

Curating and the educational turn. Eds. Paul O'Neill and Mick Wilson. Open Editions - Occasional Table Critical Series, De Appel 2010 ISBN 978-0-949004-18-5

Contemporary art seems fascinated by education right now: there's a sizeable (and ever increasing) list of publications exploring how artists are taught or learn, and to what ends; a host of conferences debating pedagogy of various species; and the development of countless art/educational projects, initiatives and experiments in both institutional and independent settings. As the editors of this volume assert, "curating, and art production more broadly, have produced, undergone or otherwise manifested an educational turn". Its curatorial focus distinguishes this book from other recent publications, even though many of the usual exemplars and theoretical perspectives re-occur from previous studies: unitednationsplaza, A.C.A.D.E.M.Y., Brown Mountain College *et al*, Lesage, Rancière and Freire to name but a few. In what is often a wickedly funny essay, Tirdad Zolghadr, himself a participant in unitednationsplaza, deals head-on with this sense of over-familiarity and the limited/repetitive forms of some projects' pedagogic offerings. I laughed out loud at his hypothetical scenario (which is, after all, not so very far from the truth): 'You sit in a circle because it's less formal, someone quotes Barthes, someone criticizes 'relational aesthetics' and then you all agree on reading Rancière's *Ignorant Schoolmaster* by next week.'

Several of the contributions are specially commissioned alongside a few older pieces considered to have become 'pivotal' in the debate; the varied approaches on offer – from interviews and performative dialogues to more formal essays – mirror the heterogeneity of argument and opinion within contemporary art. Amongst this diverse collection, key political and philosophical issues emerge: it seems that the alignment of European higher education through the Bologna process finds little favour with most contributors; there is a recognition that the days of utopian thinking are long past, and we must instead work pragmatically with what we find; and throughout the book there is a persistent critique of the so-called 'knowledge economy' in terms of university research agendas and the vexed place of creative/critical labour in late-capitalist society.

Ultimately however, I share Annette Krauss' concern that the current educational turn, and indeed its discussion in this book, may simply be a 'self-referential maelstrom' in which we (the 'easyJet-set of MA students, art professors, curators and other such 'dignatories', in Marion von Osten's sardonic definition) are simply talking to ourselves rather than to those who might really effect change. The editors say that their aspiration is to grow a range of conversations: those evidenced here are certainly stimulating, but rather as Andrea Phillips appears to suggest, much of this conversation is mere hot air when 'the real crisis of education lies elsewhere' (for her in the UK it is in primary state education with all its inequality of access and opportunity.) I guess the question remains as to how the insights of creative and critical education, whether performed inside academies, galleries or beyond, might reach the ears of those who wield real power over policy and budgets, and whether in fact they are willing to listen.

Joanne Lee