

Art Education Research No. 13/2017

Ricarda Denzer and Jo Schmeiser

Editorial Un_University / Un_Universität

*Switch on a vacuum cleaner and read the following story out loud into the noise of the machine. You might not be able to hear what you're saying, but you will be able to feel your voice in your throat and in your mouth.**

Un_1

In April 2016, under the title *Un_University / Un_Universität*, we organized a platform at the University of Applied Arts Vienna. As teachers in the TransArts department and as artists working with an interdisciplinary approach, we are used to questioning conventional borders between genres and methods. The platform's focus was not just on artistic research or social critique, but above all on thinking together and taking pleasure in creating new forms of artistic expression and socio-political frameworks.

In various spoken and performative formats – keynote talks, panel discussions, lectures, demonstrations, screenings and workshops – artists, writers, teachers and students addressed forms of teaching and learning. In this e-journal, we document a selection of these contributions to the platform and supplement them with commissioned texts and images by Jamika Ajalon, Fouad Asfour, Sabine Bitter & Helmut Weber, Eva Egermann, Simon Harder, Elke Krasny, Annette Krauss, Brandon LaBelle, Marlene Lahmer, Yen Noh, Roe Rosen, Jianan Qu, Rúbia Salgado, Studio Without Master, Nora Sternfeld, 'University of Ignoramuses', Hong-Kai Wang.

Un_University / Un_Universität discusses forms of teaching and learning, both within and beyond (art) universities. How do formats of academic knowledge transfer shape what is being taught? How can such formats be reconsidered from the viewpoint of artistic practice? And which formats and approaches are being developed elsewhere, including outside academia? The underscore in the platform's title – *Un_University* – expresses a critical oscillation between negation and affirmation. We use

artistic means to reflect on teaching at (art) universities. We discuss forms of un_university thinking, speaking, listening and reading, as well as inventing new ones. And we examine both academic and non-academic contexts and institutions to see which current forms of critical knowledge production they facilitate and/or prevent.

What takes place is a *collective listening* – on the level of structures, of teaching models, and of artistic methods: speaking and reading, body and space, language and text become objects and media of (audio) visual engagement. Teaching and learning as *collective listening* is connected with a politics of attentiveness, facilitating the question: What are the conditions for such listening?

The ear intervenes in the position of the identifying eye and the grasping hand, as well as being connected to language. As described by Doris Kolesch and Sybille Krämer in *Ach Stimme*, we examine the concept of listening and of the voice as a performative phenomenon, as sensory perceptions in space; as a movement between here and there, inside and out, sense and sensoriality. On the one hand, the voice reproduces the symbolic meaning of the words, thus referring to something, while, at the same time, something shows itself in the voice that cannot be put into words, for example the speaker's body.

Collective listening is based on a *politics of location* as proposed by Encarnación Gutiérrez Rodríguez. In the knowledge that 'we' live in an asymmetrically and hierarchically organized society or world, perceiving and acknowledging other places and contexts of knowledge production can bring forth productive debates and cooperations. But this also raises difficult questions: Who can participate? And who benefits? Critical approaches must constantly develop new forms and structures that enable access for a large, diverse group of people.

*In this story about the cake, in the place of 'cake' insert your own name or say 'I'.**

Un_2

What we know without knowing / Anti-Lecture / (Unrehearsed)

Jamika Ajalon

RD: *Unrehearsed* could mean acting without certainties.

JS: *What we know without knowing* depends on who says this sentence, from which social position.

Unhiding the body / Decolonial options / Undecided sound

Fouad Asfour

JS: *Unhiding the body* means allowing oneself to become visible with feelings, not only with thinking.

RD: *Undecided sound* evokes the possibility of not excluding something from the outset.

Questioning the fixed structure of the university / Non-simultaneous spaces of knowledge / Non-simultaneity

Sabine Bitter & Helmut Weber

JS: The concept of *non-simultaneous spaces of knowledge* places past and present histories side by side; their potentially equal status and the debates and negotiations about which histories are and have been imposed when, why and by whom can be shown in a specific architectural form.

RD: Highlighting and creating *non-simultaneous spaces of knowledge* is an important aspect of artistic work that makes it possible to discuss new and complex issues.

Moving beyond normative narratives / Illness as a weapon / In/visibility

Eva Egermann

RD: The concept of *in/visibility* raises the question of voluntary or involuntary *in/visibility*. Which in turn depends on being able to *move beyond normative narratives*.

JS: I can only *move beyond normative narratives* if I understand how I am implicated in them. And in my experience, I can only do this if other people show me, tell me, teach me.

Voicelessness as a result of societal violence / Making space for the threateningly repressed / Rehearsal

Simon Harder

RD: For me, the interesting thing about the *rehearsal* is the idea of an open form, of an event which at the moment of perception is actually already the real thing.

JS: The *rehearsal* as a form makes it possible to watch an experiment and to reflect on it at the same time.

Porosity / Counteraction / Practising the not-in-common within being-in-common

Elke Krasny

RD: *Porosity* describes a materiality altered by (external) forces and the resulting possibility of a permeability in two directions: something is let in or something moves outside.

JS: Institutional *porosity* results from relinquishing, redistributing and annulling privileges, from a process of collective de-hierarchization and restructuring.

Unlearning / Unlearning busyness / Unquestioned routines

Annette Krauss

JS: Being aware of one's own *busyness* and inquiring into its meaning is already quite a lot.

RD: *Unlearning* sounds like things or actions don't have to be the way they are. No longer knowing or being able to do something might create new perspectives.

Dissident imagination / Shelter for political homelessness / Collective making

Brandon LaBelle

RD: *Dissident imagination* and *shelter for political homelessness* express forms of political action that are shaped by our own powers of imagination and for which we still need to create a place.

JS: Devising and designing a space for the *politically homeless* – that's something I'd like to be involved in!

Teaching language / Working language / Translation

Marlene Lahmer

JS: My interpretation of *teaching language / working language* is that any teaching situation can include the critique of an imposed language, and even work on a shared, egalitarian one.

RD: Whose voice do I hear in the *translation*?

Archival mind versus curatorial mind / Collective action / Non-privileged materials

Yen Noh

RD: *Non-privileged materials* reminds me of the *Undefined Objects* in the archive of Vienna's Technical Museum. These UDOs are materials and objects whose (former) function has yet to be identified.

JS: *An archival mind* is a nice metaphor for *collective activation* of the unused regions in our heads.

**Non-existent books / Fiction as method /
Opposition**

Roe Rosen

JS: In practice, *fiction as method* enables a very pleasure-based form of social critique.

RD: For me, *fiction as method* and *opposition* put forward the possibility of still being able to create scope for action even in political states of emergency and extreme situations.

**A passive way of actively exchanging /
I am related to this chair / Do you let the object
look back?**

Jianan Qu

JS: *I am related to this chair* is a clever strategy for reflecting on self and society.

RD: *A passive way of actively exchanging* presupposes that non-action is already an action.

**Occupy the beaches of the hegemonic society /
Non-academic adult education /
De-technocratization of the university**

Rúbia Salgado

RD: *Occupying the beach* and finding flotsam and jetsam, that's what this evokes for me. Or could the technocratization of the university be subverted by acknowledging chance?

JS: *De-technocratization of the university* could swiftly transform it into a lively and popular counter-hegemonic beach.

**Sounding ventriloquism / Head and belly /
Not in and not out, but entangled with school**

Studio Without Master

RD: Dissolving the hierarchy between *head and belly*, and reading this as a metaphor and proposal for a rethinking of institutional hierarchies, makes me think of the following scene: the *head and belly* of a headless figure, with its *head* wedged under its arm beside its *belly*, engage in lively dialogue in a language that sounds like rumbling, slurping or gurgling noises.

JS: *Sounding ventriloquism* allows interiorized authorities to be heard as *cacophony* – in the back and forth between *head and belly*, rules, laws and traditions are first rendered conscious and then displaced, opening up new scope for action from below.

**Post-representative communication /
Negotiating with reality / Para-institutional
practices**

Nora Sternfeld

JS: *Negotiating with reality* appeals to me because it observes what is while shaping a space of possibility.

RD: *Negotiating with reality* is a component of my artistic work, too.

**Chewing and re-chewing knowledge /
No one is 'tabula rasa' / Ignoring is powerful**

The 'University of Ignoramuses'

JS: *No one is 'tabula rasa'* refers to hi/stories that turn us into profiteers and proponents of power relations, but it also refers to future possibilities for a practice of overwriting borders at the university – to a structural *stance of reciprocity*: who learns, who teaches and who assesses what of whom how and why?

RD: *Chewing and re-chewing knowledge* evokes the idea that digestion begins in the mouth, that knowledge is not merely swallowed.

**Listening as a mode of organizing sociality /
What Emerges in the Silence of ... /
Performative session**

Hong-Kai Wang

JS: *Smashed to pieces in the still of the night / Zerschmettert in Stücke in der Stille der Nacht*: These lyrics by Lawrence Weiner on a Nazi flak tower in Vienna come to mind in connection with the question of *what Emerges in the Silence of ...*, an engagement with the traces of the past in the present.

RD: Sound has a deterritorial power, so for me *listening as a mode of organizing sociality* also expresses the political dimension of listening.

*The following story is especially good if you hardly understand a word. For example, if someone sitting in the next room reads it to you in a quiet voice. You hear just the sound of the voice, a cough or a clearing of the throat, and perhaps you make out the occasional word, like 'eat' and maybe later 'house' or 'answer'. When the person in the next room laughs about the story, feel free to laugh along: it's a funny story.**

Translation from the German: Nicholas Grindell

* We are grateful to Fouad Asfour for drawing our attention to Jürg Schubiger's wonderful book *Dieser Hund heißt Himmel* (Beltz Verlag, 1985). Quotes from pages 42, 13 and 25.