to make art accessible to a wide range of audiences whilst avoiding the dumbing down effect. However, I wanted to get more specific with Schultz, and move away from the Irit Rogoff-type reductive definition of access, as there is a danger in missing the political opportunity to be found in articulating the very real needs of a particular minority group within the umbrella term of access. To that end, Schultz admitted that she had not engaged with, nor thought of, how her unique role might offer a cutting edge pathway to opening up disability. I found it promising when Schultz suggested that if her now former role was to take on such exciting new questioning, she would feel the need to step back and think about the role of the museum at large, and how it might become a more compassionate institution through social change.

Theory & Praxis: What or Which is “Authentically” Accessible?

All three employees whom I interviewed extensively in New York had made many similar comments about the extent to which curators in their institutions explored topics of disability and access: most of the time, this was by accident, or mere happenstance. If disability was suddenly thrust upon them, the curators were generally receptive and open to learning about a new way of thinking, but none of it was necessarily politicized, nor did these engagements fall especially into the realm of socially engaged art practice with a mandate to transform. Some of the time, even within the ostensibly real work of curatorial public engagement, the curators might have merely been pandering to artists, disabilities, and/or their social engaged practices, either separately or combined, which generally makes for an unhelpful incursion into the objectives of the educational turn. What I have proven through many of the projects described in these interviews is that these New York-based educators should be considered as curators of social engagement that are uniquely focused on disability. This suggests that this is the contemporary condition of access in the museum, and that disability is indeed a large part of the educational turn in museums and in the focus of curators. It is simply that the educators are not being acknowledged as such, owing to old-fashioned hierarchies and power struggles within the museum that continue to cause tension to varying degrees. Nor is this being acknowledged in the proliferation of critical theory based on the educational turn. There is a dis-connect between theory and praxis which is hardly surprising, and yet at one and the same time, the nature of power itself is typically reproduced in both theory and praxis.

If the educational turn was truly “turning,” and not merely reproducing a chapter in an old book, then these New York-based educators would be effectively

programming as curators with a special interest in disability and access, even though they may not agree with this. Within the context of the educational turn, and given the slippery terrain of job descriptions and shifts in museum infrastructures, it is difficult to justify and keep forcing this polarized difference between the curator and the educator. It is very hard these days to discern the true conceptual difference between the work that the curator is doing and the work that the educator is doing, only that the people who occupy these positions still remain stubbornly protective of their turf. Even though Krantz, Linzer, Rosenberg, and many others working in and outside of their departments in these large New York museums might wish to safely subscribe to Kaitavuori's terms in how she articulates the division of labour between that of the curator and the educator, I think these terms are likely to become null and void soon enough, as the museum and the art world continue to evolve.²¹ Departments need to keep talking to one another about how to handle these shifts, and museum directors need to take charge by allocating both resources and values where it is needed most. Despite all this good work being produced by these educators as it pertains to disability, I do believe that there is still room within these New York-based museums for more creative implementations of disability, especially through curatorial departments.

Ultimately, discourses on education might be the new norm, but it is also the "norm" for the educational turn to leave disability out of the conversation. Perhaps it is time to disrupt what we might mean by "norm," given this is already the key project of disability studies. It is not that curators of social engagement or otherwise are not sympathetic or open-minded about disability, as seen through the work of Allison Agsten and Sarah Schultz, but they are generally reactive rather than pro-active, or disability is put on the backburner. The educational turn professes to focus on social transformation, but artists like Helguera call out the difference between actual education and abstract education, suggesting that while many curators are taking on education-based activities and programming in order to meet the needs of their artists and their publics, they might not have the chops to do it well. Curators would do well to collaborate more effectively with educators, particularly educators like Krantz, Linzer, and Rosenberg, who work very hard and very successfully with disabled artists and communities to great critical acclaim.

Indeed, positions like the ones that Agsten and Schultz occupy have the most potential for engaging with disabled visitors and artists most frequently and dynamically, and they need to take advantage of the unique positions they occupy, at the exciting intersection of two fields that have traditionally been very compartmentalized from one another. If museums like the Hammer and the Walker (and the Directors who work for them) are already progressive and forward-thinking, as demonstrated by the instigation and creation of these positions in the first place, then surely they would also welcome and embrace a closer critical examination and experimentation with disability, and how disability might be considered as a multi-disciplinary programming opportunity, rather than a flat, narrow category that can only ever be addressed by a visitor services department. Despite the fact that there is still a division between curators who work in ostensibly authentic models of social engagement, and educators who work with disabled audiences within what I like to think as more "authentic" work within the discourse of the educational turn, it is the curator of public engagement who offers the most opportunity for bridging these two realms, and I remain very hopeful that one or several of these museums will take the lead, and see how it might be possible for not only one individual, but (more realistically in terms of time and money) a whole department, can focus on a genuine confluence of curating, educating, access, public engagement, and visitor services. Helguera says that, "Instead of critiquing the current system, you have to

make a new system that will render the previous system superfluous or irrelevant [...] we need to build institutions, we need to be institutional.”²² Building new systems would certainly move us beyond mere disability tokenism, and widen the scope of social engagement even further.

Notes

1 Irit Rogoff. 2008. “Turning,” *e-flux journal*, Journal #0, Volume 11. Accessed 8.20.2014. <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/turning/>

2 Kaija Kaitavuori, introduction to *It's all Mediating: Outlining and Incorporating the Roles of Curating and Education in the Exhibition Context*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Newcastle upon Tyne, 2013.

3 Carmen Mörsch, “Alliances for Unlearning: On the Possibility of Future Collaborations Between Gallery Education and Institutions of Critique,” *Afterall: A Journal of Art, Context, and Enquiry*, Issue 26 (Spring 2011), pp. 5-13.

4 Kaija Kaitavuori, introduction to *It's all Mediating: Outlining and Incorporating the Roles of Curating and Education in the Exhibition Context*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Newcastle upon Tyne, 2013.

5 Pablo Helguera. “Bad Education: Helen Reed interviews Pablo Helguera” in *The Pedagogical Impulse: The Living Archive*. Accessed 8.20.2014. <http://thepedagogicalimpulse.com/a-bad-education-helen-reed-interviews-pablo-helguera/>

6 Ibid.

7 Carmen Mörsch, “Alliances for Unlearning: On the Possibility of Future Collaborations Between Gallery Education and Institutions of Critique,” *Afterall: A Journal of Art, Context, and Enquiry*, Issue 26 (Spring 2011), pp. 5-13.

8 Nato Thompson, 2012. “Living as Form,” *Living As Form: Socially Engaged Art from 1991-2011*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, Creative Time Books, 21.

9 Interview with Francesca Rosenberg conducted by Amanda Cachia, 30 July and 7 August 2014.

10 <http://www.moma.org/meetme/>

11 Interview with Danielle Linzer conducted by Amanda Cachia, 30 July and 7 August 2014.

12 <http://whitney.org/Education/Access/Vlogs>

13 Interview with Georgia Krantz conducted by Amanda Cachia, 30 July and 8 August 2014.

14 Georgia Krantz, “Leveling the Participatory Field: the Mind’s Eye Program at the Guggenheim Museum” in *Disability Studies Quarterly*, Volume 33, No. 3 (2013). Accessed 8.20.14. <http://dsq-sds.org/article/view/3738/3277>

15 <http://www.guggenheim.org/video/the-touchy-subject> and <http://blogs.guggenheim.org/checklist/how-do-you-see-a-museum-with-your-eyes-closed/>

16 Pablo Helguera. “Bad Education: Helen Reed interviews Pablo Helguera” in *The Pedagogical Impulse: The Living Archive*. Accessed 8.20.2014. <http://thepedagogicalimpulse.com/a-bad-education-helen-reed-interviews-pablo-helguera/>

17 Interview with Allison Agsten conducted by Amanda Cachia, 12 August 2014.

18 For a more detailed report on the work achieved by Agsten, view this report: http://machineproject.com/files/pdf/Machine_Project_Public_Engagement_Artist_in_Residence_Report_compressed.pdf

19 Interview with Sarah Schultz conducted by Amanda Cachia, Saturday 16 August 2014.

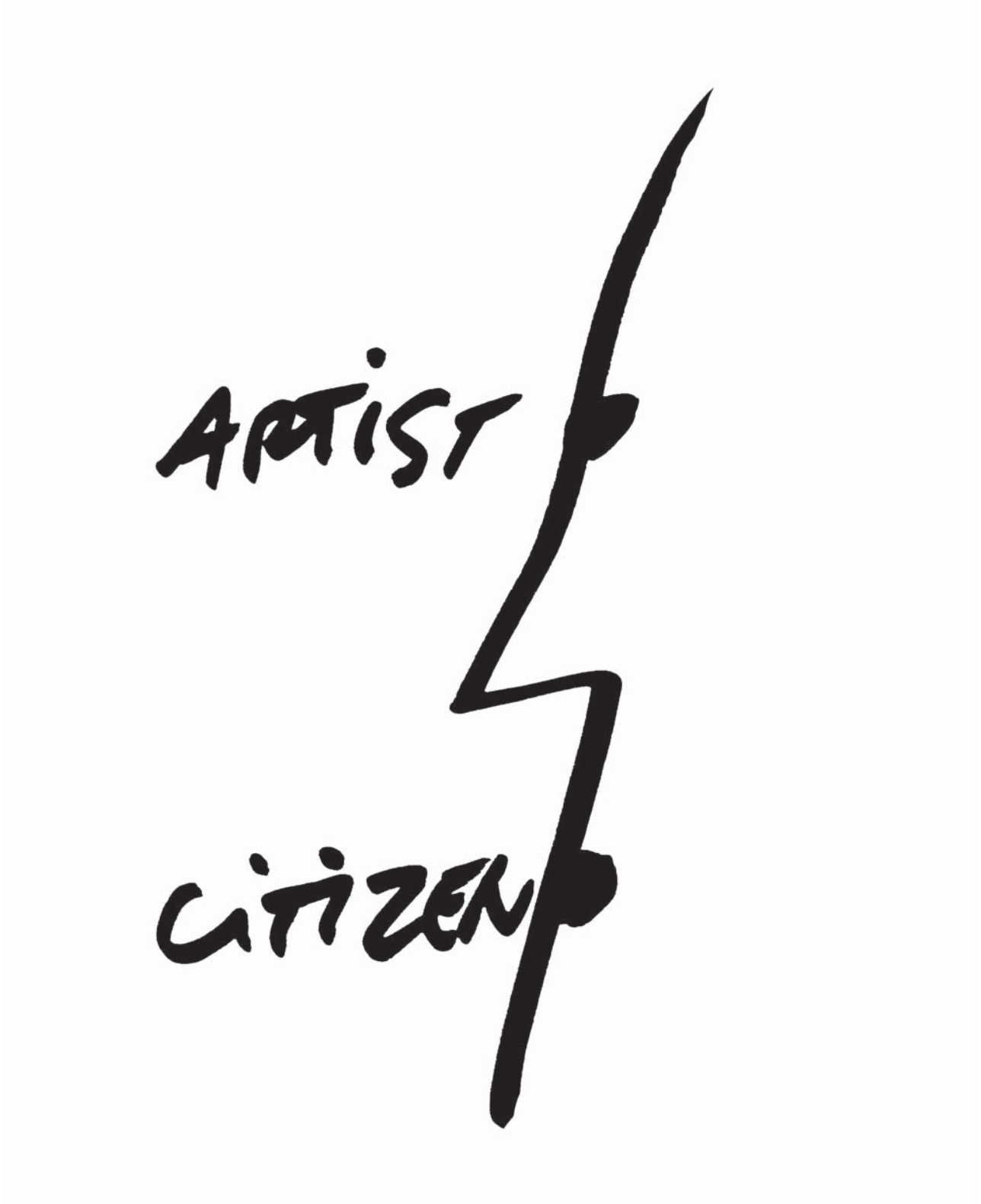
20 <http://www.walkerart.org/openfield/>

21 Kaija Kaitavuori, introduction to *It's all Mediating: Outlining and Incorporating the Roles of Curating and Education in the Exhibition Context*. Cambridge Scholars

Publishing, Newcastle upon Tyne, 2013.

22 Pablo Helguera. "Bad Education: Helen Reed interviews Pablo Helguera" in *The Pedagogical Impulse: The Living Archive*. Accessed 8.20.2014. <http://thepedagogicalimpulse.com/a-bad-education-helen-reed-interviews-pablo-helguera/>

Amanda Cachia is an independent curator from Sydney, Australia and is currently completing her PhD on the intersection of disability and contemporary art, in Art History, Theory & Criticism at the University of California, San Diego. She is the 2014 recipient of the Irving K. Zola Award for Emerging Scholars in Disability Studies, issued by the Society for Disability Studies (SDS). Cachia completed her second Masters degree in Visual & Critical Studies at the California College of the Arts (CCA) in San Francisco in 2012, and received her first Masters in Creative Curating from Goldsmiths College, University of London in 2001. Cachia held the position Director/Curator of the Dunlop Art Gallery in Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada from 2007-2010, and has curated approximately 30 exhibitions over the last ten years in various cities across the USA, England, Australia and Canada. Her critical writing has been published in numerous exhibition catalogues and online art journals including *Canadian Art* and *Art Monthly Australia*, and peer-reviewed academic journals such as *Canadian Journal of Disability Studies*, *Disability Studies Quarterly*, *Journal of Visual Art Practice* and *Museums and Social Issues: A Journal of Reflective Discourse*. Forthcoming publications include articles in issues of *The Review of Disability Studies: An International Journal*, and *The Journal of Literary and Cultural Disability Studies*. Cachia is a dwarf activist and has been the Chair of the Dwarf Artists Coalition for the Little People of America (LPA) since 2007. She also serves on the College Art Association's (CAA) Committee on Diversity Practices (2014-2017). For more information, visit www.amandacachia.com



"Artist Citizen", 2008
Artwork by Dan Perjovschi

Lets Talk About Another Concept by WochenKlausur

The artists of WochenKlausur intervene in the social-political sector to effect long-term improvements in our coexistence. In setting feasible tasks, our group tries to establish sustainable alternatives with and for diverse communities. We elaborate possible ways of problem solving with cooperating communities on-site and negotiate with public authorities, companies, and potential project contributors. Invited by art institutions, we try to reach our goals within four to twelve weeks, depending on our different tasks.

Some years ago, when our artist group worked at the *Neue Galerie im Höhmannhaus* (municipal gallery in Augsburg, Germany), one visitor dropped in several times. He watched us working, took pictures of our weekly working scheduled pinned on the wall, and always repeated the same questions:

"What is the aim of your activities; who are the people you are always talking to on the phone; what do you do at the gallery if there are no visitors; what is left to exhibit when you are gone; what are you really doing here and, first of all, why don't supplies placed on your desks more office-like?"

Our answers never seemed to satisfy his curiosity: *"We want to connect the locally based competences for water protection with international development cooperation organizations for a long-term collaboration. Therefore we are calling potential supporters to request meetings. Even if there are no visitors present, we of course continue with our tasks and will hopefully leave a structure behind that exists for a longer period."* But - to be honest - we had no idea how to answer his question concerning our failed arrangement of office supplies.

Since we set up our temporary offices in the exhibition spaces of museums or art institutions, we get in touch with the public. It has been intended as one of our working principles to meet the audience during the project phase whenever possible. One of us always finds time to talk with interested visitors, and, in very few cases, it happened that we have involved a visitor in our project. Meanwhile, we also schedule and announce specific times for public meetings during our residencies.

Back to the curious visitor mentioned above. After more visits and lots of talks it finally turned out that he thought we were pretending or rather performing office work. Our real office and supplies were seen as a stage and stage props, as if our real phone calls were just feigned as well as our computer work or the meetings. So when we thought back to our answers, we finally understood his confusion. We did not discern the core of the questions. If not performing, if not leaving an art object - why should it be art? If actually dealing with reality - why then should it be art?



Augsburg office

This was in 2007, fourteen years and twenty-five projects after WochenKlausur those 21 years we took part in many panels, seminars, workshops, and other kinds of public programmes. But – just as other artists and collectives who work in similar fields - we are still confronted with this central aspect of our work. Until today people are highly interested in the question; why do we insist in declaring our work as art?

In the first years of our group erable skepticism towards our concept of art: how to agree with an art without the least reference to aesthetics, how to classify it within the discourse related to art, how to review it, how to appraise its value?

The first project started 1993 when the artist Wolfgang Zinggl - who also worked as an art critic for a weekly newspaper - criticized an exhibition at the Viennese contemporary art institution *Secession*. Some objects of the show claimed to address "social issues," and Zinggl asked if art could not also work as a tool the capability of which lies in improving certain circumstances in society. In response to this, the director of the *Secession* offered to demonstrate his idea through an example at his institution. Zinggl built a team of eight artists; the group turned the exhibition space into an office and decided to work on a local problem. Through this first WochenKlausur project a basic system was set up to provide homeless people in Vienna with medical care out of a mobile clinic. It was possible to get a van through sponsoring and to refurbish it into a medical office. The artist group obtained the commitment of a relief organization to take over the maintenance of the van and the costs for the drivers. A covenant from the city councilor for health to pay for the doctor's salaries was needed but arduous to negotiate. Asking a befriended journalist to pretend to write an article about this project, the group succeeded in pushing the authorities into their responsibility. The city councilor – eager to avoid bad press - told the journalist he would agree to employ the doctors. The article was never published, but the service remains on duty to the present day. The mobile clinic has become a permanent institution in the city and the doctors treat more than 700 people each month.



Wien '93 bus

The "effrontery" to call such projects art has set a discourse within the local art scene, which vehemently defended the convention of art as a once-and-for-all determined concept with no option of such a change. In the early nineties, art institutions that offered public programmes to debate movements and theories in art were much more the exception than the standard like it is nowadays. But nevertheless some started to react by inviting WochenKlausur for lectures and public panels to question our intentions and the role of artists. Of course, we also have discussed the criticism within our group to challenge our own statements and to review our identity as artists.

Although conventional art history wants to conceive of us to the contrary - from the moment the term "art" (ars) emerged it has been used to describe so many different concepts, meanings, capabilities, and objects that it is not possible to find a common denominator featuring "Art."

Strictly speaking, the single word "art" was used until the 15th century without any reference to aesthetics. Proven through a complaint written in a letter, Leonardo da Vinci himself was not allowed to label himself as an artist. Scientists, philosophers, or musicians, as we call them today, had to study the seven "artes liberales" based on written methodologies. They were allowed to use the title artist and had therefore a relatively high position in society. Not so for the painters - as handymen or craftspeople trained in craft guilds, their social status was not comparable to that of artists.

Since the systems that have determined what is art and who is an artist has itself been culturally constructed, it is nearly a truism to say that the concepts of art and artworks have been as various as the cultures of their origins and as diverse as the changing centuries and decades.

Art has had different meanings and fulfilled many functions. It has served as an instrument to demonstrate power, it has satisfied allures and satiated the hunger for knowledge as well as for possession. It can define identity and can serve as an object of financial speculation or as a mirror for society. It can transmit feelings

and can create different realities. And it can also work as an instrument to improve certain circumstances in everyday life without any "aesthetic bonus."

In 1997, WochenKlausur was invited by a regional art festival in Upper Austria to work on an eight-week project in the small town of Ottensheim. We decided to devote our project to the topic of community development.

Ottensheim has some 4,000 residents. In order to familiarize ourselves with the residents' concerns and wishes for their communities, we initially sent out questionnaires to all households and talked to the people in the local taverns and on the main square. We did the same with the town councilors and the mayor. Conversations with them were recorded to support later demands, so that specific measures could be taken.

We developed a framework for public participation, and together with the interested we founded three interest groups: one for revitalizing the town's historic centre, one for promoting the social integration of older residents, and a third representing the interests of youths between the ages of ten and fourteen.

The young people, for example, told us that they had already tried for a long time to get permission to erect a skateboard ramp but without success. So, together with the new Youth Interest Group, we built a ramp - the materials required were sponsored by local businesses - and positioned it right in the middle of town. The moment the ramp was finished and placed on the main square, the mayor promised a long-term permit only if we agreed to remove it to another place selected in concert with the youngsters.

A total of fifteen interest group meetings were organized, and we invited architects, urban planners, landscape planners, and social workers to contribute ideas, information and professional experience. At the project's conclusion, WochenKlausur presented the town council with a catalog of development measures intended to serve as a basis for discussion regarding the community's future. The interest groups continued to meet, discuss and realize their wishes for the community. Even a new political party called *Pro-Ottensheim* established itself during the project. In each election since, this party has put the mayor in office.



Ottensheim skater ramp construction

When we talked with the people who came as interested art festival visitors, some asked for an outcome of our project they learned to identify as an artwork. Mostly their main interest was not so much in our project's goal and in the methods or strategies we had chosen to pursue, but in searching for the result: an object, a video, a performance. At the end, some decided that the skater ramp formed the artistic outcome of our intervention – as an artwork made by the teenage kids of Ottensheim. By trying to clarify this misinterpretation, our work was again misunderstood. A vocabulary relevant for this kind of art had not yet been established, so the response to our project was: "It might be social work."

Sure. For many special tasks there are specialists: surgeons to perform surgeries, firefighters to extinguish fires, social workers to help those in need. But in some cases, tasks can be achieved more easily in a more unorthodox way by people who are not part of the respective system. Like artists who could – just by acting as artists – more easily skip hurdles of bureaucratic systems than the concerned professional staff. Through this strategy, they of course do not turn into social workers per se but could create new jobs for them.

Two years ago the Protestant parish in Kassel (Germany) asked us to help them deal with struggles at the square in front of their church. For years, the place has been taken over by a drug and alcohol scene because it has been relatively secure and close to all the relevant medical and social facilities. This community had a bad reputation, especially due to the local press that simply fueled unjustified fears. Nevertheless, the neighborhood as well as the parish members felt threatened and wanted to banish the drug scene from the square.

In a first step we conducted more than ninety interviews with representatives of all conflict parties: the police, the office of public order, the parish members, the neighbourhood, the city council and administration, the medical and social institutions, and of course the drug users.

In accordance with the results of the interviews, we suggested creating a position for two social workers, who would act as multiply aligned mediators. Our intention was to institute a long-term position for these two social workers. This was only possible through convincing the city councilors and the church to employ them. To attract the interest of the residents and public, WochenKlausur built a small but eye-catching garden house right in the centre of Lutherplatz and invited representatives of the church, the drug scene, the social facilities, the resident cultural initiative, the police, and the city government for a series of talks.

In the end, the city of Kassel and the Protestant church agreed to employ the intermediate social worker together, who has been on duty since spring 2013.

Not for a single project has WochenKlausur taken over the duties of social work. But if we intend to work in the social field, we always make sure to involve social workers in the project's process; if we work with schools, we integrate students, parents, pedagogues, and teachers, but will not take their jobs. At one point we might decide to work for better food, yet we will not turn into chefs. Promised.

While the confusion between the features of socially engaged artists and social workers has been in the process of sorting itself out, a new criticism has jumped in to rescue art from being "downgraded to ordinariness": the neoliberal aspect of art was finally identified in community or socially engaged art.



Kassel cabin

Artists engaged in the social field who are teaming up with civil society are often suspected of undermining the welfare state in overtaking the social agendas of the public sector and replacing them through art projects. “The good ones became the bad because of beautifying capitalism” – so an accusation.

What are the social agendas of the public sector, what should a civil society care for, and what social improvements could be put into effect by artists?

Social agendas are laid down by the respective constitutions, even though the welfare states more and more circumvent their principles at the costs of social justice. What civil society could do is not only protest but also take action, and artists could equally use the capital of art to set social improvements in motion.

Of course, socially engaged artists often are supposed to be instrumentalized. Sure, some do not really care about the implications their work provokes. However, most of the community art practitioners or socially engaged artists plan and design their efforts and undertakings very consciously: their collaborations with the public sector and other partners, the contextual conditions, and the long-term impacts of their results.

If there is no chance to urge the public sector to overtake the complete financial support for our initiated projects, we try to find alternatives and cooperate with already existing organizations from the private sector or take money from private sponsors. Is this pacifying the consciousness of exploiting capitalists?

In 1999, WochenKlausur was invited to the *Venice Biennale*. We there wanted to make use of the numerous visitors. We wanted to get as much attention as possible, and we collected money for school classes we aimed to establish for Kosovo Albanian teenage refugees. These children found shelter in a few towns in Macedonia but had no access to schooling since the war. School furniture was provided by the Vienna City School Board. Publishers in Italy assisted with teaching materials, the University of Vienna sponsored twenty computers, and for transports we were able to win over Caritas, the relief organization.

Nevertheless we also had to raise money for teachers' Therefore, we asked different organizations, companies, and private individuals for donations. They contributed a total of almost 50,000 Euros, and we were able to increase this sum significantly by holding a raffle in the Austrian pavilion: for twenty Euros visitors could choose from an array of surprise bags containing prizes sponsored by a variety of Austrian and Italian companies.

Language courses were eventually organized and administered in cooperation with the Macedonian civil rights organization ADI (Association for Democratic Initiatives). One of their staff members was provided with a van by the Austrian film production company PPM to visit all of the schools regularly and deliver the necessary materials. ADI also hired the teachers, who offered courses in English, German, Italian, and French. Additionally, Biennale visitor Jeannette Armer, a teacher from Cambridge, spontaneously agreed to teach on a volunteer basis for an entire year.

Upon completing a course, each participant received an official diploma. As a civil rights organization involved in training for NGOs, ADI was allowed by government authorities to award these certificates.

Funding was sufficient to operate the language schools for three years. At the end of 2000, the classes in Macedonia were discontinued, because the refugee families had returned to Kosovo. Four classes were transferred to Kosovo and ran there for another year.



Venice bags

The bigger share of financial support came from the private sector. Did we therefore promote capitalism? Sure, we would have much more appreciated that the European Union had taken care of this "side effect" of the war. But everyone knows the endless bureaucratic ways of applying for EU funding. Even for clever artists such hurdles are too high. At least to some of their officials we had sent all the information about the project.

In any case, public responsibility for social affairs has never meant to discharge individuals from socially engaging themselves.

In a way, WochenKlausur and the educational turn grew up together; both are in their early twenties now. And in a certain way we see our work as fitting quite well into the development of curatorial practices of the past two decades.

Although we were never asked to develop an event for a public program explicitly, we were invited to participate in artists talks, workshops, or similar events quite often. And actually we see an educational aspect in each of our projects. The encounters with the visitors do not only foster an exchange of knowledge. As a step to achieve the tasks we set ourselves, we always invite people from diverse institutions, organizations, and public authorities to our temporary offices situated within the inviting museums or galleries to talk with them, to learn more about local backgrounds and from their knowledge. In return, they get involved not only in debates about social or environmental issues but also in an art discourse. Of course, most of those meetings are not public, but these discussions engage people in a discourse with which they would usually not get in touch.

However, in some cases we left the space that we were temporarily given by the inviting art institution to others. We wanted to give them an opportunity to share their knowledge or their interests with the public.

The Dunkers Kulturhus in Helsingborg, Sweden, invited WochenKlausur to participate in the exhibition *The Bourgeois Show – Social Structures in Urban Space* with an intervention. This show focused on the dominance of the bourgeoisie in Helsingborg's cultural life, which leaves few opportunities for the wide diversity of cultural trends outside of the bourgeois norm to interact with the public.

In order to increase awareness of this issue and to give neglected interest groups in the region a chance to attract public attention, WochenKlausur erected a house using euro-pallets in front of the Kulturhus as a presentation and platform for debate. We then invited a wide variety of groups, ranging from sport clubs to animal rights activists. They were asked to use this public platform for a week to present themselves, discuss their agendas with visitors, and attract new members. Each week began with a press evening, at which the organizations and groups discussed their intentions with guests from politics, culture, and the media.

Examples:

- *Curious about UFOs?* The organization UFO Sweden is working on the world's largest archive of observation reports involving unexplained, extraordinary phenomena. More than 500 people per year report such experiences. The association UFO Sweden processes the reports critically while refraining from any interpretation.
- *Skatehus in Helsingborg:* The skater organization Hjukultur presented films and provided information about the organization and its effort to create a skater house in Helsingborg.
- *How come the girls put all their energy into soccer?* The successful Helsingborg women's soccer team Statten IF presented its athletic achievements and its ambitious social projects involving work with girls and women.

Although the intervention was temporary, in the course of the events new cooperations were arranged between some of the groups and Dunkers Kulturhus. Thus the Kulturhus also benefited from the series and learned more about new segments of the public.



Helsingborg europallett house

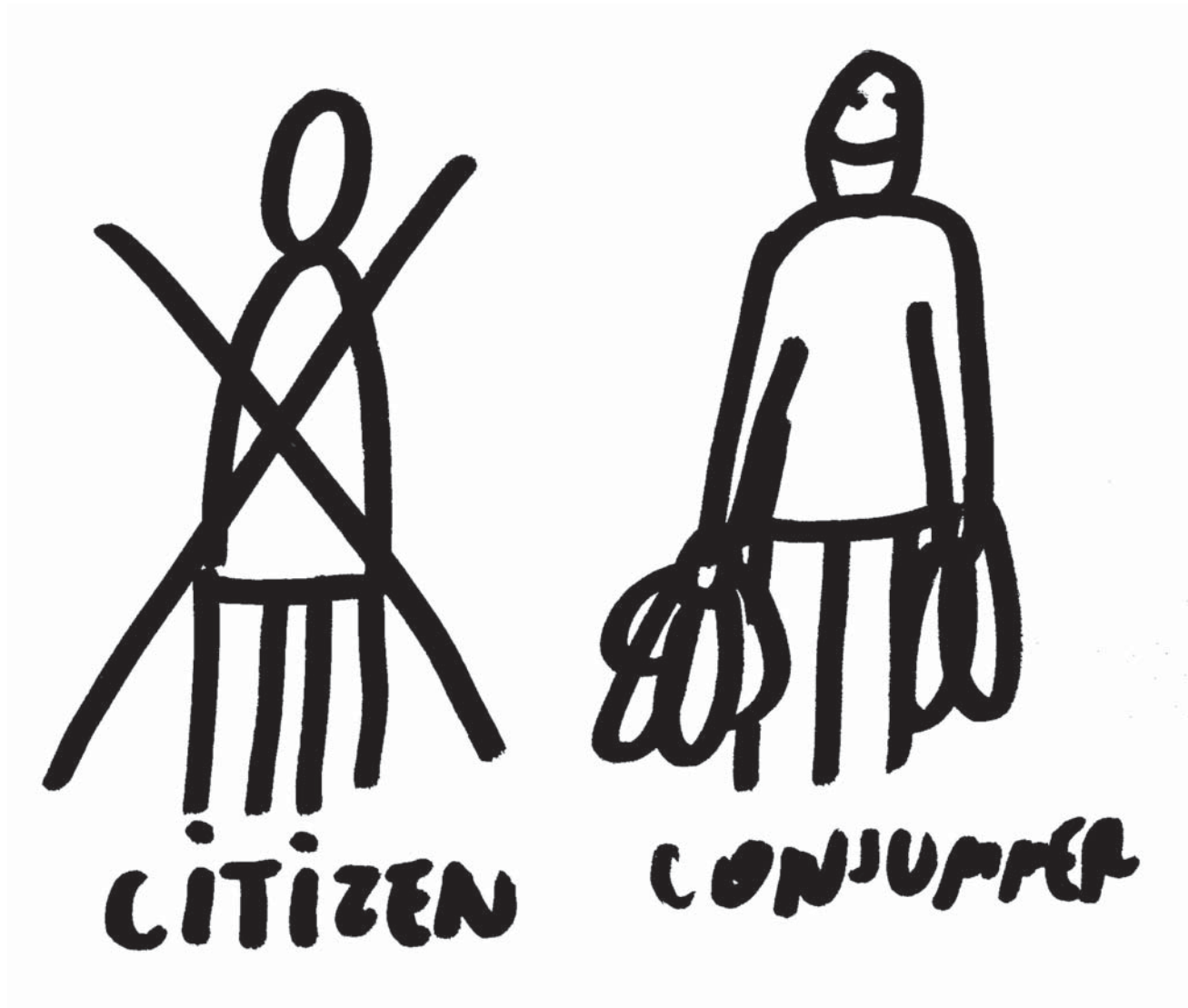
Meanwhile, we have implemented thirty-nine projects. Some of the facilities or services we initiated are still in operation, others were running for some years and discontinued because they were not needed any more, or were stopped because the funding was canceled.

www.wochenklausur.at

*Since 1993 and on invitation from different art institutions, the artist group **WochenKlausur** develops concrete proposals aimed at small, but nevertheless effective improvements to socio-political deficiencies.*

Executing projects in a restricted time-frame – from four up to twelve weeks - the group has so far completed 39 projects, in collaboration with renowned institutions such as the Secession/Vienna, Smart Museum/Chicago, The Israeli Center for Digital Art/Holon and CCA/Glasgow. Notable projects include the creation of a mobile medical care clinic for homeless people in Vienna, Secession 1993; founding an agency for hands-on learning projects in Japanese schools, Museum City Project, Fukuoka 2000; bringing residents of the native community of Kivalina together with international experts to develop and implement solutions for site-specific environmental and economic problems, Alaska Design Forum, Kivalina 2012.

For further information see: www.wochenklausur.at



"Citizen-Consumer", 2004

Artwork by Dan Perjovschi

Dan Perjovschi, born 1961, lives and works in Bucharest and Sibiu, Romania.

His solo exhibitions include *Unframed* at Kiasma Helsinki 2013, *News from the Island* at Reykjavik Art Museum in 2012, *Not over* at MACRO Rome in 2011, *Late News* at Royal Ontario Museum Toronto in 2010, *What Happen to US?* at MoMA New York and *I am not Exotic I am Exhausted* at Kunsthalle Basel in 2007, *The Room Drawing* at Tate Modern London, *On the Other Hand* at Portikus Frankfurt and *First of May* at Moderna Museet Stockholm in 2006 and *Naked Drawings* at Ludwig Museum Cologne in 2005.

He participates at group shows like *Sao Paolo Biennial 2014*, *Paris Triennial 2012*, *Dublin Contemporary* in 2011, *Lyon Biennial* in 2009, the *Sydney Biennial* and *Fifth Floor* at Tate Liverpool in 2008, *The Magelanic Cloud* at Pompidou Paris, the *52nd Venice Biennial* and the *Moscow Biennial* in 2007 and the *9th Istanbul Biennial* in 2005

Perjovschi received George Maciunas Prize in 2004 and ECF Princess Margriet Award in 2013 (with Lia Perjovschi).

Building, Dismantling: Community Orientations and Counterpublic Art in Hong Kong

by Yet Chor Sunshine Wong

Underweight

While waiting for the MTR, there are clear place markers that let you know where to stand so as not to obstruct those who are trying to leave the train. Once you shuffle in, signs abound telling you not to eat, drink, or smoke, to give up your seat to those who need it more than you, and to aim higher: improve your English, study abroad, lose weight, invest in property. At your destination, a looped recording (trilingual, in the local Cantonese as well as in Mandarin and English) accompanies your escalator trip back to street level: stand on the right, watch where you're going, don't just look at your mobile phone. Finally, one last piece of audio instruction as you exit: do not patronise hawkers or give money to beggars. This one I only heard at specific stations.

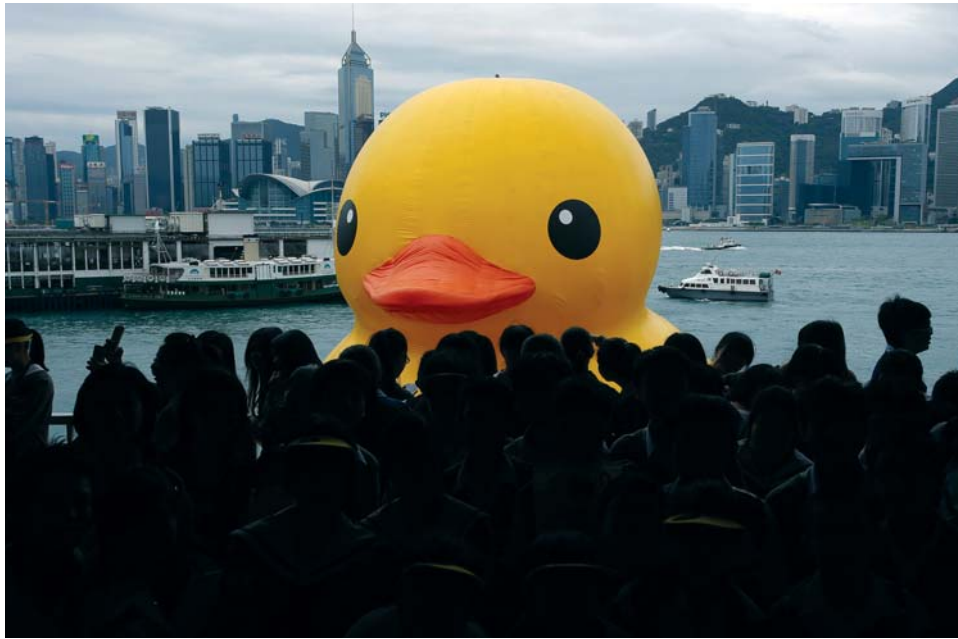


MTR place markers. Courtesy of Logatfer's Travelogue, http://logatfer.files.wordpress.com/2012/07/dsc_00672.jpg

As an overseas Hong Konger, my visits back are always marked by a difficult struggle for a sense of belonging. On my most recent trip, the city was in the midst of a similar struggle—but on a much more urgent, fundamental scale. In June 2014, over 800,000 people voted in an unofficial referendum for universal suffrage. Preparations were being made for the next stage in the fight for Hong Kong's long-deferred political autonomy: a week-long classroom strike was to take place in

September 2014 which, at the time of writing, has culminated with a three-day protest that has spread throughout the city. All the while, the official emphasis on order and consumption has become ever more palpable and oppressive. The rise of social awareness, particularly amongst the “post-80s” and “post-90s,”¹ is a change that many of my parents’ class and generation (educated professionals, born shortly after WWII) find unsettling. This is condescendingly evident in the label *mei gau ching* given to Joshua Wong Chi-Fung, the 17-year-old spokesperson of the Scholarism² movement: meaning “underweight,” it is a colloquialism for being underage. When pro-Beijing Legislative Council (Legco) member Chiang Lai-Wan belittles him on live television (“How am I supposed to debate with a *mei gau ching*?”), and government-backed bodies like the Hong Kong Youth Association are paying people off to take part in anti-civil disobedience demonstrations,³ the dominance of state power—be it through such examples of arrogant posturing or desperate acts of self-preservation—is constantly being reinforced. And the locus of this power is found some 2,000 miles away in Beijing, undermining Deng Xiaoping’s promise of “one country, two systems.”

In the face of elusive self-governance, skyrocketing property prices, and reckless urban encroachment, a more basic need for subjective and physical spaces is being articulated. The crowded cityscape spills over with chain stores and franchises, including elite educational institutions such as the Savannah College of Art and Design, which opened its Hong Kong campus in 2009 at the renovated former North Kowloon Magistracy Building, charging upwards of US\$30,000 in fees per year. Under communist China’s twenty-first century imperative to outdo capitalism at its own game, Hong Kongers have had to contend with an impossibly free, state-supported market. So, what are the alternatives? Can other possibilities survive and where might they be found? Over the last decade, a disparate group of artists have been looking for ways to extend their practices into the social, the political, and the activist in order to create and/or retrieve space for “new imaginings.”⁴ Though the approaches are, of course, multiple and varied, I would like to focus particularly on three different projects in Hong Kong that have responded to rapidly disappearing notions of belonging, intimacy, and neighbourliness. Here, I would like to express my gratitude to everyone—artists, friends, strangers—who took the time to share their thoughts with me. In many ways, I felt I was similarly “encroaching” upon their deeply rooted practices from the perspective of a semi-outsider. One of the hardest lessons to learn from the process was the importance of a lived understanding for an analysis that would do these art practices justice. What I was able to achieve in my short research trip was merely to map out, rather imprecisely, some contours of a community-oriented art that differs entirely from the dominant Euro-American discourse.



Florentijn Hofman, *Rubber Duck*, 2013. Photograph by Adam Taylor. Courtesy of Business insider, http://static3.businessinsider.com/image/5193a7ab6bb3f7c4770000a-3000-1831/ap238968524263_3.jpg

Defending place, creating space

A recent study by Vivian Ting Wing-Yan and Emma Watts demonstrates the overwhelming influence of the private art market in the way visual art is equated to wealth and spectacle⁵. Shopping malls and luxury brands often collaborate with artists, using their work as a means of enhancing the shopping experience. With over 150 private galleries and only seven public museums—compared to the ratio of one to one in the UK—the commercial art world has come to define the viewing habits of the general public in Hong Kong.⁶ Visual art is seen to bear no serious cultural responsibility and is purely a form of entertainment.⁷ Emerging from this debilitating consumerism are initiatives like *Woofers Ten*, *People's Pitch*, and *Ping Che Village School Festival*, all of which are conscious attempts at delineating a meaningful socio-political role for art in an increasingly oppressive hyper capitalist landscape.

1. *Woofers Ten*

Located on Shanghai Street in the district of Yau Ma Tei is a small, ground-floor storefront run by the Hong Kong Arts Development Council (HKADC). Since 1999, the space has been a dedicated testing ground for different types of artistic practice, with projects generally running on a two- or four-year basis. Its current form as *Woofers Ten* (“activation / regeneration space,” an ironic play on the Urban Renewal Authority’s promise to “regenerate” poorer areas) has been around for almost five years, though HKADC stopped funding the operation in September 2013.

In its early days, the ten founding members were mainly concerned with two questions: 1) how to run an “open-door space”, and 2) how to use art to think and do politics.⁸ During the first ten years of HKADC’s stewardship, there were a number of attempts at turning the storefront into an exhibition space, none of which explicitly dealt with questions of location. As a densely populated grassroots neighbourhood, Yau Ma Tei is home to many long-term residents (*kai fong*) as well as tradespeople who specialise primarily in mechanics and carpentry. Rarely did the contemporary art objects on display pique the interest of passers-by—nor was that,

to be fair, the intention of those who were in charge of the space. The turning point came in the two years leading up to the start of *Woofers Ten* in 2009, when some of the loudest, most visible mobilisations against the destruction of historic, public, and rural sites took place. Artists played a prominent role in drawing attention to the demolition of the Star Ferry pier in Central (2006-7), as well as to the commercial monopolisation of the public space in front of the Times Square shopping centre in Causeway Bay (2008).



The Star Ferry protesters occupy the adjacent Queen's Pier, which was also due to be demolished. Photo by Thirteen Wong Sap-Sam. Courtesy of http://le914.blogspot.co.uk/2007/07/blog-post_29.html

As members have come and left the collective over the last five years, their projects have also transitioned from an artist-led directive to a community-led one. "[At first,] there would be an [artistic] idea that the *kai fong* (neighbours / local residents) could only accept. In the past year, our roles have begun to reverse; the *kai fong* come up with the ideas and [it's our turn to] accept them," current *Woofers Ten* artist Vangi Fong Wan-Chi notes.⁹ Yet her colleague Roland Ip Ho-Lun offers a caveat: "Sometimes you have to say no, because there is a limit to the openness." From earlier projects like *Prize prize prize* (shop owners and residents nominate different local traders for a special award, for which the artists make bespoke trophies) to the recent weekly *kai fong* meetings, the trajectory betrays the desire for the initiative to become firmly anchored within the area. Or to "belong" and "grow roots," as both artists affirm. Though most of the original founders have moved on, the three remaining members adamantly insist on staying in Yau Ma Tei, "because it will be something else entirely if we move."¹⁰ Beyond matters of site-specificity, the refusal to leave is also aimed at shedding light on HKADC's mismanagement of resources, particularly that of vacant units; with one just a few floors above *Woofers Ten* and another in a residential high-rise nearby, it is a disconcerting realisation as small art organisations are often forced into closure due to "a lack of resources." As support for these initiatives continues to wane, artists are left to deal with a hugely unaffordable and uniform environment that is hostile to the slow cultivation of alternative ideas.



A *kai fong* meeting at Woofer Ten.
Photo by the author)

2. People's Pitch

Contrary to *Woofer Ten's* immersive investigation of a community that extends over a number of years, artist Him Lo's *People's Pitch* focuses on districts earmarked for "urban renewal" by temporarily occupying a street for a game of football. The first match took place as part of Free Space Festival, an event that fell under a larger, long-term public programme for the West Kowloon Cultural District (WKCD). In reference to the festival's namesake, participating artists like Lo were encouraged to think about the significance of "free space" and activities related to it. Since the WKCD was first put forward in 1998, the government-proposed project has been wrought with controversies, including the environmental cost (due to land reclamation), the focus on consumer experience over cultural development, and the US\$8.5 billion price tag.¹¹ These concerns, amongst others, have been furiously and repeatedly challenged.

As such, the first *People's Pitch* set within the framework of Free Space 2012 was more of a direct response to the idea behind the festival, i.e. to figuring out what kind of "space" remained open to play and autonomy in an area like West Kowloon. "When I came up with the idea [of *People's Pitch*] and put out a call online, the response exceeded my expectation. Many players either work in the cultural sector or are interested in critically understanding the impact of urban development,"¹² says Lo. Having formed a core group, they then continued to meet at different locations, including Kwun Tong district's Yan On Lane in August 2013. The event was prefaced by a few informal games that varied in the number of players, even including intimate one-a-side matches. As Yan On Lane, like many other neighbourhoods, succumbs to urban encroachment, members of *People's Pitch* have attempted to use the planning process of a football match to think through the rapid disappearance of organic, spontaneous forms of playing and living. Though the games take on a quality of an "urban ambush," they in fact demonstrate quite literally the neighbourhood's distinct sense of place: who sells football jerseys or t-shirts? Where can we send them for printing? And which streets are tucked away from traffic? For Lo, these investigations—along with the resulting conversations between themselves and the *kai fong*—constitute a process that paral-

lels making art: "There is a search, a transformation, and a form. [You see a transition] from content to materialisation, which can all be found in art."¹³



A *People's Pitch* match in Kwun Tong's Yan On Lane, August 2013. Photo by Him Lo. Courtesy of Him Lo.)

Aside from the socio-political urgency that has affected many art practitioners like Lo is what he calls the "Western," "imported," and "colonial" education of Hong Kong art schools: "I want to abandon my artistic learning. It's not because I don't want to do art; it's more of an undoing." The struggle against the encroachment of physical space turns out, in Lo's case, to be simultaneously the struggle against the encroachment of formal learning and artistic production. Confronted by an impossible economic landscape and broken promises of legislative autonomy, institutionalised authority is equally regarded with some scepticism. According to art critic Kurt Chan Yuk-Keung, Hong Kong "cannot rely on its status as a 'Special Autonomous Region' to garner special treatment from Beijing,"¹⁴ as the last seventeen years have proven. What many artists and, in the end, Hong Kongers are striving for now is a sense of "Hong Kong-ness"¹⁵ that is critical of what the city has become after the 1997 handover. Passed on from one system of dominance to another, the "handover" has turned out to be nothing short of "re-colonisation,"¹⁶ a process that has made the examination of the city's selfhood all the more urgent.

3. Ping Che Village School Festival

A large part of this evaluation entails locating the historical traces in an environment that is subjected to permanent change. Textural remnants of the past are rarely felt amidst cycles of demolition and construction, though small, isolated spaces are occasionally still left to pasture. In the outer reaches of northeast New

Territories, artist and geographer Sampson Wong Yu-Hin began a research project on ruins along with two colleagues, which aimed to extend beyond the masculine, “predatory” hunt for “ruin porn.” That decay is frequently beautified without contextual responsibility led Wong to question the ways in which he can engage with these places more meaningfully. “The reasons why there are ruins have to do with political economy: why ruins of certain kinds appear in particular cities and how they let us understand urban development through their traces,”¹⁷ Wong explains. As a group, the three co-founded EmptySCape, which would go on to organise the 2013 *Ping Che Village School Festival* in one of the last rural villages along the Hong Kong-Chinese borderland.

Its concept and structure both borrow heavily from the Echigo-Tsumari Triennial, for which Wong was a volunteer in 2012. Ostensibly an international art festival with what he calls a “complex” backstory, the first Triennial in 2000 took ten years to organise due to the lengthy period of trust-building with the residents. What was billed as a programme of “site-specific art” featuring art stars like Christian Boltanski and Yayoi Kusuma became, upon closer inspection, a strategy for attracting a global audience (and a much-needed influx of capital) to a forgotten corner of eastern Japan. Like the Niigata Prefecture, Ping Che was neglected as a marginal area of Hong Kong, though its sleepy, quiet way of life is now threatened by the prospect of regeneration. Witnessing first-hand how volunteers built and negotiated lasting relationships with the residents of Niigata Prefecture demonstrated to Wong the highly social and heteronomous infrastructure of production that both supports as well as enables the autonomous sphere of art. It is precisely in the “supporting publics”¹⁸ or “props” that performance scholar Shannon Jackson locates a potential for artistic action. By positing an aesthetics of “systemic procedures,” Jackson aims to demonstrate “their intimate and ever-shifting co-imbrication.”¹⁹ In other words, she erects a proverbial stage for the “support”—the frenzy happening in the wings, the staff, the innumerable planning meetings, etc.—to highlight its performative potentials, allowing for a renewed critique of systems that enable artistic labour (e.g. she discusses the maintenance art of Mierle Laderman-Ukeles). Wong and the co-organisers of *Ping Che Village School Festival*, however, are less concerned with the examination of systems than they are on the “supporting publics” themselves and the ways they are facilitated through art.

This goal may resemble that of the 1970s community arts movement in the UK, which sought to broaden the making of culture. In the wake of the political and subcultural radicality of the late 1960s, more and more artists began to question “the purpose of art and habitual modes of its production and reception,”²⁰ which led to collaborative experimentations with groups of people and a commitment to cultural democracy. Yet Ping Che is motivated by a more complex set of problems related to shared, embodied enactments of situated-ness that Wong describes as “a coming community”.

Conscious of his and his colleagues’ non-native status, the festival co-organisers were nonetheless immediately welcomed by the residents and encouraged to undertake anything that would bring visibility to the area. “As soon as a platform opens up, all kinds of people will want to enter, and for different reasons. They also become interested in the future of this place. These people from various social backgrounds then make up a temporary community.”²¹



Like the disused school that so captured Wong's imagination, the villagers had similarly been left to fend for themselves. The tiny building became an impetus for relationships and recall, for eliciting stories that would finally fall on listening ears. Over a few months' time, Wong and his colleagues became personally invested in the struggles of the area, attending Ping Che Alliance for "Saving Our Home" meetings as well as helping with their campaigns. This "grounded-ness," which Wong explicitly emphasises,²² translates into a balancing act of mutual generosity between organisers, artists, inhabitants, and visitors. With a plethora of workshops, site-specific sculptures, performances, and guided tours that spanned two weekends, months of preparatory work were needed. Everyone chipped in where they could; the fact that many villagers were tradespeople meant that they often helped with the realisation and installation of the works. The collaboration, conversations, assistance, and criticisms made up some of the most important "socially engaged" aspects of the project. Some villagers, for instance, were shocked by a few artists' apparent lack of "manual skills," while others had long talks with artists like Ah Hei, who spent a fortnight sculpting a school chair out of a rotten tree stump at the entrance of the school.

The Ping Che Village School Festival.
Photos by Sampson Wong Yu-Hin.
Courtesy of Sampson Wong Yu-Hin)



Ah Hei's chair, 2013. Photo by
Sampson Wong Yu-Hin. Courtesy of
Sampson Wong Yu-Hin)

The discussion of art and regeneration is rightly seen as a euphemism for gentrification in many urban contexts. But, as Wong asks, what about when art is employed as a means of “regenerating” peripheral, rural areas? Like the UK’s [Cit[ies] of Culture²³, Ping Che and Niigata Prefecture require an injection of pride and ownership; contrary to the British cities, however, these poor rural areas are seen by their respective governments as unwanted responsibilities that stand in the way of greater prosperity. To start with an artistic research project on ruins and end with a concrete question of art’s role in rural regeneration demonstrates art’s extradisciplinary contemporaneity, which has the uncanny ability to intervene in systems, to pose as another in order to harness what lies at its core. For the politically urgent context of Hong Kong, it specifically means challenging our diminishing right to define the spaces we live in.

A counterpublic art

“A community that questions its own legitimacy is legitimate.”²⁴

In describing the subsets of community structures found within the 1993 *Culture in Action* programme, art historian Miwon Kwon borrows the concept of an “unworked” community from philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy. She proposes that the optimum form of togetherness is one in which the links between people are always already contingent and stem more from a sense of “being-in-common” than the harmonious unity of “common beings.” Yet beyond the curatorial mandate of this particular art event, Kwon does not examine how a “community” comes to be or stays together. These questions are especially relevant for self-initiatives such as Woofer Ten and Ping Che Village School, which have different dynamics and *raison d’être* than commissioned projects of community art.

Literary critic and social theorist Michael Warner’s concept of *counterpublics* offer some crucial insight at this juncture. Its focus is on groups—or publics, in his words—that define themselves “by their tension with a larger public”: “Their participants are marked off from persons or citizens in general. Discussion within such a public is understood to contravene the rules obtaining in the world at large, being structured by alternative dispositions or protocols, making different assumptions about what can be said or what goes without saying.”²⁵

Of note here is Warner’s recognition of publics that function against normalising pressures. For Hong Kong, the “pressures” are generated by relentless urban encroachment and intensifying political anxiety. However, unlike Warner’s North American bias that posits a radically critical of democratic society, Hong Kongers are currently demanding for that very thing: for citizenship through voting, which includes a government that is legitimately elected by its people. I would therefore argue that counterpublics do not clearly “mark off” their identification with persons or citizens as Warner suggests, but rather refine and reclaim the fundamentals of personhood and citizenship through what he calls “alternative dispositions or protocols”.

Another key aspect of counterpublics is that it has a demographic of “indefinite strangers,”²⁶ i.e. their membership is open-ended, mutable, and dispersed throughout a network that defies closure. In the promptness of present day communication via social media, they now more frequently exist through the circula-

tion of text—visually, sonically, etc.—whether voluntarily or inadvertently. These counterpublics exist simply from being addressed: one need only be within receiving range, however “somnolently.”²⁷ By identifying the uncontainability of counterpublics, Warner recognised their latent, liquid potential that resides precisely where it cannot be coalesced.

But rationally comprehending that subjectivities resonate elsewhere, indefinitely, is not always enough. There are times when these connections need to be rendered more tangible, especially when a singular, unambiguous force is materially dominant. Groups of bodies—let’s call them *physical* counterpublics—then acquire a powerfully affective dimension, especially when they incapacitate the normal order of life. Warner’s emphasis on the virtuality of counterpublics can therefore only apply when power is not blatantly wielded as absolute. Just to illustrate the pressing state of affairs: in the time it took to complete this essay, a government-funded campaign was launched to deliberately confound the “Occupy Central” protests with “violence,” and tanks have casually rolled through the city streets shortly before China announced that there would be no real universal suffrage in 2017. At this moment, Warner’s “indefinite strangers” understandably feel the need to cohere, lest their demands be condemned to obscurity and neighbourhoods like Yau Ma Tei, Kwun Tong, and Ping Che continue to be destroyed.

The three art initiatives embody separate possibilities of Warner’s counterpublics, by producing acts and sites that remind and that gather those who are similarly positioned against the grain of dominance. These (artistic) counterpublics have taken place intuitively, purposefully; less so impulsively, though I would like to stress that this can—must—also happen, both within and beyond the realm of art (cf: the protests in Ferguson, Missouri this year, in the wake of Michael Brown’s fatal shooting). Through the forming and negotiating of relationships, the artists—in conjunction with various cohorts—experiment with collective self-assertion while resisting prohibitive state control. Borne of shared witnessing and frustrations, I believe that these counterpublic art projects have developed in direct correlation to the need for shaping what happens within one’s own society. In a perfect storm of spatial scarcity and political ire, indignation seeks amplification wherever possible. As Warner argues,

When people address publics, they engage in struggles—at varying levels of salience to consciousness, from calculated tactic to mute cognitive noise—over the conditions that bring them together as a public. (Warner, 2002, p.13)

This collective sense of grief, loss, or rage belongs to economies of negative affect, which queer and feminist scholar Sara Ahmed locates in processes of transference. The feelings “do not positively inhabit *anybody* or *anything*, meaning that ‘the subject’ is simply one nodal point in the economy rather than its origin and destination.”²⁸ Thus, for these counterpublic art projects, the signs and objects related to the disappearance of spaces and memories become the nexus around which the “surface[s]”²⁹ of counterpublics are formed; the instant that these binds take shape is when the nebulous sense of loss can be recalibrated into systemic deprivation. Or simply, when enough affective energies stir into a momentum that propels change.

Notes

1 Hong Kongers refer to those born in the 1980s and 1990s as “post-80s” and “post-90s” respectively.

2 Started in 2012, Scholarism began as a group of secondary school students who questioned the legitimacy of compulsory Moral and National Education. Now, they are actively engaged with the city’s struggle for universal suffrage.

3 On 17 August 2014, the government-backed Peace and Democracy Movement organised a demonstration against the pan-democratic Occupy Central Movement, who have been demanding full universal suffrage in the 2017 elections. An i-Cable news report (17 August 2014) revealed that government affiliate groups were handing out cash to those who would show up on the day. See: http://cablenews.i-cable.com/webapps/news_video/index.php?news_id=439448

4 Artist Luke Ching Chin-Wai talks about the importance of “new imaginings” in his practice, referring specifically to “the lack of imagination in politics” (conversation with the artist, 6 August 2014). Translated from Cantonese to English by the author.

5 Ting, W. and Watts, E., *Engaging in Art: On Art Ecology and Cultural Consumption in Hong Kong*. Paper presentation at Sapienza University in Rome, 25 June 2014.

6 *ibid.*

7 *ibid.*

8 From a conversation with artist Wen Yau, a co-founder of Woofer Ten (17 July 2014). Translated from Cantonese to English by the author.

9 From a conversation with artist Vangi Fong Wan-Chi and Roland Ip Ho-Lun, current members of Woofer Ten (30 July 2014). Translated from Cantonese to English by the author.

10 *ibid.*

11 Josh Noble. 2014. “Hong Kong’s West Kowloon Cultural District—and its real estate.” *The Financial Times*. Accessed 03.09.2014. <http://on.ft.com/1kcsPUQ>.

12 From a conversation with artist Him Lo (28 July 2014). Translated from Cantonese to English by the author.

13 *ibid.*

14 Kurt Chan Yuk-Keung, “A Short Story About Hong Kong Art: from the Colonial Phenomenon to Guerilla Aesthetics,” essay in *Hong Kong Eye: Contemporary Hong Kong Art*, Skira Editore S.p.A., 2012. pp. 63-7.

15 *ibid.*

16 *ibid.*

17 From a conversation with artist Sampson Wong Yu-Hin (30 July 2014).

18 Shannon Jackson, *Social Works: Performing Art, Supporting Publics*, Routledge, New York, 2012

19 *ibid.*, p. 149

20 Bart Moore-Gilbert (ed.), *The Arts in the 1970s: Culture Closure*, Taylor & Francis e-Library, London and New York, 2002

21 *ibid.*

22 *ibid.*

23 Started in 2009, UK City of Culture elects a winning city (now every four years) to host a number of highly publicised cultural events, e.g. the Turner Prize.

24 Miwon Kwon, *One Place After Another Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity*, MIT Press, Cambridge, 2002

25 Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, MIT Press, Cambridge, 2002, p.56

26 *ibid.*, p.106

27 *ibid.*, p.87

28 Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2004, p.46

29 *ibid.*

Yet Chor Sunshine Wong is an art worker, writer, and PhD candidate at the University of Wolverhampton. Her current research interest is in the rearticulation of socially engaged art through queer and feminist positions. She was the co-curator of Art Sheffield 2013's Parallel Programme, for which she presented a series of events that comprised walking discussions, an exhibition, and a "long table" workshop. Before moving to the UK in 2011, she ran the 91mQ Art Project Space along with five collaborators, where she curated live work and performances. She was invited to curate the Berlin leg of the Young Polish Artists touring exhibition in 2011, organised by Gdansk's Łaznia Centre for Contemporary Art. Sunshine also taught art to children for a number of years, which she misses doing greatly.

Imprint

Issue 24

Publisher

Dorothee Richter

Co-Publisher

Michael Birchall

Editor

Philipp Sack & Michael Birchall

Contributors

Amanda Cachia, Lena Seik, Megan Johnston,
Dan Perjovschi, Vagabond Reviews, Wochenklausur,
Yet Chor Sunshine Wong

Translation

Louise Bromby

Proofreading

Stephanie Carwin

Web Design and Graphic Design Concept

Ronald Kolb & Volker Schartner, Biotop 3000

Graphic Design Issue 23

Biotop 3000

Cover image

Vagabond Reviews, Arcade 1 Validation Event F2,
Neighbourhood Centre (detail), 2011.

Supported By

the Institute for Critical Theory (ith),
Zurich University of Arts, www.ith-z.ch,

With special thanks to all the contributors
and the Galerie für Zeitgenössische Kunst Leipzig
for their generous support and
Dan Perjovschi for his inspiring drawings.

ONCURATING.org is an independent international journal (both web and print) focusing on questions around curatorial practise and theory.

ONCURATING.org
Toni-Areal,
Pfungstweidstrasse 96,
8031 Zürich
info@oncurating.org
www.on-curating.org

For advertising options please visit our website and get in touch!

Special thanks to all designers, artists and curators for their contributions.

Supported by the Postgraduate Programme in Curating (www.curating.org),
Institute for Cultural Studies in the Arts (ICS),
Department of Cultural Analysis,
Zurich University of the Arts (ZHdK)