

# ARTIFICIAL HELLS

*Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*

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## Pedagogic Projects: ‘How do you bring a classroom to life as if it were a work of art?’

This chapter of this book has been the most difficult to write, because pedagogic art projects touch most closely my own professional field of activity: teaching and research. When artistic practice claims to be pedagogic, it immediately creates conflicting criteria in my mind: art is given to be seen by others, while education has no image. Viewers are not students, and students are not viewers, although their respective relationships to the artist and teacher have a certain dynamic overlap. The history of participatory art nevertheless incites us to think of these categories more elastically. For many decades, artists have attempted to forge a closer connection between art and life, referring to their interventions into social processes as art; most recently this includes educational experiments. As I have indicated throughout this book, such categorical expansions place considerable pressure on spectatorship as conventionally understood. Indeed, in its strictest sense, participation forecloses the traditional idea of spectatorship and suggests a new understanding of art without audiences, one in which everyone is a producer. At the same time, the existence of an audience is ineliminable, since it is impossible for everyone in the world to participate in every project.

The 2000s saw a marked rise of pedagogic projects undertaken by contemporary artists and curators. The cancellation of Manifesta 6 (2006), an attempt to re-organise the itinerant European biennial as an art school in Nicosia, was the moment when this trend began to accelerate. There was a conspicuous surge of interest in examining the relationship between art and pedagogy, dually motivated by artistic concerns (a desire to augment the intellectual content of relational conviviality) and developments in higher education (the rise of academic capitalism, discussed below).<sup>1</sup> Since then, both artists and curators have become increasingly engaged in projects that appropriate the tropes of education as both a method and a form: lectures, seminars, libraries, reading-rooms, publications, workshops and even full-blown schools.<sup>2</sup> This has paralleled the growth of museum education departments, whose activities are no longer restricted to classes and

workshops to enhance the viewer's understanding of a particular exhibition or collection, but can now include research networks with universities, symposia reflecting upon their practice, and interdisciplinary conferences whose scope extends far beyond the enhancement of a museum's exhibition programme.<sup>3</sup> In museums and art schools throughout Europe (and increasingly the US), conferences have been held to re-examine the politics and potentialities of art education, while numerous art magazines have produced special issues examining the intersection of art, education and performance.<sup>4</sup> The most recent developments have been institutional and corporate variants on the self-organised model, such as the Serpentine Gallery's off-site education base in London (*The Centre for Possible Studies*, 2009 onwards), Bruno Latour's interdisciplinary *School of Political Arts* at Université Sciences-Po (Paris, 2010 onwards), but also Nike's collaboration with Cooper Hewitt to produce art and design workshops for teenagers (*Make Something*, New York, 2010). It should be stressed, however, that pedagogic projects are still marginal in relation to the ongoing business of the art market, even though they are increasingly influential in the European public sector.<sup>5</sup>

The first thing that seems important to note in this efflorescence of artistic interest in education is its indication of a changing relationship between art and the academy. If in the past, academia was perceived as a dry and elitist institution (an association that persists in the use of 'academic' as a derogatory adjective), today education is figured as art's potential ally in an age of ever-decreasing public space, rampant privatisation and instrumentalised bureaucracy. At the same time, as Irit Rogoff notes, there is a certain slippage between terms like 'education', 'self-organised pedagogies', 'research' and 'knowledge production', so that the radical strands of the intersection between art and pedagogy blur easily with the neoliberal impetus to render education a product or tool in the 'knowledge economy'.<sup>6</sup> So how can we tell the difference between 'pedagogical aesthetics' and more generative intersections of art and education?<sup>7</sup> The current literature on art and pedagogy (of which Irit Rogoff's contribution is frequently cited) tends not to deal with specific modes of this intersection and the differences between art and education as discourses. For Rogoff, both art and education revolve around Foucault's notion of 'parrhesia' or 'free, blatant public speech': an educational turn in art and curating, she argues, might be 'the moment when we attend to the production and articulation of truths – not truth as correct, as provable, as fact, but truth as that which collects around it subjectivities that are neither gathered nor reflected by other utterances'. Rogoff's theory has been influential, but has the drawback of being rather general: no specific examples are given or analysed. The artist Luis Camnitzer is more to the point when he surveys the history of Latin American conceptual art, and notes that art and alternative pedagogy shared a project in resisting abuses of power by the state in the 1960s. In the



southern hemisphere, educational upheavals were premised on increasing access to education and equipping people with new creative tools; in the US and Europe, by contrast, the oppressed were equated with students, leading to changes only in the content of education, premised on freeing individuality with the assumption that democracy would follow.<sup>8</sup>

The history that Camnitzer outlines is formative for the one I am tracing, since the moment of institutional critique in art arrived at the same time as education's own self-examination, most notably in Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968), which I will return to below. These ruptures resulted in similar moves away from authoritarian models of transferring knowledge and towards the goal of empowerment through collective (class) awareness. Camnitzer – along with Joseph Beuys, Lygia Clark, Jef Geys and Tim Rollins (to name just a handful of figures) – is one of the most important precursors for contemporary artists working at the interface of art and pedagogy. For all of these artists, education was – or continues to be – a central concern in their work.

It is Joseph Beuys, however, who remains the best-known point of reference for contemporary artists' engagement with experimental pedagogy; in 1969 he claimed that 'to be a teacher is my greatest work of art'.<sup>9</sup> Ten years after he began working in the sculpture department of the Düsseldorf Kunstakademie, Beuys protested against admission restrictions and in August 1971 accepted 142 students onto his course.<sup>10</sup> This attempt to synchronise a professional position with his credo that 'everyone is an artist' (or at least, an art student) led to his expulsion from the Kunstakademie just over a year later, and to the formation, in 1973, of his own institution, the Free International University for Creativity and Interdisciplinary Research (still operational in the mid 1990s). Dedicated to realising the capacity of each person to be a creative being, this free, non-competitive, open academy offered an interdisciplinary curriculum in which culture, sociology and economics were integrated as the foundations of an all-encompassing creative programme. The Free International University sought to implement Beuys's belief that economics should not be restricted to a question of money but should include alternative forms of capital, such as people's creativity.<sup>11</sup> Prior to founding the FIU, Beuys's performances had, from 1971 onwards, already turned away from symbolic, quasi-shamanic actions towards a pedagogic format – most notably lectures and seminars on social and political structures. In February 1972, for example, he held two lecture-actions on consecutive days at Tate and the Whitechapel Art Gallery, the former lasting a marathon six and a half hours. During that Summer, he set up the *Bureau for Direct Democracy* at Documenta 5 (1972) and engaged in debate with the casual public about electoral reform. As the '70s progressed, the blackboards bearing traces of these performance-discussions became installations, occupying the space for the remainder of the exhibition as a trace of social and intellectual exchange.<sup>12</sup>

From a contemporary perspective, one of Beuys's most salient later projects is *100 Days of the Free International University*, organised for Documenta 6 (1977). Thirteen interdisciplinary workshops, open to the public, featured trade unionists, lawyers, economists, politicians, journalists, community workers, educationalists and sociologists speaking alongside actors, musicians and young artists.<sup>13</sup> In moving beyond the humanities to embrace the social sciences, Beuys prefigures an important strand of recent curatorial and artistic activity.<sup>14</sup> However, there are important differences between Beuys and artists working today: Beuys's commitment to free education was for the most part dependent on his own charismatic leadership, rendering unclear the line between education and one-man performance; today's artists, by contrast, are less likely to present themselves as the central pedagogic figure. They outsource the work of lecturing and teaching to specialists in the field – in line with the broader tendency in recent performance art to delegate performance to other people (as discussed in the previous chapter). Very little attention has been paid in Anglophone art history to Beuys's activities of the 1970s, despite the fact that they form the most central precursor of contemporary socially engaged art, intersecting artistic goals with social, political and pedagogic ambitions. Only Jan Verwoert provides a nuanced reading of Beuys's persona as a teacher in the 1970s (and it is telling that his parents were both students of the artist). He argues that Beuys's output should be characterised as a hyper-intensity of pedagogic and political commitment – an excess that both reinforced and undermined his institutional position. Beuys was both 'too progressive and too provocative': rejecting a



Joseph Beuys, Free International University seminar, 1977



curriculum, offering day-long critiques of student work, but also physically attacking the student's art if a point needed to be made.<sup>15</sup> During an official matriculation ceremony at the Kunstakademie, for example, he greeted the new students by carrying an axe and uttering inarticulate barking sounds into a microphone for ten minutes (*ÖÖ-Programm*, 1967). For Verwoert, the humour and excess of this gesture does not easily fit into his critics' narratives of mystical creativity, and seems to open up a parodic, more subversive aspect to Beuys's work as an artist and professor.

Furthermore, Verwoert also argues that Beuys's practice of speaking publicly 'should be treated not as a metadiscourse *on* his art but as an artistic medium *sui generis*'.<sup>16</sup> As seen in the reception of APG's activities (see Chapter 6), in the 1970s it was not yet possible to conceptualise public discussion as an artistic activity.<sup>17</sup> Beuys himself seemed to reinforce this impression that discussion was not a didactic medium, but a more immediate, quasi-spiritual mode of communication: 'I want to get to the origin of the matter, to the thought behind it . . . In the simplest terms, I am trying to reaffirm the concept of art and creativity in the face of Marxist doctrine.'<sup>18</sup> Today, we can recognise not just speech, but also teaching as an artistic medium. If Beuys drew a conceptual line between his output as a sculptor and his discursive/pedagogic work, many contemporary artists see no fundamental distinction between these categories. Programming events, seminars and discussions (and the alternative institutions that might result from these) can all be regarded as artistic outcomes in exactly the same way as the production of discrete objects, performances and projects. At the same time, pedagogic art raises a persistent set of epistemological problems for the art historian and critic: What does it mean to do education (and programming) *as art*? How do we judge these experiences? What kind of efficacy do they seek? Do we need to experience them first hand in order to comment on them?

Such questions can also be asked of most long-term art projects with activist or therapeutic goals, but the ambiguous status of pedagogic projects seems even more pressing for those of us already engaged in institutional education. I began writing this chapter when working at Warwick University, where the question of criteria of judgement in relation to academic activities had become crushingly remote from the motivations that first led me into this profession.<sup>19</sup> When I encountered artists speaking of education in creative and liberatory terms, it seemed perplexing, if not wilfully misguided: for me, the university was one of the most bureaucratic and stiflingly uncreative environments I had ever encountered. At the same time, I was sympathetic towards the disciplinary reorientation I was witnessing: artists seemed to be moving a 'relational' practice (in which open-ended conviviality was sufficient evidence of social engagement) towards discursive situations with high-level intellectual content. As an outsider, however, I was often dissatisfied with the visual and conceptual



rewards of these projects. When I found projects I liked and respected, I had no idea how to communicate them to others: their dominant goal seemed to be the production of a dynamic experience for participants, rather than the production of complex artistic forms. The spectatorial implications of art becoming education are therefore a recurrent theme in the following case studies I have chosen to focus on: Tania Bruguera, Paul Chan, Paweł Althamer and Thomas Hirschhorn. Each presents a different approach to this problem of spectatorship in relation to the pedagogic task, and show the advances that have taken place in both project-based work and its documentation since ‘Culture in Action’ (1993, discussed in Chapter 7). I have necessarily presented these projects in a more narrative, subjective voice than my examples in previous chapters.

### *I. Useful Art*

The first, and perhaps longest running, pedagogic project of the 2000s was *Cátedra Arte de Conducta* (2002–9): an art school conceived as a work of art by Cuban artist Tania Bruguera (b.1968). Based at her home in Havana Vieja and run with the help of two staff, it was dedicated to providing a training in political and contextual art for art students in Cuba. Bruguera established *Arte de Conducta* (or ‘behaviour art’) at the end of 2002, after returning to her country from participating in Documenta 11 with a sense of dissatisfaction at the limitations of creating artistic experiences for viewers. Instead she wished to make a concrete contribution to the art scene in Cuba, partly in response to its lack of institutional facilities and exhibition infrastructure, and partly in response to ongoing state restrictions on Cuban citizens’ travel and access to information. A third factor was the recent and rapid consumption of Cuban art by US tourists in the wake of the 2000 Havana Biennial, in which young artists had found their work bought up wholesale and rapidly integrated into a Western market over which they had no control.<sup>20</sup> One of the aims of Bruguera’s project was therefore to train a new generation of artists to deal self-reflexively with this situation, mindful of a global market while producing art that addressed their local context.

Strictly speaking, *Arte de Conducta* is best understood as a two-year course rather than as an art school proper: it was a semi-autonomous module under the auspices of the Instituto Superior de Arte (ISA) in Havana. Students didn’t get credits for attending it, but the institutional affiliation was necessary in order for Bruguera to secure visas for visiting lecturers. In the early years, many of these visitors were funded by Bruguera herself, through a teaching position at the University of Chicago (2004–9).<sup>21</sup> *Conducta* or ‘behaviour’ is Bruguera’s alternative to the Western term ‘performance art’, but it also evokes the Escuela de Conducta, a school for juvenile delinquents where Bruguera used to teach art. *Arte de Conducta*,

however, was not concerned with enforcing disciplinary norms but with the opposite: its focus was art that engages with reality, particularly at the interface of usefulness and illegality – since ethics and the law are, for Bruguera, domains that need continually to be tested. One of the archetypal works produced at the school (and the first one I was exposed to in a crit) is *El Escandalo de lo Real* (2007) by Susana Delahante. When the student showed me the photograph of this work I had no idea what I was looking at; she explained that it was an image showing herself being impregnated, via a speculum, with the semen of a recently deceased man.<sup>22</sup> A less visceral example would be Celia and Yunior's *Registro de Población* (2004), in which the artists took advantage of the legal loophole by which it is possible to repeatedly apply for identity cards: accumulated sequentially, the dated cards evoke a work by On Kawara, while also undermining the authenticated uniqueness we associate with proofs of identity.

One of the first questions that tends to be raised in relation to pedagogic art projects concerns the composition of the student body. In the case of *Arte de Conducta*, this was both rigid and very fluid. Bruguera took on eight students each year, plus an art historian, who was expected to make art (like the other students) as well as producing a continual report of the project over that year, thereby guaranteeing that *Arte de Conducta* formed a historical account of itself from within. Beyond this official intake, the workshops were also open to everyone interested: previous students, their partners, and the general public (mainly professional artists and critics). This openness is an important difference between *Arte de Conducta* and other artist's schools, such as the Kuitca programme in Buenos Aires.<sup>23</sup> As such, the structure of Bruguera's school is both official and informal:

The symbolic structure is the one where I'm reproducing the recognizable elements of an educational program, one that I install but do not respect. For example to enter the project one has to go through a selection process in front of an international jury who chooses the 'best' candidates. But once the workshops start I let in anybody who wants to attend even if they didn't make it through the selection committee.<sup>24</sup>

Some aspects of the course are more or less conventional: teaching, for example, is structured around one-week workshops that always include a public talk and crits of the students' work. Invited artists assign the students a specific project: Dan Perjovschi asked the students to make a newspaper, while Artur Żmijewski assigned the task of making a 'non-literal adaptation' of a communist propaganda film from Poland. Most of the visiting artists are engaged in performance in some way, and many are from former socialist countries, in order to help the Cuban students understand the transition their own society will inevitably be going through. There have also been curators and theorists (including myself), who together with the



artists amount to an imported exhibition culture: bringing images and ideas to the island that do not otherwise circulate there due to severe restrictions on internet usage. Bruguera has also invited a lawyer and a journalist (to advise students on the legal and press implications of undertaking performance in the public sphere), as well as historians, sociologists and mathematicians. Teachers were encouraged to regard *Arte de Conducta* as a 'mobile school' and to use the whole city as a base for operations; during my time there, the Kosovan artist Sislej Xhafa asked students to make actions in a hotel (which Cubans are forbidden from entering), outside the Museum of the Revolution, and at a barber's shop. Each workshop ends with a Friday night fiesta at Bruguera's home. The aim is to produce a space of free speech in opposition to dominant authority (not unlike Freire's aims in Brazil) and to train students not just to make art but to experience and formulate a civil society.

If the question of representation is an ongoing theme in most art classes, the question of how to communicate this school-as-art to an external audience is an ongoing problem. It is telling that Bruguera did not attempt to do this for the first five years of the project. When invited to participate in the 2008 Gwangju Biennial, however, Bruguera decided to show *Arte de Conducta*; rather than exhibiting documentation, she made the decision to show a representative sample of the students' work, albeit in a rather conventional and unsatisfying installation. A more dynamic solution was found to mark the end of the school during the 2009 Havana Biennial. Entitled *Estado de Excepción*, it comprised nine group shows over as many days, open to the public between 5 and 9 p.m., de-installed every night and



Tania Bruguera, *Cátedra Arte de Conducta*, 2002–9. Workshop with Elvía Rosa Castro.



re-installed every morning, thereby aiming to capture the urgency and intensity of the school as a whole. Each day was organised around themes such as ‘Jurisdiction’, ‘Useful Art’, and ‘Trafficking Information’, and presented a selection of work from the school alongside work by visiting lecturers (often sent as instructions), including Thomas Hirschhorn and Elmgreen & Dragset. Each night the space looked completely different, while the students’ short, sharp interventions often outstripped everything else in the biennial in terms of their subversive wit and direct engagement with the Cuban situation. Many works dealt with issues of censorship, internet restrictions and social taboos; Alejandro Ulloa, for example, simply placed the most expensive piece of computer equipment in Cuba on a plinth – an anonymous grey cable for connecting a data projector.

The question remains, however, as to why *Arte de Conducta* needs to be called a work of art, rather than simply an educational project that Bruguera undertook in her home city. One possible answer invokes her authorial identity as an artist. The school, like many of the student projects it produced, can be described as a variation on what Bruguera has designated as ‘useful art’ (*arte util*) – in other words, art that is both symbolic *and* useful, refuting the traditional Western assumption that art is useless or without function. This concept allows us to view *Arte de Conducta* as inscribed within an ongoing practice that straddles the domains of art and social utility. Presenting *Arte de Conducta* at the Havana biennial was ‘useful’ in that it allowed Bruguera to expose to an international audience a younger generation who would never otherwise be chosen by the Biennial committee. During the same Havana Biennial, Bruguera presented *Tatlin’s Whisper #6*, a controversial performance in which the Cuban public were offered one minute of free speech on a podium inside the Centro Wilfredo Lam.<sup>25</sup> While both of these projects could fall under the category of ‘doing good’ (as in the recent proliferation of NGO-style art projects), Bruguera defines useful art more broadly as a performative gesture that affects social reality, be this civil liberties or cultural politics, and which is not necessarily tied to morality or legality (as seen for example, in Susana Delahante’s *El Escandalo do Real*, or in Bruguera’s own *Tatlin’s Whisper #6*).

Bruguera’s practice, aiming to impact on both art and reality, requires that we grow accustomed to making double judgements, and to considering the impact of her actions in both domains. In the case of *Arte de Conducta*, it’s necessary to apply the criteria of experimental education *and* of artistic project. From the former perspective, the conceptual framework devised for the school testifies to a rethinking of both art-school education and the genres being taught. For example, she refers not only to *conducta* or ‘behaviour’ instead of performance, and to ‘guests’ and ‘members’ rather than teachers and students, but membership of the school is both controlled (by applications and a jury) and open to all. Her own home is the school’s headquarters and library, and she has an informal relationship with the

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students (who frequently stay overnight at her house, even in her bed, when she is away). As an artwork, the dynamic time-based solution that she eventually found for the project – a rapidly changing exhibition of the students' works alongside those of previous teachers – was exhilaratingly intense, sociable and artistically rewarding, widely agreed to be one of the best contributions to an otherwise ideologically laden Havana Biennial.

However, one drawback of making these divisions between art and education, and their attendant disciplinary criteria, is the assumption that the way we judge respective disciplines is fixed (rather than mutable); it risks foreclosing the emergence of new criteria from their intersection. Although Bruguera views the project as a work of art, she does not address what might be artistic in *Arte de Conducta*. Her criterion is the production of a new generation of socially and politically engaged artists in Cuba, but also the exposure of visiting lecturers to new ways of thinking about teaching in context. Both of these goals are long-term and unrepresentable. Rhetorically, Bruguera always privileges the social over the artistic, but I would argue that her entire shaping of *Arte de Conducta* is reliant on an artistic imagination (an ability to deal with form, experience and meaning). Rather than perceiving art as something separate (and subordinate) to a 'real social process', art is in fact integral to her conception of each project. Equally, her artistic imagination was manifest in the method she devised to display this project to the viewers of the Havana Biennial. Both art and education can have long-term goals, and they can be equally dematerialised, but imagination and daring are crucial to both.