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Re-Imagining Classrooms: Educational Environments in Contemporary Art

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Abstract

Overlaps between contemporary artistic and pedagogical practices have become commonplace in debates and publications in various fields: from curating and museum studies to art education. Often, such overlaps – particularly pedagogical projects initiated by artists – have been studied from curatorial or art historical perspectives. This paper discusses installations produced by a handful of contemporary artists who have explored educational environments not only in terms of their spatial dynamics but also in order to question conventional understandings of knowledge transmission, literacy and power structures in education. Starting off with a practice-based example of an educational environment in art, the paper then analyses other educational environments by three contemporary artists and studies their implications for art educators.

Introduction

Convergences between the fields of education and art in recent years have led to a significant renegotiation of parameters in both fields. Educational environments and pedagogical practices have infiltrated art as well as related practices such as curating and museum studies, to the extent that debates about an "educational turn" or "pedagogic turn" in contemporary art and curating have now become almost standard features in conferences, publications and university courses dealing with these disciplines (see, for example, O' Neill and Wilson, 2010; Atkinson, 2011, p. 134). Within educational research, too, creative practices have increasingly come to play a significant role. Research methodologies such as a/r/tography propose intertextual modes of inquiry that combine image and word and weave the identities of the artist, researcher and teacher into each other (Springgay, Irwin & Leggo, 2009). While various curricular, institutional and time constraints sometimes restrict the full development of individuals' dual identities as artists and teachers of art (see Dafiotis, 2013, p. 141; Thornton, 2011), the growth of emergent arts-based forms of research in education also offers the potential for the development of innovative and more socially relevant curricula frameworks moulded out of diverse forms of engagement with actual artistic practices (Rolling, 2010).

These overlaps between art and education have led to various repercussions and contestations within both fields. Within multiple fields of academic research, for instance, critical debates still rage about the value or legitimacy of arts-based approaches in formal research, including educational research (jagodzinski & Wallis, 2013), and doctoral-level studies (Wilson & van Ruiten, 2013). Within artistic and curatorial practices, practitioners still ask whether the educational turn has really transformed their field (Rogoff, 2008). Yet, less attention tends to be paid to the implications or 'lessons' that art educators may learn from established artists' interpretations or deconstructions of the educational domain. Eisner's well-known, incisive article entitled "What can education learn from the arts about the practice of education?" (2004) focuses on distinctive forms of thinking characteristic of the arts that could stimulate a new conception of education, but does not discuss specific works of art that deal directly with pedagogy or educational environments.   When a work of art like an installation foregrounds education as its subject matter, how can it influence or contribute to the work of educators, especially art educators? What new understandings of the field can scholars of education or teachers acquire from artists when the physical environment and areas of expertise they inhabit are targeted by works of art?

Admittedly, the overlap between the world of contemporary art and that of education may seem puzzling at times. In her research on pedagogic projects by contemporary artists, art historian Claire Bishop (2012) has written of her dissatisfaction with the "visual and conceptual rewards" of some of these projects, arguing that their participatory aspects often upstage their artistic side, while the creative practices of visual artists seem to be located miles

away from the more bureaucratic environments typically found in universities (pp. 245-246). Without wanting to go as far as to suggest that the artists whose works will be discussed here actually intended or expected their installations to function within the formal context of a research paradigm, this paper seeks to show that some works or installations created by contemporary artists present settings that do not only resemble educational spaces like classrooms superficially but may offer deeper insights into education that could contribute to debates and research into educational practices, especially practices related to art education. In a sense, this approach inverts a question already asked by another researcher, Denis O' Donoghue (2010), "If researchers were to consider classrooms as installations, what types of understanding about classrooms and classroom life might emerge?" (p. 401) O'Donoghue focuses on the similarities between photographs of classrooms from the past and artistic installations, and shows how both spatial arrangements are set up in specific ways that determine to some extent the way people interact with each space, and are then used by real people who immerse themselves and hence participate in the functionality of such spaces. He suggests that historians of education could collaborate with installation artists to reconstruct classrooms of the past and thus show how the organisation of classroom spaces and school furniture affect individuals' movements and the transmission of knowledge.

Instead of exploring the idea of re-enacting historical classrooms, as suggested by O'Donoghue, this paper focuses on contemporary artistic installations that explore the educational realm where members of the public address and possibly question traditional pedagogical practices as well as their own knowledge of language, history and art. Then, it studies the issues these installations raise for educators in general and explores the implications for art education more specifically.

A Practice-Based Preamble

I should state from the start that my interest in the intersection of art and education is determined to some extent by my own hybrid practice as a visual artist and art educator in the context of a university. This interest is *not* fuelled by some instrumentalist belief that the arts could acquire more legitimacy in academia if they were to become 'useful' for more traditional researchers; rather, I tend to think that artistic practices must, paradoxically, maintain a critical and antagonistic voice within educational discourse at the same time as they avoid becoming institutionalised forms of thinking and being assimilated by other disciplines. This sense of criticality and risk is all the more necessary in a dominant institutional ethos that often champions predetermined outcomes and homogenising standards.

Over many years, my own work in a number of educational spheres infiltrated my creative work in different ways, materialising in book-works and various references to childhood. However, in a project that came about in 2012 and carried over into 2013, the dialogue

between art and education became more conspicuous and presented a kind of preliminary, critical study that was developed further and in other directions within the context of academic research. For this reason, a brief description of this project will function as a creative, experiential preamble to my discussion of the work of other artists who have made use of pedagogical environments.

Medical School was an installation I worked on for several months in 2012 and was first shown at St James Cavalier Centre for Creativity in Valletta, Malta, and subsequently presented again with some modifications at Museum Haus Hövener in Brilon, Germany in 2013. Fifty small, mixed-media works composed of image transfers and fragmentary textual extracts from old medical books that had been withdrawn from an academic library formed the basis of this installation. The mixed-media works were all framed in the same way yet were sub-divided into three distinct groups. Images and texts in the first group were borrowed from a series of medical pamphlets about newborn babies and contained diagnostic information about a variety of symptoms or other visible signs of disease and malformations associated with such an early stage of human development. The second set of words and images were transferred from old public health manuals that gave guidelines for maintaining one's physical well-being throughout life in specific housing conditions with modern drainage systems, communal buildings like hospitals, swimming-pools, schools and so on. Images and texts in the third group were lifted from a book on forensic medicine, which contained clinical descriptions of deceased persons found mainly at murder or suicide scenes as well as detailed information on the scientific methods used by investigators in putting together sufficient evidence to build a case.

Figures 1 and 2. Two mixed-media works from *Medical School.*

The frames were presented in a simple, 'pedagogical' grid or linear arrangement in a mock version of a classroom, complete with real school tables or desks at which members of the public could sit. The Maltese installation also included a blackboard, inscribed with a 'bibliography' of books that had been used in the making of the fifty images, while the installation in Brilon contained the actual books on plinths. Within the installation, viewers became 'students' in a small school that classifies and regulates each stage of life, starting with the moment of birth, passing through one's life lived in relation with industrially produced implements and spaces, and finally coming to an end with the moment of death. In the framed works, handwritten annotations that name symptoms, define public hygiene or explain the moment of death shape viewers' knowledge of their own bodies by establishing the specialised authority of a "medical gaze" (Foucault, 1973). By transferring the body from the domain of tradition and superstition to that of the medical profession, medicine works to save persons' lives by simultaneously transforming each individual into a medical case and by distancing itself from most people through the cultivation of a 'difficult' medical discourse. Just as the technical spaces of the clinic or hospital replaced the home where patients would have been visited by doctors in the past, the images on the classroom walls in *Medical School* deliver bits and pieces of 'professional' information that cannot generally be found within the domesticity of the home.

Figures 3 and 4. Installation of *Medical School* in Valletta (above) and Brilon (below).

Medical School provided me with an opportunity to explore educational spaces as well as the internalisation and perpetuation of dominant forms of discourse via such environments and textbooks. Feedback received during the installations in Malta and Germany also showed that the 'cold' textual excerpts lifted from medical books and included within the fifty, mixed-media images led several visitors to reflect about and even question scientific information that becomes naturalised through educational and other channels. The following section will look at the work of other artists who have used educational environments and pedagogical processes to interrogate familiar conceptions of learning.

Educational Environments in Art

>   We never educate directly, but indirectly by means of the environment (Dewey, 1914,
>   p.19).

Artists' creative inquiries into the subject of education have varied widely, and this paper is

not intended as a comprehensive list of all possible approaches to the subject. However, some of these categories will be described very briefly here to illustrate the richness of the field. A rather straightforward approach especially in the past revolved around depictions of contemporary classrooms and portrayals of individuals during sessions of private tuition in paintings, drawings or etchings. Representations of 19th century life classes in art academies, Edgar Degas' paintings of Parisian dance classes and depictions of solitary readers or pairs of readers by Impressionist painters such as Mary Cassatt are examples of works of art in this category. A second approach to understanding pedagogical practices within artistic practices could focus on educational processes involved in the actual production of works of art. A good example would be the work of Tim Rollins, who launched the 'Art and Knowledge Workshop' in the Bronx in the mid-1980s to work with students (called the Kids of Survival, or K.O.S.) on collaborative pieces based on readings (and especially re-readings) of classic works of literature. A third category brings together installations, performances or even lectures that require visitors to engage actively in educational pursuits by becoming participants in tasks initiated by the artist. Perhaps the best-known instance in this group is the work of German artist Joseph Beuys, especially projects like his *Bureau for Direct Democracy* installed at Documenta 5 in Kassel in 1972. In what follows, I will focus on some examples belonging to this third category.

Beuys' notion of 'social sculpture' was rooted in the belief that the moulding of new social structures through debate, education and activism was a form of art-making. A case in point was his staging of a democratic platform at Documenta 5, where he discussed political reform with visitors for many hours. Indebted to Schiller's view that political change in modern society can only come about through a profound aesthetic education, Beuys expanded the remit of art beyond the gallery space and beyond the classroom; indeed, for the German artist, any place could become a gallery or a classroom. His diagrammatic blackboards – produced during lectures he held in different countries – were filled with texts dealing with subjects as diverse as art, society and economics and attest to his passion with the democratic potential of these educational relationships with his audience. For him, only by educating individuals about their own creative and political potential could a truly revolutionary 'direct democracy' come into being. Beuys used his individual calligraphy and his actions "to teach the art of living" (Buschkühle, 2013, p. 51), always putting education at the forefront of his activities:

> Our educational system as a whole is based on reading and writing. Beuys presents us with an individual form of writing — on the other side of the book. The best way to appreciate the nature of this writing is to see it not as art, science or philosophy but as pedagogics: "To be a teacher is my greatest work of art" (de Beer, 2008, p. 284).

Beuys' calligraphic mark-making on blackboards therefore represented a union of art and

pedagogy that was meant to stimulate thought and action: his teaching was translated into words which *became* his art.

The use of words in works of art naturally has a well-documented history (for example, Morley, 2005; Hunt, Lomas & Corris, 2011) that reflects the varied trajectory of modern art, from Cubism and Dadaism to Conceptual art and also represents a vast, ancient heritage in the relationships between calligraphy, poetry and painting found in the artistic expressions of Eastern cultures. It is relevant to note that several artists whose works make reference to education in general or reproduce specific educational environments also make use of language in various alphabetic or textual forms. One such example is the Chinese artist Xu Bing, whose early and peculiar relationship with books, writing and education during the so-called Cultural Revolution in China would have an important influence on his art later in life. Both his parents worked in university departments when he was young enough to be illiterate, but when he finally learnt how to read, most Chinese children would be expected to own and read only one book, Mao's *Little Red Book* (Hsingyuan, 2011, pp. 13-14). Nevertheless, he did find a use for his calligraphic skills and was enlisted to produce propaganda posters that were used to sway public opinion in favour of the government and humiliate the bourgeoisie. These posters were very effective; in the artist's own words, "(i)f you wanted to kill somebody, you did it not by gun but by brush" (quoted in Jiehong, 2007, p. 14). Unfortunately, his own father was a black-listed intellectual and therefore became a victim of this very sort of propaganda by being sent to solitary confinement, while his mother and eventually Xu Bing himself were 're-educated' by being sent to the countryside to work with farmers (Smith, 2008, pp. 333-335). The artist's childhood experiences have been compared to those of the teacher and schoolchildren portrayed in Chinese director Chen Kaige's film *King of the Children* (1987), who recite textbooks sanctioned by the Party ad nauseam, perpetuating a pedagogical model that "is ultimately that of writing that writes itself, teachers and students alike inserted in a tautological circuit as its mere linkages" (Nakatani, 2009, p. 7). Literacy for the young Xu Bing was a paradoxical instrument, teaching him skills that would be very useful in his future artistic career and also showing him how such a repetitive form of reading and writing could be a very efficient, yet doctrinaire, tool.

It is therefore hardly surprising that one of Xu Bing's earlier and best-known works, *Book from the Sky* (1987-91), is a laborious, calligraphic masterpiece that follows authoritative, Chinese design canons but nonetheless is entirely unreadable. By hand-carving around 4000 characters that look Chinese but actually have additional strokes or marks that distinguish them from any legible character, the artist subverted the ancient tradition of Chinese writing and basic principles of literacy and communication. This is how, ironically, audiences from different backgrounds are linked by a common illegibility: neither viewers in the West without any knowledge of the Chinese language nor Chinese viewers can read Xu Bing's characters

because the work brings everyone, regardless of linguistic competence, face to face with the abyss of illiteracy. Yet, it is this very illiteracy that opens up a horizon of possibilities.

> Xu Bing says he wants to produce a 'tianshu', a meaningless writing, an inscription of the meaninglessness of Chinese culture. Paradoxically he produces a work which has transcultural resonance and translatability; a work which addresses radically different audiences with an experience which is somehow the same and profoundly the same, since it starkly reveals how the extralexical serves to create undeniable and absorbing meanings (Cayley, 2000, p.501).

This "extralexical" or tacit knowledge that lies beyond the visible letters works to open up a new pedagogical space, where the significance of literacy is no longer restricted to utilitarian ends. The artist's relationship with literacy and education evolved in a new direction with *Square Word Calligraphy* (1994-96), in which he developed a new system of writing English words by making them resemble Chinese characters. By transposing the principle that Chinese words always fit an imaginary square to the English language and using a Chinese brush and ink to produce the resulting characters, Xu Bing created a baffling in-between 'language' that bridges two cultures and simultaneously imparts a feeling of discomfort in those who try to read or even write his new English language. In the presentation of *Square Word Calligraphy*, the artist also transformed a gallery space into a classroom, where members of the public could experience this shift of perspective by sitting down at desks with copybooks, ink and brushes to learn how to write and decode this hybrid, 'foreign'-looking language. The more significant pedagogical experience in *Square Word Calligraphy*, however, is probably the public's perception of the relationship between linguistic conventions and feelings of estrangement engendered by unfamiliar thinking patterns. By being put in a position where they needed to re-learn writing conventions, Western viewers in particular defamiliarised themselves from what they thought they already knew.

Another artist who produces installations that occasionally employ school desks in a classroom-like environment is Sutee Kunavichayanont, a Thai contemporary artist who has created objects and installations that encourage viewer participation and reflection about memory, nation and traditional value systems. In *History Class* (2000) and in a similar piece called *Classroom upside down* which he produced for the 5th Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art in 2006, the surface of each desk was carved with images and texts relating to Thai history, and members of the general public could sit at the desks and produce rubbings of these engravings using crayon on paper. The engravings referred to documentary and politically contentious images and texts relating to Thailand's history in the 19th and 20th centuries, including tragic events like the massacres of the 1970s, so Thai members of the audience were engaged in a re-evaluation of painful national memories and expected to reflect

about the possibility of political change. Children making prints from these tables were observed by the artist to perform creative acts by avoiding exact replicas of the artist's engraved texts; instead, "they swap and they make new sentences" (quoted in Adams & Gillogly, 2011, p. 209). Instead of simply assimilating a state-sanctioned historical narrative, individuals who experience Kunavichayanont's installation can re-write their own versions of Thai history. *History Class* is therefore not merely the sort of interactive art-piece that invites the audience into the artist's private world; rather, it instigates people to take charge of their own re-education.

Writing also occupies a central place in the work of Thomas Hirshhorn, a Swiss-born installation artist who uses ephemeral and deliberately 'vulgar' materials such as paper, cardboard, industrial tape and tinfoil in large works that are constructed in public spaces as well as galleries. Even though he has argued that his writings constitute a "space aside" from his artistic work, photocopied texts relating to political theory or philosophy often accompany his exhibitions, forming part of his sprawling 'monuments' to famous thinkers like Bataille and Gramsci or as pamphlets that are distributed to the public (Lee, 2013, p. xii). His installations often look deliberately ramshackle while his own texts occasionally lead to "misunderstandings" and "confusion":

> I'm not afraid of misunderstandings, of confusion about what I write or what I do in my work […] Obviously these aren't the critiques of a historian and theoretician. They are the critical and self-critical texts of an artist – of an artist not bothered about style, or even spelling, or quality writing, but only with energy, with his determination to put himself down in writing. I think all my writings have been failures as far as comprehension via words is concerned (Hirschhorn quoted in Buchloh, Gingeras and Basualdo, p. 138).

In *Anschool* (2005), Hirschhorn transformed a wing of the Bonnefantenmuseum in Maastricht into a 'school', complete with classrooms, desks, chairs, maps, linoleum and many texts presented in different sizes. *Anschool* also brought together several of Hirschhorn's previous works, hence proposing a kind of retrospective, but the artist's typically riotous mixture of political texts and artistic forms presented an environment without modernist unity, a place where no single interpretation or straightforward transfer of information dominated. Indeed, the provocative installation looked more like a mockery of the transfer of knowledge and seriousness that are generally associated with educational environments. While the work seemed at face value to require the audience to make connections between theories and forms by presenting them side by side, it did not offer specific ideological or interpretative directions. Rather, its material excess, like much of the artist's output, juxtaposed images and texts in ways which appeared to show that they are all merely and equally *visual* phenomena or that the consumerist world alluded to in the diverse, tacky materials used by the artist

always works to dilute the force of politically radical ambitions. The artist explained nothing, just like the fake 'characters' in Xu Bing's *Book from the Sky* say 'nothing', yet Hirschhorn's installation was affirmative to the extent that each member of the audience was invited to make connections between word and image, cause and effect: "the spectator is acknowledged in her emancipated condition of being able to make links" (Dronsfield, 2010, p. 134). Yet, whenever these "links" happen within Hirschhorn's installations, they are entirely unregulated and unpredictable. Nothing is assumed in advance.

If a visitor's experience of Hirschhorn's *Anschool* can in any sense be considered a pedagogical experience, it certainly does not tally well with the preoccupation with learning outcomes, assessment and accountability that seems to characterise contemporary educational systems. If people involved in schools and universities are increasingly being pressured to rethink their roles in relation to the idea of education as an 'investment', Hirschhorn, in contrast, undermines the 'employability' of his 'school'. Appropriately, Claire Bishop has written about the "freedom of operation...unthinkable autonomy and an unencumbered passion for knowledge" in work like Hirschhorn's, opposing it to contemporary university classes where students are "perceived as consumers, experimental teaching has been phased out and teachers have become accountable providers of knowledge" (Bishop, 2011, p 199). Similarly, Sutee Kunavichayanont's work does not prescribe specific outcomes or chronologies; rather, persons making rubbings on his desks find their own way around their history and can take the rubbings back to the privacy of their home to reflect about these images outside institutionalised spaces. Xu Bing's writing classroom also presents an indeterminate, unfamiliar space in which the "laziness of habitual thinking is challenged, and the result is an opening-up of a wider, untapped cognitive space" (Xu Bing, quoted in Steinnes, 2012, pp. 50-51). Artists like Xu Bing help us to develop new perspectives on literacy in education, beyond the "reductionism that might limit the perspectives of literacy to questions of easily measurable skills" (Steinnes, 2012, p. 36).

The most visible feature that these artists' installations share with regular classrooms is naturally the physical arrangement of specific items of furniture in a given space, but each artist also destabilises traditional power structures in unique ways in order to propose imaginative alternatives to more oppressive teaching environments that belong to what Paulo Freire would call the "banking" model of education. By using the same physical environments that are commonly associated with educational practices, artists disrupt the system from within, a strategy that could be compared to what de Certeau (1984) called "consumption", i.e. the simultaneous assimilation and modification or subversion of established narratives, systems and other products by their many users in different contexts: "The child still scrawls and daubs on his schoolbooks; even if he is punished for his crime, he has made a space for himself and signs his existence as an author on it" (p. 31). Artists create educational

environments that conform to established spatial models, blending in with children's experiences of schooling and appealing to the nostalgia of childhood in each adult visitor. But this nostalgia is deceptive; the recognisable space is re-presented and re-used in ways that visitors will find unusual and hence will need to re-adapt themselves to. For de Certeau, a typical example of this adaptive behaviour is that of the immigrant, who will generally need to find ways of making use of a new language, new forms of housing, new social relations, and so on. This is how, for instance, Thai visitors in Kunavichayanont's *History Class* become 'immigrants' who 'consume', and hence may also *change*, their environment. Whether they transform their experience of their own history or merely reproduce dominant narratives depends on the use they make of this space opened up for them by the artist.

Contemporary Art and the Estrangement of Literacy in Art Education

> Blanchot used to write: *Noli me legere*, you shall not read me. Whatever does not permit itself to be written, in writing, calls perhaps for a reader who no longer knows or does not yet know how to read: old people, children in grade school, driveling, doting over their open books (Lyotard, quoted in Lydon, 2001, p. 25).

We have already seen that references to the architecture of the classroom in the artistic installations discussed earlier are not merely self-referential, i.e. they do not simply indicate the possibility of reform in the spatial dynamics of the classroom (even though a regular revision of classroom and school design could play a crucial role in wider educational reforms). Rather, they point towards different epistemological understandings of general educational processes, alternative ways of understanding when and how learning happens and different roles for student and teacher. In particular, the way theoretical texts, documentary images of historical events and alphabets are presented by these artists within their constructed pedagogical spaces have the potential to disrupt conventional linkages between art-making, literacy and the measurement of foundational skills. While the physical environments in the installations are easily recognisable as classrooms, specific artistic devices within them are unconventional, rendering the process of recognition 'difficult'. Xu Bing creates a new alphabet or thousands of unreadable characters, throwing other experienced calligraphers in his native country off-balance by showing them what Chinese must look like to the majority of Westerners. No amount of technical skill or prior knowledge of the 'trade' could prepare other calligraphic experts (or even regular visitors to his exhibitions) for this, because what the artist proposes destabilises the very possibility of literacy. This artistic manipulation of the ancient conventions of a well-regulated system like writing is reminiscent of Russian literary critic Viktor Shklovsky's notion of *ostranenie*, usually translated as 'estrangement' or 'defamiliarization', which refers to the heightening of readers' perceptions by making everyday objects appear 'strange' and hence 'artistic' in works of literature. According to Shklovsky (1990), our familiarity with objects or rituals around us

makes us dependent on our knowledge, rather than our actual perception, of these objects; art, in contrast, refers to objects or ideas in unconventional ways to interrupt the 'automatic' process of recognition and make us see these things afresh. Shklovsky finds this literary device everywhere in Tolstoy's work, for instance; Tolstoy "does not call a thing by its name, that is, he describes it as if it were perceived for the first time, while an incident is described as if it were happening for the first time" (p. 6). We could say, in line with Shklovsky's notion of *ostranenie*, that Kunavichayanont's carved desks in his installation are not intended to be recognised as mere desks or even as representations of specific events in Thai history; rather, the recontextualisation of specific images and texts on the desks works to open a gap between the public's knowledge of Thai history and the possibility of re-schooling themselves about their own history within the context of the artist's installation. They are required to look at their history "for the first time", even if they have actually experienced these images and events so often in their lives through the media or through officially sanctioned history books.

Naturally, the inability to read or to recognise something that we previously believed we were acquainted with (as happens in some of Xu Bing's work, for instance) hinders our progress by stalling the process of understanding, but herein lies the power of art. According to Shklovsky quoting Aristotle, poetic language "ought to have the character of something foreign, something outlandish about it" (p.12). Its foreignness captivates us, makes us dwell on the potential that is integral to such an "outlandish" experience. The fact that art interacts with a community is not synonymous with its domestication for communal or communicative ends. The liberal handling of Chinese characters in Xu Bing's work or the estrangement of theoretical texts in Hirschhorn's installations deprives the *logos* of its communicative appeal, transforming characters into incoherent, inky brushstrokes and Western philosophers' ideas into a headless — or "kopflos", to use Hirschhorn's own term (Dronsfield, 2010, p. 129) — redistribution of seemingly useless political mottos in a chaotic landscape. The communal experience of art does not eliminate the singularity of experience.

Linguistic certainty is held in abeyance, in a state that Lyotard might have called *enfance* or *infantia*, a speechlessness that transcends age and even the specificity of the medium of writing. If we turn to painting, we can trace a similar speechlessness in Lyotard's dialogue with Cézanne's series of paintings inspired by the Montagne Sainte-Victoire, an example that also illustrates how the foreignness and conceptual delay mentioned earlier are not only experienced by an audience faced by unfamiliar presentations but also by the artist who attempts to escape the order of knowledge by staring for hours at the unexpected colours emitted by a mountain. By ignoring the Western pictorial convention of perspective, Cézanne brings himself face to face with coloured brushstrokes that appear to liberate themselves from the need to represent anything. The small chromatic sensations engendered by Cézanne's work expose him and his public to the givenness of vision, that is, to the act of seeing before what is

seen is identified as a particular landscape in southern France. According to Lyotard, we see the mountain "in the process of giving itself to be seen" (Lyotard, 1971, p. 204). We could simply say that Cézanne writes the mountain before his eyes are able to read it, and he delivers it to us in this unfinished state, devoid of spatial connotations and oblivious to rules. The artist finds his true vocation in an illiteracy of sorts, in what he sees "for the first time" rather than in what he has been trained to see.

The real question for art educators, then, is: how does one keep alive this illiteracy or inability to read and thus avoid the banal legibility of what is sometimes called, pejoratively, 'school art'? Or, how can the classroom environment move away from a model of 'literacy' that roots itself in the 'reading' of naturalised conventions and measurement of quantifiable, foundational skills and accommodate instead the possibility of having each learner sign his or her "existence as an author", as de Certeau writes? Many students of art have listened time and again to a popular dictum in art classes, which states that you need to know the rules well before you can break them. But this is in fact a caricatural opposition; the alternative to teaching the rules of art is not necessarily a position that antagonises these rules but a curriculum that gives students the possibility of translating experiences into a polyphony of images in a medium of their choice without resorting to didactic solutions. A pedagogy that limits its remit to predetermined learning outcomes corresponds to what Rancière (1991) has called a process of stultification, which places learners in an inferior position that relies entirely on a master's explicative teaching methods. Yet, as Rancière has shown, stultifying methodologies ultimately limit the 'schoolmaster' just as much as they limit the learner (p. 39) because they divide the pedagogical experience into two distinct parts that are mutually exclusive – one part that is representative of a specialised body of knowledge and another that groups together all those who are considered unknowledgeable. Unfortunately, very often more critical or subversive responses by such 'unknowledgeable' learners simply do not materialise because they remain subdued by disciplinary and other boundaries that are established at various levels of the educational system. In such a scenario, art education typically remains stuck in a formal domain that merely asks 'how' things are made, 'how' tools are used, and so on, rather than a more open pedagogy that revolves around 'what' learners would like to say about their experience of the world. This is how Uruguayan conceptual artist Luis Camnitzer – who, like others mentioned here, also writes from the dual platform of artist and educator – describes the problematic, and inherently political, ties between art and literacy in education:

> When the reason to read and write is primarily to receive and give orders, it is understandable that the need for learning should not be identified by the person to be alphabetized, but by the same power structure that produces those needs. Knowledge becomes predetermined and closed when both definition and identification are performed

within this restricted functional field, while a more open field would stimulate questioning and creation. In essence, one cannot educate properly without revealing the power structure within which education takes place (Luis Camnitzer 2009).

Just as reading comes before writing in most educational systems, for Camnitzer the ability to replicate specific techniques and to 'read' the codes of art often comes before the more radical ability to 'write' one's own codes in art education. Learners are taught "how to wrap the gift before knowing what it is, why I have to give it, and to whom I am to give it" (Camnitzer, quoted in Herzog, 2010, p. 33). The emphasis is on answers rather than questions. Instead, the arts in education must maintain a dynamic relationship with literacy, one that does not merely present the arts as a separate body of knowledge and skills but helps to develop 'whole' learners by "slowly drawing them into the world of becoming an 'artist'" (Barton, 2013, p. 17). The autonomy and creative energy evidenced in the installations by Xu Bing, Kunavichayanont and Hirschhorn described earlier bear witness to a questioning spirit that learning in the arts should always embody.

Conclusion

We need to explore a concept of art education that delves deeper into the role of artists in a democratic society and exposes learners to how artists think, how they mould their visions of the world and social change, and how they reconceptualise education itself through their insights: its spatial dynamics, its power structures, its instrumentalisation of learning and tendency to normalise bodies of knowledge as well as its more critical engagements with open-ended dialogue and indeterminate processes, its stultifying as well as its more liberatory moments. As Page et al. (2006) have argued, contemporary artistic practices can be used by teachers to challenge more orthodox forms of 'school art' as well as our understandings of teacher and learner. Learning itself, perhaps, can be imagined as an 'interactive', artistic process, comparable to the interactions of individual members of the audience in Kunavichayanont's *History Class*, who are required to 'write' their versions of history. We should not expect 'interactive' learning to run any smoother than whatever we have at present, because we can only imagine new classrooms via a process of *ostranenie* or estrangement; perhaps the ideal classroom for art is an "outlandish" place. By interrogating deep-rooted ideas and economist justifications of knowledge and learning, as contemporary artists tend to do, this "outlandish" education confronts the tautology of the known and the measurable, becoming a political process that responds to learners' needs in ways that really impact their lives.

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