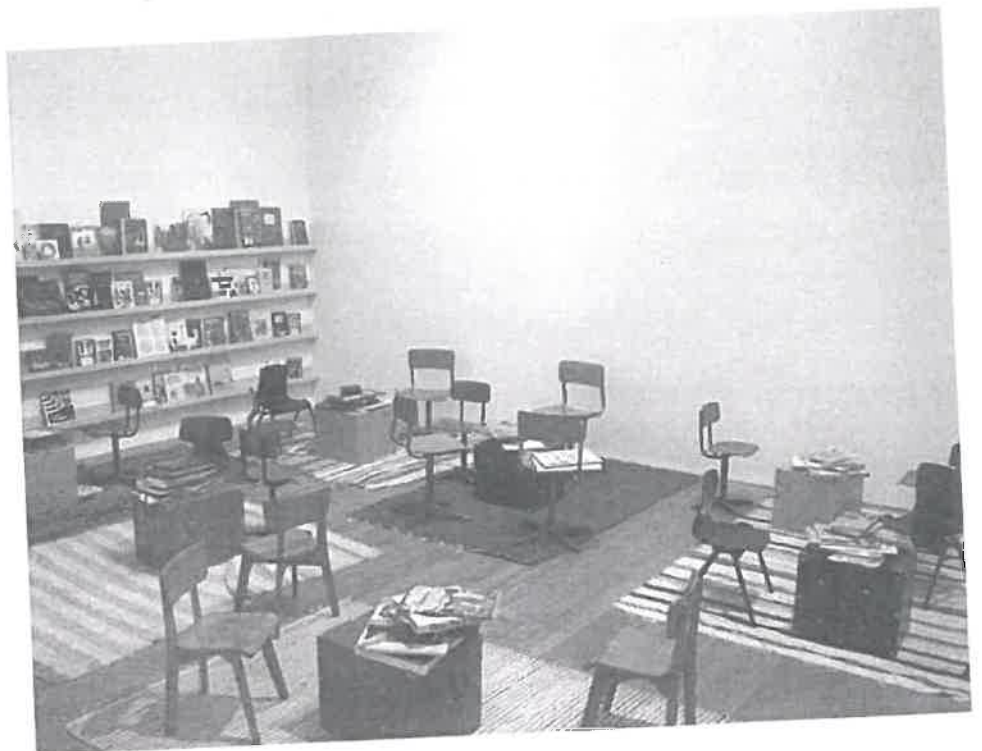


Other Indications, Exhibition Catalogue
Micosia Municipal AAs Centre (2013)





Meschac Gaba
Museum of Contemporary African Art
Tate Modern
Summer 2013
Photos: Evanthia Tselika

Did anyone say education?

The entry of Pedagogical Formats into the Gallery Space

Evanthia Tselika

Increasingly contemporary art practitioners use pedagogical art structures, educational methods and contexts in their practice, and present this in the gallery space. The educational turn of the arts that has been observed in the last decade is often associated with a wider social turn of contemporary art practices:¹ Social art practitioner and writer Dave Beech points out that in order to "understand the turn to pedagogy" it is better to "locate it within this discursive field of relational, antagonistic and dialogical practice" and to comprehend it through broader changes that can be defined as "a new social ontology of art"². The social concern describes an amalgamation of art methods and it is being described with different terms that relate to dialogical, pedagogical, socio-political and cooperative manifestations. Its trajectory can be related to community building and political organizing as that emerged in the 1960s, developed in the 1970s, expanded through cultural policy in the 1980s, systematized within cultural institutions in the 1990s,³ and can be found submerged in the museum and gallery space by 2013. The pedagogical paradigm of the social art shifts is demonstrated not only in the educational methods that are used by artists to create situations of social exchange but also through the authors that have influenced the theorization process of socially engaged practices. The work of Paulo Freire, of American educator and philosopher John Dewey, of philosopher Ivan Illich and of Jacques Rancière with his book *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation*, is cited and utilized by practitioners and theorists in the theorization process of contemporary social art practices.

The assistance of socially engaged practices by museum education departments creates an interesting parallel and is indicated by Tom Finkelpearl, presently the director of Queens Museum in New York.⁴ According to Finkelpearl, museum education departments were more socially experimental compared to their curatorial counterparts. This falls in line with the increasing debates that are being observed in recent years in relation to the educational turn and the pedagogical models that have been prevalent within contemporary art and cultural practices. Educational programmes, conferences, presentations, lectures, libraries, reading rooms, publications, roundtables, workshops and discussions now play a key role in the context of individual or collective art work and of contemporary art exhibitions. Whilst in the past educational functions mostly operated in support of exhibitions or art projects, they have been increasingly presented as the main focus and central theme of contemporary art practice and curatorial methodology. They have entered the gallery and museum space and provided an environment where audiences are invited into the gallery space to spend more time within the set up of the exhibition. Meschac Gaba's work *Museum of Contemporary African Art* at the Tate Modern, London, summer of 2013 (images below) included a library and reading room, game areas, collections, the story of his marriage and sale stands.

A growth in museum/gallery/biennial education and public art programmes is also observed. They include classes, workshops, seminars, dialogues, talks, film screenings, interaction with the local community, research networks and courses with universities, symposia, and interdisciplinary conferences. The pedagogical shift of the arts in Europe has been linked to the Bologna Declaration and the rise of academic capitalism, which caused heated debates within the context of art education by Irit Rogoff.⁵ Rogoff, who has been influential in developing an understanding of pedagogical aesthetics, is often cited within the context of the educational turn that contemporary arts depict. In her criticism of recent pedagogic turns she also points out that what she would not wish to give up is "the notion of conversation, which to [her] mind, has been the most significant shift within the art world in the past decade".⁶

The dialogical forms a key facet of the pedagogical, as that has been explored by critical pedagogist Paulo Freire who questioned the model of education where by teachers transfer information to students, and proposed the model of the teacher as a co-producer of knowledge. His theory and practice, which became internationally known with his 1968 book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* aimed for the development of critical consciousness through educative systems that blur the position of teacher and student, with an emphasis on the importance of dialogue in the context of emancipatory pedagogical practices. Freirean thought has influenced an array of academic disciplines from political science, to educational theory, to theatre and the visual arts, amongst others. Freire's interpretation of "dialogical practice" and of moving beyond "the simplistic understanding of dialogue as a mere technique"⁷ remind us of the importance of considering what types of dialogue we set up and why we are doing it. For Freire "dialogue characterizes an epistemological relationship"⁸ and it cannot be viewed as a mere tactic of student involvement. The notion of the dialogical adds another layer through which we can view the overlaps between the educational and social paradigms of contemporary art patterns.*

A few points/art projects of reference:

Joseph Beuys is a well-known point of reference for contemporary artists who work with experimental pedagogy and social practices. Beuys set up the Free International University in 1973 and in 1977 participated in Documenta 6 with the installation *Honey Pump in the Workplace* in which students of the Free International University workshops played a key role. Interdisciplinary workshops were held which were open to the public and "they featured trade unionists, lawyers, economists, politicians, journalists, community workers, educationalists and sociologists speaking alongside actors, musicians and young artists".⁹

The 1990s were particularly important for the educational shift. An example is Mark Dion's *Chicago Urban Ecology Action Group*, part of the influential project *Culture in Action: Public Art Program of Sculpture Chicago*, curated by Mary Jane Jacobs in 1993. Dion worked with a group of fifteen high-school students drawn from two schools (one private and one public) from Chicago, focusing on ecology and the interdependency of local ecosystems in Chicago's Lincoln Park.¹⁰

Tania Bruguerra's *Behaviour Art School/Cátedra Arte de Conducta* carried out from 2002 until 2009 in Havana, Cuba, probably lasted the longest in the context of experimental educational art projects in the 2000s. The focus of the school as the artist describes on her website was "on the Configuration of an Institution, Education Formats, Public Gathering, Study of the Relationship Between the Performative Arts and Politics and its implementation in Society".¹¹ It worked on two parallel dimensions. It had a yearly programme for Fine Art students of the *Instituto Superior de Arte* in Havana with which it was associated, and had open workshops that lasted for a week, which were run by local and international experts from multiple disciplines.

Another example that is often examined within the educational art turn is the project *A.C.A.D.E.M.Y.* (2006), which was part of a series of exhibitions, one of which took place at the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven, Netherlands, as a collaboration between twenty-two participants and the staff of the museum. "The project as a whole posed the question: 'What can we learn from the museum?' and referred to learning that operates beyond what the museum sets out to show or teach us".¹² Professor Irit Rogoff, who was actively involved in the project, claims that *A.C.A.D.E.M.Y.* aimed to develop a counter point to the professionalisation, technocratisation and privatisation of academies that are the consequences of the Bologna Accord and to the monitoring and outcome-based culture which characterises higher education in Europe today.¹³

Theaster Gates' 'Soul Manufacturing Corporation' manifestations have been taking place since 2011. He creates studios for making pottery, training apprentices and investigating skills, teaching and craft, within the gallery space. In the summer of 2013, he set up workshop in the Whitechapel Gallery as part of the exhibition *Spirit of Utopia*.