

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.

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