

Art, politics, pedagogy: Juxtaposing, discomfiting, disrupting

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Art, politics, pedagogy: Juxtaposing, discomfiting, disrupting

Abstract

In this opening essay we explain the rationale for the special issue, the first of two on the theme of ‘politicizing artistic pedagogies’. In doing so, we outline the connections between this collection of articles and those in the next issue of *Art & the Public Sphere*, while also stressing the distinctive, societal scope of the present issue. The essay considers some themes of particular relevance for this edited collection. For example, we discuss our understanding of art, politics and pedagogy, and draw on Juliet Hooker’s work on juxtaposition to advocate the benefits of discomfiting yet welcome disruptions to our more established ways of thinking and practising. This is often narrated in a biographical style, which enables us to highlight how we, from rather different backgrounds, came to collaborate at various points over the last decade, and how this manifested in a noteworthy and instructive teaching experience for Ian when invited to deliver two seminar sessions for Mel’s students. Overall, we promote a pluralistic and inclusive approach to the notion of ‘politicizing artistic pedagogies’ but make sure, in the process, to outline where we depart from more established positions (such as on pedagogy and on art’s function). Finally, we briefly introduce the papers that comprise the special issue.

Keywords

art, art practice, juxtaposition, knowledge, pedagogy, politicizing, politics

Introduction

Some observations or assumptions are so commonplace that they remain simultaneously present but also out of reach. This is true for our everyday lives as well as our work as academics and practitioners, yet in the latter we often assert that we are critically aware and thus ready to reflect reflexively on how we go about our work. For example, consider notions such as: art is inherently political; all aspects of life are political in one way or another; pedagogy is much more than just teaching techniques and practices. Yet how often do we retreat from these commonplace aphorisms? For example, how frequently are we part of conversations regarding *the politics of art*, political life as *the life of government and policy*, and pedagogy as *transmissions of knowledge from tutor to student*? This is not to deny the

potential utility and significance of such conversations; more to point out one of the underlying rationales for what we have sought to achieve with the term ‘politicizing artistic pedagogies’.

After years of discussion, in late 2020 we issued a Call for abstract submissions entitled ‘Politicising Artistic Pedagogies: Teachings, Publics, Struggles’, which was circulated in early 2021. This invited contributions on the range of ways and sites in which artistic pedagogies could manifest and politicize, and accordingly was explicit about its adherence to inclusive and pluralistic understandings of politics, art and pedagogy. For example, all aspects of life are to be viewed as political and not just those that are part of the ‘politics’ cage of government, elections, parties etc., and a key question is how these aspects can *politicize* or, put a different way, could be *politically mobilizable*. Moreover, art takes a number of sensory and aesthetic forms, ranging from traditional representations such as painting and architecture through to more somatic experiences produced by music and the use of contemporary technology. And finally, while teachers have the *function* of ‘educator’, we are engaged in educational relationships in all aspects of life, meaning that the question of pedagogy is entwined with hierarchies of knowledge that simultaneously promote and marginalize contrasting philosophies of life.

The Call stated that we were particularly interested in three key themes: teachings, publics, struggles. While we acknowledged that all three could be at play at any one point in time – think of the debates about statues in the UK during Summer 2020 – we welcomed contributions that, for example, focused on teachings in relatively formal educational contexts such as the seminar room or the art workshop; regarding publics, on collective spaces such as public/‘socially responsible’ artworks, the workplace, or hostile architecture; and concerning struggles, on instances that bear witness to explicitly politicizing practices in artistic and/or pedagogical terms. Finally, we were clear that contributions could take the vantage point of experience (e.g. autoethnography), representation (e.g. the medium of film) or analysis (e.g. of the artistic form or of the struggle), and that we were open to a number of ways in which the Call could be creatively interpreted.

The response was so large and impressive that we agreed to create not one but two special issues. Ian is the lead editor for this issue, which has a broader, societal scope, while Mel is the lead editor for the next issue (*Art & the Public Sphere*, volume 11, number 1), which has more of an art-discipline/practice focus. Nevertheless, the two issues should be understood as complementary and thus together comprising a greater ‘whole’; the division of labour between them was necessitated by the gratifying response that we received and the practicalities of publishing. Moreover, while this and the next issue are distinctive, we have ensured that there are still plenty of overlaps between them – see for example the papers in this issue by Burchill, Dannreuther and Edginton *et al.*

Hence, we seek to deliberately place next to each other, across both special issues, themes and arguments that normally would not be in direct proximity. In this respect we follow Juliet Hooker's (2017: 13) work on juxtaposition: '[b]y definition juxtaposition places two disparate objects side by side, and it is by being viewed simultaneously that the viewer's understanding of each object is transformed.' Hooker's focus is rather different to ours – on subaltern traditions of racial theorizing in the Americas – but her call for a more expansive reading of the thinkers that we study resonates with what we are trying to achieve here. In particular, one of our techniques of production (cf. Walter Benjamin) in the making of these two special issues is to be quite relaxed about the visibility of the seams between different papers. What might seem disjointed to some is in fact an effect of the wide range of backgrounds and approaches present in the special issues, and thus ought to be understood as a strength. Therefore, we hope that this and the next issue act as discomfiting yet welcome disruptions to our more established ways of thinking and practising (cf. Bruff 2021).

In many ways, this reflects how we came to know each other and subsequently worked together over the years. We met when both employed at Loughborough University. Mel had been there since November 2007 and Ian began in February 2012. Within a few weeks of Ian's arrival Mel, when working on a small research grant application to the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC) that explicitly required cross-disciplinary applicants, literally went through the departmental staff lists in the School of Social Sciences and found Ian's profile, which among other things talked of his interest in culture. The grant application was submitted without us having yet to meet in person! But it led to a small funded project – in which Antoinette Burchill and Matt Davies also participated (see their papers in this issue) – a jointly authored conference paper (Bruff and Jordan 2015), co-supervision of a doctoral project on art as a politicizing force (Kilcoyne 2017), and eventually this collaboration. Even now, a decade after meeting, we still feel as if we are working things out as we go along, each period of working together forcing us to jump in the dark and take ourselves well outside of our comfort zones. Overall, it has been a steep learning curve for both of us, and in many ways still is, but the benefits of unsettling each other have been significant.

Accordingly, when we consider below a few key questions of particular relevance for this edited collection, we do so by consciously juxtaposing themes and lines of argument that reflect the potential immanent to the purposeful, disjointed disruption that made possible our collaboration on these two special issues. This discussion is then followed by a brief overview of the articles that comprise this issue, before we conclude.

Pedagogy and perspectival knowledges

The celebrated author Elena Ferrante (2019) recently observed that literature does not just give us pleasure and enjoyment:

the words, delighting us, shape our visions of the world; they penetrate our bodies, flow in and alter it, educating our gaze, feelings, even our position on different issues. Besides giving pleasure, style, in accordance with a long tradition, moves and teaches us...[This is] learning that is pleasurable, learning that changes us inwardly – dramatically, even – under the impact of words that are true and charged with feeling.

While Ferrante has a particular focus, her ‘in principle’ position is of importance for the approach outlined below. For instance, all aspects of life are, in one way or another, pedagogical because we are forever enmeshed in relationships that continually (re)shape, (re)produce, and (re)envision how we understand the world. Hence knowledge is not a ‘thing’ that is picked up and passed on as a finite, ‘knowable’, unchanging entity; rather, it is the mutating process and outcome of ongoing dialogical interaction (cf. Freire 1996). However, we can never consider everything when seeking to make sense of the world: its manifold complexity makes this impossible. An important consequence is that human social practices are *perspectival*, in a necessarily practical way. Our own biographies indicate how rooted we can be in certain spaces and places, plus in the forms of knowledge we have been socialized into over the course of our existence (cf. Hamati-Ataya 2018; Bacevic 2019).

In consequence, we can make these two, related claims: (i) our knowledge of the world emerges in and through all forms of social practice, because ‘the only “philosophy” is history in action, that is, life itself’ (Gramsci 1971: 357); (ii) which philosophies, and which knowledges, predominate is crucial for how the given society evolves. While formal educational settings are clearly of importance in both ‘social practice’ and ‘predominant philosophies’ respects and should not be neglected, the ongoing production of perspectival knowledges exceeds these settings because this happens in and through all aspects of life. Therefore, the understanding of pedagogy advanced in this and the next special issue is societal in scope and also aware of the role of key sites – such as educational institutions – in those societies for the ongoing production of perspectival knowledges.

This means that there is a superficial resemblance to traditional, conventional understandings of pedagogy that emphasize the transmission of knowledge from ‘sender’ (the teacher) to ‘receiver’ (the student), in that we affirm that knowledge acquisition enables people to arrive at new ways of understanding the world. However, we see this as less related to teaching techniques *per se* and more to do with wider inequalities of power. Thus, while in principle knowledge is not finite, unchanging or fully known, in practice it could appear so as the result of the simultaneous promotion and marginalization of contrasting philosophies of life. Indeed, certain forms of knowledge come to predominate in the given society through the

marginalization and ignorance of other forms: for example, think of the classed, gendered and racialized assumptions that underpin and constitute many forms of knowledge.

While on a personal level we may literally not know of other ways of understanding the world, by virtue of our biographical trajectory, in a more societal sense it is possible to acknowledge that there is considerable potential for certain forms of knowledge to acquire the aura of granite-like, objective existence at the expense of dissenting and/or newer philosophies (cf. Gramsci 1971: 404). Moreover, one person's understanding of dissent against the grain will be another's upholding of established perspectives, even when both are engaged in critiques of the status quo. To give one example, Antonio Gramsci (1971) and John Stuart Mill (1991) both had a strong interest in what the former coined as 'common sense' and the latter 'custom', with these two terms understood as both socio-historically shaped and a hindrance to intellectual and political emancipation for society. Yet neither's wider political and social projects could be said to be analogous or even very complementary.

Therefore, as a point of principle for us as individuals, we endorse what Renate Holub (1992: 122) describes as 'Gramsci's tendency to approach a problem from multiple points of view, as if he worked from phenomenological premisses, within which the object to be studied is infinitely more complex than the concepts, terms and individual approaches designed to grasp that object'. This is essential for being able to reflect reflexively on our own perspectival knowledges. Yet the complexity of the object of enquiry and the multiple interpretative perspectives this inevitably entails means that different versions of what is understood to be dissenting forms of knowledge always co-exist, and that such versions can even perceive each other as antithetical to the notion of dissent. Reecia Orzeck (2012: 1464) captures this very well, not least because it is possible to extend her comment on academia to all aspects of our lives:

academic research is, in its entirety, an unavoidably political endeavour – the extent to which what topics we investigate, what questions we ask, and what count as valid answers are all shaped by the concerns and biases of the time and place in which we work; by the prevailing conditions of knowledge production in that time and place; by the state of our disciplines; and by our subject positions.

Heloise Weber (2007: 568) calls this the 'politics of the "invisible"/"visible"', which acts as a useful shorthand for asking ourselves what we focus on when thinking about the world in which we live; and, by definition, what we do *not* focus on. An excellent example of what this looks like in practice is what happened when one of us (Ian) was invited by the other (Mel) to deliver two linked seminar sessions as part of the 'Public Sphere' pathway of the MA Contemporary Art Practice programme at the Royal College of Art (RCA), which is what we now turn to.

Politicizing art teaching

Me: I wrote and developed the Contemporary Art Practice Programme at the RCA.¹ It was delivered via 4 pathways: Critical Practice, Moving Image, Performance, and Public Sphere. This format allowed for specificity in the discussion and production of new artworks, and the mode of delivery enabled the students to develop a refined understanding of the context of their practice via an engagement with recent histories, theories and practices related to their pathway. The programme structure encouraged students to situate their practice within the social, political and economic conditions of the contemporary world; identifying what art can contribute to ongoing critical, technological and philosophical debates. Discourse is a key aspect of 21st century art production: therefore, I expected students to be involved in navigating the relationship of art and the function of art's discourse for art's reception. Writing and action were embraced by the programme as new ways to envisage art production and social engagement. The aim of the 'Public Sphere' pathway, as part of the MA Contemporary Art Practice programme, was to address the relationship between art and politics. Not all students had studied Fine Art before joining the pathway: for example, we attracted students who had previously studied architecture, anthropology, economics and education. Through selection we aimed to create a cohort of students whose practices demonstrated the connections between art and politics in a number of ways.

Several students were engaged with questioning the purpose of art for society – inspired by the possibility of redirecting the conceptual art of the 1960s – and these students wrangled with how to develop ideas of productive critique rather than exit the debate on art's function altogether. Debates about art's function signal that established assumptions should continue to be discussed – for instance, is art a self-constituted and discrete practice separate from the other social relations, or is artistic autonomy no more than relative, meaning that artistic practice is distinct from but interwoven with broader social practices? Other students decided that the inclusion of political subject matter was the way forward, making the representation of political topics the core focus of their artworks. Additionally, the use of art as a politicizing tool through methods of critical pedagogy was a core interest for particular students, who believed that art could be utilized for the development of critical subjects (see Edginton et al. in this issue). Although titled 'Public Sphere', which refers to the rise of Western democracy, many students were occupied with decolonizing the curriculum by destabilizing this term and repositioning it in theories of the Global South, as well as Middle Eastern and Chinese contexts.

¹ I left the RCA in 2020 to join the Centre for Postdigital Cultures, Coventry University.

With colleague Pil Kollektiv, and in line with our own practices (Pil & Galia Kollektiv and the Free art collective), I decided upon a collective and content-led approach to delivering this pathway. It enabled us to open up the term 'public sphere' from the beginning of the course and forced us to holistically imagine the relationships between art and politics together with the students. We invited artists and scholars to provide inputs and planned our own reading groups, which included reading Marx as well as authors from critical theory, media studies and social theory, such as Habermas, Benjamin, Gramsci. These reading groups were held in the studios and were always premised on the acknowledgement that we were artists reading about philosophy and politics, and that our interest in the making of artworks is always about turning ideas into actions. We also felt that reading about what theories help us do would enable us to understand what the artworks we make could do.

At the same time, I felt it would be interesting to see what would happen if the Public Sphere cohort (and staff) attended sessions on 'Democracy' convened and led by a politics scholar, i.e. someone who would approach these themes from the other side of the coin to us. By the mid-2010s I had not only known Ian for a few years but our doctoral co-supervision work was well under way, and we had written and presented the aforementioned conference paper. More generally, we had often discussed how some things could appear 'critical' at first glance but when interrogated be understood as more conventional. Therefore, I considered Ian to be one of the few politics scholars to be fully engaged in exploring questions of culture and in how art can function politically, and invited him to run two sessions at RCA.

Ian: The seminars were delivered on the same day in October 2016, and were entitled 'Thinking Critically About Democracy' (in the morning) and 'Thinking Democratically About Being Critical' (in the afternoon). The question guiding the former was 'To what extent is it possible to formulate a definition of democracy that everyone is happy with?', and for the latter it was 'To what extent is it possible to be critical of each other's definitions without acting undemocratically?' The overall idea was for the sessions to begin furthest away from the students' areas of expertise and gradually move towards these areas, with the closing parts of the second session speaking directly to the Public Sphere pathway. It was in these closing moments that something rather unexpected happened. The students had enthusiastically participated in discussions all the way through, even in the earlier stages of the morning session when I tasked them with defining democracy (beloved of politics modules and degree programmes; less so in art). This carried on into the afternoon session, where for example I utilized music for similar purposes to what I cover in my article for this special issue – in this case, to explore differences between criticizing and critiquing. Yet the closing moments produced a prolonged and awkward silence. Why did this happen and what produced this silence?

Bear in mind that this was only a few months after the Brexit referendum in the UK, and only a couple of weeks after Theresa May's infamous 'citizen of nowhere' speech to the Conservatives' party conference. Furthermore, the students in these sessions were significantly international in composition but also of an age – and, given the critical nature of the Public Sphere pathway, the inclination – to be of a Remain mindset. So it made sense for me to use the final part of the afternoon session to connect, directly and explicitly, art and politics. I did so by introducing Titian's *Rape of Europa* painting and deliberately juxtaposing it with the infamous *Breaking Point* poster from the final stages of the referendum campaign. While I was not aware at the time of Juliet Hooker's work, her discussion of juxtaposition fits well with what I was trying to achieve here. In addition to the above quotation, Hooker (2017: 13) views juxtaposition as a 'historical-interpretive approach that seeks to situate the resonances and/or discontinuities.'

In other words, by placing these two artworks side-by-side, it was possible to understand that the messages immanent to *Breaking Point* – a soft and feminine Europe being violated by a deceptive yet alluring Other (Muslim refugees from Syria containing potential suicide bombers and rapists) – have a very long heritage. Indeed, Nigel Farage, who was the face of the *Breaking Point* message regarding Brexit, has referred to the Greek myth represented in *Rape of Europa*.² Therefore, the aim was not just to suggest a direct, explicit link between art and politics but also to suggest that the 'dangers' to Europe by non-European Others has resonated across history. As is widely known, Titian's painting was commissioned by Philip II of Spain, who understood himself as the leader of Christendom against Protestant and Muslim enemies (in the latter case, the increasingly powerful Ottoman Empire).

So, I asked the students for comments on this juxtaposition, and...nothing. All day, the main 'problem' had been reining in their enthusiasm and capacity to keep talking through different themes, in the name of sticking to time. Therefore, I had to ask the question: why the silence on precisely the part of the two sessions that was closest to them and furthest away from me? Part of the answer came from the students who, after some further awkward silence, volunteered that perhaps the fact that they all know the painting and its position in art history meant they knew others in the room would be more likely to scrutinize and judge what they said. This is understandable to a degree, and affects all students in one way or another, but for me there had to be more than this. So I asked Mel about it, and her response was...

Mel: Fine Art tends to be taught as a studio-based model, which in the main comprises individual tutorial sessions held with the student in their studio space. Alongside this, students attend Critical and Historical Studies sessions and some Professional Studies elements are part of their study. First year undergraduate students, on a three-year BA programme, may do

² See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5hIW-wKcdfc>

a series of introductions or short projects in which they work together with some contextual inputs by the studio staff. Lots of programmes are separated into specific technical outcomes – Painting, Sculpture, Printmaking, Drawing, Installation, Photography, Time-based Media, Digital, Ceramics, Performance, etc. This separation into different genres or forms is not unique – see for instance how Politics departments often separate Political Theory from International Politics, as if the study of the latter does not involve theoretical work – but it is rather pronounced in Fine Art programmes. It means that students are taught within a particular Western tradition: this is usually based upon a combination of a Beaux Arts approach, which was dominant in France between 1830s and the late 19th century, and a 20th century Modernist approach as endorsed by Clement Greenberg (among others).

The difficulty with teaching Fine Art from an individual masterclass perspective is that it undermines the fact that knowledge about art and ideas can be transferred, reworked and thus echo across space and time as well as in different artistic forms. It infers that making art cannot be taught through a range of methods and that it is based on aptitude or technical ability, rather than understood as a social practice in which techniques and methods are part of wider artistic relations of production. In this arrangement, individual self-expression is privileged over shared and collective knowledge. In consequence, it can imply that the production of artworks is a singular activity that is carried out by the artist alone, overlooking others who are involved in the complex process of production as well as in getting the artwork to its viewers (cf. Wolff 1993).

There has undoubtedly been resistance to developing new ways of teaching art in order to retain the studio model, and this is demonstrated by the limited changes in the way Fine Art is taught. I studied Painting in 1984, and I was interested in reading, talking and acting politically in the world; my practice has rejected long-established technological and individual approaches to art-making, due to their strong emphasis on technique/form and the assumption that artistic practice is self-constituted rather than part of wider social relations. In my career as a teacher, I have usually been the one member of staff that has been volunteered to teach reading groups or develop content whilst other members of staff, usually white men, walked around the studio giving out opinions and sharing ‘gems’ of wisdom; the unequal power relations immanent to such understandings of knowledge production were simultaneously always on display and invisibilized by unquestioned assumptions of universality and best artistic practice.

After 25 years of teaching art and design, it was at the RCA that I found myself among colleagues that wanted to teach Fine Art differently, aka Contemporary Art Practice. However, this means that, in Raymond Williams’ terms, the more holistic approach that I take and which I had become accustomed to through our collaborations is still emergent; more traditional understandings of art remain dominant. This, to me, explains why the students were so

strongly discomfited by the concluding part of Ian's seminars. The students would have instinctively understood his use of *Rape of Europa* and *Breaking Point* as two very different and thus incommensurable formats – classic, traditional painting and contemporary, designed poster. This is despite the fact that they are based on the same myth and tropes about Europe and show how artistic ideas can be transferred and reworked across history and across forms. As a result, Ian forced the students to confront directly the conservatisms regarding art that have layered up across their learning biographies – even when they consider themselves as critical or even radical practitioners – because he forefronted not the representations *per se* but the question of how/why those representations were produced and reproduced in different settings. In this sense, inviting Ian to contribute to the Public Sphere pathway was a success, but it inevitably leads to the question of what can be done to push things further.

For the next special issue, I co-write a paper with Andy Hewitt. We describe a recent project we undertook with PGR students from the Institute of Education, University College London³, entitled, 'How to talk to the city: Public interventions and observations in the practice of art and ethnography'. In this project we work with 12 non-artists; we guide them not in utilizing artistic methods to make ethnographies (their original aim), but rather to introduce them to what contemporary art does. We support them to produce their own artworks. Throughout the project we are reminded that positionality is the main aspect of making art, whilst when making ethnographies the search for objectivity is key. By studying together, we (Hewitt and Jordan) learn about the limitations of the Western-dominated art world and the inadequacies of the bourgeois public sphere. More broadly, the decolonizing agenda has successfully rocked this boat over the past decade, leading to growing self-awareness and reflexivity in art teaching and the beginning of long-overdue changes. A few of the articles in the next special issue address this.

The studio model thus privileges a method of making and responding which is important, but needs to be paired with knowledge and ideas to create reflexive and analytical methods for the development of artworks. Otherwise, as we discuss in the next section, there is the risk that even approaches to art that explicitly seek to disrupt 'objective' understandings of art's function, reproduce in new forms the very conservatisms that they seek to overcome.

The formalism of 'innovative' artistic practices

A key development in recent decades has been the emergence of 'contemporary art', a plurality of movements in the production of art which go beyond both the modernist legacy and a temporal definition of 'contemporary' as something produced within our lifetime(s). There has not been a full break with either modernism or the temporal, though, meaning that

³ We were invited by the Institute because of an essay we wrote (Jordan and Hewitt 2018).

'contemporary art' is in a complicated relationship with both. Indeed, one of the core characteristics of contemporary art is viewed to be its pluralism, ranging from the rethinking of traditional forms of visual culture such as painting (e.g. Pop Art) to the introduction of new sites for art to inhabit (e.g. international art biennales) to the use of interpersonal relations as a 'new' material to produce an artwork (relational aesthetics) to new conceptual developments aiding our understanding of new and old forms of visual culture (e.g. Conceptual Art).

Associated with the rise to prominence of contemporary art has been the emergence of attempts to understand art in light of these new developments. Debates about the function and purpose of art have a long history, and are seemingly never-ending. Nonetheless, and taking inspiration from the multi-faceted nature of contemporary art, there is now a well-established assumption that art is a space in which its limits are boundless. Iconic (and iconoclastic) works such as Duchamp's 'Fountain' (1917) are often invoked to support the argument that art is anything that one wants it to be. Nevertheless, while these discussions have been enlightening and often instructive, we ought to reflect on *the way in which* art's potential is viewed as limitless.

For example, a dominant tendency is to view art's potential as limitless primarily through innovation in the form it takes, leading to a focus on formal (re)arrangements of the object rather than on relations of artistic production. Hence, 'innovation' is primarily confined to what art *is* rather than what it is *doing*. This is significant, because a key claim of dominant understandings of art is that breaking the shackles imposed by traditional, narrow approaches to art enables it to contribute to wider processes of social and political change. Thus the emphasis on expanding the *category* of art, as opposed to expanding its politicizing potential in more *substantive* ways, has placed clear restrictions on art's transformative potential.

This has three knock-on effects worthy of note. Firstly, the traditional notion of art as a privileged, autonomous terrain in society is retained and in some ways reinforced, because there is a dizzying array of ways in which art is portrayed, even if the underlying content might overlap across the different forms it takes. Secondly, the emphasis on innovation of form produces a tendency to continue with the traditional 'great individual' understanding of artworks, whereby the insurgent artist (such as Damien Hirst) or the exhibition curator acting as the conductor of an orchestra of forms are lauded for their efforts in breaking the mould. Thirdly and finally, even seemingly different, more radical approaches such as those affiliated with the 'relational aesthetics/art' perspective fall into this position, because its focus on collaboration and the whole social picture leads to an orientation towards *process* rather than *product*, thus downplaying the role of power inequalities in shaping which artworks are produced and how they are received.

As such, while form-heavy accounts of art have certainly become richer and more diverse in the past decades, they are still operating on the same plane as traditional, narrower

approaches such as those advocated by Clement Greenberg (as outlined most emphatically in his 1960 essay *Modernist Painting*). Moreover, they follow in the tracks of earlier interventions such as Rosalind Krauss' seminal 1979 essay *Sculpture in the Expanded Field*. Here, Krauss seeks to enlarge the 'field' of art by, for instance, opening up and clarifying sculpture's position in relation to other artistic categories such as painting; but she also, in consequence, focuses on increasing the amount of formal considerations and constituents of art rather than the transformative potential of the artistic practices themselves.

While not wishing to do away with the innovations in form that are such a strong component of contemporary art, there ought to be a rebalancing of the relationship between form and content when considering art. The multiplying of forms that could be taken by artworks is not in itself a negative development, in either the art practices themselves or the understandings of art that they are associated with. Nevertheless, it leads to a neglect of the content of the artwork, with the artist's role restricted primarily to formal (re)arrangements of the object. More specifically, there needs to be a renewed focus on the *productive potential* of art: both how it is produced, and how it could be productive of societal change.

We address this point in greater detail in our introductory essay to the next special issue. What we have hopefully achieved here is to show how the more societal scope of the opening part of this essay (e.g. the need to be careful when considering pedagogical themes) has its equivalents when the optic is narrowed to consider art more centrally. As noted earlier, the centres of gravity for this and the next special issue are different, with this issue leaning towards the first half of this essay and the next issue being closer to the second half. Nevertheless, as also noted earlier, it is important to remain aware of how the two collections together comprise a greater whole that help disrupt more dominant understandings of the themes and debates that are addressed. And on that note, we now offer a brief overview of the papers in this special issue.

Outlining the special issue

This special issue contains ten articles in addition to this introductory essay, and they can be considered in pairs. Maja Zonjić and her student collaborators address the pedagogies and politics of care in the context of a community initiative on period poverty and debates about student/academic activism. Antoinette Burchill utilizes the notion of conflictual sociability to explore, partly autoethnographically, how passers-by in public spaces could be transformed into active political participants. These pedagogically-oriented papers are followed by another two on publics, this time from a more overtly artistic vantage point. Enrica Lovaglio and Manuel Scortichini consider two case studies – Rio de Janeiro and Baltimore – when discussing the potential role of public art interventions in urban transformation. Maria Simeona Martinez and Joseph Palis cover similar themes, but with a focus on counter-mapping in metropolitan Manila

as embodied in the practices of three artists that promote the development of subaltern counterpublics.

Next, Adam Morton's and Matt Davies' papers examine the entanglements between urban built environments, state power and capital accumulation. Morton does so through an analysis of the Monument to the Revolution in Mexico City and the socio-spatial struggles bound up with it, whereas Davies enquires into the potential of fiction – in this case China Miéville's novel *Perdido Street Station* – for helping students to defamiliarize and thus politicize their understandings of urban space. Kathryn Starnes' and Ian Bruff's articles take this on, asking how particular pedagogical commitments can contribute to such defamiliarizations/politicizations among students. Starnes makes the case for creative folklore enabling us to interrogate our disciplinary canons and boundaries and thus to redefine what knowledge 'should' look like; Bruff utilizes a materialist conception of aesthetics to discuss his experiences of using extreme metal music in the name of cultivating surprise and curiosity. Charlie Dannreuther and Sadie Edginton, Alex Parry and Cecilia Östholm conclude the issue. Dannreuther builds on Bruff's exploration of the sensory to argue for a critical embodied pedagogy and considers the challenges posed to this approach in a UK university environment. Edginton et al. use their teaching experiences to argue that students and artists can organize their own cultures of learning in opposition to those that the university-as-business wants to promote.

Conclusion

We end this essay, which has often biographically highlighted the benefits of collaboration and juxtaposing different insights and approaches, with some thank yous. Firstly, we were genuinely surprised by the number of abstract submissions we received after circulating the Call, and were impressed by the high-quality nature of these submissions, too. Therefore, we would like to thank all of those who sent us an abstract, including those who were not accepted into this or the next special issue. To us, this shows that there is considerable interest in the themes addressed by the Call, and we hope that this and the next special issue help develop further conversations and discussions along these lines. Secondly, thanks to the authors participating in this special issue, not least because the relatively tight timeframe was not ideal, especially in a pandemic. And thirdly, we are grateful to the referees of the articles published in this special issue, who often expressed enthusiastic support for what we were trying to achieve and also wrote excellent reviews.

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