



after the turn: an art educational program beyond the canon within a digital free art space | Gaza

Concept

Experiencing the lockdown of public life due to Covid-19 is a reality shared by billions of people in almost all countries around the globe. A reality of restricted mobility is the daily life for people in Gaza since 2007, when the blockade started, limiting two million Palestinians to their right to freedom of movement. In the wake of the coronavirus pandemic, the feeling of living under closure is suddenly shared worldwide, though with certainly different (pre-)conditions. Today, with their experience in dealing with this crisis, the tables have turned, and the people of Gaza are, in some ways, ahead of us.

At the same time, the pandemic is causing a major shift, change, transformation, and a breaking point of no return. Albeit disconnected physically and geographically, a joint narrative and collective memory are written which may open a portal (Arundhati Roy) to a new sense of how we are present in the world - how we connect and relate to realities remote from our own. The act of solidarity is renegotiated and catapulted into a new light. ***after the turn*** has evolved over the past two years yet its approach is more acute now than ever before. From notions of digital education to participatory learning and the democratization of knowledge sharing and production; particular attention is given to the act of translation, away from hierarchies and power dynamics of knowledge.

The experience of closure and isolation caused by the pandemic has highlighted the sensitivity of global supply systems and its multiple interruptions and the impact this has had on various professions in the cultural sector. The closure of the Gaza Strip has signified severe challenges for artists long before. For Gaza's artistic scene this means being cut off, with no possibility to access artist materials and resources, gaining knowledge of new techniques while facing the impossibility of transporting artwork beyond the borders and into exhibition spaces, galleries and museums. Consequently, artistic work produced in Gaza cannot be included, is therefore missing in the historiography of archiving and documenting. The project aims at constructing a narrative of art history beyond the canon that includes these artistic perspectives. Besides the physical restrictions, access to the discourse in the field of arts and participation in debate and discussion is also restricted even though interest beyond borders in Gaza's artistic production, artwork and practice as much as hearing the local scene's artistic expression and its powerful creativity is growing worldwide. Dynamics and relationships of power constituting the systems and structures of



the modern world are maintaining asymmetrical communication relations and disconnection between those under siege and the rest of the world.

Against this backdrop, **after the turn** anticipates, within a *digital free art space*, to open up a platform and program for safe reflection, knowledge exchange and transfer, following the idea of digital teaching and critique which is inspired by Paul Freire. The *digital free art space* functions therefore as a place for critical thinking and reflective knowledge production by relating daily life experiences to academic and creative content. More than ever, listening to plural realities and different 'ways of knowing and experiencing the world' is essential. It is a call to take many perspectives into close consideration, "especially (of) those whose very existence is questioned and produced as indispensable and insignificant" as W.E.B. du Bois formulated it (Maldonado-Torres 2008:8).

Digital teaching is the right mode that offers an opportunity to break out of deadlocked structures of knowledge transfer and to experiment in new ways. A *digital free art space* can act as a counter space in response to the lack of art education in Gaza with its censored curriculum compromising fine art studies, - also challenging formal education of the academy. In such space, changing the distribution of roles between teachers and students, and who learns from who, becomes possible. Away from knowledge mediation to accompany and guide the learning process with the ability to provide critical feedback, the notion of who can be a "knower" and what things ought to be known is turned upside down. Combined with the methodology of decoloniality, aspects of digitality offer an approach to shift the asymmetric relationship between inside and outside, the center and the periphery, in other words, relevance and irrelevance. This also highlights the importance of the availability of knowledge in the Arabic language.

What has been designed for the art educational program **after the turn** to overcome the idea of closure and being enclosed, - albeit temporarily and imaginatively, and to free art educational practice from the facts on the ground has also become a global concern of today's situation caused by the coronavirus to overcome closures of schools and universities. The situation of digital education and knowledge as well as accessibility to it becomes all the more poignant. As Gaza is - involuntarily - ahead of us in dealing with crises, the cultural sphere on site is also ahead of many in making the most of digitization: The idea of transmission as long-lasting reality as the only way to make a meaningful connection.

The **after the turn** curriculum aims at making visible, opening up, and advancing radically distinct perspectives and positionalities that scrutinize the art canon



and Western academic formal education as the only valid framework and possibility of existence, analysis, and critical thought.

On the importance of translation

The translation of text and voice is known for its complexity while visual language can reach beyond the frames of language. Similarly, theories, ideas and thinking can be translated for different disciplines, translating terms and implicit knowledge or practice and therefore touching the core of knowledge distribution. (and what is taught and shared in formal education for example)

Contextualizing is a common term in this endeavor, which is used in theoretical as well as practical approaches. But what does it mean? What does it mean to translate theories towards a specific understanding of localization, contextualization, and translation of social and political groundings? Do theories change in new contexts? Stuart Hall emphasizes that "...translation is a continuous process of re-articulation and re-contextualization without any notion of a primary origin" (Hall: 1996:393), however, theories are embedded in geopolitical power relations that dominate the present academic and art discourse. This tendency still formulates homogenized approaches, - and creates asymmetrical knowledge distribution within the canon. This program is about exploring what lies beyond that canon: Participants discuss and relate concepts of translational theory and practice by reading selected works (theories, films, artworks) against the grain and applying the reflective practice to their body of work and train of thought.