

## PEDAGOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

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One of the most pressing pedagogical questions for me, having been involved in teaching within theoretical and critical studies on several Fine Art and Design programmes, is what it is we *do* when we do critical theory on a practical, creative educational programme. Supposedly, we do something different from what we do when we teach theory within art history, art theory, cultural studies, design history or design theory degrees, but how is it different, or better perhaps, how can we start developing models that allow us to do theory differently? Given my own background, being somebody who has been heavily involved in teaching, or better perhaps, in *doing* theory within fine art and design degrees, and being somebody involved in an artistic practice oriented towards research processes and what is commonly considered the domain of theory, my perspective, and my interests, are dual in the sense that I straddle the divide between theoretical and artistic research, a divide that is often very pronounced when it comes to academic research and education, trying to situate myself, instead, pedagogically and in terms of research, firmly within the rather uncertain domain of creative critical forms of expression in relation to artistic practices such as design and fine art.

It is, in fact, an issue I've had to deal with consistently over the years, and it remains an issue that I regularly confront working within higher education; the somewhat artificial and arbitrary separation of theory from practice, or the "scientific" from the "artistic," as if all theory rests upon the same foundation as those of the traditional sciences, and as if all artistic research relies on methods, procedures and approaches that are devoid of critical, theoretically informed perspectives; as if there aren't productive crossovers, synergy effects, that occur precisely *between* theoretical and artistic research, from and sometimes simultaneously, as it were, from both directions.

This is a binary, a dualism, that I've seen reflected in the curricula of most of the art and design programmes I've taught on. You have blocks of theory during which students are made to sit through lectures and seminars on art or design history, cultural studies or critical theory. At the end of the course, they write an essay and at the end of the programme, often a longer thesis. In my experience, you often have one group of students who are interested and attentive, produce legible essays based on solid research, and one group of students who tend to sit through seminars lethargically and submit uninspired work.

When we prove successful in garnering the interest of motivated and ambitious students in the issues we try to bring up for discussion, this situation, in my experience, often results in critically astute and well-informed artistic and design practices, but for the most part, again, in my experience, we provide an addendum, a knowledge kept within parenthesis, at a distance, at arm's length, from the artistic or design process.

Now, artistic research, or research within artistic practice, does of course exist but we don't seem to quite know, or at any rate agree upon, exactly what it is, other than that it is not like theoretical research in the traditional sense. Theoretical research drawing upon exploratory methods, inter- and transdisciplinary approaches including different forms of artistic interpretation and articulation also exist, but it is a narrow field, it seems, even within the humanities where research often seems to rest relatively comfortably within formats inherited from the traditional sciences, formats that are arguably not conducive to more experimental research carried out within certain marginalized intersections in academia. In other words, it seems to me our field would benefit from a displacement of the dichotomies that bind us to an either or – either theory (scientific research) or practice (artistic research), and an opening up towards the plethora of methods and perspectives that could develop – that are, in fact, developing – at the very exciting intersection between disciplinary silos in general and between theoretical and artistic research and practice in particular.

I want to emphasize that I'm not suggesting these practices do not yet exist; they do, but in this field, we have to deal with a massive amount of resistance that derives from the dichotomy I have just described. The problem I find when I ask myself what we do when we do theory on fine art and design degrees –

or better perhaps, what we should be doing when we teach theory on fine art and design degrees – derives, in no small part, from this dichotomy, translated into the structures and syllabi of art and design programmes. What we need, then, I think, is to find new responses to this question; what do we do when we do theory?

This is, of course, not the right context for an in-depth discussion of this question, but in order to highlight the issues that remain central to my view on and interest in pedagogy, I would like to provide some potential points of entry all the same, and I would also like to offer some examples of work that I've been involved in developing at the Department of Design at Linnaeus University where we have been given the exciting opportunity to experiment with pedagogical models that integrate theory and practice in different ways within the framework of two new bachelor programmes and one master programme in design with a focus on actions and agencies for change.

To offer a biographical detour, of sorts, I should add that I was schooled in the tradition of the Marxian – not to say Marxist – and feminist art history taught at the Social and Feminist Histories of Art MA programmes at the University of Leeds. I would sit through close-reading seminars with my fellow Art History students but also, in one or two courses, with students from the Fine Art programme. These mixed seminars were tremendously refreshing to me for two reasons: first, they tended to involve a closer engagement with actual artistic practices and art works, and second, the character of the student group was different which opened up to other perspectives and points of entry. I found these courses exciting precisely *because* they involved mixed groups – theory students and fine art students – and although pretty conventional in format and limited to students in two very related fields, they seemed to open up to *other* ways of doing theory; that one can do theory in performative writing, in the graphic design and layout of a text, in artistic interpretation and articulation, in collages and diagrams, in creating situations or performances. It appeared to me, at that stage, that the lecture, the seminar, the essay, thesis or book, locked the very exciting critical potential of theory within some very narrow confines, and that these confines and conventions, in fact, tended to produce certain kinds of theory rather than others; that the form, the convention, in some ways, obstructed or blocked *other* forms of thought.

I won't dwell for longer on my own biographical history. The reason I'm bringing this up, is that to me, the situation I found myself in, learning how to do theory, was different from what I expected. It involved methods and processes of thought and articulation different from those with which I was familiar, and I found this deeply inspiring. In no small part, this had to do with the mixed group – the fact that we came from theoretical as well as fine art degrees, and this seemed to open up to ways of doing theory differently.

My first proposition, then, is that when we do theory on fine art and design degrees, we ought to do theory *differently* from how we do theory on art historical and theoretical programmes. To turn to Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari for a moment, they certainly insisted, at least in their later work, after the two volumes of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, on the separated-ness of philosophy, science and art, and indeed on the distinctness and specificity of each of the arts (painting, sculpture, literature, film, etc.).<sup>i</sup> Yet, they allowed for escape routes within each delineated field of practice. Deleuze described the quality of a certain strand of philosophy, for instance, as being about carving out a theatrical space within philosophy. This, to Deleuze, is the great achievement of philosophers such as Nietzsche and Kierkegaard. They are not doing theatre. They carve out a theatrical space, they make room for a veritable theatre, inside philosophy, and through such carving out, philosophy transforms, opens up to different forms of thought.<sup>ii</sup>

They say something similar about literature. Writing about Franz Kafka – but this is a more general claim – they argue that great literature begins with an architecture.<sup>iii</sup> A writer needs to set up an architecture within literature. She needs to construct a set of planes and frames that amount to nothing less than an architecture. This does not mean the writer is an architect. It means that for literature – or for a particular kind of literature – to venture on a trajectory of differentiation, to become other to itself, to break with the conventions that bind it, it needs to construct an architecture within literature.

To get to the significance of this notion, however, we need to rethink the distinction Deleuze and Guattari tend to maintain between philosophical thought and artistic practice, and open up, instead, to the notion that transversal lines may cross between these fields in practices that are creative *and* critical, and significantly, that may transgress such dichotomies altogether producing exceedingly hybrid forms. It is precisely such *contamination* of the one with the other – the theatrical space within philosophy, the architecture within literature – that is at stake here.

I suppose what I'm suggesting is that rather than doing theory – the theory with which we are familiar in ways with which we are familiar – on fine art and design degrees, we need to somehow carve out a space for theory within fine art practice; a space for a mutual contamination, that shifts the parameters of artistic research and practice while potentially offering theoretical research and practice escape routes from its generic formats and frameworks.

This notion of mutual contamination brings me to my second suggestion, my second point of entry into this outline of a pedagogical perspective. Again, I turn to Deleuze, but this time to a text, or rather a conversation, that I suppose is less widely read than his work with Guattari. The text I'm referring to is a transcription of a 1972 conversation between Gilles Deleuze and Michel Foucault published under the title *Intellectuals and Power*<sup>iv</sup> in which they describe the relationship between theory and practice as a process of relays. It is, in other words, a question of theory opening out into practice, and practice, in turn articulating itself as theory. There is no primacy to either theory or practice. They unfold, continuously, one into the other, in a sort of twisting choreography.

Now, they are talking about activism and political practice, but I don't think it's too much of a stretch of the imagination, to think the relationship between theory and artistic practice in the same way. It is not a dichotomy or dualism where one term is consistently the privileged one. It is a relay process involving continuous shifts and transformations. It is not about doing theory within fine art practice. It is about producing a site for contamination that involve both in a continuous relay process; to carve out a theoretical space within fine art practice and to construct the scaffolding of an art within theoretical practice to allow for a movement between the two.

Third, I would like to emphasize the relevance of sensations and experiences as pedagogical tools when doing theory on fine art and design degrees. I mean this in two senses:

First, in the sense that one ought to begin with the concrete experience of a situation or encounter rather than a theoretical reflection upon a situation or encounter. I keep coming back to Deleuze and Guattari, and I will do so once more. Guattari once wrote about writing, that it begins in something else.<sup>v</sup> It requires an encounter with what is outside the field of literature: drugs (Burrough's opiates, Kerouac's Bensedrines), travel (Kerouac's mountain, Burrough's Tangiers), other technologies (Burrough's and Beckett's tape recorders), to mention but a few. Doing theory on fine art and design degrees, I think perhaps we ought to adopt a similar approach – doing theory, in the sense proposed here, begins with the encounter with what is, in a sense, outside of the theoretical. It begins with an experience, an encounter, a situation, a problematic explored and experienced practically, materially, concretely. Exciting and inspiring work opening up these kinds of approaches and perspectives has been carried out by Deleuzians such as Elizabeth Grosz and Spinozist feminists such as Moira Gatens and Genevieve Lloyd, amongst many others, not to mention neuroscientists such as Antonio Damasio and psychoanalysts such as Catherine Malabou. It is, I believe, an interesting field to consider when it comes to developing creative critical pedagogies such as the ones I've been trying to hint at.

Second, and this is interrelated, I think we ought to encourage students to think of reading – theory as well as poetry and literature – looking at art, dealing with materials, media and technologies, as – initially – affective, sensuous experiences. In an interview, Guattari once said that it is not a question of reading writers such as Joyce or Kafka, or to rephrase this slightly, it is not a question of interpretation; much rather, it is a question of making love with Joyce or Kafka, a conjugal affair, a love affair.<sup>vi</sup> Deleuze, of course, has (in)famously made a similar remark about reading (and writing on) philosophy.<sup>vii</sup> This is not to say that reading doesn't involve thought or theory. It is to say that it begins

in an encounter of a different kind, that prompts one to think, that generates theory. In fact, the encounter with a theoretical concept may be one instance of this, if it is affective, sensuous, if it strikes you and brings you off on a trajectory of thought. In this sense, the encounter with a text, an image, a concept – and the list, of course, continues – is always creative but also, in a sense, a crisis in that it prompts a transformation, or becoming-other. Following Anne Dufourmantelle, one might then perhaps say that it is an ethico-aesthetic encounter, and act, that inevitably involves risk.

Finally, one last proposition – given the complexities and urgencies we are currently facing, with interconnected climate crises across what we habitually tend to think of as the separate domains of ecology, economy, culture, science, etc., an overall incitement, pedagogically and in terms of research, must be a paradigmatic orientation towards specifically earthbound encounters and practices across disciplines, scientific and artistic alike. The instigation of a *geo*-ontology, specifically, and a *geo*-epistemology traversing disciplines and fields of practice, including what I have referred to as creative critical ones, is thus paramount. What such planetary encounter, an encountering the Earth anew, entails in terms of pedagogy is a difficult and uncertain question, but it is one that needs to saturate our approaches to collective learning, challenging, questioning and, at times, disrupting habitual forms and structures for engendering knowledge in order to allow for more radical thoughts, shifts and points of departure. The notion of a creative critical contamination of disciplinary knowledge – that is, not an inter- or multidisciplinary approach but one that constructs, immanently, from within, mutagenetic potentials for transversality putting new conceptual figurations at work – and a notion of relay-like passages between critical-theoretical reflection, creative artistic expression, and their implementation in practice is a starting point, as is the notion that knowledge, thought, is embodied, lodged in an embodied life, in *ethos* and *aesthesis*, but introducing the prefix *geo*- into this diagram that I've been trying to draw, complicates matters, threatens any creative and affirmative approach with either a convincing nihilism and/or the black suns of melancholia, but it also, potentially, opens up to processes of *geo*-transversality that remain transformative rather than reproductive of exploitative practices and behaviours. It is in relation to such transversality that we need to start constructing creative critical pedagogies facing the admittedly Sisyphean task of living in and with the climate emergency.

On a more practical note, I'd like to give a couple of examples of pedagogical experiments I have been part of developing at the Department of Design, Linnaeus University, and elsewhere:

*Biomapping*: Students are asked to explore a fictional life, from birth to death, by engaging with the material artefacts, spaces, sites, architectures, structures and systems that shape and form our lives.<sup>viii</sup> Documenting the processes photographically, they then construct collages from the material assembled on a long scroll of paper. In the third stage of the workshop semi-transparent tracing paper are put on top of the collage and the students are encouraged to sketch and write on the paper, exploring the material from a sustainability perspective looking at the ways in which ecological, economic, socio-political and cultural systems produce a complex ecology in which we are situated as subjects and the different processes and economies of production, exchange and consumption this involves. Students can then explore the issues thus raised in further depth in seminars and reading groups.

*Fictioning*: This workshop concerns itself with the practicalities and pragmatics of fictioning, understood as the material embodiment or instantiation of fiction within the real.<sup>ix</sup> Questions raised concern the ways in which fiction can contribute to the ethico-aesthetic production of subjectivity (understood as something potentially collective and not necessarily tethered to an individual) through discourse as well as socio-materialities such as artefacts, garments and masks. Also important is the site of fictioning, which is to say the local environment, its different histories and futures, its passageways and points of transits, both real and imagined. In the workshop, students conduct exploratory walks making use of deliberate sensory attentiveness-es documented in sound, photographs / videos, texts, maps and drawings. Exploring notions of collaborative fictioning in and across different senses and media, the material thus gathered during the walks are turned into inter- or transmedial assemblages opening up to collective fictions that are performed in different ways (readings, screenings, listening

sessions, performances, rituals, etc.). Initial mapping/diagramming projects and sonic/aural soundings of the local environment (through attentiveness) is thus used to dismantle and discuss the fictions that constitute “the real” and to performatively actualize other fictions - or even new myths – which in turn can be discussed in terms of the usefulness of fictioning as a catalyst for social and political change.

*Metalogues:* Taking its inspiration from Gregory Bateson,<sup>x</sup> the metalogue workshop is a model that helps student groups explore issues to do with identity and otherness. Students are divided into groups and given one or more texts to read on a potentially contentious theme. They are then encouraged to discuss the text, recording their discussion using video cameras. At the second stage of the workshop, students watch the recording and discuss their experience of watching themselves. Together they decide upon the most significant part of the recording and make a transcription of this section in the form of a manuscript. They then re-enact their discussion, playing themselves, then taking turns playing each other. In the concluding discussion, the experience of the workshop is used as a basis for more in-depth and theoretically informed, reflective discussions around issues to do with issues such as identity, otherness, sociality and collaboration.

*Breakfast workshops:* Taking its inspiration from a therapeutic model developed by Daniel Stern,<sup>xi</sup> students are introduced to two different conceptions of time in relationship to memory: the chronological time that you construct to narrate a particular period of time (for instance, the period from getting out of bed to arriving at college), and the intensities of time you actually remember in the form of distinct memory images (for instance, a tooth brush, a broken bottle, or the logotype printed on a box of orange juice). Students are then asked to sit in silence and try to distinguish between these two different kinds of time reflecting on a particular period of time during their day or the preceding day, such as having breakfast in the morning. In the process, they make note of the things they remember distinctly, the distinct images that appear, even if they seem entirely irrelevant. In the next step of the exercise, students are encouraged to reflect upon the reasons why they remember certain things distinctly (for example, why do you think you remember the toothbrush distinctly and not anything else from the part of your morning spent in the bathroom?). As they reflect upon this, they are encouraged to make notes or sketch, considering what caused them to remember specific details distinctly. In the third step of the exercise, they are asked to repeat the question, delving deeper into what may have caused them to remember something distinctly. Throughout the process, students are reminded that the material they come up with will remain confidential and that they will not be asked to share it with the class or with any member of staff. Doing the exercise, most students come up against significant biographical events that have shaped their images of themselves, as well as their anxieties, concerns, prejudices and preconceptions of others. At this stage, significant questions around culture and identity can be introduced to give students some context and allow them to reflect on their experience of the workshop in light of relevant critical and theoretical frameworks.

*Rituals of Care:* This workshop is an attempt to map out the foundations of an ethico-aesthetic practice focusing on the rituals of everyday life and the notion of ‘care’ in relation to sustainability. First, students explore the rituals involved in any given part of their day, outlining and reflecting upon the day preceding the workshop. In three steps, participants are then asked to reflect upon and contextualize these reflections, keeping the notion of ritual and the distinction and movement between routine or habit and ritual, firmly in mind. Second, students work in groups speculatively designing what rituals of care will be required as we face a future increasingly defined by climate related crises, keeping in mind the etymological distinction between care as “looking after” and care as “lament or loss.” What rituals do we need to invent, what kinds of attentiveness, in order to construct universes in which life, in some form, can be cared for? Which routines and habits do we need to put an end to and at what emotional, cultural, social and political cost? What rituals of loss and mourning might this entail?

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<sup>i</sup> For reference, see Deleuze, G. and Guattari, F., *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (London: Athlone Press, 1984), *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (London: Athlone Press, 1988) and *What is Philosophy?* (London: Verso, 1994).

<sup>ii</sup> Deleuze, G., *Difference and Repetition* (London: Athlone Press, 1994)

<sup>iii</sup> Deleuze, G. and Guattari, F., *Kafka: Towards a Minor Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986)

<sup>iv</sup> Intellectuals and Power

<sup>v</sup> Guattari, F., 'A Liberation of Desire: An Interview with George Stambolian,' in Genosko, G. [ed.], *The Guattari Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996)

<sup>vi</sup> Guattari, F., *ibid.*

<sup>vii</sup> Deleuze, G., 'I have nothing to admit,' in *Semiotext(e)* (2:3, 1977)

<sup>viii</sup> Benjamin, W., *One-Way Street* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016)

<sup>ix</sup> O'Sullivan, S. and Burrows, D., *Fictioning: The Myth-Functions of Contemporary Art and Philosophy* (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 2019)

<sup>x</sup> Bateson, G., *Steps to an Ecology of Mind: Collected Essays in Anthropology, Psychiatry, Evolution, and Epistemology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000)

<sup>xi</sup> Stern, S., *The Present Moment in Psychotherapy and Everyday Life* (New York: Norton and Co, 2004)