

Curating the University: Overlapping problems and solutions

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Art and Knowledge, Art as Knowledge

Who was born first, the arts or the artist? According to the historical art narrative, the answer for this apparently tricky question is quite simple: art was born first. For centuries, there was no distinction between artistic creation and the work of artisans. In most cases, artistic production was the result of collective work and the idea of a single creator, while existing, was totally obliterated. The dependence of artists (or artisans for that matter) on clerical power largely explains why artists were not recognized until the Renaissance, a period in which artists and thinkers allowed themselves to compete with God in the creative realm. Prior to this period, the capacity to create had been an exclusively divine attribute.

Leonardo da Vinci was a role figure in reshaping the artistic realm. In line with the thinking of the time, da Vinci emphasised mimetic precision as a way of assessing art, which he described as «the science of representing nature». It would be the fullness of this representation, employing experimentation and observation as methodological tools that would lead to the integration of art and scientific knowledge. These are the grounds that led da Vinci to state that «art is a thing of the mind», referring specifically to painting, since sculpture – due to its lack of colour – would never be able to accomplish the representational totality required by the principles of scientific representation.

The geometric precision of perspective as the transposition of a rational way of seeing, the sfumato which made it possible to generate degrees of light and shade –, as well as the positions defended by artists – the importance of the process, or the primacy of the idea –, transformed this period into a preliminary moment of modern and contemporary breakthroughs in the relationship between art and knowledge.

The distinction between the words «atelier» and «studio», nowadays used mostly as synonyms, emerged precisely from the understanding of art as an intellectual and scientific activity. As Mondzain-Baudinet points out, it is difficult to trace back the primary origin of the term atelier, however the first trace of the word refers to wood volumes or the workspace of carpenters (Mondzain-Baudinet, 1989, p. 320). The emergence of the word studio, as Véronique Rodriguez (2002) claims, to designate the place of work of artists took place during the Renaissance period, when artists began to claim that their work derives not only from a know-how, a skill, but mainly from an intellectual activity. Oddly enough a very similar reason was invoked to proclaim the death of the studio. As Jens Hoffman puts forward,

with the shifts in artistic creation over the last century, «the death of the studio has been proclaimed at numerous times, especially at the heyday of conceptual art in the late 1960s and 1970s, when the concept of art as idea penetrated more traditional artistic production [...]» (Hoffmann, 2012, p. 12).

Nevertheless, the etymology of the word studio – from Italian studio «room for study,» from Latin studium «apply oneself to the acquisition of learning, pursue a formal course of study»^[1] – persists and will perpetuate the symbiotic connection between art and knowledge and the understanding of art as knowledge. In 1999, Barbara Vanderlinden and Hans Ulrich Obrist curated, in various venues in Antwerp, the exhibition *Laboratorium*, based on the similarities of scientific laboratories and artistic studios. The project, pairing artists and scientists, aimed at questioning «the academic distinctions between scientific and artistic research, pushing the boundaries of what is considered ‘knowledge’ and how it is produced»^[2].

The relationship between artists and academia is, since the pre-modernist period, a conflictive one, to say the least. Modernisms were disruptive to the putative narrative of art history and art practice (Belting, 1989; Danto, 2001), and once again the supremacy of the artists’ intellectual activity was central to the question. As Ortega y Gasset claimed in 1925, with modernisms «from painting things, one began to paint ideas» (Gasset, 2008, p. 106); the veil that concealed the device – verisimilitude – is replaced by a take on the subjective eye of the artist who no longer seeks universal images that any human being can recognise: «the artist became blind to the outside world and turned his eyes to the interior and subjective landscapes» (Gasset, 2008, p. 106). These changes took place in a crucial moment in the history of (Fine Arts) academy, hence the relationship between artistic production and the university. The emergence of pre-modernists was the moment «in which academicism was confronted with, and weakened by, different methods of calibrating aesthetic as well as other ways of dealing with the status of nature or the nature of representation» (Denis and Trod, 2000, p. 2)

Today the recognition that art practice is epistemically valid is consensual. However, academic protocols and evaluation contingencies are still considered inadequate to the assessment of artworks. This conflict is not new, as Colin Trod and Rafael Cardoso Denis noted while reflecting on Fine Arts academic narratives since the 19th century: «academicism was written away by two manoeuvres: it was either unable to bear the weight of proper critical evaluation and judgement or it disappeared beneath a superior theoretical power that overwhelmed it» (Denis and Trod, 2000, p. 1). In 2006, the Vanabbe Museum, in Eindhoven, organised the program *Academy – Learning from the museum*, which included exhibitions, conferences and other events curated by renowned academics and curators.

Among them was Dieter Roelstraete, who some years later described his participation as an ambivalent experience; even recognising that he «had the singular good fortune of being involved in» it, he also has «fond memories of it as partially failed Project – a Project that was somehow, and certainly as an exhibition, derailed. Retrospectively [...] my greatest critique was that Academy as a whole, and certainly as series of exhibitions, was far too academic» (Roelstraete, 2013, p. 2114).

Despite the large number of programmes that offer the opportunity to developed practice-based artistic research, artists still oblige to settle a theoretical framework for their own work, a praxis that establish an acute hierarchy in which verbal academic knowledge always prevail upon visual and artistic academic knowledge^[3]. So it seems that is far too artistic to the academia to present the artwork as an autonomous academic piece. Despite the undeniable proximity of two fields/theories/practices/institutions, the distances that existed and still exist keep feeding this continuous tensional negotiation. As Thierry de Duve sustains, «schools have not always existed, and nothing says that they must always exist. In a way, they already no longer exist. Their proliferation is perhaps a trompe l'oeil, masking the fact that the transmission of art today from artist to artist is very far from occurring directly in schools» (de Duve, 2009, p. 16). Boris Groys goes even further: «just as art after Duchamp can be anything, so can art education be anything. Art education is an education that functions more as an idea of education, as education per se, because art education is finally unspecific» (Groys, 2009, p. 27).

At the same time, the verbal dependence of the artwork on verbal and other mediation strategies is a strong obstacle to the academic autonomy of artistic practice. This is not to say that theoretical, critical, speculative or essayistic (when verbal) production about art and within art is illegitimate or unnecessary, but it should be addressed, when not assumed as an artistic practice, as other thing than artworks, such as Museology, Art History, Art Criticism, Cultural Critique, Curatorial Practice and Thought, among others. These gravitational art disciplines appear to fit better within academic protocols and have largely contributed for the change of the university in recent years.

Museums, universities and (the production of) knowledge

The birth of the museum is another key moment in the complex correlation between art and knowledge. It is already a commonplace to say that the relationship between museums and knowledge is as old as the museum itself. As Tony Bennett argues:

«[...] the museum, in its nineteenth-century form, was thought into being via a process of double differentiation. For the process of fashioning a new space of representation for the modern public museum was, at the same time, one of constructing and defending that space of representation as a rational and scientific one, fully capable of bearing the didactic burden upon it, by differentiating it from the disorder that was imputed to competing exhibitionary institutions» (Bennett, 1995, p. 1).

Discussing the historical development of nineteenth and twentieth-century museums alongside fairs and international exhibitions, Bennett describes the museum as an instrument of governance through a Foucauldian perspective. The museum was born as a strategy of power to create regimes of truth that were proved by a pedagogical discourse that organizes time and the space, creating (just some) stories of History.

The construction of any display device always aims at establishing the spectators' gaze (Alpers, 1991; Bal, 2006, Lavine and Karp, 1991) through multiple strategies that regulate social performances and the epistemological fabric. It is consensual among theorists and thinkers that museums are structures of governance that represent exercises of power over the viewer, playing a pivotal role in the «shaping of knowledge» (Hooper-Greenhill, 1992). Benedict Anderson even claims that the grammar of colonial ideologies, policies and imaginaries were profoundly changed and reinforced by three institutions: «these three institutions were the census, the map, and the museum: together, they profoundly shaped the way in which the colonial state imagined its dominion – the nature of the human beings it ruled, the geography of its domain, and the legitimacy of its ancestry» (Anderson, 1991, 84).

Since the birth of the museum, many things have changed. Nevertheless the production of knowledge (regimes) is still one of the main activities performed by museological institutions (of art and historical). In 1992, Eilean Hooper-Greenhill claimed that «knowledge is now well understood as the commodity that museums offer» (Hooper-Greenhill, 1992, p. 2). The empirical histories of modern art exhibitions, «as critical forms central to the public presentation of arts since the 18th century [...] only began to be written in the early 1980s» and «what such histories continue to show is the role that exhibitions, as sites of knowledge production, have played in the formation and understanding of art throughout the 19th and 20th centuries» (Ribas, 2013, p. 1361). Therefore, knowledge and education seem to be the words that stand for the joint venture of museums and universities in the 21st century, even when they seem to be against each other. More recently, museums and other exhibitionary institutions have pursued what is designated as the «educational turn in curating» (Rogoff, 2008; O'Neil and Wilson, 2010).

On the one hand, despite the diversity of places of enunciation and mediation activities that take place at museological structures, museums always have a programme and a mission statement that asserts an ideological and epistemological position. On the other hand, almost every (art) museum offers more educational activities than exhibitions and presents the production of critical thinking as one of their main goals. A perfect example of this disposition is the official description of the recently opened Museum of Art, Architecture and Technology (MAAT): «MAAT – The Museum of Art, Architecture and Technology is a new cultural proposal for the city of Lisbon. A museum that combines these three fields in a space for debate, discovery, critical thinking and international dialogue»^[4]. Ten years before, in 2006, the Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA) had launched the first edition of its Independent Studies Programme, named PEI after its acronym in Spanish, a learning and research programme «n»^[5]. Despite the statute of independent programme, PEI has agreements with diverse universities and the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona accredits the PEI as a Specific Masters in Museum Studies and Critical Theory.

For the best and for the worst reasons, the production of knowledge has been central both in art and science, universities and museums. The problems caused and the solutions found by this production became central for curatorial practices, serving as raw material for reflection and practice within the cultural framework. In the preface to the book *Contemporary Curating and Museum Education*, published in 2017, the editors Carmen Morsch, Angeli Sachs and Thomas Sieber (2017, p. 10) pose the question: «how does museum work change when curation and education are understood as a single, integrated concept?» The same question could be asked about the university. However, as Irit Rogoff argues, there are bad and good things in this educational turn in curating but «at its best, education forms collectivities [...], small ontological communities propelled by desire and curiosity, cemented together by the kind of empowerment that comes from intellectual challenge» (Rogoff, 2008, p. 32). It is not a mere coincidence that the last paragraph of Claire Bishop's *Radical Museology* appeals both to museums and the academy, giving them the opportunity of a common future and to form an ontological community:

«The task of articulating cultural value is now urgent in both the museum and the academy, where a tsunami of fiscal imperatives threatens to deluge all that is complicated, creative, vulnerable, intelligent, adventurous, and critical in the public sphere. Significantly, it is a question of temporality around which this struggle now takes place: authentic culture operates within a slower time frame than the accelerated abstractions of finance capital and the annual cycles of accounting (based on positivist data and requiring demonstrable impact). But it is precisely this lack of synchronicity that points to an alternative world of values in

which museums – but also culture, education, and democracy – are not subject to the banalities of a spreadsheet or the statistical mystifications of an opinion poll, but enable us to access a rich and diverse history, to question the present, and to realize a different future. This future does not yet have a name, but we are standing on its brink. If the last forty years have been marked by ‘posts’ (post-war, post-colonialism, postmodernism, post-communism), then today, at last, we seem to be in a period of anticipation – an era that museums of contemporary art can help us collectively to sense and understand» (Bishop, 2013, 62).

Curating by the Books

Despite the emergence of a wide range of books offering prescriptive solutions to exhibition making or art writing – The Curator’s Handbook by Adrien George (2015), officially described as «a step-by-step guide to every aspect of putting on an art exhibition, with tips from a range of influential curators» or How to Write About Contemporary Art by Gilda Williams (2014) «an essential handbook for students and professionals on writing eloquently, accurately, and originally about contemporary art» –, curating is not an activity that can be exercised by the book.

However, books seem to be essential for curatorial thought. Even those who are sceptical about the efficacy or validity of curatorial education programmes, as Adriano Pedrosa, concede that «each curator must develop his or her own cartography and standpoint through their own readings, travel research, interests» (Pedrosa, 2013, p. 2026). The proliferation of bookshops and large-scale libraries in museums all around the world is a strong signal of this interdependence between curating and books. Introducing the 56th edition of Venice Biennale, All the World’s Futures, Okwui Enwezor quoted Walter Benjamin’s Theses on the Philosophy of History which, according to Enwezor, «brought a focus to how the work of art can challenge us to see much further and beyond the prosaic appearance of things» (Enwezor, 2015, s/p)^[6]. In 2015, João Ribas curated the exhibition Under the Clouds: From Paranoia to the Digital Sublime. As Ribas described it:

«Since the second half of the 20th century, we have lived under the shadow of two clouds: the mushroom cloud of the atomic bomb, and the ‘cloud’ of distributed information networks. How did the central metaphor of cold war paranoia become the utopian metaphor of today? ‘Under the Clouds’ explores the contemporary sublime that has replaced the natural one, and the interrelated effects and affects of these two clouds on life and work, leisure and love, and on images, bodies, and minds» (Ribas, 2015, s/p)^[7].

This exhibition, as well as the catalogue published with it, is a perfect example to understand curating as an activity that totally overlaps the agenda of cultural critique and humanities research. The exhibition presents a transdisciplinary

perspective, from a critical approach, taking in account not just artistic production but also a theoretical reflection from diverse realms of social sciences. This method and result is exactly what allows distinguishing exhibition making (or curating) from curatorial practice. As Jean-Paul Martinon and Irit Rogoff claim:

«If ‘curating’ is a gamut of professional practices that had to do with setting up exhibitions and other modes of display, then ‘the curatorial’ operates at a very different level: it explores all that takes place on the stage set-up, both intentionally and unintentionally, by the curator and views it as an event of knowledge» (Martinon and Rogoff, 2013, p. 75).

Therefore, the curatorial, as a method and a practice, does not differ much from what cultural critique aims to be: a radical and subversive intrusion into the academy that wishes to trouble the concept of culture and enmesh it with social power and the production and dissemination of knowledge. Following Foucault’s text *What is Critique*, Judith Butler argues that the very question, «what is critique?» is an instance of the critical enterprise in question, and so the question not only poses the problem – what is this critique that we supposedly do or, indeed, aspire to do? – but enacts a certain mode of questioning which will prove central to the activity of critique itself» (Butler, 2001, p. 25).

The very title and subtitle of the conference for which this article was written are a clear example of how curatorial and museological practices and theoretical and critical approaches are closer than ever: an academic conference which takes place at a museum of contemporary art, whose title evokes a certain type of academic publication – a reader – and that even presents as subtitle a departing question – «what practices should 21st century Museums pursue, how and why?» – as in good academic practices.

New Words, New Worlds

As Austin taught us long ago (1975), there are performative sentences or performative utterances, which propose «not to describe my doing of what I should be said in so uttering to be doing or to state that I am doing it: it is to do it. [...]» (Austin, 1975, pp. 6-7). Therefore words create reality, and so do images and artistic practices. As Barbara Bolt argues «[...] imaging also produces reality. According to this proposition the material practice of art can transcend its structure as representation and, in the dynamic productivity of the performative act, produce ontological effects» (Bolt, 2004, p. 186). Against this backdrop, we can say that recent artistic production and designations have been shaping a new art world where research and academic methods can be recognized.

Art-based research, research-based art, exhibition essays, visual-essays, film-essays, essay-films, conference-performance, performance-conference, constitute a new lexicon now frequently in use in museums, universities and other art or academic spaces. This sharing and combination of words is a strong indication that new realities are to come – the diversity of new institutionalisms is another sign of these changes. Universities are now welcoming new spaces where a curatorial and a critical thought is applied to the pursuing of knowledge.

La Box: gallery-school

La Box is the gallery of The Ecole Nationale Supérieure d'Art (National School of Art/ENSA) in Bourges. Housed in a 17th century building in the Old Town, covering almost 10,000 square meters, the School includes various workspaces and technical facilities that are frequently modernized and re-equipped. ENSA offers a Master programme in Fine Arts with an emphasis «on the kind of inventiveness and creativity that are only possible in a setting where interpersonal exchange and ideas are part of the everyday scene; this is a generous, receptive place conducive to artistic encounters and intermeshing^[8].»

Following this commitment to interpersonal exchange, since 1991, ENSA has been providing residencies in a yearly basis, with the backing of the Regional Cultural Affairs Office (DRAC) and France's Centre Region. These residencies are intended to give young artists from France and abroad the opportunity to carry out a personal artistic project connected with the School, its teaching, its students and other external partners.

Operating on a research and practice model, ENSA fosters creative thinking and discussion, while putting together practical applications and critical analysis. The La Box gallery reflects this practice led research approach positioning itself as one of ENSA's main teaching tools.

Unlike many European Art Universities, the gallery of ENSA is not an exhibition space to show the work of students and tutors and it is not a University museum, with a collection. Rather than focusing on what is produced in the University only, La Box's programme encompasses exhibitions with artists from France and abroad in ten exhibitions relating to the study programme. Part of its planning is undertaken by young guest curators, selected through a yearly international open call. The guidelines of the open call imply, on one hand, a strong relationship with the School's teaching and research aims as well as a close communication with the students and, on the other hand, with the local context through institutional partnerships.

Chosen and monitored by the ENSA teaching team, the curators work on experimental programmes involving the active participation of the students, who consequently work together with major figures of the contemporary scene in the production of an exhibition project.

Assuming itself as a key teaching tool of ENSA, La Box's programme ties with the school teaching and research areas integrating the students into the designing and realisation of the exhibition programme while also providing a broader view of what is at stake in curatorial practice.

Rather than focusing on the physical aspect of producing and presenting work by art students and tutors, the focus is on the intersection between research and practice; students and professionals; local and international. As guest curators take the role of tutors, researchers and practitioners, students learn while researching and translating the results of their processes and findings through the practice of putting together a curatorial project. In such a process, ENSA enters a realm in-between an Arts School and an Arts Institution.

Tensta Konsthall: new models, new institutions

Tensta Konsthall is an art center dedicated to the production and exhibition of contemporary art located in Tensta, a suburb twenty minutes on the subway from Stockholm center.

Today, around 39,000 people live in Tensta, of whom almost 60% have a foreign background, facing numerous challenges, including problems of identity;, marginalisation;, and socio-economic challenges^[9]. Since the 1980s, large waves of migrants and newcomers settled in this suburb mainly because of the more affordable prices of rents and because other immigrant communities were already residing there^[10].

It is in this context that the artistic programme of Tensta Konsthall unfolds. With an on-going inquiry on what contemporary art is and can be, it focuses on the local audience while being relevant within the internal artistic discourses at international level. That is the case with the mediation program, a very dear aspect to the konsthall as the series of seminars titled «What does art mediation do?» during the spring of 2012 showed. In collaboration with the Department of Visual Arts Education and Curatorlab, Konstfack, these series explored the ways in which the audience can meet art and take an active role in it, remindful of the idea of social sculpture coined by Joseph Beuys^[11].

Tensta Konsthall deliberately wants to create a programme different from the education or pedagogical departments of bigger or more conventional art institutions, hence the wider denomination of mediation programme. Much more

than creating parallel programmes to the exhibitions or pedagogical activities, the mediators at Tensta Konsthall see themselves as researchers for whom art is as much at focus as Tensta. Reflections on the grand-narratives^[12] that shape this Stockholm suburb, such as ideas of gang violence and crime associated to it, are usually the departure point for projects initiated within the mediation programme, which often include collaborations with local organisations, such as a separatist fashion project created for young girls from Ross Tensta gymnasium.

One key example of Tensta Konsthall's commitment to long-term research is «The New Model», jointly curated with Lars Bang Larssen, which uses Palle Nielsen's legendary project «The Model: A Model for a Qualitative Society», from 1968, as a starting point. Transforming the main exhibition space of Moderna Museet into an adventure playground for children, Nielsen and his activist collaborators wanted them to have the chance to become «themselves», and express their own reality. This would happen through play in a setting freed of the adult world and the urban environment. Nielsen's project was formed by his critique of late modernist housing estates in Denmark and their alienating effects in people. In «The New Model» the questions of «The Model» are reformulated, with Tensta as the framework – how to create a qualitative society but from a radically different reality than the one existing in the late 1960s? Between 2011 and 2014, «The New Model» explored the legacy of «The Model» in a series of projects, including seminars, commissions and exhibitions by artists including the group exhibition «The society without qualities», where artists addressed the role of play as a methodology not only to understand but to create the world that surrounds us^[13].





«There is no knife without roses», seminar series curated by Luísa Santos in the frame of «what does art do?» by Maria Lind. Tensta Konsthall, Stockholm, 2012. Photo: Tensta Konsthall

Seminars, fashion projects, commissions, exhibitions, lectures, and conferences are examples of the programme that Tensta Konsthall has been proposing as projects. Rather than producing or presenting and conserving artworks, as we know it, the focus is on the production of knowledge and foreground criticality and discourse, which may or may not imply the production of artworks. Specialist and local audiences come together for the events, creating a momentary critical mass that amplifies the intensity as well as the reach of the Tensta Konsthall's programme, allowing the institution to reinvent itself through different strands and across audiences.

LxC Container: At the Edge of Research and Practice

Since the mid 1990s, the structures of medium-sized and under-funded contemporary art institutions have been reorganising the curatorial, educational and administrative practices in a process that has been extending the meaning and functions of the institution and absorbing aspects of institutional critique as proposed in the 1970s on what has become known as a «New Institutionalism»^[14]. A term borrowed from the social sciences, it proposes a transformation of the art

institution from within, a proposal that can be compared to Gayatri Spivak's «affirmative sabotage»^[15]. This type of sabotage implies reusing tools for a different aim than what they were originally designed for. Similarly, new institutionalism, characterised by open-endedness and dialogue, and leading to events-based and process-based work, utilises some of the strategies inherent in the ways in which many contemporary artists produce work.

Under this idea, the curatorial programmes of the institutions are not only the traditional exhibitions but also an integrated programme where exhibitions are conceived as one part in many, including archives, talks, discursive events, film screenings, radio and TV shows, reading groups, workshops and residencies. The art institution becomes then a place where production, presentation, research, debate, and community engagement intersects in an open space where everybody is welcome to be part of the programme and the social arena in which it is conceived^[16]. Alex Farquharson, curator, writer and director of Tate Britain has noted:

«New Institutionalism, and much recent art, sidesteps the problem of the white cube altogether. If white-walled rooms are the site for exhibitions one week, a recording studio or political workshop the next, then it is no longer the container that defines the contents as art, but the contents that determine the identity of the container»^[17].

Curators and artists alike have embraced the implications for the art institution as an arena of experiments, a studio for the production of work and a laboratory for learning and education. These ideas have its roots in the open museum of Pontus Hultén and the many curators and museum directors such as Harald Szeemann, Peter F. Althaus, and Jean Leering who have contributed to its development. Research and learning are core in this reinvention process^[18]. The Academia is also demanding for a reinvention of the University that puts the focus on the experiments we would expect to see in a laboratory or in an artists' studio^[19].

Rather than the more traditional and territorial departmentalisation of different disciplinary discourses as well as of practice and theory, new institutionalism implies an interdisciplinary approach, which integrates research and its practical results in the production of work and knowledge.

However, neither art spaces within universities neither new institutionalism are that new. Trying to answer the question «What ever happened to new institutionalism?»^[20] James Voorhies, began his presentation of the Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts (CCVA), institution which he currently leads. The CCVA was completed in 1963 to house Harvard University's visual art Programme and is the only building designed by Le Corbusier in North America. By the late 1960s the pedagogical framework of the institution was developed into a combination of

academic workshops, artist studios and exhibitions and highlighted as a site «where creativity and visual literacy could coalesce within the conventional undertakings of the university» and where «students from a range of disciplines – science, design, architecture, philosophy, and literature – came together with leading practitioners to sharpen sensory awareness of the visual art» (Voorhies, 2014, p. 5).

Integrated in The Lisbon Consortium, a cultural network and international MA and PhD programme in Culture Studies of the Faculty of Human Sciences of the Universidade Católica Portuguesa, LxC Container aims precisely to operate in the institutional field and through institutional critique beyond its areas of expertise and within an interdisciplinary approach which encourages and explores experimental methodologies to the production and presentation of contemporary visual arts. The LxC Container does not want to be new for the sake of newness, however it wants to be a new space that inherits the good practices developed by art institutions and universities (or art institutions within universities) for the last decades, allowing for a combination of new and old practices, as well as diachronic perspectives. In this context, one of its main goals is very similar to that of the CCVA – to be a place where students from different academic disciplines meet to develop visual literacy. Visual literacy is understood here after Isabel Capeloa Gil's reflection: the image is not a natural product, it is neither transparent nor true; visual literacy is not structured from a linguistic conception of the image nor does it conceive the relation between text and image as hierarchical; visual literacy is transdisciplinary; visual literacy is contingent and should be seen as a process; visual literacy conceives perception as an interrelationship and image as an interpellation object; visual literacy is a citizenship strategy (Gil, 2011, pp. 24-28).

The Lisbon Consortium's MA Programme in Culture Studies is ranked #3 by the Eduniversal Worldwide Best Masters Ranking in Arts and Cultural Management and counts on 60% international students as well as international visiting professors from Universities such as the Freie Universität Berlin, PUC de São Paulo, Università Ca' Foscari, Venice, and the University of Hamburg, among others. An innovative international learning, research and practice model, The Lisbon Consortium is based on inter-institutional cooperation and interdisciplinary research, fostering exchange and excellency in cultural activities and cultural entrepreneurship with the Culture Studies MA and PhD programmes at Universidade Católica Portuguesa in Lisbon.

It is in this collaborative and interdisciplinary context that LxC Container's programme will unfold. In the form of appointments and workshops throughout the year, an orchestrated curatorial research-based programme will provide an

opportunity for young researchers and students to work with artists and develop a coherent set of presentations. Emphasising the interrelatedness of practice and discourse, it allows for cooperation between artists, students, researchers of diverse areas, professors and different actors of the contemporary scene while confronted in the development of a curatorial project under an arts-based research approach.



João Biscainho, «Mirror Drumming», 2016-2017, artistic project by João Biscainho in the frame of «5/5: 5 artists, 5 project rooms», a curatorial project by the international MA and PhD students in Culture Studies, The Lisbon Consortium, Universidade Católica Portuguesa. Installation shot, Carpe Diem Arte & Pesquisa, 2017. Photo: João Biscainho



Luísa Jacinto, «No one knows», 2017, artistic project by Luísa Jacinto in the frame of «5/5: 5 artists, 5 project rooms», a curatorial project by the international MA and PhD students in Culture Studies, The Lisbon Consortium, Universidade Católica Portuguesa. Installation shot, Faculdade de Ciências Humanas, Universidade Católica Portuguesa, 2017. Photo: Atena Abrahimia

While believing that contemporary art is best grasped in counterpoint with its historical precedents and antecedents, the LxC Container recognises the social role of art and its imbrication in other systems such as economy and politics. Rather than closing itself in the realm of academia or in the realm of art production only, LxC Container positions itself at the edge between interdisciplinary research

and practice, operating through epistemological reciprocity and demonstrating how cultural practices illuminate critical reflection. With this methodology, which fosters production of knowledge and critical thought, the LxC Container will encourage alternative interpretations of artistic, institutional, and cultural histories which, ultimately, reflect the acknowledgement of the responsibility that both art and academic institutions have as social agents in the contemporary world.

The idea of a container stimulates dynamics of mobility and movement, which are mandatory in the contemporary art system. The LxC Container is integrated in The Lisbon Consortium Programme, both on-site – in the university campus – and off-site – beyond the premises of the university –, promoting mobile, nomadic and parallel practices that allow contamination as well as varied and dissensual thought. As any container, it aims at being around the (art)world system acting as a platform not just of carriage but of encounters and dialogues among institutions, students, artists, art agents and the audience. The LxC Container could be anywhere it would make sense and its artistic programme will always be a work in progress and an unfinished project, never monolithic or crystallised. Therefore, it will be a chameleonic container, welcoming all that is productive content. Elena Filipovic claims that:

Instead of the «production of knowledge» so frequently cited in institutional statements of purpose, an exhibition might provoke feelings of irreverence or doubt, or an experience that is at once emotional, sensual, political, and intellectual while being decidedly not predetermined, scripted, or directed by the curator or the institution (Filipovic, 2013, p. 1157).

Agreeing and disagreeing with Filipovic, the LxC Container aspires for exhibitions (and other programmes) that will occupy the same place – alongside, not instead – of the production of knowledge, since we understand knowledge as a multimodal entity that can be produced through different processes and with different results.

Conclusion: Why An(Other) Art Space?

«Whilst it is relatively easy to commission artists and to create projects where extraordinary learning can be produced, it is perhaps harder to find the time and institutional space to look critically at what is produced and discuss the value of the work. This is necessarily a slow process within institutions where typically there is little time and space for reflection. In my view the solution lies somewhere between the academy and the gallery, and we should continue to develop strategies to ensure that we can oscillate and operate with stealth across both and smuggle knowledge between the two»^[21].

Sally Tallant sets out with the utmost clarity the position under which arts-based research labours. We are living in a time characterised by conflict and challenges, as shown by the social and economic crisis, the massive flow of migrants and refugees arriving from diverse war theatres, and climate change, to name only a few. Artists live the social, economic and political changes and change with it. Most artists are not working in their closed studios anymore: there are artists witnessing and participating in the everyday of war; artists who are social activists; artists who use their work as a way of communicating and addressing social change; artists asking for a wider participation from all citizens; artists who make critical observations; and artists who choose to be part of small and big revolutions.

Conflict arises on a material, lived realm, but also on the immaterial level of the mind and representation. Furthermore, art, as a creative form, is inherently conflictual as it involves rupture and the collision of differences as methodologies to perceive, reflect upon, and visually translate (alternative proposals to) the world we live in.

But what methodologies can be used? Addressing or criticising the social conditions does not seem enough, as many artists have been recognising^[22]. Artists, curators, cultural workers and museum directors have been adopting models anchored in a theoretical and academic ground to conduct exhibition practices of knowledge. The theoretical models validate the knowledge produced through the production of artworks as well as the discourses around this production. At the same time, in the domain of Academia, there is a growing interest in the production of ideas and knowledge through arts practices operating in the contemporary world.

We are living in a world where it does not seem enough to act exclusively in the realm of theoretical ideas or in the practical aspects of visually translating our world as means to reflect upon it. Now is the moment to create the conditions to foster mutual transfer of knowledge between different disciplinary areas and ways of practice.

The blueprint for such conditions seems to lie somewhere between a joint action of different individuals and institutions, in a constant dialogue and confront, immersing in each other's methodologies to then emerge with real time proposals.

Spaces like the LxC Container, which is a housed and integrating part of a University, should seek to engage with that idea of intersection and challenge it to foster an idea of a society of free and critical thinking. This intersection is grounded in the locality of its production: the international MA and PhD programme in Culture Studies of the Portuguese Catholic University. Through the production of research at the intersection of the modes of cultural production, an arts based

research space such as the LxC Container should nurture the circumstances to discuss the conditions under which cultural work operates, and constantly test the relationship between responsible citizenship, artistic practices and cultural policies.

It is not good enough to devise a good research programme in isolation; instead what we do must address the artistic production practices that make up the contemporary agenda. This is an undoubtedly demanding aim. Yet, maybe only as such a space an institution might even begin to imagine justifying, on one hand, new or continued funding and, on the other hand, the production of dozens of future academics, curators, social agents, cultural workers, writers, and museum directors every year.

Maybe only as spaces at the edge, «somewhere between the academy and the gallery», which «smuggle knowledge between the two» can art and cultural institutions be justified at all in the contemporary times, not less than making what art does at its best: showing perspectives and creating alternatives to the world we live in^[23].

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Footnotes

1. ^ <http://www.etymonline.com/>
2. ^ <http://www.formerwest.org/ResearchLibrary/Laboratorium>
3. ^ In Literacia Visual – Estudos sobre a Inquietude das Imagens, the author Isabel Capeloa Gil takes as examples the works of Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault to sustain how «work on the visual» has been «inevitably done in verbal form», not being able to «ponder the visual beyond the constraint of linguistic decoding, which will inevitably be linguistic» (Gil, 2011, p. 20). The impossibility of inter-symbolic translation, conveyed by the structuralist and poststructuralist discourse, ends up questioning «the imperial ambition of the textualization of the world» (Gil, 2011, p. 21)
4. ^ Information available in <https://www.maat.pt/en/about>
5. ^ Information available in <http://www.macba.cat/en/pei-2017-18>
6. ^ <http://www.labiennale.org/en/art/archive/56th-exhibition/enwezor/>
7. ^ <http://www.serralves.pt/en/activities/under-the-clouds-from-paranoia-to-the-digital-sublime/>
8. ^ ENSA. Call for a curatorial Project La Box 2016-2017. Accessed: February 2017. http://www.ensa-bourges.fr/images/stories/box/applicationform_curatorial_project.pdf
9. ^ Interpeace. Voices from Tensta. Report of a pilot project in Tensta, a suburb of Stockholm. May 2015. Accessed: May 2016. http://interpeace.se/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Voices_From_Tensta.pdf
10. ^ Roger Andersson and Åsa Bråmås. (2004). «Selective migration in Swedish Distressed Neighborhoods: Can Area-based Urban Policies Counteract Segregation Processes?». Housing Studies, Vol. 19, N.º. 4, p. 518.
11. ^ Joseph Beuys (1921-1986) coined the idea of social sculpture as a Gesamtkunstwerk (complete and all-embracing work of art) (v. Rosenthal, 2005). During the documenta 5 Beuys organised debates with the public, which aimed at opening up a new space for audience participation with art and artists, while creating a new social sphere for the critical thinking and discussion of the role of art in society. Under this lens, art would be part of

the process of constructing citizenship and cultural identity (v. Foster, et al., 2004).

12. [^] By grand-narratives here we are referring to David Boje's (2002) concept of stories that are told by one instead of the small stories told by many. These grand-narratives are, usually, prejudiced ideas of a determined reality that, by being repeated, become regarded as absolute truths.
13. [^] Lars Bang Larssen. (2010). *The Model: A Model for a Qualitative Society* (1968). Barcelona: MACBA.
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15. [^] Gayatri Spivak. (2012). *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
16. [^] Jonas Ekeberg (ed.). (2003), *New Institutionalism, Versted#1*. Norway: Office for Contemporary Art, pp. 9 - 14.
17. [^] Alex Farquharson, «Bureaux de change». *Frieze*, n.º 101, September 2006.
18. [^] Sally Tallant. (2009). «Experiments in integrated programming». *Tate Papers*, Issue 11.
19. [^] Isabel Capeloa Gil brought up the idea of the University as an artist's studio in her inaugural speech as Rector of the Portuguese Catholic University on October 2016. Capeloa Gil described the metaphors used in the discourses of the universities such as «market of ideas», «factory» and «laboratory» as pertinent but insufficient. Instead, Capeloa Gil proposed the university without walls, which more than an instrumentalizing knowledge factory, would work as an artist's studio.
20. [^] One of the things that happened is a criticism to New Institutionalism. As Voorhies himself sums up in a book published very recently (February 2017): «Although New Institutionalism denounced the behavioural effects of the white cube, it risked reducing the possibility to negotiate freely in this different circumstance with art. Critics believed New Institutionalism moved too much in synchronicity with the changing models of capital and its consumers' desire for personalized experiences. The criticism is not unfounded given our perspective over time. The requirement to participate in a specific way does not lessen the sway an institution has over its public» (Voorhies, 2017, p. 215).

21. [^] Sally Tallant. (2009). «Experiments in integrated programming» in Tate Papers, Issue 11.
22. [^] Ahmet Oğut. «CCC: Currency of Collective Consciousness». E-flux journal #62, February 2015.
23. [^] Maria Lind. Keynote speech Curating in the Most beautiful Kunshtalle in the world. Como: Antonio Ratti Foundation, 21 November 2011.