

The Educational Turn in Art: Rewriting the Hidden Curriculum

Janna Graham, Valeria Graziano, Susan Kelly

Around 2006, the art world developed a prolonged fascination with questions of education, pedagogy and the art school. 'The Educational Turn', as it became known, produced an enormous array of exhibitions, books and curatorial initiatives, from the ill-fated Manifesta 6 *Art School* in Nicosia, to the exhibition series *Academy: Learning from Art/ Learning from the Museum* at the Van Abbe Museum, Eindhoven and MuHKA Antwerp (2006); *United Nations Plaza* Berlin; to the Hayward Gallery's *De-schooling Society* series in 2010; and publications such as Stephen Henry Madoff's *Art School: Propositions for the 21st Century* (MIT, 2009), and *Curating and the Educational Turn* (Wilson and O'Neill eds., de Appel, 2010). Manifesta 8 (Murcia 2010), the 30th Biennale of Sao Paulo (2012), the 6th and 8th Mercosul Biennials (2007, 2011) and Documenta 13 (Kassel 2012), also devoted considerable space to themes of education during this period.

The term 'Educational Turn' gained prominence in Irit Rogoff's e-flux article 'Turning' (2008) where she identified this recent trend in artistic and curatorial practices that engage with educational paradigms and problematics. Prompted in part by the rolling out of the European Union Bologna Process, which aimed to standardise university education across the EU, the Educational Turn provided a critique of the idea of education as one-directional knowledge transfer and training, and the framing of education as a commercialised industry, reduced to the utilitarianism of training for working life. Many of the initiatives cited above, produced temporary 'alternative' educational projects and schools, using texts such as Jacques Ranciere's *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* (1987/1991) or Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) to evoke other forms of knowledge production and new proto-institutions of learning.

Educational theorist Ivan Illich, another referenced author within the Educational Turn, used the notion of the 'Hidden Curriculum' to describe those educational situations that lie beneath the stated curriculum. He wrote extensively about non-curricular knowledge: the structures of power, discipline and coercion that shape the experiences of students and teachers in schools (Illich, 1971). What if any then, was the hidden curriculum of the Educational Turn? What were its micropolitical affects on participants and those involved in the parallel struggles around education during its height?

Missed opportunities?

It is significant that the majority of these curatorial initiatives were developed at the same time as the intense neo-liberalisation of higher and museum and gallery-based education across Europe, and perhaps most deeply in the UK. As the Bologna Process was instigated across Europe to much protest, the UK for example, saw the total public de-funding of all arts and humanities subjects at university level, alongside the tripling of university tuition fees to £9,000 per year. In 2010 and 2011, a series of mass student protests and occupations took place in London, Vienna, Amsterdam, Rome, Zagreb and elsewhere, marked a period of radical social experimentation and militancy that had not been seen in student movements for many years. At the same time, museum and gallery education departments, many with important radical democratic and feminist traditions, received funding cuts or were subsumed under dubious 'outreach' and 'service delivery' frameworks, including that of Serpentine Galleries, which significantly reduced education budgets in favour of an expansion designed by Zaha Hadid, or FACT Liverpool which

voluntarised its in gallery invigilators. In addition, in the UK government policy for secondary level education highly incentivised the reduction of the arts curriculum in schools, in favour of pathways toward 'STEM' (science, technology, engineering, maths) subjects. Groups like Arts Against Cuts and Arts Emergency were particularly active in the UK, campaigning against cuts to art education, but also at the centre of burgeoning anti-austerity movements.

And yet, this elaborate set of exhibitions, public programmes and writings on themes of education that constituted the Educational Turn, made barely any connections to these highly visible struggles. Discrete projects with students, talks, short courses here and there aside, the debate about the art school within the art world remained detached from both the micro and macropolitical efforts of resistance taking place in campaign groups and in institutions of education. There was no intervention into marketization processes, or the daily capitulations of art schools and galleries to intensifying regimes of managerialism, or into the processes of indebting generations of students and artists to come. In most British art schools for instance, the debates surrounding the neo-liberal turn in art education were simply unheard or deemed irrelevant. The art school and questions of pedagogy were instead engaged with and performed as a discrete thematic, another piece of content for the art world to play with, extract value from, and move on.

From this perspective, the Education Turn was a missed opportunity to pose questions and re-shape art curricula and institutions – to develop a pan-European movement to oppose the Bologna Accord and the brutal changes imposed on art education in the early phases of austerity politics. It is important to ask why and how this happened? Why was the Educational Turn both structurally and politically cut off from both the everyday realities and situated imaginaries of art education? Why did it fail to intervene or engage with the experiences of educators and artists doing long term work in the institutions that came under attack?

Nora Sternfeld has argued that the Educational Turn showed little interest in the 'unglamorous tasks of Museum education departments'. In taking this position, she argued that the re-framing of education-as-art risked a re-positioning of artists and curators as the only transformative agents, ignoring the history and the role of the educator (Sternfeld 2010). This disconnect can, however, also be traced to a deeper problem in art institutions since at least the 1990s, where radical ideas have increasingly been packaged as a new kind of 'content capitalism', deliberately separated from their immediate contexts and the politics they name. Hito Steyerl observes that "contemporary art feeds on the crumbs of a massive and widespread redistribution of wealth from the poor to the rich, conducted by means of an on-going class struggle from above" (Steyerl, 2011).

Indeed, Steyerl and others have argued that contemporary art institutions, with their clear alignments with the ruling elements of neoliberal society (states, corporations, private collectors etc.), are precisely produced as sanitised places for staging temporary theatres of public discourse, by maintaining a strategic distance from the practices in which such discussions might provoke social and political antagonism. In such a context, formerly public institutions are increasingly dependent on the wealthy donors for the majority of their funding, and centre more and more of their activity on fundraising, branding and servicing sponsors. Furthermore, citing the artist and curator - in an art world characterised by temporary, fleeting and project-based modes of production - as the main transformative agents cannot help but render pedagogical interventions as discrete packaged experiences, far from material or institutional politics, and far from the constituencies involved in everyday and long term struggles for radical education. It might be argued therefore, that rather than

open up a meaningful debate and set of interventions around the issue of art education, the Educational Turn instead produced a space for the inoculation of politics, immunising its participants against the implications of radical ideas.

The Educational Turn and the rise of Public Programming

The disconnect between education struggles and pedagogy as spectacle that the Educational Turn encapsulates has broader implications beyond the arts as it can be situated within the widespread interest, since the 1990s, in the discursive, intellectual and conversational practices of the emerging field of public programming. Public programming represents a significant move beyond the more traditional display activities of the art establishment that used to suggest the main remit of galleries, museums, art fairs and biennials to be exhibition making. While some of the projects of the Educational Turn involved the production of art works (for example, Gelitin's, *Brauner Garten* produced for the M HKA *Academy* exhibition in 2006), most activities have been discursive in nature, framed as temporary schools, symposia, seminars and lecture series. Considered from this angle, the Educational Turn is significant not only in relation to art education's traditional mission of producing and reproducing audiences for art (Morsch, 2011), but also as a sites for contemporary production of public discourse.

'Public programming' is employed by the art field as an umbrella label that includes various kinds of initiatives, including workshops, lectures, conversations, parallel events, collective walks and research projects. It does not yet belong exclusively to any particular professional niche within the ecology of cultural organisations, although some institutions have begun to create positions for example, 'Head of Public Programming' or 'Curator of Public Programmes' (see for example, the positions of 'Associate Curator: Talks and Events' at the ICA, London; Curator of Public Events and Residencies at the KW Institute for Contemporary Art Berlin; Head of Public Programmes and Education at MACBA, Barcelona). Sometimes public programming can fall under the remit of education departments, where it generally encompasses activities geared towards educated adult audiences, as distinct from young people or what are often termed 'communities,' meaning people of lower income and education. Other times, the activities are initiated directly by artists as part of residencies or commissions; and yet on other occasions - as in the majority of projects associated with the Educational Turn - this concept is used by curators or academic researchers to name discursive events as core elaborations of their own curatorial concepts. This can result in series of public events that merely produce & display associations between proper names of the art scene and the most current theoretical terms in circulation at a given time.

Though public discourse in art institutions has existed since their inception, from the 1990s it has increased as a vital aspect of arts culture. Coinciding with a perception that the spaces for public debate of intellectual concepts have been reduced due to the increasing privatisation and individuation of many aspects of public life, and the art world's extension of its growing interest in critical theory to its publics, arts institutions as disparate as biennials, publicly funded organisations and art fairs have committed ever greater curatorial and programmatic resources to publicly staged discursive activities. This expansion crucially positions the contemporary art institution as a site for the production of contemporary knowledges relevant to other kinds of audiences not necessarily invested in artistic debates.

Public Programming without a public sphere

Within this context, philosopher Peter Osborne - in his introduction to Tate Britain's 2008 Art and Immaterial Labour conference - went so far as to propose that 'art spaces have become some of the only public spaces in which an alternative political critique can be made'¹. What notion of the public is at work here? How can contemporary art institutions, biennials and so on be understood as 'alternative' or 'public' spaces with their predominantly private finance arrangements, their prioritization of fundraising, and the myriad petty corruptions these new public-private configurations entail? How can we understand the term 'public' in the context of what Steyerl calls 'post democratic globalisation' (Steyerl, 2011)? Surely, this notion of the public is part of an idea of democracy that no longer exists – an idea of democracy that Colin Crouch, Wolfgang Streeck and others have asserted, is no longer compatible with capitalism (Streeck, 2011; Crouch 2013).

Crouch has warned that we are currently moving toward a post-democratic society, which 'continues to have and to use all the institutions of democracy, but in which they increasingly become a formal shell.' In this context, he tellingly suggests that the 'energy and innovative drive of democratic practices pass away from the democratic arena and into small circles of a politico-economic elite' (Crouch, 2013). Staged discursive events produced in the name of the public take on this feeling of a hollow shell today. The shell is the space that produces and maintains a distance from an elite that permit the practices of 'alternative' political debate, while structurally disabling their passage into meaningful consequences.

We might also imagine this shell of democracy through Paolo Virno's haunting description of the contemporary condition of 'publicness without a public sphere'. In his book *Grammar of the Multitude*, Virno uses the collective, but nevertheless cut off and enclosed, space of the *séance* to point to this 'unreal' feeling of contemporary forms of publicness. In the *séance* the participants hold hands, they are present together, sometimes deeply connected to each other, but not to any space beyond the room in which the ritual is staged. Virno distinguishes this feeling of publicness from the notion of the public sphere where he argues, 'the many can tend to common affairs'. (Virno, 2004: 65-68) Here, Virno is not interested in harking back to, or romanticizing an older notion of the public sphere – but rather points to the impossibility of such of a sphere under conditions of post-Fordism, and by extension ,post-democracy.

Projects realised within the framework of the Educational Turn gestured toward and made significant use of the legacies of radical education and arts pedagogy aligned with movements of democracy. Indeed at times they were formatted using facilitation methods developed social movements such as the camp or the general assembly. Yet, when realised within a context of post-democratic art institutions, participants are routinely prevented from the tending to common affairs that exist in functioning democracies. Further they are prevented from following through the implications of debate and at once blocked from intervening into the conditions *spoken of* or the spaces they are *spoken in*. This for the simple reason that the public democratic spaces pre-supposed by the Educational Turn - its context within the conditions of contemporary public programming - no longer exist.

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Re-orienting the educational turn

If what is hidden in the hidden curriculum of the Educational Turn is the practice of detachment, the consumption of knowledge and the attribution of its place away from the 'tending to common affairs' of democratic agency then what we learn is to avoid social and political antagonism, to abandon the implications of what we read and learn, and to disregard struggles for radical education in the name of producing yet more privatised cultural capital. What this learning produces is a parallel world of events and projects detached from sites of action, rendering those implicated in the politics of education frustrated and exhausted and the urgency that propels a seemingly endless stream of events, deflated. Where the claim to the Educational Turn lies in the praxes of critical education, its curriculum rather produces a sense of deep alienation, deep incapacitation to act.

How could the projects associated with the Educational Turn produce a different curriculum, new conditions that could support the building of a public, democratic and radical education? What would it mean if the Educational Turn were to intervene in the politics of education at the sites of its production, moving education away from what the New Labour government in the UK described as the 'harnessing' of knowledge production for wealth creation, and away from preparing subjects for the post-Fordist 'creative' and 'knowledge' economies? How could the activity of public programming in the arts become one that challenges the dominant classist, patriarchal and colonialist modes of public discourse?

Paolo Freire famously argued that acts of reading always involve the reading of the word *and* the world together: a 'permanent movement back and forth between "reading" reality and reading words' (Freire, 1985:18). Freire's pedagogical practice highlights the connection between knowledge production and social action. In his view, the activity of programming has to be carried out *with*, and not *for* or *about*, its destined 'public':

We simply cannot go to the laborers — urban or peasant — in the banking style, to give them "knowledge" or to impose upon them the model of the "good man" contained in a program whose content we have ourselves organized. Many political and educational plans have failed because their authors designed them according to their own personal views of reality, never once taking into account (except as mere objects of their actions) the *men-in-situation* to whom their program was ostensibly directed. (Freire, 1970: 35)

Felix Guattari's organizational principle of 'transversality' (1984) also insists on the necessity of moving continuously between critical thought and the conditions in which it is practiced, attending to the dimensions of life that surround it. As Freire, Guattari and other militant pedagogists repeatedly suggest, discursive projects that don't articulate a sustained commitment to social struggle can never be in a position to forge new spaces of democratic public debate. In a related argument, Argentinian group Collective Situaciones have argued, these detached, authored political conversations can only produce 'socially constructed questions [...] represented as "themes" before which we have to position ourselves' (2009). Questions are allocated and privatised to the research project of the proper name, coming into public existence solely as unique positions to be agreed with, disagreed with, modified and so on.

Indeed, a commitment to radical pedagogy can emerge only from the active challenging and dismantling of the systems — both symbolic and material — that arrange the current neoliberal division of labour between artists, curators, educators,

activists, unionists, and students. Such division of labour does not simply amount to a neutral difference in professional specialisation, as it acts as an operative mechanism for the allocation of resources, directly calling into question the priorities of actors – their career successes, ideals of the arts, their desire to ‘do good’, produce political transformation, and so on.

As well as radically altering our reading practices, and composing transversal processes as continuous movements between critical reflection and intervention in the conditions of production, to re-orient the Educational Turn we urgently need to excavate and learn from other histories that have informed radical pedagogy and art education. Paradoxically, the Educational Turn ignored much of these literatures and histories of education, performing what Gayatri Spivak has called a ‘sanctioned ignorance’ that ignores struggles from below at best, and at worst performs what she calls ‘interested denial’ (Spivak, 1990:125) For to ignore these histories and struggles is also to ignore the underlying problems of the political present that have produced the crisis under supposed scrutiny: the dismantling of the welfare state, the systematic re-distribution of wealth to the rich, the disappearance of public funding, and the return of the idea that art and culture are only for certain social classes.

Genealogies of radical education might be found for instance in the development of free popular educational provision initiated by mutualist movements in Europe during the 18th and 19th centuries. These Friendly Societies and other mutualist organizations were the first forms of workers associations developed in modernity, preceding the formation of unions and parties, and they often included co-operative educational programmes for the children of workers, as well as incentives for parents to send their children to school rather than work. Moreover, the same mutualist movements also created the People's Houses, arguably the first institutions for popular art education in modern Europe. We might also learn about the experiments of Celestin Freinet in and Fernand Oury and in France in the 1950s, whose schools used practical education, such as the production of collective newspapers and pamphlets to support the process of spontaneous re-organisation of life in school and society. Schools in the Ecole Moderne network set up by Freinet worked transversally, taking the form of assemblies of students, teachers and community members producing shared knowledge, resources and ownership in and outside of the school. Knowledge gained and analyses formulated within these settings underpinned those used by many within the generation of agitators in the 1968 uprisings, among them Felix Guattari.

Shannon Jackson (2011) recommends that while within the art world today, ‘social work’ is often used to insult the quality of a project, it is crucial to become more aware of the different histories of welfare and social policy, including those radical practices that in the past exposed and politicised the continuity between reproductive care, education, culture and leisure. Settlement Houses, created in the 19th century, - understood by some as the origins of the profession - brought together formally educated and non-educated people as co-habitants of working class neighbourhoods. Originally set up within philanthropic frameworks, settlement groups often resisted paternalism, transgressed tradition gender roles and class positions to learn other ways of living, being and transforming the world together. Within this genealogy the later practice of ‘sociocultural animation,’ a critical and progressive approach to social work developed across Europe during the 1960s and 1970s, was concerned with the cultural and material poverty of certain populations, such as residents of social housing projects, whose most immediate needs were met by welfare policies but were reduced to being clients of the state. Cultural

programmes here, were understood as a critical antidote to the paternalistic formulation attributed to social work by art critics and practitioners today.

Attending to these examples of resistant ethics within public sector work of the past, suggests other positions within the false consensus attributed to public/private neoliberal institutions, lending context to current subversive and often un-named practices, and traction to Educational Turn's claim to a radical pairing of culture and education .

What these histories of radical pedagogy inevitably produce is the de-centring of the field of art as the primary locus of discourse and social innovation, in favour of a poly-vocal range of practices situated amongst the more complex histories of social justice movements. Co-emerging with feminism, postcolonial struggles, workers struggles, and so on, the most wide-reaching theories of radical pedagogy were invented not as themes, but as tools to further the aims of popular education and respond to specific forms of inequality and coercion. Re-orientating the Educational Turn around actions linked directly to these genealogies, would importantly bring into focus the continuities between these struggles, their cultural dimensions and the granting of education as a free social right under the welfare state, a right currently being dismantled. Equally these genealogies position arts and pedagogy within the wider project of living otherwise, inventing practices of care, social reproduction and decolonisation alongside those of culture and education, conjunctions that are deeply needed to survive and context the anxiety, debt, precarity and isolation produced at the hands of current neoliberal educational reform.

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