

Notes for an Art School

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Exhibition as School
in a Divided City

Just looking at the titles of some recent large-scale international art exhibitions —‘The Production of Cultural Difference’, ‘The Challenge of Colonisation’, ‘Critical Confrontation With the Present’, ‘Urban Conditions’, etc.—one quickly realises that there is an increasing desire, on the part of the organisers and participants of these shows, to see their work as concrete social projects or active interventions. Such language and positioning has become the norm, and it now seems that artistic practice is automatically expected to play an active part in society. But is an exhibition, no matter how ambitious, the most effective vehicle for such engagement?

In 1937, André Breton and Diego Rivera (and, it is believed, Leon Trotsky) wrote the manifesto ‘For an Independent Revolutionary Art’. They call for a ‘true art, which is not content to play variations on ready-made models but rather insists on expressing the inner needs of man and of mankind in its time —true art is unable not to be revolutionary, not to aspire to a complete and radical reconstruction of society.’ What may appear to be a naive call for all-or-nothing revolution includes a subtle and important justification for that demand—that we, as artists, curators, writers, need to engage with society in order to create certain freedoms, to produce the conditions necessary for creative activity to take place at all.

But what precisely does it mean, the desire that art should enter all aspects of social life? Is it a desire to bring art out of rarefied and privileged spaces, or is it merely a move towards the further instrumentalisation of art practice? Perhaps the exhibition is not the place to start. One must begin at the beginning. The Manifesta team proposed going back to school.

The Bauhaus, in its brief period of activity, arguably accomplished what any number of Venice Biennials have not (and at a fraction of the cost) —a wide range of artistic practitioners coming together to redefine art, what it can and should be, and most importantly, to produce tangible results. All this in the face of Walter Gropius’ famous assertion that ‘art cannot be taught’. An art school, it would appear, does not teach art, but sets up the conditions necessary for creative production, and by extension the conditions for collaboration and social engagement. For Manifesta too, these conditions are necessary. To follow Breton and Rivera, ‘We cannot remain indifferent to the intellectual conditions under which creative activity takes place; nor should we fail to pay all respect to those particular laws which govern intellectual creation.’

The need for a more productive and open-ended structure is heightened by the location of this Manifesta—the divided city of Nicosia. It is one thing to bring together a group of colleagues at a designated space under the rubric of an ‘exhibition’ in London or Berlin, it is another altogether to do the same thing in the Cypriot capital. Given the absence of a widespread and historically established cultural apparatus to uphold part of the proposition, the implications of such a gesture are altogether different. The ‘particular laws which govern intellectual creation’ demand self-criticality, and require consideration of political pasts and presents, religious conflicts, and economic forces.

The aftermath of colonial rule has left Cyprus without such national cultural institutions as a museum of modern or contemporary art, an opera or an art academy. Ethnic and religious tensions have resulted in what appears to be an insurmountable political, economic and cultural divide. And while Cyprus historically maintained close commercial ties both with its regional neighbours

and with trade centres further afield, this did not lead to cultural exchanges on the same scale. There are few cultural institutions significant enough to deserve or withstand critique, while the political situation is already prominently displayed by an ever-present Green Line—a presence so strong as to render other ‘political displays’ superficial at best. In other words, the situation demands not commentary, but involvement and production. There is a need to engage with realities in a comprehensive, direct way, to build common ground for the divided city to meet and work, and to pose pertinent questions and answer them as practically as possible—all goals that are often central to the concerns of a school.

It can be argued that this approach is applicable to a much larger situation, far beyond the boundaries of Cyprus. It can be said that the position of artist-as-social-commentator/critic has run its course. Perhaps it’s time to consider forms of art (and wider cultural practices) that can continue to be viable even in the absence of reference points such as institutions, that can remain relevant even in the presence of overt politicisation of the landscape, that can remain productive both within the centres of art production and without.

But what specifically is an art school, and what is an art school at this point in time? My research for the Manifesta 6 School yielded a range of models, from art academies and experimental schools to collaborative projects, accompanied by the insistent voices of critics lamenting the ‘crisis of the art school’. Yet there has been an amazing range of schools in the past one hundred years: from the ultra-academic *École nationale supérieure des beaux-arts* to the high-priced Columbia MFA, from the inclusiveness of the various Bauhaus schools and the dynamism of the *Staedelschule* to the elite coteries of the Whitney Independent Study Program (ISP). Given this proliferation of different models of art education, the notion of crisis seems, at the very least, a misplaced one. Art education is not in stasis. It is being constantly re-thought, restructured and re-invented.

École Temporaire, run by Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster, Pierre Huyghe and Philippe Parreno from 1998 to 1999, was a series of workshops conducted at several universities and schools in Europe. In one, the artists rented a cinema for a day and screened a feature film, while narrating potential alternative scenarios before the start of each scene. Another workshop was a seminar held at the top of a mountain, a location only accessible by dogsled. In yet another, the artists interviewed the participants in the middle of a frozen lake. Each workshop was a situation filmed and edited by participants and addressed directly to the students at the beginning of the next class session, creating a chain of connections and continuity, and in this way constituting a school that stretched over a range of times, spaces and institutions.

The Mountain School of Art was started in Los Angeles just this year by artists Piero Golia and Erik Wesley. In their exposé, they write:

MSA[^] [Mountain School of Art] is not to be considered an ‘art project’ but a real, fully functioning school. Although the school is small in size, the program as well as its collective ambition is substantial. It is important to understand the intentions of developing as a serious contender in the field of education and culture while maintaining a position as a supportive element in relation to other institutions. MSA[^] members often liken their pursuits to those of 18th century European

revolutionists. Our present location at the back rooms of the Mountain Bar, one of LA’s hippest ‘Art’ bars and hottest nightlife spots, provides a pungent metaphor for this as these revolutionists held court in the back rooms of bakeries, printshops, etc. The culture undercurrent is perpetually condemned to the backroom of the establishment. It is the intention of MSA[^] to continue this tradition while holding onto a more orthodox notion of educational impetus.

The Copenhagen Free University was started by Henriette Heise and Jakob Jakobsen in their apartment. As they describe it:

The Copenhagen Free University opened in May 2001 in our flat. The Free University is an artist-run institution dedicated to the production of critical consciousness and poetic language. We do not accept the so-called new knowledge economy as the framing understanding of knowledge.

We work with forms of knowledge that are fleeting, fluid, schizophrenic, uncompromising [sic] subjective, uneconomic, acapitalist, produced in the kitchen, produced when asleep or arisen on a social excursion—collectively.

What is remarkable is not what these programmes propose, but that they should exist simultaneously, offering such varied approaches at the radical end of the art education spectrum. But bringing up these examples is only to underscore how far the nature of education has evolved in the past century. Only when these experiments are set alongside the historic establishments of the Beaux-Arts and the Art Students League do we have a complete picture. And complete it must be, whatever the type of practice one may wish to pursue, whatever political projects one might wish to promote. As Boris Groys points out in an interview included in this volume, artists' practices are often formed in opposition to their education; methodologies and techniques borrowed from fields seemingly irrelevant to advanced cultural practices can also form the basis for the production of advanced and radical art. Clearly, there is unlimited potential today for the artist pursuing an education.

The real crisis in art education appears to be one of distribution: radical, experimental and advanced institutions are clustered in Europe and North America, acting as magnets for those in other regions who wish to participate in advanced art practice and discourse. As a result, despite the diversity of practitioners, discourse and focus tends to remain bound, on many levels, to these centres of institutional production and their relatively homogenous concerns.

Perhaps the most efficient way to impact the general state of art education is not by denying the plurality of existing schools and programmes, but by building a new productive model. In 1967, Fluxus artist George Maciunas, following 'the great contribution made by Bauhaus and Black Mountain', drew up his prospectus for an experimental art school in the village of New Marlborough. The plan was never realised, due to his untimely death the same year. His prospectus was one of the most inspiring discoveries of my research, a fully formed vision of learning and production in no more than two pages. I was struck by its subjectivity, a singular worldview that drew as much from the spirit of Fluxus as it did from the actual body of work that its loose group of artists produced. The prospectus encapsulates a particular poetics, a core vision that simply and gracefully branches out to encompass all that was relevant in the art production of the day. It is a proposal that hinges on the notion of 'possibility', saying far less about what needs to be done than about what can be done.

The actual activity that can take place in a school—experimentation, scholarship, research, discussion, criticism, collaboration, friendship—is a continuous process of redefining and seeking out the potential in practice and theory at a given point in time. An art school is not concerned solely with the process of learning, but can be and often is a highly active site of cultural production: books and magazines, exhibitions, new commissioned works, seminars and symposia, film screenings, concerts, performances, theatre productions, new fashion and

product designs, architectural projects, public resources such as libraries and archives of all kinds, outreach, organisation—these and many other activities and projects can all be triggered in a school. I say ‘triggered’ rather than ‘located at’ or ‘based in’ to draw attention to the danger pointed out by Paulo Freire, who wisely cautioned against positioning a school as a privileged or an exclusive site of ‘knowledge production’, which only reaffirms existing social inequalities and hierarchies. The activities of the Manifesta 6 School are an attempt to infiltrate the space of the city, to transform it and be transformed by it.

Experimentation is key to the structure of a school, to the process of learning and to notions of progress. It is also key to this project, to the motivation and goals behind the Manifesta 6 School, and to the rationale behind an exhibition as a school. The group of people involved in organising the Manifesta 6 School are not an NGO, a ministry or a bureaucratic educational committee. I see this school as a subjective act, essentially, an experiment—one that aims to open, to question, to encourage the formation of subjectivities. So, although I have outlined my hopes and aims above, there is no ‘ideal’ Manifesta 6 School. There are no ideal results, no hard-and-fast principles beyond the production and circulation of possibilities, a reshuffling of priorities for Manifesta and Nicosia, and an attempt to privilege the conditions for creative intellectual production, both in the city and beyond.

To go back to the beginning, to go back to school, involves a great deal more than the desire to bring art into social life. Producing tangible results that move beyond commentary requires research, groundwork and a continuous process of involvement and production. Let’s call it homework. And a little bit of homework never hurt anyone.

Prospectus for New Marlborough Centre for Arts

George Maciunas

The Centre is being created in recognition of the great contribution made by Bauhaus and Black Mountain as a think-tank and training ground for the future avant-garde. The acquisition of a beautiful "village" of a group of some 12 buildings in the township of New Marlborough presents the possibility of creating a similar center that could devote itself to:

1. study, research, experimentation and development of various advanced ideas and forms in art, history of art, design & documentation,
2. teaching small groups of apprentices in subjects and through procedures not found in colleges,
3. production and marketing of various products, objects and events developed at the centre,
4. organization of events and performances by residents and visitors of the centre.

The Centre would be structured as follows:

1. Studios, workshops and residencies for permanent and visiting members of the community would be housed in buildings 3 to 12, the tentative list of members is as follows:

(a) permanent residents:

- George Maciunas (design, production of multiple objects, new sports, new forms of documenting history, diagrams)
- Robert Watts (director of school, workshops & studios; events, environment and objects)
- Jimmy Giuffrey (jazz workshop)
- Yoshimasa Wada (developing new acoustical instruments)

(b) visiting members:

- Ayo (tactile objects & events)
- David Behrman (electronic music)
- George Brecht (concept art, border-line art, non art, objects, events etc.)
- Trisha Brown (kinesthetic events & environments, anti-gravitational dance)
- Bob Diamond (electronic engineer)
- Jean Dupuy (optic & sound constructions)
- Robert Filliou (literary art, poetry, verbal objects)
- Richard Foreman (surrealist theatre, state mechanics)
- Geoff Hendricks (events & environments)
- Dick Higgins (theatre, art criticism, poetry, music, action music)
- Joe Jones (musical machines & kinetic art)
- Alison Knowles (bean art)
- Shikego Kubota (video art)
- Joan Mekas (film-poetry, film criticism)
- Larry Miller (e.s.p. art)

- Peter Moore (photography, photo-technology, documentation, archives)
- Nam June Paik (action music, kinetic art, robots, video art)
- Takako Saito (games, sports, objects)
- Paul Sharits (experimental cinema)
- Stuart Sherman (magic acts, new vaudeville)
- Daniel Spoerri (objects, events, culinary art)
- Stan Vanderbeek (animation film, video art)
- Ben Vautier (concept art, humorous art, street events)
- La Monte Young (concept art, electronic music, endless music)

2. School-workshop. Students will be accepted on a part time basis. For most part instruction will be individual. Students will maintain a working relationship with the staff. When appropriate, students will assist the staff in their ongoing research. At all times students shall be considered part of the learning community on an equal basis. Students will be introduced to a wide range of experience not ordinarily found in conventional schools and art programs.

3. Library, archives and exhibit space (buildings 1a, 2, 13). It would contain reference material on past & present avant-garde, original documents, prototypes, possibly contain archives of photo-documentation (Peter Moore's), exhibit new work in sound, graphics, objects, video etc. and would contain the "learning machine" being developed by G. Maciunas.

4. Performance space (chamber music room in 1b, theatre in building 2) & lawn bandstand. Music room to be used for small scale, solo events, music, lectures, video presentations, suitable for audiences up to 40. Theatre with audiences up in balconies and a 30ft x 60ft performance space in the middle, for multi-media, inter-media performances, events, theatre, music, dance, cinema, new sports, games etc. Suitable for audiences up to 100.

5. Technical workshops (located in basements of building 2 & 3) to contain equipment for electronic music, video, machine shop, wood working shop, ceramic workshop, photo darkroom, film editing & processing, recording studio, chemical laboratory.

An Incomplete Chronology of Experimental Art Schools

- École nationale supérieure des beaux-arts (1671)
- Drawing School (1751, Geneva)
- Vienna University of Applied Arts (1867)
- Académie Julien (1868, Paris)
- The Flying University (Warsaw, 1883, several versions until 1979)
- Gustave Moreau's Paris studio (1892–98)
- Ox-Bow (1910)
- Ealing Art College (renamed 1913)
- Merz Akademie (1918, Stuttgart)
- Vitebsk Art School (1918–1920s, founded by Marc Chagall)
- Bauhaus (1919–1933, founded by Walter Gropius)
- VKhuTeMas School of Architecture (Moscow, founded 1920)
- Black Mountain College (1933–57, founded by John Andrew Rice)
- Bard College (Annandale-on-Hudson, renamed 1934)
- St John's College (Annapolis, 1937 reform initiated by Stringfellow Barr and Scott Buchanan)
- Berlin Free University (founded 1945)
- Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture (1946)
- Independent Group seminars at the ICA (London, 1947–52)
- John Cage at the New School for Social Research (1956–60)
- Ray Johnson's New York Correspondence School (founded early 1960s)
- Intermedia (Toronto, 1960s)
- Experimental Art School (Copenhagen, founded 1961 by Paul Gernes & Troels Andersen)
- National Art Schools (Havana, built 1961)
- Bauhaus Situationniste (Sweden, 1963)
- John Latham and the Artist Placement Group (London, formed 1966)
- The Munich Academy for Television and Film (1967)
- Nova Scotia College of Arts and Design (founded 1882, renamed 1967)
- Whitney ISP Program (New York, founded 1968)
- Jörg Immendorff, Chris Reinecke and the LIDL-Akademie (1968–69) at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf
- New Marlborough Centre for Arts (George Maciunas, 1968–69)
- Image Bank (Vancouver, founded 1969)
- Joseph Beuys' 'Free International University of Creativity and Interdisciplinary Research' (founded 1974)
- Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics (Boulder, founded 1974 by Allen Ginsberg and Anne Waldman)
- General Idea (Toronto, founded 1977)
- Escola de Artes Visuais do Parque Lage (Rio de Janeiro)
- Ultimate Akademie (Cologne, founded 1988 by Al Hansen and Lisa Cieslik)
- The Vera List Center for Art and Politics at the New School (New York, founded 1992)
- DasArts (Amsterdam, established 1994)
- Mode2Research—NPO Austria (Eva Maria Kosa, 1997)
- École Temporaire (1998–1999, Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster, Philippe Parreno and Pierre Huyghe)
- Proto Academy (Edinburgh, 1998–2002, founded by Charles Esche)
- The Independent Art School (Hull, founded 1999)
- School for the History and Theory of Images (Belgrade, 1999, founded by Branimir Stojanovic)
- The Real Presence (Belgrade, annually since 2000, founded by Biljana Tomic)
- Centre for Advanced Study (CAS), Sofia (founded 2000)
- Copenhagen Free University (founded 2001 by Henriette Heise and Jakob Jakobsen)
- Masters in Print and Multimedia, University of Bologna (founded 2001 by Umberto Eco)
- ArtSchool Palestine (founded 2001, London)
- Campus 2002 at Kokerei Zollverein, Essen (founded by Marius Babias and Florian Waldvogel)
- Gasthof 2002 at Staedelschule, Frankfurt
- School of Missing Studies (Belgrade, founded 2002)
- Future Academy (London, founded 2002 by Clementine Deliss)
- University of Openness (London, founded 2002)
- Manoa Free University (founded 2003)
- Informal University in Foundation (Berlin, founded 2003)
- The Paraeducation Department (Rotterdam, founded 2004 by Sarah Pierce and Annie Fletcher)
- Cork Caucus (Cork, 2004–05)
- Mountain School of Art (Los Angeles, founded 2005 by Piero Golia and Erik Wesley)
- Free University of Los Angeles
- L'université tangente
- La Universidad Nómada
- Facoltà di Fuga
- Göteborgs Autonoma Skolas