

On the Correspondences between Education, Mediation and the Curatorial

Tags:

education

mediation

curatorial

situated knowledge

Since the 1990s the relation between contemporary dance and performance and the curatorial has fundamentally changed: Experiments, labs, exhibitions, workshops, durational, immersive and participatory formats, lecture performances, practice or research-based projects, collective platforms of exchange – this variety of newly emerging working and presentation formats within contemporary dance are challenging the relation between production and reception. Starting from these expanded possibilities, we ask for the practices, procedures, and protocols, which are underlying curatorial concepts, we look at the curatorial as a tool of mediation, translation etc., as an intervening practice between the production process and the public sphere, between practice /as praxis and poiesis. How are education, mediation and dramaturgy linked to each other, and how could we bring forth new ideas and approaches to each practice if we discuss them together?

Education About 15 years ago Jacques Rancière's essays on *The Ignorant Master* and *The Emancipated Spectator* had given a strong impulse within performance art theory.¹ Rancière's position declares pedagogy as a means to cancel the distance between the positions of knowing and not-knowing, between the teacher and the students, to understand the state of not-knowing not as an inferior form of knowledge but rather as its opposite, as a position of emancipation.

These discourses have shaped the discussion around the issue of education as well as on mediation ever since, while at the same time increasing interest for pedagogies and alternative art schools. Most of these schools were dedicated to the ideas of aesthetic experience as formulated by John and Evelyn Dewey in their article "Schools of tomorrow", written in 1915, where they describe art schools as laboratories of tomorrow's societies.² But how could schools – between artistic research and activism reach-out into social and political contexts or neighbor-hoods – fulfill the need for a protective space for experiment and exchange and at the same time avoid the ivory tower? If the arts market still

¹ Ulrike Melzig, Marten Spangberg, Nina Thielicke (eds., 2014): *Reverse Engineering Education in Dance, Choreography and the Performing Arts follow-up Reader for MODE05*.

² John and Evelyn Dewey (2008): *Schools of Tomorrow* (1915). To call to mind few of them as for example the Bauhaus 1919 (vgl. Marion van Osten et.al. Bauhaus imaginista (exposition and catalogue) HKW, Berlin), the Kala Bharam founded by Rabindranath Tagore in 1919, or the Russian VkhUTEMA by Malevich 1919, Black Mountain College 1933-57, Cal Arts with its Feminist Art Program in the 1960s, the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf in the years with Joseph Beuys, or more currently ruangrupa's Gudskul project in Indonesia. Also see the catalogue to the exhibition *Bildungsschock // Learning Shock: Politics and Architecture in the 1960s and 1970s*, curated by Tom Holert at HKW Berlin.

believes in the idea of an elite, education remains an accessory within a system, selecting the 'best', instead of bettering individuals – a meritocracy, which finally has no social impact – and the contrary to the democratization of art which for example Joseph Beuys envisioned, when he claimed art education for everyone.

Artist, art critic & curator Luis Camnitzer proposes two questions: What school would you like to accept you as a student? And how would you like the school to be in order to accept you?

From this personal approach, we could add further questions: What knowledge is needed in order to shape the future? How do we learn today? How do schools become laboratories of democracy? What role do the arts play in developing new forms of acting and thinking? What new partnerships are needed to strengthen schools as social places? And how to organize a collective form of learning?

Mediation It was not accidental that the issue of mediation spread at the same time. With Carmen Mörsch's educational program for the documenta 12, by which she claimed the need for different approaches in mediation, she differentiates between affirmation, reproduction contra deconstruction and a transformative approach. Programs for outreach have been growing since then, closely connected to the issues of accessibility, diversity, and the intersectional needs of communication.

Art historian Helmut Draxler also tackles the issue of mediation, not only in the art sphere, but he diagnoses the hype of mediation as a symptom of contemporary societies; mediation here stands for quite diverse reformistic, pedagogical, therapeutic, mentoring, coaching and curatorial practices, a phenomenon, which we also see at work within art schools and universities, where we are in a constant need of reforming, changing, optimizing – without ever arriving at the end.³ It serves a perfect and ongoing communication, which today stands for an uninterrupted flux of economics. But what should mediation replace or maybe also obscure? Does it replace political demands? Draxler sees these forms of communication as constitutively failing practices, mentioning the imaginary, or sometimes even the phantasmatic charging of political claims and the certainties of solutions of a naive voluntarism, which are not far from an individualistic request for expression. In his eyes, the claim for constant reformation and mediation aims at overcoming or compensating a desired position of immediacy, which in Modernism still meant the embodiment of 'authentic' lifestyles. From this first position the second diagnosis follows: The need for mediation assumes a state of permanent deficiency, be it in the realm of immediacy or of overcoming difference/s. But actually, mediation should take seriously these differences. As a "third position" mediation works in the interstices and as unfinished process it produces social spaces of encounter. Its interventionist character, its feedbacking structures etc. could be analyzed in this context.

³ Helmut Draxler (2016): *Abdrift des Wollens. Eine Theorie der Vermittlung*, Wien.

The Curatorial The curatorial seems to be a practice redefining itself every time anew. Beatrice von Bismarck interrogates the various “Relations in Motion”, between curatorial and art practices and immaterial, respectively affective labor. She draws back on developments in the 1960s,

“when artists like Marcel Broodthaers, Michael Asher, Daniel Buren, Bruce Nauman, Dan Graham or Robert Morris extended their activities to selecting, assembling, arranging, contextualizing, presenting and communicating their own bodies as well as their artworks, public goods and spaces. The conceptual activities replaced the production of objects, management, organization, counselling, publication and teaching connecting social and self-technologies, acquiring a specific social relevance in their overlapping with the post-Fordist conceptions of work, which Maurizio Lazzarato has gathered under the term immaterial labor.”⁴

The immaterial or affective labor is at the core of dramaturgical practices, as Bojana Kunst has described it in “The economy of proximity”,⁵ it participates in a neo-liberal system of self-exploitation and exhaustion. The social function of the curatorial as care-taking could thus easily become a trap, which has to be dealt with in a critical perspective.

Without getting closer to specific curatorial practices at this point I just want to refer to one possible perspective: The attempt to produce a new consciousness seems equally present in education, mediation and dramaturgy. This consciousness is always incomplete but also driven by incompleteness itself, by the distance established. This means an inexhaustible work of criticism in action. In their thoughts on post-hoc dramaturgy, Sergej Pristas and Tom Medak refer to Weber’s idea of Nach-Denken – of afterthought. The temporal extension of this process allows for a relief and an extension of perspectives. Let me propose three concepts:

1st Referring to a short essay by **Irit Rogoff – “Academy as potentiality”**,⁶ in which (with reference to Agamben) she points out that this potentiality lies especially in not-doing, not-making, in not-bringing-into-being, to avoid instrumentalizing and as such to undermine the existing institutional strategies of usefulness.

2nd **Fred Moten and Stefano Harney** insist that the only option to profit from the educational system lies in **“Stealing from the University”**.⁷ In the face of the neoliberal administration of the university the undercommons escape to the underground. “The general wealth of social life finds itself confronted by mutations in the mechanisms of control: the proliferation of capitalist logistics,

⁴ Beatrice von Bismarck (2010): *Relations in Motion. The Curatorial Condition in Visual Art and its Possibilities for the Neighboring Disciplines*, in: Curating Performing Arts, Frakcija Performing Arts Journal, no. 55, 50–57.

⁵ Bojana Kunst (2015): *The economy of proximity. Dramaturgical work in contemporary dance*, in: *Performance Research* (14), 2009, 81–88.

⁶ Irit Rogoff (2006): *Academy as Potentiality*, in: A.C.A.D.E.M.Y., ed. by Angelika Nollen et al, Frankfurt a.M. revolver 14-15; see also Sarah Ahmed (2019): *What’s the use? On the Uses of Use*, Duke U.P. 2019.

⁷ Fred Moten, Stefano Harney (2013): *The University and the Undercommons, Seven Theses*. In: *Journal for performing arts theory* (23), 9–16, Online: <http://www.tkh-generator.net/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/EN-tkh-23-single-WEB.pdf>, (04.08.2021)

governance by credit and the management of pedagogy.” Therefore, the thought of an exterior becomes impossible. The critical academic as acknowledged position stands in opposition to the “Maroons”, the slaves who abandoned their chains, or those who refuse professionalization. The inner antagonism lies in the division between professional and critical education. Stealing from the university would thus mean not to reproduce ideologies and get specialized in transgressing theory’s own professions. This includes a decolonizing perspective, and it questions the given canon as well as it stirs the system of (re)production of knowledge.

3rd Ecologies of Practice, Technologies of Belonging⁸ & Situated Knowledges⁹

With Isabelle Stengers and Donna Haraway we could propose a speculation against the probable, which imposes a duty or constraint, which engages thought. If the touchstone of speculation is not the probable but the possible, an obligation goes hand in hand with this concept. Entanglement of problem and solution, things and words, the actual and the virtual – keeps us referring to a reality in flux and a future that cannot be anticipated. It requires a concrete involvement in a now. A Partial perspective as an examination of the conditions in which knowledge is formed. This concerns epistemological assumptions, institutional and economic interests, media & technologies as well as representation of knowledge. And it demands for a slow science of interpretation, which would be sensitive about already existing and reproduced power relations, about our own blind spots and the ignorance of historic exclusions and incompatibilities.

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curating
in
context



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⁸ Isabelle Stengers (2005): *Introductory Notes on an Ecology of Practices*. In: Cultural Studies Review 11 (1). 183-196.

⁹ Donna Haraway (1988): *Situated Knowledge. The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective*. In: Feminist Studies 14 (3), 575-599.