

Pedagogy in the expanded field

Foreword

Pedagogy in the Expanded Field

Pablo Helguera

The present publication has the objective of offering a compilation of the different focus areas of the Educational Program, including texts, testimonials and documents related to the different activities that comprise it. It is conducted as much with the goal to serve as a memorial of this edition of the Biennial as to function as a reference anthology about the relation between pedagogy and contemporary art.

Everyone who is familiar with the world of biennials knows that their pedagogical aspect is usually limited, or practiced with reluctance. As essentially international events, the biennials that follow the Venice example tend to favor the transiting audience (Venice usually lacks a local audience) and specially the international artistic community, for many of which the mediation process means a little less than a nuisance to experience the work in a direct manner.

In contrast, the Mercosul Biennial is an exceptional case, as much with its commitment to pedagogy as with its intimate relation with the local audience. Since its beginnings, this biennial's mediator training program had the double function as a school, enabling an unique disposition to the mediator's field in the city of Porto Alegre. The pedagogical model was expanded in the 6th Mercosul Biennial, when its artistic director Gabriel Pérez-Barreiro invited the artist Luis Camnitzer to take over the newly created position of pedagogical curator. In this edition, Camnitzer, who during the course of his career has deeply reflected on the parallel between art and education,

sought to render visible the learning process as a creative act, establishing the parallel between making art and creating knowledge. The 7th Mercosul Biennial, directed by Victoria Noorthorn and Camilo Yáñez, brought to the pedagogical curatorship the Argentinean artist Marina de Caro. Caro gave special emphasis to the implementation of projects of a participative nature in several localities on the Rio Grande do Sul state.

The curatorial model conceived by José Roca for the 8th edition of this Biennial, proposed for the first time the participation of the pedagogical curator as a member of the curatorial staff, enabling the pedagogical component not to be confined exclusively to the work's interpretation or for it to exist as a parallel program of activities, but integrating it completely to the conceptualization process and the selection of artists and works.

Those suitable conditions, combined with the enormous availability of the Mercosul Biennial's pedagogical and production staff, presented a unique opportunity to accomplish a series of expansion experiences with the pedagogical model.

When José Roca invited me to be part of the curatorial staff of this Biennial, I was going through a period of reflection upon how pedagogy could work as a tool to the implementation and understanding of the series of works that nowadays is denominated "social practice", or art of social practice. In recent years, possibly as a result of the

influence of relational static and institutional critic, many artists conceive their work as a group of activities that can include collaborative works, actions on the public sphere, investigations, didactical narratives or even the appropriation of the museum's institutional language. Within the 8th Mercosul Biennial's group of artists one might find several sorts of strategies more or less linked with those processes of pedagogy's communication and interpretation and/or social practice. The work of Argentinean artist Alicia Herrero is based on dialogue as a work; the Spanish artist Paco Cao makes use of the didactic rhetoric of the documentary and the exhibition to manufacture complex sets about cultural identity; the Slavs and Tartars Collective utilizes public publications and programs as a way to disseminate its ideas; the Center for Land Use Interpretation acts as an essentially educational institution that releases and problematizes information over the geoeconomic and geopolitical characteristics of the north American landscape, etc.

Besides the possibility of inviting artists whose works actively incorporates the elements of pedagogy, the 8th Biennial's theme, "Essays on Geopoetics", in my opinion, also offers an invitation to literalize the notion of expanding pedagogy's field of action. In a way that, quoting the famous expression by Rosalind Krauss "Sculpture in the Expanded Field", and reflecting upon the term "reterritorialization" by Deleuze and Guattari, I've proposed the idea of conceiving pedagogy as a territory with different regions. One of them, the most known, is situated in the field of interpretation or education as an instrument of understanding art; the second is the amalgamation of art and education (like the art practice of the aforementioned artists), and the third is the arts as an educational instrument, which – in lack of a better term – I denominated art as knowledge of the world.

Art interpretation or mediation is an essentially dialogical field that, however, in the traditional practice tends to be carried out as a soliloquy; this means that even though investigations upon learning indicates in a relevant way that one learns better by discussing and exchanging personal reflections, the tendency is to treat a guided visit

as a fable narrative or data recitation. This tendency is natural, since a groups activation by conversation is an extremely difficult task that requires practice and skill; however, ignoring the need for dialogue equals denying the potential for reflection and individual knowledge. In the mediation program emphasis was placed on these inductive and dialogical strategies, including using Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy's views and Augusto Boal's group dynamics with the purpose of tracing a direct line between Brazil's rich pedagogical tradition. Thus, in this volume are included some texts used as resources for the mediation course's participants.

One of the most important dialogical strategies, and probably this year's Biennial most ambitious project, was the creation of Casa M, conceived as a center dedicated to the local artistic community where local voices could be heard as well as the visitors'. Through a dialog, conferences, workshops, performances and other social activities program, Casa M functioned as a local counterpoint, intermediating regional and international, or as an interlocutor space between this Biennial's themes. We've been very lucky, or maybe we've received as a twist of fate the fact that the house that was ultimately chosen for this project was the one where once lived the artist Cristina Balbão, a teacher at the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul.

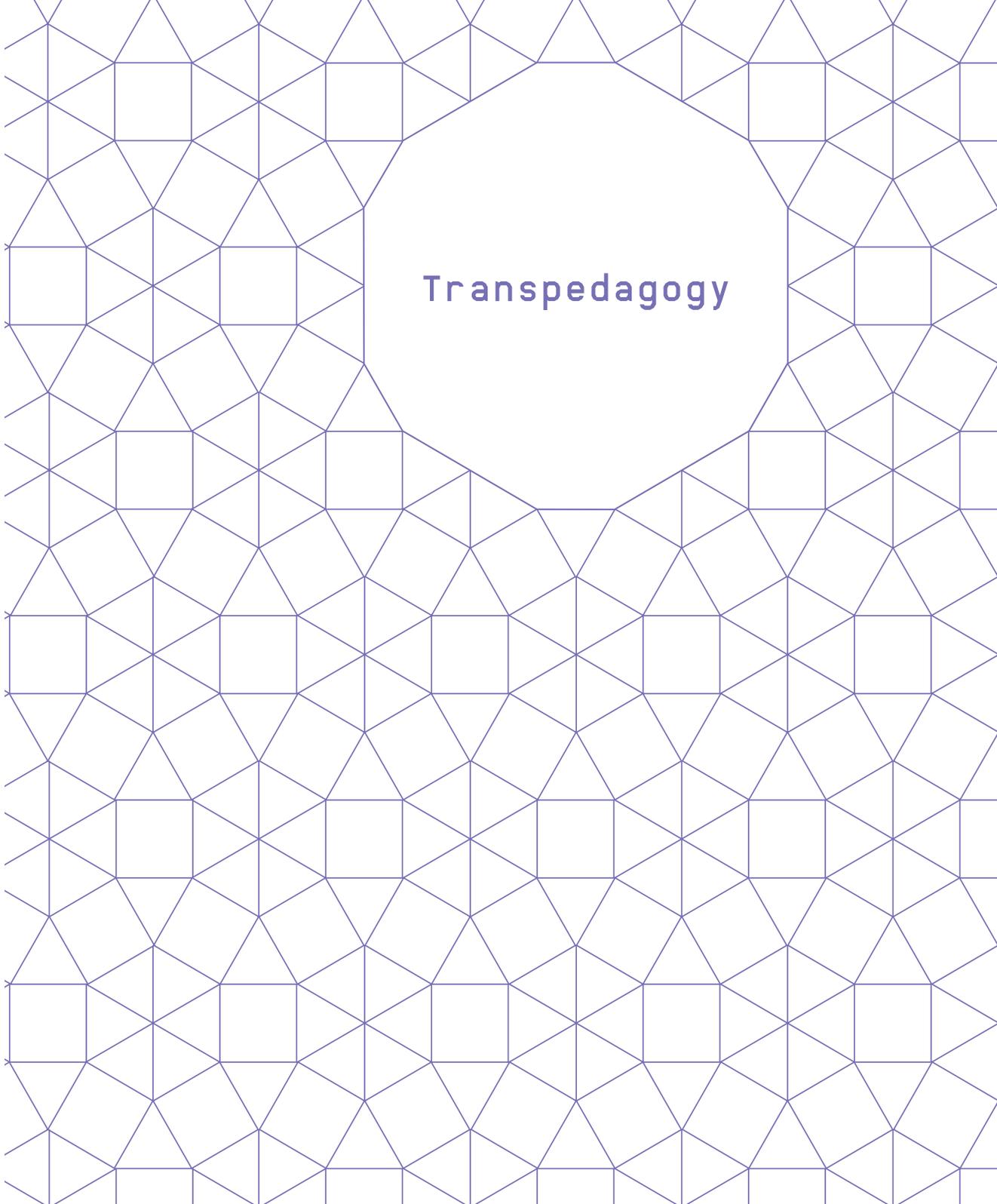
That which I sometimes called transpedagogy, or art as education, manifested itself possibly in a more direct manner with the Finnish collective Ykon's project, presented on the Geopoetics exhibition. Ykon utilizes the pedagogical resources of the game to invite the audience to solve the world's problems in a participative process that answers the dialog processes between the world's summits. This type of work uses art to invite the participant to enter a playful world where it's possible to free yourself from reality in a temporal manner, this time using dynamics with a pedagogical accuracy that allows the experience to be more than a merely dispersed experience, but that – most likely without drawing attention from the participants – becomes a constructive, productive and satisfactory experience for the group's members.

In a similar fashion, several projects of this Biennial's Travel Notebooks component have engaged collaborations from local communities that on a few moments acquired a fusion on the scope of education and arts.

Regarding the third emphasis area – art as knowledge of the world – the idea of expanding the usual Biennial audience was sought. In the school context, for example, I've realized that since the beginning of this project's investigation that teachers of several disciplines outside art saw the Biennial with interest, but with little knowledge regarding how to integrate its content with their school program. With that goal, a series of teacher's guides was produced spanning several disciplines directly connected to the Biennial's themes (geography, history, literature, etc) that presented the artwork not only as a study object to be valued as such, but also as a window to be able to acquire an understanding of relevant themes for those or other spheres. A similar approach happened on the different workshops held on the several venues of the Biennial's exhibition.

Finally, a fundamental component – and in my opinion, urgent – that was sought to emphasize on the Biennial's pedagogical project was the evaluation theme. Projects of cyclic characteristics, such as the biennials usually have the flaw of lacking sufficient reflection upon the past; as a result, each new edition reinvents the unnecessary and tends to fall on the same challenges once lived by previous editions. In a way that, with the objective of assisting on the process of reflection for the future, I've invited two prominent educators in Brazil, Luiz Guilherme Vergara and Jessica Gogan, who have exercised the function of observers of this Biennial's own pedagogical process, producing a documentation and evaluation project for it, which can be consulted in a partial manner on this volume. My hope is that the assemblage of these experiences, reflections and testimonials may serve as a guideline not only to future Biennial's editions, but also as groundwork to appreciate the enormous potential that the pedagogy discipline has on the field of art practice.

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Transpedagogy

Transpedagogy

Pablo Helguera

In this book I have discussed SEA primarily through the lens of pedagogy. For that reason, it is particularly relevant to acknowledge that a substantial portion of SEA projects explicitly describe themselves as pedagogical. In I proposed the term “Tran pedagogy” to refer to projects by artists and collectives that blend educational processes and art-making in works that offer an experience that is clearly different from conventional art academies or formal art education.¹ The term emerged out of the necessity to describe a common denominator in the work of a number of artists that escaped the usual definitions used around participatory art.

In contrast to the discipline of art education, which traditionally focuses on the interpretation of art or teaching art-making skills, in Transpedagogy the pedagogical process is the core of the artwork. Such works create their own autonomous environment, mostly outside of any academic or institutional framework.

It is important to set aside, as I have done in previous sections, the symbolic practices of education and those practices that propose a rethinking of education through art only in theory but not in practice.

Education-as-art projects may appear contradictory through the lens of strict pedagogy. They often aim to democratize viewers, making them partners, participants, or collaborators in the construction of the work, yet also

retain the opacity of meaning common in contemporary art vocabularies. It goes against the nature of an artwork to explain itself, and yet this is precisely what educators do in lessons or curriculum – thus the clash of disciplinary goals. In other words, artists, curators, and critics liberally employ the term “pedagogy” when speaking of these kinds of projects, but they are reluctant to subject the work to the standard evaluative structures of education science. Where this dichotomy is accepted, we are contenting ourselves with mimesis or simulacra – we pretend that we use education or pedagogy, but we do not actually use them – returning to the differentiation of symbolic and actual action discussed in previous chapters. When an art project presents itself as a school or a workshop, we must ask what, specifically, is being taught or learned, and how. Conversely, if the experience is meant to be a simulation or illustration of education, it is inappropriate to discuss it as an actual educational project.

Second, it is necessary to ask whether a project of this nature offers new pedagogical approaches in art. If an educational project purports to critique conventional notions of pedagogy, as it is often claimed or desired, we must ask in what terms this critique is being articulated. This is particularly important, because artists often work from a series of misperceptions around education that prevent the development of truly thoughtful or critical contributions.

The field of education has the misfortune, perhaps well earned, of being represented by the mainstream as restrictive, controlling, and homogenizing. And it is true that there

are plenty of places where old-fashioned forms of education still operate, where art history is recitation, where biographical anecdotes are presented as evidence to reveal the meaning of a work, and where educators seem to condescend to, patronize, or infantilize their audience. This is the kind of education that thinker Ivan Illich critiqued in his 1971 book *Deschooling Society*. In it Illich argues for a radical dismantling of the school system in all its institutionalized forms, which he considers an oppressive regime. Forty years after its publication, what was a progressive leftist idea has, ironically, become appealing to neoliberals and the conservative right. The dismantling of the structures of education is today allied with the principles of deregulation and a free market, a disavowal of the civic responsibility to provide learning structures to those who need them the most and a reinforcement of elitism. To turn education into a self-selective process in contemporary art only reinforces the elitist tendencies of the art world.

In reality, education today is fueled by the progressive ideas discussed above, ranging from critical pedagogy and inquiry-based learning to the exploration of creativity in early childhood. For this reason it is important to understand the existing structures of education and to learn how to innovate with them. To critique, for example, the old-fashioned boarding school system of memorization today would be equivalent, in the art world, to mounting a fierce attack on a nineteenth-century art movement; a project that offers an alternative to an old model is in dialogue with the past and not with the future.

Once we set aside these all-too-common pitfalls in SEA's embrace of education, we encounter myriad art projects that engage with pedagogy in a deep and creative way, proposing potentially exciting directions.

I think of the somewhat recent fascination in contemporary art with education as “pedagogy in the expanded field,” to adapt Rosalind Krauss's famous description of postmodern sculpture. In the expanded field of pedagogy in art, the practice of education is no longer restricted to its traditional activities, namely art instruction (for artists),

connoisseurship (for art historians and curators), and interpretation (for the general public). Traditional pedagogy fails to recognize three things: first, the creative performativity of the act of education; second, the fact that the collective construction of an art milieu, with artworks and ideas, is a collective construction of knowledge; and third, the fact that knowledge of art does not end in knowing the artwork but is a tool for understanding the world.

Organizations like the *Center for Land Use Interpretation*, in Los Angeles, which straddle art practice, education, and research, utilize art formats and processes as pedagogical vehicles. The very distancing that some collectives take from art and the blurring of boundaries between disciplines indicate an emerging form of art-making in which art does not point at itself but instead focuses on the social process of exchange. This is a powerful and positive reenvisioning of education that can only happen in art, as it depends on art's unique patterns of performativity, experience, and exploration of ambiguity.

¹ See Helguera, “Notes Toward a Transpedagogy,” in *Art, Architecture and Pedagogy: Experiments in Learning*, Ken Erlich, Editor. Los Angeles: Viralnet.net,

Transpedagogy: contemporary art and the vehicles of education

Preliminary Dialogue with Pablo Helguera

1. Many art projects that incorporate pedagogy as a medium seem to be a reaction/response to institutionalized Education – particularly museum education – functioning as a sort of institutional critique. Do you agree with this statement? And if so, what are the concrete aspects of educational methodologies that are being critiqued?

Mark Allen (artist, Director and Founder, Machine Project)

I don't see artists working in the area putting forward an institutional critique of museum education programs. I view the rise of these pedagogical projects as a natural outgrowth of the vastly expanded field of inquiry currently pursued by artists in the last 20 years. With other source materials and disciplines come other kinds of methodologies and experimentation with pedagogy seems to be part of that. In the case of my work at Machine Project, I see it based on the following set of proposals:

1. Pedagogy as a site of pleasure and play
2. A rejection of the model of public education increasingly based on standardization of knowledge
3. The use of an art context as a discursive space for knowledge of all kinds
4. Education and learning as a central and participatory part of the social life of a community

Tom Finkelpearl (Executive Director, Queens Museum of Art)

Please excuse the grand generalizations in this answer! In the American context, I don't think that pedagogical art

projects are necessarily created in reaction to institutional education, and certainly don't think that they are created in reaction to museum education. I would contend that, starting in the late 1960s many artists were seeking alternatives to a commercial art world, commercial society, and the growing hyper-individualism in the USA, and some found inspiration in radical pedagogy. By the late 1970s authors like Paulo Freire were showing up in a lot of artists' studios. But there has been tension between straightforward educational projects and art from the start. For example, it is instructive to see how different Allan Kaprow's motivations were from those of Herbert Kohl when they collaborated on a project in the Berkeley Public School system in 1969 – "Project Other Ways." From reports I have read, Kohl's goals were directly pedagogical – opening minds, raising critical and political consciousness, etc. – while Kaprow's were more oriented to creating non-conventional relations or experiences without a particular political or social goal. One could say that Kaprow was creating some sort of implicit critique of conventional education, but in a substantially different manner than Kohl, who was an educator and well known critic of institutional educational practices. Of course educational art projects often end up being sponsored by museum education departments, and there is often friction in terms of technique and motivation, but I don't think that the artists set out to critique those practices.

Claire Bishop (Associate Professor, Art History Department, CUNY Graduate Center, New York, and Visiting Professor, Curating Contemporary Art Department, Royal College of Art, London)

The research I have done has shown that the impulses for pedagogic formats in contemporary art are extremely

varied. Some are responding to changes in institutionalized pedagogy, but others are responding to the exigencies of a local situation, to working through (and compensating for) their own experiences of education, to being an auto-didact (this is a particularly strong motivation)... along with other motivations involving 'social sculpture' and rethinking audience engagement.

Dominic Willson (Curator of Education and Public Programs, SFMoMA)

This category of art practices that adopt certain forms and strategies of education – let's call it art-as-education. Education curators in museums are increasingly programming art-as-education projects. Are these projects a critique of Museum Education? No, I don't think so. Or, at least, only in the sense of delimiting a category.

Education Curators are looking to redefine the scope of what they do. Their traditional role of mediating between legitimated knowledge and an imagined general public is dissolving (now that Art History is no longer the sole, or even primary, knowledge base either for new art practice or the public encounter with art, and the general public is more visibly fragmented). They find themselves with the job, not of mediating, but of creating platforms, occasions, situations for an educational experience (or an experience of education) to take place. Institutional art spaces have become some of the most visible, even spectacular, theatres of informal education and educational expectation in public view.

Museums are highly regulated spaces, but their educational agenda is, at present, relatively unscripted. If there's even going to be a single, new educational function for museums, I don't think it has emerged yet. The current practice of programming artists' projects that take the form of education is, for the Education Curators, a way of trying to find the outlines of a new role.

These projects are possible, in institutional terms, because: they resemble Education and Public Programs; of the relative autonomy that goes with the secondary status of Education Curators; they tend not to involve blue-chip

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artists; they are not object-based, and are therefore largely outside the museum-collector-gallerist system. If there is a moment of Institutional Critique, it may be aimed at this system.

For Museum Education this might be less a matter of Institutional Critique and more a matter of Sculpture in the Expanded Field. Very loosely, this is something like Education in the Expanded Field. I can almost imagine a grid of research/not-research, teaching/not-teaching.

The object of critique is (or, at least, I think, can be) education at large. I think there is an analogy with Media Arts. Just as media artists have used the (institutional, discursive) space of art to explore cinematic, televisual and online experience at a critical distance from cinema, TV and the Web, so other artists have explored educational experience at a critical distance from the established structures and practices of educational institutions.

Missing from our questionnaire is the question of what education at large can learn from art-as-education. In most contemporary contexts, education is instrumentalized. It is rendered as training. There may be a few contexts (and art institutions might be one of them) in which it would be possible to work critically against that state of affairs, and to examine the contribution of art practice to understanding the current possibilities and limits of education as a vehicle for social hope.

Bernardo Ortiz (artist)

If I were prompted to answer quickly I would say that "institutionalized education" is actually responsible for using pedagogy as medium. It instrumentalizes pedagogical practices in a way that they become mere tools that can be used and dropped without thinking that much about them; thus transforming the critical possibilities of these practices into something that is normally called "edutainment."

There is something implicit in the word medium, I think, that has to be avoided. The way a medium tries to erase itself from the picture that it presents. This is certainly not

something new. But it is something worth repeating since a museum has the nasty habit of rendering itself invisible.

I'm thinking about the implications of treating pedagogy as a medium – specifically in a museum setting. Would it render itself invisible? Would it help in giving the illusion that the museum is transparent? Would it just become a new set of tools that replace the old ones, but then leave the structure intact – or secure it even more?

Rhetorical questions no doubt. Perhaps the trouble lies in the word medium. It gives the illusion of some kind of practicality, as if it were a matter of technology, of something used and then put aside. But pedagogy should be considered for what it is: a practice. There are pedagogical tools, of course, but what one does with them is not a mere mediation – it is a political action. I think about my own context, again. The way certain practices there, that may seem purely academic elsewhere, can become a way of making politics: translation, for example, or historical investigation, or publication, etc. The fact that they seem purely academic elsewhere is symptomatic of the inner workings of institutional control.

A more accurate framework needs to be constructed around pedagogical practices. One that considers not only the information that flows through the tools of pedagogy, but that incorporates the questions of how it does flow and what it does with that flux. In that sense the performative power, and thus the critical edge, of pedagogy can be harnessed.

Jessica Gogan (Curator of Special Projects, Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh)

Thank you for the opportunity to muse on all this. Interestingly for me, I found myself struggling somewhat with the questions. Perhaps because while I am concerned with situating and exploring art and educational practices within the field, I find myself more drawn and think it ultimately more useful to simultaneously explore this work within a larger contemporary context. For example, seeing this work within emerging paradigms and parallels of practice in diverse fields such as health,

human rights, socio-political geography and education – all of which emphasize an amplified engagement with the patient-individual-learner-citizen in his or her context. It seems important for any critical inquiry to reflect on the underpinnings of these emerging art and educational practices and their parallels and possibilities within a larger systemic complexity. So in reflecting on the first question, I would rather suggest that the current shifts or turns in art and educational practice are part of a larger continuum of institutional critique in general, of notions and possibilities of authorship, and of formalist contexts and approaches. In many spheres throughout the 20th century, whether education, economics or art practice, there is a dislocation of focus from facts, products, or art objects and the single creator, to process, experience, and co-authorship. In an artistic context, initiating with the Constructivists (artists and education theorists) and particularly since the 1960s, much art points to an engagement with the processes of mapping and shifting from object to space, practice and relationality. Similarly as the Dadaists and 60s artists rebelled against the perceived alienation of art and life, I think the current shifts in practice can also be seen in this context. However in contrast to 60s radicalism, current practices embrace a more ethical consciousness, and as Bourriaud suggests, are less oppositional and more congenial approaches, by discovering “new assemblages, possible relations between distinct units and alliances struck up between different partners.”¹

Also, I should note that I understand “art projects that incorporate pedagogy as a medium” to mean art projects that use participatory practices that emphasize experience, encounters or relationality often with specific ethical and socio-cultural intents. The critique embodied in these practices seems to strive to emphasize a shift in how we understand knowledge to a notion of knowledge-creation as the participatory process itself.

¹ Nicholas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics* (Simon Pleasance & Fronza Woods with the participation of Mathieu Copeland, Trans.). Dijon: Les Presses du réel, 2002, p. 45.

In this regard, one of my greatest concerns with situating or evaluating this work is that we are only beginning to articulate it and in many cases lack critical information and understanding in order to critique these practices. Current critical and presentation formats seem inadequate to truly capture and critique practices and works that emphasize experience and process. Here, we often miss a richer exploration of art's experiential dimension, the nature of participatory process and socio-cultural impact that is an essential part of the artistic proposal or the work. We need the tools and formats to gather new knowledge on this work in order to begin to situate it.

Sofia Olascoaga (Head of Department, Educational and Public Programs, Museo Carrillo Gil, Mexico City)

Carolina Alba (Museo Carrillo Gil, Mexico City)

There is a wider search from artistic practice that motivates the incorporation of pedagogical thought, which refers to the need of a critical position regarding studio/object-based practice and the parameters for art distribution related to it, and places itself in a direct relationship with specific communities, dialogical or socially engaged works. These practices may not always be reacting specifically to museum education, but to more complex or wider aspects of art production, distribution and consumption, questioning the artist's role and the need to participate from his/her own community.

In Mexico's recent history, from the beginning of the 90s, there are a number of examples of artist-initiated projects that emerged as a reaction for the lack of academic programs providing institutional structure for contemporary practices, and specially for specialized art education. Spaces such as La Quiñonera, Temistocles 44, La Panadería, which were created to satisfy a very straightforward need for dialogue, critique and meeting points for contemporary practices related to installation and performance, that had no space for exhibition, critique and socialization. In later years, other collectively activated projects have been initiated as a response to the absence of educational programs for emerging artists. Either completely independently or partly supported by institutions, they embody the concerns of the artists that create them.

The following examples may be more similar to artist-run spaces rather than practices using pedagogy as a medium; however, they put pedagogical concerns at the center and are to be integrated by artistic practice and development in a local context where the specificity of museum education, academic programs and artistic education seems to be less clearly institutionalized as fields of knowledge and practice:

ESAY in Merida, Yucatán, created by Monica Castillo and a group of artists/scholars immersed in deep thought and a long creative process of designing theoretical and practice-based art school programs. La Curtiduría and TAGA, by Demián Flores in Oaxaca, inspired and supported by previous IAGO, MACO and CASA projects by Francisco Toledo. Seminario de Medios Múltiples, by artist José Miguel González Casanova, and an in-process educational space by artist Yoshua Okon and Eduardo Abaroa, among others.

Wendy Woon (Deputy Director for Education, The Museum of Modern Art, New York)

I think the projects are motivated by varied intentions rather than simply a critique of museum education. Often they stem from an institutional critique of traditional interpretation of art, which although often ascribed to museum education, most often stems from more academic constraints of art history and theory, which heavily influence the way some interpret art through their scholarly publications and exhibitions in museums. The critique is often concerned with the limitations of interpretation in the service of academic knowledge production rather than more nuanced and faceted readings of living artists' practices.

Like most museum educators, artists understand that the viewer plays an active rather than a passive/receptive role in constructing meanings with art. Duchamp's quote speaks to this:

“The creative act is not performed by the artist alone. The spectator brings the work in contact with the external world, deciphering and interpreting its inner qualifications. And thus adds his contribution to the creative act.”

Museum education suffers from the perception that it follows traditional classroom methods and practices. Although the field of museum education is young, most contemporary museum education practice, informed by constructivist theory, underscores a more nuanced and fugitive understanding of how the viewer creates meaning with art rather than the passive transmission of knowledge from object to viewer more akin to traditional art historical models of thinking. In many ways, artists and museum educators are aligned in this understanding of the complexity and participatory nature of interpretation. The performative aspects of museum education and creating artwork are also allied. I think that museum education at its best is informed by artists' practices.

Some pedagogical art projects seem utopian and often formalize informal practices that artists use to foster the development of their work – book clubs, discussion groups, interdisciplinary research and exchange.

The larger questions I have about some pedagogically focused art projects revolve around the role of “audience” participation and what the quality of the invitation is. If it's an institutional invitation, why this select group of people over others, and what does that say about the values of the artist or institution?

Many institutions and smaller not-for-profits have invited artists to engage directly with audiences for varying reasons – because the artist is interested in working with specific audiences, because the institution has a larger agenda to develop under-represented audiences such as those who have not participated in the museum before, and groups that do not see themselves reflected in the collections or staff. The make-up of artists exhibiting was typical concerns in the 90s. Identity politics reflected in curatorial practice of the time also drove many of these artist-led projects with under represented audiences.

Some of the projects are more focused on direct engagement through exchange and art-making with varied audiences, recognizing that the production of art is as much process as product, and interpretation is not left only to the authority of the artist, critics or art historians.

The larger ethical issues that rise to the surface are: Is the audience simply the fodder to create the project? In essence, is it being used to make the art project? Are there perceived benefits for those participating and are they what those participating would perceive as the benefits or is this an idealized notion of “the good” that art should do? Authorship? Respect for the participants weighs heavily for me in many of these projects. These issues arise because the artist functions within a very tightly defined “art world.” Another issue is projects that suggest some sense of “democracy” yet in truth mimic the elitism of academia.

Sally Tallant (Head of Programmes, Serpentine Gallery, London)

I agree with this statement to some extent. The area that has most commonly been adopted at least in terms of structure is public programmes. Recent artists and curatorial projects such as the Serpentine Gallery's Park Nights and Marathon series, Night School at the Museum (Anton Vidolke), Manifesta6 (unrealised art school), and the lecture itself which has been a long standing tool for artists such as Robert Morris, Martha Rosler, Maria Pask, and Mark Leckey. In these situations it could be said that the lecture is a format for performance and relates more to a history of performance than it does to that of pedagogy.

In terms of methodologies that are being critiqued it is more complicated to pin-point. Education has played a role within institutions where non-traditional practices have found a space. Performance, time-based and event-based practice, collaborative and site-related commissions as well as work that prompts political questions and requires contextual negotiation or actualisation, have all been facilitated through these programmes. So, rather than offering a critique I see this as producing a different kind of knowledge and experience. The new institutionalism proposed in the early 90s collapses the traditional hierarchies between departments and now it is more possible to develop programming strands that utilise the spaces and expertise of all departments.

Janna Graham (Education Project Curator, Serpentine Gallery, London)

I don't think that these initiatives are a response to museum education at all. The emphasis on pedagogy seems rather more in line with utopian gestures that continue on from the avant-garde project of collapsing boundaries between art and life. This combined with an overall exhaustion with the degree to which institutions of art and education (whether they are museums, biennials, or art schools) have become increasingly corporate and spectacle oriented. Not quite satisfied with the relational offered in terms of an experience economy, or simply an 'aesthetic', artists, as they often have in the past, are looking for alternative forms of practicing art with others.

There was also a turn to pedagogy in many theoretical contexts that coincided with this turn in artistic work: Gayatri Spivak in recent years has published work on her literacy pedagogy after many years of silence on the topic, Ranciere's *Ignorant Schoolmaster* was translated into English and became a major text on readings lists, and people have started re-reading or reading Freire for the first time...

I agree with Sally that their relationship to museum education is more akin to mimicry in terms of form i.e. by adopting public programming models (and sometimes the least developed of these in our field i.e. the lecture), etc. but it is also parasitic. For example, art contexts provide funding and contexts for meeting publics that are useful if you are interested in engaging people in work. Their difference from institutional critique is that they don't take the institution as the object of their critique but are perhaps rather more interested the development of a set of critical reading tools for the world.

Tania Bruguera (artist)

In my case, with the project Arte de Conducta, I approached Education as a material that functions in the frame of and as a political space. I was not so interested in the specific area of museum education but more in the political significance of the medium itself and its dynamic in society at large. The way in which I worked on it was by dealing with the relationship between art and politics and setting up a

possible place to create a conversation about it. I worked on learning as the visible expression of an experience. I did not use the belief in the process of learning as a means of communicating general concepts of knowledge or references but in the construction of the learning as a result of a reflexive experience. In our case that was done through the creation of artworks that generated those discussions. It was more a system in which one was putting into practice (with all the rules involved in that commitment) tools that were supposed to be used in their symbolic capacity. I never forgot that we were dealing with education as a political tool. Education was the methodology and the subject but the goal was never to change education but to seek political results through it. It was a strategy where I took the tool of power to create power. Now that the project is finished, I can say that its manifestation was the creation of a school for political art. The main element I was criticizing in terms of education was the pretended transition (paralleling proto-capitalism in Cuba) affecting the social role of art, one that was comfortably assuming a complicit and servile collaboration between the power structure and the artist. I always hoped for the work not to become education as a mere reference to a form. That is something I'm a bit worried about due to the recent flourish of education-related art projects. Education can't only be seen as a series of sensible combinations but as a way to change (or at least be a reference or a point of view) someone's life for a long time.

If there is anything I'm working on in terms of education it is the desire to explore the effect of a concept: Revolution.

In my case I'm not so interested in art-as-education but on education as art. I'm interested in exploring the ways in which things become artistic. I'm interested in seeing what makes a moment art, a moment that comes from the realm of the political.

Political art always assumes its educational side because it wants a result.

Education was also the desire to create a context for the work and its set of rules to be experienced.

2. What is to be learned by institutions from artist-instigated pedagogical projects?

Claire Bishop

To think independently and imaginatively about a context and its audience. The last thing we need is institutions copying artists' pedagogic projects as a simple replacement for copying inherited formats of art education. What artists can teach institutions is by example only: how to think out of the box and devise new rules for the game, if not new games entirely.

Qiu Zhijie (artist)

Pedagogical projects held by institutions such as museums and schools disseminate values that are generally accepted by the public. These values are acknowledged and established in a process of selection from and negotiation among many conflicting values, and what are selected are always the most easily acceptable ones to the public. To put it in another way, these values are so easily accepted that they are almost obvious and self-explanatory. On the other hand, values advocated by artist-instigated pedagogical projects can include those that have not been accepted by the public. They can even be in conflict with those being disseminated by institutions. There should be no obvious/self-explanatory values in art projects, but rather experimental twists on such values. If such twists can be comprehensive and cover all aspects, they may bring confusion to society. But naturally shifted values will also bring more ways to disseminate value. Because of the nature of institutions, they cannot discard mainstream values. However, to experiment with some unconventional ways of disseminating values will help to avoid the "self-explanatory illusion" of mainstream values.

Tania Bruguera

Art, as well as education, work in context and are time and information-sensitive. Once an institution is ready to "learn" from an artist-instigated pedagogical project, it means that the capacity of that project to challenge has expired. Instead of trying to learn from artistic-generated pedagogical projects, which mostly mean copying a model and not adapting

its intentions, the institution should prepare itself to be part of the creation of space and time for critique (self-critique in some cases) and propose to build moments instead. Some institutions simply can't do any of it. They are mainly focusing on not threatening the generation and justification for their expenses that are often based on a stable and popular sense of prestige due to a constructed idea of success that, so far, does not entail self-criticism or doubt. Also, the need from the institution to have and pre-define satisfactory (for the institution) concrete visible results (truths) to be executed as promised before the project starts, is for me another main struggle when an artist is commissioned to work with the institution on such proposals.

In order to do so, the institution should become an audience as well and lose their powerful role as specialists and never forget that education is a political tool. Maybe the discussion should not be about what form the artist will provide the institution with but what political discussion they are entering into by doing so. Education is about ideological formation, about the construction of a model to process issues, it is about the ethics of knowledge. Are museums interested in the relationship between ethics and desire? Are museums interested in creating a system by which people analyze while doing? Are the museums interested in this or just in using such a tool to generate more prestige? Or is education just used to transfer information on specific art works instead of creating a sense of creativity in the receptor?

Bernardo Ortiz

One could think about the word performance that I introduced in my previous answer. All pedagogical acts are performative. They don't just present a discourse, they re-present it. Act it out. To acknowledge this performative dimension of pedagogy might steer an institution to realize that it too has a performative dimension in the sense that everyone that interacts with an institution (its executives, employees, public, critics, etc.) is involved in some sort of (very serious) role-playing. That it is a game doesn't make it false or inoffensive. On the contrary: if an institution realizes that it is playing a (very serious) game, it can be more critical of itself.

Perhaps this is getting closer to that new framework that I suggested. I think of a short essay I read a few months ago. In it a philosopher, Giorgio Agamben, proposes the importance of re-instating the critical dimension of play, its capacity to undo power. "Profanation" he calls it, and values the way it goes beyond the process of secularization, stripping not only the cult-value of a thing but rendering it literally powerless through play. Artist-instigated pedagogical projects just might do that to institutions. By altering the way a part of the institution works, the whole might realize that it is, after all, a (very serious) game, and consequently find different ways of playing it. In doing so power relations are changed, roles are inverted, and the stability of the institution is challenged performatively, not just discursively.

Mark Allen

As artists' practices overlap with educational programming, it becomes clear that the division between the curatorial departments and educational departments of institutions is artificial and reinforces certain hierarchies of value for different forms of cultural production. Artist-instigated pedagogical projects tend to emphasize the discursive mode over the validation and canonization which typifies the classic mode of the museum. They open up the museum to other kinds of practices.

Jessica Gogan

As in my response to the first question I understand "pedagogical" as art projects that use participatory practices that emphasize experience, encounters or relationality often with specific ethical and socio-cultural intent. What is critically important is to situate the artistic practice, intention and "the work of art"² in a larger context of a collective construction of knowledge. The learning is and should

2 In *Art as Experience*, John Dewey noted the difference between a work of art and the work of art (a useful distinction in exploring this kind of work, both artistic and institutional): "...the first is physical and potential; [the work of art] is active and experienced. It is what the product does, its working." John Dewey, *Art as Experience*, New York: Perigee, 1934/80. p.162

be a learning "with" or a "being with"³ as Friere's existential learning suggests. In this sense the artist is learner and participant along with institution-viewer-citizen. Creative art practices and material thinking can challenge and open up institutional practice enabling the possibility of the museum as creative and ethical site. Simultaneously artists' work can be enriched by a greater understanding of viewers-learners-citizens, by other emerging practices from diverse fields, and educational as well.

As contemporary artists reinvent their practice, so too must art museums, to avoid becoming a 21st century "sepulcher for works of art," recalling Theodor Adorno's critique.⁴ As valued barometres of taste and sites of symbolic material culture, art museums have a unique opportunity together with artists and diverse individuals to put forward a more dynamic mediation role, as instigator, organizer, stage, and vantage point, where today's complexities can be both performed and critiqued. It seems vital that both artists and art museums need to respond to a 21st century post-post-modern-aware context where it is no longer possible to make or present art without participating in creating, challenging or reinforcing taxonomies and ideologies. What new roles and approaches are possible?

From an institutional perspective these emerging art practices challenge the very essence of museum work. How viable is a redefinition of art museum work inspired by emerging artistic, ethical and socio-cultural practices? What would an art museum as vested in collecting experiences as objects look like?

Sofia Olascoaga | Carolina Alba

To what motives, needs, concerns, interests, objectives, do artists respond?

3 Paulo Friere, *Education for Critical Consciousness* London/New York: Continuum, 1974/2007. p 102.

4 Theodor W. Adorno, "Valery Proust Museum," in *Prisms*. (Samuel and Shiery Weber, Trans.). London: Neville Spearman, 1967, pp. 173–186; cited in Douglas Crimp, *On the Museum's Ruins*. Cambridge/London: MIT Press, 1993, p. 44.

To what motives, needs, concerns, interests, objectives, do institutions respond? How and what do they engage with?

Which forms do these responses embody, and how do they shape the relationships and communication established within the projects and their participants?

Aspects to be learned:

- Subjective concerns that create particular forms of dialogue and connection with the audience as co-workers in a one-to-one basis, where hierarchical dispositions are subverted and differ radically from a relationship generated by any institution and an individual, and the political implications this involves.
- Multi-layered, organic, horizontal, complex, sensitive networking creative and conceptual process.
- Community building, group-based identity rather than vertical, hierarchical, authority and paternalist providing.
- A critical potential that responds to succinct meaning, rather than to a more political, general, systemic concern.
- A critical potential that embodies and embraces values beyond the comfort-zones of the politically correct, and emphasizes the presence of the cultural abject.

Wendy Woon

My hope is that with serious consideration these practices open up dialogue about the relationship of art, interpretation and the viewer and evolve into a more informed and complex notion of the public aspects of “creating, exhibiting and interpreting” works of art and the role of curators, critics, theorists, artists, and museum educators.

Sally Tallant

Often when a project is instigated by artists a different set of questions is posed – more along the lines of “How shall we realise this?” as opposed to “Why are we (or should we be) doing this?” Also the support of the curatorial team across the institution can mean that the work is given better visibility and is positioned as a core activity for the institution rather than annexed as often happens with education projects.

Janna Graham

If they are listening, institutions also learn that the disciplinary and departmental hierarchies are questioned by these practices as they require more interdisciplinary skill sets (often valourising those historically associated with educators).

3. How can pedagogical methodologies whose goal is to understand audience responses benefit art practice (if at all)?

Mark Allen

Can art as pedagogy become self-reflexive in some way? Is it possible for these practices to provide education and a critique of education simultaneously? I'm interested in projects which maintain utopian aspirations while acting within the sphere of immediate possibility and practicality.

Qiu Zhijie

Pedagogical projects carried out by artists have a shrewd interpretative ability to the reaction and participation of their receiver. Any reaction from the receiver, including rejection, can be interpreted as a good result. It is hard to say that such pedagogical projects have a clear goal. In this sense, institutions such as museums should be on guard of pedagogical projects carried out by artists. On the other hand, artists should rethink and revalue such interpretation, which has too much room for interpretation. They should try to establish certain cross-referencing guidelines. Only so can they utilize their projects' advantage of being game-like and experimental, and give new ideas to pedagogical methods that already exist in the system. For me in today's world, the possibility to realize this is very slim.

Tania Bruguera

That audience is not a mere accident but its *raison d'être*.

That knowledge and its effect have expiration dates.

That time is needed for a social transformation.

That creativity is not the goal but a tool.

That utopia is an accessible phase of reality not its fatality.

That everybody wants to understand.

Bernardo Ortiz

The importance of play and the performative dimension of pedagogy must go both ways. I am loathe to the idea that art, just by being called ‘art’ is automatically a means of transformation, as if there was some magical property inscribed on the word. At the same time that it challenges the stability of the institutional, play also questions the role of the artist and its relation to the public. If what is meant by understanding audiences and studying their responses is some sort of administrative task carried out by means of statistics and surveys, there is not much to be learned there. But if it means letting the interaction implicit in a pedagogical performance transform the work, then what has been said about the institutional would also be true for the artist. In that sense a pedagogical practice becomes a political position. It is rooted in thought and discourse but entails an actual transformation of spaces and people.

Sofia Olascoaga | Carolina Alba

- To design a structure that may help to articulate continuity.
- To exercise the location of the mediator's role and its function beyond spectacle.
- To incorporate participants in an activated way.
- To question an artist's role in society, and his/her position regarding complex social mapping.
- To establish objectives that may help guiding artistic process to desired ends (or not).
- However, from this perspective, art practices may still consider the importance of subjective positioning, and subversive search, for a more complex construction of meaning that avoids the risk of becoming instrumentalized programs of collectivity.

4. Conventional pedagogy has set goals and parameters toward its audience. What are the benefits/downfalls in establishing similar structure to art projects that engage in similar practices?

Grant Kester (Associate Professor of Art History and Coordinator, Ph.D. Program in Art History, Theory and Criticism at the University of California, San Diego)

We'd need to begin by problematizing the term “pedagogy,” or at least coming up with a working definition of the term. I would suggest that “conventional” pedagogy has little relevance for most contemporary art practices, especially those that involve collaborative exchange and learning (Tania Bruguera's Catedra Arte de Conducta in Cuba, Mapa Teatro's work in Bogota, the Rural Studio in Alabama, Temescal Amity Works in Oakland, Can Masdeu in Barcelona, etc.). A more relevant source of influence, inspiration and differentiation would come from the tradition of “radical” or “critical” pedagogy that grew out of Paulo Freire's writing (with US-based proponents including bell hooks, Henry Giroux and Peter McLaren), as well as the work of Ivan Illich and Augusto Boal. In this tradition conventional pedagogy is identified with a “banking” style of education in which the teacher possesses an a priori wisdom that is “deposited” in the student's consciousness. A radical pedagogy would involve forms of participatory learning that destabilize the hierarchy between teacher and student (or artist/audience, for our purposes). This would also lead to the interrelationship between experimental pedagogy and the discourse of pragmatism (Mead and especially Dewey). There are, as well, other traditions of alternative pedagogy within the arts that extend back to Joseph Beuys, the Situationist “Free University,” Black Mountain School, Vkhutemas, etc.

Qiu Zhijie

Artists learned the model of establishing goals toward specific groups of people from the tradition of taking commissions, so of course it is important for them to study specific groups of people. Similarly, any specific pedagogical project also relies on the study of a specific group of people. Moreover, while pedagogy developed

by artists aims toward a specific group of people, it at the same time sets its goal toward an imagined future or a different group of audiences. That is to say, an artist sets his goal toward a specific audience but also goes beyond it; specific parameters and methods should also be suitable for observations and studies of a broader scope. This is something that is beyond the systemized, clearly-defined conventional pedagogy. Systemized pedagogical projects in general set up concrete goals, with specific evaluation standards, and thus overlook symbolic levels.

Tania Bruguera

If by pedagogy we are referring to a learning process to acquire palpable knowledge / understanding of things, then the main benefits are:

- The possibilities of presenting art to society as something useful in practical terms and that it comprehends the idea of a tangible result, one where the sensible is seeing through behavior.
- The political dimension of social actions.
- The need to construct an idea of a better human being.
- To prefigure what one can do with knowledge, art becoming the place where to propose applications for that knowledge.

But the downfall will be if people think about art as a structure, a style, and not also as a place to find that knowledge, and if there is a mimetic approach to the traditional structures of power involved in a learning process. Another downfall could be the creation of homogenous groups where knowledge is a gray area and finding community via shared references. To forget the important role of the outsider, of the drop-out, of the ones that have no memory or can't concentrate, of the ones that can't understand. And the main one for me would be to lose the double and simultaneous condition of observer and participant; doing something while criticizing it.

Mark Allen

Art practices which engage in pedagogy tend to be more experiential, digressive, and less results-oriented. There is

seldom a specific curriculum in the way there might be in formal educational programs. In fact, many art schools do not use traditional grading structure (A-F), because it seems inadequate as a meter of evaluation.

At Machine our programming is based in the intrinsic pleasures of learning and information, instead of predetermined extrinsic goals of skill or acquisition of knowledge. We are invested in education for the sake of knowledge, not what one can do with that knowledge. This is similar to the tradition of the liberal arts model, except that this engagement with education allows for a certain fluidity in duration and depth of research, and additionally, lacks a structure for institutional validation.

As an open ended practice, the goals and parameters of the practice are allowed to remain emergent. Learning about what goals and parameters might be is one of the main topics of exploration. This opens a space for new trajectories and methods of inquiry to develop in manners which are simply not affirmed by traditional academia.

Claire Bishop

My instinct is that it would be the kiss of death to impose goals (learning outcomes, assessment criteria, etc) on artistic pedagogic projects. However, many of the latter can produce frustration among institutionalised educators: the apparently superficial use of pedagogic formats (seminars, lectures, reading rooms, etc); an ambiguous blurring between students and viewers; a lack of clearly defined goal, outcome or expertise (often deriving from the fact that the artist is an auto-didact). Add to this the compromises that ensue when education (an essentially closed process) is made to fit the requirements of art's open and supposedly 'universal' accessibility, and you begin to suspect that – despite prevalent trends – education and art have less and less in common.

Tom Finkelpearl

The sorts of goals set by education departments must be avoided in educational-art projects. Evaluation and

towards the active and transformative distribution of knowledge, as opposed to its accumulation.

- As an artistic creation that is vital, connected to the need of subjective potential relationships with the world and not as an instrumentalized practice or a predetermined pattern to consume information and cultural products.

Dominic Willson

I would want to include in this category (of art-as-education) work that is not participatory. I don't think of it as a subset of participatory art or or Social Practice, or as having a necessary connection to Relational Aesthetics.

Qiu Zhijie

What characterizes participation in contemporary art is the temporary absence of authority. Neither the artist's way of interpretation nor the ideal way of participation set by him is considered the only authoritative voice. There is always room for other interpretations.

Tania Bruguera

Actually if it is art it should precisely propose a new kind of participation, one that is not clear for anyone and that is created in the midst of the interactions. Confusion is a handy element because it provides the un-feared possibility of participating and relocating. This is where some political art has failed in my opinion, when in their recognition of the educational side of political gestures they appropriated the literal expressions of learning instead of creating new ways to engage, ones where the distribution of power is negotiated, where people have to re-think their place, where the political is acted by the participants. It is important that the project plans at several times (especially when successful) to stop and create again a sort of chaos or a sort of disorganization of its structures so again new distributions can emerge as well as a new rotation of possibilities to be accepted and the space to validate new proposals. The learning process, if used in art, should not be appropriated to justify a sense of truth.

benchmarks are becoming a destructive force in American museums – the same sort of mindset that has brought us “no child left behind.” In certain cases, we have been interested in creating social network maps to evaluate projects sponsored by the Queens Museum – but these were social projects that included art. We have never set “goals and parameters toward the audience” for art projects. Don't get me wrong, I am not nearly as hostile to “instrumentalization” as many critics, but I am very hostile to the sorts of evaluation that I have seen imposed on museums by technocrat grant officers at foundations.

Wendy Woon

I think that goals and parameters can be cumbersome for these projects and become too inwardly focused and limiting. Discussion of reasonable expectations and ethical considerations however I think could be very helpful to engage in before, during and after projects as way of moving our understanding of these emerging practices forward.

Serpentine Gallery – Janna Graham

I think it's sad when art projects adopt the strategies of conventional pedagogy. It's much more interesting when they take up critical pedagogical histories.

5. How can we characterize the kind of participation that takes place in a work with a core pedagogical component?

Claire Bishop

Without subjecting the work to tedious, bureaucratized modes of standardised assessment criteria, we can't. And as long as this work exists in a liminal space – comparable to Lygia Clark's hybrid forms of art and therapy – I think that's fine.

Sofia Olascoaga | Carolina Alba

- As one that seeks for a dialogue-based construction of meaning. That stimulates the collective building of knowledge. As active and constructive participation, engaging

Also in the use of education in art one should negotiate the location of the destabilizing strategies used in art.

There is a fundamental difference between education and art. Education is about transmitting elements of consensus; art is the disruption of them. Education is the transmission and memorization of elements that make us a collective based in a sense of truth that has been agreed to previously and before the actual delivering of the data. Art is a space leading to a new organization of meanings and that sometimes is done through chaos or through confronting an established sense of truth. The difference is that even when both are ideological activities, education has a clear goal of constructing a defined identity that is related to its function in society and to the expectations of the role of the individual and the collective. Somehow the only thing I can see as similar between art and education is the fact that they are both procedures to convince people about something we believe in (that being data or ideas). In education the demand for creativity and the demand for confrontation towards a norm seems to be more like a training process where the student learns how to behave and how to create a structure to deal with such and hopefully how to create a system to introduce (and impose) their point of view. Education provides a common ground of understanding, a common world of references that makes us fundamentally equal (at a very basic level). In art you are forced to get inside the artist's world and it is your responsibility as an audience to find the common ground with it (and become an equal).

It seems possible for one discipline to appropriate elements of the other but it needs to be clear that the expectations are different. The ideal would be to have those expectations meet at a middle point where the collective acknowledges the legitimacy of another point of view; one where the road to accumulate knowledge and create knowledge meet.

The excitement about the "new" is different in education than in art. In education the new is related to the excitement of when one found something that is understood, that we have understood. In art the new is discovering

what we do not know, what we do not understand (and sometimes discovering that we are not sure we want to).

Mark Allen

I don't think the mode of participation can be characterized in any specific way. Activities including a pedagogical component might range from one-time lectures and hands-on workshops, to discussion groups or long-running "schools", to volunteers working on large scale projects or engaging in a hands-on project.

Many people I've spoken to in this area have expressed interest in the lateral learning that might take place among participants, and how knowledge is shared in a loosely networked manner rather than absorbed through a top-down model. These works frequently function within a peer-to-peer social structure, in which the roles of teacher and student are frequently passed back and forth.

I question if many of the activities are qualitatively different from what might be happening in a forward thinking educational program. Instead, these actions are characterized by using a different framework to talk about what is taking place. The social context of the art space creates a meaning of it different from that in a college; this is similar to what Bourriand discusses in "Relational Aesthetics."

Grant Kester

All art is pedagogical, to the extent that it seeks to inform, inspire or enlighten the viewer. The question is, how is this experience enacted or produced for the viewer? The original meaning of pedagogy is literally "to lead the child". Herein lies one of the key tensions within the modernist avant-garde, based on the opposition between dominance and subordination, blindness and insight, ignorance and revelation. The child-like viewer (possessing an undeveloped consciousness) is led by the artist to grasp the fuller complexity of the sensual or natural world, identity, etc. It's important to bear in mind the continuing centrality of Friedrich Schiller (most recently via Ranciere) for mainstream art theory. In Schiller we encounter an adjudicatory apparatus that positions the philistine viewer

(the 'rabble' who are incapable of properly appreciating advanced art) as impious or immoral (slaves to the easy seductions of romance novels and ghost stories), and art as the instrument of their salvation. The artist, possessing a god-like ability to transcend the debilitating influence of banal popular literature and an increasingly materialist society, is able to ameliorate the blinkered ignorance of the multitudes through the process of "aesthetic education." The work of art trains us for social interactions that we aren't yet prepared for in real life by accustoming us to the undecideability of all knowledge. For Schiller any actual social or political change is deferred to an indefinite and idealized future, when the aesthetic will have finally completed its civilizing mission.

Serpentine Gallery

This changes according to the specific context and content so it is hard to be generic.

6. In what way was the relationship drawn between performance art and performative pedagogy useful and in which way is it unhelpful to understand this practice?

Mark Allen

I don't know, would love to hear more about this from other participants.

Sofia Olascoaga | Carolina Alba

As a relationship that could be helpful to understand both practices if it does have reciprocal links. On the one hand, performative pedagogy may contribute to performance art by including the consideration of methodologies and dynamics that open the space for a more experiential approach to the individual and collective construction of knowledge, subjective and critical positions towards our environment and life process. On the other hand, performance art as artistic process may enhance the focus of this from an individual perspective that values the creation of subjective significance beyond conventions, roles and effective functionality within society.

Serpentine Gallery

Performance histories have had an enormous influence on the development of programming. The collaborative and time-based nature of these interventions demand an approach to production that inherently disrupts the status quo of the institution and this agonistic relation produces the possibility of rupture, change and reinvention.

Nicola Lees (Public Programmes Curator, Serpentine Gallery, London)

The Serpentine Park Nights programme and the Marathon series have historically focused on interdisciplinary practices inviting leading academics, philosophers, architects, playwrights, poets, theatre directors and actors to participate in both artists lead and collaborative projects – perhaps following a long London tradition, i.e. the Independent Group's exhibitions, discussion at the ICA and *This is Tomorrow* at the Whitechapel Galleries, creating new histories beyond this realm.

7. What is the distinction of approaches between using art as a vehicle to teach art vs. using artistic strategies toward creating a better understanding of issues outside art (social, political, etc)?

Wendy Woon

I think "teaching" is an outdated idea in museums. I think facilitating experiences that support viewers in making connections between art and life (social, political, historical, personal contexts), inviting new perspectives through exchange, provoking emotional, creative or intellectual responses beyond comfort zones and fostering tolerance for ambiguity is a more relevant approach that respects the viewer.

Tania Bruguera

It is helpful to use art as a vehicle to teach art if you believe that art is an experience in itself. If you believe that art, no matter what anyone else is talking about, is always about art.

I advocate more for teaching non-art (issues outside art) for art's sake. Teaching philosophy, engineering, ethnography,

sociology, law, science, etc, better prepares the artist for when they use those references. Then they really know what they are talking about and they have a bigger spectrum and current approaches to issues, languages, and strategies on those disciplines. Also that way we can prevent a future of mostly self-referential artistic subjects (if I want to get really fatalistic).

Using artistic strategies to understand issues outside art gives the sense of freedom that may be needed to lose fear, to feel empowered and change the dimension of things.

8. How can pedagogy, through the work of artists, contribute to reinventing gallery and museum practices?

Sally Tallant

The notion of the gallery as a 'living museum' proposed by Alexander Dörner, or 'fun palace' (Cedric Price) proposes the space of the gallery and museum as one that embraces experience and learning. Recent curatorial discussions have focused on 'new institutionalism'. Characterised by open-endedness and dialogue, and leading to events-based and process-based work, it utilises some of the strategies inherent in the ways in which many contemporary artists make work. Since the 1990s many artists and curators have embraced the idea of creating flexible platforms for presenting work, extending the institution and its functions and absorbing institutional critique proposed in the 1970s. The 'new institution' places equal emphasis on all programmes and creates spaces and modes of display that reflect this, including archives, reading rooms, residency schemes, talks and events as well as exhibitions.

The implications for the gallery as a platform for experimentation and a laboratory for learning have been embraced by curators and artists alike and education and learning are at the heart of this process of reinvention. What new institutionalism demands is an integrated approach to programming and the integration of programming teams so that education, exhibitions, performance, and public programmes are conceived as part of a programme of activity rather than the more traditional and territorial

departmentalisation of these areas of work. This interdisciplinary approach engages a wide framework of timescales and the flexibility to work across strands of programming.

Janna Graham

I'd say it depends on the pedagogy they are using. Pedagogy – or Education – sits on a kind of turning point. On the one hand it can be used to disturb the very rigid performance distinction between 'institution of art' and 'world', by inviting a much wider range of people to become involved, and troubling more reified dynamics between institutions, and those that take place amongst staff of arts institutions (i.e. towards the democratisation of culture), or to centre cultural institutions, their expertise, and their capacity to provide expert knowledge and experience products (i.e. towards Cultural Democracy).

Tania Bruguera

It depends on the amount of control the museum wants to have, the concept they have of the demographic of their audience and what the mission of the institution is (because pedagogy always has a mission). Pedagogy is about authority and authenticity as well as museums but while pedagogy is about ethics and desire, the museum is about appreciation, one that should not be related to moral issues. While education is about providing knowledge that could and would be used in everyday life (practical use), the museum's perspective on the usefulness of art model is not that clear (not even when they show actual useful art work). While education wants to create a concept of citizenship / social being (expected active role) the museum wants to create a concept of spectatorship (expected, traditionally, to be a passive role).

9. In the activist realm, in what ways can artistic/pedagogical projects impact an audience that straightforward activism can not? Why is it important (if at all) to keep these practices within the artistic realm?

Grant Kester

This is a difficult question to answer without beginning with a discussion of semantics. What exactly is an artistic

"realm"? Does this refer to a physical space? A set of institutions? A discursive system? A particular mode of knowledge? And what is "straightforward" activism? The recent action at the UN racism conference in Geneva in which protestors, dressed as clowns, threw their fake red noses at Mahmoud Ahmadinejad? A member of the Yes Men posing as a representative of Dow Chemicals admitting responsibility for the Bhopal disaster on national TV? The Clandestine Insurgent Clown Army? The *escraches* of H.I.J.O.S and Grupo Etcetera? I would suggest that we are living in a moment during which the borders between "art" and "activism" (as well as many other adjacent or parallel cultural practices, such as participatory planning, ethnography, radical social work, and environmental science) are being re-negotiated.

Tom Finkelpearl

Artistic/pedagogical projects have an unusual possibility to examine the teacher/student relationship – which is one of the most contentious realms of cooperative/interactive art – and therefore one of the more interesting in my mind. I don't think it is important to keep this practice within the "artistic realm" as this sort of dualism tends to be unproductive.

Qiu Zhijie

If we think of creation as a type of work that can influence ways of thinking, education is no doubt part of such work. Another goal of creation is to create feelings and ways of thinking. An activist-artist will always include pedagogical goals in this creation; it is the manifestation of his activist nature. In this sense, the pedagogical component is always important to artistic creation.

The agenda of an activist, at least at its beginning stage, will always be marginalized by the established social system. Art creation has the capacity to create a debate and its experimental nature has the ability to free itself from constraints. Thus, art creation can provide a better way to engage activism. Society tends to reject activism, but with the help of art creation, for example its game-like quality, more people can be engaged in activism.

The expression of activist ideas in artistic realm should be open and stimulating, rather than being a direct declaration, in order to avoid any pre-conceived rejection.

Tania Bruguera

Again, it is a matter of emphasis, voice, sense of clarity in the message and the ways the ideological is used. It has to do, also, with the erosion of the language used, as well as how one wants to enter the discussion. It is not the same to start by questioning, by giving information or by making something emotional. It depends also on what is expected in terms of processing information by the audience, if the goal is to create a short or long term effect, if the desire is to have an immediate reaction towards the problem or to create an atmosphere for something less reactive, more reflective. I find that all of the options (activism, art, pedagogy) are strategies not a means in themselves. They are tools for political work. They are not just languages or forms but adaptable resources to form conscience and ways to activate action (whether reflexives or proper actions). They are all dealing with setting states of mind and a sense of appreciation of a situation. They are all demanding something from us. The difference between those tools is what each demands: confrontation (activism), institutionalization (pedagogy) or negotiation (art). Another difference is if one wants results (concrete results) and how quickly, how time is conceived in the response to a situation. Activism, education and art have each their own tempo due to their reception and engagement techniques. Another difference is the way one wants to use a sense of immediacy and to work with a sense of authorized criteria.

Mark Allen

Art practices engaging activist aims cover a spectrum from rigorously results-based to highly speculative and discursive. I think the question is not are there specific practices that should be kept inside or outside the artistic realm, rather the artistic realm is one of several methods for analyzing or activating these practices. Any activity in question can be viewed as activism or aesthetics depending on what analytical framework you want to apply.

The position of whether the piece is viewed as activism or art might vary relative to whether you consider yourself audience or participant. People participating in the piece may view it as activism, audience may view it as art, depends on the subject position.

I do feel that it is important to allow at least some of these projects to exist in the artistic realm, which affords them a larger space of quixotic / poetic / philosophical possibility outside of a results-based framework for evaluation based on qualities of political efficacy.

Carin Kuoni (Director of Public Programs, New School, New York)

It seems inaccurate to distinguish between artistic and activist realms as a matter of principle. Each project, whether artistic or activist or both involves different conditions, strategies, and notions of outcome or goals, always, however, involving a public manifestation. The political or social value of the artistic gesture lies in its immediacy and openness that may, however, come at the cost of a specific aim or agenda. In the hands of artists and other creative thinkers, speculation on specific or more general agendas can become a much more inclusive undertaking where museum visitors/spectators/participants are directly called on to contribute with their own imagination and desires. This sense of a temporal community into which each participant can insert his or her own set of priorities may be one of the contributions of pedagogy-based artistic interventions. Belonging is not defined in terms of specific political goals but in terms of a potential participation.

10. How are these current practices indebted to institutional critique and relational aesthetics, and how do they contrast?

Mark Allen

Institutional critique at the core was a project about exposing the underlying frameworks of power and ideology embedded in cultural institutions. I think in our current time people are fairly sophisticated about the unsavory influences on museums and are less interested in pointing

them out to other people. That said, the level of criticality possessed by most contemporary audiences as a result of the institutional critique legacy allows art pedagogical projects to operate with a level of self-reflexive criticality which might otherwise be difficult to discern.

Relational aesthetics is most valuable in its articulation of the social as a material and site of aesthetic investigation. The idea of art as an open space in cultural production, a model for other ways of life, and the idea of a collective, socialized experience of art are all valuable aspects of the relational aesthetics discourse which have seeped into art pedagogical projects.

Another influential text would be David Graeber's "Fragments of an Anarchist Anthropology."

Tom Finkelpearl

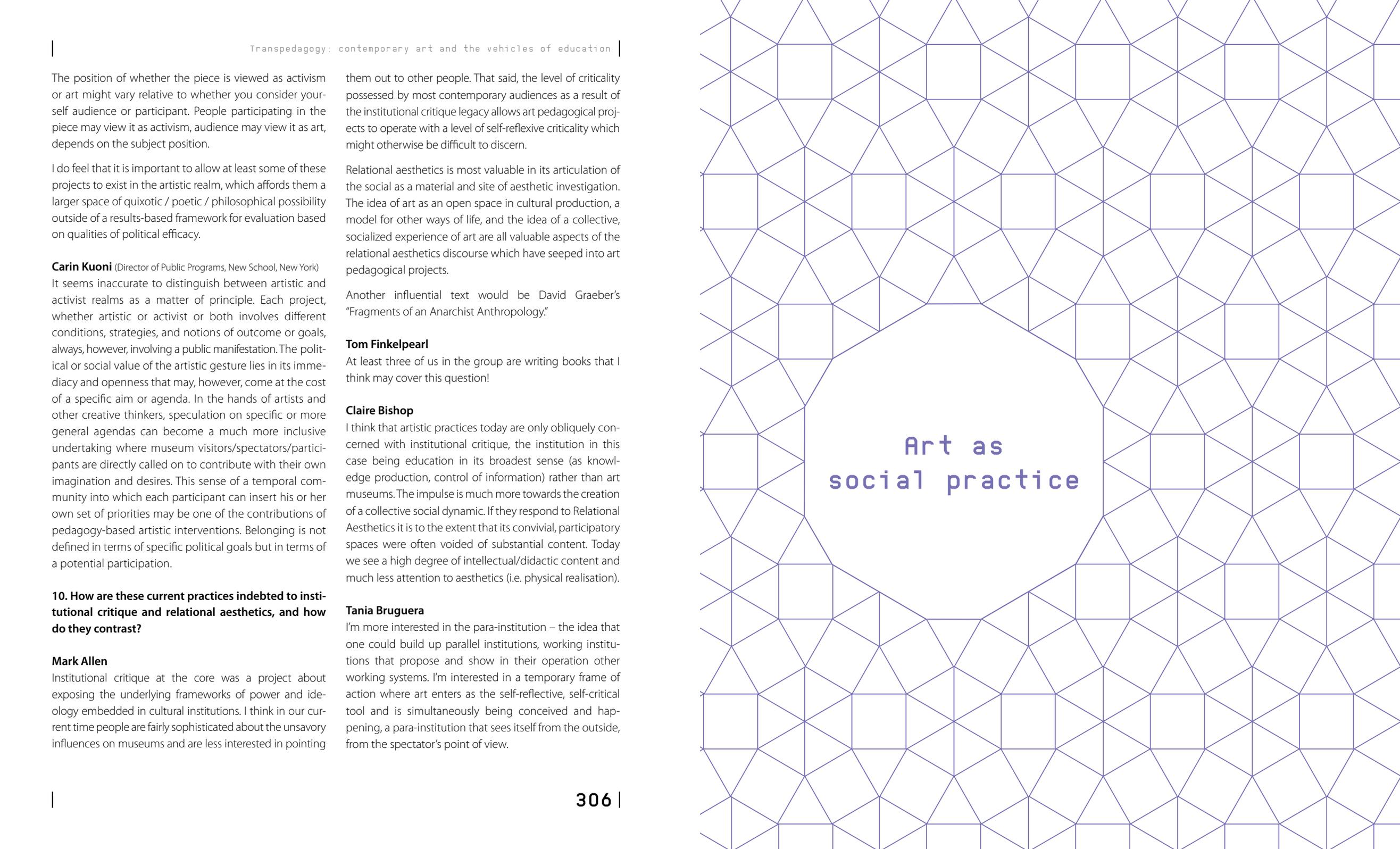
At least three of us in the group are writing books that I think may cover this question!

Claire Bishop

I think that artistic practices today are only obliquely concerned with institutional critique, the institution in this case being education in its broadest sense (as knowledge production, control of information) rather than art museums. The impulse is much more towards the creation of a collective social dynamic. If they respond to Relational Aesthetics it is to the extent that its convivial, participatory spaces were often voided of substantial content. Today we see a high degree of intellectual/didactic content and much less attention to aesthetics (i.e. physical realisation).

Tania Bruguera

I'm more interested in the para-institution – the idea that one could build up parallel institutions, working institutions that propose and show in their operation other working systems. I'm interested in a temporary frame of action where art enters as the self-reflective, self-critical tool and is simultaneously being conceived and happening, a para-institution that sees itself from the outside, from the spectator's point of view.



Art as
social practice

Education as social engaged art

Pablo Helguera

Definitions

What do we mean when we say “socially engaged art”? As the terminology around this practice is particularly porous, it is necessary to create a provisional definition of the kind of work that will be discussed here.

All art, inasmuch as it is created to be communicated to or experienced by others, is social. Yet to claim that all art is social does not take us very far in understanding the difference between a static work such as a painting and a social interaction that proclaims itself as art – that is, socially engaged art.

We can distinguish a subset of artworks that feature the experience of their own creation as a central element. An action painting is a record of the gestural brushstrokes that produced it, but the act of executing those brushstrokes is not the primary objective of its making (otherwise the painting would not be preserved). A Chinese water painting or a mandala, by contrast, is essentially about the process of its making, and its eventual disappearance is consistent with its ephemeral identity. Conceptualism introduced the thought process as artwork; the materiality of the artwork is optional.

Socially engaged art falls within the tradition of conceptual process art. But it does not follow that all process-based art is also socially engaged: if this were so, a sculpture by Donald Judd would fall in the same category as, say, a performance by Thomas Hirshhorn. Minimalism, for instance, though conceptual and process based, depends on processes that ensure the removal of the artist from

the production – eliminating the “engagement” that is a definitive element of socially engaged art.

While there is no complete agreement as to what constitutes a meaningful interaction or social engagement, what characterizes socially engaged art is its dependence on social intercourse as a factor of its existence.

Socially engaged art, as a category of practice, is still a working construct. In many descriptions, however, it encompasses a genealogy that goes back to the avant-garde and expands significantly during the emergence of Post-Minimalism.¹ The social movements of the 1960s led to greater social engagement in art and the emergence of performance art and installation art, centering on process and site-specific city, which all influence socially engaged art practice today. In previous decades, art based on social interaction has been identified as “relational aesthetics” and “community,” “collaborative,” “participatory,” “dialogic,” and “public” art, among many other titles. (Its redefinitions, like that of other kinds of art, have stemmed from the urge to draw lines between generations and unload historical baggage.) “Social practice” has emerged most prominently in recent publications, symposia, and exhibitions and is the most generally favored term for socially engaged art. The new term excludes, for the first time, an explicit reference to art-making. Its immediate predecessor, “relational

¹ In this text it is not possible (nor is it the goal) to trace a history of socially engaged art; instead I focus mainly on the practice as it exists today, with reference to specific artists, movements, and events that have significantly informed it.

aesthetics,” preserves the term in its parent principle, aesthetics (which, ironically, refers more to traditional values – i.e., beauty – than does “art”). The exclusion of “art” coincides with a growing general discomfort with the connotations of the term. “Social practice” avoids evocations of both the modern role of the artist (as an illuminated visionary) and the postmodern version of the artist (as a self-conscious critical being). Instead the term democratizes the construct, making the artist into an individual whose specialty includes working with society in a professional capacity.

Between Disciplines

The term “social practice” obscures the discipline from which socially engaged art has emerged (i.e., art). In this way it denotes the critical detachment from other forms of art-making (primarily centered and built on the personality of the artist) that is inherent to socially engaged art, which, almost by definition, is dependent on the involvement of others besides the instigator of the artwork. It also thus raises the question of whether such activity belongs to the field of art at all. This is an important query; art students attracted to this form of art-making often find themselves wondering whether it would be more useful to abandon art altogether and instead become professional community organizers, activists, politicians, ethnographers, or sociologists. Indeed, in addition to sitting uncomfortably between and across these disciplines and downplaying the role of the individual artist, socially engaged art is specifically at odds with the capitalist market infrastructure of the art world: it does not fit well in the traditional collecting practices of contemporary art, and the prevailing cult of the individual artist is problematic for those whose goal is to work with others, generally in collaborative projects with democratic ideals. Many artists look for ways to renounce not only object-making but authorship altogether, in the kind of “stealth” art practice that philosopher Stephen Wright argues for, in which the artist is a secret agent in the real world, with an artistic agenda.²

² See “Por un arte clandestino,” the author’s conversation with Stephen Wright in <http://pablohelguera.net//por-un-arte-clandestino-conversacion-con-stephen-wright-/>. Wright later wrote a text based on this exchange, http://www.entrepreneur.com/tradejournals/article/_html.

Yet the uncomfortable position of socially engaged art, identified as art yet located between more conventional art forms and the related disciplines of sociology, politics, and the like, is exactly the position it should inhabit. The practice’s direct links to and conflicts with both art and sociology must be overtly declared and the tension addressed, but not resolved. Socially engaged artists can and should challenge the art market in attempts to redefine the notion of authorship, but to do so they must accept and affirm their existence in the realm of art, as artists. And the artist as social practitioner must also make peace with the common accusation that he or she is not an artist but an “amateur” anthropologist, sociologist, etc. Socially engaged art functions by attaching itself to subjects and problems that normally belong to other disciplines, moving them temporarily into a space of ambiguity. It is this temporary snatching away of subjects into the realm of art-making that brings new insights to a particular problem or condition and in turn makes it visible to other disciplines. For this reason, I believe that the best term for this kind of practice is what I have thus far been using as a generic descriptor – that is, “socially engaged art” (or SEA), a term that emerged in the mid 1970s, as it unambiguously acknowledges a connection to the practice of art.³

Symbolic and Actual Practice

To understand SEA, an important distinction must be made between two types of art practice: symbolic and actual. As I will show, SEA is an actual, not symbolic, practice.

A few examples:

- Let’s say an artist or group of artists creates an “artist-run school,” proposing a radical new approach to teaching. The project is presented as an art project but also as a functioning school (a relevant example, given the recent emergence of similar projects). The “school,” however, in its course offerings, resembles a regular, if slightly unorthodox, city college. In content and format, the courses are not different

³ From this point forward I will use this term to refer to the type of artwork that is the subject of this book.

in structure from most continuing education courses. Furthermore, the readings and course load encourage self-selectivity by virtue of the avenues through which it is promoted and by offering a sampling that is typical of a specific art world readership, to the point that the students taking the courses are not average adults but rather art students or art-world insiders. It is arguable, therefore, whether the project constitutes a radical approach to education; nor does it risk opening itself up to a public beyond the small sphere of the converted.

- An artist organizes a political rally about a local issue. The project, which is supported by a local arts center in a medium-size city, fails to attract many local residents; only a couple dozen people show up, most of whom work at the arts center. The event is documented on video and presented as part of an exhibition. In truth, can the artist claim to have organized a rally?

These are two examples of works that are politically or socially motivated but act through the representation of ideas or issues. These are works that are designed to address social or political issues only in an allegorical, metaphorical, or symbolic level (for example, a painting about social issues is not very different from a public art project that claims to offer a social experience but only does so in a symbolic way such as the ones just described above). The work does not control a social situation in an instrumental and strategic way in order to achieve a specific end.

This distinction is partially based on Jürgen Habermas's work *The Theory of Communicative Action* (1961). In it Habermas argues that social action (an act constructed by the relations between individuals) is more than a mere manipulation of circumstances by an individual to obtain a desired goal (that is, more than just the use of strategic and instrumental reason). He instead favors what he describes as communicative action, a type of social action geared to communication and understanding between individuals that can have a lasting effect on the spheres of politics and culture as a true emancipatory force.

Most artists who produce socially engaged works are interested in creating a kind of collective art that affects the public sphere in a deep and meaningful way, not in creating a representation – like a theatrical play – of a social issue. Certainly many SEA projects are in tune with the goals of deliberative democracy and discourse ethics, and most believe that art of any kind can't avoid taking a position in current political and social affairs. (The counter-argument is that art is largely a symbolic practice, and as such the impact it has on a society can't be measured directly; but then again, such hypothetical art, as symbolic, would not be considered socially engaged but rather would fall into the other familiar categories, such as installation, video, etc.) It is true that much SEA is composed of simple gestures and actions that may be perceived as symbolic. For example, Paul Ramirez-Jonas's work *Key to the City* (1910) revolved around a symbolic act – giving a person a key as a symbol of the city. Yet although Ramirez-Jonas's contains a symbolic act, it is not symbolic practice but rather communicative action (or "actual" practice) – that is, the symbolic act is part of a meaningful conceptual gesture.⁴

The difference between symbolic and actual practice is not hierarchical; rather, its importance lies in allowing a certain distinction to be made: it would be important, for example, to understand and identify the difference between a project in which I establish a health campaign for children in a war-torn country and a project in which I imagine a health campaign and fabricate documentation of it in Photoshop. Such a fabrication might result in a fascinating work, but it would be a symbolic action, relying on literary and public relations mechanisms to attain verisimilitude and credibility.

To summarize: social interaction occupies a central and inextricable part of any socially engaged artwork. SEA is a hybrid, multi-disciplinary activity that exists somewhere between art and non-art, and its state may be permanently

⁴ Paul Ramirez Jonas's project, produced by Creative Time, took place in New York City in the Summer of 2010.

unresolved. SEA depends on actual – not imagined or hypothetical – social action.

What will concern us next is how SEA can bring together, engage, and even critique a particular group of people.

Community

In this section I will consider some of the defining elements around group relationships created through SEA. They include, A: The construction of a community or temporary social group through a collective experience; B: The construction of multi-layered participatory structures; C: The role of social media in the construction of community; D: The role of time; E: Assumptions about audience.

a. The Construction of a Community

"Community" is a word commonly associated with SEA. Not only does each SEA project depend on a community for its existence, but such projects are, most people agree, community-building mechanisms. But what kind of community does SEA aspire to create? The relationships that artists establish with the communities they work with can vary widely; SEA projects may have nearly nothing in common.

Shannon Jackson compares and contrasts SEA projects in her study *Social Works: Performing Art, Supporting Publics*, juxtaposing the community art project *Touchable Stories* (begun), by Shannon Flattery, which seeks to help "individual communities define their own voice," the artist says, and the work of Santiago Sierra, who pays workers from disadvantaged and marginalized groups to do demeaning tasks.⁵ These projects are both accepted as SEA, yet they could not be more different.

The typical community art project (for instance, a children's mural project) is able to fulfill its purpose of strengthening a community's sense of self by lessening or suspending criticality regarding the form and content of the product

⁵ Shannon Jackson, *Social Works: Performing Art, Supporting Publics* (London: Routledge,), p. .

and, often, promoting "feel-good" positive social values.⁶ Sierra's work, at the opposite end of the spectrum, exploits individuals with the goal of denouncing exploitation – a powerful conceptual gesture that openly embraces the ethical contradiction of denouncing that which one perpetrates. Sierra's community of participants is financially contracted; they participate in order to get paid, not out of interest or for their love for art.

To further complicate matters, let's say that SEA is successful inasmuch as it builds community bonds. By this logic, Sierra's work would not be a successful one but the children's mural project would hold together, as it helps build community. This thinking would not hold true to art world standards, which consider Sierra's conceptual gestures – if objectionable – as more sophisticated and relevant to the debates around performance and art than the average community mural. Furthermore, is it still successful SEA if the community fostered by an art work is a racist hate group? This points to a larger, unresolved issue: Does SEA, by definition, have particular goals when it comes to engaging a community?

All art invites social interaction; yet in the case of SEA it is the process itself – the fabrication of the work – that is social. Furthermore, SEA is often characterized by the activation of members of the public in roles beyond that of passive receptor. While many artworks made over the last four decades have encouraged the participation of the viewer (Fluxus scores and instructions, installations by Felix Gonzalez-Torres, and most works associated with relational aesthetics, such as Rirkrit Tiravanija's shared meals), this participation mostly involves the execution of an idea (following a Fluxus instruction, for example) or the free partaking of the work in an open-ended social environment (such as sharing a meal).

SEA, as it is manifested today, continues in the spirit of these practices but often expands the depth of the social

⁶ This is not meant to be a critique of community art, which, like all forms of art, exists in more and less successful iterations. Nor is it a critique of Sierra's practice. The examples are presented merely to illustrate the spectrum along which collaboration and confrontation operate.

relationship, at times promoting ideas such as empowerment, criticality, and sustainability among the participants. Like the political and activist art inspired by 1970 feminism and identity politics, SEA usually has an overt agenda, but its emphasis is less on the act of protest than on becoming a platform or a network for the participation of others, so that the e"effects of the project may outlast its ephemeral presentation.

Sierra's performance and the children's mural project exemplify the extremes of SEA because they adopt social interaction strategies of total confrontation and total harmony, respectively. Neither of these extremes leads easily to, or is the result of, a critically self-reflexive dialogue with an engaged community, which is, as I will try to argue, a key pursuit for the majority of works within this practice.

One factor of SEA that must be considered is its expansion to include participants from outside the regular circles of art and the art world. Most historical participatory art (thinking from the avant-gardes to the present) has been staged within the confines of an art environment, be it a gallery, museum, or event to which visitors arrive predisposed to have an art experience or already belonging to a set of values and interests that connect them to art. While many SEA projects still follow this more conservative or traditional approach, the more ambitious and risk-taking projects directly engage with the public realm – with the street, the open social space, the non-art community – a task that presents so many variables that only few artists can undertake it successfully.

Currently, perhaps the most accepted description of the community SEA creates is "emancipated"; that is, to use Jacques Rancière's oft-quoted words, "a community of narrators and translators."⁷ This means that its participants willingly engage in a dialogue from which they extract enough critical and experiential wealth to walk away feeling enriched, perhaps even claiming some ownership of the experience or ability to reproduce it with others.

7 Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator* (London: Verso, 2009), p. 22.

To understand what this dialogue may consist of, it is important to understand what we mean by interaction. Like the division between insider and outsider art and the definition of community, there is no general, agreed-upon understanding of participation, engagement, or collaboration. As mentioned above, in some conceptual art, the role of the participant is nominal; he or she may be an instrument for the completion of the work (for Marcel Duchamp, for example) or a directed performer (in a Fluxus piece). There are as many kinds of participation as there are participatory projects, but nominal or symbolic interaction cannot be equated with an in-depth, long-term exchange of ideas, experiences, and collaborations, as their goals are different. To understand these different approaches allows for a sense of what each can accomplish.

b. Multi-Layered Participatory Structures

Participation, as a blanket term, can quickly lose its meaning around art. Do I participate by simply entering an exhibition gallery? Or am I only a participant when I am actively involved in the making of a work? If I find myself in the middle of the creation of an artwork but I decline to get involved, have I participated or not?

Participation shares the same problem as SEA, as previously discussed. Arguably, all art is participatory because it requires the presence of a spectator; the basic act of being there in front of an artwork is a form of participation. The conditions of participation for SEA are often more specific, and it is important to understand it in the time frame during which it happens.

Some of the most sophisticated SEA offers rich layers of participation, manifested in accordance with the level of engagement a viewer displays. We can establish a very tentative taxonomy:⁸

1. *Nominal participation.* The visitor or viewer contemplates the work in a reflective manner, in passive detachment

8 Suzanne Lacy delinea estruturas participativas de outra forma em seu livro *Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1995), p. 178.

that is nonetheless a form of participation. The artist Muntadas posted this warning for one of his exhibitions: "Attention: Perception Requires Participation."

2. *Directed participation.* The visitor completes a simple task to contribute to the creation of the work (for example, Yoko Ono's *Wish Tree* [1996] in which visitors are encouraged to write a wish on a piece of paper and hang it on a tree).

3. *Creative participation.* The visitor provides content for a component of the work within a structure established by the artist (for example, Allison Smith's work *The Muster* [2005], in which fifty volunteers in Civil War uniforms engaged in a reenactment, declaring the causes for which they, personally, were fighting).

4. *Collaborative participation.* The visitor shares responsibility for developing the structure and content of the work in collaboration and direct dialogue with the artist (Caroline Woolard's ongoing project "Our Goods", where participants offer goods or services on the basis of interest and need, is an example of this way of working).

Usually, nominal and directed participation take place in a single encounter, while creative and collaborative participation tend to develop over longer periods of time (from a single day to months or years).

A work incorporating participation at a nominal or directed level is not necessarily more or less successful or desirable than one featuring creative or collaborative participation. However, it is important to keep the distinctions in mind, for at least three reasons: first, they help us in outlining the range of possible goals for a participatory framework; second, as I will show later, they can create a useful frame of reference in evaluating a work's intention in relation to its actualization; third, a consideration of the degree of participation a work entails is intimately related to any evaluation of the way in which it constructs a community experience.

In addition to their degree of participation, it is equally important to recognize the predisposition toward participation that individuals may have in a particular project.

In social work, individuals or communities (often referred to as "clients") with whom the social worker interacts are divided into three groups: those who actively and willingly engage in an activity, or voluntary (such as "Flash mob" type of action, which will be discussed further); those who are coerced or mandated to engage, or non-voluntary (for example, a high school class collaborating in the activist project) and those who encounter a project in a public space or engage in a situation without having full knowledge that it is an art project, or involuntary.⁹ An awareness of the voluntary, nonvoluntary, or involuntary predisposition of participants in a given project allows for the formulation of a successful approach to an individual or community, as approaches for participants with different predispositions vary widely. For example, if a participant is willingly and actively engaged as a volunteer, it may be in the interest of the artist to make gestures to encourage that involvement. If a participant has been forced to be part of the project for external reasons, it may be beneficial for the artist to acknowledge that fact and, if the objective is engagement, take measures to create a greater sense of ownership for that person. In the case of involuntary participants, the artist may decide to hide the action from them or to make them aware at a certain point of their participation in the art project.

Institutions such as Machine Project in Los Angeles, Morgan J. Puett's and Mark Dion's *Mildred's Lane* in Pennsylvania, or Caroline Woolard's *Trade School* in New York offer environments in which visitors gradually develop sets of relationships that allow them to contribute meaningfully in the construction of new situations, effectively becoming not only interlocutors but collaborators in a joint enterprise.

c. Virtual Participation: Social Media

This book does not aim to encompass the online world, but a word should be said about the relationship between face-to-face and virtual sociality. It is relevant that the use

9 See John Pulin and contributors, *Strengths-Based Generalist Practice: A Collaborative Approach* (Belmont: Thomson Brooks/Cole, 2000), p. 15.

of “social practice” as a term rose almost in perfect synchrony with new, online social media. This parallelism can be interpreted in many ways: perhaps the new iteration of SEA was inspired by the new fluidity of communication, or, alternatively, perhaps it was a reaction against the ethereal nature of virtual encounters, an affirmation of the personal and the local. The likelihood is that recent forms of SEA are both a response to the interconnectivity of today’s world and the result of a desire to make those connections more direct and less dependent on a virtual interface. In any case, social networks have proven to be very effective forms for instigating social action.

In a flash mob, a group of people, usually of strangers, suddenly congregates, directed to the same spot via communication from a leader over an online social network. While ash mobs usually don’t proclaim themselves as artworks, they do fall neatly into the category of directed participation outlined above. In addition, online social networks have proven to be useful platforms for the organization of carefully planned political actions. Much has been made recently of the ways in which Twitter and Facebook helped bring large groups of people together in events connected with the so-called Arab Spring of 2011, and the social significance of these gatherings can’t be considered merely symbolic. Art projects that, in a much more humble way, offer a time and space for congregation and developing relationships also can serve an important role in helping diverse groups of people – neighbors, students, a group of artists – find commonalities through activities.

Social networks and other online platforms can be very beneficial vehicles for continuing work that has been started in person. Online learning platforms like Blackboard and Haiku provide spaces in which community members can interact, commenting and exchanging information on the production of a project. These platforms have their own idiosyncrasies and etiquette, but for the most part the general rules of social interaction apply.

d. Time and Effort

If there is something common to every pedagogical approach, it is an emphasis on the necessity of investing

time to achieve a goal. Some educational goals simply can’t be achieved if one is not willing to invest time: you can’t learn a language in a day; you can’t become an expert in martial arts at a weekend workshop. According to Malcolm Gladwell, it takes about ten thousand hours of practice to become expert at anything.¹⁰ A museum can hold an art workshop for a school, but the school must commit to a time frame of, say, at least three hours if the experience is to be successful. Even very limited time periods of engagement can be productive when goals are clearly set: a one-hour gallery conversation at a museum for a non-specialized audience can’t turn visitors into art specialists, but it can be effective in inspiring interest in a subject and making a focused point about a particular kind of art or artist.

Many problems in community projects are due to unrealistic goals in relation to the expected time investment. An SEA project can make particularly great demands of time and effort on an artist – demands that are usually at odds with the time constraints posed by biennials and other international art events, let alone the pressure for product and near-immediate gratification from the art market. This may be the single biggest reason why SEA projects fail to succeed. An artist may be invited by a biennial a few months in advance of the event to do a site-specific community collaboration. By the time the artist has found a group of people to work with (which is not always easy or even possible), it is likely that the time for developing the project is limited, and the end result may be rushed. Most successful SEA projects are developed by artists who have worked in a particular community for a long time and have an in-depth understanding of those participants. This is also why SEA projects, like exotic fruit, usually travel poorly when “exported” to other locations to be replicated.

In rare instances, artists or curators have the luxury of spending a long time in a particular location, with very rich results. A prime example is France Morin’s ongoing project *The Quiet in the Land*, a series of SEA projects that have

¹⁰ See chapter two of Malcolm Gladwell, *Outliers* (New York: Little Brown & Co., 2008).

each taken several years to accomplish. Morin’s remarkable determination has allowed her (and teams of artists) to successfully engage with communities as disparate as the Shakers of Sabbathday Lake, Maine, and the monks and novices, artisans, and students of Luang Prabang, Laos. Morin acts as catalyst for the development of artists’ projects, moving into the regions where she is interested in working several years in advance of the work period to gain the trust of the community. Her interest lies in creating projects that “strive to activate the ‘space between’ groups and individuals as a zone of potentiality, in which the relationship between contemporary art and life may be renegotiated.”¹¹ Morin’s projects are key references for understanding the great demands – and great potential – of artists deeply engaging in a social environment.

e. Audience Questions

“Who is your audience?” This is commonly the first question educators ask about any pedagogical activity in the planning. In art, by contrast, to preestablish an audience is seen by some to restrict a work’s possible impact, which is why many artists are usually reluctant to answer that question about their work. Common responses are, “I don’t have any audience in mind” and “My audience is whoever is interested.”

To some, the idea of an audience for an artwork-in-progress is a contradiction: If the artwork is new, how can an audience for it already exist? By this logic, new ideas – and new types of art – create their own audiences after they are made. I would argue, however, that ideas and artworks have implicit audiences, and this is especially true in the case of SEA, where the audience is often inextricable from the work.

In the movie *Field of Dreams* (1980), an Iowa farmer (played by Kevin Costner) walking through a corn field suddenly hears a voice saying, “If you build it, he will come.” He envisions a baseball field and is strongly compelled to build it.

¹¹ Quote from website *The Quiet in the Land*: <http://www.thequietintheland.org/description.php>.

The phrase has entered the English language in the variation of “build it and they will come” as if it is an adage of ancient wisdom and not from the pen of a Hollywood screenwriter. The implied message is that building comes first, audiences second. Yet the opposite is true. We build because audiences exist. We build because we seek to reach out to others, and they will come initially because they recognize themselves in what we have built. After that initial interaction, spaces enter a process of self-identification, ownership, and evolution based on group interests and ideas. They are not static spaces for static viewers but ever-evolving, growing, or decaying communities that build themselves, develop, and eventually dismantle.

Various sociologists have argued – David Berreby most notably – that as humans we are predisposed to express a tribal mindset of “us” versus “them,” and each statement we make is oriented in relation to a set of preexisting social codes that include or exclude sectors of people.¹² The contemporary art milieu is most distinctively about exclusion, not inclusion, because the structure of social interactions within its confines are based on a repertory of cultural codes, or passwords, that provide status and a role within a given conversation. Radical, countercultural, or alternative practices employ those exclusionary passwords as well, to maintain a distance from the mainstream.

Many participatory projects that are open, in theory, to the broad public, in fact serve very specific audiences. It could be said that a SEA project operates within three registers: one is its immediate circle of participants and supporters; the second is the critical art world, toward which it usually looks for validation; and the third is society at large, through governmental structures, the media, and other organizations or systems that may absorb and assimilate the ideas or other aspects of the project. In some cases – in residency programs, for example – visual artists are commissioned to work with a predetermined audience. While these initiatives often result in interesting and

¹² David Berreby, *Us and Them: The Science of Identity*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008.

successful art projects, they run the risk of limiting the support they can provide to the artist by prescribing set parameters for audiences and spaces, possibly trying to full quotas set by grant makers. Spaces and institutions in this situation often find themselves between a rock and a hard place, trying to sell a very hermetic product – very self-referential, cutting-edge art – to (often non-art) communities with very different interests and concerns.

Audiences are never “others” – they are always very concrete selves. In other words, it is impossible to plan a participatory experience and take steps to make it public without also making some assumption about those who will eventually partake in it. Do they read Artforum? Do they watch CNN? Do they speak English? Do they live in Idaho? Do they vote Democrat? When we organize and promote an exhibition or create a public program, we make decisions regarding its hypothetical audience or audiences, even if intuitively. Sociolinguist Allan Bell coined the term “audience design” in 1984, referring to the ways in which the media addresses different types of audiences through “style shifts” in speech.¹³ Since that time, the discipline of sociolinguistics has defined structures by which we can recognize the patterns speakers use to engage with audiences in multiple social and linguistic environments through register and social dialect variations. So if an arts organization is to be thought of as a “speaker,” it is possible to conceive of it as operating – through its programs and activities – in multiple social registers that may or may not include an art “intelligentsia,” a more immediate contemporary-art audience with its inner codes and references, and the larger public.

Most curators and artists, when I have articulated this view to them, have expressed wariness about the notion of a preconceived audience. To them, it sounds reductive and prone to mistakes. They feel that to identify a certain demographic or social group as the audience for a work

may be to oversimplify their individuality and idiosyncrasies – an attitude that may perhaps have grown from critiques of “essentialism” in the early 1980s. I usually turn the question the other way around: Is it possible to not conceive of an audience for your work, to create an experience that is intended to be public without the slightest bias toward a particular kind of interlocutor, be it a rice farmer in Laos or a professor of philosophy at Columbia University? The debate may boil down to art practice itself and to the common statement by artists that they don’t have a viewer in mind while making their work – in other words, that they only produce for themselves. What is usually not questioned, however, is how one’s notion of one’s self is created. It is the construct of a vast collectivity of people who have influenced one’s thoughts and one’s values, and to speak to one’s self is more than a solipsistic exercise – it is, rather, a silent way of speaking to the portion of civilization that is summarized in our minds. It is true that no audience construct is absolute – they all are, in fact, fictional groupings that we make based on biased assumptions. Nonetheless, they are what we have to go by, and experience in a variety of fields has proven that, as inexact as audience constructs may be, it is more productive to work with one than by no presuppositions whatsoever.

The problem doesn’t lie in the decision whether or not to reach for large or selective audiences but rather in understanding and defining which groups we wish to speak to and in making conscious steps to reach out to them in a constructive, methodical way: for example, an artist attempting to find an audience may not benefit by trying experimental methods – he or she could be better served by traditional marketing. To get the results they desire, artists must be clear with themselves in articulating the audiences to whom they wish to speak and in understanding the context from which they are addressing them.

13 Allan Bell, (1984) Language Style as Audience Design. In: Coupland, N. and A. Jaworski (1997, eds.) Sociolinguistics: a Reader and Coursebook, pp. 240–50. New York: St Martin’s Press Inc.

What is the “social” in social practice?: comparing experiments in performance

Shannon Jackson

In my innermost heart I am a Minimalist with a guilt complex.
Santiago Sierra¹

Touchable Stories began in 1996 with the idea of using the talents of contemporary artists to help individual communities define their own voice and give it public expression.

Shannon Flattery, *Touchable Stories* website
(italics in original)²

The above quotations come from two artists whose work differs enormously, yet both artists’ work has been called “social practice.” As I noted recently in the “Lexicon” special issue of *Performance Research*, social practice is a term that has allegiances with a number of movements in experimental art and performance studies.³ Those allegiances bring to mind other terms that share some kinship with social practice: activist art, social work, protest performance, performance ethnography, community art, relational aesthetics, conversation pieces, action research, and other terms that signal a social turn in art practice as well as the representational dimension of social and political formations. However, “social practice” is also embedded

in a longer history of terms that have not always enjoyed triumphant celebration in the history of aesthetics: literal art, functionalist art, dumbed-down art, social realist art, victim art, consumable art, and related terms that have been coined to lament the capitulations to accessibility and intelligibility that can occur when art practice and social practice – aesthetics and politics – combine. How should we come w terms with this difference? Do the barometers for assessing aesthetic innovation differ so enormously from those that assess social innovation?

The tensions and opportunities in conducting an interdisciplinary analysis of social practice, an interdisciplinary that integrates experimental aesthetic movements with the traditions of social science and social theory, are regularly felt in the field of performance studies. The cross-disciplinary site of performance studies provides a forum for asking some very pointed questions about different critical barometers. Is, for instance, the visual artist’s sense of the social in conceptual art comparable to the folklorist’s sense of the social? Do they have the same commitments to historical contextualization? Are they similarly or differently interested in the medium of embodiment, voice, gesture, and collective assembly? Similarly, we might ask whether a shared interest in participation provides a link between a social movement theorist and a Boalian forum theatre-maker. Do they have the same barometers for gauging efficacy? For understanding human action? As someone whose first book examined social reform in

1 Quoted in Eckhard Schneider, *300 Tons*, in Schneider, *Santiago Sierra: 300 Tons and Previous Works* (Germany: KUB, 2003), 33.

2 *Touchable Stories*, www.touchablestories.org. Accessed September 7, 2007.

3 Shannon Jackson, *Social Practice, Performance Research* 11.3 (September 2007), 113-18.

the cultural performances of the settlement movement, who now finds herself regularly teaching courses in contemporary experimental art, I am continually compelled by cross-disciplinary tensions and questions.⁴ Often they confuse me. By exploring different techniques and effects within the category of “social practice,” this chapter seeks to make explicit some of the contradictions and competing stakes of interdisciplinary scholarship and experimental art-making in performance studies. Firstly, I offer an account of both contemporary and past debates in aesthetic theory around the social in art practice, arguing for the usefulness of the term “heteronomy” in understanding both experimental art and social selves. I then reflect on how two artists, Santiago Sierra and Shannon Flattery of *Touchable Stories*, offer different models for engaging the legacies and debates of social practice.

Social aesthetics and its debates

The visual art critic Claire Bishop’s essay *Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics*, published in *October* in 2004, set off a great deal of discussion in the experimental art world, including a fairly lacerating response from one of the artists she critiques, Liam Gillick. Bishop’s continued reflection appeared subsequently in *Artforum*, along with a variety of explicit and implicit responses in that journal and others.⁵ Their concerns are symptomatic of the kind of discourse and confusion that emerges whenever a discussion of politics and aesthetics is underway, especially over how such discussion provokes and is provoked by a categorical crisis around performance as both an aesthetic form and a social one.

Bishop’s *October* essay and her *Artforum* piece express themselves in slightly different terms, but together they

create oppositions among different critical paradigms and art movements. Generally, Bishop seeks to support what she calls the “antagonist” possibilities of art practice. Antagonism is the term she uses to argue for the necessity of a criticality and a resistance to intelligibility that is, in her view, necessary for aesthetics and, again in her view, neutralized when art starts to read into social territory. Art practices that seek to create a harmonious space of intersubjective encounter – that is, those that “feel good” – risk neutralizing the capacity of critical reflection. Furthermore, art practices that seek to ameliorate social ills – that is, those that “do good” – risk becoming overly instrumentalized, neutralizing the formal complexities and interrogative possibilities of art under the homogenizing umbrella of a social goal. As her argument unfolds, certain artists – such as Rirkrit Tiravanija and Liam Gillick – end up on the “bad” feel-good side of the critical equation; Tiravanija’s renowned use of gallery space as a site for food preparation and festive circulation does not leave room for a critical antagonism. Meanwhile, the “do-gooding” impulses of other social practices in Liverpool, Los Angeles, San Sebastian, Rotterdam, and Istanbul are critiqued for their uncritical gestures of “responsibility.” Bishop’s critiques are leveled most heavily at Oda Projesi, a Turkish artist collective that moved into a three-room apartment in Istanbul and proceeded to visit their neighbors and invite them over, eventually sponsoring children’s workshops, parades, potlucks, and other events that sought to create a context for dialogue and exchange. Indeed, their practice might be called a contemporary instance of settlement work. At the same time, other artists such as Santiago Sierra, Thomas Hirschorn, Francis Alÿs, and Alexandra Mir end up on Bishop’s “good” antagonistic side. She reconsiders Hirschorn’s well-publicized contribution to “Documenta XI” in 2002, *Bataille Monument*, a piece that was sited in a local bar and on the lawn shared by two housing projects Norstadt, a suburb miles away from the “Documenta” venue in Kassel. Defending him against accusations that Hirschorn appropriated a local space without gaining a sufficiently deep understanding of its local politics, Bishop foregrounds the degree to which

Hirschorn’s decisions and *Structures* created a space of disorientation for “Documenta” spectators, one that disallowed any notion of “community identity” to form and simultaneously “re-admitted a degree of autonomy to art.”⁶

In creating a critical barometer for making these determinations, Bishop invokes Chantal Mouffe, whose social theory argues for the necessity of antagonism within and between large-scale social sectors. Bishop thereby equates a (post)socialist theory of antagonism with the felt antagonism of a spectator’s encounter with appropriately edgy art material.⁷ By opposing antagonistic and nonantagonistic art, Bishop seeks to foreground the extent to which “ethical judgments” and a “generalized set of moral precepts” govern the goals and analysis of such work in lieu of aesthetic criteria.⁸ Moreover, the social mission of social art overdetermines its structure, creating a desire for functionality and efficacy that neutralizes art’s capacity to remain outside the instrumentalist prescriptions of the social. While Bishop’s arguments are not exactly the same – sometimes Bishop does not like art that is feeling good and sometimes she does not like art that is doing good – together, the essays reassemble a familiar lexicon for understanding (and casting judgment upon) a social practice. Such a critical barometer measures an artwork’s place among a number of polarizations: 1) social celebration versus social antagonism; 2) legibility versus illegibility; 3) radical functionality versus radical unfunctionality; and 4) artistic heteronomy versus artistic autonomy. The thrust of Bishop’s “discontent” is that “the social turn” in art practice is in danger of emphasizing the first terms in this series of pairings over the critical, illegible, useless, and autonomous domains that art must necessarily inhabit in order to be itself. Bishop draws some new lines in the sand in some very old debates about aesthetics and politics. She condemns art that uses

references that are easily consumed and accessible, calls for social goals that aspire to “effective” social change, and collaborates to invest overly in a “Christian ethic of the good soul” to engage in an “authorial self-sacrifice” to communities and societies. Instead, she argues that “The best collaborative practices of the past ten years address this contradictory pull between autonomy and social intervention, and reflect on this antinomy both in the structure of the work *and* in the conditions of its reception.”⁹

It is hard for me to disagree with the phrasing of the last sentence. Indeed, the fact that Bishop elsewhere advocates art practice that “attempt to think the aesthetic and the social/political *together*, rather than subsuming both within the ethical” seems to dovetail with the kind of coincidence between the social and the aesthetic that I find myself perpetually seeking. In fact, I would imagine that a number of readers of this volume would claim to be similar seekers. So where are these judgments coming from? Where have terms like intelligibility and unintelligibility become polarized? Why is the other-directed work of social art cast as a capitulation to the “Christian ethic of the good soul” (a religious equation that surely is the fastest route to damnation in critical humanities circles)? Finally, what is meant by the ideas of autonomy and heteronomy in all these aesthetic debates about social practice?

I would imagine that the above snapshot of Bishop’s work might pique curiosity in a performance studies student trained in the field of social movements, or another working in the field of folklore, or another experienced in the practice of critical ethnography. All might consider themselves scholars of the “social” and all might consider themselves to be interested in artistic interventions into the social. At the same time, such students might be less inclined to see anything radically rewarding in the “feel-bad” artists that Bishop favors. Let me briefly try to suggest a lineage for debates like the one I have described; by doing so, I hope to be able to reorient and revise a visual arts critique such as Bishop’s, yet I also hope to show how

4 Shannon Jackson, *Lines of Activity: Performance, Domesticity, Hull-House Historiography* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2000).

5 Claire Bishop, *Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics*, *October* 110 (Fall 2004), 51-79; Liam Gillick, *Contingent Factors: A Response to Claire Bishop*, *October* 115 (Winter 2006), 95-107; and Claire Bishop, *The Social Turn: Collaboration and its Discontents*, *Artforum* 44 (February 2006), 178-83.

6 Bishop, *Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics*, 74, 75.

7 Chantal Mouffe, ed., *Deconstruction and Pragmatism* (London: Routledge, 1996).

8 Bishop, *The Social Turn*, 181

9 *Ibid.*, 183.

the formal language of the field of the visual arts offers performance studies a certain kind of critical traction in understanding social practice as an extended form.

Even to use a phrase like “extended form” is to invoke an aesthetic vocabulary, one that has sought over the course of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries to understand how the claims of the social altered the conventional parameters of the art object. Of course, the conventions of nineteenth-century aesthetics argued that art achieved its greatness to the degree that its representations transcended its material substrate, rising above its raw material and its social apparatus of production. This is one way of casting an early aesthetic opposition between “autonomy” and “heteronomy.” Such terms have a varied etymology, but for the purposes of this debate the etymology that seems most helpful is the one that aligns autonomy with “the condition of being self-governing” and “heteronomy” with “the condition of being governed by an external rule.” Transcendent art achieved the former state by appearing to exist independently from its material; that is, it seemed to exist autonomously from the conditions of its making. In many ways the debates of twentieth-century aesthetics have revolved around whether, how, and to what extent an art form could have such status and/or achieve such an autonomous effect. For some, the achievement of transcendence was only sublimation: the achievement of autonomy merely the disavowal of the “external rules” that perpetually structured all social life, including the social life of aesthetics. Early twentieth-century workers’ movements were one of many places where the social role of art was reimagined in heteronomous terms, whether in the appropriation of vernacular forms, the institution of social realism as a progressive aesthetic, or the Constructivist reimagining of the affinity between artistic labor and social labor.

It was after the Second World War, however – upon seeing how the fascist aesthetic use of the vernacular and the Stalinist enforcement of realist aesthetics had rationalized purges of all varieties – that Theodor Adorno questioned the social effects of so-called heteronomous art. In essays such as *Commitment* and *The Autonomy of Art*, Adorno’s

main figure for condemnation was not a celebrated hero of either fascist or Stalinist regimes but, famously, the leftist, avant-garde theatre-maker Bertolt Brecht.¹⁰ Adorno roundly criticized “Brecht’s didacticism” and argued that the playwright’s desire to be socially engaged had in fact blunted his efficacy.¹¹ Brecht’s desire to be useful had produced an instrumentalization of aesthetics. His desire to be accessible had produced a legibility of plot and character that only “trivialized” politics into easy good and “bad oppositions.”¹² For Adorno, Brecht’s entire “oeuvre” was a capitulation to the “crudely heteronomous demands” of the social that ultimately divested aesthetics of its reason for being. It is important to note that Adorno – and Brecht – were just as likely to encounter critics who argued the opposite. Unlike Adorno, Georg Lukács, as well as a variety of leftist comrades, did not find Brecht’s work “too intelligible”; rather, they found it to be not intelligible *enough* to be of social use. Meanwhile, Walter Benjamin argued that Brecht was the un-example of an aesthetic practice that was at once socially engaged and formally innovative, not an instrumentalization of aesthetics.

This variation in interpretation notwithstanding, it should be noted that Adorno’s defense of autonomy was made in somewhat new terms. He was concerned with how much the call for socially intelligible art rationalized intellectual closure:

Today the curmudgeons whom no bombs could demolish have allied themselves with the philistines who rage against the alleged incomprehensibility of the new art... This is why today autonomous rather than committed works of art should be encouraged in Germany. Committed works all too readily credit themselves with every noble value, and then manipulate them at their ease.¹³

10 Theodor Adorno, *Commitment*, in Andrew Arato and Eike Gebhart, eds., *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader* (New York: Continuum, 1982), 300-18, and Adorno, *The Autonomy of Art*, in Brian O’Connor, ed., *The Adorno Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell 2000), 239-63.

11 Adorno, *Commitment*, 306.

12 *Ibid.*, 308.

13 *Ibid.*, 316, 317.

Rather than a celebration of aesthetic transcendence, aesthetic autonomy was crucial in order to preserve a space of criticality, a question mark amid the piety, righteousness, and near dualisms of “committed art.” Even in the most sublimated work of art there is a hidden “it should be otherwise.”¹⁴ This willingness to occupy a place of refusal was for Adorno the most important goal of aesthetic practice. It meant questioning the social pull to “accommodate to the world” – refusing social conventions of intelligibility and utility – however well intentioned and morally just their causes seemed. However much Adorno’s legacy in modernist aesthetics was celebrated or repudiated in the last half of the twentieth-century, his language echoes in a variety of critical circles. Questions around intelligibility and unintelligibility persist in circles that grapple with the modernist preoccupations in the postmodern embrace of ambiguity. Questions around autonomy and heteronomy persist in circles that grapple with the extension of art into social space. Finally, questions around the utility and futility of art persist in circles that grapple with the social and formal dimensions of social art practice.

Similar kinds of preoccupations have propelled subsequent twentieth-century art experimentation. Marcel Duchamp famously entered with a different politics to ask a similar formal question about the autonomy of the art object, installing everyday objects in art museums to expose art as an effect heteronomously produced by the conventions of the museum. Perhaps the most significant movement credited and blamed with presaging the conversation on social art is Minimalism and all varieties of post-minimalist extensions. Artists such as Donald Judd, Sol LeWitt, Tony Smith, and Robert Morris were heralded as the “fathers” of this movement and were, of course, the figures most famously trounced in Michael Fried’s notorious 1967 essay on Minimalist “theatricality,” *Art and Objecthood*. Employing a reductive sculptural vocabulary – one that rejected both figuration and abstraction to utilize specific geometrical forms such as the cube, the line, the polyhedron, the parallelepiped, and the serial

repetition of such forms – Minimalist artists created such “specific objects” in part to expose the conditions of viewing to the spectator who received them. As legions of critics have noted subsequently, Fried’s impulse to call such techniques “theatrical” had to do with his discomfort with such self-aware forms of spectatorship and with the durational experience they produced. For example, “[I]teralist sensibility is theatrical because, to begin with, it is concerned with the actual circumstances in which the beholder encounters literalist work... the experience of literalist art is of an object *in a situation* – one that, virtually by definition, *includes the beholder*.”¹⁵ Fried went on to quote the sculptor Morris on *Specific Objects* to comment on the artist’s desire to turn aesthetic experience into a self-conscious spatialized experience for the spectator:

*The better new work takes relationships out of the work and makes them a function of space, light, and the viewer’s field of vision. The object is but one of the terms in the newer aesthetic. It is in some ways more reflexive because one’s awareness of oneself existing in the same space as the work is stronger than in previous work, with its many internal relationships. One is more aware than before that he himself is establishing relations as he apprehends the object from various positions and under varying conditions of light and spatial context.*¹⁶

While Morris wished to make clear the degree to which such situations decentered the spectator – “I wish to emphasize that things are in a space within oneself, rather than... [that] one is in a space surrounded by things” – Fried refused to accept the importance of the distinction:

Again, there is no clear or hard distinction between the two States of affairs: one is, after all, always surrounded by things. But the things that are literalist works of art must somehow confront the beholder – they must, one might always say, be placed not just in his space but in his way... It is, I think, worth remarking that “the entire situation” means exactly that: all of it – including it seems the beholder’s body ... Everything counts – not as part of the object, but as part of the situation

15 Michael Fried, *Art and Objecthood*, *Artforum* 5 (June 1967), 152.

16 *Ibid.*, 153.

in which its objecthood is established and on which that objecthood at least partly depends.¹⁷

Although Fried does not use the word “heteronomy” in this essay, what is striking is his degree of discomfort with the externally derived claims of the “situation,” claims that placed demands of an external order that could only be experienced as confrontation or inconvenience (“in his way”). The “everything” which “counts” saturated the viewing experience, provoking not only an awareness of a new medium – the *body* of the beholder – but, as a result, an awareness of the art object as “dependent.” The interdependency of art and spectator, an object and situation, thus disallowed an experience of aesthetic autonomy. Interestingly, Fried – like Adorno, and not unlike Bishop – turned to theatre and to a theatrical vocabulary to critique the *social* encumbrances and interdependencies of heteronomous art.

Much has been made of the legacy of Minimalism to the emerging performance art. While their techniques deviated dramatically from the reductive Minimalist form, much experimental, often gallery-based, performance shares the goal of producing this kind of spectatorial self-consciousness in an extended space. The beholder’s recognition of embodiment extended to the art object itself and ultimately to the body of the artist who further unsettled the boundaries of visual art practice by inserting the body of the visual artist (for example, Vito Acconci, Chris Burden, and Karen Finley). While occasionally the formal preoccupations behind this extension are forgotten in the sensationalism surrounding some performance art interventions, much performance art of the late twentieth-century is helpfully understood as post-Minimalist experimentation. Performance art has been said to “break the frame” of visual art, which is not only to claim a generalized rebellious impulse but also to suggest that such breaking exposes the frame, making participants aware of the supporting apparatus of aesthetic experience by disallowing its bounded obfuscations.

17 Ibid., 154-5.

I hope that, by this point, the reader understands my interest in reviewing some episodes in the history of twentieth-century aesthetics. Such histories assist us in navigating the different disciplines that contribute to this conversation. This kind of experimentation in self-reflexivity in art practice and art criticism developed in the same decades in which other academic fields began to grapple with the apparatus of scholarly production and scholarly writing. Although very different in their politics, gestures, and styles, the impulses of critical ethnography, of situated knowledge-making, and self-reflexivity in cross-cultural writing partook of a similar desire to understand the conventions by which our most treasured experiences, pleasures, and ideas are made. As the twentieth-century gave way to the twenty-first, both art practices and new scholarship in the humanities and social sciences wrestled with a variety of “social” issues that made the need for this self-consciousness particularly urgent. Civil rights movements across the globe, western and transnational feminisms, and postcolonial and anti-Orientalist reflection on the representation of otherness promoted not simply new knowledges and new art-making but forms of practice that asked participants to reflect on *how* they had come to know and to call attention to the assumptions and conventions that had kept them from knowing and experiencing differently.

In other words, in the past few decades, both art-making and social inquiry have been induced to avow their heteronomy, the degree to which their making and their thinking were “governed by external rules,” that is, contingent and interdependent with a world that they could not pretend to transcend. It is in recognition of this shared impulse that I find myself most interested in trying to see how we can cast the question of “social practice” – in aesthetics, in the humanities, and in the social sciences – as the heterogeneous pursuit of a shared formal problem.

Social practice: two cases

I opened this chapter with epigraphs from two artists who are “very different” yet linked by the social turn of their aesthetic practice. Santiago Sierra, a Spanish artist

currently based in Mexico City, has an international reputation in the contemporary art world. He has participated in annual festivals and biennials and received major commissions from a range of art organizations in both elite cosmopolitan cities and locally engaged galleries and museums in Latin and South America. Shannon Flattery is the founder and artistic director of *Touchable Stories*, a Boston-based community arts group that creates multiyear, interactive, site-specific oral history installations in neighborhood community spaces. According to their curators, spectators, and reviewers, both artists address social issues of marginalization, especially those of poverty, labor, immigration, exile, urbanization, and environmental injustice. However, to compare one artist who calls himself “a Minimalist with a guilt complex” with another who seeks to give marginal sectors of society the opportunity to “define their own voice” is to compare different artistic methods of social engagement, even if both produce a consciousness of artistic heteronomy and social interdependency. As I will suggest below, Sierra produces such effects through an aesthetics of reduction while Flattery does so through an aesthetics of expansion. While Flattery’s practice exemplifies an ethic of critical ethnography in its methods of extended collaboration and intermedia incorporation, Sierra’s social engagements are in some ways “antisocial,” exposing the reductive operations of social inequity by mimicking their forms. At the same time, both artists cultivate an awareness in spectators of their systemic relation to the social issues addressed and to the durational, spatial, and embodied structures in which that address occurs.

Let me consider first the experience of duration, as it came forward from Minimalist experiments and as it has been reworked by Sierra. The durational consciousness produced by the Minimalist object was an effect disparaged in Fried’s essay and celebrated by Minimalism’s proponents. Whereas Fried condemned the “endlessness” of Minimalist sculpture, Morris lauded durational experimentation to such a degree that he found himself turning to collaboration with time-based artists of performance and even adding another signature essay, *Notes on Dance*, to

his critical writing. In the latter essay Morris emphasized the structural nature of time. Duration was less something to be manipulated than a structure to be exposed; silences were used not so much as “punctuations” but “to make duration itself palpable.”¹⁸ Sierra utilizes duration in a way that both extends Minimalist technique and calls its bluff. Consider, for instance, his 1999 piece *Paid People*, created for the Museo Rufino Tamayo in Mexico. Here 465 people were hired to stand over the entire floor space of the museum’s primary display area (five people per square meter). As the crowd of people stood, expecting to receive an hourly minimum wage for their effort, spectators came to watch the bodies trying to be still while simultaneously being aware of the ticking of time. The basic structure of the piece thus addresses the conventions by which labor is organized under the phrase “time and materials.” In a structure where the only material is the hired worker’s body, the notion of time as something bought comes more startlingly into view. But it also shows the degree to which the Minimalist interest in “time’s palpability” has a class basis. The piece exposed the degree to which time is already quite palpable to those who watch the clock for a living. Thus the piece not only avowed duration as a structuring influence on the artwork but also exposed duration as itself governed by the external rules of the wage system. Subsequent pieces such as *Eight People Paid to Remain Inside Cardboard Boxes* (Guatemala City, 1999), *A Person Paid for 360 Continuous Working Hours* (New York, 2000), or *430 People Paid 30 Soles* (Lima, 2001) reused a similar basic structure, while other projects such as *250 cm Line Tattooed on Six Paid People* (Havana, 1999) or *160 cm Line Tattooed on 4 People* (Salamanca, 2000) raised the stakes of the exchange in hiring people who allow themselves to be tattooed. Indeed, in Sierra’s open reuse of hired labor as the foundation for his pieces, time emerges not only as a natural force that the artwork can no longer transcend (à la Minimalism) but as a social force heteronomously dependent on the asymmetries of capitalist

18 Robert Morris, *Notes on Dance*, *The Tulane Drama Review* 10.2 (1965), 183.

economics. Duration is all the more palpable when it is exchanged for a wage.

The reduction – indeed, some would say, the replicated dehumanization – of Sierra’s practice is nearly the opposite of the kind of rehumanizing impulses at work in pieces by *Touchable Stories*. Where as Sierra’s pieces transform “collaboration” into a hiring relationship and make little mention of the histories of participants – and never their names – *Touchable Stories* conducts roughly eighteen months of research – meeting neighbors, sitting in on civic meetings, holding community dinners, and collecting hundreds of hours of oral histories to serve both as the inspiration for an exhibit and as the aural medium in an installation. The process of living among the people it seeks to represent supports the creation of large site-specific installations that are called “living mazes,” sired in church basements, community centers, and former retail spaces donated for two years by individuals and groups living in the marginalized neighborhoods of Dorchester, Central Square, and Allston, Massachusetts and, most recently, in Richmond, California.¹⁹ In each of its “living mazes,” small groups move through interactive installations, listening to the voices of caped oral histories as they open drawers, turn knobs, pull curtains, and linger on pillows to encounter stories of migration, relocation, gentrification, violence, and loss.

As different as this gesture is from the work of Sierra, we could say that “duration” is still an integral structure in the *Touchable Stories* practice. However, understanding its durational investments requires that we look in different places. Indeed, “time” is a word that repeatedly emerges in much *Touchable Stories* documentation, but here the emphasis is on the artists’ willingness to spend time on understanding issues and worlds of great complexity. Here the durational commitment to shared time and space is in fact the underlying structure of *Touchable Stories*’ practice,

a willingness to commit time – indeed to commit, as Flattery does, to self-relocation in a new neighborhood space for years – in order to allow one’s predetermined sense of the issues and arguments to change as well as to create a collaboration with community members that has a provisional relationship of trust. *Touchable Stories* thereby shares in an ethic of participatory ethnography as so many of its practitioners have theorized it, committing to a degree of sensuous knowing over time. Interestingly, it is this durational and spatial commitment that a critic like Bishop finds unaesthetic in groups such as *Oda Projesi* and other “social turns” with which she is “discontented.”²⁰ Adorno, too, might well have found this durational commitment to be a capitulation to the “crudely heteronomous demands” of the social, but it seems to me that the challenge here is to allow duration to have a different kind of aesthetic palpability.²¹ Even if Flattery’s ethic of participation can be analogized to the practices of the ethnographer, the settlement worker, or the activist, it seems important to notice the specificity of her desire to do so under her self-identification as an artist. While her attempt to know others with more complexity and intimacy might read to some as instrumentalization of the art process, we might also note the degree to which this form of participation is differently “endless” in a *Touchable Stories* project. The multiyear collaborations seem not to end even after the installation has come down. Just as we might analyse the experimental durational structures of the endurance performances of Marina Abramovic or Linda Montano, we might notice that the durational commitment to shared time-space is a *technique* of the social artist, that it is a commitment made whose consequences are unforeseen and – by virtue of an implicit social contract – will be received and incorporated by the process and its structure. Moreover, this experience of duration is part of a larger gesture of collaboration that is not only an “authorial self-sacrifice,” as Bishop would have it, but also a more radical experiment in authorial release to the

external claims of others, one that might be asking a basic question about how far the avowal of aesthetic heteronomy can be pursued.

Similar kinds of exercises in reorientation would be necessary to compare other elements in the work of Sierra and *Touchable Stories*. Sierra works with Minimalist forms such as the cube, the line, and the parallelepiped, but situates them differently through the incorporation of wage laborers. In a piece that seemed to comment on both the Minimalist form and the desire to “do good,” Sierra’s *90cm Bread Cube* (2003) was a solid bread cube baked in specific dimensions and offered as charity in a shelter for homeless people in Mexico City. Documentation shows people gathered round to slice off parts of the cube onto paper plates, the geometry of the cube undone by the claims of its marginalized consumers. Sierra also works with the Minimalist desire to avow the force of gravity; indeed, his work can be placed in a direct genealogy with Minimalism’s emphasis on sculpture over painting and the tendency in that movement to privilege artworks that oriented themselves toward the ground plane of the floor rather than the anti-gravitational plane of the wall. Orientation toward the floor – without a pedestal – was seen as an avowal of the art object’s relationship to the natural external rule of gravity – opposing itself to painting’s attempt to overcome gravity with hooks, wires, and frames on a wall. In pieces like *Object Measuring 600 x 57 X 52 cm Constructed to be Held Horizontally to a Wall or 24 Blocks of Concrete Constantly Moved During a Day’s Work by Paid Workers*, Sierra evokes the Minimalist impulse toward gravitational avowal as inherited from the large, heavy geometrical installations of Donald Judd, Sol LeWitt, Richard Serra, and others.

However, Sierra’s engagement with the social politics of gravity is different; indeed, by hiring workers to move such large, heavy Minimalist forms, he exposes the anti-gravitational labor required to install a gravitational aesthetic intervention. Here the gravitational – like the durational – has a class basis, forcing an acknowledgment of the long classed history that governs the social management of

gravity. Like duration, gravity has always been palpable for the class historically hired to do the most heavy lifting. Finally, we can see a similar relationship of reuse and revision when it comes to another Minimalist trope: seriality. As a term that exposes the steady operation of rime and that uses repetition to question the myth of originality, the serial reproduction of similar forms appears throughout Sierra’s work; once again, however, the “moved constantly” of such repetitions exposes seriality as enmeshed in the repetitive forms of labor that were never given the status of “authorship” in the first place.

Finding such kinds of Minimalist genealogies in the practice of *Touchable Stories* would require a reorientation and a willingness to look in different places for an engagement with gravity, seriality, futility, and the limits of the intelligible. It might begin with a form – the suspended collection of glass jars – that has become a recurrent motif in all *Touchable Stories*’ projects. Jars hang at slightly different eye levels in a series; inside, viewers find miniature photographs of old buildings transferred to translucent paper, usually illuminated through the back light on a nearby wall. While listening to stories of neighborhood spaces that have since been destroyed, visitors linger before the jars, holding them to identify the doorframes, signposts, and other features that tell them which disappeared building they are viewing. The installation functions at many levels. It evokes the rhythms of encounter found in a gallery or museum, calling forth the steady flow of people as they move from one image to the next in a row. However, the images are suspended from the ceiling, allowing circular movement around the image as one might encounter a sculpture. The antigravitational suspension from on high emphasizes the airspace underneath and allows for another kind of interaction – touch, the careful holding of the object itself. Meanwhile, that formal suspension sets off and is set off by the contents inside; the seeming weight and immobility of the building is countered by the ease of its uprooting; a social history of uprooted urbanization is thus made palpable by an aesthetic form that lifts all too easily, presented in a glass jar that is both precious and easily broken. While this kind of

19 Shannon Jackson, *Touchable Stories and the Performance of Infrastructural Memory*, in Della Pollock, ed., *Remembering: Oral History Performance* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 45-66.

20 Bishop, *The Social Turn*, 178.

21 Adorno, *Commitment*, 312.

seriality is surely a sentimental one, the cumulative effect creates a heightened spatial consciousness on several levels, allowing the boundaries of the art object to extend into the spectators’ space – “in his way?” – while simultaneously provoking reflection upon the spectators’ own spatial location in a longer urban history, a history on which that spectatorial location “depends.”

Having offered some sample readings of the work of two very “different” artists, it is simultaneously important to observe how “different” such readings could be. To emphasize this fact is not simply to withdraw into a generalized relativism as a critic but also to foreground the different kinds of precedents and object histories that structure an encounter with a social practice. Such variation seems to affect and afflict practices that seek to think “aesthetics and politics together.” Just as Breehr became a figure who received contradictory forms of critique, so the works of both Sierra and *Touchable Stories* have endured all varieties of critique, ranging from every position on the poles to which I referred above: social celebration/social antagonism, radically unfunctional /radically functional, unintelligible /intelligible, autonomous /heteronomous. For some, the slicing up and doling out of Sierra’s *90 cm Bread Cube* was an attempt to be functional; for others, it was a parody, of such a gesture. The contrast raises the question of how we might compare such a meal with the kind of “community dinners” that *Touchable Stories* sponsors as part of its process. For some, *Touchable Stories*’ glass-jar displays convey the literal history of a neighborhood too explicitly. For others, the miniaturization and absent didactics do not convey enough information. Too intelligible? Too unintelligible? For some, Sierra is an advocate for the poor; for others, he is simply a cynic. For some, *Touchable Stories* instrumentalizes aesthetics in service of social progress. For others, its commitment to maintaining an aesthetic space over two years in a site that could be put to “real use” only confirms aesthetic futility. Such differences demonstrate the very different metrics and barometers that critics and viewers bring to bear on social practice, an exceptionally hybrid form. But such differences might also be the occupational hazard

of heteronomous engagement. For my part, I find it helpful to keep eyes and heart trained on the particular ways in which this conjunction can form and transform, the numerous ways in which the avowal of heteronomy can have simultaneously aesthetic precision and social effects. Such an approach, however, means acknowledging the degree to which art and humans are not “self-governing.” And it means deciding to believe that an awareness of that interdependency can yield both innovative aesthetic forms and an innovative social politics.

Complaints Choir of Teutônia

The Complaints Choir Project, by the Finnish duo Tellervo Kalleinen and Oliver Kochta-Kalleinen consists in gathering people from different places so they can express their complaints. Here we present the duo’s brief description of the project as well as a testimony of the musician who coordinated the project in the city of Teutônia, Lucas Brolese, and the lyrics for the complaints sung by the inhabitants of the city.

According to the artists, it all got started during a winter day walk of Tellervo Kalleinen and Oliver Kochta-Kalleinen in Helsinki. Perhaps it was due to the coldness of the day that they ended up discussing the possibility of transforming the huge energy people put into complaining into something else. Perhaps not directly into heat – but into something powerful anyway. In the Finnish vocabulary there is an expression “Valituskuoro.” It means “Complaints Choir” and it is used to describe situations where a lot of people are complaining simultaneously. Kalleinen and Kochta-Kalleinen thought: “Wouldn’t it be fantastic to take this expression literally and organize a real Complaints Choir!”

As complaining is a universal phenomenon the project could be organized in any city around the world. Kalleinen and Kochta-Kalleinen offered the concept to different events where they were invited as artists – but it was only after Springhill Institute in Birmingham got excited about the idea that the First Complaints Choir became a reality. After the Complaints Choir of Birmingham became a surprise success Kalleinen and Kochta-Kalleinen have been invited to initiate complaints choirs all around the globe.¹

In Brazil, the project was presented for the first time at the 8th Mercosul Biennial, in Porto Alegre. Here it is called Complaints Choir of Teutônia², making mention of the municipality in which it was carried out: Teutônia.

Testimonial of Lucas Brolese

Before I start my account I think it is important to explain a little about how my story is related to music and to the work in Teutônia. I was born in Caxias do Sul, in 1980, in a family of Italian and Portuguese origins. Music appreciation was present in my childhood. In 1988 I moved, along with my parents, to Santa Cruz do Sul, and there I started to learn music, self-thought. In the middle of 1995 I started playing the bass in local rock bands.

In 1997 my parents decided to live in Teutônia, a young and promising city in terms of agricultural industry. I almost got depressed. To tell you the truth, I did get depressed. In Santa Cruz I had a group of friends who liked art and music, while in Teutônia young people seemed to speak another language.

I did not have any choice but to adapt and, fortunately, I learned that the city had a very strong music tradition due to its German colonization. Although at the time I had no taste for German folkloric music, and therefore did not assimilate the local taste for music, I heard that the city hall offered classes of singing, music theory and several wind instruments. The classes happened at Centro Cultural 25 de Julho, where today I direct the workshops.

¹ Available at <http://www.complaintschoir.org/history.html>

² A video recording of the Complaints Choir of Teutônia is available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Z28tiJuCWM>

I started studying music theory and singing and, in the following year, I started teaching guitar and joined a local rock band. It was also when I visited the first edition of Mercosul Biennial, with a group from Teutônia. Later, considering the professional activities that the city offered me, I decided to study music formally, outside Teutônia. I concluded a technical course in conducting and singing and after a graduation in music.

In 2008 I created an alternative cultural space where professionals of the region worked, using the studio for rehearsals, classes, exhibitions and presentations. A year later the space hosted the Song Workshop of Rosario Bléfari, which was part of the residency program of the 7th Mercosul Biennial. At the time I was also working in other cities, and therefore could help promoting the project and guarantee a public interested and prepared for the activities proposed. The partnership was a success.

In 2010 I received the visit of Gabriela Silva, the person in charge of the operational coordination of the Educational Project of the 8th Mercosul Biennial. She came with a curator and they seemed to be analyzing the possibility of a new project around the region. We visited cultural spaces in Teutônia and Estrela.

In 2011 I got a call from Gabriela about the work of Kochta-Kalleinen. I tried to learn more about their work, watched some of their videos and was fascinated by possibility of taking such an interesting project to Teutônia.

The idea of bringing together different people with a similar local culture, in order to sing their complaints together and express their afflictions, desires and dreams, picturing a specific local scenery, really motivated me. The proposal was very tempting, since I appreciate cooperation in artistic creation. I decided to accept the invitation and started announcing the project. I talked to almost 70 possible singers, among choirs and music students of the region where I work, and thought there would not be enough positions for all of them in Teutônia's Complaints Choir.

Sometime later the Biennial's production got in touch to tell me no complaints had arrived, which really worried me.

The project was going to be developed during school vacation and I knew many good singers would be traveling. However, in my weekly meetings with the possible participants, I was assured they would participate, even if they had not sent their complaints yet. I knew that while some would be traveling, others would spend their vacation in Teutônia, so I could still believe everything would work out fine.

I asked the production to insert Portuguese captions on the videos of the Complaints Choirs around the world and elaborate some material about the Biennial, contemporary art and conceptual art, since after talking to the people of the region I realized many were not aware of the subject. Valuing education and arts, unfortunately, is not common in the country of soccer and, unfortunately, even the ones who are interested in art have little access to it, especially in the countryside. Despite these conclusions, slowly some complaints started to arrive by email. At that time I was already in touch with Oliver, who seemed uneasy about the lack of complaints of Brazilians.

I went to the radio station that plays only German folkloric music and to Teutônia's Culture Board. I phoned the conductors of traditional choirs in the city and also music and theater teachers. All of them thought the idea was interesting but did not confirm their participation, so the anxiety continued.

On July 8th I met Oliver, and we talked about the project for an hour. In my opinion we already had a reasonable number of complaints by then, but they were not enough for him. People had doubts about how to write their complaints, some wrote rhyming verses, and others sent four strophes. I also had many doubts about the composition process – should I use rhymes or not? should everybody sing the complaint of a child or only the children? While we talked I was adapting my ear to the new idiom that would be adopted for our communication. I was instructed to favor the meaning of the sentences instead of the rhymes, and that everybody should sing everybody's complaints. The orientations helped me to organize the adaptation of the text and made the composition process easier.

The weeks before the first meeting with the singers were of great anxiety for me, but finally I met the aspiring complainers for the first time on Saturday, July 9th, a cold but sunny day. I met around 40 people willing to engage in a project that, like me, they did not know how would end.

After Oliver's presentation and my speech, I started a vocal warm-up to evaluate the singers and the composition possibilities offered by the group. Next, Oliver conducted a group exercise to collect, classify and exhibit new complaints. In two hours we had the raw material for the composition and the possible singers for our choir. We also had the presence of RBS TV and ZH on that day, covering the event and motivating the project and the group just formed.

Although I arrived home relieved, I still had to figure out how to transform those complaints that had no metric or rhyme into music, and how to combine the voice of children and adults, some without any experience. I had a first musical idea, a harmony and a melody of samba, and I recorded it not to forget. Soon more ideas came and I visualized a suite with three movements based on those complaints. By the middle of the week I had the musical idea almost concluded, but the arrangement, the transcription of the melody and the text had not been initiated yet. The night before our first rehearsal I slept less than 4 hours.

At 7 a.m. I went to the radio station, during the most popular local program, to invite the community to join the project for the last time. This final effort was worth it because it brought us the only two traditional choir singers of Teutônia, a couple in their middle sixties, who cheerfully appeared at the arranged local at the right time.

In that afternoon I made the classification of the singers, but many who were in the workshop gave up. I could not understand exactly why – was it lack of artistic sensibility? were they afraid of singing such a strange text? But what matters is that new and determined singers were joining the group. I presented the song in the first rehearsal, in the afternoon of July 16th. Everybody thought it was fun and

was surprised to see the complaints turned into to music, but they found it difficult to sing it.

At night, after an evaluation of the first rehearsal, I was part of the jury in the 23rd edition of a singing festival that happens in an association of German descendants, in Linha Clara, Teutônia. Oliver went with me and was thrilled and curious about the similarities between that community in the countryside of southern Brazil and his homeland. It was a real micro-nation. Oliver took a lot of pictures that night. The *fachwerk* building hosted around 500 people.

Oliver and I were mentioned by the deputy mayor and received much applause. He drank some beer from the bottle, like people do in Germany, and we ate the boiled piñon which was sold in the party. He told me had bought a kind of nut in the market near the hotel the night before, but could not eat it – the nut was uncooked piñon. After almost 6 hours of entertainment we went back to the hotel.

On the next day, after some rest, I passed the introduction and the first part of the song to the group. I asked the musicians who could read scores to bring an instrument and we divided them by types. At the end, the whole group rehearsed together. The meeting went well but I started thinking we would have little time to get to a mature result.

During the week I worked on the score of the piece, but the length of the text made the font of the lyrics too small. Oliver and Ricardo came to Estrela and we worked at my place. Oliver suggested giving just the lyrics to the singers, instead of a score with melody and text.

I took me a long time to find a way of matching the text to the musical writing, but fortunately I arrived at satisfying result by adapting the graph files of the music writing software and pasting them to the word processor.

A couple of days before the next rehearsal Oliver contacted me and asked me to substitute some of the sentences in the lyrics because he thought they were too complex. He also asked me to include some that had been left aside. At that moment I realized the due to present the

final result in 3 weeks was too short, but it was the only one we had. Running against time, after many tries, I managed to add two new strophes to the 3rd movement and substitute some verses so that the textual sentence did not lose the naturalness of someone complaining.

Finally, the text was ready and on the rehearsal of Wednesday, July 20th, we would be able to practice the whole piece. However, many of the singers could not show up. I was already anxious with the short time left to finish the composition and the arrangement, and the absence of the singers made me even more worried. The situation could turn people off and delay the project. That night the rehearsal was slow and we did not sing the entire piece.

Two days later, on Friday, July 22nd, the choir was complete again and we could rehearse the whole piece, defining details of the performance such as dialogues and positions. The melodies were not well tuned yet and many singers could not articulate the words properly, but the recording had to be done on the next day.

Then, on a sunny Saturday, with the polar wind blowing, we had a quick warm up and rehearsed the complete piece once, from beginning to end. Soon after we moved to the place where the performance would take place, about 100 meters from where we used to practice. Some were a little insecure and all of us were anxious, but we occupied the place chosen by Oliver for the performance.

Already positioned, I was worried about the symmetry of the choir, the acoustic, and body language. The women complained about their high heels sinking on the grass, afraid they would fall, and others complained about the sun. Complaint after complaint, the public began to arrive at the local, the fire engine was ready, and we started the lament. I could not see the public's reaction to the performance, since they were behind me, but their applause confirmed my expectations. Later we recorded the scenes at the lake and before nightfall the ones at the hall of Grêmio Recreativo Teutoniense.

Sunday, July 24th, was the last day of the recording. We went to the bus station and stayed there part of the

afternoon. We had a lot of fun and I thought that location, which is familiar to every inhabitant of Teutônia, would be interesting in film. Later we went to the administration center of the city, where there was a pedestrian crossing with a flower box in the middle. At the beginning of the night we went to our last location, a simple hot dog restaurant with plastic walls, very unusual to Oliver but quite common around here. There we recorded the samba part and spent some more time together.

When everything was finished, Oliver asked me to record just the guitar in a place called Teutocar, but he did not know its address. Even though it was already dark, we managed to find it and recorded there using the headlights of a car, showing the entrance of the garage. When I arrived home I watched a report about us on RBS TV and went to bed feeling relieved.

On the next day I felt as if I had just gotten out of a pleasant but distressing trance that lasted for 15 days. It was great to have the opportunity of talking about such serious and important things in a light-hearted way through music. On the other hand, I was really tense about having such a short time to make a good work and maintain a group of 40 people united by the same spirit: complain with humor.

From that moment on I could evaluate everything that had happened and what the Complaints Choir meant to my work and to Teutônia. Besides being the first one in Latin America, our choir had also been prepared in record time.

In a moment of career transition, this experience changed my perspective about music and contemporary art. My work gained new perspectives, with more life and irreverence. Oliver gave me permission to form new complaints choirs around Latin America and I am willing to do it.

For the singers of the complaints choir this was also a very important experience. Some had never been to Mercosul Biennial, and others had not even heard of it. They learned about art, were coauthors of the piece, expanded their perspectives, overcame prejudices and maintained the spirit of the project, and they did all that having a lot of fun. I am really happy about how art interfered on these

people's lives and about the courage they showed by participating.

The peculiarity of Teutônia's culture is registered in this poetic production of great importance. Future generations will be able to watch this cheerful, avant-garde, historic recording, which reveals the aspirations of the citizens who lived there at the beginning of the 21st century.

The performances carried out on September 11th, in front of Casa M and at the quayside warehouses, were really moving and symbolized the maturity of the work. It was also a great surprise to have such a large and responsive audience.

Biennial's production was fundamental for the success of the Complaints Choir, and I would like to thank all of them, especially the artists Kochta-Kalleinen, who created the concept that put our lives in motion in the last semester.

Our Complaints

Complaints Choir of Teutônia

Complaints, complaints, complaints
 Sauerkraut gives you gas, I don't like fences
 The Boa Vista brook is so polluted
 Queues irritate me, I have bad breath
 I like the girl and she doesn't even know I exist
 I can't speak German, because of that I'm always excluded
 I want to smell good, but it's too cold to shower
 I hate Japanese cartoons
 My beard isn't big yet
 I want more action and fewer meetings
 I think that the slimness dictatorship is so idiotic
 And whoever told me beauty has a standard
 My neighbor has some angry dogs
 When they get loose I jump the fence to escape
 At my school they don't have music classes
 But to compensate, there is religion
 My girlfriend doesn't tell me she loves me
 I really hate who abuses animals
 There are no trains in Brazil
 Young people don't sing in choirs anymore
 And I failed five times already in the driving exam

A truck came from Germany
 For the Teutônia Fire Department
 Too bad it doesn't go faster than 40 kilometers an hour
 There are too many smartasses on my country
 From the necktie to the slipper wearing
 Beer is getting worse
 Why the train doesn't stop at Canabarro?
 Bad mood is annoying and who complains in vain
 The firm's boss only wants to see production
 Getting old hurts, I have a wooden leg
 I have a neighbor who's bad at the accordion
 Government built stadiums, emergency rooms are over capacity
 My dogs piss outside the newspaper
 My neighbor hates my cats
 Skaters are prejudiced
 Why does soccer attracts Brazilians so much?
 Why is it that in the city that chants and enchants
 There's only space for orchestras and choirs?
 My girlfriend uses my shaver
 Annoying people listen to "tunts"³ at the Harmonia Lagoon
 Why the police stop me at every roadblock?
 I'm starting to think I look like an outlaw
 It's annoying when the toilet seat is cold
 My father complains about having a headache
 Jails are over capacity and the foolish people pay for it,
 But there are criminals that don't go to jail
 Gasoline is too expensive, that's a real robbery
 For free they give you a package of herb tea
 Lack of manners annoy me
 If it keeps up I'll leave for Afghanistan
 I hate racists, my car was stolen
 I have PMS, teachers are underpaid
 Teutônia bands only play brass bands
 So many people have the same name as me
 Some teutonians call imports
 Whoever comes here looking for jobs
 It lacks sound traffic signs for those who cannot see
 My mother chooses my clothes

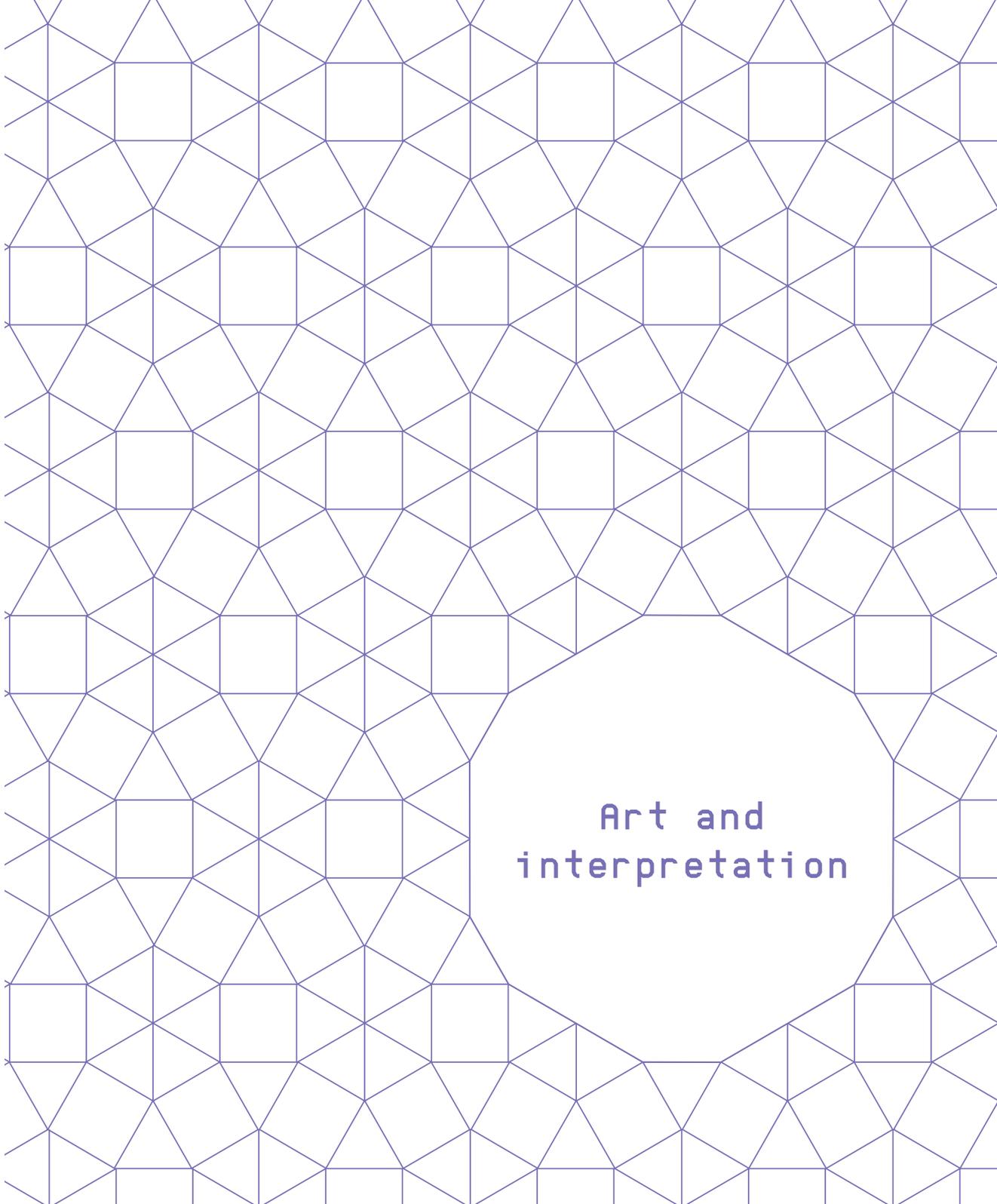
3 Brazilian onomatopoeia that refers to the beat of electronic music.

High taxes for videogames, I have a big head
 There's a shortage of youngsters who wishes to play the tuba
 I want to drink coke at every meal
 My parents only leave me on weekends
 I hate winter, I'm so cold
 I have the flu and it doesn't even snow to compensate it
 Complaints, complaints, complaints, complaints
 Thirty thousand inhabitants and not a single movie theater in town
 And the format of the clouds in the sky should be sharper
 I'm upset because people call me little
 I'll still see Galvão swallow his own tongue⁴
 My guitar and vocal teacher is always late
 That garbage on the floor may drown us
 We pay triple for good import instruments
 I hate who gossips about other people's lives
 We invest in stadiums, leave out education
 I think Brazilian TV alienates the citizens
 Die Qualität der Holzschue ist nicht mehr die selbe so wie früher⁵
 Brazilians manage to leave everything for the last minute
 My sons never stay home, they're always outside
 Those motorbikes that pass and make a huge noise
 I can't sing in tune and I don't find that funny
 In school we don't see subjects that can be useful
 Local singers won't sing in our choir
 Complaints, complaints, complaints, complaints
 I work three months a year to pay taxes for the government
 In school there's a kid who calls me faggot
 I pay taxes, but I still have to pay insurance and tolls
 And the telemarketing attendants always call me during the soap opera
 Hello I'd like to be giving a gift for you sir
 I can't stand listening to my mother say I don't help anymore
 I'm tired of waking up with the neighbor's dog barking
 So much scams in D.C.
 They carry the money in their underwear

4 Galvão Bueno is a Brazilian television sports narrator and presenter.

5 This line was in german on the original portuguese lyrics.

I'm tired of playing at the bar and hearing
 Cries when I have to get paid
 In democracy only those who know how to govern are on the opposition
 My bed hits the wall, makes noise to accuse me
 There isn't a recording studio in my city
 So I can make music with my band
 My mother tells me not to run, because I'll get sweaty and stink
 Every annoying guy and there's a lot of people
 Once was an annoying child
 Some people talk a lot and monopolize the conversations
 I have a tendency to gain weight, I can't eat everything I feel like
 I want to walk on the sidewalk with my cane and not fall on some hole
 I want to have time to do what I like, spend time with who makes me feel good
 I want to walk on the sidewalk with my cane and not fall on some hole
 Complaints, complaints, complaints, complaints



Art and
 interpretation

The weight of the story: narrativity as a tool of mediation¹

Pablo Helguera

The National Palace in Mexico City features a group of murals painted by Diego Rivera which tell the history of Mexico. When I used to go to look at the murals in Palace as a student, visitors would often find a group of 'informal' guides at the entrance who persisted in offering their services (in later years this practice was formalised, unfortunately, and now one can rely on "official" guides). The explanations offered by these guides competed in terms of colour and details of dubious veracity, with one more elaborate than the other, developing embellishments that even the most naïve tourist would find hard to believe. They would identify characters, ideas and events that had little or nothing to do with the images painted by Rivera or with the documented history of Mexico. Although the guides' narratives could extend to the purest fantasy, they would fiercely defend their speciality against intervention from any "novice" guide. I remember on one occasion taking some tourist friends to see the Palace murals. When one of the local guides approached to offer their services, I politely declined, explaining that I would lead the visit for my guests. Offended and somewhat sceptical, the guide accompanied our group, listening attentively to my explanation and interrupting at the end of each phrase to question my descriptions. The visit was converted into a little duet, with my voice telling about the various sections of the mural, counterpointed by the many complaints by the local guide.

Due to their highly illustrative nature, Rivera's murals lent themselves easily to being read as an illustrated story by the local guides, who moreover developed a wide variety of additional theories and narratives based on them, which certainly became more complex each time they were repeated. They made up their stories benefiting from a combination of assorted information available about the murals, together with highly personal interpretation of the facts, and presented their narrative in an authoritative and definitive voice.

Once cultural spaces like museums also become tourist spaces, the role of the mediator is often confused with that of the tourist guide – essentially a task of providing services to spectators as clients and not as an interlocutor; providing information, and sometimes being amusing and energetic.

The problem, obviously, is that this type of communication has little or nothing to do with education. Since the 18th century, education has recognised the importance of personal experience as the driving force for learning, together with the need to engage students so that they can assimilate the knowledge. Yet the trend of providing the public with a narrative, an illustrated story, continues in museums and archaeological and tourist sites throughout the world. What is it that draws us towards this narrativity, and what effects – positive or negative – does this have on the educational process? How is it possible to use narrative resources to demonstrate the complexity of the work rather than to simplify it?

¹ This text was written for the 8th Mercosul Biennial mediators' handbook

In this brief text I shall try to describe this narrative phenomenon in its various manifestations, some more sophisticated than others, describing how it appears in contemporary art, arguing why it should be resisted and proposing some ways of using narration as an ally of interpretation rather than an enemy. In this article I shall consider narrativity as any kind of inference from information that, in one way or another, constitutes a small illustration of events or facts.

We are often said to be narrative beings, our relationship with the world being constructed through a sequential logic that we give to the discontinuous and complex events of reality. When we cannot find the traces of a narrative, our reaction is one of estrangement and even rejection.

This impulse of attributing narrativity to things, which goes back to the myths of the origin of ancient literature, is similarly applicable to contemporary art. On encountering a conceptual artwork or an abstract painting, the novice adult viewer often experiences a degree of apprehension: presented with an object whose referents are unfamiliar and therefore unable to form an opinion or a feeling about it. Lacking a vocabulary to describe or justify the object, the viewer tends to experience a series of reactions, the most common of which is one of shame, feeling that he or she should "know" what the work "means", and the fact that not knowing reveals his or her "ignorance", and indignation at the thought that the creator of the work is probably trying to confuse or make fun of the viewer.

This apprehension is often contagious, and the guide or mediator frequently succumbs to the same discomfort, whether from an individual or a group. The immediate temptation is to find a narrative hook that can be used to restore an aura of "familiarity" to the situation and help to rationalise the visual "enigma". The challenge to be faced when using narrative to clarify knowledge of a work is to be able to use it appropriately. It is easily possible with narrative to fall into reductionism, either creating the impression that a work can be "explained" through a story, or the idea that the work is little more than the product of a series of anecdotes that justify its existence and its artistic value.

Therefore, it is important firstly to understand the types of narrative that might emerge during a guided visit. Generally speaking, they can be classified into: 1. Biographical information about the artist; 2. Information about the artistic or political period when the work was made; 3. "Curricular" information about the work (where it was shown before, the history of its restoration, when it entered a collection, etc.); 4. Information related to its manufacture (materials, the process of its creation, etc.); 5. Comments, theories or references about the work, whether from the actual artist, scholars of the work or other people.

Although these models of information may be relevant at times, if incorporated badly into a guided visit they can provide a determinist explanation of the content of a work. An example of this is the way that some people have interpreted the development of the work of the photo-realist painter Chuck Close. In 1998 Close suffered a spinal artery collapse that left him almost totally paralysed. A common error in a guided visit to his work involves mentioning this fact as if it explains the type of painting that Close produced in his later career (the apparent argument is that Close's early work is much more rigorously photo-realistic than his current work). In fact, and contrary to general perception, the evolution of Close's way of painting has very little relationship to the physical event that caused his paralysis, and the insertion of this information into a guided visit suggests a cause and effect that gets in the way of seeing Close's natural progression from one form of painting to another.

This does not mean that insertion of anecdote into a guided visit is not useful or necessary in some cases. The anecdotal circumstances of the production of some works are sometimes inextricable from the works themselves (such as several of Marina Abramovic's performances, which refer directly to personal events).

Other types of information, not just biographical, are often mentioned because they are colourful, attractive or simply entertaining, but with no relevance to the work being interpreted.

So, before placing a line of narrative into a mediation exercise, the mediator needs to consider the following questions:

1. How can this information help to complement or contextualise the experience of the work being looked at?

As a guide, it is important for the mediator to plan in advance the essential points to be addressed when introducing the work and how these points can be clarified through a brief narration. For example, if we are talking about the work by the Slovenian group Irwin, whose work involves creating the embassy of an imaginary country that issues passports to anyone requesting one, it is relevant to mention that several people in Nigeria have obtained the passport for migratory purposes and at times to cross borders between different countries. The information illustrates the real impact caused by this work.

2. When is the best moment to insert this information or anecdote into the presentation?

The mediator needs to be aware of the process of the group's analysis of the work. It is important to remember that visitors need time to look and make comments about what they are looking at. Providing a large amount of information about the work immediately after beginning the encounter can prove counterproductive. It is therefore relevant to add a dynamic of dialogue, inviting reflection about certain aspects of the work and then gradually, as these reflections develop, add relevant information that might help these reflections progress.

3. To what extent is too much information being provided?

Perhaps the most common problem among mediators with some knowledge of art history is not one of knowing the relevant information about a work, but rather being able to confine that information to the most vital points or components. Inexpert mediators aim to tell everything they know, while experienced mediators aim to present just the most relevant aspects for that particular moment. It is important to remember that the audience is standing

up in an open space, possibly with other distractions, and that the possibility for complete concentration may be limited, so it may be better not to go into too much detail or overly specialised themes.

4. How representative or relevant is a piece of information for understanding the broader issues in relation to the work being interpreted?

As we mentioned in the section about biography, each artist and each work often comes with (historical, biographical, contextual) information whose communication is irresistible to due to its interest or for other reasons. But one needs to ensure that this information will effectively lead to better understanding of the work, and will not simply exist as interesting information that ends up as a replacement for the possible readings of the work.

5. How can this information contribute towards showing the complexity of the work?

As mentioned above, anecdote can lead to interpretive reductionism. Duchamp's famous phrase, "the work is completed by the spectator", can for example be taken literally, as a formula that explains Duchamp's entire artistic process; in fact the phrase needs to be understood in a broader context in which the artist shows his awareness of the role of the spectator, but does not make the hands of the spectator responsible for making the physical work. When quoting various sources about a work, it is important that the mediator: 1) suitably specifies the context of the phrase or quotation, and 2) can offer visitors several views of the same work, by quoting critics, artists or individuals with contradictory views about a work, for example.

It is important to stress in these five examples (despite it perhaps being implicit) that these narrative additions need to operate within a field of dialogue, in which the mediator needs constantly to involve visitors in exchange and reflection about the work and, based on their comments and reflections, then offer further information that can thus lead to a collaborative interpretation of the work.

* * *

Narrativity is an inevitable component in any guided visit, so it is therefore essential to know how to direct it productively and generatively. As I mentioned at the start of this article, our human impulse is to transform all ambiguity into logical narrative, a gravitational force that pulls at us constantly. The task of the mediator is to resist this force that comes from the public and which is often expressed through phrases like "tell me the story of this work", or "what does this mean?" or "what was the artist's intention?" The mediator needs to work with these questions to be able to provide relevant information accompanied by new questions and comments that can help the viewer understand that there is no simple explanation of a work but rather a range of components – formal, historical, contemporary – which together give it meaning. Our work as mediators does not need to conflict with the animated spirit of the Rivera murals tourist guides; it needs instead to establish strict rules to avoid falling into anecdote or dramatization. These forces can be rationed through comparison, dialogue and critical distance that can lead to a true reflection and study of a work of art.

The art of teaching in the Museum

Rika Burnham and Elliott Kai-Kee

A class is studying a small painting by Rembrandt in the galleries of the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles. The museum educator has been inviting the assembled visitors to look ever more closely, guiding the class toward an understanding both of the painting itself and of our reasons for studying it. The class has been anything but passive indeed, it has been lively. The painting is *The Abduction of Europe* (1632), a picture that depicts in delicate detail a story from Greek mythology, the kidnapping of the Phoenician princess Europe by Zeus in the guise of a white bull. The visitors have shared their observations, speculations, ideas. As the class concludes, the museum educator asks the participants to speculate on the painting's larger meaning, to say what they think this work is, finally, about, as revealed by their tongue discussion. The group's experience has clearly moved beyond the telling of a single story. One participant suggests that Rembrandt's work is about the fearlessness of traveling into the unknown. Another says that it concerns the story of the soul's leaving the earthly for the heavenly realm. When the class comes to an end, people move closer to the painting and continue their discussions.

In the same museum, another museum educator is also conducting a group of students through the galleries. He begins with a Roman statue of Venus, followed by an eighteenth-century French terra-cotta bust of Madame Récamier by Joseph Chinard. For each sculpture, he asks the students to focus on only one detail, the hands. The students are encouraged to observe and take note of the sculpted figures' gestures, much as it they were

studying a person. Time seems to slow as perception sharpens. The educator listens patiently as the students begin to "read" the sculptures as a whole through the expressiveness of the hands. The group moves on to a mysterious trait by Millet in which the students discuss the nature of love, and then to a painting of a Russian princess by Winterhalter, in which the artifice of all the details is suddenly theatrical, dazzling, and delightful. At the end, no one wants to leave.

As museum educators we teach in many kinds of programs, and teach in many ways. Every museum educator brings unique gifts to the art of teaching through works of art. The two classes described above might seem at first glance quite different. The first museum educator stays with a single work of art for the entire session, constructs her class around the observations and ideas of the students, and trusts that through their collective experience, a larger meaning will emerge. The second educator inspires his students with a feeling of confidence by guiding their observations of a single feature common to several works, and then allows a main idea to emerge. The two classes, however, are also alike in certain essential ways. In both cases, the students and the instructor are animated, concentrated, focused, and active. Their investigation is tightly focused on the works under discussion, and the group together reaches for a sense of the artworks as a whole. At the end, when the participants cluster around the works of art, still wanting to continue the experience of discovery, the instructors know that their students have understood that engagement with a work of art is a beginning, not an end.

The opportunities museum educators have to teach and learn are granted to us by the collections of objects in the care of the institutions in which we work, and by the students and visitors we invite to consider these objects. These artworks also impose upon us a great obligation, to bring them alive for those we lead through the galleries. For ultimately, it is our devoted attention that keeps artworks alive generation after generation.

This essay is the result of our work as museum educators. It began with a casual discussion about what constitutes good teaching, and what we can do to guide ourselves and our docent colleagues toward consistent and principled teaching in our museums. We know that it is possible to bring visitors to a greater understanding of works of art, and that these experiences can be transformative. Our teaching practice is grounded both in the everyday realities of our work and in the sense of limitless possibility and the idealism we share.

For many years, in our museums, we have taught students of all ages, and we have taught others how to teach in museums. We share the conviction that teaching is most effective when guided by clear goals and principles. We hope to define here the source from which good teaching emanates, and to describe an approach to teaching broad enough to encompass all kinds of museum education practice, which may prove useful for a range of education programs and audiences. We hope equally to encourage reflection in other practitioners upon our own art form. For we believe that museum teaching is indeed an art, a creative practice.

The teaching we have come to believe in strives to make possible a certain kind of experience with art objects. Good museum teaching comprises many skills that enable instructors to engage visitors, inspiring them to look closely and understand the works of art they are viewing. It is vital that we know our audiences and the collections from which we teach. We must always be able to provide accurate and pertinent art-historical and other contextual information. We must be well versed in interactive learning techniques. But we must think of such

knowledge and such techniques not as ends in themselves, but as tools to be used for the larger purpose of enabling each visitor to have a deep and distinctive experience of specific artworks. None of us can attain the goal of facilitating such a transformative experience for every visitor in every lesson. Nonetheless, the idea of keeping such experiences always in mind as our goal will give our practice consistency and direction. It can become the heart of everything we do.

In *Art as Experience* John Dewey¹ discusses how experiences with art may be marked off from ordinary experience by a sense of wholeness and unity, and characterized at their close by feelings of enjoyment and fulfillment. Such experiences are examples of what Dewey calls "an experience," distinct from the flow of ordinary experience. Indeed, Dewey says, it is our experiences with art that exemplify best what it means to have "an experience." Such Deweyian experiences have an internal integration – a focus – that holds them together. They include "a movement of anticipation and culmination, one that finally comes to completion."

Dewey's theory describes well the kind of experiences we want to make possible for visitors to our museums. We hope that they will feel the time they have spent with us in our galleries has yielded special experiences different and separate from whatever else they have known. We hope that they will leave having understood one work of art or many in a deep and satisfying way. In the classes described above, visitors felt engaged and focused by "an experience" of an art-work that took them out of their ordinary lives.

Dewey also observes that experiences of works of art unfold over time. The element of time, important in all aesthetic encounters, is clearly highlighted in the museum context. Seeing is more than mere looking; looking is more than a casual glance. "An experience" of

¹ John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (1934; reprint, New York: Perigee Books, 1980) chap. 3, "Having an Experience" and Philip W. Jackson, *John Dewey and the Lessons of Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), chap. 1, "Experience and the Arts."

intense, focused seeing doesn't just "end," but builds up toward a satisfying conclusion. What Dewey calls "culmination" leaves us in a state of ardent appreciation.

Similarly, we hope the visitors we invite into our galleries will make discoveries, think freely and inventively, and work toward meaning through prolonged visual study of the artworks they focus upon. We hope that they will leave with the afterglow of an investigation that has brought observations, thoughts, and feelings together into a whole (even if only a temporary, provisional whole), with a sense of having reached a point of knowledge and understanding, with a feeling of accomplishment.

Museum educators create programs that invite people to gather around works of art for the purpose of sustained and careful seeing. Engaging the visitor's attention is our first task. Even though works of art are mounted on pedestals, or hung in elaborate frames, or bracketed by text all of which are designed to direct attention to them most casual visitors spend little more than: 1 few seconds with each. Museum environments are almost always beautiful, but they are often noisy and distracting, too. People's reasons for coming to the museum are varied. Why should they stop and attend to the objects?

As museum educators, we are obliged to create a structure of engagement, a means of inviting people to appreciate and understand great works. We implicitly promise visitors that our knowledge will guide their looking, and that, at the same time, we will respect the knowledge and life experience that they bring with them. We are also always looking to learn more ourselves. We must communicate our own commitment to the shared enterprise of seeing, our belief that looking together and talking about art is a valuable and significant experience for us, too. Our manner must assure visitors that we are knowledgeable about the artworks in our collections and skillful in bringing people and artworks together in meaningful ways. Side by side, the instructor and students will investigate the works of art. Everyone must trust from the outset that his or her understanding will increase as a result of the experience.

We ask visitors to gather around an object, creating a kind closed space where the experience begins. We ask them to commit an hour to the study of a limited number of objects, or perhaps only one. The physical separation from the larger flow of the museum allows the group to focus and concentrate. There is a place for silence as well as for speech. We invite them to take a minute to look. Fundamental to the experience are moments of contemplation, of silent meditation upon the works of art. We ask visitors to turn away from their immersion in everyday concerns and to slip into the world of the object. Our focus may be narrow, or broad. In these first moments viewers may, but are not asked to, relate their intellectual or emotional responses to anything outside the work of art. We ask only that they take some time to look at, and think about, and study the work of art before them. We begin in silence as an undirected way of taking note of the work in its entirety. Each participant has a chance to form his or her own first impressions and ideas. It is from individual experiences that the collective experience will flow.

The class studying the painting by Rembrandt is asked to begin by simply looking at the painting in silence. An observer walking into the gallery would see twenty people, looking so intently that one might think they were watching a play. Their eyes shift from the gallery to the entire wall, next to the picture frame and its label, then into the picture itself. Suddenly, the painting snaps vividly into focus, as though it were the only object in room. After this moment of silence, the instructor asks for thoughts, observations.

The second class begins with a specific focus, a detail, the hands of the Roman statue of Venus. Does the detail suggest modesty, or perhaps simply surprise upon encountering an unexpected view? The instructor encourages everyone to read the sculpted figure as if she were a person across the room. In this moment, he suggests that by virtue of living in the world, by virtue of our observations and interactions with the people we know, we have within us the essential knowledge to read this sculpture, and then the next work of art we encounter, and so on.

In both cases, what might look like a conversation is in fact a series of observations, an investigation of sorts. It begins with an open-ended invitation for thoughts and observations. Participants articulate what they are seeing and how they are making sense of what they see. Such a facilitated discussion differs from a lecture, which constructs for the listener. It differs too from pure inquiry methods, in which the teacher's basic mode of discourse is questioning. In the investigation we encourage, the teacher sometimes gives answers. The conversation is a give and take; everyone, teacher and students, contributes. The museum instructor reiterates and restates the visitors' observations, building on everyone's desire to talk about the effects the artworks have, and what is interesting in them. Everyone is invited to share ideas; some will see things others do not. Almost everyone has an opinion. Many voices are better than one. Everyone should feel welcome in this conversation, but it is not necessarily the instructor's goal that everyone should actively contribute. The instructor may ask questions, invite comments, make a statement, or provide information. The participants may ask questions, or ruminate silently. A shared vocabulary develops among the group. People begin to respond to each other's ideas, and comment on them. Conversation expands everyone's experience of the objects, propelled by a sense of discovery.

The museum instructor carefully sustains the by encouraging and summarizing new insights and observations. It is important to note that observations come up in what appear to be random order. There is no script, no preformulated series of questions. No two people see in exactly the same way, and no groups of people unfold works of art in the same way. The instructor expresses appreciation for an insight, or presses the participants further in their thinking. Sometimes one observation leads to another, or opens up a new area of looking. Sometimes the instructor asks the participants to hold a thought, or a question, in order to follow the implications of a suggestion, an observation, or an idea. The many thoughts are like balls in the air, juggled by the instructor, who moves quickly and decisively to keep them up and active as long as possible.

The objective is to follow observations, put descriptive phrases into play, create chains of thought, and respond to questions and comments throughout, advancing some ideas and saving others to be brought back later. The museum instructor keeps track of the complex and various parts of a growing conversation. Sometimes observations are taken and supplemented with similar ideas other people have had, or those of the instructor, in order to build a larger argument about the work of art, or about art itself. A real conversation emerges as a result of the sensitivity and perceptivity of the museum instructor. This requires practice, skill, and preparatory work that allows the teacher to understand the ideas that emerge, and to move the conversation forward. With every work of art, the meaning changes; with every class, the dialogue is different. Order as well as shape emerges: this is the making of meaning.

What does the instructor do to prepare? Part of the instructor's prepare is always to spend time with the artwork, looking closely for extended periods of time. The instructor who teaches the Rembrandt painting spends many hours in the gallery, looking at the painting from all angles, from close, from far. She sees it first as she has always seen this painting, a small work that hung for many years in the galleries of The Metropolitan Museum of Art. At the Getty, it looks different, newly cleaned and sparkling. The instructor then asks herself to see it as if for the first time, as a participant in a class might see it. She finds she is puzzled about the action, wondering what brings this assemblage of detailed characters together. The expressiveness of the faces and the gestures of the hands all suggest a story. She also notices Rembrandt's configuration of primary colors, the ghostly gray background, the way the action is pulled out of the darkness by the light. She does a sketch, to think through the compositional structure. The image of the painting becomes implanted in her mind: the story and the elements of the work that tell the story.

The participants understand from the outset that Rembrandt is telling a story, as they see what Rembrandt is guiding them to see through the of tiny details, the glowing

lights and shadowy darks, the gentle distribution of primary colors across the mysterious landscape. The instructor does not tell the students the title of the painting or the story of Europa's abduction. Instead she urges the students to make sense of the story by entering Rembrandt's visual world, trusting what they can see and understand through observation alone. She assures them that she will in the end tell them the specifics of the narrative, and the relevant art-historical information, but asks, will they not trust Rembrandt, and their own eyes, for the moment?

The instructor's preparatory work continues with research. She reads the museum's curatorial files; she consults articles, catalogues, and reference works; she speaks with colleagues. Deep knowledge of the artworks is a part of good gallery teaching. Information, together with seeing, is the source of ideas. The museum educator honors both objects and audience by bringing them together in an experience guided by scholarship.

How does the instructor use the knowledge she has gained from art-historical research? She uses it to enable her to suggest possibilities, not to establish conclusive interpretations that she will impose upon her students. She suggests relationships between a work and the circumstances of its creation and reception, thereby supplying visitors with information that indicates how and why a work came to be, how it was made, and how it was viewed in its original social and artistic context, and what the artwork has meant to its audiences over time.

The class considering the statue of Venus has taken little time to propose several explanations for the way she stands with her hands half covering and half revealing her body. In response to one suggestion that her gesture may be one of modesty, the instructor asks, why should Venus, as goddess of love and beauty, be modest? The question is clearly intriguing to the students, and the discussion of possible explanations becomes animated and more complex. At this point, the instructor informs the students that this statue is a version of an original Greek statue made by Praxiteles in the fourth century B.C., famous in its time as the first large-scale sculpture of Aphrodite portrayed

without clothing. Might not Praxiteles be making a startling statement about female modesty? Might he be asserting that this familiar human emotion is so powerful, it extends even to goddesses, and even to the goddess of love herself? The instructor suggests another possibility: perhaps Praxiteles is referring to the Greek belief that it was dangerous for mortals to see their gods naked. Then again, he says, the statue might simply be illustrating the myth that on a voyage from Cyprus to Greece, Aphrodite stopped on the island of Knidos – where the original statue was erected to wash the foam off her body. What does the group do with this information? The group is drawn in by the excitement of new discovery, and the ensuing discussion is lively. The students will decide for themselves what meaning to embrace. The instructor ends the consideration with his own question: could the sculptor have had in mind all of these stories and ideas as he decided to place the goddess's hands strategically to cover a body both beautiful and dangerous to behold?

The instructor uses art-historical information to deepen and enrich the visitors' experience of the work. He does not provide all the information at his command at the outset, because he does not want the group to see the sculpture first as an artifact of history; he wants the viewers to attend to the artwork's here-and-now physical presence before them. He intends his provision of art-historical information to increase the range of interpretive possibilities, and indeed, it causes the discussion to widen. He invites his students to look at the sculpture carefully for themselves, and then, as they point out details, ask questions, or stumble over the roots of ambiguity, he moves their experience further with his own observations, or information that makes them see more, and see differently. The goal is to extend the conversation, to make the understanding of the work deeper, in part by making the students feel that they are getting closer to the work by grasping it in its historical context. But the information is not meant to decide among contending interpretations to end the conversation as it might have if the instructor were to adduce only a single historical circumstance, or, in response to a question concerning meaning, were to

rely on the authority of his knowledge to say, "This is what Praxiteles meant." Instead, the skilful use of the information makes the students aware of ambiguities, and it is ultimately that awareness, and acceptance of its attendant complexities, that enriches their experience.

Art history sometimes increases our ability to understand works of art, and make meaning, as described above. But sometimes a work seems to speak directly to us. What does Rembrandt do to bring us so close to the experience of being abducted? What does Rembrandt draw upon in us when he gives form to the story of the abduction of Europa? Our edge may yield a hypothesis about the meaning of the work itself, but a sense of the painting's inherent urgency may also suggest a poetic idea about Rembrandt's seeking out the edges of the soul's experience and its passions.

Eventually, someone asks a pivotal question. Why in the world is this woman riding on the back of a bull? The instructor says a question like this is a gift that can open our understanding, and at that moment, she decides to tell the story from the Roman poet Ovid of how Zeus fell in love with the beautiful Europa, how he seduced her by turning himself into a beautiful prancing along the shore, and enticed her to climb up on his back so that he could steal her away to ravish her. The group refocuses their discussion, and begins to see more details that both explicate the story and reveal the painting's narration of it to be very complex. The class examines Europa's face and finds it strange that she appears unafraid, looking back to shore as if signaling that she understands the significance of what is occurring. A student observes that the moment is portentous. The class realizes that the painting embodies a complex of ideas that goes far beyond simple storytelling. It is important to know the story, but knowing it does not exhaust the painting's meaning, nor is the story by any means all that the painting is about.

In museum teaching, the importance of the instructor's research is that it yields potential interpretations. The instructor begins to formulate ideas about the work – what is important, what is unusual, what the work is about.

From her own research and experience, she develops a sense of the work's possible meaning or meanings. She devises from these possibilities a kind of plan, a structure of ideas that will support an exploration of the work. The structure may be more or less elaborate, depending on what and how many works of art the class will be looking at. The structure may include an initial direction of inquiry, and a sequence of questions or ideas that might push the conversation in particular directions. The educator's ideas are put forth with an openness to change. The instructor should be encouraged to think of such a plan as experimental, open, and flexible.

The instructor's sense of the range of a work's possible interpretations is an essential component of gallery teaching, for it will inevitably, if subtly, affect the direction of the visitors' exploration. As their exploration deepens and widens in scope, the group continually tests the hypotheses that emerge against further observations. This is the most delicate part of the endeavor. Museum instructors must always have a sense of direction, a sense of the possible outcome of any group's encounter with a given artwork, yet must, equally, cultivate a willingness to listen and to yield to what unfolds in conversation. The instructor's questions and remarks should be open-ended. With truly open questions, we encourage and honor participation in the unfolding discussion, and unexpected comments the group's awareness of what is possible. Leading questions, however – questions with predetermined answers – do not, in the end, lead anywhere. As instructors, we should think of ourselves as being part of the group, learning alongside everyone else. We use our own hypotheses about a work's meaning to help guide the group's experience. Intense looking and deep concentration able every viewer to construct his or her own meaning, within boundaries charted by the artwork itself.

From her own study of the picture, the instructor had come to believe that the theme of *The Abduction of Europa* is human lives caught up in the gods' larger designs, the interweaving of divine and mortal destinies. But when someone asks, "Why is this woman riding on

the back of a bull?” the discussion turns unexpectedly. The students focus anew on the painting, and now see Europa as a heroine facing her uncertain fate with courage and fortitude. If we were in her place, they say, we would be afraid. But she is not. And so the conversation shifts from Zeus and his actions to the universal meaning of such a strange journey: is Europa on a mysterious journey from life to death? Is Rembrandt investigating a journey to unknown places, to the realm of the divine? Does Europa represent all people in this way? The instructor’s own hypothesis disappears and yields to the suggestions and interpretation of the group.

Looking at a work of art involves a series of actions – taking it in as a whole, focusing on details, thinking and reflecting on them, pausing to look again, and so on. Interpretation and understanding alternate with moments of emotion. In the end, everything should come together, with the experience of the artwork unified in an expanded whole. Dewey writes of how emotions hold the elements of experience together: “Emotion is the moving and cementing force.”² It is through emotion above all that we engage our audiences; we harness the impetus of that marks encounters with works of art interest, like, dislike, puzzlement, curiosity, passion – and strive to maintain the momentum emotion provides as we further explore the works. The artworks we look at may be powerful, enchanting, frightening, sad, beautiful. Characters and places within the depicted scenes come alive, and the viewer may live a little in them, moved and transported.

As they discuss Millet’s comparatively stark and simple portrait of Louise-Antoinette Feuardent, the students pause to look at the way Millet painted her hands, puzzling at the ring on her middle finger, the way she rests her arms on her dress, and the expression on her face. Someone says, “She is so beautiful.” For a moment, it seems as though there is nothing more to say.

The museum educator’s task is a delicate one. On the one hand our goal is for people to gain a greater knowledge

and understanding of a work, and on the other for them to connect with it personally, directly. Emotional evolution is a necessary precondition for awakening to a work’s poetic possibilities. We know that the encounter of artworks is as much a matter of the heart as of the mind, that learning about artworks is motivated and held together by emotion as much as by intellect.

Each encounter with a work of art ends differently, unpredictably. As Dewey writes, “we have an experience when the material experienced runs its course to fulfillment.”³ “An experience” of an artwork in some way never ends, but in the hour or so that museum educators have with a group, we aim to provide an experience that reaches a moment of culmination, a point at which the observations and thoughts of the group come together. We must sense when this has happened. The experience may end gradually, with a slowly developing appreciation of all the resources an artist has used to a particular effect. It may end suddenly, in a moment of discovery, as if the curtain has been pulled aside to reveal a work’s final layer of meaning. It may end in a sentence. Or it may end in silence and wonder.

Like the artist’s own process of creation, experiencing a work of art is not a regular and predictable process. In both of the classes described here, each group has concentrated on the artwork, and turned it about in their imaginations. We have allowed our minds to wander and speculate; we have reached a resting place, then begun again, as the work revealed itself gradually in time. We have experimented, looking from one viewpoint and another, followed the trails leading from our first impressions, fellow participants’ comments, or a scholar’s thesis. We have moved from the life of the object to our own inner lives, and back, fitting pieces of one into the other. We have come back to a work again and again, because each time we look, a different understanding is possible. We have worked together in this creative process. We have been held together by our belief that we will leave with

2 Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 42.

3 Ibid., 35.

an understanding of the artwork that we did not have when we began. We have contributed our perceptions and knowledge to a collective experience that has allowed each of us to understand and appreciate the work more fully.

A museum instructor who teaches for any length of time knows that often our viewers expect, or hope to arrive at “what an artwork means,” a single interpretation, with some sense of solidity and finality. The instructor reinforces and relies on the viewers’ trust that meaning is possible, yet at the same time, teaches that ultimately the interpretation of works of art inevitably encounters complexity and ambiguity. We move through our conversation, supplement observations with knowledge, and develop a sense about possible meanings. We arrive at a synthesis, and a possible understanding of the particular work of art we are studying. But we also arrive at the larger idea that works live and remain important because their meanings change. They accumulate past views, and are affected by the resources each new viewer brings. We always begin with the object, but the process of studying art in the museum is a creative process that transforms objects into something new. Dewey went so far as to say that, in a sense, the work of art does not exist until it becomes alive in the viewer’s experience⁴. As we have said, we would add that it is only our ongoing engagement with works that keeps them alive.

Teaching is the heart of our practice. But many of us find we do not have the time to about and prepare for it properly. As we look around our museums and museums everywhere, we see teaching that seems to have lost its way, become mechanical, unsure of its purpose. We have proposed a practice that aims high, at experiences that transform our visitors.

Museums are places of possibility. But possibilities are only made real when educators skillfully use the broad knowledge and understanding they have of objects throughout their museums to inspire and encourage people to dream

a little with them, and to make them their own. What we teach is not just “how” to look for, but in the end, the possibilities of what art may be.

Teaching in museums is a complicated art. It requires tremendous preparation, knowledge, and planning. It is motivated by a love and knowledge of artworks, but also from an appreciation of the infinite possibilities of meaning that accumulate around them. It requires flexibility, balancing between a desire to share hard-won understanding, and openness to interpretations that come from completely new places. It is a delicate art, requiring the ability to engage, cajole, and listen, to move from viewpoint to view point, all the while guiding, collecting, and building. It is an art ultimately committed to expanding and enriching the visitor’s experience.

4 Ibid., 108.

Towards a future letter regarding a most beneficial frame of mind for the museum educator

Amir Parsa

(In which will be provided a summary account of an illuminating case study, followed by the description of components of said frame of mind)

Sitting in front of Mondrian's *Broadway Boogie Woogie*. Educator with a group of older adults and their middle-aged sons and daughters. Some also with their spouses and a couple even with a professional caregiver. Around fifteen people in all. Older adults with dementia, or cognitive loss, as some like to call them. Group in front of a painting as we've seen countless times. Educator: friendly tone and smile, and when everyone has settled in, lets them know they will be starting here and that they should take their time to look, and then, to go ahead and tell him what they see in this painting. 'What are some of the colors that you see,' he asks, 'what are some of the shapes that you see?'

He thinks it's a safe question and in fact it is, except that on this day (this day we'll come to know as a wondrous and revelatory one), one of the visitors – I remember his name, distinctly, his hair even and his brow and the way he would stoop in his seat yet remained alert (uncannily alert!) – Rob (short for Robert), fellow in his 90's (I later discover), non-chalantly and with a very sweet smile on his face, blurts out: 'Oh, I see triangles, I see circles, I see squares, rectangles... I see them all...'

Educator smiles but he's almost paralyzed: can't seem to figure out how to respond, probably thinking, what to

say, because, of course, it's a pretty wrong answer: there are only squares and rectangles in Mondrian's *Broadway Boogie Woogie*, a work he composed and finished in New York, the city that inspired it, in 1942-43. Tricky, then: what to do. Amazingly, it turns out that it's unnecessary to do anything: someone else just took off after the few strange (yet somehow unproblematic) moments of silence that followed Rob's burst, and comments on the colors, the lines, and other aspects of the painting. Carry on, then, all is back on track...

Only a few moments have passed until, again, Rob: 'Have you ever been to Costa Rica?' Just like that. Random, out of the blue, seemingly unconnected to the flow of the discussion and the content of the exchanges. Plus, it was not Guatemala, or Mexico, or some other country in the region, or another exotic location, but that: Costa Rica. The educator still in front of *Broadway Boogie Woogie*. Smiles and: 'No, no... I have to admit, I haven't!' Well, Rob responds, you oughta go. (I always remember the strangeness of the 'awe' in 'oughta', and, because of that, his expression, the sense of wonder that accompanied his proposition...)

We move on. Group conversing and now others making some insightful comments and untangling the techniques Mondrian used, the overall composition... and then, Rob again. This time, though, he hits close to home, literally. He says, this time: 'Have you ever been to Brooklyn?'

'That,' the educator laughs, 'I've done!' The whole group erupts in laughter. And Rob carries on: he tells of the Brooklyn of the present day, the lights, the 'crazy' folks, the new buildings, the speed, the parks and the runners and the new schools and the way the streets have changed and the new parents and the, and the, and the... – and the Brooklyn he'd known, before, the Brooklyn of old: who lived there and how, how it was slower, how it was more familiar, how it was people who knew each other, and how there was less speed and less movement and less people coming and going like this. The music that was played, the dances, the parties, the good times. Carries on, does Rob, in a most delightful, most energetic, most articulate way. And, for good measure, lest the reader get the impression that he was complaining in any way, he was also bringing up the virtue of this new Brooklyn, and what he appreciated, and all that was wrong before... This was all Brooklyn, now and then, good and bad, and everything in between, with other participants joining in, describing their own experiences with Brooklyn, yes, and, later, with other places and homes they had known...

And then it hits me: Of course! The amazing nature of the connection! The perception beyond the first elements, and a sort of 'going through' that was precisely what *Broadway Boogie Woogie*, in its attempt at capturing the essence of the city, at rendering a sensory essence of place, invited the viewer to do. And that Rob had, what's the word, grasped?, felt?, connected to? The word might be missing, but Rob had, I am convinced (so, no: it had not been an accident), upon his first viewing of the work, somehow, through some mechanism in the mind, connected to the varieties of sensations that render places in our memories, in our perceptions. Precisely because of the cognitive changes his mind had gone through, Rob had been able to make connections that we, in our habitual mode of perceiving the world around us, simply did not. We could not, that is, overcome the (very useful, granted) habits of mind, our 'reading' of a work. We see rectangles and squares first, straight lines, primary colors, and only later, the potential depiction of the city.

With the dozens and dozens of groups I myself had discussed this painting, I had noticed that many participants would detect, after phases of careful observation and detailed description, the possibility that the work was in some way related to the depiction of a city. The insinuation of a map, streets, a grid: all were always suggested, without any figurative reminders of course, without any representation of recognizable objects, without the illusion of 'seeing' the city's monuments or people. With most groups, through conversation and their own deductions, we would always come to how *Broadway Boogie Woogie* succeeded masterfully in bringing together form, style and content in such a way that the very essence of a place was rendered: the rhythm, the flow of passersby, the lights, the movement. Streets, cars, speed, interconnectedness, chaos (and order), the very abstractions that actual figures and things turn into in this haze of displacements. Verticalness and horizontalness, grids and mazes, the sense of energy and the paradoxical sensation of lost humanness within a confined space. Freedom and the robotic transmutation: all of the sensations come through the painting, in a way that most viewers never really imagine until a conversation has been launched.

What had proven fascinating in Rob's take was that he had almost immediately bypassed the rational and verbal steps. Skipped the phases, in effect, and connected almost immediately to the sense of place, the essence of place. A connection that then allowed the conversation to digress in ways that would indeed prove revealing. It had not been by accident that Rob had brought up Costa Rica, and certainly not by accident that he had brought up Brooklyn: each comment was in its own peculiar way a personal recollection, a connection made to experiences of places, experiences and sensations of places, for which *Broadway Boogie Woogie* had acted as an immediate catalyst. And: it had not been by accident that he had answered that he saw 'triangles and circles... and everything else: the question, to him, had prompted an invitation to 'see' the shapes (and sounds and more) in these experiences. It wasn't the shapes in the painting he was enumerating, but all the shapes and colors and feelings that were being made present in his mind.

In effect, what Rob was revealing, not in any magical or mystical way, but in a most concrete yet fascinating way, was what it meant to 'see'.

* * *

I am often asked in various settings what makes a good educator – more specifically a museum educator or an art educator, one that works with various types of audiences in these most public of venues. The question is often centered around how much information one should/must give, how much knowledge one must have, what tone one must take, what sequence of questions one must put together etc... These are all relevant queries, and indeed, important considerations for any educator to take into account in the building of a properly informative and exciting educational experience. Close viewing, visual literacy, the mastery of inquiry-based techniques, delivering a certain amount of information, all are crucial in inviting comments and interpretations. But... But: what the particular experience with Rob that day in MoMA's galleries proved to me – and for which I think this case is particularly noteworthy as an Ur-example, and 'exemplary example' – is that the necessity of open-ness, a certain attitude and approach, a certain adoption of an attitude and disposition, a *cultivation of a frame of mind*, is perhaps at the foundation of the most rewarding educational experience. The most important ingredient, and made up of very concrete components. This disposition, the importance of this 'way of being' and 'way of being-present' supersedes, in effect, any strategy or methodology that is put into action during the learning experiences. A way of being that should be cultivated and sustained. What the interaction with the group in front of *Broadway Boogie Woogie* once again confirmed, were some of the most important ingredients of this frame of mind:

a. An openness that is genuine, where one values the comments of everyone involved; where one, cognizant that not all interpretations are 'right' or 'correct', nevertheless believes in their value, even if to redirect and enrich conversations. An openness that values all reactions, and

that invites participation, in order to then facilitate the right balance between the amount of information given and the personal interpretations that flow. Call it the *openness imperative*. Without this overall attitude, Rob simply would not have been able to express himself, and in the ways that he did, with the ease and lightness, and without scruples or hesitations. It's the creation of an environment, the construction of a space of possible interaction.

b. Along with this openness, there is a necessity for awareness that all responses come from somewhere: banal to say, perhaps, but it is important to recognize that any comment comes from personal expectations, life experiences, previous interaction with art or museums, and certainly previous interactions within learning situations. This awareness, and the corollary legitimization of the fact of the response (which is in no way necessarily a legitimization of the actual content of the response), allows exchanges that in turn lead to powerful learning opportunities. It was curiosity and the constant activation of this awareness of the *personal source*, that kept us attuned to Rob's pattern of responses, how that pattern was connected to the work we were exploring, and what it was revealing about his connective interpretation.

c. Which bring us to the crucial importance of the valuing of learning on the part of the educator. As often as this point is made, it is not always internalized, and at times comes across as a bit hokey or corny. I am, however, convinced that the best educators are those who genuinely believe that all interactions, and all situations, will very potentially allow them to learn and grow as well. The educators who see themselves as merely providing a service are at a distinct disadvantage from those who are passionately engaged, with whom *learning valuation* resonates deeply: those who believe that this particular experience on this particular day is also an opportunity for them – one in which they might gain insight into a work, or into perception as such, or into the working of the changing/differing mind, or human nature plain and simple – all through the conversations, the discussions and the stories that are generated and shared. The educator needs to

always remain alert and curious, fascinated by humanity, very much in the mold of the always-curious journalist, and the eternally fascinated poet. This was fully in display with Rob's group: absent this overall attitude, an educator might simply have become frustrated with Rob's seemingly off-base comments, or, at best, dismiss his interjections as superfluous asides.

d. Concurrently, cognition of the value of digressions and story telling are also of utmost importance. *Narrative connections*, the conscious activation and perpetuation of personal narratives in connection to the works and the conversations at hand, fashion frameworks for learning. In effect, this way of being-present with people, practiced in our everyday lives all the time, does not only create a positive feeling of belonging in the interpreter, but aids the internalization of information through connection to relevant personal experience. It is not in any way diminishing the importance of a work, or compromising its value or importance: rather, it is allowing the work to become a permanent part of the experience of the viewer, perhaps in ways that are more meaningful. This is where Rob's unstated connections were allowing us to attain the point where we spoke about his (and then everyone's) experiences in Brooklyn, and where, in turn, these narratives generated charming conversations about the meaning of place and home, about the nature of societal change and transformations.

e. Admittedly, the components of this disposition towards openness rest on a particular hermeneutic position that the educators, in my opinion, must unapologetically entertain and defend: a theoretical position much better articulated in literary theory than it has been in art theory so far, and where one privileges reader-response, or viewer-response, or, more generically, audience-response. (Or, to be more inclusive and integrate the panoply of works that now fall into our pretty fragile category of 'art', *experiencer-response*.) The delicate nature of this topic and the more complex debates at play prevent us from expounding further here, but the important note is this: valuing the responses of the viewers or experiencers of artwork is not

simply done to integrate people's stories, or to 'make them feel good' (all points that I've heard and that were made with good intention), nor is it simply to develop literacy of any kind. It is, rather, a theoretical position vis-à-vis the very nature of artwork: one which does indeed diminish an outside entity's claim to singular authority in interpretation, and places the response of those experiencing the work at the center of the very fact of the aesthetic phenomenon. Had we launched our discussion assuming that Mondrian's work needed explanation or contextualization right off the bat, we never would have been in position to invite unaffected response, which had in fact allowed the rest of the program to unfold the way it did. We did provide plenty of information at the opportune times, and provided in-depth analysis of the work, but always without the posturing that one might potentially associate with discussion of artwork in general (and this one in particular).

f. Finally, none of this is possible without a comfort-level with silences, and a cultivation of patience. The educator is lost and forever adrift who fears silence, and who lacks patience. Together, *patience and the embrace of silences* allow conversations and exchanges to become fruitful and powerful learning experiences. They are, in essence, foundations to the foundations: the rocks in the terra firma that will invite meaningful educational interactions.

* * *

The letter to any present and future educator would integrate these points, and insist on deriving theory through practice, and allowing practice to enlighten one's theoretical constructs. The openness imperative, the personal source awareness, learning valuation, narrative connection, audience-centered interpretation, and a cultivation of patience: these are lessons learned from practice and compose a solid foundation for the activation of meaningful educational experiences. They were fully on display in a most illustrative example that to this day, fascinates and moves me, and, more importantly, serves as a reminder for the adoption of the right frame of mind

for the educator. 'Have you ever been to Costa Rica' is a question that is ensconced in my mind as the beginning phrase of a grand revelatory experience, where, by dint of exchanges and conversations, I was once again provided insight into the workings of the human mind.

In a re-writing then, I would go ahead and do this: launch a potential letter to my dear fellow educators, whereupon I expound how, a few years ago, in a gallery at MoMA, a particular experience touched me in such a way that I derived the most unexpected revelations. I would carry on and integrate this entire paper into the letter while changing the tone and, perhaps, some of the formulations. The second sentence would, for example, go something like this: 'We were sitting in front of Mondrian's *Broadway Boogie Woogie*.' And the third: 'The educator is sitting with a group of older adults and their middle-aged sons and daughters.' You get the point. I also know how the letter would begin. Sure of it, in fact. Absolutely certain.

Dear fellow educators (it would begin):

Have you ever been to Costa Rica?

Learning in pictures and conversations in the "Spaces in Between"

Wendy Moon

Where better to write about learning in "places in between" than on the subway? Those transitional spaces where we pass time that somehow seems unfulfilled unless we occupy ourselves with some important business.

When and how we learn is a subject that preoccupies not only museum educators but many who ponder the mystery of what happens in that liminal space in between subject and object – whether it be a word on page, spoken word, or art object.

I was recently asked to give a five-minute presentation on learning. As I pondered various profound current theories and research that have influenced my thinking and imagined an impressive PowerPoint full of images of the brain and potent quotes, I realized that what really had me thinking lately was not so much an expert book or lecture, but unexpected conversations in those places in between what I assumed would be great learning experiences at conferences or talks by revered intellectuals.

In fact these unexpected encounters and the subsequent connections and images they had catalyzed had a much more powerful and thought-provoking effect.

Somewhere along my fifty plus years I had allowed myself to create assumptions about learning that defied my instincts. I had forgotten that learning is unexpected, non-linear, playful and about being open to experience. And most of the time it does not happen in isolation, rather in conversation-mediated experiences.

In museums we often assume that the object and or the artist speak for themselves in a one-way conversation, and that meanings are fixed or translated only by experts. This assumes that works of art mean exactly what they were intended to be at the time they were made, and are somehow fixed in time by placing them in a clean white box of a space.

Test your assumptions.

Two conversations and a handful of pictures. (A tale told in five minutes)

I was carefully ensconced in my aisle seat and on my way to a conference about the brain and learning in the digital age. My iPad and keyboard were in the seat pocket ready for action as soon as we were off the ground and it is safe to use electronic devices. I had a big assignment to accomplish before landing.

My window seat companion is in his place and I'm monitoring the aisle hoping that no one would be sitting between us on this six-hour flight. Then, as luck would have it, I see this big burly man loaded down with rugged looking bags and the largest and most worn out looking pair of in-line skates I have ever seen. The bags got tossed into compartments here and there and my new middle-seat companion, best described as half Crocodile Dundee and half aging rock star, took his place along with his gigantic skates, which flopped to the floor between us. Larger than life, he took up not only his seat but seemed

to morph over the space around him, and I was sure his voice carried to the aisles to the front and back of ours.

A friendly and seemingly kind character, I knew enough to disengage myself as soon as possible and quickly fit my headphones snugly over my ears and begin to tap away at my assignment. It was important that I finish this assignment so I could focus without distraction on what I expected to be a rich learning experience at the conference. Even with the headphones on I could still hear his intense and relentless conversation with my window seat neighbor. He talked about driving across the country in a particular type of old car and then cutting it up and welding it into a sculpture when he arrived. I couldn't help but be intrigued and think about what a perfect solution that was to Brooklyn alternate side parking restrictions!

As I continued to work furiously I continued to hear his conversation, like the second track on a recording session. His topics ranged variously and it became clear to me that I was not only sitting next to a character, but someone who was curious and interested in many things and many people – and who pondered and probed questions deeply, as the rhythm of his conversation was peppered with staccato phrases that followed long pauses and rhetorical questions. As I tried hard to concentrate, words like “Bauhaus” and “Museum of Modern Art” rose above the chatter and my interest began to pique

At about the fourth hour I had exhausted my assignment and was wrapping it up. I took off my headphones and surfaced again. I thought perhaps that I should give my window seatmate a break from this guy who seemed to be claiming a good part of my elbow and air space.

It was not a hard task to begin a conversation. He wanted to know what I did at MoMA and our conversation evolved into thoughts on the failings of public education and my concerns that visual interpretation was not valued over the written word and my hopes that the arrival of the digital age might shift those values accordingly. He told me that he was a biophysicist and that both the arts and sciences relied upon the powers of observation. He told

me a story about Freeman Dyson asking Albert Einstein how he got his ideas. Einstein said “I see them in pictures.”

I smiled to myself as this picture comes to my mind from my ten-year old son's favorite book *Odd Boy Out*, a book about Einstein's life. It's a picture of Einstein pushing his son in a carriage as he looks up towards the sky and sees his ideas form.

“Sometimes he pushes his baby son's carriage through the streets of Zurich. Like a night sky filled with stars, Albert's mind is bright with glowing ideas. And as stars are joined into images called constellations, Albert's ideas make a picture of space and time and energy and matter that no one has seen before.”

Odd Boy Out: Young Albert Einstein, Don Brown

We talked about how teaching to the test, which requires memorizing facts, was not the kind of skill set we need for the future. The ability to visualize, to ask probing questions, imagine, analyze, synthesize, and solve problems in innovative ways seems a much better test of learning.

He posed the question aloud – how could one test to see if children who have had visual arts programs learned more? He paused for a long time, I imagined visualizing what that might look like. After the flight he continued to puzzle about this in emails. As we left the plane I learned that early on his career, this character had researched a certain type of yeast (which he had asked me to visualize and describe – I imagined fern-like, (close!) while he noted that text books always get it wrong and make it football-shaped) had found the cure for a serious condition.

The second conversation was also one of those inadvertent experiences.

MoMA hosted a conference on art and healthcare and a fancy dinner followed by a talk by a New York Times best selling author and physician. Although I was not looking forward to the small talk and the rubber chicken dinner, it was made palatable by the thought that maybe I would learn from this renowned speaker. However, I remember very little of what he spoke about. Rather, it was the man seated next to me that had a very profound impact.

Like the speaker, he was also a physician and they had gone to school together. He relished the opportunity to greet the speaker – interestingly without any shred of competitiveness but with true admiration for his accomplishments. He told me that he had been very ambitious when he was a young doctor and had put his career at the forefront of his life and time. In his thirties he was diagnosed with a fatal disease and that had made him rethink what he valued. He had three children and decided that the most important thing he could do was spend time with each of them. His wife did not adjust to the shift in his values and that relationship suffered. At that time my eight-year old son was having great difficulties at school and we were about to embark on a series of tests, which was weighing heavily on my mind. The physician assured me that my son was going to be fine, and that boys were just different and learned differently. He noted that his son had also had similar challenges and it had all worked out. Somehow this shared experience soothed my troubled mind.

Talking about children, he shared a story with me about his eldest daughter. She has shown great interest in art and he decided that she should see the best collection of modern art, so he brought her to MoMA when she was twelve. As they walked through the galleries she asked him to explain what they were seeing. At first he could give her some insights but as modernism evolved and abstraction took hold he was at a loss to explain the art of the times to his daughter. He puzzled over why it was so difficult to explain the artistic expression of our culture to her. At the time he was also reading a book on physics that he had brought along on the trip. It occurred to him that there was a parallel between modern art and modern physics. Both had become almost incomprehensible-yet they both dealt with similar ideas of light, space, and time. In fact, he noted that Einstein had come up with his theory of relativity by visualizing himself riding a light beam through space. He noted that physicists think in numbers and equations like artists think in image and metaphor.

The fragmentation of the Cubists was like seeing things from multiple perspectives, not unlike Einstein's view from

the lights beam – unfixed to one point time. The futurists attempted to introduce the element of time. For the Fauvist light, and color became liberated from representation and became an essential element of composition. Pollock probed deep space, marking gesture and velocity in paint in relation to the body. Not sure you need? This man was a museum educator's dream! He connected his own interests and experiences to make sense of what he was seeing. He went on to write a New York Times best seller about the relationship between art and physics. He sent me the book and I began reading it on the subway. The man next to me turned and said “that's such an amazing book.” I was sure to share that with the doctor in my thank you email. He died last year, and even three years later I continue to think about that chance moment of learning that I think I will undoubtedly circle back to again and again.

This got me thinking about my own first experiences at MoMA. I was a twenty-year-old art student from Canada. I had met the love of my teen years, Picasso, at the Niagara Falls Public Library. Somewhere in the stacks I'd found him, along with Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas – the salons of art and poetry that had made my small town life tolerable. This was my first chance to see Picassos in the flesh.

The three works I remember most from that first MoMA encounter are Meret Oppenheim's *Object* (1936) a fur-lined teacup, Giacometti's *The Palace at 4 a.m.* (1932), and Picasso's *Guernica* (1937) – the impressive full-scale mural about the horrors of war. Each of these works resonated with the young artist in me. All somewhat disturbing, now that I think about it!

Perhaps the greatest learning experience was the day my son was born, waiting and listening – for that sound which is your fate. That profound moment when you realize that you will never be alone again or without a thought of responsibility in your mind. It was as if the world cracked in half, the world I had thought I'd known so well, and something much richer and much more complex had revealed itself and I pondered how I'd never known any of this before.

On a sunny June day a week after my son was born, we took him out for a ride around the block in his stroller. Near an intersection a car came barreling around the corner towards the sidewalk at an alarming velocity. It was as if I had been struck by a wave, my mind raced through its database – I went on full alert as never before. An image from the past seared my mind and I was overwhelmed with its power in that moment. The image was from *Guernica* – the image of the screaming woman holding the dying child. It was only now, in that moment, that I truly understood the image I’d seen twenty so many years before, with every cell of my body.

Learning doesn’t happen in straight lines. And it doesn’t necessarily happen in front of a work of art. As mediators between art and people, educators must remember that meaning, like art takes place in light, space and time and from multiple perspectives.

Duchamp hit the nail on the head when he said “...the creative act is not performed by the artist alone; the spectator brings the work in contact with the external world by deciphering and interpreting its inner qualifications and thus adds his contribution to the creative act.”

It is important to remember that engaging with art is a creative act for the viewer. The role of the mediator is to give space for that creativity, to continually test our assumptions about what learning with art can be, and to approach the process of mediation with equal passion for the art and the individual. Respect the creative process that takes place between them. Approaching mediation as a creative enterprise is key. It all happens in pictures and conversations. Be open. Listen. Engage. Be playful. Imagine what could be.

[in] Course: a place where lines vibrate

Rafael Silveira [Rafa Élis]

When I was invited to write an account of my experience with mediator training, I soon thought I could not forget to mention what I’ve lived at the Mediator Training program on the 8th Mercosul Visual Arts Biennial¹. However I’d like to warn the reader about the fact that that this report is insufficient to comprehend all that happened during the meetings that took place during this course². It would be impossible to mention here all the classes, activities, researches, dynamics that happened. I bring only, then, a small cutout, with movements that didn’t happened in a linear manner but, sometimes, crossed paths: small fragments from the middle of the course, that extended its movements upon me and in so many people.

In the effort to make this account clear and close to what the experience was about, I divided the text in two moments. In the first, I try to turn experiences into words,

presenting the reader some of the programs that formed this course. In a second moment, I put myself thinking about the implications, deviations and movements generated by those meetings – the great subtleties that I perceive don’t only go through the mediators, but all of those that dove on this Biennial’s Educational Program. Movements that expand time, space and beyond the exhibition’s period.

1. [in] Course

The distance called into question: the cloud’s emergence

In this course, we passed through a series of unknown territories. Current and virtual places. Besides the presential participants in Porto Alegre, we counted with mediators from several Brazilian cities and states attending the classes long distance. This mediator group, that came to be known as *cloud*, participated actively during classes. I, in person at the ICBNA, with my laptop, met the group in a chat room, lending my voice to the ones present, but with their bodies from afar. Through the intense participation of *cloud*, we created a positive point over the distance factor: silent conversation. While lecturers spoke, we produced a dialog that, overlapped with the class themes, became a kind of collective hypertext. If a subject with which someone identified appeared, soon this experience was shared; when an expression unknown to someone appeared, soon a link about it was sent (with images, videos or text); when a class activity appeared we soon found ways to accomplish it, bypassing the distance issue. The classes grew with the group’s silent and collective participation.

1 The course, that took place from may to september, 2011, had presential classes held at the Instituto Cultural Brasileiro Norte-Americano (ICBNA) and on the exhibition sites of Cultural Institutions in Porto Alegre. Classes had the participation of around 300 people, 50 of those attending it long distance, by an internet simultaneous transmission of the classes. All students, presential or not, participated in an LVA (Learning Virtual Ambient), in which we developed forums, made available reading materials, activities, etc.

2 I’ll use here, and on the rest of this article, the word *course* not only as a classes and activities systematized with a specific goal, but as something that flows and moves in multiple directions, without knowing beforehand where this course is taking us or where we are taking this course to. The movement in a unknown direction is its only condition to be possible.

Cloud rained through the course's period and into the exhibition. Mediators representing several territories, cultures and accents came to Porto Alegre meeting the local mediators and sharing the same space. A space that held artistic propositions that discussed notions such as: nation (its creation or dissolution), territorial conflicts, identity, frontiers, migration, landscape, etc. besides the beautiful meeting between this curatorial project Essays on Geopoetics and the mediator team from several places, genuine cultural, artistic and pedagogical interchanges happened. A fact that enriched, in a way both visible and invisible, the Educational Program of this Mercosul Biennial edition.

Walking with closer with no maps: Discussion Groups and Fletcherizing

I've been realizing the importance of moments that escape the educator's control, whatever the nature of the educational space. I'm not speaking the sort of lack of control in which the educator simply makes him or herself absent without the proposal of learning moments, but of an action that aims to discard of the control over the student's creative process, stimulating them to create. Enabling an answer that escapes the proposed enunciation, turning it into a new enunciation. Enabling students to guide us into unknown paths. With the intention of creating these sort of moments in the mediator's training, we developed two small experimental programs, which were inserted already during the course as complementary activities. Although conceived and ministered by the EAD modality team (distance education), the meetings were developed in person at Casa M³.

The *Art Discussion Groups* were conceived specially for without visual arts graduation and consisted in a series

3 Active action of the 8th Mercosul Biennial, situated at an old loft situated at Fernando Machado Street, 513, that used to belong to the educator Cristina Balbão. The house hosted, besides the described programs, teacher's training courses, neighbor activities, workshops, performances, video sessions, short term exhibitions, permanent exhibitions, chats with artists, curators and critics, presenting itself as a fundamental action for this Biennial's Educational Program.

of thematic meetings with art discussions. We began introducing the theme, contextualizing it, main artists and works, then we put the debate into practice. With that appeared groups on: Duchamp & Warhol, Conceptual Art, Performance, Relational Aesthetics, illustration and video from William Kentridge and, finally, Contemporary Art⁴. With this, we created a brief and lacunary genealogy of contemporary art. A genealogy that contributed, from the perspective of several knowledge areas expressed on the mediator's many formation areas, to the comprehension of the changes art has gone through, or the plurality of art conceptions that nowadays we call contemporary.

The *Fletcherizing* activity was a surprise in all of its senses. I've appropriated myself of a situation driven by the North-American teacher and artist Harrell Fletcher: a singular seminary that will develop, with the help of his students on the University of Portland⁵. Fletcher tells us, in a beautiful account, the situation arisen from the task he given to his students: inviting anyone interested in sharing in public any topic they wished, speaking about it for ten minutes. That seminary engaged at a great variety of subjects, presented by people with completely distinct profiles. According to Fletcher, the subjects presented by the guests included: health care, bus itineraries, skating, scuba diving, furniture polishing, invisible social networks, street music, etc⁶.

I started to wonder: what would happen if we done something similar with the mediators? An activity in which each subject could take us to an unknown place without maps for the path we'd follow. With this, we started the *Fletcherizing* activity. The only rule was the time limit. Each person had seven minutes to speak

4 The contemporary art discussion group was conducted by the artist and teacher Rodrigo Nuñez.

5 HARREL, Fletcher. Algumas idéias sobre arte e educação. In: BARREIRO, Gabriel Pérez and CAMNITZER, Luis. Educação para a arte/Arte para a educação. Porto Alegre. Mercosul Biennial Foundation, 2009.

6 Idem, p. 49.

about any subject (really) of interest, in a way we didn't knew the subject until the moment of each presentation. The activity course was beautiful. Amongst the discussed subjects: photographic preservation, kung-fu, manga history, painting, popular myths, music and the resonance box, literature and education, passion for sandals, travels and transformation, performance, etc. it was a sort of meeting without an agenda. A meeting with extremely important subjects, since each of its participants had to choose one amongst an infinity of interests or experiences to share. With this, each apparently ordinary subject was discussed with passion, beholden by eyes that smiled by listening to something so important for the speaker.

I believe that another contribution of those programs were the proposition of a more intimate and informal class style. A class style that, by counting with a small group of participants, comes close to a conversation amongst friends. We were transported to a place that composed the subjectivity of each of us, to be taken soon, by another voice, to a completely distant and distinct place. A travel with no maps.

Experience and dialog composing a learning place: mediation strategies

Certain time, while I was in my room writing on my computer, my five year old goddaughter opened the door and asked:

– Rafa, how do you see what's in the computer without your glasses on? – she asked, surprised by the sight of my glasses standing on my desk. In front of the computer there was a window were we could see a field. I said:

– Come here, Luísa. Can you see through the window? In the middle of the field, far ahead, there's something pink. Can you tell me what is it? She said:

– It's a flower, a beautiful rose.

– With no glasses I can't see that flower, just a pink stain, but I can see the words that are on the computer in front of me. I need glasses to see what's far away or close by?

– What's far away.

I put my glasses on and said:

– Really it's a beautiful flower!

I always ask myself *what other ways besides speech could be converted into pedagogical potencies in mediation?* In this conversation with my granddaughter, it's clear I could have simply said: I have myopia, I need glasses to see what's far away. But that would be me and not Luísa doing her connections, observing, moving, thinking about the reason I, strangely, don't use glasses to read (specially because a lot of people put on glasses just to read!). There was a mystery in that!

Beyond the meetings at the ICBNA auditorium, some of the course's classes were taught in the exhibition spaces of cultural institutions. It was the case of Rika Burnham, Pablo Helguera and Amir Parsa's classes. Within those practical activities, I'd like to draw attention to a class in which was fully immersed: the August 4th meeting – Mediation Strategies – a class given by the art-educators team I'm part of, the E Collective.

In a mediator's class the question was: how to speak with the course's students, in the clearest way possible, if there aren't formulas and recipes to be followed on an educative work? How to develop a class that escapes control stimulating improvisation and the creativeness of the mediators? Inside this idea the *Pandora's Box* activity was created. A week before this class, we launched at AVA a forum asking students to describe a situation in which they were afraid to deal at the educational work with the audience. Amongst the proposed situations were: *mediation with a group of people with specific necessities, a disperse group of children, mediation for a group of art "specialists", a school group touching the works, a very apathetical group, etc.* Each situation was placed in a small box. On the exhibition spaces of the Museo de Arte do Rio Grande do Sul and the Iberê Camargo Foundation we opened a box in which an activity that was passed on in the theater and with a strong reference to Augusto Boal. From the group of mediators we called in three or four people to pick up,

in a random manner, a small piece of golden paper and stage the situation described in it. People would stand still after the situation's performance in a way that one of the other people would leave the spectator part behind and acted and interfered the scene proposing a solution to the proposed "problem" presented and converting it in a learning situation. It was about saying what was possible to do in that situation, but to act on that moment. With this, for each presented situation, different solutions arose. The question "what to do?" started to be conceived in another dimension, because with this exercise, which became real from the students development and participation, we began a collective construction of an action repertoire. Any possibility of formula to deal with the multiplicity that is the audience and the artistic production. We approached what I call *sensibility method*. Sensibility is what guides (or bewilders) the encounters with the artworks, with school groups and the most diverse visitor's profile. Sensibility and involvement are needed to realize and feel the singularities and multiplicities that are the visitors and exhibited works. Each group demands a different path, built always in a singular and collaborative way.

Those programs sounded to me like sharing, creation and improvisation exercises. An exercise in which we don't pre-establish a place of arrival or a point to be reached, but the insertion in a movement in which we didn't know where it would take us.

Starting to realize: School Experiences Program

*The school experience was action. Experimenting a bit of mediation and inventing*⁷.

Priscila Borba de Ávila

We went without the pretention to carry on this work [...] we were afraid to reach the children [...] we were already told they had problems, that they didn't work too much because,

⁷ Testimonial written by Priscila Borba de Ávila and presented at a class in the Mediators Training Course in Porto Alegre on September 1st, 2011. Priscila acted as a mediator at this Biennial.

*ultimately, their motor skills was too hard, their situation was hard. They produced a lot! [...] a boy, Jonathan, did a fantastic job*⁸

Gabriel Bartz

The School Experiences Program⁹, developed at the end of the course, consisted in one of the most outstanding experiences on this process of invention and diving into the unknown. The students were invited to develop, together with their teachers, an activity with school groups. The three school meetings (observation, activity execution and closing, besides the planning period with the teachers) were enough for the students to realized the importance of the work they have been developing and the passion it could develop. A series of pre-conceptions and myths about the school audience began to fall, giving space to the meeting experience.

The Gabriel Bartz testimonial exemplifies a good part of the experiences in which the mediators planned the activities without many expectations, due to some generalizations that circulate about the school ambient. As a result, the mediators came back from the schools with beautiful testimonials. Student's Complaint Choirs¹⁰ were performed at schools, games that discussed the notions of territory, sensible activities with groups of people with physical or cognitive singularities, enthusiastic participations, exchanges, and moments of beauty. Always present on the mediator's testimonials: the transformation of a pre-conception of what the school was supposed to be, the

⁸ Speech given by Gabriel Bartz on the Mediator Training Course of the 8th Biennial in Porto Alegre on September 1st, 2011. Gabriel acted as a mediator at this Biennial.

⁹ The School Experiences Program was born through a SMED (City of Porto Alegre's Education Secretariat), aiming to give the mediators an opportunity to be in a close contact with the municipal schools network reality. In this Mediators Training Course the experience could be developed, on private schools, public schools, schools from other cities and states as well as the schools in Porto Alegre.

¹⁰ In reference to the Complaints Choir, a Project by artists Oliver Kochta and Kalleinen, that's part of the Travel Notebooks of the 8th Mercosul Biennial.

direct experience with the students and teachers of the school network in a collaborative work. The perception that the course was directing itself for the effective public work. The time was high.

2. A place where lines vibrate

The nomad line¹¹

In a text called *Politics*¹², Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet tell us we are, individually or in groups, composed by three kinds of lines: a sedentary line, a migrating line and a nomad one: the sedentary line, which would be of *hard segmentarity, it's about the family-the profession; the work-the vacation, school-and after the army-and, after the factory-and after retirement [...] Segments that carve us in all senses*¹³. The second line would be of migrating nature: *this line is about much more flexible segments [...] connections, attractions and repulsions that don't coincide with segments, secret madness, etc. In short, becomings that don't share the same rhythms with our history*¹⁴. This line would be what passes under the hard segments of the first one. There's still a third kind of line, a nomad one: it's *the line of escape and greatest slope [...] As if something would lead us, through the segments, bet also beyond our limits, towards an unknown destination, unpredictable, nonexistent*¹⁵.

I would like to draw attention to this nomad or escape line. This line that operates transformations on the micro-politics sphere. A sphere in which our thoughts and actions escape certain models and become mutable singularities producing echoes all over the world. Actions that constitute new forms of subjectivity. Practices that produce new

¹¹ I'd like to make it clear to the reader that I will be reducing Deleuze's study around lines, however I wanted to bring forward a brief introduction to what he understands as micro-politics in the intention of making clear the concept of escape line or nomad line.

¹² DELEUZE, Gilles & PARNET, Claire. *Dialogs*. São Paulo: Editora Escuta, 1998, p.145.

¹³ Idem.

¹⁴ Idem, p. 145 & 146.

¹⁵ Idem.

forms of resistance to the subjectivity forms of contemporary capitalism, which reduce our existence to a state of survival by a series of existence modulation mechanisms. In response to this visibly invisible power that interferes with our lives, our bodies and *our ways of understanding, feeling, loving, thinking and even creating*¹⁶, would act what passes on this nomad line.

The line's vibration, the appearance of music

What we have to try as mediators is to make people leave differently of the way they've entered.

André Silva de Castro¹⁷

Here I'll assign a musical quality (or, before that, a physics quality) to Deleuze's nomad line: *vibration*. With the possibility of vibration, we'll imagine this line as a strained rope, like a chord in a musical instrument. A sound is produced when a body vibrates, making the environment around it vibrate as well. With this association between sound and the nomad line in mind, let's think on the mediators training spaces and educational actions on art exhibitions. In those places traversed by art and education we become music with our bodies vibrating and making other bodies vibrate. We alter other bodies' rhythms and we are altered by the rhythms of other bodies. This third line appears to be a line moving in several directions that are traversed by the music that appears between art and education.

In this course, in the collection of experiences propitiated by the classes, discussions, experiences, dialogs, researches and, especially in the relations the mediators developed between themselves and with the audience, I felt the vibration of this line. I felt that line vibrate with people that experimented and experiment a new configuration of themselves, always heteronomous: young

¹⁶ PELBART, Peter Pál. Por um corpo Vivo: Cartografias biopolíticas. In: LOBOSQUE, Ana Marta (org.). Caderno de Saúde Mental. Seminário Universidade e reforma psiquiátrica: Interrogando a distância. Belo Horizonte: ESP-MG, 2009. V. 2. p. 25.

¹⁷ Speech by Andre Silva de Castro on the 8th Mercosul Biennial of Visual Arts' Mediators Training Course in Porto Alegre, on September 1st, 2011. He also acted as a mediator on this Biennial.

artists that review their productions, educations that start to conceive education as a poetic action or people from distinct areas that create escape routes to be able to keep in touch with art and/or education. In brief, people who operate turnarounds, often irreversible, in their lives.

I'd like to bring a speech from the course that touched me deeply. A line that vibrated and made my body vibrate. Obviously it would be impossible to reproduce precisely the sound that this speech produced with the set of elements that made the environment vibrate. I try only to update this vibration's sound, or better: I try to write down its score:

[...] what I came to pursue here at the Biennial with that experience, with the contact with the arts, with the critics, what to reflect and reflect, was to deconstruct myself!¹⁸ Today I quit my job. It was beautiful! My last day of work and now on this unemployment condition... and to make people think and to make myself think. I hope... Bah! Imagine if [I] can make people turn around! That's the idea! I hope I can!¹⁹

Gaston Santi Kremer

Gaston expresses a transformation, a rhythmic variation that passes through art and take it to a way of thinking that doesn't end in itself. The act of deconstructing him or herself like the creation of an escape line on a movement that seems to be condition for an affirmative life. His speech, as well as André's, previously quoted, also express not only a will to vibrate, but a will to vibrate collectively. A will to reverberate on the world the tone of his/her transformations. A vibration that wants to extend itself on continuous variation. When I remember the course I think of this speech that touched me by activating a feeling that has sprung within me when I was a mediator at the 6th Mercosul Biennial and has pulsed ever since.

The musicality of change

As vibrating and vibrated on the course; on the educational action towards the audience, we became poor, rich,

18 In reference to Santiago Sierra's piece titled "Person Remunerated for a Period of 360 Consecutive Hours" (2000).

19 Proferida por Gaston Santi Kremer, *idem*.

elderly, teachers, students. We became calm and agitated people, we became artists, assemblers, artworks, curators, critics, blind and deaf people. In brief, we changed. Music makes us dance to the becomings. The difference passes through our bodies. We become who we are when we become different from ourselves. *To become who you are is to change, to differ from yourself, to reinvent yourself*²⁰ to say what couldn't be said, think what couldn't be thought, feel what couldn't be felt, hear what couldn't be heard, taste what had no taste. To allow the difference to emanate from our bodies. To allow the difference to be highly contagious, and to free our bodies from antibodies against those viruses.

Middaly (not to say Finally)

It's not about thinking more about a discussion between art and social field or the education-art-politics triad, discussing its pretense causes and effects, but to think what happens there, between those three domains allowing the appearance of singularities. Listening to music, so present on this Educational Program, which passes through the mediators' trainings and the educational actions in art exhibitions. like in a part of the song composed by the mediators at the end of the course: *to bring the extraordinary to daily life*²¹. To allow the appearance and insert yourself into this musicality that which accompanies the encounter between art, education and politics constitutes a place that is nomad by nature.

Once played, this line will not stop vibrating and will not allow itself to stop. In a logic of contagion, mediators

20 ROCHA, Sílvia Pimenta Velloso. Tornar-se quem se é: a vida como exercício de estilo. In: LINS, Daniel (org.). *Nietzsche/Deleuze: arte, resistência*. Simpósio Internacional de Filosofia. Rio de Janeiro: Forense Universitária; Fortaleza: Fundação de Cultura, Esporte e Turismo, 2007. p. 293.

21 Improvised collective creation. Curiously sung over the melody of *Metamorfose Ambulante* by Raul Seixas. The song was created by the Mediators Training Course's students and the artist Luis Guilherme Vergara being conceived as a *Hopes Choir*, in reference to the *Complaints Choir Project* by artists Oliver Kochta and Kalleinen, presented on the Travel Notebooks exhibition. Maybe now it's the time for a *Experiences Choir*.

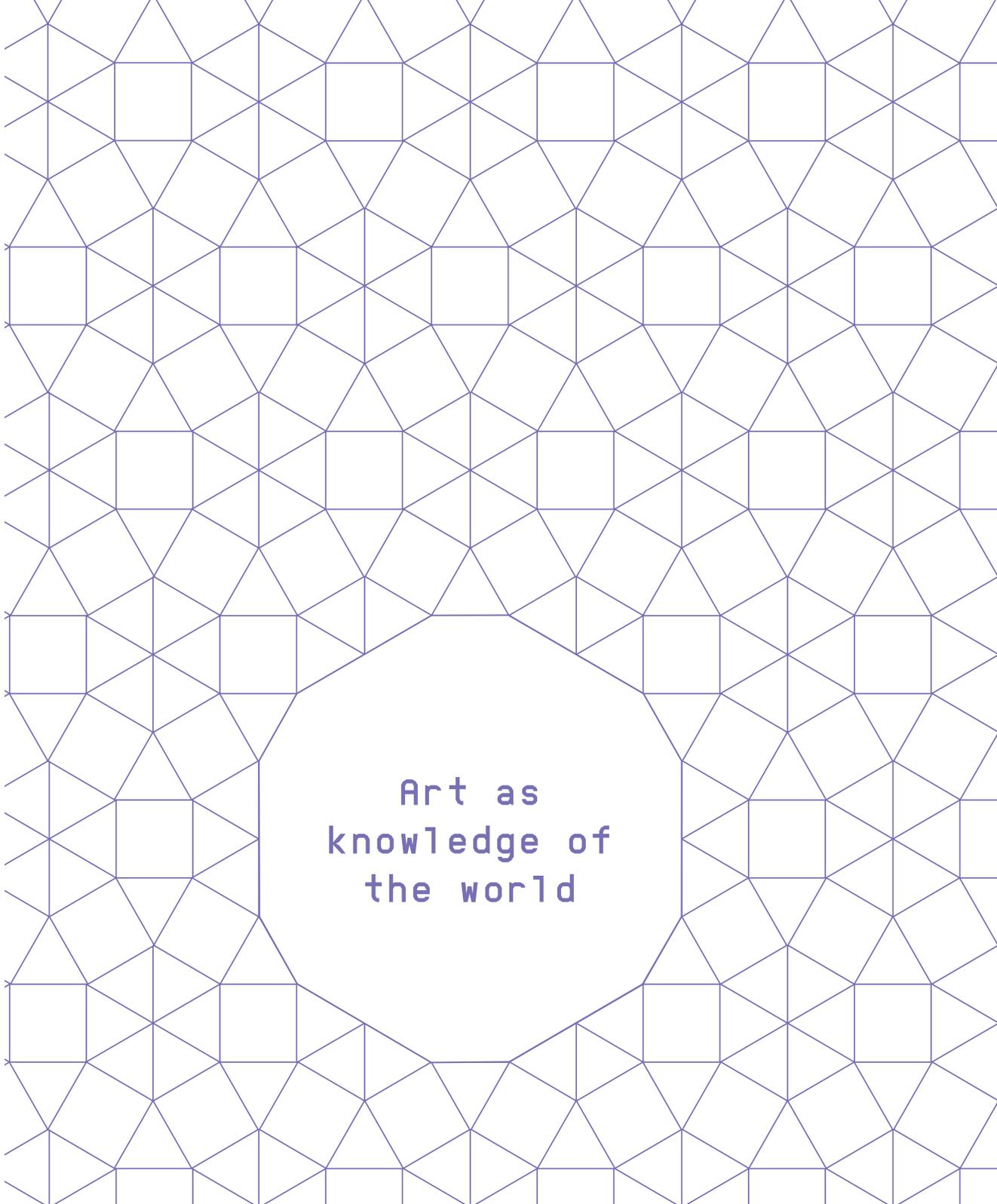
follow the course. Follow with educational encounters with the public. Follow in the construction of an aesthetic life – a production of beauty, a plastic production of itself. Follow becoming who they are in a political answer to a world of stabilities, of binary thinking and role model. Live re-educating (themselves) – unmaking thought models, stimulating singularities and multiplicities. These people compose the inhabitants of a nomad territory – a place where lines vibrate.

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**Art as
knowledge of
the world**

An interview with Jerome Bruner

by Pablo Helguera

In preparation of the Ælia Media project, the Ælia Media producers team headed to Reggio Emilia to experience a retreat discussing some of the pedagogical principles of this learning system. There we were lucky to encounter Jerome Bruner, one of the leading developmental psychologists of the XXth century and one of the most influential thinkers in the history of early childhood education. At 95, he continues to be active in researching, publishing and lecturing around the world. The Reggio system has been of interest to Bruner for the last two decades, and he agreed to be interviewed about the contributions to this system and the way in which it can help think about visual arts. The interview was held at Hotel Posta in Reggio Emilia on July 12, 2011. In attendance were Pablo Helguera, Wendy Woon (Director of Education of the MoMA in New York), Julia Draganovic and Claudia Loeffenholz.

Pablo Helguera: How do you see the visual arts playing a difference between the Reggio Emilia approach and other early childhood education systems?

Jerome Bruner: The first and honest answer has to be that they do not draw a distinction between art and other forms of knowing. That is to say, the thing that is characteristic of knowing something, is knowing it in several ways. To take an example: how do you bring order into a group of children? How do you get them to do something together? So they were playing the game 'cat and mouse'. Do you know the game?

PH: Uh, no.

JB: You don't know 'cat and mouse'? You were not well brought up.

(Laughter)

JB: The cat chases the mouse and the mouse runs, he has to run up around and then he has to come back and join the group. There is a discussion of how does a group form so that you can join the group. Question: Does it make a circle of people? You go run around a circle the other one chases you, you get back in and the group protects you. So there's that. I have seen them work on that kind of a problem. I have seen them work on the problem of how does light, for example, when it is shown on a circular thing, put pressure? How do you go from light to pressure on a set of things in a circle? And it's essentially to ask the different ways in which things express themselves within a group. So that for example, a group can form itself in a circle it can form itself in a square or you take, you name the problem and what is characteristic of the approach here is that when the children are playing some sort of a game to get them to be conscious of, "what is it that you're doing? How can you think of it? How can you make other arrangements?" In short, the main thing is "what is possible?" It is not just teaching what is, but what is possible. And I think this plus the fact – that's is one of the main elements of the education here; The other one is exchange. That is to say when I ask a question I expect you to give me the best answer and to answer me and when you ask me a question, I answer you. So that the notion of dialogue and the fact that knowledge is dialogic, that there is an answer to a question but there are other alternative answers to a questions. So that the world is assumed to have order but there are different orders,

different possibilities. The possibilities are explored by exchange. It's, if I can put, I think I mentioned this to you, it's like marriage between adults; You're officially, "you're married." But what is a marriage? The answer to which is, "what an interesting question."

(Laughter)

JB: [...] There's a form of communicating, a form of looking at the possible worlds, and to do this there is a certain frame of mind but it also is dialogic and dialogue is so tremendously important. And dialogue and respect for other people's way of knowing things. So the teachers are there to be part of the dialogue, they are also there to give a sense of possibility. You say, "what is the, how to describe it, what is that word, "curriculum?" The answer to which is curriculum. What isn't part of the curriculum? To me what's important is the recognition of the fact that you are capable of communicating and that there are problems where the real task is to look at the possibilities. I mean what kind of game should be played? Well what are the possible kinds of games? They invent games. They turn ordinary activities into games. Like we're doing now, sort of thing. You know?

PH: The emphasis on the visual seems to be very important in the Reggio system. Is visuality dialogic? Does it have to be based on verbal language?

JB: In many ways, in the last scene in Shakespeare's Hamlet, there's a wonderful scene where Hamlet and Ptolemy are together and they are quarreling what was the meaning of faithfulness and faithlessness in marriage and so on. And I can't remember whether it's Ptolemy or Hamlet that is standing there, talking about this and is not seeing the world like it. I think it's hamlet that says to Ptolemy,

"see yonder cloud, 'tis shaped like a camel!"

"Nay, has a back like a weasel!"

"Mmm...perhaps, I see what you mean."

And they then talk about this. And it is Shakespeare's way in the end of saying, that if you want to interpret what happens in Hamlet, you'd better not just stick with one

way. Hamlet is not just about one thing. It's about many things. And it's not only true in drama but let me give you an example that was given to me by the great physicist, Niels Bohr. I think I might have mentioned this to you before, I'm not sure. His son one day, went walking through a five and ten store and he saw a toy and he put it in his pocket. The next day he came to his father and he said, showing him the toy, "I took this from the store the other day and I did not pay." And his father looked at me and said, "How shall I look at that conversation with that boy? In the light of love? Or in the light of justice? In the light of justice, he is guilty. In the light of love, it's wonderful that this boy is telling me about this. So should I just punish him or should we talk about how everyone is tempted to take it, and what the problem is of how you control yourself, how you control those impulses?"

You can make it into a funny story, you can make it into a molto silenzioso. But it's important that you look at it in different ways and I think a school here, they don't have a specific creed as they have games that they play. But the important thing is to keep the conversation going. To be a teacher here is to be a partner as well as a teacher. I think this is very very important. So it doesn't matter if someone draws and a picture and someone says, "what's that?" and the child says, "oh. That's a tiger," and then he says, "well what's the tiger doing?" "I don't know. What could he be doing?" So they build a story around the possibility. And I want to argue that at one level, that is the basis of inter-human intelligence – looking at possibility. On the other hand, we live in a society that has fairly rigid conventions. This is a hotel. This is not a center for symposiums and the sort. On the other hand what we do is to turn it into that. So this room for example, is one the most famous seminar rooms in the entire world. A seminar room at the Hotel Posta? And so it goes.

I should give you a little bit of my history. When I was very young was the period when MoMA first opened. And I went to MoMA for the first time and thought to myself, "My God! This is fantastic. What is this place?" And over – how long has MoMA been opened?

PH: 1929. 90 years...

JB: But it wasn't in 1929 because... When it moved into the new building... that was 1929?

PH: Oh you're... no no no. 1929 was when it was founded. You're referring to the 53rd street building which opened in the thirties.

JB: Somewhere in the thirties so I was... so I have an older brother. He's dead now. He took me to MoMA. I had been to other museums before and I didn't quite know what it was in except I love it. I had a stereotype idea of what Picasso was. I hadn't dreamed that there was an earlier Picasso [indecipherable] but this notion of a storehouse of temptation, temptation to look at what is possible. But this is the same way in which I teach my subject matter. One of the reasons I am famous is because some of the most brilliant scholars running the world of psychology are my students. (Laughter). They [still] send me papers to read and my task is to keep [them] looking. So that's a funny kind of a teacher. At the same time you have to be supportive, Supportive and challenging. Maybe that's the nature of the human species. We bring order to people, partly the order is imposed [...] but partly the order is imposed from the inside. So bringing together the inside or the outside finding a way of doing it that's not only for the individual but for the community when the community says, "this is reality! That's it!"

PH: One thing we see currently happening is the crisis in art education, in higher art education

JB: Oh, higher art education?

PH: Where we used to have the academy model where people would learn how to paint in the 19th century, which was replaced by the Bauhaus model where it was about technique, technique in a more expanded sense.

JB: Well technique that was more than – the Bauhaus was more than technique. Technique was needed for the expression of the human imagination. It technicalized the human imagination.

PH: But today that model doesn't seem to work anymore and art schools don't seem to have a model and we still don't seem to know what approach to take to teach art. And I wonder if there is a way we could learn from certain approaches like Reggio or other systems. Is it about fostering creativity? Or about fostering a certain kind of creative thinking?

JB: First, let them look and see what they think that is art.

Wendy Woon: Seems to me that play is a certain part of many artists' processes...

JB: It has to be playful. But then you ask, "What is play?" And play is getting away from certain constraints so the play can be all kinds of plays. [...] What is the model? What is the thing they are trying to represent? representation, what is this thing? [...] How do we then get schools for making? Why basically, is painting so unoriginal? We talk about the originality but I think more of conventional imagery?

PH: I am interested in art as a way of learning, as making art as a way of learning. Of course you can learn from a painting by learning the story and learning the information and discussing but I feel that the best way of learning is actually by making. Whenever you are inspired by art, the first impulse that you have is like, "I want to make art as well." So I wanted to hear your thoughts about making art as a way of learning. Which we also think that like the children in Reggio do it so naturally. They make these installations that look like artists' installations. There is definitely something happening there. And we're just wondering if you that is something that is inherent in all of us, the desire to create?

JB: To create, to explore the possible. I keep coming back to that. And that's one of the things that Reggio does. You've watched the classes. I never can predict what's going to happen next. And I'm delighted. I like being surprised and they obviously love being surprised. They acted out and they discovered one other thing that I think is tremendously important: that you can share surprises. You can share them by talking about them, not only by

talking about them but by taking a pencil in hand and drawing, painting. And the one thing I want everybody to be careful of is that you don't push this too much. Pressure on children.

PH: How? How would you pressure too much?

JB: By having lessons. Here is the lesson for today: What we're doing today is learning how to make rounded cheeks. Come on. Who needs that?

(Laughter)

Thinker, academic – but academia is in some ways based on this idea of transmission of knowledge –

WW: But is there hope for academia? That's what I'd like to know Is there hope for a different kind of way of thinking [about art]...?

JB: It's not just for the teaching of art it's for the teaching of any subject. [...] It's such an interesting thing. You know I had the 50th birthday party of my book recently, "The Process of Education," and NYU had a big – [event with] everybody... so funny. (Laughter) But the thing that's so interesting to me is the extent to which, when we came to the issue of discovery learning as opposed to the instance of the, "Bleh! Learn this!" give it in such a way that they discover for themselves not that they have to reinvent physics or mathematics or anything like that but they discover a bit of what it's like and what the alternative is like and what the possibility is like. I keep coming back to the word, "possibility" I think – if you talk to my children they'll say, 'oh he's always talking about that.' But it is incredibly true. It is true and it isn't true but to recognize for example that when one is working on a problem, yes you can have this interesting kind of thing of picking a set of prime numbers that cannot be divided in any way. I remember when my kids first discovered prime numbers they had all sorts of things to say, "Wow a prime number a prime number is something that nobody can do anything about. It keeps its independence." What a political idea of prime numbers – a childhood political idea of prime numbers. Yet in some sense – it's not bad. So it carries over when I introduce this notion of transfer.

You need it for communication but then you use it for something else. Can you do this? Can you do this teaching in school? And I say, "yes." That the – why do we have our number system? The notion of equal distances between 1 and 2 and 1000 and 1001 is another way of looking at it called Fechner's Law, to the effect that the difference that the numbers should be applied in terms of how much in addition is take to notice that there has been a change. So when you have 1000 unit you have to add more than 1 to notice that it's gone up so you get the Weber-Fechner Law in which the number system is according to proportionality. And you don't have the equidistant 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 up like that. And when you start thinking about these different forms of numbers you begin to get the idea that numbering is just one of the ways in which we produce order and magnitude, that there are many many different ways of doing it. You know? So should I introduce some sort of a thing about, you know, cheeks? Roundness of cheeks. She's a number 5. I want these things to be part of the way in which teachers think about teaching any subject. Historically or whatever.

WW: That's what I think is really interesting because we don't think of teaching as a creative act.

JB: We don't think of teaching as a creative act?

WW: And we should!

JB: We damn well better. So it's that funny combination in which we want to give you something you have to learn something but you have to learn it in a way that you can use it to go beyond the information given. A million years ago when this first began buzzing inside my head, I wrote a paper, which was called, Going Beyond the Information Given. And it was so interesting. The physicists loved the paper the psychologists said "well..." Psychology is a very conservative – are you a psychologist? I don't know whether they consider me a psychologist anymore or not...

(Laughter)

PH: Now Paolo Freire, which we were talking about yesterday I mean I think he felt that people, that

students should only get information the ones that were ready to –

JB: Talking about Paolo Freire?

PH: Paolo Freire – talking about a system based on the idea you would only provide information once the person is ready to do something with it. When the person realizes that they need that information, when they ask for it.

JB: That's too romantic! (Laughter) It doesn't take into account fun. A lot of learning is just because it's fun. It's interesting to me – I'll put it in a funny kind of way. I should tell you I'm a sailor. I have the great distinction as I think I mentioned to you the other day, of being the only professor in the history of Oxford University who sailed his own boat across the Atlantic Ocean to come from America to Oxford to occupy my chair. Everybody says, "Isn't that amazing?" But the fact of the matter is, it's very straightforward: you get a book of navigation, a compass, and a boat and you sail.

PH: Wow. (Laughter) Doesn't sound so straightforward to me.

JB: And each part of it has a technique. It was so interesting to me that I got thinking about the fact that from the point of view of a sailor – because you don't have a boat in the bush or anything – the shape of the world depends on knowing where the wind is that will take you; that is to say you can cross the Atlantic Ocean and have a good wind by a northern route or you can go a southern route but if you go in between you'll sit there and go, "Where's the wind?" So that the size of the ocean, the meaning of ocean from the point of view of sailing is different than how you present it in a geography book to kids. And I want to do that. If you make the projection, not Mercator projection but a projection in terms of how long it takes to cover the distance, and the longer it takes to cover the distance the longer the representation and everything like that. The map of the North Atlantic is very short at the northern end then – shshshsh – and the southern end it gets short again. So why not give them different modes of

representing things? I mean if Picasso had known these details he would have painted the world this way too, I'm sure; but we're so damned literal-minded in the way we teach, so conventional and teachers only now are beginning to realize the importance of stimulating the imagination and some of them do it wonderfully.

PH: What is it that makes one connected to art?

JB: Sheer penetration. The fact that it goes into a – it creates a world; it's a somewhat different emotional meaning. [...] You know there was a notion in the nineteenth century that came along that talked about the Gesamtkunstwerk, the general work of art. It was one of the things that writers of opera were trying to do. Some of them did it very badly [...] and some without being aware of it at all and I would take [...] into a new system of bringing an art form that can't be described fully in advance because we don't know what it is until we do it! And so I don't want to give them the definition in advance, "And now dear students, follow the definition and produce the work of art." I want also to keep some of the spontaneity and then turn around afterward because you learn a lot by looking at what you did even though you didn't know what the hell you were doing when you did it. And why should you know in that rationalistic way? (Long pause) I could go on and on. You people have got to go meet a train... Have I left something hanging in the air?

An interview with Alicia Herrero

by Pablo Helguera

Alicia Herrero is an Argentinean artist whose work questions the ideological and market systems, as well as the way they connect with art. To realize her researches and experiences, Herrero uses a great variety of conceptual strategies, as well as other disciplines, using from academical devices like symposiums and seminars, to auction houses' protocols. Hererro describes the project presented for the Mercosul Biennial, "Revolutionary Travell," as a "navigated novel" consisting in using the navigable rivers of South America as an infrastructure to form chapters of a book. Herrero's spirit in her projects is eminently dialogical and, therefore, usually narrowly close to pedagogy. In this interview, we seek to ask about the artists interest on the conversation question, and how it has manifested in her several projects.

* * *

PH: In several of your projects, the dialog, the conversation, or before, what you've been calling "conversational stages", performs a central part. What motivates you to utilize conversation as a central element on your practice?

AH: One of the things that motivates me the most is the potential happening that involves the creation of those "conversational stages", possible ways to relate performance, theater, symposium, popular assemblies, round tables, or television talk show resources and, therefore, being able to use place them in ubiquity in relation to art's own strategies, its kinds and visibility devices.

PH: In your "Considerations upon the public" Project you've used a whole variety of presentational and dialog devices ranging from theater to talk shows. What motivated you, in this particular occasion, to seek this multiplicity of formats? What was, to you, that those formats potentiated and what kind of discoveries (if any) you did when doing that experience?

AH: *Considerations upon the public, a three act symposium* (2010-2011) happens the paradoxical context of a present in which, curiously, while several South-American States are celebrating their 200th anniversaries of colonial independence, at the same time, the greatest global capitalist systemic crisis is happening, what shows, once again, the dependence in relation of the financial state. The banks are who seems to be writing history's script... That also can be applied to the power accumulated by the logics of the capital on the art system itself, which produces, in this field, a clear unbalance. CUP resorts to question the naturalization of those market logics at the same time it re-interrogates the rhetorics of freedom used from art's field.

The project proposes to introduce a debate and an experience upon the "public thing", locating itself on the territorial borders of artistical, academical, and political discourse. It is a performative talk in the relevant auditoriums of three iconic public institutions on the city of Buenos Aires: university, bank and congress. They were Act 1 – on the Rojas Cultural Center Auditorium, at the University of Buenos Aires – that challenges art and knowledge relocations; Act 2 – at the Nación Argentina Bank Headquarters, located at De Mayo's Square – to

expose remaps of art and economy; and Act 3 – at the National Congress Parliament Auditorium – a place where is possible to unfold new cartographies and questions about the emancipatory processes. Added to those displacements is the uncommon integration of several social actors that activate and introduce several perspectives: political analysts, artists, activists, researchers in the field of philosophy, art and sociology, economists, musicians, journalists, urban planners, actors, video producers.

The project potentiates three key questions. The first is related to “act” the public revising concepts of freedom of speech forged by the historical vanguards. That is possible in CUP, once that, at the same time it produces its existence on the limits of visibility stages and the world of art’s topics (rarely the question of the audience is addressed on the speeches on this field), question its politics and production conditions, what Walter Benjamin calls “production device”. The second is about stages, the “representational stage of speech and debate”. In CUP, the public auditoriums (university, bank, congress) offer an expansive multiplicity for a debate about the audience, but also enter the scene with that the huge potential of researching the limits of those emblematic devices: how they produce listening and participation. The auditoriums are read also in their representational dimension.

The third question is what makes the first two possible: the *performance talk*. It is about a conversational form that interrupts the classic symposium scheme, proposing a redistribution of the artistic processes at the same time making its classification difficult. Expands the idea of theater to symposium, and the idea of symposium to talk show, including in its construction: a *regisseur*, previous work tables, actors that act as introductory guides to the proposed institutions, theater lightning, posters, live incidental music, a moderator performance, a panel of specialists on the presented thematic, stages the act of debating upon “participative stands” with special faculties, and creates a *in situ* script that tends to streamline the audience active participatory fluxes. Its complexity favors situating the experience in a heuristic strategy and in a

perceptual multiplicity proposed as a way of continuous displacement. In that sense, it’s interesting to add the background of CUP and the Chat Project, which started in 2000 and was presented at the Boijmans Museum in Rotterdam in 2001, opening the Conversations Series, of which the slogan enunciates: “the political explosion of a body, a field, an institution...” a staging of objects in dialogue. But also *Magazine in Situ*, that, since 2004, generated several conversational situations in specific places, as navigating the Beagle Canal during one edition.

CUP, a Three Act Symposium also is a video of each act and a publication.

PH: On those discursive experiences, what kind of discoveries, revelations or experiences you’ve lived that demonstrate: 1) something new about the way we use that sort of communication; 2) something new about the way we relate to art?

AH: There were some revelations. For example, the resulting traces of the use of certain technics of mapping on the creation of situations. Even though on other projects I’ve recurred to inventories, re-cataloging, market indicators or hydrographical charts, in *CUP, a Three Act Symposium* what was mapped and unmapped was the “territory in debate”, the devices and the instrumental with which was we relied to put in act “the democracy”. One of those lines was finding as much the auditoriums-parliaments offered by the city as its own special organization; its use, as our behavior and bodies are trained for. For many participants, it was the first time they entered those stages and had direct contact with its theatricality, conventions and historical-political context.

The three acts presented between themselves a dramaturgy that expressed itself on the progressive inclusion of formal changes until altering completely its type of organization. Each act outlined its own strategy of alteration of the use of the auditorium space and the concept of symposium. There was mobility of the standard equipment, dragging, with it, the acting bodies and its parts; the words spoken gained another dimension with the adding

of posters, sounds of acoustic live instruments, lightning changes or prior secret conversations as a rehearsal. It was a process that offered small crisis (those generated usually for the intermediary states, the displacement of belonging spaces, fields, types or parts), the apparition of less auto-regulation of speech, the overcoming of a certain institutionalized lexicon and the achievement of new speech collective mappings. Potentiated a fact that overflowed the complexity of the public debate exercise and the use of critical devices and freedom rhetorics used on the field of art.

Colablablab

Hope Ginsburg

October 6, 2011
Sponge HQ
Richmond, VA

Colablablab is a collaborative lab about a lab; my undergraduate students and I register for a Biology 101 lecture class in the Department of Biology and a Biology 101 Lab. Our class is the meta-class, an art class about transgressing disciplines and thumbing one's nose at divisions between experts and learners. The Colablablab is rooted in the School of the Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond, VA. In this experiment in curricular ecology, art students get their science general education requirements fulfilled; they do it together, in context and with students from outside the School of the Arts. Biology students, who are also welcome in the class, fulfill a humanities requirement and subvert the methodologies of their "home" field.

Colablablab happens in the Sponge HQ at the top floor of the university gallery at night. Sponge (2006-present) began as an artwork by Hope Ginsburg, but based on the reproductive habits of its namesake (if a sea-sponge is placed in a blender, each bit will grow into an adult sponge), the project grows through the actions of its co-producers. Colablablab students open the Sponge HQ to the public each Thursday and all students have access to the HQ during gallery hours. There, along with working on their own projects (which range from making dye from plants to producing audio works which connect flocking birds to skaters in a roller derby), they may tend to the indoor observation beehive (which is rigged with a closed-circuit infrared camera for observing the bees), care for the schooling fish and algae-eaters in the

ninety-gallon aquarium, feed the composting redworms, massage wool fiber into felt rugs, read in the library on their custom nap mats (we are working on a project about radical napping) or work on any number of group or individual projects. Colablablab 2011 is underway, with a visiting lotus flower expert on the calendar for next week. Colablablab 2010 mounted an exhibition at the Sponge HQ, produced a performance at Richmond's Reference Gallery and hosted two event-meals, "The Cellular Dinner" and "Evolutionary Feast." We also made a booth for the Science Fair exhibition at Flux Factory in Long Island City, NY, for which we were awarded the trophy for being "Most Empirically Rebellious." The collectively authored and designed Colablablabook is available on Lulu.com. Please do visit our site, spongespace.net/colablablab and come spend some time at the HQ in Richmond, Virginia.

In academic fashion, here is an appendix, in which some samples of Colablablab culture are extracted for you. Following is an excerpt from a planning e-mail for the event meal Cellular Dinner, in which each Colablablaborator was assigned a duty based on the specific function of an animal cell part. Each "cell part" was identifiable by the color and pattern of his or her clothing, which was pre-assigned. Pizza toppings were carefully placed to model an animal cell. The pizzas were prepared from scratch and baked in a wood-fired oven built by "cell nucleus" Katie Connor.

Hello everyone,

We live at 2504 Brook Rd. Please arrive at 6. If you can give people rides, reply to all to let people know.

Here are the parts of the cell and their function:

Nucleus (Kate and Olivia): The nucleus is the control center of the cell that dictates what all of the other organelles do. The nucleus also stores the DNA.

So we are going to tell everyone what to do.

We are going to wear gold.

Endoplasmic Reticulum (two people): The endoplasmic reticulum (ER) is where most chemical reactions take place. The cell makes lipids and other chemicals, and sometimes has ribosomes attached.

These people will cut up vegetables and other stuff we put on the pizzas.

They are going to wear their favorite hat and purple. [...]

– Katie Connor and Olivia Gibian, Colablablaborators, 2010

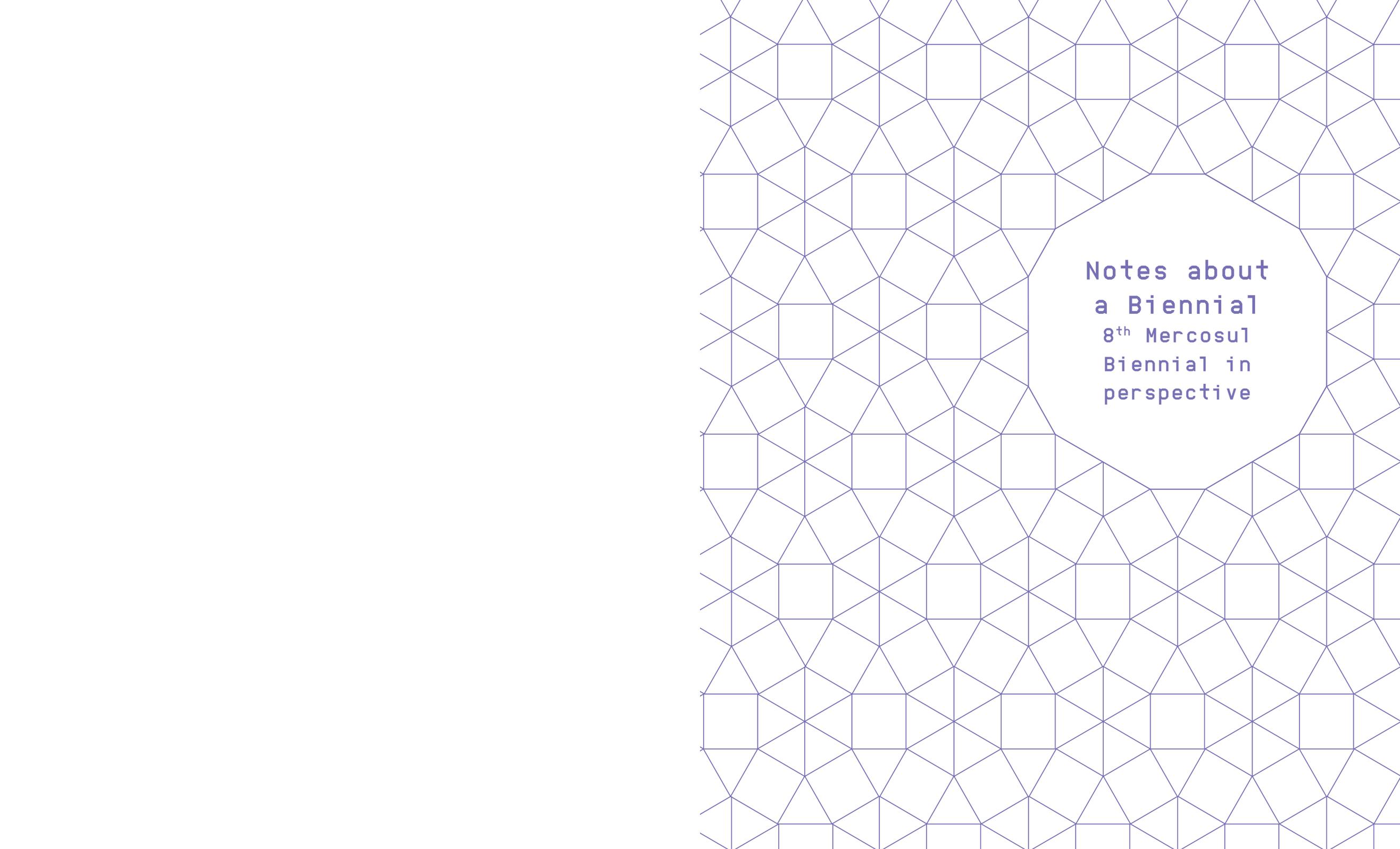
The e-mail below, though not as metaphoric in tone, is an apt example of the students' formation of their own community of practice.

So I'm not sure about the exact time yet (seemed like everyone was free sunday nightish) but with the exam on monday it seems like it would be a good time for a study review! I feel like things will go smoothly if everyone brings their study guides as filled out as possible (study guides pending on bb) and bio books if ya got em, the more studying before hand the more spongey our review will be!!!

The address is 5 North Vine (connected to home team grill off of main st) a block down from main art. Its the creepy black gate in the wall. It would be sweet if everyone brought a couple small bills to chip in for a pizza or snacks etc etc etcalso if you are driving you might get towed for parking in the lot but there is a ton of parking on vine see ya in bio lab!

– Julie (757-718-3595)

–Julie Hundley, Colablablaborator, 2011



**Notes about
a Biennial
8th Mercosul
Biennial in
perspective**

Educational curatorship, art methodologies, training and permanence: the change in education at the Mercosul Biennial

Mônica Hoff¹

"It's not enough to be able to read, "Eve saw the grape." You have to know the position Eve occupies in her social context, who worked to produce the grape and who profits from that work"

Paulo Freire

"The whole world + the work = the whole world."

Martin Creed

Some years ago it would have been impossible for an exhibition education programme to engage an artist. That was a role for an educator. Even today, vacancies for art disciplines in the Brazilian public education system cannot be filled by an artist. Once again, this is the job of an educator. In university education, art "candidates" attend the Arts Institute, and (art) educators attend the Faculty of Education. The division between educators and artists is, as we can see, historical as well as geographical. It is a case of "each monkey on its own branch", as the saying goes.²

¹ Visual artist, with specialist studies in Art Education at PPGEDU-UFRGS and postgraduate studies in Economics of Culture at PPGE-UFRGS. She has been responsible for the General Coordination of the Mercosul Biennial Education Programme since 2006.

² Popular saying referring to limits imposed by boundaries. In other words, "each in their place".

In the art field, the premise that art is an educational process *par excellence* has particularly been discussed in the last decade, with the explosion of collaborative proposals, mainly on the initiative of artists, and with the creation of the role of education curator. In (art) education this premise is a condition of existence and strongly resists (or follows, like a lover for a loved one) the changes occurring in the field of art. There have been many movements towards fitting one into the other, creating an arranged marriage between art and education. And it seems that the more forced this relationship becomes, the more it becomes a relationship of dependency and, therefore, submission.

In Brazil, art teaching has had a place in the school curriculum – for better or worse, it is true – for little more than 30 years. The campaign for its permanent position nonetheless continues to this day. The importance of its presence is undeniable, as we know. Yet it would be difficult for the arts to occupy a position in the top ten within school educational politics. Shouldn't art be sufficiently appealing in itself? Or has education been unable to explore art as a powerful educational tool? Or, furthermore, could it be that the system no longer fulfils the demands of its target audience: teachers and students? Who do we work for? Who are we doing it for? Who are we targeting? What are we doing?

I would hazard a guess that the nub of the question lies in our insistence on treating art as a discipline, and therefore often as something in isolation. If we consider art as an educational process, it is at least strange that it enters our lives and becomes part of our education as a subject area with a place on the timetable and six-monthly evaluation.

By understanding/defining art as a subject area, we give it a series of rules and regulations that are inherent to that condition. By trying to promote the opening out of education through the experience of art, we wind up confining the art experience within a concept that is suffocating and restrictive. In this sense, the transformation of art into a subject area was probably one of the great misfortunes we inflicted upon ourselves in the second half of the 20th century. (Hoff, 2010)

Art as an educational process extends beyond the impositions of the curriculum. It therefore needs to generate an ecosystem that can go beyond those barriers. But it is often swallowed up by endless political-educational demands and requirements that not infrequently forget its real role.

The education programme for a contemporary art Biennial involves a series of premises, demands and requirements. It is a genuine puzzle, involving a range of different forces. The Mercosul Biennial is known for its concern, and hence respect, for education, having organised education projects since the first edition of the event in 1997. For the first three biennials this took place through a programme serving visitors, which we nowadays call mediation, and the production of educational material for schools and teachers. There was certainly no greater reflection on what was being produced or the real needs of the local community. And moreover, each new edition of the Biennial involved a new education programme and consequently a new team for devising it and implementing it. Few records were made of these experiences, and in many cases they only existed in the memories of those involved.

I shall make a brief digression here to mention a little of this local setting which is the birthplace and home of the Mercosul Biennial. Porto Alegre is a medium-sized Brazilian

city of around 1.5 million inhabitants, with a relatively small range of cultural facilities, particularly in terms of the visual arts. Until the emergence of the Mercosul Biennial there was no art mediation; neither was there any specialist workforce focused on the conception and construction of visual arts projects – either you were an artist or you were a theorist or an educator; and it was very common to see artists who had just left university leaving for other parts of Brazil and the rest of the world due to the lack of local structure and incentive.

In 2011 the art market remains small, with the number of galleries working with contemporary art countable on the fingers of one hand. Many colleagues still move from a degree in art into teacher training, not out of any sympathy with education, but because of the total lack of any other option in the labour market. This scenario is certainly not exclusive to Porto Alegre or the Mercosul Biennial. But it was upon this cultural barrenness and condition as an "eccentric centre"³ that the Mercosul Visual Arts Biennial emerged in the mid 1990s as a major event, the like of which had never been seen before, built out of collective desire – therefore without parameters – and open to many external factors. Through hard work and the involvement of many, this huge undertaking continued its course and after many difficulties entered its adolescence in 2011 with the education programme as its flagship.

As we have mentioned, the education programme featured in all the Biennials and, after eight editions, we can single out two important leaps forward and some underlying subtleties. The first leap forward was conceptual and structural, occurring on the occasion of the 4th Mercosul Biennial, in 2003. This edition was responsible for guaranteeing a *locus* for education within the event; meaning that for the first time, and still following the traditional model of running alongside the curatorial project, there was a indeed and education programme – duly planned,

³ The term refers to an exhibition organised by Marília Panitz and Gê Orthof in Brasília in 2003 that dealt with the condition of periphery as a conceptually potent question.

with a well defined theoretical basis, and more focused on the school community and the relationship with the public. By localising requirements and attempting to address a series of demands from the field of education, the 4th Biennial education programme was responsible for ensuring the existence of education programmes in the following biennials⁴.

The second great leap forward, and the most significant to date, occurred in 2006-7 on the occasion of the 6th Mercosul Biennial. It is precisely this period and its relationship with the education programmes of the subsequent Biennials that are addressed by this article.

The 6th Mercosul Biennial became known as the Educational Biennial. This was due on the one hand to the figure of the education curator – a position created by the exhibition curator Gabriel Perez-Barreiro in response to a demand that had been identified in the development of the Mercosul Biennial; and on the other hand due to the interest and willingness of the Mercosul Biennial institution to position itself not just as an institution organising a major art exhibition every two years, but also as an educational institution concerned with meeting the needs of its primary audience, school pupils. So, in addition to fertile soil, there was also a common desire.

The role of the education curator represented at that time the creation of a real space for reflection on practices that had been taking place in the previous editions of the Mercosul Biennial and particularly on how the community had received and responded to these practices.

Educational curatorship (or an epistemological leap forward)

The first time that anything was heard about educational curatorship in Brazil was in 1996, with the text “Curadoria Educativa: Percepção Imaginativa / Consciência do Olhar” [Educational curatorship: Imaginative Perception / Awareness of the Eye], presented that same year by Luiz

Guilherme Vergara⁵ at the ANPAP (National Association of Visual Arts Researchers). Vergara referred to educational curatorship as a strategy “whose main aim is to explore the power of art as a vehicle for cultural action” (Vergara 2011). And also “to make art accessible to a diversified audience and make it culturally active” (Vergara 2011). It is strange to think that this text was presented one year before the organisation of the first edition of the Mercosul Biennial (1997), and that educational curatorship would only become part of the process of the event a decade later. We already began delayed. In 1996 Vergara predicted what now seems to be agreed, and in a way what Paulo Sérgio Duarte pointed to in 2005 as chief curator of the 5th Mercosul Biennial, believing that “a truly educational project cannot just be linked to an exhibition that takes place every two years and closes after two or three months, but needs to extend in time and become a continuous action”. Paulo Sérgio was referring at that time to the need to think of the education programme as a permanent action, which survives beyond the biannual exhibitions, and takes place in partnership with other institutions and the teaching network. This change ended up taking place after the 6th Mercosul Biennial, and therefore after the establishment of the education curator.

The term education curator is quite controversial in Brazil. There are those who agree with it, such as the case of the last São Paulo Biennial (2010), which adopted the function. And there are those who see it as “a pedantic term, one more device for not addressing what really matters, education,” such as Ana Mae Barbosa (2008), an important figure in Brazilian education and a key reference in Brazilian art education.

For the Mercosul Biennial, educational curatorship ensured a *locus* of reflection and the possibility of constructing a really effective education programme, in the sense of being open to community requirements and arranging a continuous and permanent activity. Until then, the education

programme had operated somewhat blindly, fumbling between inaccurate information and intuition.

Vergara refers in his text to the specific experiences (of education curators and perception) focused on a particular exhibition process in New York in the 1990s. When we are talking about educational curatorship in the case of the Mercosul Biennial we are referring to a complex system of actions and strategies that precede and continue beyond the exhibition.

According Luis Camnitzer, (2006) the education curator for the 6th Biennial and therefore the first education curator in the history of the Mercosul Biennial “La Bienal se auto-define como una institución de acción cultural en sesión permanente, dentro de la cual la exposición periódica (bianual en este momento), es solamente una de las actividades” [The Biennial defines itself as an institution for cultural activity that is in permanent activity, within which the periodical exhibition (biannually at present) is just one of its activities].

Camnitzer proposed at the time that the Mercosul Biennial should reinvent itself and indeed take on its educational role. This is a role that comes into effect when we consider long-term processes in constant dialogue with the community. Only then is it possible to make art culturally active, as Vergara had envisaged in 1996.

Ideally, the overall curatorship of a project, be it an exhibition or a Biennial, should always be educational. In our republic⁶, the educational characteristic should always be an inherent part of a curatorial project. Just like “social change” the educational change could guarantee a truly epistemological change for the field of art. Strictly speaking, if art is essentially an educational process, then all curatorship is educational. Unfortunately, this generally is only hypothetically so.

The role of education curator at the Mercosul Biennial has taken different forms in the three editions in which it has existed: in the 6th Biennial as “someone who plays no

part in selection of the artists. (...) Someone who acts as an ambassador to the public and observes the event with the eyes of the visitor” (Camnitzer, 2009, p 15); in the 7th Biennial as someone who still plays no part in the selection of the artists for the exhibitions, but who suggests the direct participation of artists in the education programme, as well as someone who is free to propose autonomous actions, strategies and activities that are not necessarily related to the exhibition project; and in this 8th Biennial in 2011 as someone who plays a part in the selection of the artists, definition of the exhibition components and actions and who has responsibility for devising one of the exhibition projects and the educational actions.

In the 8th Biennial the curatorial and educational proposals are linked together, and it is hard to tell where one ends and the other begins. As soon as this happens, we are no longer talking of a causal relationship between the education programme and the curatorial proposal, but rather of a kind of conditional relationship on equal terms – if the education programme undergoes any changes, large or small, they will have direct repercussions on the curatorial actions and vice-versa.

Another important factor, this time common between the curatorship of these biennials, is the fact that the three curators are artists, which inevitably reflects on, governs and defines the educational proposals. The methodologies are derived from practice in the field of art.

Artistic methodologies

“Is it possible to organise productive experiences that integrate the world of contemporary art and the education system?”⁷ (Rubinich 2009, p.184) We would probably say yes. But I would go back and ask whether it is possible to organise productive experiences that integrate the world of contemporary art and the education system without the one being, in practice, an accessory of the other. Or whether it is possible for art and education to

4 Until the 6th Mercosul Biennial, the education programme was a process totally related to the biannual exhibitions. So that when a biennial ended, so did the education programme. There was no continuity

5 A Brazilian artist and educator, Vergara was director of the Education Division at MAC-Niterói from 1996 to 2005 and Chief Director of the same institution from 2005 to 2008.

6 Here relating the art system to Plato's idea of the “ideal” republic.

7 Free translation of “Es posible lograr experiencias productivas que integren al mundo artístico contemporáneo y al sistema educativo?”.

be players in the same process. What is the scale of this equilibrium? Does it exist? Is it necessary?

Historically, the relationship between art and education, particularly in Brazil, has been governed by educators' considerable investment in art and by artists' minimal investment in education. The dialogical relationship that is so often referred to nowadays is not as recurrent as it seems. There is still a very large gap between the interests of art and education. The systems of one and the other seem to respond to different forces. And this is where I always ask myself, what then is the role of a contemporary art Biennial's education programme? Is it to present artworks to the community? Is it to serve the thousands of people looking for a "meaning" for art? Is it to provide transport so that these people can have an aesthetic experience inside the exhibition space? Do they really need to leave their neighbourhoods, towns and regions for this to occur? Is the art experience really connected to a visit to an exhibition space?

On the occasion of the 7th Mercosul Biennial, in 2009, the education programme sought to invert that order of things. Instead of concentrating its actions in the exhibition spaces, and therefore determining the aesthetic experience in relation to art objects, it was completely decentralised, acting in direct collaboration with different communities in Porto Alegre and regional towns in Rio Grande do Sul. We were seeking at that time to work with what we termed artistic methodologies. Instead of a "translation" of art using educational tools, we chose to work with art proposals with considerable educational capital, whether that capital was part of the artists' intentions or recognised as a powerful component by the project team.

To that end, 14 artists (with a total of 12 projects), mostly from Latin America, were invited to take part. Having been sent material about the different regions of the state, each artist selected a region and made an initial journey of recognition and investigation, later focused on a one-month residency in the chosen town. This programme was called *Available Artists*, and began with a map of nine towns and ended with the residencies involving more than twenty,

due to the interests of neighbouring communities. The projects were quite different from each other, but all shared a common idea that putting people in contact with people is perhaps the most powerful action that art can generate.

In her lecture on "The virtual museum" at the 2004 ICOM annual congress, Suzanne Keene, Senior Lecturer in Museum and Heritage Studies at University College London, compared the traditional museum with the museum of the future and traditional museological dynamics with contemporary ones, emphasising this change of focus:

(...) the museum of the future will be more of a process or an experience, moving out into the spaces of the communities that it serves. For it can no longer be assumed that collections are central to the role of the museum – rather, it is people.⁸

Marina De Caro's proposal for the 7th Biennial involved revising the actions developed by the previous education programmes and prioritising those with strong social potential, basing her work on the idea of utopias. According to Caro (2009, p. 04),

Entre la practica y la teoría, encontramos experiencias que desde hace años cultivan la escucha y el habla, el grito y el susurro, la poesía y el arte. Antes, en un espacio íntimo, y ahora, multiplicados, marcamos en el mapa los lugares de encuentros, las micropolis, las ciudades independientes y experimentales. [Between practice and theory we can find experiences that for years have led to listening and speaking, cries and whispers, poetry and art. Earlier, in an intimate space, and now multiplied, we mark places of meetings on the map, micropolises, independent and experimental cities.]

In addition to offering tools for the community, the 7th Biennial education programme sought to work in partnership with it, exchanging knowledge and ways of doing and making in conditions of full collaboration. In other words,

8 Quoted by Meyric-Hughes, Henry. <A história e a importância da Bienal como instrumento de globalização>. In: *Arte, Crítica e Mundialização*, 2008, p. 31.

replacing ignorance and using art as a way of resolving problems, demonstrating its connection with the education proposal of Luis Camnitzer.

For De Caro it was essential to consider the education programme and the Biennial itself not as a space but as a period of work. A period governed by many voices and forces in a situation that was completely decentralised and beyond the scope of the Biennial itself. From the teacher-training sessions, transformed in this edition into a Residency Programme, to the student workshops and the actual experience of mediation, the work platform proposed by De Caro was based on decentralisation of actions and sharing of knowledge, making it so important that the residency projects were open to conditions of collaboration.

Another important constituent factor of Marina's project is autonomy. The 7th Mercosul Biennial education programme operated practically independently, involving artists, activities and its own budget, and based on precepts that did not necessarily need to relate to the curatorial project's exhibition programme. It created its own zone of artistic-educational autonomy.

The residency programmes ranged from *gymnastics and political philosophy classes*, run by the Argentinean sociologist Diego Melero for secondary-school and university students; to a kind of *Vicinal (art) collection* formed from works loaned by inhabitants of different neighbourhoods of Caxias do Sul – the Chilean curator Gonzalo Pedraza and his co-curators knocked on the doors of numerous people, asking a simple and very pertinent question: "Could you lend me an artwork?"; and also involving a system of exchange of desires created by the French artist Nicolas Floc'h that consisted of a collaborative realisation of the desires of three communities in Porto Alegre on a real scale – a school one hour from the city centre, a group of teenagers from one of the most dangerous favelas in the city and an autonomous community responsible for occupation of an abandoned building in Porto Alegre city centre. The desires: a van for students from the Lami school, a football pitch and band for the teenagers from

Morro da Cruz and a visual identity kit for the Comunidade Autônoma Utopia e Luta. Another project involved the construction of a simple web of threads, string and similar materials, proposed by the Brazilian artist João Modé and made collectively by communities in four border regions in the state to generate a kind of third border in these places where Brazil meets Uruguay and where there is therefore some cultural overlap⁹.

The condition for carrying out this project was one of availability. Availability for listening, for changing direction, for changing ideas, availability for people. *Available artists* was certainly one of the most interesting programmes carried out by the Mercosul Biennial so far. Based on a generous process of collaboration – generosity is a luxury item nowadays –, it managed to meet demands in the (expanded) field of education and culture. Afterwards, it became even clearer that the distance felt by educators in relation to art is, above all, a responsibility of the field of art which, in a constant concern against allowing itself to be simplified, ends up shutting itself into very specific system constructed on particularly heavy foundations that still in the main prioritise experience of the object over human relations, communication and participation.

A process of decentralisation

The *Available Artists* Programme confirmed an important process which had begun in the 6th Biennial: decentralisation of the education programme. Aiming to chart the art-education scene in the interior of the state, a working party of artists and educators willing and interested in visiting different regions in Rio Grande do Sul was organised to promote debate about contemporary art and to arrange workshops. 52 encounters took place in more than 40 towns, involving 7,000 teachers. This was unprecedented in a Visual Arts Biennial, unprecedented for a State Education Department and unprecedented for the teachers themselves, who had not taken part in training

9 Publications and videos arising out of the Available Artists Residency Programme can be found on the Mercosul Biennial website: www.bienalmercosul.art.br

and updating related to this huge area called art. It was a total success. And it also created a huge problem: what are we going to do with those 7,000 teachers, after all? What kind of relationship can be established? How can we do it? What expectations do those people have? What desires, wishes and interests do these teachers have? What is the role of the Biennial in all this?

The process of decentralising the Mercosul Biennial education actions began like that, blindly, on an impulse, eager to resolve problems that we did not in fact know very well. Traditionally, the teacher-training sessions had only taken place in Porto Alegre, shortly before the exhibition opening, with an aim of introducing themes, exhibitions, artists and works, and indicating approaches for art teachers. It was therefore impossible to find out what we knew and what we were doing. We did not know. But we somehow knew that it was worth the investment. When it comes to education, the slightest return is at least a return, and we needed to understand how this educational fabric, this primary public for the Biennial, was organised at a regional level.

The result of this initial movement towards decentralisation raised the need to reconsider the place and function of the project. Here was an open channel with 7,000 teachers (7,000 is 70 x 100, which is no small number!) so what could we do with it? Did we have to do something with it? How? Where would we begin/continue? Few teachers know this, but the process of making the education programme permanent, which began after the end of the 6th Biennial, is largely due to each one of them.

Since then, the education programme has become increasingly Freireian, looking principally at the world, at people and at the usual processes of this world. The commitment to art is less a commitment and more a way of thinking and being. It is less the subject of proposal and more an inherent condition of the person proposing it. This was reflected not just in the *Available Artists* project, but also in two other programmes that occupied special places in the decentralisation process.

One of them was *Practical Maps*. This was proposed by Marina De Caro in a response to the Education Space¹⁰ created at the 6th Biennial. One of De Caro's questions on contacting the education programme was most pointed: "Doesn't Porto Alegre have artists, (and consequently, artist's studios)?" Quite calmly, and curious about the purpose of the question, I replied, "Yes, of course; many, in fact.". Marina continued, "So why just relate the visitor's experience of art to the space of the Biennial, an event that takes place every two years and lasts little more than two months?", adding, "Wouldn't it be more interesting to capitalise on these artists, studios, groups, galleries and spaces that already exist in Porto Alegre, suggesting that they offer workshops, talks, courses and other activities of interest for the students and teachers visiting the Biennial? In that way, the end of the exhibition will not compromise the experience and people will be able to organise and make their choices and contacts without the mediation of the Biennial." With such a proposal De Caro not only opened eyes towards the community and positioned it within the process and as an agent of proposal, but also strengthened the creation of links between different players on the same stage.

To that end, a process of charting the artistic and educational activities on offer in the city of Porto Alegre was organised. These offerings formed a diary that was provided in the format of a map distributed to schools, universities and the Biennial space itself. Workshops took place in schools, parks, museums and city squares, and involved students, teachers and Biennial visitors, the elderly and many other interested people.

The other programme was *Mediator Public*. My intention for this article is not, I repeat, to present the successful

10 The Education Space included a space for research, dialogue and creation focused on the visiting public on the Quayside, one of the places occupied by the Mercosul Biennial. This space was used for organising workshops, talks, lectures, exhibitions, video shows and other activities. It was entirely run by a group of eight coordinators developing the workshops, the system of exhibitions and programming, etc.

educational actions of the Mercosul Biennial, far from it; but rather, based on subtle features of their proposals, to share some points of view about art and education. *Mediator Public* was quite a small activity, which took place during the final days of the exhibition, but with potential for discussion that certainly exceeds the 7000 words available for this article. I will therefore try to avoid too much detail. The project involved offering the community the possibility of suggesting some mediation about a particular work, visit or Biennial exhibition. It would be hard to be more Freireian! "There is no teaching without learning,"¹¹ he would say. It started with the participation of the dressmaker who had made the curtains used for staging of one of the works. Dona Eny had spent weeks in the exhibition space while it was still being built, making the huge curtains. Finishing her work some days before the Biennial opening, she left and never came back, until we invited her to return and talk a little about her experience of spending so much time making something that would be a key feature for putting on an art exhibition of which she had minimal information but the responsibility of an artist. Dona Eny showed us not what goes on behind the art object, but what it cannot tell; she told of an aesthetic experience based on the non-experience of an artwork. She offered us a reading of the exhibition that went beyond its possibility of existence as art. Is not that the real role of an education programme: "to know the position Eve occupies in her social context, who worked to produce the grape and who profits from that work"¹²? (Freire 1995)

The formative role (an endogenous process)

Audience development is one of the central concerns for museums and cultural institutions throughout the world. It is no different for the "off-centred" Mercosul Biennial. Numbers are constantly increasing. Exhibitions are ever

11 This is an allusion to the opening chapter of Paulo Freire's *Pedagogia da Autonomia*, published in 1996, (p. 21)

12 Relating the aesthetic experience of Dona Eny with the process of literacy created by Paulo Freire, in which he indicated that reading does not just imply joining words together, but contextualising what those words are saying.

more packed with visitors. And this has guaranteed the organisation and permanence of many of the projects. It is no different at the "now permanent institution of cultural actions," the Mercosul Biennial. Nonetheless, after 7.5 editions, we have now managed to acquire a better view of this scenario and recognise where and when this development is actually effective.

Mediator training¹³ is one of the oldest actions at the Mercosul Biennial, having been present since the first edition, with a central aim of preparing people to work as mediators, serving the public visiting the exhibitions; a public that is the key target of what we are terming "Audience Development". Yet, some editions ago, the primary audience for the Biennial was recognised not to be just the schools and/or exhibition visitor, but the mediators themselves. These are people who have a transformative experience with art and who, more than anyone else, form opinions about it. When we consider that they are mostly students from a wide range of university courses (from arts to medicine, via law, education, biology, engineering, philosophy, music, architecture, communication and an endless list of other areas of knowledge), with little or no knowledge of art, who invest their time in attending a three-month course twice a week, making direct contact with artists, curators and concepts that are new to them, to do something which they are not very sure what it is and that will demand almost exclusive dedication from them as a daily job sharing the space with people they have never seen before, and all for the sake of a greater power known as art, there is no way that they can be ignored as the primary audience for the Mercosul Biennial. Around 2000 students have worked (and continue to work) as mediators during the different editions of the event. Among the numbers making up the Mercosul Biennial, this is certainly the most valuable, for this is the one that generates a large part of the rest.

If the Mercosul Biennial really is an educational institution, it is largely due to this experience. And, more than

13 Meaning: monitors, guides, facilitators or educators, depending on taste, geography and theoretical basis.

creating audiences for the Biennial itself, it also generates a qualified workforce for the city, since all the critics, artists, educators, exhibition installers, directors, managers, and curators have all at some time in our lives been mediators.

Permanence

Biennials are known for their temporary, ostentatious and fleeting nature. For a good part of the population of Porto Alegre, they are no different. The Biennial arrives every two years, setting up a circus, spending lots of money, showing works that no-one understands, takes it all down and then goes away. Goes where, I ask (myself). Where does the Mercosul Biennial go after each of its editions closes? What relationship does it establish with the community to the extent that it is still questioned about leaving nothing for the city? What should it be leaving for the city? What kind of “thing” is it hoped to leave for the city? Of all possibilities, I can only think of education. It’s a cliché, a cheap point, but there is no economic growth without education, no cultural investment supports itself without taking account of education. Remember that “(...) education alone does not change society, but society cannot be changed without education.” (Freire 1987)

By chance – or destiny, who knows? – in 2007-8, due to the leap forward brought about by the 6th Biennial, the foundation reinvented itself as an institution and, aware of its educational role, chose to turn its education programme into a permanent action constructed in partnership with the community and in constant dialogue with teachers, students and other agents in the local teaching network. Obviously this was not an easy decision, but it was understood as necessary, and nowadays governs all the steps taken by the Mercosul Biennial.

The movement of collaboration and respect existing between the curatorial and education programmes of the last three editions of the Biennial reflects the institution’s stance in relation to its educational mission.

arrival point = departure point

We know that a visual arts biennial is a grandiose event driven by quite a generous budget; a budget that might account for a series of public requirements considered as

fundamental. It is therefore impossible to talk about an education programme based solely on educational prerogatives. The theoretical precepts of a programme such as this encompass much more than concepts coming from the fields of art and education.

Talking some years ago with my father about the total budget for (one edition of) the Mercosul Biennial, he told me that it amounted exactly to the annual budget (apart from payroll) of the town where he was born and raised, Butiá, which now has around 20,000 inhabitants, no museum, no cultural centres, a few schools and a history of poverty and decline brought about by the unbridled and inhuman mining industry. Recollection of that conversation, apparently with no greater purpose, has stayed with me throughout all the steps and decisions taken within the education programme and has determined the definition of many of its processes. Two weights, two measures: I find it hard to imagine that the same amount is spent on an art exhibition as is spent to run a town of 20,000 inhabitants. Two weights, two measures: I find it hard to imagine that the expenses of a town of 20,000 inhabitants only amount to the sum spent on organising an art exhibition.

At the first meeting I had with Luis Camnitzer, in 2006, he was told of the number of students expected to visit the 6th Biennial: 200,000. I remember leaving the room during the break and noting that Luis seemed a little uncomfortable. He was uncomfortable with the figures. So I told him not to worry, that it was possible, and if not, it would be no problem if we only served half that contingent. Luis was polite, and pretended to be relieved by the news. It was some years before I realised that the problem was the fact of it not being a problem.

On starting work with Marina De Caro in 2008, after a meeting in which we introduced some of the actions organised for previous editions, and the numbers achieved, Marina looked at me and said, “Why do you have to do everything so big in Brazil: big exhibitions, lots of artists, thousands of workshops, hundreds of thousands of visitors? Can’t we do it on a scale of one to one?” Working with Marina was amazing in the sense of learning how to do things small, working on a scale that was, indeed, human.

An education programme is not a construct originating from the relationship between a theoretical concept and practical activities, resulting in numbers. Whenever I think of the Mercosul Biennial education programme, I see a landscape of actions that go beyond the fields of art and education to invade other sectors of our huge realm of human needs: it ranges from the creation of jobs to questions of public transport, including basic sanitation, school meals, the prison system, unfair income distribution, student and teacher self-esteem, until landing on the enigmatic sector of contemporary art. We are talking about things of the world. Of things in themselves and in contrast with others.

The Mercosul Biennial education programme is constructed every day based on the methodologies of its participants, teachers, students, collaborators and curators. The proposals of Luiz Camnitzer, Marina De Caro and Pablo Helguera remain living and current. And they do not just complement each other but exist in fact when they are in contact with each other. Luis’s project, for example, exists to its highest potential principally after the organisation of Marina’s project. Marina’s project demonstrates not just the educational proposals behind the 7th Biennial, but also anticipates processes in the 8th Biennial. And Pablo’s programme readdresses issues approached by Luis’s programme and carries out processes unfinished by Marina. Rather than comparisons, what is established is a relationship of dialogue and collaboration. Although the Mercosul Biennial education programme is commonly linked to biannual experiences and thus to the educational (curatorial) proposals, what gives it strength and power is that subtle thread that ties them together, guaranteeing space for reinvention and continuation.

Either we [re]invent [ourselves], or we are lost. Is that not what Simon Rodriguez¹⁴ predicted so well?

14 Simon Rodriguez (1769-1853) was certainly one of history’s most interesting educators. Teacher and mentor to Simon Bolívar, one suspects that Paulo Freire must have read him at some time, given the meeting of ideas between the two. This text is quoted as a sign of hope.

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Multiple voices essays: Field notes

8th Biennial Educational Program Evaluation [in progress]

Jessica Gogan and Luiz Guilherme Vergara

Bernard Tschumi said in The Pleasure of Architecture: if you want to follow architecture's first rule, break it. Something similar can be said about being a curator. There are no applicable parameters to each case, just intentions and desires. It's better to be consequent with the project's development than consistent like a hypothetical should.

José Roca, General Curator for the 8th Mercosul Biennial¹

[...] the Biennial proposes a metaphorical attempt to "reterritorialize" – expression used by Deleuze and Guattari to indicate the process by which one deconstructs the old order and establishes a new one – the field of pedagogy on the scope of visual arts. In the same way, makes reference to Rosalind Krauss' influential essay, Sculpture in the Expanded Field, in which the need for artistic practice to break the conventional expositive parameters is articulated. Several years later, it was suggested that this expanded field, "reterritorialized", of art had a social characteristic, in which pedagogy occupied a central role as a tool of communication, reflection and, in the words of Paulo Freire, awareness.

Pablo Helguera, Pedagogical Curator
for the 8th Mercosul Biennial²

The record of practice is the line that is weaving the history of our process. It's through it we stay for each other [...] but it's not enough to record and keep it to yourself what was thought, it's fundamental to socialize reflection's contents to each and every one of us. It's fundamental to offer individual understanding to build the collective collection. Like Paulo Freire pointed out so well, the record of reflection and the its public socialization are "conscience constitutors" [...] and also tools for the building of knowledge.

Madalena Freire³

How to follow the curatorship of a Biennial that intends to break rules and expand, in time and space, the artistic, curatorial and pedagogical practices in an organic manner developed within context? How to recognize the reterritorialization processes of pedagogy in the field of visual arts and an artistic imaginary in the field of pedagogy? How to evaluate and document an educational program that builds on the practice of answering in a "imaginative, creative and flexible way before a work of art, according to the same dynamics offered by contemporary art"⁴?

1 In (duo) decalogue, *Essays on Geopoetics*, 8th Mercosul Biennial Catalogue, 2011, p. 18.

2 In Educational Program: The Expanded Field of Pedagogy, *Essays on Geopoetics*, 8th Mercosul Biennial Catalogue, 2011, p. 558.

3 In *Educador, Educador, Educador*. São Paulo: Paz e Terra, 2008, p.55 & 60.

4 Pablo Helguera. "Mediators Training Course Release." 8th Mercosul Biennial, 2011

How to document those imaginative experiences always ephemeral, micro and invisible? How the artistic happening acquires a geopoetical dimension?

To take on this challenge, we opted to evaluate and follow this Educational Program for its poetical and political dimensions, breaking positivistic, through an invitation to reflection and collecting of voices expressing different motivations during the 8th Biennial experiences. We propose to hear much more than to watch, who to process that symbiosis between artistic and pedagogical practice, revealing an understanding of evaluation and research as a form of complicity – recreating, monitoring and reflecting with the people acting in the field. Thus our proposition unfolds itself in a genealogy of motivations, searching where and how those voices' irradiation reaches a field of autonomous reverberations beyond the exhibition warehouses. Through this process of cartographies and enunciations the evaluation device integrates itself to the means end ends of the expanded Educational Program, like a formation field of new subjectivities in all of its rhizomathical perspective of geopoetics and reterritorializations.

This accomplice perspective also used the innovative work of polish psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi. His "flow" concept expresses the feeling he perceives as a synthesis of the psychology of optimum experience⁵. In his "flow" research, he points out important aspects that need to be present to conciliate those experiences. Amongst them, the most important are: intrinsic motivation, constructions with previous knowledges of autonomy, following organically the results (immediate feedback). Another referential research is the work of Harvard Project Zero, an educational studies center in the United States, connected to

5 Mihály Csikszentmihályi. *Flow and the Psychology of Optimal Experience*. New York: Harper Perennial, 1990; Mihály Csikszentmihályi & Kim Hermason "Intrinsic Motivation in Museums: What Makes a Visitor Want to Learn?" in John Falk and Lynn Dierking orgs. *Public Institutions for Personal Learning: Establishing a Research Agenda*. America Association of Museums: 1995. Also Ted Talk: http://www.ted.com/talks/lang/por_br/mihaly_csikszentmihalyi_on_flow.html

the University of Harvard, that attempts to identify the quality indicators and contexts in art education programs all over the country⁶. Besides important factors they've noticed, such as participative learning, ambient and quality of materials and professionals, they found out that the best quality indicator is the pursuit for quality itself – which involves will, motivation and a serious reflection upon the process. In other words, the more you see a pursuit for quality, the more quality is found.

So, the methodological option chosen was to transform the evaluation device in an invitation to reflection through an ombudsman, like a resonance camera inside the process. This way, those enunciations "reflect the ways by which the individuals see themselves," re-feeding wills, expectations and concerns of the testimony subjects themselves. This collection of exercises of speech and listening revealed an internal field, a subterranean layer of other previous "uncovered" temporalities, rich of contaminations and motivations. So, the constructivist and phenomenological process of individualizations, of voices that could express the reverberations between awareness, belonging and management. This field amplification is captured as a poetic microgeography bringing up a polyphony driven by a collective will, not fully conscious, in its organic, relational and ethical dimensions.

Beyond the general monitoring and a special focus on the mediators training course, our evaluation proposal involved gathering of testimonials by the individuals belonging to different role levels, active on the integration of curatorship, art and Educational Program of the 8th Mercosul Biennial: 1) Curatorship staff, coordination and production of the Educational Program; 2) Casa M (the new artistic and cultural center inaugurated by the 8th Mercosul Biennial in

6 Harvard Project Zero Arts Education Study. Authors: Steve Seidel, Shari Tishman, Ellen Winner, Lois Hetland, & Patricia Palmer. *The Qualities of Quality: Excellence in Arts Education and How to Achieve It*. <http://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/arts-education/arts-classroom-instruction/Documents/Understanding-Excellence-in-Arts-Education.pdf> p. 8

the city of Porto Alegre four months prior to the opening of the Biennial exhibition); 4) Travel Notebooks (project of residences and pedagogical initiatives on the state of Rio Grande do Sul also inaugurated on that period before the exhibition); 5) Mediators (including the training course) and teachers. Each of those activities was selected by a group of 8 people, a number chosen following the 8th Mercosul Biennial, but also, provoking a symbolical relation with the 8 of infinity. Also, we related the collection of 8 testimonials per group as representatives of a sample that generated multiple voices and reverberations on the Curatorial and Educational Program. The collection has been happening in three key moments of the 8th Mercosul Biennial: in May and July, by occasion of the Casa M's inauguration, beginning of the Mediators' Training Course and the progress of the Travel Notebooks projects; the second series of interviews happened on the eve of the "exhibition" opening and at the end of the Mediators' Training Course, in September; and the last, third collection, it's scheduled to happen at the Biennial's closing, in November. This way, it is important to highlight that this essay is a partial reflection upon an unfinished artistic and pedagogic process. However, what this document reflects it's already of significance to detect the reverberations and resonances that interlace themselves in a series of field notes, experiences and reflections accumulated in an intense and rich path of six months of process.

In the next pages will follow quotations, field notes, testimonials, observations of the multiple voices involved in this Biennial's irradiations and reverberations, composing a polyphonic writing of the speech of this event's artists, curators, mediators, teachers, coordinators, producers and participants on this expanded field of education. This reflection and evaluation document expresses a phenomenological contact with a field expanded by the multiplication of the voices of the artists and agents of the education-curatorship process territorializing contemporary artistic practices. You can identify this set of enunciations inside the activation field, the emergence of an ethical living attitude that qualifies and differences the geopoeitic proposal as a becoming potency in the formation of a collective body

(vibrating?) of mediators and experiences, resulting in the latency of a consciousness incarnated by several actors in its own act of expression and sharing.

Reverberations and Resonances in process

Pablo Helguera, Pedagogical Curator

Ground and principles for the Educational Program (notes and registers – Casa M September 11, 2011)

"How to expand the pedagogical and contemporary art's field? ...Education is a way to interpreting the connection between art and the world... pedagogy is a way of working..."

How to change the place of education on this society?

How can contemporary art contribute?

How society can receive?"

Renata Montechiare, Research Assistant at the MESA Institute (field notes, October 18, 2011 report, Porto Alegre)

About the concept of reverberation – Geopoetics: the concept that guides the Biennial is at the speech of every mediator. I have no doubt about it. In a little wider evaluation, I understand the curatorship has provided this understanding. Even the most distracted can see this concept through the visiting of the spaces, even because the works speak openly about the "geography" theme, and while talking to other people, subjects related to frontiers,

7 The term Vibrating Body is explored by Suely Rolnik when she refers to Lygia Clark's work in different texts. Rolnik explores the relational and transitional dimension between life and art, subject and world: "the capacity of our body to vibrate to the world's music, composition of affections that touches us live." However, here we utilize here as a collective body that emerges from different poetic autonomy zones, instigating by mediations (reverberations) and sharing of voices and experiences in this field that expands by mediation/education. Suely Rolnik "shapes herself in a contemporary soul: Lygia Clark's complete-emptiness." In *The Experimental Exercise of Freedom: Lygia Clark, Gego, Mathias Goeritz, Hélio Oiticica and Mira Schendel*, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, 1999. Also recommended: ROLNIK, Suely. *Cartografia Sentimental: Transformações contemporâneas do desejo*. Porto Alegre: Sulina; Editora da UFRGS, 2007

flag, territory, etc always emerge. One mediator told me, in his view, there's a very clear speech about what kind of geopolitical concepts are intended to be deconstructed, realized a precise line of thought in the sense of re-thinking frontiers and the uses of land, unmaking flags, etc.

Maria Helena Gaidzinski – Santander Cultural Educational Program Coordinator (Interview notes, Casa M, September 3, 2011)

"The Concept of infinity in the affection exchange: give and receive / correspondence and corresponding:

Exchange / transport and travel.

Relations to gaucho traditions – of the tea.

Gaucho localism: welcome the whole world / relation to territoriality.

Making A NEW COUNTRY!!!!"

This voice interaction simultaneously keep them apart and together, that is, they constitute a unique social body. It's for this reason I refer to society as a body with multiple voices and contrast it to society as a univocal subject of a collection of individual subjects.

Fred Evans: The Multi-Voiced Body⁸

José Roca explores ideas and perspectives for art to active and creates territories, micro-nations, communities and poetic autonomy zones. But, for that, he needs to approach artists and curators to a third emerging transdisciplinary group of educational professionals, to recognize, explore and interact with life's complexities and identity at the country and frontiers of Rio Grande do Sul and, from there, active entanglement and exchange networks or aesthetical and cultural contaminations of Latin America. It's very clear that this curatorial proposition wouldn't be so right if it wasn't supported by a strong Educational Program.

8 EVANS, Fred. *The Multivoiced Body. Society and communication in the age of diversity*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2009. (p. 75). "This interplay among the voices simultaneously keeps them separate and holds them together, that is, constitutes them as a social body. It is for this reason that I refer to society as a multivoiced body and contrast it with society as a univocal subject of a collection of individual subjects.

If, for one side, the careful 16 year old construction of the Mercosul Biennial of an educational focusing, specially on the last two editions, this time is doubled. However, it is noteworthy at the 8th Biennial a new critical investment on the part of the integrated relation between curatorship and education. This way, it's evaluated as essential the integration and hybrid part of Pablo Helguera. Artist/educator, as pedagogical curator on the curatorial staff with José Roca, radicalizing the foundations and geopoeitic desires while device and methods of the Educational Program. This integrated step between curatorship and education fundamentally conducts all the training of educators, mediators and teachers in an pedagogy expanded field sense by autonomy and participation – were everyone becomes "idea multiplier" agents, expressing one of the Educational Program's goals. Why not add voices? Together, as a curatorial body, elaborate strategies that seek out to break standard expositive parameters. The Biennials' challenges, Pablo recognizes, are located exactly in the relations between space and mediation and coalitions of different temporalities. The voices and desires of Roca and Pablo are tuned in the critical and strategic recognition that most biennials concentrate a very high investment in a limited exhibition and spectacle time with several artists and works, which give support, in most cases, in educational programs conventionally established by doctrinal basis of hegemonic aesthetic values. Roca and Pablo invest in the integration between curatorship and Educational Program as strategies to expand the thickness and density of the Biennial in time and space.

Mediators' Training Course

Meeting: Mediators' Training (July 21st) exploring keywords to describe the possible poetics of the mediation experience and its challenges.

Words describing positive experiences

Exchange – most used word

Discover, discovery, look, joy, active listening, peace, relaxation, free, contemplation, immersion (ecstasy), signification and appropriation (it's a part of me), satisfaction,

enthusiasm, pleasure, exchange, re-enchantment, interlace, creation, silence, well-being, knowledge transmission, discovery, involvement, trust, sharing, pride, communication and feelings, tuning, realization (positive return), satisfaction, involvement, tranquility, happiness, freedom, affinity, reflection, domination, curiosity, dialog, immersion, interest, re-elaboration, amusement, affection.

Words describing negative experiences

Frustration – most used word

Disinterest, anxiety, frustration, locked, incompetence, lack of fluidity, time limit, obligation, demotivation, impotence, bad communication, stress, lack of interest, lack of respect, unbalance, bad, lack of security, forgetfulness, tension, absence, exhaustion, sadness, tiresomeness, dispersion, incomprehension, apathy, dissatisfaction, divergence, disarray, doubt, rupture, distance, enclosure, disrespect, monolog, hurry.

Gabriela Silva – Educational Program Operational Coordinator (interview notes, Casa M, September 3, 2011)

Positive evaluation in relation to the Mediators' Training Course: 300 people graduated by the Mediators' Course; (...) thinking of an educational process – stimulated people as idea multipliers.

Maria Aparecida Aliano (Cida) – Political Cultures Coordinator – City Educacional Secretariat / Porto Alegre (text sent on October 21, 2011)

"Ratify what was spoken and emphasize the mediators' interactions with the school audience. Many factors contribute to the good performance of the mediators during this edition, but, I evaluate that School Experiences are relevant. Before School Experiences, there were some complaints at the schools about the inadequate way some mediators interacted with the students even, in some cases, cases of misunderstanding. Since the Experiences were realized, this kind of problem decreased and, in this edition, I've only received compliments, in which teachers make explicit the adequacy between the audience and mediation, according to their specificities.

Anaiara Letícia Ventura da Silva – Mediator (evaluation, September)

Between the experiences that had impact to me, the first was the mediation with Rika Burnham, made in one of MARGS' expositive spaces on the first moments of the course. That experience touched me deeply in respect to the way of realizing the "mediated", his/her perceptions and experiences with the work, and made me reflect on what will mean to be a mediator, more as a facilitator between work and spectator, than anything else.

An intense program of mediators and teachers' training was created and executed in a three months period prior the opening of the exhibition. Field notes, interviews and observations made with the mediators recorded the reverberations and resonances triggered by those workshops.

The symbolic presence of enunciation exercises, speech and hearing, transits this Geopoetics Biennial, not only on the important works by Coco Fusco, Oliver Kochta and Tellervo Kalleinen with the Complaints Choir, between other videos that present politically speeches of voiceless groups and social segments. This resonance and reverberation of power and sense of multiplying voices is inaugurated as well on the first day of the Mediators' Training Course with Rika Burnham and Pablo Helguera. At MARGS, in different Galleries, Rika and Pablo invited mediators to two exercises guided in the sharing of different points of view about a work, by dialog, by listening performance, taking them to recognition of oneself in relation to the other by their enunciations and articulations of their perceptions. Since then, during three months, mediators kept contact with presentations of pedagogical practices of welcoming and interaction strategies with emphasis on the multiplying of voices breaking the dictatorial silences of the visual arts' spaces. In all testimonials' collections and evaluations of this training course the importance and singularity related to the previous editions of the Biennial were highlighted, from the focus on the autonomy of experiences and interpretative strategies.

Mediators were intensively prepared to the pedagogical exercise of the poetic fruition autonomy, motivated for

a even greater overflow with the artistic experiences in the expanded fields and frontiers of unconventional urban activation territories. On the mediators' evaluations about the training course it is evident the appreciation and affection generated by Rika Burnham and Amir Parsa. The symbolic sense of having a voice, giving voice, having speech and hearing, is emphasized on this evaluation as reverberations and resonances of how much interlacement and unity between the geopoetic curatorship and Paulo Freire's autonomy – or participative – pedagogy, enabling the authorial empowerment of actions and mediations of the artist-educators (as poetic mediators) on the existential and political activation of the aesthetic experience. What would justify a conceptual qualitative equivalence between the Educational program and the curatorial "aspiration", or geopoetical will, by activations of expanded territories of deterritorializations and reterritorializations by artistic processes.

In parallel with the testimonial collection, during the Mediators' Training Course, it was introduced a proposal of individual drawings as cartographical records of the involvements and reflections within a process of three months of interactions, workshops and lectures. The drawings were asked also in three moments, corresponding also with the testimonial collection. Those maps register, in a free and graphical manner, how each mediator was understanding, perceiving his/herself and projecting his/her feelings that involve the educational proposition for mediation. In the second series of map drawings, mediators could compare through those cartographies, the impacts and transformations, especially effective of and conceptual, of the scope of hopes, motivations and desires involving the horizons of possibilities of mediation. A third series of maps will be realized at the end of November, exactly during the closing period of the Biennial. Some examples are shown here.

Inaugurating infrastructures

Gabriela Silva – Educational Program Operational Coordinator (interview notes, Casa M, September 3)

What's happening after this Biennial?
40 activated cities on the country of the Rio Grande do Sul state;

150 – 200 people involved directly with the projects;
What the next Biennial's structure is going to be like? Taking into account the historic legacy of previous Biennials;

The Biennial has a very square structural origin; very hierarchical; dismembering processes – trying to fit different fronts. People still try to put things into little boxes; structural processes to absorb other relations need to be more organic, less formal;

Mônica Hoff, Educational Program General Coordinator (Interview notes, September 2011)

"To me, the Educational Program is made by human relations more than anything else. Art is a tool that is there, that we use, abuse, desire, appropriate, but it is done by human relations, exchanges of desires between people (...), by fusion points, by divergence points end what we can establish as a network with the community, the neighborhood."

Fernanda Albuquerque (Casa M interview / May):

(...) "we are not working for the 24th, we are working to what the house may come to be. We still don't know what it is going to be. We have a beautiful project, in the sense of schedule, spaces, audiences (...), in other words, a series of projects and programs for the house, but we still don't know what it is going to be. It isn't what it is, it is the use people make of it."

Paula Krause, Casa M production

"Now we have to see how this is going to happen in Porto Alegre. I don't know if you know Porto Alegre, if you've spent time here, but in my opinion it's a super challenge for the Porto Alegre audience. It isn't an easy audience." [about Casa M]

One of the vital elements of the curatorial proposal was to create infrastructure, to offer the city and region resources that may continue after the wave of Biennial fervor.

The first thought here that comes to mind is Casa M, which we heard throughout as one of the most appreciated and radical dimensions of this Biennial, the voices expressing both desire for and questioning around making this a permanent space.

Is temporality a generative and/or a limiting tension? The frenzy of Casa M programming, almost as if making up for all the time it might not be open in the future, the conviviality of the space, the energized presence of the mediators, and the activation of the neighborhood was all made possible by the generous curatorial gesture of creating local infrastructure. The question remains, however, that even with the permanence of physical space, whether the very human and temporal energy is sustainable. Nevertheless, the possibilities generated from this infrastructural support, from the community perspective, while at times critical, was mostly appreciative of how the Biennial can “give an arm” to local art scene. Additionally, others saw the advantage of the Biennial as an effective lever in local issues, adding a stamp of approval in cultural negotiations where “it’s not just me saying it.”

Yet, perhaps the most radical contribution of infrastructure of this Biennial is the human resource one. Roca asserts in the “[duo] decalogo”, that a Biennial is not an art school. Undoubtedly, this responds to the European Biennial Manifesta 6 and its curatorial project *Exhibition as School*, 2006 which proposed a kind of postgraduate temporary school for artists, curators and scholars.⁹ Yet, while the 8th Mercosul Biennial may not be an art school such as this one, it could be described as most definitely a public school of art or indeed a radical school of public art made so by the vitality of the Pedagogic Project and the team of mediators, striving to weave artistic and pedagogic processes together as they engage diverse publics.

An understanding of the public art school idea, however re-imagined inside a formal learning context, is also absorbed in Casa M’s work and all over the state. If, for one

side, the achievement in respect to Casa M, as a space of shared experiences and exchanges displaced and complementary to the great expositive format of the warehouses exhibition, is celebrated unanimously as a poetic autonomy zone for the integration between this curatorial and educational program. By another, the teachers’ training initiatives irradiate this curatorial-educational partnership to the country and reaching the frontiers. It is noticed even more the empowerment of the mediations radicalizing conceptual transdisciplinary initiatives of collaboration and construction of a poetic and critic consciousness on local, regional and global daily life. New senses of mutual belonging between the biennial and the Rio Grande do Sul state are activated.

This sense of building human resources is critical to the Biennial proposal of building belonging and nurturing regional investment. As one of the cultural producers, Liane Strapazon remarked, she saw these initiatives and projects as “planting seeds.” The differing demands and desires to nurture these seeds is this a rich, poetic, political, and creative legacy that this Biennial will leave.

Curatorial and educational confluences: “theme as a action device” and “reterritorialization of pedagogy on the field of visual arts”

Rafael Silveira, EAD Modality Coordinator at the Mediators’ Training Course (interview notes, Casa M, September 3)

“Contact with transformation”: art/education phenomenon

Renata Montechiare, Research Assistant at the MESA Institute (Mediations, Encounters, Art Societies). (Field notes, reflections, October 16 to 19, 2011, Porto Alegre)

Mediators in groups: since the first visit to one of the Biennial’s spaces I’ve realized the mediators are in groups based on their work space. The ones from Unseen City add and overlap with the ones from Casa M because it is there where they start their activities. Generally, the mediators don’t seem to circulate through the spaces, I couldn’t see if there is an exchange between them. I saw that there is,

on the contrary, the desire of space affirmation: “Casa M is the best place”; “Santander has the best staff”; “The quayside is the Biennial”; “Unseen City is the most experimental mediation”; etc. those statements don’t seem to establish a rivalry to the point of generating disputes, but demark territories. Interesting since Geopoetics can be used to think also on these terms.

Diana Kolker, Teachers’ Training (text emailed at October, 21)

“I wish for the course to configure itself as a meeting place of formal and non-formal educators – [I wish] that a new space with nomad educators to be created... educators with a nomad dimension – utopian – but it happened.”

Roca and Pablo’s curatorial proposition identifies an unfolding at the Biennial between exhibition and activation, as forms of giving poetical, social and political amplitude and thickness to the time and place of the Biennial. We identify during the enunciation of the Biennial’s manifesto, Roca’s “(duo) decálogo”, a first driving and activating genealogy that underlies politically a wish and desire of the curatorship turned to the field expansion. Therefore, also, the convergence between geographic, poetic, ethic – invokes a theme as a action device. “Geopoetics is in everything”, voices echo from the curatorship to mediation. In the same way, the “action” project unfolded in activation as a theme – for example, Casa M’s temporality inaugurates a meeting place. For this purpose, there are desires to be unfolded in the need of achieving a rich and broad scheduling, running with and against the time to support the Biennial. In the same way, the Nomad Mediators project – appears as a flow of collective needs in synergy with the curatorial proposals on the Poetic Autonomy Zones, breaking or overflowing limits of the practices of restricted mediators to the specific exhibition spaces.

As each of those cases would embody, (re)territorializing the exteriorization of an expanded field of affections of art for education? Or of education as a more radical form of art – be it poetic, politic or pedagogic? In this manner the Educational Program, performs itself through the

commitment with the multiplying of voices, in its several senses and assemblages. But, for that, needs to be understood transcending traditional “triad between interpretation-mediation-service” of the educational proposals, as José Roca comments.

So, it was verified in the collection of voices, an invitation to reflection, how art is an amplifier of pedagogical or different knowledges (poetic and politic of knowledge exchange) sharing. But also, how much of education (institutive structure of the formation of attitudes, habits and subjectivities in municipal and state networks) is being embodied, motivated and activated by new artistic practices.

“Empowering Proximity:” Caring and approaching

Márcia Wander, teacher

(...) “dealing with special students, sometimes we can experience mediators with preconception, of not knowing how to deal or having a concern of dumping too much information on a group that has another way of receiving that information. So I think, increasingly, following since the first until now, 7th Biennial, close to the 8th I see with a great care to provoke, to approach those parts. Because in the years that there is no Biennial the school keeps on working, keeps searching culture and art spaces all over town.”

Ethiene Nachtigal, Mediators’ Training Course Production and Mediators’ Coordinator

“this thing of the humans to extrapolate tremendously, we being able to work with people, with different identities and that those people can awake for new things and awake between themselves as well. The mediators are to me a very special public and I see inside this experience with the public as well, with people who are living in an experience.”

Marília Schmitt Fernandes, Teacher – Canoas (metropolitan region city). (Testimonial notes, Casa M, September 3)

“The Biennial infiltrates, I bring a student who afterwards brings his parents to the Biennial!”

9 See Notes for an Art School <http://manifesta.org/manifesta-6/>

Reverberation – Unseen City ... Even our homes have unseen spaces.

How to enchant yourself with that!

The Biennial is pointing to this shift of focus process.

...“urgent life”

I am Bienalized and my students as well!!!”

A teacher spoke of the importance to potentiate proximity. Increasingly the Biennial is constructing approximation networks on the city and region. For it, talking of experiences with the mediators, of the school experiences, the care increases with proximity. The overflowing and activations of the Biennial’s theme and the mediators’ training in this edition can be addressed or evaluated qualitatively as reverberations and resonances of expectations and curatorial or pedagogical desires. Countless cases of mediator and teacher initiatives were noticed which exchange motivations and sharing between schools were inspired by the Eugênio Dittborn exhibition.

The ombudsman experience in this invitation to reflection aimed to take maximum care of the motivation and hope indicators expressed on the speeches of every direct or indirect agent on the curatorship and mediations interviews. Between speeches, on the attention to sparkling eyes, on the intensity of the enunciation rhythms, the testimonial embodied the appearance of an ethics of caring about the encounter with art, and through art with another subject, another collective of desires still not completely conscious. The care with a micro-geopoetic dimension of encounters was well recognized as a point of pedagogical approach between subjects of speeches and hearings, where they multiply by the sharing of voices the possibility of memorable and “lonely” (tribute to Milton Santos) happenings. The reflections and voices collection served also to detect, feed and empower those enunciations that still aren’t fully conscious of the emergency, even if indicial, of an ethics and collective will that leads the caring about the relations that qualify the expanded field of education to beyond the exhibition space – subjects of autopoetic-microcosmos.

Curatorial resonances: ZAP – “Zonas de Autonomia Poéticas” (Poetic Autonomy Zones) as a pedagogical dimension

Ana Stumpf Mitchell – Mediator (email, October 21, 2011)

“Essays on Geopoetics. Multiple and several attempts of meeting with my multiplicity through the diversity of voices. Mediation that is medi[t]ation! Action through the environment, the space. Frontiers established by rivers, by the water in our bodies, by what flows. At each new welcomed group, a new orchestra, a new composition. E the most fun is that, through art, I’m a complete researcher and a complete geographer! Curiosity, mine and the visitor’s – is what guide each new conversation. I was never so happy at a job before. The museum is now, with the noble presence of women, children and elderly. How to chose the right words to express my gratitude to so many people? Doing my job in the best possible way is the least I can do... and besides all it’s great! People? I chose to work as a mediator because I had given up being a teacher and a geographer. What a curious universe, since I’ve never felt so as so much of a teacher and geographer... And with so much joy. :)”

Nomad Mediators: breaking the quayside’s frontiers

Initiative and reverberation example of the educational program... builds on the practice of answering in a imaginative, creative and flexible manner, to a work, according to the same dynamics that are offered to contemporary art.

Nomad Mediation Manifesto

We, the nomad mediators, found on each other a need for transformation.

Our choir doesn't complain, it claims. We don't want flags, milestones, not even a knife to say that this is our territory.

We want to be free to pass trough frontiers without passports or stamps.

We don't see this biennial as an already sewn fabric, but as a loom in constant activity, and we feel the need to be free to cross that mutant mesh, choosing and being chosen in the thread's path, its knots and entanglements.

Traveling through warehouses to absorb other languages and perspectives, providing the visitors a sip of every rum, chachaça, or beer on the way.

We want, therefore, to boost the public-work interaction without repeating words just for the sake of it, but with the intention of building our souls and consequently the public's in a more universal manner.

Therefore, we allow ourselves to question to which point the Educational Program can or should be thought of as from expography? We know that the space itself is a delimiter to curatorship, since there are some works that could be on the same exhibition, but are geographically distant, and the dialog that could emerge between them dies in silence.

We want, finally, to activate dialogs between works of different warehouses and put them in the same mediator line, but not necessarily conductor, that may run autonomously through the quayside.

ZAP was a curatorial concept translated to mediation as a territory of pedestrian enunciations, at the ground level, from body to body that collects itself by cohabitations, in the will to accomplish the poetic, nomadic, transient and autonomous micro-zones, but also remarkable. That will be the micro-poetic measure of how much of the spoken will is embodied on mediations such as the expanded field of knowledge exchanges, amplified as polyphonies of human relations, of new wills and autonomies of the vital exercise of expansion of the identity, mapping and frontier sense.

Roca invokes one more sense of care with the Educational Project when he talks of a relation learning/teaching with “art, in itself, as a instance of knowledge that not always passes through rationality.” It remains for us, once again, to verify the collection of testimonials, like the body of voices of the Biennial’s mediator agents answer, recognize, activate and take care of this instance of art. The curatorship and the Educational Program then are responsible for the special care with the safety of this instance or here referred to as equivalent micro-ZAPs that need to be unfolded as the expanded field of education. In the same way, we recognize an approach with Paulo Freire’s concept

of existential learning¹⁰, introducing what embodies in respect with the several temporalities at play in the collective and political building of the acquiring of languages by art. Those instances of mediations and contact experience between art and life are taken care by its possibility of existential amplitude or “life’s memorable moments” (Roca, 2011). We propose a special attention over the care with geopoetics that reflects on mediations such as micro-ZAPs at ground level, where mediations happen. Are pointed out on this process pedagogical, philosophical and ethical references that act on the resignification and empowerment of the human geographies by art. The micro-ZAPs multiply on mediations by nomadic experiences (or deterritorializations), where the poetic and educational autonomy are not unrelated to a solidary event.

Other theoretical references may be rescued to compose this brief approach of entanglements and conceptual emergences that involves the Educational Program, and specially the field of formation to activation of mediators, whose emancipation and achievement happens at the level of micro-ZAPs. One can then talk of solidary event (Milton Santos) and existential learning (Paulo Freire). But, also facing other possible theoretic articulations, Hans-Georg Gadamer¹¹, as support for exploring the field of meeting between artistic and mediation practices as a flow of temporalities or the present itself and the update of art as a “game, party – sharing rituals and the emergence of a symbolic event”. This theme is represented on the Mediators’ Training Course as foundations for Relational Routes. Is this reflective conjugation, which identifies also a pedagogical approach between the activation field of mediation and the emergence of a collective “vibrating body” of voice multiplying (a concept that runs during this entire essay). It’s in this weaving and woven field between world-objects and life, that the mediators in their nomad

¹⁰ Freire, Paulo. Ação cultural para a liberdade. 8. ed. Rio de Janeiro: Editora Paz e Terra. 1982.

¹¹ GADAMER Hans-Georg. La Actualidad de lo Bello. Barcelona. Ediciones Paidós Ibérica. 1991

visits and promoting embodied readings and mobile readers of a geopoetic in action. This Biennial's mediators become agents of an expansion of the Syely Rolnik's¹² "vibrating body" concept that addresses Lygia Clark's passages and concerns on the art-subjectivity-body-life and world relation.

"...each one's vibrating body. The body is a home. It's about a poetic shelter where living equals communicating. Men's movements build this cellular habitable shelter, allowing a nucleus to mix with others"

Rumors ["Burburinhos"] & Artisanal Conceptualism

Given the scope of the *Cadernos de Viagem* [Travel Notebooks] residencies throughout Rio Grande de Sul we were only able to follow two of the projects. Both projects were quite different in how the possibility of participation was engaged with and approached. Each offers some interesting insights into the evolving nature of social art practice. Columbian artist Mateo Lopez's work often combines traveling, writing and drawing, a sort of artistic and poetic ethnography. He speaks very eloquently and unassumingly of his art process as a kind of "artisanal conceptualism." His time in the tiny town of Illopolis, approximately four hours from Porto Alegre, working with diverse community groups and those engaged with the Caminho dos Moinhos [Walk of the Mills] and the city's Museu de Pão [Bread Museum] sparked both debate and creativity, as well as consolidating a local tourism initiative and a campaign to restore the mills.

One participant in the artist's workshop seemed unclear of what she was getting into, asking, "I didn't know what he wanted." Her words reflect one of the challenges around this kind of short-term based residency work (in this case one month), balancing the need to contextualize the project and potential associated experiences and artistic intent. Her words also note the importance of deconstructing,

critiquing and reflecting on the multiple agendas at play – institutional, curatorial, artistic, community. Projects can become vortexes where the time to develop and evolve relationships takes a back seat to the temporal drive of the work that needs to be done. Another aspect of her words also point to a challenge in this kind of project-based engagement that is less organic to a community, that often community members spend a considerable amount of time worrying about what the outsider wants, making a genuine exchange difficult.

Other participants however enjoyed the newness of the experience and laughingly suggested the fuss the artist presence had caused by describing the "burburinho" in the town. Another moment was enthusiastically described by the coordinator of the museum, where she noted the town mayor, secretaries of education and culture were all together with a puzzled teacher holding drawings of two students that seemed interesting but she was not sure what to do with. They decided to call "Mateo" Who, as a sort of artist doctor was called upon to give advice on what to do. The very presence of the artist in these moments in all its essentialism truly matters. A simple noticing, a creativity acknowledged, and validated, is all that is required. Mateo gave various workshops and held an exhibition of his drawings and responses to the context at the Mill (part of the museum). His original intention to build a collective bread oven at the Cais [site of Biennial exhibition], but unfortunately this could not happen because of public code restrictions and fire hazards. He brought instead his drawings inspired by the architecture of the mills and the town together with a series of specially crafted three-dimensional geometric paper structures.

Finnish artist Oliver Koshta's project Choir of Complaints, which he had inaugurated in other cities several years previously, was proposed as a project for Teutonia, a local city, as it had more than a 100 choirs, assumed to be a natural choice for such a participatory project. All were surprised when none of these choirs appeared interested in the rather radical proposal of singing complaints.

12 Rolnik, Suely. *Molda-se uma alma contemporânea: o vazio-pleno de Lygia Clark*. In *The Experimental Exercise of Freedom: Lygia Clark, Gego, Mathias Goeritz, Hélio Oiticica and Mira Schendel*, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, 1999.

What ensued, however, seemed to fully grasp the geopoetic and radical participatory and pedagogic spirit of the Biennial, where approximately 40 singers of all ages and from all walks of life came together to write and sing their complaints, documented and played as video in the exhibition component of *Cadernos de Viagem* at Cais and via various performances.

One of the participants, blind for decades, spoke of this as the best thing he had done in his life since becoming blind, another woman said the project completely changed her outlook on life, and another decided she complained too much. This kind of practice is a unique feature of the combination of art and pedagogy, as one of the educator/artists and mediator supervisors Rafael Silveira adroitly commented, referring to aspects of the mediator course, that brings one into "contact with transformation."

Perhaps the most radical aspect of the Choir of Complaints proposal was the role of the artist himself – once again essential, fundamentally present, yet in this case completely in the background. In the two performances of the choir at Casa M and Cais on September 11th, the artist stayed at the back of the choir, the group assuming such autonomy in the first performance they almost forgot to mention him in the list of participants applauded at the end. Here the conceptual praxis is a radical kind of radical unauthoring, constructing possibilities for the autonomy of others.

An important note regarding both projects is how each one demonstrated the critical importance of local "keyworkers" in this kind of socially engaged art practice. In these projects Lucas Brolese and Marizangela Secco played central roles as keyworkers – critical allies and community organizers that opened up their networks, understood how the projects could benefit their own constituencies, and became active mobilizing forces in making these projects happen.¹³ On those projects, Lucas Brolese

13 *Museums, Keyworkers and Lifelong Learning: shared practice in five countries*, Buro fur Kulturvermittlung, Vienna, Austria, 2001, edited by Gabriele Stoger and Annette Stannett, p. 14.

and Marizangela Secco were essential as key collaborators, allied critics and community organizers, that have opened their social network, understood how the projects could benefit (everyone) by its own constitution and became active local forces mobilizers by allowing its achievements.

Exchange

Denis. Artist – editor / teacher / mediator (interview notes. Casa M, September 3)

"...it's very cool to see the Biennial and visit other cities! The Biennial in Porto Alegre is more distant from the city itself... It only happens every 2 years – the biennial doesn't get to some peripheral zones – and every 2 years there's a hiatus. Of course you realize a construction, but now I'm in contact with the registries of noncompliance to group people (peripheral socials) / segments outside the field of arts;

Maria Aparecida Aliano (Cida) – Porto Alegre Educational Secretariat Culture Politics Coordinator. (Interview notes, September 3)

Successful activities' plan:
Mediators' displacement to different regions of Porto Alegre;
Knowledge of different realities;
Well structured schools;
Relation periphery x center = learning through differences

One of the rich enthusiasms of accompanying and listening to this Biennial process and one of the lingering questions is the notion of "troca." It was the word most often cited in energetic discussions and debates. We heard "troca de paradigmas and desires for "troca" of experiences as being core to and the most pleasurable aspect of the mediation process, each mediator embraced the open-ended and poetic possibilities of this very human sense of exchange. Yet, however pleasurable and poetic, there is the challenging question around pluralism for its own sake, a concern that these exchanges through art and participation may leave power structures unquestioned, critical issues untouched, and maybe even reinforced.

With this, we are not suggesting that criticality was abstracted, on the contrary, with the success of the pedagogical expansion of this Biennial and its challenge facing the traditional frontiers of what has been understood as art and education, new critical expectations and demands are guaranteed just as a Freirean sense of transformative praxis that continuously situates itself inside an assumed internal self-criticism, where “a good education can only be achieved if its method is explicit and interrogates in itself”¹⁴.

Becomings in Geopoetic reverberations

Gabriela Silva – Educational Program Operational Coordinator

“Bienal is like the wind!”

Has been very imprecise – amplitude of time and space / since April.

New evaluation parameters for the 8th Biennial:

“Spectacle vs. Expanded process / critical evaluation moment and value crossings.”

Maria Adélia de Souza. Notes of a tribute to Milton Santos

Relations with the curatorial geopoetic proposal: forming community with an emphasis on local – daily life

“Faith in the future of the world build by the poor slow men of the planet”

(...) against globalization “cynical!”

Convergence of moments: technical system vs. solidary interdependence. The “other’s event” – socially excluded... Moment of “planet cognicity”...

Blending of the world to the place: solidary event – innovative political doings, taking back earth’s meaning...

...reason and emotion: to paths to understand contemporary world...”

¹⁴ Camnitzer, Luis. *Conceptualism in Latin American Art: Didactics of Liberation*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007, p. 112

André Luiz da Rocha – geographer – visual arts: woks at the pedagogical training of teachers, traveling to the country and at Casa M (Interview Notes, Casa M, September 3)

Work in Livramento at the Teachers’ Training was a “Special experience of identity, frontiers – the pure objective of this Biennial.” ... There is a Positive sense – a very positive evaluation.

“In the country, there were registries of lack of infrastructure (cultural, for the arts)”

It is noteworthy at the 8th Biennial a geopoetic exercise that inhabits the threshold of a radical change in the arts to the 21st Century. What surfaces by polyphony, by the sense of world will and sharing by art, is configured on this essay as a collective vibrating body¹⁵ that happens by the entanglement of multiple voices, which is also of multiple temporalities. We emphasize and perceive on this still opened and unfinished reflection process, micro-geopoetics through which is exteriorized the still unseen of the critical passage between the visual culture primacy to the exercises of engagement polyphonies and voice multiplying. On this emblematic turnout, the territorialization is rehearsed as a geopoetic laboratory, but is configured at ground level by the convergence between the curatorial and educational programs.

However, the resonances and reverberations bring forth and demand new hearings for the Biennial structure itself. Another side of the speeches is simultaneously concealed and revealing as a measure of ethical commitment with the encounters between the Educational and Curatorial Programs, such as Travel Notebooks and the different local realities. Other echoes appear from historical silences, or

¹⁵ This concept of vibrating body by Suely Rolnik works here with Fred Evans notion of Multiple Voices Body, therefore the formulation: “Collective Vibrating Body that integrates the vision of this collection of speeches, but also the knowledge of reverberations and resonances between discourse and curatorial desire, Educational Program and all of its activities that multiply as vitality and territorialization on this Biennial.

by the silenced, reverberating with the achievements of an autonomy and participative pedagogy. Not only the happiness of the shared experiences like the assemblages of new temporalities, subjectivities and territorialities, but also, the mediators’ anxieties and anguish before the awakening to wills and desires of the culturally and citizenship neglected, often repressed. In silence, progressively, are whispered the expectatives by continuity and sustainability, especially in relation to Casa M’s future, a symbolic point of meetings between the Curatorial, Pedagogical and also, of the Documentation and Research Center, Biennial’s “heart and memory”.

In that sense, geopoetics would stop being just a curatorial project for the 8th Mercosul Biennial, but the inauguration of a even more radical procedural reterritorialization, guided by the institution’s capacity of becoming a living critical and pedagogical structure, that shelters for its own sustainability, the flexibility and sensibility to the reverberations and resonances of new foundations and principles of the art education phenomenon outbreak for the 21st Century.

Casa M

José Roca, Paola Santoscoy and Fernanda Albuquerque

If there's something I've always been very careful about is the triumphalist rhetoric of the power-point presentations in which event's curators or organizers show images of their projects and tell how wonderful and harmonious it was, how many people attended, the incredible presence of the audience, the so intense that visitors had with the works, etc. paper can take on anything, and a speech sustained by images even more. But sometimes, for those who were really there, it seems as if another project is being talked about: there were thousands of problems and fights, the audience didn't show up, people didn't interact. Everything ends up existing in a field of fiction that installs itself in audience with a deceptive and rotund presentation.

Casa M arises from the desire of the curatorial project that a Biennial's resources, in this case Porto Alegre's, serve as means to create a local infrastructure. On the original project, it was called *Casa Mercosul*, but during the process we've decided to leave only the M to give emphasis to the word "casa", highlighting the domestic characteristic that this space had, in which the expository (that the public would've associated with "Mercosul" through the Biennial), wouldn't be dominant. In fact, the expository would be a smaller dimension of this space: its emphasis would be the convivial.

Casa M opened its doors to the public in may 2011, four months prior the Biennial's official opening. During that time period, specially on the weeks preceding the opening, I understood the practical meaning of the popular saying

"to become a victim of your own success": every time I went to work at Casa M, it was almost impossible to find free space, because all of its rooms, from the living/ coffee, to the kitchen/conference table, passing through the reading room and the projection attic, were occupied by different groups: mediators taking the training course classes, curators lecturing workshops, artists cooking lasagnas, students discussing, the audience watching a video show. Sometimes the only available space was the rooftop.

Everyone knows that a space's success isn't in its building (even though good architecture and furniture design help); is in its scheduling. As much in the quality of what is being presented as in its intensity and continuous nature. Therefore, we destined important resources to the Biennial's educational project to be able to offer a quality schedule. For that, it was primordial the direction of Pablo Helguera, the Biennial Pedagogical Curator and specially the unconditional support of Mónica Hoff, director of the Educational Program, who since the beginning realized the possibilities that the project had to articulate educational activities, both which already existed as the ones that could be conceived because of it. We design several programs, each one with a specific character and audience in mind. We assembled an advisory council with personalities from disciplines like theater, music or literature to avoid staying in an little artistic world ghetto, and at the same time creating new audiences, bringing the ones interested in music to art events, the ones interested in art to theater, the ones interested in theater to music, etc. there's nothing more annoying than having to always see the same people on openings: here it was about creating a new audience to what we've done, or at least expand it.

1 Translator note: *casa* is the Portuguese word for *house*.

Like I've said before, a project such as this doesn't solve itself only in square feet. But that doesn't mean a good architectonic project isn't essential. Eduardo Saurin and Lena Cavalheiro understood the project's spirit and design modular furniture that allowed great versatility on the use of space. The house is extremely narrow (14,76 feet!!) and very long, what presented potential circulation problems and easements that were solved in a practical manner. Artists Vitor Cesar, Daniel Acosta, and Fernando Limberger, conducted practical projects (the bell, the library and the garden, respectively), works of art that, since they are functional, kept their enigmatic character. The house had the warm family atmosphere we had imagined for it.

Looking at it critically, I believe the coffee didn't work as a meeting place, even though we provided free water, coffee, tea and wireless internet. Our idea was that the artists and the local public, especially neighbors, came to Casa M just to hang around and talk, like in a neighborhood coffee shop. Maybe, if we had a commercial coffee shop, that would've worked, since sometimes people just don't enter a place without something specific in mind or without an invitation; In contrast, at a place where you pay for coffee, a person feels in the right to enter without permission, because it becomes *in fact* a public space. The truth is, it takes a long time to make a place become an everyday place for a community.

The Biennial supported this pilot project for a year. We'd like for it to become permanent, but the economical and management realities render its continuity very difficult. We believe it was a project that exceeded expectations. Hopefully, the community that supported us with its presence can resume the project and create something similar in the future.

José Roca

For me, the goodness of a project such as Casa M, takes root, amongst other things, in the fact that its nature allows immediacy in the execution of ideas and projects, something that a larger structure such as a museum rarely can manage to accomplish. Due to its scale and to the fact that the emphasis of its scheduling isn't centered on the expositive, its scheduling can answer faster to what happens 'outside', that is, can, inside its lines of work, incorporate in a natural manner the discussions that may be happening inside the city's artistic community, the public sphere, or simply questions related to relevant news on politics, economy, sports, etc. that is something that in the expositive scope swallows itself more and takes much longer to appear in an exhibition or publishing. In the time I've lived Casa M's operation, that happened in very diverse ways: from the framing of an assembly of themes that appeared inside of other conversations or presentations, such as gastronomy or astrology, going through events that revolved around local festivals, up to the schedule's incorporation of some conversation or concert with people that were passing through Porto Alegre.

The multidisciplinary emphasis of its schedule and its interest in integrating the many communities to its usual audience causes Casa M to work more as an idea generator site, as a place to establish relations and where work processes are shown, than just a space for the presentation of finished projects. In that sense, it is about a structure that allows error and affectation, something that inside an institution is a real privilege, since it speaks of the bet in a critical dialog for inside and out, which advances towards experimenting with production and art advertising formats. This adds up to the 'homely' experience of the site, which in my case provided a close and daily relation with everything that happens there.

Paola Santoscoy

Perhaps the image that most closely matches the Casa M experience one of a laboratory. A kind of investigation, from one perspective, of the Biennial's presence possibilities and actions on the local context and, from another, the idea of a cultural venue: how much is it possible to rely on more independent formats in an institutional context; of the possibility to encourage crossovers and collaborations between different languages and fields of expertise; of the emphasis on reflection and on the artistic process more than in its results; of alternative methods of approaching and addressing different audiences; and, of course, of the experience of creating a space that resembles a home, where exchange and cohabitation are central aspects and stimulates a more domestic – closest, purposeful – relationship with the place.

Five months passed since the opening, the laboratory feeling remains. In part because of the dynamic itself of programs such as *Combos* and *Duets*, that by each edition were rehearsing a new approach between people, experiences and languages, inviting participants to act in a lesser known terrain and, for that reason, riskier and more stimulating than usual. In part also, because of the way that each *Showcase* reconfigures the house's entrance and its connection to the street, proposing new perceptions on the site, sometimes with works that relate more with its architecture, the case of works by Tiago Giora and Rommulo Conceição, sometimes with projects that are built around the relation with the surroundings and the neighborhood, like in the showcase proposed by Helene Sacco. The disciplinary crossover and the investigative – more than affirmative – tone of the courses and workshops is another element that approaches the house to the notion of a laboratory.

Perhaps the most important aspect in this sense is the way the site has been experienced and appropriated not only by the public, but by those working there: producers, educators, curators, artists, mediators. Rooftop garden, music rehearsals on the basement, kitchen transformed in a bread workshop for kids or in a classroom for groups coming from local universities, reading room hosting a

theater play, garden turned into a children's playground, stair performances and a dance floor improvised on a studio are a few of the experiences that give life to Casa M and lend new meanings to the place.

Fernanda Albuquerque

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Curadora adjunta de la 8ª Bienal del Mercosur, Paola fue curadora de la I Bienal de las Américas, en Denver (EUA), intitulada "La Naturaleza de las Cosas". Fue curadora en diferentes espacios expositivos de la Ciudad de México: La Panadería (2000-2001), Museo de Arte Carrillo Gil (2001-2003) y Museo Tamayo Arte Contemporáneo (2004-2007).

En 2005, junto con Willy Kautz y Sebastián Romo, inició el proyecto curatorial 111 (un día, un artista, una obra). En 2007 y 2008, ejerció la función de curadora de la sección Suelo Projects en el Arco (España).

Rafael Silveira (Rafa Eis)

Artista visual y educador. Integró las acciones educativas de la Fundação Iberê Camargo y de la Bienal del Mercosur. Recentemente coordinó un segmento del EAD del Curso de formación de los mediadores de la 8ª Bienal Del Mercosur y actuó como tutor de los mediadores en la misma edición. Es integrante del Coletivo E – grupo independiente de arte-educadores

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Rika Burnham es educadora del museo adjunta do Metropolitan Museum of Art e fue becaria en el J. Paul Getty Museum en 2002.

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Doutora em la Northwestern University (1995), es profesora de Retórica y Teatro, Danza y Estudios de Performance em la University of California, Berkeley/CA/EUA.

Wendy Woon

Diretora de Educación del Museum of Modern Art – MoMA (Nova Iorque/EUA). Fue Directora de Educación del Museum of Contemporary Art de Chicago, de 1995 a 2006.

About the authors

Alicia Herrero

Visual Artist, Herrero constantly inquires about themes such as art economy, the relation between art and the audience and the intellectual and institution's role on the building of knowledge. The artist elaborates her proposals through careful theoretical reflections that manifest themselves as theses by interacting with the audience, participants, or readers of her several projects. At the 8th Mercosul Biennial she participates in the Geopoetics exhibition.

Amir Parsa

Writer, theorist, educator and poet. He is the director of the Alzheimer's Project at the Museum of Modern Art – MoMA (New York / USA). He implemented programs for different audiences and created initiatives relating art to fields such as literacy, community development and health.

Elliot Kai-Kee

Elliot Kai-Kee is a museum educator and educational specialist in charge of gallery instructions at the J. Paul Getty Museum.

Fernanda Albuquerque

Assistant Curator at the 8th Mercosul Biennial, Fernanda is a journalist, curator and art critic. Currently coursing her PhD studies in History, Theory and Art Critic on the PPGAV/UFRGS, she was a curator at the Centro Cultural São Paulo, worked at the Educational Program at the 29th São Paulo Biennial (2010), on the art critic group at Paço das Artes (2007, 2008 and 2010) and at the Tomie Ohtake Institute. In 2009 developed the Vandelluz Project at the 7th Mercosul Biennial.

Hope Ginsburg

Hope Ginsburg is an assistant teacher at the Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond, VA. Her work is related to Social Practice. In 2007, she moved to Richmond, VA, where is an assistant teacher at the Art Foundation and Painting & Printmaking departments at VCUarts.

Her ongoing project, Sponge, which was spawned from the culture of experimentation, pedagogy and learning at MIT in 2006 and now is hosted at Anderson Gallery VCUarts.

Jerome Bruner

American psychologist, he is considered the father of cognitive psychology. Bruner researched the classroom work and developed a theory of instruction, that suggests educator's goals and means for action, based on the study of cognition. Much of this theory is connected to child development research. Gained great world notoriety due to his participation on the North-American curricular reform during the 1960s.

Jessica Gogan

Independent curator/educator, works with projects on Brazil and the United States and develops research on Art History for the University of Pittsburgh PhD. She is co-founder of the MESA institute and co-coordinator of the Experimental Center of Education and Art at the Museum of Modern Art in Rio de Janeiro. She was educational director and special projects curator at the Andy Warhol Museum, conducting exhibitions and projects in the areas of art, education and social development.

José Roca

General curator of the 8th Mercosul Biennial, José Roca is graduated in architecture (at the Universidad Nacional de Colombia) with a specialization in Critical Studies (at Whitney Independent Study Program, New York) and a master's degree in Design and Cultural Buildings Management (at Ecole d'Architecture Paris-Villemin, Paris). Directed the artistic program at the Banco de La Republica, in Bogota. Was co-curator of the First Poli/Graphical Triennial at San Juan/Puerto Rico (2004), the 27th São Paulo Biennial (Brazil, 2006) and the Encuentro de Medellín MDE07 (2007) and the Car[ajena], Cartagena/Colombia (2007), and the artistic director of Philagrafika 2010: the Graphic Unconscious, in Philadelphia.

Lucas Brolese

Musician and music teacher, Brolese was the organizer, conductor and composer of the Teutônia Complaints Choir, project of the Finnish artists Kochta and Kalleinen, part of the Travel Notebooks Exhibition, 8th Mercosul Biennial.

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Master's degree in Arts and Ambient Installations by the Studio Art and Environmental Program of the Art Department, New York University, in 1993. PhD in Art and Education by the Art and Education of the Art Department, New York University. CEO at the MAC-Niterói (2005-2008). Director of the Art and Education Division (1996-2005) and coordinator of the Graduation Course in Cultural Production at UFF (2007-2010) with the Art Department at UFF/RJ.

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Pablo Helguera

Pedagogical Curator for the 8th Mercosul Biennial, Pablo Helguera is a visual artist and educator. Has worked on several museums of contemporary art was chief of Public Programs at the Educational Department at the Guggenheim Museum, New York (1998-2005). Since 2007, he is the director of the Adult and Academic Program at the Museum of Modern Art – MoMA (New York / USA).

Paola Santoscoy

Assistant Curator for the 8th Mercosul Biennial, Paola was the curator for the I Bienal de Las Américas, in Denver, USA, titled "La Naturaleza de Las Cosas". She was curator in different exhibition spaces in Mexico City: La Panadería (2000-2001), Museo de Arte Carrillo Gil (2001-2003) and Museo Tamayo Arte Contemporáneo (2004-2007). In 2005, with Willy Kautz and Sebastián Romo, she initiated the curatorial project 111 (un día, un artista, una obra). In 2007 and 2008, acted as curator for the Solo Projects section at Arco (Espanha).

Rafael Silveira (Rafa Eis)

Visual artist and educator. Integrated the Educational Programme at Iberê Camargo Foundation and Mercosul Biennial Foundation. Recently has coordinated the ODL mode of the Training Course for Mediators of the 8th Mercosul Biennial and worked as supervisor of the team of mediators. He is a member of the Coletivo E – independent group of art educators.

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