

We are multiple
—Notes on developing art education

Abstract:

In the presentation I will discuss the MFA programme Critical & Pedagogical Studies at Malmö Art Academy, which I have been developing for the past five years. The programme was initiated in 2011 as a progressive venture that entered into a composite field including aspects of artistic practice, research, and pedagogy—explored from the position of the artist. The three main areas (practice, pedagogy, and critical theory) are combined and form the core of the programme—disciplines that otherwise tend to be divided within contemporary art education. Through dialogical and collective learning situations for a small group of artists and participants, the programme encourages a space for critical reflection upon the multiple positions that artists can inhabit. These positions can be seen as a necessity for exploring different articulations in the field of art, but often they have become a prerequisite for making a living by means of artistic practice. For instance, teaching and pedagogy can play a significant role in expanding the multiple positions that one can inhabit in an artistic practice. During the presentation I would like to elaborate a bit on pedagogy as artistic method and matter, in order to better address its materiality or immateriality, as well as the notion of artists teaching artists.

Outline:

Intro to talk

Intro to programme

Hybrid practice in a neoliberal sphere

Pedagogy and work stories

Introduction to talk

Thank you for inviting me to this exciting conference. I am a visual artist and the programme director of the Critical & Pedagogical Studies MFA programme at Malmö Art Academy, also called the CPS programme. I will read from this paper to make sure I keep on track throughout my presentation—despite the slightly dry format, so bear with me.

The images you will see as a speedy slide show are an archival mix of exam projects and seminar situations from the CPS programme. In this presentation, which I have given the title ***We are multiple—Notes on developing art education***, I will attempt to map a few positions relating to artistic practice and pedagogy, as well as describe some central aspects in the development of the MFA programme Critical & Pedagogical Studies, which has just entered its fifth year. The programme was initiated in 2011 and was the first programme in Europe to merge the fields of pedagogy, critical thinking, and artistic practice as its core foundation. The programme attempts to be an experimental platform where the students effect and partially shape a flexible curriculum. It is a progressive venture that enters a field between artistic practice, research, and pedagogy—disciplines which tend to be divided within contemporary art education.

Mentioning “pedagogy” can still trigger some awkward responses. It is rarely mentioned as an aspect of artistic practice and only indirectly used when discussing art education through terms like ‘learning strategies’. Perhaps pedagogy is still so strongly associated with the teacher-pupil situation witnessed in classrooms all over the world, that using the word in a broader sense can become a challenge? One of the graduating students in the CPS programme recently did a small survey on ‘artists teaching artists’ as a part of her exam project and found that only half of the interviewed artist-educators answered “yes” to the question “can art be taught?” This perhaps is a consequence of the teacher-pupil concept that is conjured by the use of the word “taught”.

One of the questions that keeps recurring in regards to the CPS programme is: Are you educating art teachers in this programme? And, to be clear from the beginning: No—we are investigating multiple possible articulations in the field of art from the position of the artist.

Introduction to Malmö Art Academy

Before I begin describing the Critical & Pedagogical Studies programme in more detail, I will make a brief introduction to the structure of Malmö Art Academy for those of you who are not familiar with the institution.

At Malmö Art Academy, there are four different programmes: First, there is a BFA Fine Arts Studio programme, which is a three-year programme consisting of a foundation course, individual work in the studio, and individual tutoring, and which ends with a group exhibition and writing an essay.

The second programme is the MFA Fine Arts Studio programme, which is a two-year graduate programme that includes in-depth research in art through individual studio practice and self-chosen courses and ends with a solo exhibition and writing an essay.

The third programme is the four-year PhD programme, which is an experimental and highly individualised programme that focuses on identifying, understanding, and developing artistic thinking as a specialised field of knowledge production.

The fourth and newest programme is the two-year Critical & Pedagogical Studies MFA programme, which differs in its structure and learning situation from the three already mentioned. Malmö Art Academy has no separate departments—and, in order to break down hierarchical power structures often present in art academies, no teacher, professor, or guest lecturer is allowed to enter a studio or workspace without an invitation from the student beforehand.

Students in the BFA and MFA studio programmes organise their own curricula, choosing from a wide range of courses on topics such as art theory, artistic techniques, and artistic interpretation. This is different for the Critical & Pedagogical Studies participants, who need to adhere to a certain course structure.

Critical & Pedagogical Studies is an international programme that leads to a Master's degree in Fine Arts, and it works across the borders between art theory, practice, and pedagogy. In the CPS programme, the courses often take place around a table in the shared workspace, where every participant is included and asked to contribute to the conversation. Courses can also consist of movement sessions, such as city walks or site visits, in an attempt to break free from the learning situation of the seminar table—something which has

turned out to be difficult for many guest lecturers. Being placed around the table can feel like a safe zone, where one is acquainted only with the half-bodies of others, each person cut in two by the seminar table or the computer screen, as the Italian critic and media activist Franco Bifo Berardi puts it. He claims that media virtualisation and the exploitation of the intellect has destroyed the empathy among bodies, the pleasure of touching each other, and the pleasure of living in urban spaces. But how do we understand the fabric of a dialogical learning situation—not only by looking at the spaces where the exchange takes place, but also by reflecting upon how it affects the learning situation to be also *physically* part of a group?

A main objective of the programme is to create a foundation for developing communicative skills through an understanding of how to mediate and educate—allowing space for non-adaptability in order to push the boundaries for education and pedagogy in relation to artistic research and practice even further. The pedagogical focus area is the strengthening of artistic praxis, grounded in both theory and practice. Here we have implemented a key pedagogical component in the programme, which is a practical internship, in the third semester. During the internship the students are able to explore the notion of pedagogy as practice and the position of artist as educator or artist as mediator. This is shaped through the process of the students' own individual projects and research during the placement. Here the CPS student explores hands-on experience in educational situations in order to test out experimental pedagogical strategies on a practical level and in a way that stems from their own individual artistic practices.

These projects take on different characters depending on the variety of artistic practices of the current cohort. Projects have ranged from creating collective working models for a group of cultural producers in Portugal, to developing alternative models for the studio visit as an attempt to look at power structures. The internship has proven to be a very valuable pedagogical tool, since it allows the students to contextualise the theory in practice and to develop their vocabulary through their own artistic practices.

The core of the Critical & Pedagogical Studies programme is structured around the small group of students (—we accept up to nine). This forms a dialogical learning situation, where exchange and participation is essential. The programme is continuously developed from semester to semester to keep the structure as open as possible (within the institutional framework), and to allow

experimental progress to unfold through creative processes. We encourage the CPS students to take part in this ongoing development.

With a course structure predominantly based on a dialogical situation, students are expected to participate in scheduled and self-initiated group sessions. This allows them to contribute through sharing their experiences and to learn together in a relational situation, as well as to view pedagogy as an artistic method and practice. In her essay “A Pedagogical Turn: Brief Notes on Education as Art,” the San Francisco-based artist and teacher Kristina Lee Podesva gives examples of a shift in artists’ relation to education—from the structure of the art academy to education as a form of art:

“One of the most well known instances of education as a form of art appears in Joseph Beuys’ practice beginning in the 1970s. While earlier efforts undertaken by the Russian Constructivists, the Bauhaus, and the faculty of Black Mountain College, among others, sought to erode the distinction between art and life through educational vehicles, they did not appropriate pedagogical forms in their artistic production, using them instead as a means to an end. By contrast, Beuys presented scores of educational lectures as performances, documented in a series of photographs and blackboard drawings that register the artists’ actions.”

Education and pedagogy as artistic material could be one format being explored within the frame of this programme, where practice also is considered a pedagogical method to be explored. Although, Joseph Beuys could be critiqued for his patriarchal approach—that is, education as an art practice centred around his persona.

So many things have been written on the educational turn: the art school; the academy and its ties to neoliberal agendas; the potentiality of the academy; how the Bologna Accords have affected the art academy; and so forth.

Gert Biesta, who is a professor in the Department of Education of Brunel University London, points to the ambiguity in pedagogy when it comes to art education. That is, students are expected to interact with openness and uncertainty as a part of the creative process in order for them to negotiate the complex and unpredictable working situations as an artist (Biesta, 2008). How

is it then possible to speak about an educational strategy within art education, if the conditions for such pedagogy are precarious?

To approach the viewpoint of learning from another perspective, I turn to Brazilian thinker and educator Paulo Freire. In his key text from 1970, “Pedagogy of the Oppressed,” he questions what he calls the “banking” concept of education, a model described as teachers depositing knowledge and information into students, who become mere objects that absorb the knowledge presented by the authoritarian knowledge producing subject—the teacher (Freire, 2003). Freire proposed an alternative model of education where both teacher and student can facilitate and produce empowerment through a non-hierarchical process based on libertarian principles. He was interested in the practice of freedom and favoured a democratic form of pedagogy through dialogical education as opposed to curriculum-based education. Through a democratic approach to learning, is it then at all possible to work in the gap between the uncertainty of an artistic process and the structured educational activities within an art academy?

When thinking of dialogical-based learning, we need to keep in mind that most educators at art academies are either artist-educators or theoretician-educators, which means the individual practice comes first, and the role of the teacher second, as is pointed out in the studies of Professor Ann-Mari Edström (Edström, 2008). The educators speak from their field of interest and personal viewpoint, which allows them to enter the dialogue without didactics, since most are interested in developing their field further. There is of course a difference between traditional studio programmes, where the students are left in periods of solitude, and the more structured programmes, such as Critical & Pedagogical Studies at Malmo Art Academy, where students are expected to enter planned group situations as part of their education. Through communication between the teacher and the learner, a gap is created in which education takes place, as described by Gert Biesta. This space for communication should be acknowledged for its uncertainties, risks, possibilities, and relations. It is in this gap, this in-betweeness, that education can take place. “Ultimately we cannot have a theory in education,” argues Biesta, since “the gap in which education takes place is, after all, ultimately unrepresentable”. This does not mean that we can dismiss the gap due to its lack of representation, since it is only from the “transformative” gap that learning can take place (Biesta, 2004, 2010). Only in the dialogical “gap” can we perform a more egalitarian communication between teacher and learner.

And in acknowledging the gap, art education can simultaneously exist as a discipline within the framework of the institution.

Professor Irit Rogoff, from Goldsmiths college of arts in London, argues for the “academy as potentiality,” as based on Agamben’s notion of “to be potential,” about which he states that it “means to be one’s own lack, to be in relation to one’s own incapacity”. Rogoff continues:

“So thinking ‘academy’ as ‘potentiality’ is to think the possibilities of not doing, not making, not bringing into being at the very centre of acts of thinking, making and doing. It means dismissing much of the instrumentalisation that seems to go hand in hand with education and much of the managerism that is associated with a notion of ‘training’ for this or that profession or market.”
(Rogoff, 2006)

To think of the academy as a space for potentiality and non-instrumentalised learning challenges the standardised system realised through the Bologna Accords. Though the argument perhaps also idealises the space of the academy. Perhaps it is by rethinking the pedagogical means and learning processes that the potentiality of such a space can be released? As mentioned earlier, this is something I have been investigating with the CPS programme, and it is not a question I claim to have a definitive answer to.

It feels like we are in a moment of time when we can discuss the different potentials in pedagogy and education in relation to artistic production—this conference being one example.

I argue that teaching and pedagogy can play a significant role in expanding the multiple positions that one can inhabit in an artistic practice. I would like to elaborate a bit on pedagogy as artistic method and matter, in order to better address its materiality or immateriality.

One way of looking at pedagogy as a method interwoven within an artistic practice could be through the term “work stories,” which was coined by the Swedish artist and writer Magnus Bärtås.¹ He speaks about work stories as a tool for the artist in terms of self-narration. A work story is a written or oral narrative about the forming of materials, immaterial units, situations, relations, and social practices that are, or lead to, an artwork. Work stories

¹ Magnus Bärtås, *You Told Me—verkberättelser och videoessäer*, Dissertation #19, in *ArtMonitor*, Gothenburg University. 2010

speak primarily about processes, and processes are ongoing, which means that work stories take place both in a zone of transition and also in one of transaction.

Self-narration in an artistic practice can be seen as having ties to pedagogy, as it is a form of embodied mediation. It is a process that traditionally lies outside the realm of artistic practice and thereby can function as an expansion of the artist's dialogue with an audience. This seems especially relevant if one views an art exhibition as a context capable of creating new generative experience, which means including mediation as part of the creative work. This is a view presented by Nathaniel Katz in correspondence with Raqs Media Collective in 2008.²

Magnus Bærtås furthermore addresses the importance of artists working and acting from their own set of premises when it comes to writing, talking, and sharing their work stories. This claim of a space to speak for oneself as an artist can also be considered an artistic material through which processes can be revealed or hidden depending on the chosen strategies. Though it can be an immaterial task to trace the shifts and transformations that occur in an artistic practice, one might say that mediation could be considered as a relational substance. In other words, it is a place from which the storyteller can open doors to rooms filled with speculation and anticipation, each having a potential to conceal or unravel the processes of the chosen artistic practice and material.

Artist, curator, author, and professor Marion von Osten has mentioned a Russian constructivist approach when speaking about her own practice,³ as the constructivists did not discriminate between the artistic positions and activities we have come to think of as different. She claims it is a matter of tradition and a matter of which genealogy you insert yourself into. She refers to a second-wave feminist art tradition, whereby self-organisation and exhibition-making challenged the dominant perception of the artist, as based upon a nineteenth-century male genius model. One of the reflections she brings up is that inhabiting different and multiple roles comes out of a necessity to oscillate between multitudes of "possible articulations" in the field of art.

² Raqs Media Collective, *Wonderful Uncertainty: Curating and the Educational Turn* (Open Editions/Die Appel, 2010), 76–82.

³ <http://www.on-curating.org/index.php/issue-19-reader/marion-von-osten-on-her-collaborative-style-and-multiple-roles.html#.VCvd8-dD3e4>

These days, this way of working is often referred to as hybrid practice. The basic definition of hybridity is a biological mixture between two species, which can be seen on both a material level as well as on a practical level. In this case, I'm applying the notion of hybridity to describe a multiplicity embedded in a practice—in this instance an artistic practice. This resonates with a decolonial discourse on the awareness of hybridity in place of multiculturalism—such as seen in Homi K. Bhabha's book *The Location of Culture* from 1994,⁴ in which he pleads for a transnational culture liberated from Western multiculturalism and celebration of cultural diversity, which is seen as a way of recolonising the subject.

Not only, as Marion von Osten mentions, is hybridity a necessity for exploring multiple articulations in the field of art, but it is often a prerequisite for making a living by means of artistic practice. In this way, holding multiple positions can be seen as a way towards sustainability for the artist. However, one must also be aware of the issue of hybridity in the realm of neoliberalism, where precarious working conditions have become the ultimate celebration of the so-called flexible and employable citizen, which has been promoted by the current sociopolitical conditions. The fact that having multiple positions and roles could be perceived as simply a way of conforming to the neoliberal agenda means that an in-depth discussion on multiplicity in an artistic practice is needed as a critical self-reflection, which the CPS programme encourages.

Regarding the notion of "critical," I should mention that I speak from a structuralist point of view, where the focal point is to understand culture as means of a larger system or structure. "Critical" in this sense means looking at how different aspects of society are interlinked and affect one another. Being critical also means attempting to understand the invisible hierarchies within all structures, institutions, and society, and how they relate to the context, as well as to ethics. A critical approach is, in my opinion, crucial to an artist's position as a cultural producer, for only through awareness can the core of things be examined, or at least addressed on a broader scale.

In conclusion, my aim is to continue developing the gap in which we learn, to question and expand how we think about education and its related structures, and I intend to pursue this further within the Critical & Pedagogical Studies programme. Rather than creating a dichotomy between the specialised and

⁴ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (Routledge, 1994).

the interdisciplinary, or the material and the immaterial—I am interested in investigating the space they share.