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## A Questioned Practice: Twenty Reflections on Art, Doubt, and Error

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That instant when Agnes suddenly, without preparation, lifted her arm in a flowing, easy motion was miraculous. How was it possible that in a single fraction of a second, and for the very first time, she discovered a motion of the arm and body so perfect and polished that it resembled a finished work of art?

— Milan Kundera, *Immortality* (1992, pp. 39-40)

**1. IT SEEMS COMMONPLACE** to state that when it comes to art one can say and write almost everything, except that this is immediately rejected by a counter-argument that clearly states the opposite: art is *not* everything. Both statement and objection appear valid as they seek legitimacy by pointing at art.

To argue that art embraces everything would suggest that art is a way of life, or it is life itself. This might suggest that art is everything and nothing, and that there is nothing to say:

I am here , And there is nothing to say .  
 those who get somewhere , If among you are  
 any moment . let them leave at  
 Silence ; but what silence requires What we re-quire is  
 Is that I go on talking .

(Cage 1999, p. 109)

**2. THIS PROMPTS TWO QUESTIONS:** Is art a *form* of life—as Richard Wollheim suggests in *Art and its Objects?* (1980, §45-48; pp. 105ff) As a form of life, is art definite or indefinite? To speak of art as a form of life is to suggest that art is bound by specific meanings. On the other hand one could, as Benedetto Croce (1994) suggests, define art by what art is not. However this would not diminish the number of boundaries that define art. Bearing Croce’s contextual argument in mind, this approach would not help us, as it opens art to further tautologies.

Unless we are clear where Wollheim’s argument is coming from (i.e. Wittgenstein’s concept of language games as forms of life) there is a risk of misrepresenting the idea of art as a form of life.

The phrase [form of life] appears as descriptive or invocatory of the total context within which alone language can exist: the complex of habits, experiences, skills, with which language interlocks in that it could not be operated without them and, equally, they cannot be identified without reference to it. In particular Wittgenstein set himself against two false views of language. According the first view language consists essentially in names: names are connected unambiguously with objects, which they denote: and it is in virtue of this denoting relation that the words that we utter, whether to ourselves or out loud, are about things, that our speech and thought are ‘*of the world*. According to the second view, language in itself is a set of inert marks: in order to acquire a reference to things, what is needed are certain characteristic experiences on the part of the potential language-users, notably the experiences of meaning, and (to a lesser degree) of understanding: it is in virtue of these experiences that what we utter, aloud and to ourselves, is *about the world*. (Wollheim 1980, p. 104-5, my emphases)

Wollheim adds that there are considerable differences between the two views. But then he also explains that, “the two views also have something in common” in that they both “presuppose that these experiences exist, and can be identified quite separately from language”,

adding that, “the characterization of language (alternatively, of this or that sublanguage) as a ‘form of life’ is intended to dispute the separation on either level.”

Thereby Wollheim’s moral of the story: “The characterization of art too as a form of life has certain parallel implications” (1980, p. 105); and he goes on to show how (ibid. pp. 105ff).

**3. BETWEEN THE INTERSTICES OF BEING ‘OF’ THE WORLD AND BEING ABOUT THE WORLD** one finds how Wittgenstein, like many others before and after him, begins his travels over the horizons of language. Where does this leave art? Wollheim suggests several implications.

I would do no justice to Wollheim’s work if I were to presume to describe what he says. It would be far better to read his *Art and Its Objects*. However there is one critical remark that cannot go unquoted. Wollheim argues that one of the implications that emerges from stating that art is a form of life would be that: “we do wrong to postulate, of each work of art, a particular aesthetic intention or impulse which both accounts for that work and can be identified independently of it. For though there could be such a thing, *there need not be.*” (Wollheim 1980, p. 110 my emphasis) This leads to the question of possibility. Anyone reading Wollheim would have to ask how we could decide whether possible questions on art are necessary, or otherwise whether these questions remain contingent on what we are doing or talking about when we “make” art.

**4. THIS CALLS FOR THE POWER OF JUDGMENT**, which is not unlike what is discussed in Immanuel Kant’s third critique. (Kant 1974) In other words this implies that we judge the necessity of possible questions against their contingent nature. If we go with Kant’s notion of judgment we must assume that human reason can (and indeed must) mediate between particularity and universality, between contingency and necessity. So to mediate a question is to presume something like an answer that would enjoy a degree of universality. This is a problem for art. No one is sure whether it is necessary to find an answer for art’s questions. It is less clear whether any answer could or should aspire to a degree of universality, although many artists and many more educators may well argue that without a degree of universality, art risks losing legitimacy.

Be that as it may, to identify or try to define art’s questions (let alone art’s answers) is never clear. The problem lies with agency: Who poses the question? The artist or the audience? The educator or the learner? The individual, society or the *polis*? Another question has to do with the object of art, and subsequently the objects of its questions. What are we questioning? Like the dilemma over art being anything and everything, the question itself remains unclear.

**5. WE NOW RECALL KUNDERA’S BEAUTIFUL QUESTION** that opens this essay. “How was it possible that in a single fraction of a second, and for the very first time, she discovered a motion of the arm and body so perfect and polished that it resembled a finished work of art?”

What does it mean to say “*resembling* a finished work of art”? Should a beautiful gesture resemble a work of art? Does resembling a work of art also mean that this act or object is *almost* a work of art? Whose motion of the arm and body would qualify as a work of art?

**6. IN CASE IT IS NOT YET CLEAR**, this is a discussion of a number of unmediated narratives that tend to aggregate and span across the plural horizon of arts practice. In terms of the arts *as well as* education, these questions are approached within several scenarios that are set against ever-changing backdrops and which occur within contexts that keep shifting and altering their boundaries. The questions that we pose are accordingly captured within a spread of statements that are variously intended and openly formed. These questions share one objective: to identify or suggest, support or contest, numerous paradigms and methods that somehow link what *is*, what is *done* and what we come to *know* of art’s diverse practices.

The flip side of this discussion reveals and belongs to the remits of education. This engages us with a discussion of education that would seek to distance itself from academia’s established approach. And yet, this discussion also claims a rightful place in academia. It is within this apparent contradiction that this essay takes the opportunity to discuss arts research as a *practice-based* method.

A practice-based approach is open enough to adopt different points of departure. In this essay, this is more likely to locate itself within the interstices that one could take from Wollheim’s discussion of art as a form of life. More specifically, I see art practice as inhabiting the spaces found between the act or state of “being *of* the world” and “being *about* the world”.

Similar approaches are not uncommon in arts discourse, but not so in education—especially, I dare add, within the general tenor of arts educational research, where the question of legitimation often limits art’s argument to the parameters of the social sciences. Because the latter continues to prompt my objection to mainstream arts education, I consider any form of research that is embedded in arts practice as a strong and credible form of *rebuttal* or *resistance*. This also means that arts practice as a *method* of research must problematize its own practice lest it becomes normalized and endorsed by the legitimized ark that it is meant to resist and reject in the first place.

**7. IN EDUCATION, ANY INTERSTITIAL DISCOURSE IS ULTIMATELY REJECTED.** Education is mostly studied within a predominantly developmental and social scientific context. For decades this “new” approach to education has become the established norm. It is widespread amongst educational researchers who, for reasons that appear more valid than not, presume to understand learning through a methodological combination of pertinent facts, applicable methods, and effective practices. The reason for this is clearly explained in Karl Mannheim’s essay *On the Nature of Economic Ambition and its Significance for the Social Education of Man* (1936 [2000]) where he clearly lays out the reason for the need of what was then a radical change in educational practices and objectives:

[O]ur emphasis upon the social factors in education does not mean that we want to minimize or suppress the factors upon which the older type of education was based, such as interpersonal contacts, skills, or traditional cultural values. We rather want to supplement these older factors, to make them more concrete and to add to them the missing third dimension—the social dimension. (Mannheim 1936 [2000], p. 233)

Mannheim argues that central to a sociological theory of education are “the investigation of social factors [and] the significance of the social environment for education” (1936 [2000], p. 233). He cites two reasons for this. The first is that “it is necessary to know as exactly as possible the kind of world in which the new generation is expected to live”, where he articulates social, industrial (technological) and economic change and the readiness of future generations for it. The second reason is perhaps more significant to our discussion. As he puts it, this “already borders on politics.” (ibid.) This has to do with knowledge and making the world manageable and prepared. It relates to social reform and the discussion of “an ‘industrial pedagogy’ as an instrument of social reform.” (ibid.) Mannheim states that “it can be expected that in an era of social transformation such as that in which we find ourselves, men will try turn their attention more and more consciously to the investigation of those influences at work in the everyday life of society which favours the development of a new human type” (1936 [2000], 233-234). In a nutshell:

The task of education, therefore, is not merely to develop people adjusted to the present situation, but also people who will be in a position to act as agents of social development to a further stage. (Mannheim 1936 [2000], p. 234)

Though written in the 1930s, Mannheim’s essays on the sociology of knowledge remain compellingly current. Even when Mannheim’s essays thankfully miss out on current managerial and policy-ridden jargon, his social scientific approach to education retains a strong presence in the collective unconscious of Educational studies. Fully subscribed to the sociology of knowledge, the Educationalist establishment remains true to Mannheim’s call. In

terms of the arts, the educationalist argument continues to seek and draw a direct link between the arts, society and the learner's journey—the contexts of which would range between the school, the museum, the playground, the studio, the home, or indeed everyday life.

So where is the problem? *Prima facie* there doesn't seem to be one, until it becomes clear that in its *givenness*, any method of educational legitimacy that frames the arts within the sociology of knowledge is tightly mortgaged to forms of legitimation that are as foundational as those which Mannheim sets out to rebut. (See Mannheim 1936 [2000] pp. 230-231) As art educators would confirm, to argue for art's place in education is often tied to an expectation where even an arts-based method has to gain its legitimacy within a social scientific framework. (See Gray & Malins 2004; Bresler 2007; Cahnmann-Taylor & Siegesmund 2008; Knowles & Cole 2008; and Hickman 2008) To ignore this expectation is to remain outside. It is to become someone acting rather suspiciously by adopting a *modus operandi* that remains unaccountable and which is not interested in gaining legitimacy and less so inclined to subscribe to the positivist grounds of social scientific research. Yet unless one moves outside the boundaries of such expectations, there is a risk of turning art's inherent criticality into an instrumental form of learning and doing.

Arts researchers who seek to legitimize the arts from a social scientific approach—even when they propose fairly unorthodox and 'open' methods—seem to take instrumentalism for granted, or even as a *given*. In fact some would argue that it is important that the arts are regarded as instruments of research because that would gain the arts enough legitimacy to be able to push the boundaries. In principle one would agree on such a strategy. However my objection is that no matter how inventive, open, or critical an arts method may be, to court or claim legitimation is to frame one's act within a *givenness* that is inherently teleological.

**8. A MEANINGFUL VARIANT** of such a social scientific approach to arts-research is found in what is called *a/r/tography*, which Irwin and Springgay claim to be a "living inquiry", by which they also mean an opening to descriptions and interpretations that gather a "complexity of experience among researchers, artists and educators, as well as the lives of the individuals within the communities they interact with." (Springgay & Irwin 2008, p. xxv) The artographic imagination does not simply regard arts practice as a method, but as a way of representing the wider remits of life and living. Although one could rightly object and argue that even when one articulates a wider remit, this still represents a method, one also needs to investigate whether the 'method' of artography is being explicitly anomalous when its approach to being *of* and *about* the world remains open.

It is worth noting that prior to *a/r/tography*'s entry in the lexicon of arts education, the notion of art as a living practice was already commonplace, especially when the arts and the

quotidian found a common ground in Modernism and more so in Late Modernism. Good examples are the works of John Cage, Joseph Beuys, Louise Bourgeois, Chris Marker, Fernando Pessoa ... my friend's cooking, my neighbor's delicate lawn mowing, Agnes's graceful presence in Kundera's story ... and the sheer act of living. Contemporary arts practice, especially participatory art, have taken this approach to its own logical conclusions. This reiterates what Beuys and others have said about art and everydayness.

So one could say that a/r/tographers have done due diligence and taken this approach a step further in terms of assuming what, just under eighty years ago, John Dewey (2005[1934]) argued in his *Art as Experience*: "the esthetic is no intruder in experience from without, whether by way of idle luxury or transcendent reality, but that it is the clarified and intensified development of traits that belong to every normally complete experience." (p. 48) Yet as we re-read Dewey after, or in the light of the artographer's notion of a "living inquiry", one begins to wonder whether the equivalence between *living, feeling* and *doing* becomes problematic in terms of how the re-positioning of the arts as an inquiry found in everyday life would translate in the *rebuttal* and *resistance* that one finds in art per se. As argued above (§1), this opens several questions.

One would assume that a/r/tography resists the privileging of one medium or approach over another—whether written, expressed, marked or otherwise. Presumably this would also apply to those practices where the tools of research are evidently carried through a particular or no medium at all. It may seem easy to leave such an argument open to the notion of an anomalous method—or indeed a *non-method* that is open to shortcuts in order to resist definition. Yet such a shortcut poses unwarranted limits on the scope of a practice like a/r/tography where it risks evoking an elusive sense of *everything*.

Describing one of their projects, Irwin et al explain that "a/r/tographical inquiry [is] a methodology of situations" which comes about by "shar[ing] the journey of a collaborative project undertaken by a group of artist, educator, researchers working with a number of families in a nearby city." (Irwin et al 2008, p. 205) The pattern that this kind of research takes may be described through Hasebe-Lundt et al's discussion of another project, which they characterize as a form of *métissage* or "artful braiding" that in their words, "offers a rapprochement between alternative and mainstream curriculum discourses and seeks a genuine exchange among the writers, and between the writers and their various authors." (2008, p. 58)

**9. TO "WRITE" ART** calls for a degree of specificity in that such an action claims to identify the mutual relationship between *ars* and *graphie*, art and writing. To move between art and writing (broadly understood) implies that art and writing unfold *together* (Springgay &

Irwin 2008, p. xxvi) and (one would assume) *within each other*. This approach is couched in a variety of traditions that hail from philosophy, literature, theory and the arts. This genealogy leads to a range of much more recent approaches, starting with the quasi-canonical Derridean tropes of *difference/deferral* and *slippage* to that of *relationality*, as it has become more commonly expressed in participatory arts practice and more notably in the work of Nicholas Borriaud.

As a/r/tographers have continuously argued, in its *métissage* of manners, media, lexica, acts and methods, their approach to arts research and practice is not seeking to claim something new. Neither does it come from nowhere. Rather, a/r/tographers are keen to explain that their interest is to take arts methods into arts practice's interstitial spaces where art making reclaims its *contiguous* potential. (Irwin&Springgay 2008, p. xxviii)

This is quite reassuring. Rather than regard specificity and hybridity as mutually exclusive, a/r/tographers seem to be saying that arts practice is an inherent form of mutual inclusion. This mutualism is negotiated across divergent forms of activity. Although such activities could be methodologically incompatible, an artographic approach would effectively bear out these activities' contiguous possibilities. Without wanting to distort this approach to contiguity, I would see the artographer as engaging in a degree of curatorial practice where a space is opened and commonly shared by artists, educators and participants, and where separate and distinct roles whose performative distinctions have conventionally defined specific art forms, now stand to become irrelevant.

Yet while I feel reassured by a/r/tographers and other arts researchers who travel on similar routes, there seems to remain a lingering question over the whole issue of method per se, and more so with regards to the response to the methodological imperatives that the arts research community continues to articulate from the vantage point of practice as this claims its place within the legitimate pantheon of methodology. (See, for example, Sullivan 2009; MacLeod & Holdridge 2006; and Barone & Eisner 2011)

The question keeps returning, where, as it were, the tongue always goes to the same sore tooth: Could a definition of arts research, avoid social scientific demands, and instead emerge as distinct from what amounts to "a sociology of knowledge that has been merely brought up from outside"? (Adorno 1990, p. 197)

**10. THE POTENTIAL RUB** comes with the implications by which this promised contiguity remains open. Though almost every artist and educator is likely to buy into the contiguous promise that a/r/tography holds, shouldn't arts research as a method own up to the risks that it carries? This question should not be limited to one variant of arts research (such as

a/r/tography and other similar approaches), but all of them put together.

It could also be argued that to call an artist a researcher adds nothing to his or her arts practice. It's like calling a man or a woman a living human being who recognizes the contingent nature of life's interstitial faults. Apart from being a process that educates us into accepting life's contingencies, this would ultimately add nothing to the stated description. A contiguous understanding of the world leaves us in the same quandary by which a positivist legitimation of arts practice remains prone to become an instrument of the *status quo*.

Taking a less skeptical approach, one could argue that in view of the quandary produced by arts practice, arts research confirms the necessity of risk. More importantly, this also confirms that arts research does not afford any comfort because—albeit acknowledged—the risk remains unchanged. Thus like any other practice both arts research and (more so) arts educational research are never immune from reification.

**11. FAR FROM SCANDALIZING THE PIOUS OR ENTERTAINING THE INCREDULOUS**—as St Paul does when he presents the notion of *kenosis* to the Jews and the Greeks (1 Corinthians 1:22-23; see also Badiou 2003, pp. 47ff)—I would argue that any case for arts practice (let alone arts research) must be intentionally blurred by dint of its *kenotic* degrees of intention. (See Baldacchino 2012a)

The notion of *kenosis* advances the idea of a thought, and consequently a praxis, which retreats and moves against the idea of a fixed ground of meaning that runs everything within its walls of legitimation. As Gianni Vattimo (1985; 1988, 1995; Vattimo & Rovatti 1988) confirms in his argument for weak thought (*pensiero debole*), *kenosis* has nothing to do with a weakening of the argument or a practice, but opens up the agency of thought itself—here understood as a practice. As I have argued elsewhere, this also makes a similar case for a *weak pedagogy*. By stating and proposing a “kenotic argument by which the politics of pedagogical aesthetics are articulated on the possibilities opened by art's groundlessness, we can [also] state that weak pedagogy is characterized by a state of affairs where learning is affirmed in its *deschooled*, *agonistic* and *multiple* properties.” (Baldacchino 2012a, p. 191) Through an articulation of weakness in art and education, we would heed to Ernesto Laclau's eloquent argument for the transformation of grounds into horizons. (Laclau 2005) This transformation finds a way round the contradiction of making a case *qua* case, where the idea of making a case warrants its continuous *deferral*, *questioning* and *changing*.

In the specific case of arts practice this means that there is no real case to be made. Strangely enough, this becomes another case. This reveals the questionable nature of practice *per se*, or what Adorno (2000, p. 6) rightly dismisses as an unmediated form of practiciness that “leads to

the production of people who like organizing things and who imagine that once you have organized something, once you have arranged for some rally or other, you have achieved something of importance, without pondering for a moment whether such activities have any chance at all of effectively impinging on reality.”

To be able to argue for a contiguous approach that unfolds in a way that would preserve the immanent criticality of arts practice, any claim that favors an arts-based method must address practiciness and the quandary of legitimation. Practiciness must be tackled head on by declaring that the intention of a practice-based research method must never afford to regard practice as a ground. This gains urgency when this ground is declared as being open-ended, or where a practice-informed method of research is deemed equivalent to the same ways of life by which we do art and education even when we are not professional artists or educationalists. (See Springgay & Irwin 2008 pp. xxivff)

It is not cynical to argue that to escape from the quandary of methodological legitimation (of which practiciness is a clear symptom), one must take the risk of the quandary itself. This also applies to the challenge of entering an infinite and ever-returning alternation between “making another case” (as an *addition*) and “making an *other* case” (as a *distinction*) without finding oneself stuck in a tautology. As such, the intention behind the need to turn grounds into horizons is not to support a particular method, whether practice-based or otherwise, but to capture and develop the specificity of arts practice in its forms of *distinction*, and therefore as an act of *resistance* and *rebuttal*.

As I see it, for arts researchers to live up to their own expectations, they must take the opportunity to discuss how practice is an act that intentionally confuses the issue, while at the same time, it can never afford to stop the arts or educational practitioners from discussing and engaging with it.

**12. TO MAKE A CASE FOR PRACTICE** amounts to bring about: (i) a persistent form of *doubt* and (ii) an incessant search for *error*.

Any case that is made on the horizon of sustainable doubt and realizable error is clearly prompted by an expressed refutation of a foundational ground for arts practice. (See Baldacchino 2005; 2009a; 2009b; 2012a) This is especially crucial when, more often than not, a strong foundationalist premise is wrongly assumed on the basis of critical, progressive, or liberal approaches to art, philosophy and education. Such a premise clearly deceives us into thinking that at the end there is an emancipatory or liberating outcome. However this does not occur. It does not happen not because of wrong intentions, but because the quandaries of legitimation have not been accepted and engaged with. The perceived failure of progressive

and liberal education touted by many conservatives is in effect a symptom of a situation that preserves the *status quo*—except that conservatives do not like to admit it.

This scenario is not unrelated to a developmental approach that presents educational criticality as a resolved form of action premised on a supposedly open-ended context where, in effect, a learner-centered pedagogy ends up promoting the very opposite. “It is certainly futile to expect a child to evolve a universe out of his own mere mind as it is for a philosopher to attempt that task,” Dewey argues in *The Child and the Curriculum*.

Development does not mean just getting something out of the mind. It is a development of experience and into experience that is really wanted. And this is impossible save as just that educative medium is provided which will enable the powers and interests that have been selected as valuable to function. They must operate, and how they operate will depend almost entirely upon the stimuli which surround them and the material upon which they exercise themselves. (Dewey 1963, p. 18)

Rather than at learner-centeredness per se, Dewey’s critique is directed at an unmediated notion of experience. One could likewise translate this within an argument for practice, where a similar critique could be directed at an unmediated notion of practice that fails to perceive the underlying dialectic that defines it.

**13. DEWEY’S CONCERN** dwells on the danger of creating a situation that claims that learning takes place developmentally, as if development is a *given*. This distorts the notion of development, where learning is regarded as a self-sustained ground on which everything and everyone—including the learner—needs to stand and is expected to “grow”. Dewey reveals and tackles the quandary of learning in reverse. While some might read him as if he is imposing on the learner an environment that would ultimately shape her ways of learning, Dewey’s position does the exact opposite by recognizing the contradictory nature of learning. Here one begins to appreciate Dewey’s very own dialectical approach to education:

There is no such thing as sheer self-activity possible—because all activity takes place in a medium, in a situation, and with reference to its conditions. But again no such thing as imposition of truth from without, as insertion of truth from without, is possible. All depends upon the activity which the mind itself undergoes in responding to what is presented from without. (Dewey 1963 pp. 30-1)

To take this further, I would invite the reader to engage in three adjoining “spaces” of argument: the first is marked by *the question of practice* (see §14 — §16, below), the second

inhabits *the whereabouts of doubt* (see §17 and §19, below), and the third invokes what I would call *the poetic scoping of unlearning* (see §18 and §19, below).

#### **14. THE QUESTION OF PRACTICE IS MARKED BY ITS CONTINUOUS RETURN.**

Reading Cage with Dewey in mind, I find interesting parallels. Just as Dewey stops us from simply assuming growth as a given, Cage does the same when he talks about chance. Far from being simply ‘given’, chance is a discipline that is presumed on tangible degrees of choice. Cage states that, “most people who believe that I’m interested in chance don’t realize that I use chance as a discipline. They think I use it—I don’t know—as a way of giving up making choices. But my choices consist in choosing what questions to ask.” (Cage 2003, p. 17) The dialectical relation that characterizes Cage’s comments on chance is not that different from Dewey’s comments on learning. His approach to the distinction between his “modern” work and Beethoven reveals another facet of how Cage thinks and does music. Here he draws a dialectical relationship between ambient sound and music as they run in parallel to fluency and interruption.

If the music can accept ambient sounds and not be interrupted thereby, it’s a modern piece of music. If, as with a composition of Beethoven, a baby crying, or someone in the audience coughing, interrupts the music, then we know that it isn’t modern. I think that the present way of deciding whether something is useful as art is to ask whether it is interrupted *by* the actions of others, or whether it is fluent *with* the actions of others. (Cage 2003, p. 224, my emphases)

Perhaps the best way of approaching this statement is to read it in reverse. Whereas Beethoven cannot afford interruption, “modern” music is characterized by an interruption that continuously returns—which means that interruption becomes an intrinsic iteration of Cage’s “modern” music. Interruption becomes a practice that must sustain itself as an ever-returning state of affairs where no resolution is possible because interruption cannot afford to be broken into separate constituencies. So interruption as a genre is not a problem in and of itself. Rather it represents a formal specificity. Yet to argue for art’s specificity becomes problematic if it were to exclude other artists, like Beethoven, from the inherent dialectic that it portends. On a closer look, one can see that by drawing this distinction, Cage is not putting Beethoven in a very different category. Rather, by excluding interruption from an audience that listens to Beethoven, Cage is re-contextualizing the specificity of Beethoven’s practice within a perspective that has to negotiate and accept the iterative returns that make Beethoven’s work unique. Thus Cage reads Beethoven *after* Cage. By transforming interruption into a musical genre that plays a dominant role in his music, he finds himself reconstructing the notion of artistic specificity, and so in drawing a distinction between his work and Beethoven’s he also brings out the common horizon that they share.

This may be an odd explanation, especially when one reads how Cage objects to de Kooning who once told him in a restaurant that if one were to put a frame around breadcrumbs on the table that would not be art. “And what I am saying is that it is”, Cage remarks. “He [de Kooning] was saying that it wasn’t because he connects art with his activity—he connects with himself as an artist whereas I would want art to slip out of us into the world in which we live.” (Cage 2003, p. 226) Does this interrupt Cage’s theory of interruption?

**15. ART’S INTERRUPTIVE RETURN IS WHAT MAKES RISK VIABLE** and arts practice is marked by perhaps the most tangible risk that it has to take: **ART’S NEED TO SPEAK ITSELF OUT OF EXISTENCE.**

Cage’s intervention on the need for art “to slip out of us into the world” is clearly based on this risk. The risk is not one but multiple. There is a risk that in saying so one appears beautifully naïve. “Modern art has turned life into art,” Cage adds “and now I think it’s time for life (by life I mean such things as government, the social rules and all those things) to turn the environment and everything into art” (Cage 2003, p. 226).

This begs the question: isn’t this redemption meant to return again and again by means of a genre of interruptions? I would definitely say so. Cage, for sure, does not root for an art left to itself, or its own devices. (We must remember how he perceives chance from the lens and agency of *choice*.)

Art might be beautiful, he says, but “it should spill out of just being beautiful and move over to other aspects of life so that when we’re not with art it has nevertheless influenced our actions or our responses to the environment” (Cage 2003, *ibid*).

In his statements on art’s interruption Cage is not alone. He cannot pretend to claim anything new even when he interrupts the “old” and argues for the “new”. This method is what makes arts practice different from any other form of human activity. Arts practice is synonymous with the risks of the contingency within which it recognizes itself as art. Art practice reveals that art must continuously strive to become non-art. It perpetually takes itself out of its state of being art in order to return again, and again, as art.

Take three disparate (but never random) examples: Caravaggio’s *Deposizione* (1602-1604), Louise Bourgeois’s *Couple* series (late 1990s — early 2000) and Cornelia Parker’s *The Maybe* (1995). Formally, these works already move beyond the expected, though not particularly carrying intended shock value. More than shock these works are marked by a character of *futureing*, as Maxine Greene would say, citing Sartre. The artist, says Sartre, “must break the already crystallized habits which make us see in the present tense those institutions

and customs which are already out of date.” In this respect Greene argues that the artist helps us to do this by force of art’s “problematic nature”. Again citing Sartre, she states that the artist provides a true image of our time by considering it “from the pinnacle of the future which it is creating, since it is tomorrow which will decide today’s truth.” (See Greene 1978, p. 172)

**16. METHODOLOGICALLY SPEAKING, ART’S FUTURING SEEMS MORE ALCHEMIC THAN SCIENTIFIC.** This tends to be the case not because there is some inherent antagonistic relationship between the arts and the natural sciences. Rather there is a difference in terms of their temporal location. Through arts practice, one could argue that contiguity redefines temporality and suspends the conventions of ‘timing’ as practiced by the natural sciences. To illustrate this I would cite a philosopher and a political theorist, Michèle Le Doueff and Antonio Gramsci.

In *The Philosophical Imaginary*, Le Doueff takes Galileo as an example:

Galileo’s case might lead us to say (...) that a revolutionary scientific idea may, precisely because of its unfamiliarity, be born among metaphors and confusion and attain its ‘fine abstract pointing’ only afterwards, by integration into a scientific system not yet constituted at the time of its initial appearance. (Le Doueff 2002, p. 38)

In a similar vein, Gramsci deals with what he calls a *relative ignorance of reality* by which we continuously anticipate future concepts that are still not historically ripe to be fully understood and contextualized by current knowledge and methods of inquiry. He takes Kant’s *noumenon* as a model for this kind of concept where “one could make an historical forecast that simply consists of a thought projected in what is to come as a process of development like that which until now, has been verified in the past.” (Gramsci 1975, p. 48) More specifically he argues that the *noumenon* represents a recognition of “the concrete sense of a ‘relative ignorance’ of reality [*una ‘relativa ignoranza’ della realtà*] as something still ‘unknown’.” One day in the future we would get a full knowledge of this once we have adequate “‘physical’ and intellectual instruments” of inquiry. (Gramsci 1975, p. 48, my emphasis)

Elsewhere I explore the link between Gramsci’s notion of relative ignorance and formative aesthetics (Baldacchino 2012b), but here I want to push the notion of formative aesthetics a bit further by contextualizing it within a practice that inherently represents a form of *finding* rather than simply *searching*. This couches the idea of inquiry into a framework of anticipation. More so it cuts short and even dismisses those methodological processes by which researchers expect to gain legitimation.

It is immaterial whether legitimation is artistic, educational, social, economic, moral ... etc., the dismissal of legitimation has one main reason: *legitimation* per se tends to prejudice and therefore foreclose those possibilities that relative ignorance could unleash. Galileo's case is a good example. Upon rejecting the legitimacy that the Church would have given him, at the risk of losing his life as a heretic, Galileo saved his scientific discoveries from suppression or total loss.

Le Doeuff argues that because a revolutionary scientific idea like Galileo's was radically unfamiliar to the conventions of scientific practices and methods of the day, it was "born among metaphors and confusion and attain[ed] its 'fine abstract pointing' only afterwards." Gramsci is even more radical. The position is that of a relative ignorance that confronts reality by the assumption of a future knowledge. This helps us understand and learn what is yet to be known. The anticipation of ignorance in Gramsci's discussion of the Kantian *noumenon* reminds us of more recent arguments on ignorance and learning in the work of Jacques Rancière (1991). It also recalls the 16th century theologian and philosopher Nicolas de Cusa who in his *De Docta Ignorantia* (Of Learned Ignorance), states that, "if the foregoing points are true, then since the desire in us is not in vain, assuredly we desire to know that we do not know."

If we can fully attain unto this [knowledge of our ignorance], we will attain unto learned ignorance. For a man—even one very well versed in learning—will attain unto nothing more perfect than to be found to be most learned in the ignorance which is distinctively his. The more he knows that he is unknowing, the more learned he will be. (De Cusa 1990, I, §1-2, p. 6)

**17. DOUBT REFLECTS A TENSION BETWEEN THE PRACTICE OF ARTS AND THAT OF EDUCATION.** Adopting the phenomenological method of *epoché*, by temporarily bracketing arts education away from social scientific methods, will reveal the tension by which art and education relate to each other as antinomic practices—as a paradox, or *aporia*.

An educational context would invariably presume that arts practice operates as a vehicle of teaching and learning. Here arts practice appears to converge with pedagogical practice. But this is marked by a tension between two forms of practice—that of the arts and that of pedagogy whose conventions, by circumstance or necessity, are bound to contradict each other. This tension reveals art's need to return to its originary practice, to its own facticity *qua* art. However this return can never replicate or restore the same practice of origin. Just like Cage's genre of interruption, art's return is continuous. In fact there is no real return to an *origin* or *beginning* because they cannot be replicated. An origin could only 'return' as a

transformed iteration. Once this happens, practice needs to be taught again, and again, and again ... as it is transformed into other iterations.

In this pattern, the practices of the arts and pedagogy resist from becoming grounds of instruction. Rather they form a horizon of alterity—or better put, an *exchange* that sustains a narrative of doubt through which art's answers become education's questions, and where in turn, education's answers form and inform art's doubt. This is where practice takes a critical role, and where one could begin to make a case for art's pedagogy of praxis.

While the notion of a 'returned' practice sounds tautological, in the case where arts practice refuses to become a pedagogical instrument, the tautology is broken. The notion of an *originary* practice that was once expressive and which some educationalists seem to suggest is now educational, loses its relevance. The method of *epoché* reveals how an originary point of convergence, which appears to grow or is to be taken as a given in the relationship between the arts and education, is a myth. This myth is no different from that of the self-learning child that Dewey exposes and invalidates.

Through the method of *epoché*, the dialectical relationship between art and education begins to appear more clearly. Just as art practice is an aporia, any relationship between the arts and educational practice remains marked by a necessary contradiction between two diverse conventions of practice: that of art and that of education. This is where the pedagogy of art could only offer open-ended—and therefore partial—answers. This also explains how arts education becomes a discourse of *unlearning*. (See Baldacchino 2012c)

### **18. AS A FORM OF POETIC SCOPING, UNLEARNING CANNOT BE DESCRIBED.**

Arts practice constitutes the only viable pedagogical vehicle through which one could make a claim for unlearning without becoming entangled within a web of developmental, cognitive or social determinism. I propose to approach this challenge via three avenues.

The first avenue is a way for (i) art as a political act: where unlearning is read against the intentionality that is informed by an array of political conditions, including those of citizenship, belonging and action. This reveals (ii) art's pedagogical philosophies: where a distinction is made between a philosophy of art education and a philosophy of learning, this distinction emerges from within art's 'returned' facts, by which we are then engaged with (iii) art's praxis as a poetic discourse of unlearning: where the learning is removed from universal certainty, and resumed on the basis of art's contingent nature.

It would be difficult to discuss art's praxis as a form of unlearning unless this is contextualized within the bracketing that is followed in the previous reflection (§17, above).

We must also bear in mind that, as discussed in §15 and §16, art is moved by an continuous form of exiting which talks itself out of the political spaces of definition and legitimation. Art's exit strategy—or as I have called it elsewhere, art's *exit pedagogy* (Baldacchino 2012a)—is intrinsically tied to the manner of its practice. As a practice that is turned into doubt, art is praxis by default. This is because, as we have seen in Gramsci's concept of relative ignorance (§16, above), praxis cannot become a critical act unless it is an act of doubt. We have also argued that practice could never represent a perversion that degenerates into practiciness. This is because for praxis to retain its criticality, it must not be reduced to a procedure of certainties defined by a ground (see §11, above). Thus by arts praxis one does not simply imply a critical practice of art, but a praxis that portends a groundlessness that is given form by art's critical doubt.

**19. BY ART'S DOUBT WE UNLEARN THE CERTAINTY OF PRACTICE.** Once we establish that unlearning is central to art's praxis, we would then start to make sense of arts pedagogical practice as an act of *poetic scoping*. Scoping is one of the main characteristics of arts practice. It transforms research into an act of finding. Artful acts are acts of continuous scoping. As an act of scoping, arts practice (*qua* finding) exits the social scientist's ground and travels over the horizon of the specificity of the arts. Here the *datum* is generated and the object of the search becomes, like Duchamp's art, a *found* object.

When we argue for doubt as that which prompts arts practice to act as a form of research that generates data and finds its objects, we begin to understand how as praxis, art must doubt itself. As we have seen in the discussion of Cage's aesthetics, art moves out of itself by slipping “out of us into the world” (§14 and §15). This implies that arts practice rejects all grounds, including its own. Put another way, art as praxis rejects the circularity by which groundlessness could become another ground. Likewise, to avoid becoming its own ground, art must reject itself as a ‘making’—i.e. as an objectified end. Instead, art articulates itself as a *doing*, as a poetic act of scoping. (See Baldacchino 2012a, pp. 62-66; 86ff)

This recalls Adorno's well-known remark in *Minima Moralia*: “The contradiction between what is and what is made, is the vital element of art and circumscribes its law of development, but it is also art's shame.” (Adorno 1991, p. 226)

**20. AS A DOING, ART'S PRAXIS GAINS ITS NORMALCY.** In pedagogical terms, art's doing emerges from our urge to continuously unlearn the artifacts of making, which constitute art's uniqueness and its “shame”. While the word “shame” appears too harsh, one must read art as an act of embarrassment that is revealing rather than demeaning. Art's embarrassment reveals art's continuous act of otherness, a perpetual act of exiting from itself to be itself. Or to use Cage's expression: an exiting by which art “spill[s] out of just being beautiful”; or in

this case, an approach that confirms how art continuously *spills out of just making*. In claiming its acts of making as a source of both pride and embarrassment, arts practice reveals its contradictory *ways of doing*.

Art's challenge to the sociology of knowledge is found in claiming back its normalcy by turning its contingent nature into a choice, in the same way Cage reveals his discipline in chance. In asserting its contingent nature—in turning chance into a choice—art surpasses the walls of the *polis* and claims back its intimacy with the excluded stranger, by becoming a stranger to those who seek to turn it into an instrument. (Greene 1973; Baldacchino 2009b; 2012a)

Art exits the polis by refusing to represent. It refuses to teach, and it assumes a position of ignorance. It refuses to make, and thus forfeits the comforts of complicit citizenship. In other words, art gains its normalcy when it unlearns the normality by which it is expected to behave within the walls of the city-state. Upon exiting the polis art becomes the equivalent of the exiled, the rejected, the foreigner, the refugee, the undocumented ... the barbarian who speaks neither Latin nor Greek. In other words, art shares its existence with the “illegal migrant”. Upon rejecting the artifacts that are made under the guise of ‘art’, art rejects those forms of legitimation that expect it to become reified into an instrument of teaching and learning. In this way arts practice asserts itself as a human act—as **a doing that constantly needs to unlearn itself**. Likewise, art's poetic scoping is an act of making that is constantly unmade. Art's poetics of practice—art's *making*—is an act of *unmaking*.

Like the unlearnt, the unmade ‘allows’ us to reclaim our right to our contingency. Only as contingent beings could we claim the *yet-unclaimed* and the *already-unlearnt*. This is where knowledge begins to unravel, and where it is constantly returned as a way that *knows* by way of what it seeks to *doubt* and of which it seeks to retain a *viable ignorance*.

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