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Educational Turn in Art: Turning art into the production of a *new* knowledge

Abstract: *Educational turn in art* as a term was first introduced during the last decade of the twentieth century in curatorial practices, although the very concept of turning art into educational vehicle, or into production of a *new* knowledge can be traced earlier into the art movements, schools and alternative pedagogical approaches. However, the idea that the art world could be transformed into an art network, an educational space that encourages the production and exchange of knowledge, certainly opens up a lot of questions both to the academic field and the field of artistic and representational practices. The text “Educational turn in art: Turning art into the production of a *new* knowledge” attempts to give an overview on the concepts of the educational turn in art, and also to shed some light on the important issues regarding the status of art in the contemporary information age.

Key words: educational turn, art, knowledge, information.

Going further into theoretical discourse that develops in post-postmodern context and also within the globalization and/or postglobalization world, lots of discussions have lately been dedicated to the notion of the role of *turns* in theory. The twentieth century in humanities witnessed a great influence of the *linguistic turn*, which left its marks on anthropology, social sciences, literature, and also had its impact in the development of semiotics and theories of meaning, which found their further application in huge theoretical movements such as theoretical psychoanalysis, theory of deconstruction and so on. It seems that *turn* is not just an accident, a sudden breakthrough of a new approach; it is more of a *turning*, an active movement and generative process which presents itself as a new reading strategy, an interpretative model which goes into thorough resignification of a chosen discourse (Rogoff, 2010). What matters here is the introduction of a new type of knowledge production, which turns on (and not just turns *around*) the new ways of understanding old phenomena, and opens up possibilities of creating new strategies of communicating contemporary issues. Turn in theories and humanities, thus, is less similar to cut-and-change strategy,

and more to the resignificational continuation within the already present field or path of thought (Rogoff, 2010). What is more important, it is not the object that is turning (the theory, the artwork, the literature) – it is *we* who are shifting our perspectives to find a way of responding to the new social, political, institutional, interpretational and other circumstances. Or, through the words of Irit Rogoff: „In a turn, we turn *away* from something or *towards* or *around* something and it is *we* who are in movement, rather than it” (2010: 42).

The *after theory* atmosphere (Eagleton, 2004), which heavily relies on the reflection of numerous turns in the recent theoretical thought,¹ and also on understanding of a contemporary time we think, live and create in, made the appearance in the world of art too.² One of the most recent turns in art theory, art presentation and art production is surely the *educational turn*, which became prominent in the last decade of the twentieth century, first in curatorial practices, and later in the very concept of the artists’ and art groups’ works, which also had its repercussion on the comprehensions and expectations of the art audience (Rogoff, 2010). In other words, although starting from the curatorial perspective, or, more precisely, in the new ideas and ways of presenting art and introducing it to the audience, educational turn in art has had influence on all the stages and all the elements of art production.

The idea that art can *educate* (and not only serve as a *beautiful object* or as an evidence of the artist’s inspiration, ingenuity or skill) is not entirely new. Art schools and groups of the twentieth century such as *Bauhaus* (1919-1933, Germany) or *Black Mountain College* (1933-1957, USA) already presented similar ways of understanding the role of art and the artist not only within the world of art, but also in and for the wider society in which the artist works in (Vidokle, 2010; Nikolić, 2016; Šuvaković, 2012). In the case of *Bauhaus*, turning to combining the craft and fine arts led to the focus on applied art (graphic design, interior design, industrial design, typography) and experimental art, which both opened the issue of the place of art in everyday life, and also introduced the process of learning in the very process of creating art and understanding art. In the view of the *Bauhaus* group of artists and their educators, art was not to be understood as a finished object to be placed in the abstractly encircled space (gallery, museum or the academia), but the object opened to further use – either practical or intellectual. In this sense, art should stimulate the questions of the very function of art within the

1 In the timespan of the last one hundred years, we can think, for example, of the linguistic turn, postcolonial turn, cultural studies turn, gender studies turn, new materialisms turn, media turn, etc.

2 By the world of art I consider the discourse of the art world which does not consist only of art works and artists, but also of the whole complexity of the institutional order (museums, galleries, academia, critics, curators, audience etc) that actually produces art as *art*, art as a symbolical value in itself, but only within the (regulations of the) art world. See Danto, 1964 and Dickie, 1971.

society, which aims at critical reworking the discourse of art on the one hand, and on the other, encourages both artists and art consumers (audience, buyers and other users of art production) to ponder upon the possibilities and roles that art can have in everyday and contemporary world. Also, the focus on experimental and research approach, often introducing new techniques or new ways of understanding art moved artists, professors and art audience to experience the continual learning within the process of creating and consuming art. Art was, thus, reframed as an *educational function* of the society, which will exactly be the thesis matching the efforts of the curators' practices in the end of the twentieth century. *Black Mountain College* was even more obvious with their attitude towards art as an educational field. Moreover, for the artists of *Black Mountain College* art was seen as an emancipatory practice, as a kind of educational function that actually emancipates both the artist and the artistic audience (previously educated or not formally educated) from the petrified structures of the institutional knowledge – be it within the art world or within the wider society (Graham, 2010). The program of *Black Mountain College* was openly oriented towards the educational turn in art (although the very term *educational turn* was introduced some sixty years later, during the nineties), and was greatly inspired by the pedagogical theories of John Dewey (1859-1952), who proposed the educational and social reforms as a way of linking the environment the individual lives in with the ways he or she gains knowledge. Dewey defined art as an *experience* (Dewey, 1980), which uncovers the complexity of the artist's and also audience's relation to the local culture and context within which this art is produced, presented and perceived. In this sense, art is an interactive process through which the artist, as well as the art critic or curator, and also the audience learn about the cultural and social environment they are dealing with (Dewey, 1963). For John Dewey, the most efficient learning happens in an interactive environment, a kind of context where the learner is able to connect to knowledge in the way he or she finds most inspirational and/or appealing, uncovering the object of thought – *an information* – not as a unit to be copy/pasted in the sum of personal knowledge, but as an element to be worked and reworked with (Dewey, 1963). Similar to this, *Black Mountain College's* approach looks at art as an experimental and developmental practice that engage artists, audiences and critics to exchange the questions and knowledge in all directions; in other words, knowledge is seen not to be coming from *one* source (professor or educator to the artist, the artist to the audience), but interchangeably and from within different directions, simultaneously. Here, art is not taught, art is not educated; art *educates* and serves as a tool for raising awareness of the importance of the educated – the informed, creative, critical and brave individual within the society and the communities he or she lives and works in.³

3 Note also the ideas of the Summerhill School which kept working at the similar historical time in England (1921-), and that also encouraged creative and democratic, almost anarchic approach in learning

In defining the educational turn in art in the contemporary times, Paul O'Neill and Mick Wilson say that it is the matter of a turn to education in art, which includes using art as an educational format, or as a new educational method, as well as including art into educational programs and processes (O'Neill and Wilson, 2010). This turn reflects itself both in the production of contemporary art and also in the way of shaping its presentation in the institutional spaces (galleries, museums, schools) and open spaces (streets, other public spaces). O'Neill and Wilson notice that in the first years of adopting the educational turn strategies in art, curators went for the renowned pedagogical strategies, such as discussions, talks, symposia, programs, debates and so on, implementing them within the traditional institutional art spaces. However, further involvement into the educational turn practices in art brought more complex and creative ways of incorporating education in art, or, better to say, incorporating the art as the educational vehicle into the world of art and wider society. "This is not simply to propose that curatorial projects have increasingly adopted education as a theme; it is, rather, to assert that curating increasingly operates as an expanded educational praxis" (O'Neill and Wilson, 2010: 12).

Placing the weight of the implementation of educational turn in art onto curators brings out a significant element of understanding the contemporary society in the last two to three decades. Art is not considered an object anymore, nor a pure act of creating the object. In the era of intensive informational circulation (*via* new media especially), art took the participative role in the informational age and became relevant as *communication*.⁴ Educational turn in art can be, thus, also seen as a *communicational turn in art*, or a turn of art to communication, turn of art *into* communication. In this sense curatorial practice becomes the art itself *via* education, precisely, through the way art transformed into the art (or skill, or an effort, a task and challenge) of education. Through curatorial practices art (re)activates social encounters, and so it strengthens interaction, discussion, knowledge exchange and knowledge production and distribution. It *communicates* itself but it also communicates (and by that intervention it *transforms*) the social reality shifting and reshaping the very positions of the artist, critics and audience (Verwoert, 2010). The old hierarchies are gone; communication develops in all parts of the art network.⁵

and comprehending the heritage of the body of knowledge within the academic, educational and social field (Neill, 1960). This will confirm that these approaches to life experiences (of thinking, making encounters, creating [art] and more) as educational are not so new, and that the educational turn in art had its predecessors and already recognized platforms to begin with (Nikolić, 2016).

4 In this sense art discourse had liberated itself from the notions of *the end of the art world* (Morgan, 1998) and redefined itself as a concurrent element of the contemporary society.

5 This also points to the possibility of rethinking the concept of the art world through a new term: the *art network*.

Art transformed into communication also points to another transformation brought by the educational turn in art. Since in this new conception there are no hierarchically related reference points, all the previously established patterns of how the artwork should be comprehended have dissolved, making the whole project about the process of learning about art itself. For example, the artist is not an exclusive *source* of the artwork anymore, since the curator is already reshaping it through another interpretational and communicational layer; the work is *reworked* and recontextualized in the process of curating. Also, critics are not the only relevant voice that reads the work and delivers it to an audience in the form of explained value; educational turn in art means that within the art network, art work becomes an art project that converts the whole art institution into the organ of *communication*, where the knowledge of the audience is also valued and taken into account (Aguirre, 2010).⁶ As a matter of fact, learning then materializes itself in all the network points through communication (the artist learns from the curator; the curator learns from the audience; the audience learns from the artist; the audience learns from the curator; art critics learn from the audience; the audience learns from art critics and so on, all the combinations included). It is not just that the author (which in the traditional comprehension of the process of art creation takes place of an artist) is dead (Barthes, 1977);⁷ it is the audience that is dead too, for in the educational turn in art they bear the transformation from receivers/perceivers to educators/educated, using art as a vehicle for a multidirectional educational process. All the participants in this process take place similar to Barthes' *writer without books (sans livres)*, where texts are not products but *practices* (Barthes, 1989), or, where communication goes through the art as network of communication aiming at explorational *learning* (about art, about art institutions, about artistic ideas, about social and cultural processes and contexts and so on). Or, in Barthes' words, "Research is never anything but the sum total of people who, in fact, *search*" (Barthes, 1989: 341). Also, the place of art as the educational tool in contemporary society brings out the questions of the mechanisms and patterns of this exact cultural context, so art (as educational) becomes a platform through which the society is potentially transformed (Graham, 2010: 125). In this process art is (re)moved from the myth of the artistic autonomy, and placed directly in the midst of the cultural production of everyday where it takes its forms, where the interpretations of it are produced and distributed and where, if it fulfils the idea of being the vehicle of education, it actually shifts the role of art from abstract to rather concrete, or, as Liam Gillick says, „There [in art] should be a desire to transfer the critical dilemma into an imminent, temporal space rather than to defer it into the dysfunctional infinite" (Gillick, 2010: 169).

6 Compare ideas in Brecht, 1964.

7 See Vidokle, 2010.

The educational turn in art as a turn to communication and a turn to art as information can be looked at from one more side. Historically, art has been about the production of a value (Khan, 2010: 119). Since in the contemporary society we can identify information (and also: being informed, being wired on the channels of information [internet, other media]) as the main value, as a guarantee of being meaningfully present in the actual moment, it is very possible that with the educational turn in art no really new economy has been formed, that it is just the place of the value that has shifted from the symbolical, surplus one (art in traditional kind of sense, art as a beautiful – thus valuable object), to the practical, applicable one (art as an information; art as a communicational, educational value) (Bauer, 2010).

Irit Rogoff (2010: 40-41) identifies four characteristics of art as educational art, of art within the scope of educational turn:

- Concentration on the potentiality and actualization
- Focus on urgency, not emergency
- Aim on accessibility of education
- Understanding education (and thus art) as challenge.

From Rogoff's perspective, educational turn in art brought the concept of opening, or opened production of knowledge, as a kind of a production of a *new* knowledge. Detached from the petrified mechanisms of both the academic and museum contexts, it liberates the artist from the role of „a skilful artisan” or „the voiceless genius”. It also liberates the mechanism of art critics from the exclusive right (and responsibility) to *define* the valuable art, or the value in concrete art, and, lastly, it liberates the audience from the role of a mute, uneducated crowd that is waiting for a proper, professional explanation of art. In the context of an educational turn in art, all the roles have become participative and emancipative: artists, curators, art critics, audiences educate each other through the *relational art* situation (Bourriand, 2002). What is more, they *produce* each other interchangeably through the knowledge production that they exchange. The audience becomes the creator of the message – which was the role previously assigned to the artist; the artist becomes the audience for the new artistic context to be happening, and the whole situation relies on the relational productive strategy into which all the traditional roles in the art world are decentered and opened to catalyst function (Beech, 2010). The artifact still exists; it is just the art perception and the roles of perception within the art world that are changed, shifted, repositioned. This situation Robert Stam names *relational art* (Stam, 2015: 282).

Back to Rogoff (Rogoff, 2010), recognizing the potentiality and actualization of art within the educational turn should bring the attention to the contemporary society

and bring out the roles of artist, curator, and also critics, academia and audience as roles of active participants in the actual culture where this art is situated in. It should focus on urgency as a continual, perpetual need for a constructive social intervention – a form of a creative participation, where participants in the art world recognize their position as important for the whole society. Art is not encapsulated within the separate world of itself; it is a relevant and active part of the wide cultural and social milieu, and as such it participates in its change and redefinition. Educational art should also democratize knowledge, making it more accessible and open to different kinds of audience which then, from their side, put an input into the whole network of knowledge, always reforming and reinvestigating the old and producing the *new* knowledge through feedback information. Finally, as Rogoff explains (Rogoff, 2010), both education and art are a challenge, and as such they introduce new issues for the field of theory of art too.

And in the end, one of the issues that touches both theory of art and its generative institutions (faculties, academia) is this: if art has taken the place of a vehicle of education, what would be the role of academia in the times of educational turn in art? Is educational turn in art and new roles of art network participants a circumstance that expands the influence of academia, or should it be perceived as a threat to the institutionally provided knowledge? Or, as Dieter Lesage puts it, „Very often, the academic turn seems to be a way to turn *away* from the academy: indeed, if the art field becomes an academic one, then what an academy has to offer can also be found elsewhere, at other institutions and self-organized initiatives constituting the field of expanded academia. The suggestion seems clear: we don't need the academy” (Dieter Lesage, quoted in Zolghadr, 2010: 160). The interpretational choice remains open, of course; but if the quality of challenge is based both in the fields of art and education, and if the aim of educational turn is to encourage production of a *new* knowledge in the wider social realm considering the actuality of that specific social realm, we can conclude that art, being an educational challenge, does not necessarily pose a threat to the academic context. Nevertheless, it surely means that in the age of educational turn in art both the discourse of art production and the discourse of the production of art knowledge – which includes both exhibitional and academic contexts – will have to rethink their positions, because within the educational turn it is not the art that is exhibited – it is the information; it is the knowledge that is produced, explored, communicated and transformed.

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Obrazovni obrt u umetnosti: preobražavanje umetnosti u proizvodnju *novog* znanja

Apstrakt: Termin *pedagoški obrt u umetnosti* je prvi put uveden tokom poslednje decenije dvadesetog veka u kustoskoj praksi, iako se sam koncept transformacije umetnosti u pedagoško sredstvo, ili u proizvodnju *novog* znanja može naći i u ranijim umetničkim pokretima, školama i alternativnim pedagoškim pristupima. Međutim, ideja da se svet umetnosti može transformisati u mrežu umetnosti, obrazovni prostor koji podstiče proizvodnju i razmenu znanja, svakako pokreće mnoga pitanja kako u akademskoj oblasti tako i u oblasti umetničke i reprezentativne prakse. Tekst "Pedagoški obrt u umetnosti: preobražavanje umetnosti u proizvodnju *novog* znanja" pokušava da pruži pregled pojmova pedagoškog obrta u umetnosti, kao i da donekle osvetli značajne probleme u vezi sa statusom umetnosti u savremenom informacionom dobu.

Ključne reči: obrazovni obrt, umetnost, znanje, informacija