1 The Liberatory Lecturer

Cutting Through the Educational Fault Lines in Art and Politics

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The increasing interest around the nexus of art, politics and education is tied to the expansion and intensification of artistic practices, analyses, histories and critiques qualified by terms like "participatory," "dialogical" and "socially engaged." Socially engaged art (SEA) is an umbrella term that designates a wide range of politically driven artistic practices that emerged throughout the early-mid 20th century in the United States and Western Europe either outside or across the borders of formal art spaces and communities for particular political purposes. The difference is that today, as Noni Brynjolson notes, SEA is not only a wider concept but also one "that recognizes the institutionalization and increased formalization of these practices" at the turn of the 21st century.[1]

For Claire Bishop, the beginning of the 21st century was marked by "conspicuous surge of interest in examining the relationship between art and pedagogy" produced by an artistic and a desire to move from critique to participation and the rise of the neoliberal university. With capital's demand for growth, remaining competitive in the global marketplace required universities to expand their course offerings and degrees. Universities offer more advanced degrees in subjects like Museum Studies along with "research networks with universities, symposia reflecting upon their practice, and interdisciplinary conferences" (not to mention the book in which this chapter appears) while art practitioners deploy "lectures, seminars, libraries, reading-rooms, publications, workshops and even full-blown schools."[2] Grant Kester likewise refers to the "recent 'pedagogical turn' in art practice" that entails "the use of workshops, archives, libraries, reading groups, and a whole pedagogical apparatus" operating parallel to the proper sites of the university.[3]

Terms like "education" and "pedagogy" are sprinkled throughout much of this research but are generally underarticulated or unquestioned. Furthermore, how education and educational forms are distinct from or relate to art, aesthetics and politics are generally cast aside, assumed, or absent. This is even the case in Bishop's 2012 critique of "participatory art," the last chapter of which she dedicates to "pedagogic projects." Here, the political—at least explicitly—retreats, as she argues "the current literature on art and pedagogy … tends not to deal with specific modes of this intersection and the differences between art and education as discourses."[4] Bishop keeps good and plenty of company when glossing over the specificity of education and its role in art and politics today. The recurrent problem not only crops up in her primary target—SEA proponent Kester—but also in critical educational theory.

This chapter takes this opening to identify the main pedagogical fault lines in SEA debates. It then turns to the two most prominently cited contemporary educational theorists: Jacques Rancière and Paulo Freire. Evaluating Bishop and Kester's critiques of the

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former, it picks up on Bishop's stated preference for Freire. Identifying that the primary difference between the two is not a question of hierarchy, agency, or authority, it shows that the main distinction is the politics informing their educational theories. The intention is to provide those interested in SEA practices and research better precision with which to think about the relationship between politics, art and education.

The Pedagogies of SEA's Champions and Critics

There are at least three main lines of educational contestation in the SEA debates: the attribution of agency, the existence and desirability of hierarchy and authority, and the relationship between theory and practice—or between the aesthetic and the ethical. These threads are operative throughout Kester's work, beginning with *Conversation Pieces*, a trigger for recent explicit theorizations of collaborative practice. Over the last 20 years, Kester has in various ways argued that today the artist provides *context* instead of *content*, agency is distributed through numerous forces, hierarchy is dismantled, and the distance between theory and praxis is minimized or eliminated. In particular, SEA responds to the Critical Theory of the Frankfurt School's faux-radicalism as evidenced by Theodor Adorno's refusal to participate in the May 1968 Paris student rebellions (allegedly) inspired in part by his work. Adorno simply stated it wasn't his responsibility "to determine how his insight might be applied," providing an excellent excuse for the "critical theorist" to "remain aloof and disengaged from immediate, tactical questions of practice of application."[5] Such an autonomous realm enables an adequate critique of the existing order, which situates the critical theorist on the margins—but not *outside*—of the institutions. "The revolutionary," Kester relays, "would decamp to the institutional margins of political life, the university, the gallery and the publishing house to create a heterotopic space of experimentation."[6]

Adorno's educational theory resonates with Kester's reading of Jacques Rancière. In his only book on education, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, Rancière follows the intellectual journey of Joseph Jacotot who, in the 19th century, found himself in a difficult teaching situation. The French professor was sent to teach Flemish students who didn't speak or read the French words that Jacotot spoke or that appeared on the pages of the book he taught them, *Les Aventures de Télémaque*. The schoolmaster ignorant of Flemish did teach the students ignorant of French. Rancière reads the story as a polemic of "the explicative order" and the "stultifying pedagogue." The explicative order is a spiral where the teacher explains their knowledge to students and then evaluates their demonstration of that knowledge. Explication is stultifying because it establishes a relationship of inequality insofar as "equality remains the only reason for inequality."[7] It teaches us that we need the teacher (whose intelligence will always be superior) and produces a "circle of powerlessness" because the gap between the empowered and powerless, the intelligent and unintelligent, can only narrow, it can never close.[8] Emancipatory education, on the other hand, *proceeds from the assumption* that all intelligences are equal. The only thing Jacotot needed was a third object—an intermediary between the teacher and student—to teach.

Rancière merely replaces the authority of the teacher with the authority of the book that each sovereign individual can interpret according to "his or her own autonomous meaning."[9] Enlightenment's search for the autonomous, rational agent reappears in modern form, where the utopian promise is one of "full communism." Whether in Kant or Rancière, this telos "is defined by a deliberative depreciation of the creative and prefigurative power of political practice itself."[10]

Interestingly, Bishop doesn't mention Kester, her main target who exemplifies the "social turn" *Artificial Hells* criticizes. A champion of the "remarkable proliferation of collaborative, collective and transdisciplinary approaches to art-making," Kester doesn't explicitly articulate any educational theory.[11] All the same, his work on SEA is implicitly tied to pedagogy and education. For Kester, the various practices grouped under SEA emerge *in response to* the failure of the avant-garde to galvanize a revolutionary movement. The modern avant-garde failed to galvanize art as part of a revolutionary project to overthrow capitalism. The contemporary avant-garde requires a defense of the autonomy of art and theory, for only under such conditions can one take a distanced view of society for critical negation.

Bishop takes Kester to task for erasing not the autonomy of art, but of aesthetic experience, for her problems with participatory art are the equation of art and politics or ethics and the evasion of rupture and disagreement. There is—or must be—a universal, transcendental and timeless realm of the "aesthetic" and another of the political for, as Bishop argues that we "must discuss, analyse and compare this work critically *as art*, since this is the institutional field in which it is endorsed and disseminated," and insists that "unease, discomfort, or frustration—along with fear, contradiction, exhilaration and absurdity—can be crucial to any work's artistic impact."[12] The problem with SEA in general is that it eliminates (or tries to eliminate) boundaries between art and life, the aesthetic and the political. She doesn't dismiss its political potential but rather cautions that it "is not an automatic formula for political art, but one strategy (among many) that can be deployed in particular contexts to specific ends."[13] Bishop prefers Paulo Freire to Rancière because, she alleges, the former acknowledges we can't simply wish away the hierarchical relation between teacher and student.

Freire is famous for his critique of the "banking model" of education and his praxis of "dialogical" education. Because dialogue takes place under any number of determinant factors, the teacher's authority provides space for students to actualize newfound freedoms without becoming authoritarian. Dialogue occurs *within* the teacher-student relationship without dissolving or breaking it, which is akin to her position on art and the social. Bishop rejects pedagogical art that "instrumentalises the aesthetic" by providing a means to achieve a non-aesthetic outcome to endorse pedagogical art as balancing "the fine line of a dual horizon—faced towards the social field but also towards art itself" or by holding "art and the social … in continual tension."[14]

Kester's historical narrative justifies a pedagogical theory that rejects pedagogical authority. Adorno was a later manifestation of Friedrich Schiller's aesthetic educator, who remains isolated from political and everyday life to remain politically aloof so as to guide the masses in political transformation, all while "the work of art trains us for social interactions that we are not yet prepared for in real life."[15] The educational argument at play concerns the authority and agency of the pedagogical relationship and the temporality of the political project insofar as revolution is always deferred to a future and abstract revolutionary insurrection. Kester (over)corrects Bishop, interpreting Rancière's emancipatory logic as *too* authoritarian. Rancière relocates authority to a third object before reassigning it to the teacher, who must put it before students, who *need* the object (i.e., book) for emancipation. Rancière never claims emancipation negates authority and defines the emancipatory educator as one who "knows no compromises" and "absolutely commands of a subject what it supposes it is capable of commanding itself."[16] Neither hierarchy, agency, nor authority distinguishes Freire from Rancière. What their contrast reveals is a foundational *political* difference that

sheds light on a political commonality between Kester and Bishop: while both believe social transformation is possible but within limits. In Kester's latest work, artistic politics "means actively intervening in these [existing] institutions and structures in order to transform or reinvent them."[17]

We see the differential embrace of the reigning dogma in Western academia today: an *a priori* rejection of the possibility and actuality of revolution premised on an unquestioned and unexamined evaluation of the 20th-century liberation and socialist struggles as failures. For Bishop, they lead in a predetermined and strategist way to "totalitarianism," a term without context that paves the way for equating the Soviet Union with Nazi Germany, Stalin with Hitler and communism with fascism. "The most immediate heir to Russian mass spectacle," Bishop writes, "is found in the grotesque displays of military prowess and mass conformity at the Nuremberg rallies."[18] Kester is more ambivalent or contradictory. He repeats the misreading of Lenin's praxis of revolution and the party as premised on a detached avant-garde elitism in which the vanguard is an enlightened leading the stupid masses.[19] He then, however, approvingly cites the aesthetic politics of a political formation based explicitly on Leninism—the Black Panther Party—as a "generative site for the reciprocal influence of social change and artistic production."[20]

The Panthers "possessed a sophisticated understanding of the cultural politics of image and performance."[21] If the Party Ministry of Culture Emory Douglas embodies this "performative sensibility," he deployed it to link the Panthers' newspaper, then titled *Black Community News Service*, with the global communist movement.[22] Take the October 1969 edition. The front page is divided vertically but unevenly. A rendering of Party leader Eldridge Cleaver and a quote where he equates the flag of America to the Japanese Empire is predominant. Below, four renderings of Korean revolutionary Kim Il Sung stand over a quote where Kim identifies US imperialism as the primary enemy of the world's people.[23] Because for Kester Marxism is Adorno and Adorno is Marxism, the communist project is made up of "white men" and its alternatives are found in men like Frantz Fanon, Walter Rodney and W.E.B Du Bois—all of whom were explicitly part of the communist tradition, with the last dying as a Communist Party member.[24]

Meanwhile, Bishop's assertion that the autonomy of aesthetic experience is necessary to the *artistic quality* of art works doesn't prevent her from arguing them as "contrived displays of collective unity."[25] While the USSR defended its revolution from 14 imperialist countries, reorganized the international communist movement by uniting the socialist and anti-colonial struggles, and provided feeding, clothing and teaching to an overwhelmingly poor and destitute population, Bishop is able to artistically critique them insofar as "participation was more important than watchability, dramatic impact or technical skill."[26] It is almost as if the early 20th-century mass mobilizations in the world's first socialist country were meant for today's critics in the institutional settings that apparently legitimize some things and not others as "art."

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Bishop never acknowledges the *politics* of Freire's pedagogical praxis or his thoughts on the relationship between pedagogy and politics. When discussing her own pedagogical artistic practice, Bishop foregoes any discussion of its *politics*. This move discloses quite a lot. Her first example is Cuban artist Tania Bruguera's (in)formal art school project in which Bishop participates. In one course, "most of the *visiting artists* are engaged in performance in some way, and many are from former socialist countries, in order to *help*

the Cuban students understand the transition their own society will *inevitably* be going through."[27] Bishop and others collaborated with Bruguera's students to produce "an *imported* exhibition culture: bringing images and ideas to the island that do not otherwise circulate there due to *severe restrictions* on internet usage."[28] Unaware of her own *political participation* in the *pedagogical* project, she humbly brags about exposing the ignorant Cubans to the ideas and images of the capitalist-owned social media. Nowhere does Bishop mention the reasons for such "severe restrictions" (e.g., the US embargo and blockade, the right of nations to self-determination), let alone what constitutes them as "severe." The overthrow of the Cuban Revolution is taken as *inevitable* and *desirable*, something painfully ironic to those who bothered to finish reading Freire's classic, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

In *Artificial Hells*, Bishop equates Freire's praxis with critical pedagogy, arguing the latter constitutes "a rupture in the history of education that is contemporaneous with upheavals in art's own history circa 1968."[29] Indeed, the dominant narrative of critical pedagogy *originates* with Freire's work before traveling to the Frankfurt School (although Joe Kincheloe holds the latter is the defining feature of the field).[30] Isaac Gottesman's historical inquiry debunks this myth, detailing critical pedagogy as a 1980s North American project merely bolstered by individual relationships with Freire. Instead, its founders operated under different and even antagonistic axioms in that Freire practiced and theorized education in building social movements and constructing revolutionary societies from a revolutionary Marxist perspective, while critical pedagogy focused on "revealing" the hidden mechanisms of domination in society from an orientation that "embraced liberal conceptions of the public sphere, citizenship, and the nation-state."[31] Curry Malott proposes a distinction that captures the essence of the break, documenting how critical pedagogy emerged as an anti-communist break from revolutionary projects worldwide. In critical education, Malott writes, these anti-communist and antirevolutionary theories "so taken-for-granted, so presupposed, that those of us in the field reproduce it effortlessly like a daily, ritualized routine."[32]

Two examples prove the accuracy of the anti-communist break between Freire's revolutionary educational *praxis* and critical pedagogy's radical *critique* that mirrors that of Marxism and the Frankfurt School. The first is *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, a work born of struggle. It is not an abstract methodology but a pedagogy situated within an overarching political vision: the revolutionary communist project. Freire begins the last chapter by translating Lenin's famous dictum about the impossibility of developing revolutionary practice without doing the same for revolutionary theory.[33]

Dialogue in itself is not political, let alone oppositional; it is only political as Freire thinks it when it is the educational relationship between the revolutionary leadership and the masses. Yet revolutions need not entail dialogic processes depending on their conjuncture. He sees the Cuban Revolution as one such example, arguing that it was more horizontal by circumstances "forced on the leaders," but that their leadership was dialogically affirmed *after* the conquest of state power.[34] The revolutionary pedagogue looks for "the *most efficient and viable* means of helping the people" carry out the revolution.[35] Freire's pedagogy wasn't a method of classroom instruction but a revolutionary pedagogical philosophy "necessitated by, yet lacking in, the theory of the vanguard."[36] Indeed, as Tyson E. Lewis writes, the accusation of Freire as "nothing more than a vanguard is both right and wrong" insofar as it fleshes out the pedagogy of the Party but does not reduce "dialogical pedagogy into a vulgar notion of leadership."[37]

It is no wonder that Amílcar Cabral, more than any other, embodies "the pedagogue of the revolution" for Freire, who was invited by the revolutionary government to assess and advise them on their educational praxis after Cabral's death.[38] Henry Giroux's review of the book glosses over the anti-colonial revolutionaries that sought out Freire, bypassing any discussion of revolution or organization. The destination of Giroux's detour is an absurd critique: Freire's Marxist analysis is a "strong, rhetorical indictment" that might be "justifiable for Third World radicals who need spend little time documenting and exposing the objective conditions of domination for the oppressed" but not in North America or the imperialist core where the domination of the oppressed is "much less obvious."[39] Freire never thought anything could be transplanted from one context to another, but Giroux's claim is different. Giroux claimed oppression is "hidden" from people in colonizing countries. As such, we need the public intellectuals to lift the wool over our eyes—whatever side of the SEA debates with which they align.

Conclusion

In his first legal talk after his exile from Brazil, Freire recounts a discussion with an educational worker who fought under Cabral in the national liberation and socialist struggle, where he asked the worker what impressed him most about Cabral. The young man tells Freire it was his foresight, or "his capacity to know beyond his immediate surroundings and to imagine the not yet."[40] Freire needed a concrete example. Right after an intensive air-bombing campaign, Cabral gathered the fighters together for a lecture (not a dialogue). Knowing the bombs could start dropping again at any moment, Cabral directed troops *away* from the frontlines "to send to a different battlefront. I need two hundred of you to send to Guinea-Conakry, to the Capacitation Institute" to prepare them to work as teachers in the territories the revolutionaries liberated."[41] Cabral inquired into the young man's objection that they must wait until the armed struggle is over to engage in education. Cabral responded: we must divert 200 fighters to school *to* win. Here, we could argue Freire presents political pedagogy as inherently aesthetic in that it concerns the ability to relay an alternative sensorium that is both present and to come.

Cabral's pedagogy of revolution combined speaking *with* the people and speaking *to* them, or dialogue and lecturing within a political project. Against the false binary of the authoritarian (who only speaks *to*) and the anarchist (who only speaks *with*), Cabral could only *speak to* because he *spoke with*. He concludes by defending his pedagogical work against attacks of constructivism. "Education is indeed directive," he says, "it is a *starting out from*" in order to head in a particular direction.[42] The teacher is an authority precisely because they are guided by an end point that is always open to suspension and redirection. Yet the teacher's authority is only effective if taken up by the multiple agents' operative in any given setting.

Notes

1 Noni Brynjolson, "Learning from Watts House Project: On Failure and Reparative Practice in Socially Engaged Art," *Public Art Dialogue* 10, no. 2 (2020): 221.
2 Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (New York: Verso, 2012), 241, 242.
3 Grant Kester, "The Noisy Optimism of Immediate Action: Theory, Practice, and Pedagogy in Contemporary Art," *Art Journal* 71, no. 2 (2012): 95.
4 Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, 242.

5 Kester, "The Noisy Optimism of Immediate Action," 88.
6 Grant Kester, "Lessons in Futility: Francis Alÿs and the Legacy of May '68," *Third Text* 23, no. 4 (2009): 411.
7 Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation*, trans. K. Ross (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), 88.
8 Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation*, 15.
9 Kester, "The Noisy Optimism of Immediate Action," 95.
10 Grant H. Kester, *Beyond the Sovereign Self: Aesthetic Autonomy from the Avant-Garde to Socially Engaged Art* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2024), 21, 22.
11 Grant Kester, "Lessons in Futility: Francis Alÿs and the Legacy of May '68," *Third Text* 23, no. 4 (2009): 409.
12 Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, 13, 26.
13 Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, 283.
14 Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, 274, 278.
15 Kester, *Lessons in Futility*, 410.
16 Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 38.
17 Kester, *Beyond the Sovereign Self*, 227.
18 Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, 74.
19 Lenin consistently combatted these tendencies. In "What is to be Done?" for an early example, Lenin criticizes the Narodniks for trying to make a revolution without the masses and the economists for belittling the intelligence of the masses. He argues for a pedagogical balance between spontaneity and organization guided by the Party, a organization that eliminates "*all distinctions as between workers and intellectuals*." Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, "What Is to Be Done?" in *Essential Works of Lenin*, ed. Henry M. Christman (New York: Dover Publications, 1987), 137.
20 Grant Kester, *The Sovereign Self: Aesthetic Autonomy from the Enlightenment to the Avant-Garde* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2023), 139.
21 Kester, *The Sovereign Self: Aesthetic Autonomy from the Enlightenment to the Avant-Garde*, 137.
22 Kester, *The Sovereign Self: Aesthetic Autonomy from the Enlightenment to the Avant-Garde*, 138.
23 The Black Panther, *Black Community News Service*, 25 October 1969, 1.
24 Du Bois joined after Khrushchev's "Secret Speech" and even defended the Soviet Union's intervention to help defeat the 1956 counterrevolution in Hungary. See Ford, *Communist Study*, 99–113.
25 Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, 130.
26 Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, 63.
27 Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, 247, emphasis added.
28 Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, 248, emphasis added.
29 Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, 267.
30 Joe Kincheloe, *Critical Pedagogy Primer* (New York: Peter Lang, 2008).
31 Isaac Gottesman, *The Critical Turn in Education: From Marxist Critique to Poststructuralist Feminism to Critical Theories of Race* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 75.
32 Curry S. Malott, "In Defense of Communism: Against Critical Pedagogy, Capitalism, and Trump," *Critical Education* 8, no. 1 (2017): 7; See also Derek R. Ford, "From 'Authentic' to Actual Marxist Educational Theory: Advancing Revolutionary Pedagogies," *International Critical Thought* 113, no. 4 (2023): 506–524.
33 Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum, 2011), 183.
34 Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 165.
35 Paulo Freire, "Cultural Action and Conscientization," *Harvard Educational Review* 40, no. 3 (1970): 470, emphasis added.
36 Tyson E. Lewis, *Educational Potentialities: Collected Talks on Revolutionary Education, Organizing, and Aesthetics* (Madison: Iskra Books, 2023), 153–154.
37 Lewis, *Educational Potentialities: Collected Talks on Revolutionary Education, Organizing, and Aesthetics*, 156.
38 Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy in Process: Letters to Guinea-Bissau* (London: Bloomsbury, 1978).
39 Henry A. Giroux, "Paulo Freire's Approach to Radical Educational Reform," *Curriculum Inquiry* 9, no. 3 (1979): 267.

40 Paulo Freire, "South African Freedom Fighter Amilcar Cabral: Pedagogue of the Revolution," in *Critical Pedagogy in Uncertain Times: Hope and Possibility*, ed. Sheila L. Macrine (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 164.
41 Freire, "South African Freedom Fighter Amilcar Cabral: Pedagogue of the Revolution" .
42 Freire, "South African Freedom Fighter Amilcar Cabral: Pedagogue of the Revolution", 169.

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