

**ART ± EDUCATION**  
**THE PARADOX OF THE VENTRILOQUIST'S SOLILOQUY**

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**ABSTRACT**

When we speak of art education, are we trying to make sense of something by means of *something else*, just as a ventriloquist speaks with the mouth of a dummy to make us believe that he is having a dialogue with someone else when in effect he is speaking to himself? This paper discusses how art education could only flourish as an act of approximation as it rejects the incremental and constructivist assumptions that have turned art and education into transactional instruments. Discussing art and education's immanent relationship, this paper argues that art education is only necessary by force of the accidents that characterise it. Four scenarios, here identified in what the author calls the paradox of the ventriloquist's soliloquy in art education, illustrate this argument. In discussing how this comes about, this paper makes reference to Herner Saeverot's concept of indirect pedagogy and Charles Garoian's prosthetic pedagogy.

**KEY WORDS**

Art; Education; Immanence; Paradox; Ventriloquism; Approximation;  
Indirect pedagogy; Prosthetic pedagogy; Unlearning.



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# Art ± Education: The Paradox of the Ventriloquist's Soliloquy

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It might even be possible that what constitutes the value of those good and honoured things resides precisely in their being artfully related, knotted and crocheted to these wicked, apparently antithetical things, perhaps even in their being essentially identical with them. Perhaps!—But who is willing to concern himself with such dangerous perhapses! For that we have to await the arrival of a new species of philosopher, one which possesses tastes and inclinations opposite to and different from those of its predecessors—philosophers of the dangerous ‘perhaps’ in every sense.

Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 2003 (§2, p. 34)

The approaches taken on the whys and wherefores of a convergence between art and education in the contexts inhabited or created by what we call *art education* remain distinctly divergent and contingent on many a «perhaps». In its contingency, this divergence is implicit and explicit in equal measure in that it reflects a sequence of *dispositions* that are externalised as *habits* (Dewey, 2008) by which we often project a sense of identity and legitimation on how we regard the arts and where we locate them pedagogically.

Dispositions and habits could be said to emerge from where we stand, who we are and how we think and practice the relationship between art and education—a relationship that is not clear and less so predictable. Yet there



remains a context by which this relationship is often invested *a priori*, where more often than not, art and education converge on a transactional horizon where an exchange comes to presume a cultural consensus that is often regarded as intrinsically *good, beautiful* and somehow *true*.

Here it will be argued that this presumption of consensus often comes at a high price, where both art and education's separate immanence and the dialectical position they hold in their respective spheres are seriously distorted by the same transactional condition that schools them.

## TWO FORMS OF IMMANENCE

To start with, one needs to locate where and what constitutes the *agency* of the art educational transaction. The centrist view that customarily appears to be liberal and social-democratic, gets to the point of art education by asserting this agency within the identification of social and individual needs as measured against what society and the individual could contribute to the ever-changing constructs of the economy and the polity. The critical approach, which is somewhat on the left of the liberal and social democratic centre, would extend this state of affairs to a form of emancipation *through* the arts, where art and education seem to provide forms of critical growth and social empowerment.

While both the left and centre appear to articulate the convergence of art with education as a critical-pragmatic opening of possibilities, in and of itself the identification of a benefit or need does not guarantee that we capture the agency by which art and education are exchanged or even made to work together. As we have to ask why and how we choose to go along with such instances of convergence, we must also find out the real nature of the agency that brings about this relationship. To start with, is this a matter for artists, educators, both, or someone else—such as the democratic right to engage with the arts and to have an education, or indeed the interests, vested or otherwise, by which the market is said to be driven?

We come across such questions in a variety of ways and circumstances. At the same time, the sense by which we put across the arts and education—together or separately—invariably moves beyond the expectations held by those who see this relationship as a necessary practice found in institutions such as schools or museums, while somehow claiming that such venues need to retain a place for equality, freedom and democracy.



There is a danger that in the haste to assume a democratic and emancipatory horizon for the arts in education, art's immanence is lost by the fact that education is confronted by a degree of unfreedom when in its claims for emancipation it gets entangled by the conditions therein. Thus one needs to be careful not to close the possibility that in art education the agency of convergence resides in what is immanent within art and education in their distinct and specific dimensions, and not in what they could bring to each other for the sake of what appears to remain true and good. This raises the immediate question as to whether art and education would implicitly inform each other, or whether any possible convergence would need clear mediational mechanisms that could be identified with structures like the school, religion, the state, or anything that deems the arts as pedagogical, institutional, instrumental and therefore political.

This prompts at least two takes on immanence and the relationship between art and education. The first invests immanence in the relationship itself. This means that its *value* and measure of function (as a transactional form of convergence) is intrinsic to the relationship between the two, and not from one being the expression of the other. The second instance would locate immanence in the separate *dimensions* of art and education. This would need to pay attention to both art and education in terms of what they are (their *being*) and their ways of doing (what they *make* and therefore make *known*).

While it could be inferred that any separation between art and education remains historical inasmuch as their relationship remains openly instrumental (and therefore inevitably manufactured by the varying consents and interests that lie beyond their respective spheres) a case for mutual immanence—located in the separate *dimensions* of art and education—stands opposed to an immanence attributed to their manufactured and consented relationship. In the latter case, by externalizing art and education's function, the polity mandates a relationship that leads to the inevitable reduction of their *dimensions* into measured *values* by which they are then assessed. On the other hand, the former context presents a relationship which predicates an identification and empowerment of art and education in their autonomous *dimension*—meaning that in their relationship, art and education would have to find ways to conform to, as well oppose, each other dialectically.

This is where both the educator and the artist would need to resist those quick assumptions made by the notion of art education as a *koiné* that comes *naturally*. If there is anything *natural* about art education, this is found in the



haphazard and thereby self-elective ways by which anything assumed to be artistic or educative is marked by chance, a continuous struggle to find and make, and an unbroken string of contradictions and *aporiae*.

## THE VENTRILOQUIST'S ACT

While the nature of art and education's inherent relationship is of primary concern, this cannot be established unless one locates its agency—i.e. what brings art and education together. It is easy to argue that agency and immanence inform each other. However, in this quick conflation we often fail to recognise the agency that makes of art education a commonplace *koiné*. This confusion comes from a lack of attention to the performative values by which an agency is expediently confused with immanence. In terms of the performative expectations, by which knowledge is often externalised into a measured outcome (Lyotard, 1989; Illich 2009; Illich 2010) agency is easily distorted by an external voice whose deception is akin to a ventriloquist's. This voice imposes an agency that appears immanent in form (as it plays the part of art education—the dummy) though it remains entirely extrinsic in its content and intent (as it serves the external needs of those who sponsor the transaction—the ventriloquist).

Here I am drawing an analogy from the ventriloquist and the dummy because I would argue that the convergence of art with education often betrays a false hermeneutic which conceals a deliberate strategy of a voice posing as a form of agency. Being neither artistic nor educational, this strategy is political as it fulfils the prerequisites of instrumental reason, which Horkheimer (2012, viii) identifies with «the self-surrender by reason of its status as a spiritual substance» leading to «the socially conditioned tendency towards neo-Positivism or the instrumentalization of thought, as well as the vain effort to rescue thought from this fate.»

When we speak of instrumental reason, we are not simply assuming a hegemonic mechanism that betrays the presumed consent of common sense. Rather, instrumental reason presents itself as commonsensical. Here it appears to pertain to the logic of attainment, which in the process of gaining results, seeks to neuter the dialectic that characterizes the *dimensions* by which art and education express their singular immanence. This appeal to «common sense»—often backed up by unquestioned assumptions of art's pres-



ence in schools as a tool for growth—clearly demonstrates how instrumental reason seeks legitimation for art education as a means to an end.

Back to the ventriloquist analogy, to neuter the dialectic one must first eliminate the other. Posing the fallacy of another voice that is effectively the same is one way of doing this. One could conceal the other by convincing him or her that one is being given a voice, while in effect one is exerting power upon the other by putting words in his or her mouth. As a false representation of otherness this is a fabricated hermeneutic that (a) precludes the difference and alterity that are intrinsic to art and education, and (b) creates a false sense of equivalence between such dimensions with the specific intent to eradicate the dialectical nature that sustains the separate specificities from where art and education emerge as autonomous dimensions.

Through art education, instrumental reason could assume ventriloquism as a mechanism where the contexts by which we pose or locate art and education's autonomous identities (as what they *are*) and functions (as what they *do*) become compromised by how the ventriloquist's voice serves as an agent of both.

This false appearance of difference (with an appearance of two separate personae, as dummy and actor, that are effectively the same) results in the effective elimination of the *paradox* that characterizes how art and education emerge together in their incommensurate and incongruent dimension. More so this fallacy goes on to proscribe the intrinsic dialectic by which art and education could relate with each other. Instead, here the ventriloquist's voice presents art education as a *koiné* of settled convergence, as a coherent state of affairs, (where dummy and actor are a mere spectacle) which is singularly and permanently synthesized. As I have argued elsewhere (Baldacchino, 2015), this is symptomatic of a prosthetic synthesis that proscribes any further dialectical possibilities. This leaves us with art education as a unified discipline that causes art and education to self-surrender the original immanence that gives them autonomy.

#### WHO IS «SPEAKING»?

However, there is a further dimension to this state of affairs, which equally requires recognition and attention, as it is one of the few possibilities by which art education can move out of its instrumental predicament.



By suggesting that the ventriloquist's voice is foisted on art education it does not simply mean that neither artist nor educator have any more voices left. There are further voices or, to use Garoian's (2013) notion of prosthesis as a possible fourth loop in the dialectical process, the chain of contradictions could be extended by artistic and pedagogical possibilities that would offer a further paradoxical iteration which, contrary to the above scenario, would remedy the dilemma of a permanent synthesis.<sup>1</sup>

Often the question revolves around whether the artist's or the educator's voice would act to the detriment of the dialectical relationship that art education comes to represent at the point of its convergence. This initially raises at least three scenarios of ventriloquism.

In the first place, the ventriloquist is external to artists and educators alike. Here, ventriloquism is an attempt to instrumentalise art education for specific means to measured ends. As we have seen above, this forms part of the larger instrumental context by which reason and with it knowledge are being assumed as quantifiable means towards an end.

Secondly, the artist becomes a ventriloquist where, rather than articulate art's immanence, he or she seeks to impose art's ways of doing on the pedagogical sphere. I would argue that this form of ventriloquism not only fails to understand and bear art's *formative* possibilities, but it impairs art's own pedagogical immanence by reducing its gnoseological values into an epistemological hierarchy. The distinction between *gnoseology* and *epistemology* returns to how art relates to truth where, being intrinsic to knowledge, it belongs to the truth of art as a gnoseology, as a philosophy of knowledge; while epistemologically speaking, the knowledge of art belongs to an extrinsic discipline, or an epistemological structure by which it seeks validity and value against other disciplines. This distinction implies a further context: when we speak of art's pedagogical immanence, we also touch on how art's philosophy of knowing (as gnoseology) relates to truth as a claim for freedom.

A third form of ventriloquism occurs when educationalists view the arts as instruments of learning in a context where art's immanence is neither

<sup>1</sup> The background to the problematic relationship between a synthesis and the possibility of an extended prosthesis is initially conceived and presented in Charles Garoian's brilliant volume *The prosthetic pedagogy of art: Embodied research and practice* (2013), which I discuss at length in my paper «The Métier of Living: Art, Genocide, and Education» published in a special edition of *Qualitative Inquiry* that puts Garoian's book to the test of various approaches and analyses in art education (Baldacchino, 2015).

afforded its specificity nor considered in its autonomy, thereby externalising art into an educational means to a political end. Here art's place is located on an epistemological structure where it is seen as a form of knowledge whose claim for freedom is externally conditioned.

As one begins to look closer at what these three forms of ventriloquism could mean and where they would leave art education as a dialectic, two basal questions emerge: *As educators what do we want the arts to say, do, or be?* and *As artists what do we want education to say, do, or be?* Slightly reworded, we can pose these questions as: *Who is «speaking» when education «speaks»?* and *Who is «speaking» when art «speaks»?*

Speech must be regarded as an attempt to converse by dint of a presumed convergence. However, we know that «speaking» in art and education is only one way of conversing. There are many other ways of conversing without ever aiming to reach agreement or settling a dispute. This open-endedness is cue to other forms of engagement by which «speech» is a continuous assertion of positioning—knowing very well that what is sought is not ending the conversation, but recognising and valuing difference.

In this way, the analogy of speaking retains its relevance by means of a shift in its intent and import. By its intent, one continues to speak. By import, we begin to identify the immanent spheres of art and education where speaking doesn't have an *outside*. While this might not make much sense beyond the spheres of art and education, when we teach art the concept and practice of speech have to widen and take on meanings that they never had while unlearning others which are assumed in common parlance. More importantly, speech widens because teaching art implies *being thrown* into the being of art, where gnoseologically speaking art as *knowing* is begotten and never made, because neither narration nor explanation would teach us what art is.

*Being thrown* implies an immersion by which we are often led to believe that this resolves the dispute in which a dialectical relationship is sustained. However here the point of *being thrown*—or indeed *thrownness per se*—raises a number of questions: In what and with whom are we immersed? Is this an immersion into knowing, meaning, doing, learning, unlearning ...? In other words, what does this immersion really imply?

Just as a ventriloquist speaks with the mouth of a dummy to make us believe that he is having a dialogue with someone else when in effect he is speaking to himself, could we argue that we are doing something similar with art and education? In view of the three scenarios mentioned above, this





could mean that ventriloquism, far from being just a form of manipulation, represents an immersion in meaning through a conversation that remains indirect.

This raises a fourth scenario for ventriloquism. In the other three scenarios there is a situation that one could identify with the ossification of synthesis where the ventriloquist's act becomes a prosthetic synthesis that has nothing further to offer because it forecloses the dialectic between art and education. However, in a fourth scenario, we have the possibility of what I call a synthetic prosthesis (Baldacchino, 2015)—a concept that I develop in response to Garoian's dynamic notion of art's prosthetic pedagogy (2013). In this case, the ventriloquist's voice begins to mediate this synthetic prosthesis as an open-endedness by which art education speaks indirectly, and where the chain of contradictions is re-opened—and in turn left open—to further paradoxical possibilities.

#### SPEAKING WITH WHOM?

While there is a serious issue with how a ventriloquist's immersion in art's relationship with education directly affects the immanence of art and education—whether separately or in conjunction—the indirectness of a ventriloquist's «conversation» also raises some very interesting questions about agency in this very relationship, especially in terms of practical pedagogical issues.

One wonders whether the practices of art and education are actually speaking to each other or to themselves. Likewise one could ask whether art and education are forced to be each other's dummies or whether one takes control of the other. This opens the possibility for the analogy of the ventriloquist to be used as a way of critiquing and thereby problematizing the mechanistic approach to art pedagogy. One possibility by which the ventriloquist analogy could be turned on its head and regarded (as well as used) as one which benefits the relationship between art and education has to do with the intent and agency of speaking *per se*, and how in terms of art—and more so art teaching—this dialogue could potentially take a character of indirectness by which art education is somehow deconstructed.

This pertains to the question of knowledge and to how art as a form of knowing—rather than a form of *knowledge*—comes closest to a gnoseological



approach. This articulation of art education as a possible gnoseology might need some adjustments in terms of how we are used to and expected to perceive art education both in terms of how it is schooled and how it is taught. The difference is very evident in how an approach to art education from within the immanence of its relationship would intrinsically reject the restrictions of an epistemological structure, such as those found in contexts where knowledge becomes a curriculum.

From a gnoseological perspective, when we speak of art education, more than a matter of control, we must continuously return to how as a form of knowing, it pertains to the truth of teaching and that of art. More often than not, as teachers and artists we are challenged by questions over what pushes and controls whom: is the dummy an artistic or an educational performance? It seems to me that such a question falls back on an instrumental assumption that renders ventriloquism to mere manipulation.

One could see how a different approach to the question would alter the stance from which we would then regard art's own pedagogical immanence. This altered position would pose questions like: Could we really separate art and education or should we even try to separate them once their *ventriloquised* voice begins to open up the possibility of indirectness and within it the possibilities of an *indirect* pedagogy?

As Herner Saeverot succinctly put it, an indirect pedagogy is «a form of existential education rather than a locked method». He goes on to explain that an indirect pedagogy «is opposed to the pedagogic language used by the kind of teacher who likes to explain things, including how to exist as a human» (Saeverot, 2013, ix). More so, Saeverot goes on to show how this indirectness takes several forms, some of which pertain to spheres and practices that would be deemed as problematic by liberal and social constructivists, such as elements of seduction and deception. While teachers «must not reprimand the students but take them seriously», it must enrich the experience by giving them something that «ensnares the students» into thinking differently. «This seduction therefore has consequently a slight connection to education as it can lead the students into an educational process that questions their present attitude» (Saeverot, 2013, p. 21).

In refusing to explain, art education must take on the indirect mechanisms by which it seduces while it introduces the student to new avenues whose allures would prompt learning to reverse itself and undo what it supposedly constructs. Art's immanence is the first cause of any deception that



takes place in such an indirect pedagogy, while *being thrown* remains neither gentle nor didactic. This is not that different from Kant's grammar of judgement, by which, he tells us, we have to find ways of bridging reason with the incongruence of beauty and the sublime.

By using and adapting the tools of pure and practical reason, the immanence of the relationship between art and education can only hold if, like judgement, it operates on borrowed grammars—indeed borrowed from that which attempts to bridge the disinterestedness of the aesthetic and the meaningful aims of a teleological approach. By adapting tools that are never meant to be used in this way, art and education act as each other's ventriloquist. The deception here is not intent on manipulation, but to double-cross the same instrumental reason which, under the guise of constructivism, remains alien to both art and education.

This means that the only way to approach a «want of accordance» between the imagination and reason (Kant, 1974, §27, p. 119) by which art and education could construe an immanent relationship, would imply a form of indirectness that preserves art education from becoming an extrinsic connection. To illustrate how an indirect pedagogy works, one could argue that by dint of our teleological reasoning we come to realise that art's pedagogical practice cannot be other than a refusal of teleology; a paradox that comes closest to articulate art's specificity.

## HOW ARE WE SPEAKING?

So with whom are art and education speaking, and how? The answer could go in every direction, though this often appears as if it is going nowhere. Art and education may well be seen as if they are speaking to no one, as frequently they appear to speak to each other, like a dummy and ventriloquist having a conversation. Yet we know that while this is not a conversation, but a soliloquy, the deception is purely performative, as it is meant to address an audience—hence the ventriloquist's paradox. At this point we become spectators, just as we become students, we form part of society, we enter the polity, and we consider ourselves as a community of practitioners. In other words, as indirect communicators, we witness art and education as a performing soliloquy that speaks to everyone, and in whose indirect existence we are also thrown.



An image that could be seen as being prompted by art's ability to speak to everyone by speaking to itself is Carlo Carrà's *L'idolo ermafrodito* (*The hermaphrodite idol*, 1917). The idol's body remains without features. Yet in its solitary and magisterial pose it claims to represent life, while at the same time we are taught nothing of it.

Carrà's work confronts us with an enigmatic vision that could only attract one's attention by its sense of deception. As it remains indirect in Carrà's depiction, the idol's claim to being—or in what it is immersed—has to be deceptive. The deception is found in the illusion of peace by which the idol's hermaphrodite form bears no difference of gender, disposition, symbol, or any other metaphor or identifier that might cause conflict. Likewise, the space inhabited by the hermaphrodite idol bears no indices. It fails to indicate a specific time or an actual space. At best, the space is ideational because it transcends its formal values in prototypical ways, and yet this space remains neutral, as it does not even suggest a guide of sorts. Even colour remains subdued.

What Carrà's humanoid figure seems to suggest could be everything or nothing at all. Yet for those interested in a pedagogical lineage the magisterial pose is important because a *magister* is a teacher, and his or her perspective is privileged by what is given in terms of the epistemological space that knowledge is supposed to «fill» or «inhabit». Being magisterial, the pose is expected to impart and thereby share that knowledge with those who want to listen or partake of it.

Yet in this assumption of *non-speech* done in magisterial pose, Carrà's hermaphrodite gives us nothing of the sort. The magisterial is only suggestive in the sense of alluring one to assume that there is more to its nothingness. It seems to entertain the idea of a pose by which art could not simply suggest but also affirm knowledge by its metaphysical claims of equivalence between the physical and its *beyond*. More so, this magister entertains the idea of knowledge from its sense of being as a further sense of ambiguity that could only find accommodation within a gnoseological approach where knowing and being curiously conflate.

We know that in the art of Carlo Carrà and Giorgio De Chirico the metaphysical is radically distanced from Surrealism. It gives itself a special space where the equivalence of the *now* with the *beyond* suggests the actuality of what is *outside*. This actuality is deeply immanent and thus the outside is also a referent of an *inside* that is never distinct from it. Again, to say nothing by saying it all remains elusive, though not that distanced from the hermeneutic edifices



by which the metaphysical is used as a means of explaining the actual. Even when dubbed *metaphysical*, art is not implied as an otherness beyond the physical but as that which is arrived at—perhaps by «ask(ing) oneself first: what morality does this (does he—) aim at?» (Nietzsche, 2003 §6, p. 37).

## ARTISTS ± EDUCATORS

We know that the claim to morality in Nietzsche is a claim to move beyond it, «where a philosophy which ventures to do so places itself, by that act alone beyond good and evil». This comes from how such a philosophy recognizes «untruth as a condition of life» and resists «customary value-sentiments in a dangerous fashion» (Nietzsche, 2003 §4, p. 36). Those familiar with the layers of interpretation by which Nietzsche sustains his non-identitarian narrative, would also recognise how just like Carrà's idol, he or she who seeks to privilege the interrogation of one's morality is in effect doing nothing by assuming that he or she is doing everything.

In this structure we would also have to ask how art turns us into a community of learners *and* doers, while at the same time it invites us to reject these kinds of definitions. Quick answers to what artists are or do effectively reinforce those constructivist assumptions that coach artists and educators into the role of earnest *builders*. Given that education has been assumed *in primis* as a building project, the constructivist assumptions that come with it in liberal and progressive pedagogies seem to retain a loyalty to the *Bildung* of which, more often than not, a concept of criticality is expected to be a natural attribute.

As I have suggested earlier in this essay, the danger lies in how hasty assumptions often mistake a democratic and emancipatory horizon for the arts in education as a passage into the morals which art, in its deceptive and indirect pedagogy, must seek to avoid in order to exit the polity's instrumental rationale. This is why, notwithstanding the critical argument for emancipation, art education often signals a loss of immanence where art finds itself constructed on the unfree grids of epistemological teleology; a teleology assumed on the patterns by which a sociology of knowledge was meant to task education «not merely to develop people adjusted to the present situation, but also people who will be in a position to act as agents of social development to a further stage» (Mannheim, 2000, p. 234).



If we build learning (as constructivists sometimes argue in their unquestioned acceptance of student-centred processes) there is a risk that rather than speak to everyone and no one, we create formulas on how we speak to each other—thereby reducing speech into a moral imperative by transforming art's *maybe* into an *ought*, into an *aesthetic* imperative. In this respect, the sociologist of knowledge sustains a kind of *Bildung* that does not seek to negate the immediate to imagine possibilities from where one could, dialectically speaking, grasp the accident in order to save oneself from the assumption of necessity. On the contrary, the sociology of knowledge regards education as a means to avoid the accident. Hence, to a social constructivist like Mannheim, «the social relations governing everyday life are an important subject for research if it is desired to rescue more and more factors in the social education of men from the realm of 'accident'» (Mannheim, 2000, p. 234).

As Mannheim's progressive credentials invariably offer a kind of *suc-cour* by which this kind of social constructivism seems to retain a hope for a rational outcome, it is not easy to simply dismiss such an approach to the sociology of knowledge as instrumentalist. Likewise Mannheim's take on how the so-called *milieu* of social constellations creates a firm ground on which one could build a possible plan for action (Mannheim, 2000, p. 234ff) is equally attractive.

However, albeit progressive, Mannheim's approach remains open to the transformation of critical practice into a measured end. Here, the critical *Bildung* which Hegel assumed as a simultaneous «process of self-transformation and an acquisition of the power to grasp and articulate reasons for what one believes or knows» (Wood, 1998, p. 302) is transformed into a progressive and incremental rejection of that «immediacy of substantial life» from where *Bildung* laboriously emerges (Hegel, 1977, p. 3).

Let's not forget that Hegel regarded *Bildung* as that which gives one the power «to support and refute the general conception [or universal thought] with reason» (Hegel, 1977, p. 3). If this approach to *Bildung* is transformed into an ability to be «rescued from the realm of accident» (Mannheim, 2000, p. 234) then all that this progressive approach would achieve is an elaborate grid of skill-sets that proscribes the individual's creative refusal, thereby neutering the critical immanence of *Bildung* by reducing it to a form of incremental building.

The neutering of *Bildung* comes with the suppression of its dialectical nature. Dialectically speaking the accident retains its necessity as that which negates necessity *per se*. This might seem too abstract unless one revisits Dewey's own



approach to growth, which he sees as essentially rooted in immaturity. Here, Dewey's Hegelian foundations become pragmatic. As he succinctly put it, for a child growth is not something done to her, but something that she does herself (Dewey, 1966, p. 41). Likewise for *Bildung*—understood as a formative critical event that we often translate as *culture* or *education*—the accident cannot be rejected.

In the case of art education, to approach and indeed critique the sociological neutering of *Bildung* one cannot simply critique the assumptions of teaching as a choice between instrumental skill-sets and a creative construction of self-referential critical individuals (as we normally do when confronting traditional-conservative with progressive-liberal forms of education). Rather, we need to take a detour and approach art's pedagogical question from a disposition where art education implies that artists and educators are *more or less* equivalent—as *artists ± educators*. At the same time, this approximation provides both a mean as well as an addition that is signified by its subtraction (and vice versa).

Thus rather than an equivalence between a creative artistic activity and a progressive form of education, here we have an approximation by which art education continuously signals a perpetual negotiation between that which it adds and that which it subtracts from the same *life-forms* that we call *art* and *education* (Wollheim, 1980; Baldacchino, 2013). One caveat is that this sense of approximation could only come into effect through an indirect pedagogical approach, which means that we might also have to indulge in a degree of ventriloquism.

## APPROXIMATED SOLILOQUIES

By way of concluding, I would like to further unpack my claim for approximation and claim the averaging that signals «*art ± education*» in terms of what it might imply as a method—or poetics—of the *more or less*.

We know from basic mathematics that  $1 \pm 1 =$  either 2 or 0. Yet  $1 \pm 1$  is also 1 in that 1 is the mean, or average, of 1 and 1. In trying to assume that there is some equivalence between art and education in the *koiné art education*, we have argued that this could imply a variety of possibilities. Often such possibilities reveal a paradox. These possibilities also refuse to affirm that one could progressively assume a solid definition for art education. This would directly contradict any constructionist approach to art education.



Instead of a secured accrual of definition or function, we're left with a state of approximation, by which we could affirm that art's method is marked by what might be, *more or less*. Any presumed *convergence* between art and education does not add up. Rather, it remains disjointed by the paradoxical nature that brings it together. This is evidenced by the historical contexts in which art and education have been conflated in any conceivable way.

More so, we experience this in terms of how, as forms of life, art and education have asserted a sense of autonomy in our ways of being by dint of the interiority that we attribute to them. Far from some metaphysical assumption, how we come to relate art with education pertains to the same sense of being by which many individuals or communities figured out how to think and do the impossible. The fact that artistic practice is often deemed to be either a form of genius or madness has nothing to do with some romanticised view of the errant artist who disdains the world. On the contrary, it is the artist's love of the world that has turned him or her into outcasts of society. After all, what artists do is never deemed to be certain, let alone measurable. And when this happened, as art became an institution, art had to gain value—be it as a form of learning or earning, by which the aesthetic was reinvented to sustain what could be deemed as true or beautiful.

While many would prefer to go with this institutionalised assumption of art education as the very avenue by which creativity prompts growth and meaning, the same argument cannot be sustained by the certainties by which those who want to claim legitimacy for art education go on to measure and instrumentalise such legitimacy. This is why current claims for the creative and culture industries as integral to the wealth and wellbeing of society convince only those who seek art as a form of certainty—indeed as a currency by which an economy or a state of being is assumed.

As one returns to the *aporia* of art, the question is rather simple: Is art education a necessity or a matter of contingent situations?

Devotees of order and progress alike, whether traditional or liberal, would be disinclined to leave this question unanswered and will tell us how art is there for us to learn and even earn, as indeed we have a wealth of literature to show. Yet in their earnestness to legitimise art education through learning and earning, these colleagues fail to explain why we must insist that both art and education are only necessary by force of their accident, and when forced into a structure, they fail.





More so, to insist that art education is some kind of *milieu* that settles the question on firm ground—be it that of learning, earning or anything else—is to abort the state of immaturity in which growth retains its possibilities. Far from a romantic argument for a state of innocence, this is a call for an approach by which art and education would always provide ways of keeping an ace up our sleeves in order to win the perpetual game of contingency. This is what we learn from the paradox of the ventriloquist’s soliloquy.

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