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Learning Lab Arts and Design

In this article, I look at changes in art and design education from the point of view of changing methodological and cultural practices. I compare historical learning processes with modern practices in art and design to identify diverse research and teaching methods for the Learning Lab Arts and Design (LLAD). In the first Western art academies, learning was understood as imitating aesthetic guidelines, while in the early guilds, learning design skills was always related to knowledge transfer and the development of new products. In the later art and design schools, education moved away from predetermined patterns and media to individual creativity and transformation, and often became an expression of creative protest. The learning of art became a practice in which the focus is not on the result but on the process. Today, I propose that design and artistic creation be taught in LLAD as diverse learning practices in digital and virtual space. Learning should take place through a variety of activities. This includes: express, exchange, liberate, observe, deconstruct, think, digitize, turn, emancipate, experience, remember, educate, experiment, flow, form, research, continue, design, imitate, interact, intervene, map, combine, construct, copy, create, criticize, live, learn, materialize, measure, open, participate, perform, politicize, produce, protest, recycle, reflect, reform, reconstruct, pretend, mirror, play, standardize, theorize, transform, transcend, process, connect, forget, try, repeat, draw.

Collecting Data from Previous Art and Design Education

In 2018, the Istanbul Design Biennial consisted of six pop-up schools. The tag line dubbed "design as learning and learning as design."[1] The educational turn,[2] proclaimed in the arts more than a decade earlier, had arrived in the design world. The educational turn in the arts questioned learning processes as one-way knowledge transfers and challenged learning as an avenue into capitalist society. It sought to show alternative educational and learning methods, meaning: methods with alternative ultimate ends. In contrast, learning in design as seen in Istanbul was proposed as a way to keep up with the vast changes in a fragmenting (digital) society. Yet do curator-led discussions about education lead to feasible change in the learning cultures of art and design schools? Or is learning in arts and design not subject to constant change, change which mirrors

[1] 4th Istanbul Design Biennial, http://aschoolofschools.iksv.org, accessed on November 30, 2018.

[2] Rogoff, Irit (2008) 'Turning', *E-Flux Journal* 18, https://www.kultur-vermittlung.ch/zeit-fuer-vermittlung/download/materialpool/MFV0501.pdf, accessed on November 30, 2018.

[3] Symposium: (Un-)Learning Place, January 2019, Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin.

[4] Steve Lohr, The Age of Big Data, New York Times, Februray 11, 2012.

[5] Thierry de Duve, When Form has become Attitude and beyond, in Felicity Allen (ed.), *Education* (Cambridge/Mass: The MIT Press, 2011), 60-68.

[6] James Elkins, Why Art Cannot Be Taught (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 5.

political and cultural frameworks anyway? Shall we attempt a complete re-start by un-learning, as proposed by the Haus der Kulturen der Welt?[3]

With this article I want to propose another approach. In 2019 the biggest challenge for educators and learners is how to deal with accumulating knowledge and methods – arts and design learning data which are rapidly multiplying.[4] At art and design schools students should be prepared to approach a multitude of learning possibilities as sets of data. In the context of the newly founded Learning Lab Arts and Design (LLAD) at the Institute for Art and Design Education in Basel, I sketch an attempt to process and collect multifaceted art and design learning practices in a data toolbox. The approach I develop here favors opportunities to learn from past and future cultures, to learn from other artistic and design diciplines and to jam, sample and mix traditional learning practices. In this article I reflect on past and present art and design learning methods to start collecting data for the LLAD learning tool box.

Vast changes to and varied attempts at learning may be tracked historically. The Belgian art historian Thierry de Duve has studied changes to learning cultures in Western art schools, from imitating to copying, imagining, deconstructing and simulating.[5] Following his example, I am implementing historic data sampling of learning methods in arts and design as a possibility to identify different learning activities - to be collected, researched and experienced at the LLAD.

Historic Data 1

The term academy is still used for art and design schools in Europe today. The name goes back to Plato's school of philosophy, founded around 385 BC at Akademia, a sanctuary of Athena, the goddess of wisdom and skill, north of Athens. Were skills seen as something one could learn in early academies? We might imagine those first academies, where arts were also taught, as places for noblemen and their sons – priviledged clients whose primary interest was to be entertained and learn through actively listening to their teachers about natural sciences and the humanities.[6] Learning happened through imitating one's teacher in speech and behavior. *Is imitating a learning activity that could be relevant for learning arts and design today and therefore for the LLAD tool box?*

Data 2

The Renaissance academy went on to honor the ancient academic model, but added measuring as a way to learn how to make two- and three-dimensional art. The measurement of aspects such as leg-arm-ratio and central perspectives was discovered as a new method of gaining an understanding of the world. *Mapping, measuring and comparing still open up new perspectives in arts and design learning today.*

Data 3

L'École des Beaux Arts, the French Academy, was a standardized model for learning in the arts, which was later used globally for colonalization and exporting Western world views. The French Academy system focused on repeating a Western male canon of ideals to push and entrench a certain knowledge system. Drawing was seen as the only learning tool to foster understanding of set standards, through repeating certain movements of the the eye and hand. First the students had to copy from copies, than draw from casts, before they were allowed to look at the real world.[7] The idea of copying ideals and the obsession with drawing were emulated as learning methods by all European art academies at the time. Academy timetables looked alike for art students all over the place: drawing classes six days a week.[8] The learning situation at design schools, the first one to open in 1767, did not differ much:[9] drawing from copies, drawing from plaster casts, drawing from flowers and ornaments, and finally drawing from real life. Learning at the academy did not necessarily prepare for a profession or life outside the school. *Should remembering, repeating, copying and drawing be implemented at art and design schools in 2019?*

[7] Dany Butt (2017) Artistic Research in the Future Academy (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), 51.

[8] Nikolaus Pevsner, Academies of Art. Past and Present (Cambridge/Mass: University Press, 1940/2014), 175.

[9] The first trade school for craftsmanship and manufacturing, École Royale Gratuite de Dessin, opened in 1767.

Data 4

With the French Revolution and the following changes to societal hierarchies, thinkers began to question previous learning standards. In his treatise *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* (*Über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen*), Friedrich Schiller comes to

[10] J.C. Friedrich von Schiller: *Letters upon the Aesthetic Values of Man*, 1793, Third letter.

[11] J.C. Friedrich von Schiller: *Letters upon the Aesthetic Values of Man*, 1793, Tenth letter.

[12] Tate Modern, London: Why Study Art? Video, https://www.tate.org.uk/art/videos/tateshots/why-study-art, last accessed on November 30, 2018.

the realisation that aesthetic practices cannot be enforced with moral standards.[10] He speaks up against representational and earmarked arts.[11] Schiller introduces the wholly new – at that time, in the West - concept of play as a way to support the formal and sensous drive to learn not only reason but also a sense of beauty. Learning was opened to individualized forms of expression of emotions and purposelessness. *Today studying arts should be still seen as an open, playful, purposeless space, where one may try out different roles.*[12]

Data 5

[13] William Morris, Lectures on Art delivered in support of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, Morris lecture on The Lesser Arts (London, Macmillan, 1882).

Another movement which sought to promote learning and creating beyond set standards was the Arts and Crafts Movement in England. During industralisation, William Morris fought for teaching the creation of imperfect, hand-made, soul-ful products in order to give a contrast to the aesthetics and economics of machine made goods.[13] *Here we go, crafting is on its way back into the curricula of art and design schools.*

Data 6

[14] John Dewey, Democracy and Education (New York, Macmillian, 1916).

[15] Paul Klee, Pedagogical Sketchbook 1925 (London: Faber und Faber, 1973).

Industrialization and the invention of new technologies such as photography, film and factories for mass production also supported fast progress in the the teaching of arts and design. With an industry to reproduce standardized objects, both the arts and design were freed from representation and reproduction and opened up to expression, experimentation, and process as values in art and design making. The US-American educational reformer John Dewey understood learning not as an isolated activity, but as a tool for making connections. According to Dewey, learning in the arts should include all sorts of activities and materials.[14] Following this new trend, the painter Paul Klee invited his students to learn from and experiment with the artistic elements themselves, for example by asking students to take a line for a walk.[15] *Let me add freeing, processing, expressing, connecting and experimenting to the LLAD learning tool box.*

Data 7

The industrialization also generated a new generation of art and design schools, such as the Bauhaus in Germany or VKhUTEMAS in Moscow. These schools worked on eliminating borders between different art and design disciplines. They offered general preliminary courses, pooled architecture, sculpture, painting and performance with industrial design and new technologies. The students were asked to combine learning through activites in work shops, classic drawing with teachings in mathematics, aesthetic experience, and psychology. Vastly educated artists began to interact and interefere with the world by means of arts and design. *The following activities number among the many things one may learn from Bauhaus: border crossing, combining, performing, connecting, interacting, interfering.*

Data 8

The Black Mountain College in North Carolina (1933-1954) can be seen as a fascinating chapter in the history of learning in the arts. The college was born out of the intention to invent a new type of college, one based on John Dewey's principles of progressive education and the Bauhaus principals. Freedom in learning was the driving motor. At the Black Mountain College learning did not take place for the sake of good grades, as there were none; rather students were provided with a liberal education and the granted the privilege of observing senior artists while they educated themselves. Reputable teachers such as Anni and Josef Albers or Buckminster Fuller made themselves available to be observed while working on campus. Black Mountain's pedagogy could be cast in a critical light as "imitating 2.0" - or seen more positively as a nudge towards learning to be truly independent in one's learning, as the students had to find their learning methods themselves.[16] Learning to learn was seen as a preparation for life.[17] *Learning methods to take with us: inventing, observing, learning, becoming.*

[16] When a student felt ready to graduate, she requested her examination, almost no one ever graduated.

[17] Josef Albers, On Art Instruction, Black Mountain College Bulletin, 1934-35.

Data 9

Later, learning in art and design schools developed even further away from métiers and media. In the 1960s learning in the art and design school came to refer to protesting against previous generations and suppressive structures. Learning in the arts was a way to get the means to protest or express an attitude.[18] The London art schools may serve as concrete examples of how to reform educational structures out of the arts through student protest.[19] *Learning is protesting. Learning is expressing. Learning is politicizing. Learning is reforming.*

Data 9.5

At about the same time, learning art became a practice with a focus on process, not outcome.[20] Art pedagogy was interested in art-making as therapy. *Learning is processing. Learning is practicing. Learning is experiencing. Learning is transforming.*

Data 10

In the late 1980s, Jacques Ranciere went one step further by re-telling the story of Jean-Joseph Jacotot, a school master of the 19th century. Jacoto, so the legend goes, went from France to Belgium to teach students without speaking their language.[21] In this case learning is supposed to happen as a process of completely emancipating oneself from one's teachers, as a metaphor for emancipating oneself from any given norms and rules. *Learning = processing = emancipating.*

Data 11

With the globalization of the education market and the following standardization of learning structures (Bologna reform), art and design schools moved their focus to artistic research. The shift in curricula towards research-orientated terminology and theory-laden teaching marked a new interest in exchanging and relating methods of the arts and the sciences. Newly-founded third cycle PhD programs in art and design promised to supply new learning tools to

[18] Thierry de Duve, When Form has become Attitude and beyond, in Felicity Allen (ed.), *Education* (Cambridge/Mass, The MIT Press, 2011), 60-68. 64.

[19] Nigel Llewellyn and Beth Williamson (ed.), The London Art Schools, Reforming the Art World, 1960 – now (London: Tate Publishing, 2015).

[20] Thierry de Duve, When Form has become Attitude and beyond, in Felicity Allen (ed.), *Education* (Cambridge/Mass, The MIT Press, 2011), 60-68. 64.

[21] Jacques Rancière, The Ignorant Schoolmaster (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991).

further develop one's artistic practice and contribute to the research community. What these methods and tools could be remains undefined. Even Henk Borgdorff, one of the heads of the PhDArts program in Leiden and Den Hague, leaves the identification of fixed learning methods open: "We can justifiably speak of artistic research ('research in the arts') when that artistic practice is not only the result of the research, but also its methodological vehicle, when the research unfolds in and through the acts of creating and performing."[22] *Shall I recommend standardizing as a learning tool? Or rather theorizing, exchanging, relating and researching?*

Data 12

There is also an opposing trend to the universitization of the art school touched on above. In recent years new arts and learning environments – free of charge, open to the public and temporary – have been established with the aim of offering counter-knowledge production spaces. These schools, often artist-led, have popped up in places far away from Western art centers, such as the International Academy of Art Palestine or Tania Bruguera's Beviour Art School in Havana or Mass Alexandrina.[23] Most of them are available online for better accessibility by excluded groups, such as the study programs Kiron or The Silent University.[24] *Political learning is critical thinking, opening, freeing, educating, participating, digitalizing, producing and fleeting.*

Data 11 + 12

In this new manner of sampling data of arts learning and learning environments ECAM PhD candidate Felipe Castelblanco manages to combine and learn from the last sets of data. While studying in Basel he is working on his long-term collaborative project, the PARA-SITE school. "The school infiltrates the university in a parasitical way and uses its resources, people and infrastructure to embrace & serve immigrants and artist-nomads excluded by official universities in the USA and Europe. This project explores education as artistic material and the university as a contested political arena."[25]

Here we are back at the beginning of this article with a concrete version of an educational turn: learning turns into artistic material,

[22] Henk Borgdorff, The Production of Knowledge in Artistic Research, in Michael Biggs, Henrik Karlson Henk, The Routledge Companion to Research in the Arts (Oxord, Routledge, 2006) 43-63, 46.

[23] Sam Thorne, New Schools. A Survey of recently founded arti-run academies and education programs, Freeze, September 1, 2012. Sam Thorne, School: A Recent History of Independent Art Schools (Berlin, Sternberg 2017).

[24] http://www.kiron.ngo, last accessed November 30, 2018; http://www.thesilentuniversity.org, last accessed November 30, 2018.

[25] http://parasiteschool.org, last accessed November 30, 2018.

by deconstructing, reconstructing and reusing established structures and forming new ones. Learning is living as parasites.

Data 1-12 + ?

In 2019 at LLAD we are going to build up and reflect on a rapidly expanding data set of learning practices from the arts, design and past and present cultures to create an ever-growing toolbox of learning. Treating learning in arts and design history as data, I allow myself to depart from chronological order. Instead I organize the (of course incomplete and by the time of publication out-dated) data in an alphabetic system. Learning in arts and design is: *becoming, border crossing, combining, comparing, connecting, copying, crafting, creating, critical thinking, deconstructing, drawing, educating, exchanging, experiencing, fleeting, forming, digitalizing, emancipating, experimenting, expressing, forgetting, freeing, imitating, interacting, interfering, learning, living (as parasites), artistic material, mapping, measuring, mirroring, observing, opening, participating, performing, playing, politicizing, practicing, pretending, processing, producing, protesting, reconstructing, reusing, reflecting, reforming, relating, remembering, repeating, researching, standardizing, theorizing, thinking, transforming, trying, turning. . .*

May the learners, artists, designers, researchers, teachers, educators and supporters of the Learning Lab Arts and Design discover and combine even more learning activities. Only one data shall remain a constant: The art and design school is a vital and dangerous space of new possibilities.

Recommended Readings

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