

# **Introduction**

# **The Catering**

# **Regime**

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The most important department at universities and academies these days is the general and technical services facility. It is not only the students who have to comply with the rules imposed on them by an army of service workers. Teachers also submit to being disciplined by security staff, copy services, IT people, roster makers, and waitresses serving coffee or organizing a reception. The scientific staff, artistic administration and teachers are being steered into this catering regime by the school's business administration. Of course, the service staff and supporting educational workers are not to blame, as they are not personally responsible for the bio-political discipline to which they submit the school's users on a daily basis. Responsibility lies foremost with the 'organizing forces', i.e. school boards and, at the end of the day, the authority or government that decides on educational policy.

Barring a few exceptions, most school boards and governments have come to believe that institutes should focus on their 'core business' and had best outsource all other activities. Sandwiches are no longer to be prepared by the mum of one of the teachers or students and the cleaner can no longer be some distant relative of one of the staff. Henceforth, everything is to be done in a professional manner. Within Europe, the notorious rule of 'European tenders' has been introduced to guarantee some level of objectivity in comparing price and quality. Michel Foucault, if he were still alive, would lick his fingers if confronted with such a regime. The French intellectual, who introduced the notion of 'biopolitics' in philosophy, would have described in glorious detail how this catering regime deeply affects daily life itself, hence '*biopolitics*'.

It is not just the sandwiches and cups of coffee that go down our gullets — often dispensed by machines — that are firmly controlled by the general services troops, but also how we navigate the school building and how much time we're allowed to spend in a classroom or studio. Our use of some military jargon here is not unintentional. As far back as a century ago, Max Weber already pointed out how a bureaucracy's organization was directly inspired by the command structure of the military. Likewise, the disciplinary power of the catering regime is founded on a correctional system. Art academies and universities that have embraced this regime by now definitely realize that they have indeed let a powerful and very obstinate *Fremdkörper* (alien) in. Some heads of schools try to spare their students this regime by using alternative spaces far from the school building itself. Teachers and professors who wish to share their artis-

tic and intellectual enthusiasm via book launches, symposiums and other extracurricular activities prefer to find cheaper accommodations with less rigid hours elsewhere. These days, the school building is often seen as a suffocating environment because the general services department has become the control department.

You may perhaps think that we are laying it on a bit too thick and are grossly exaggerating things. Okay, being art lovers, we confess that we are adept at exaggerating, but our seemingly overblown take may be not all that weird once we closely examine the principle of catering and define what catering is exactly, and especially what it actually *does*. Catering delivers food on demand, made-to-measure. Not just, hopefully, high-quality and tasty food, but — and this is the most important principle of catering — it delivers it on time, in the right quantity and in the right place. Catering therefore is all about short-term stock management, distribution, and timing (as it deals mostly in fresh food with a limited shelf life). It is essential to accurately estimate the potential demand. In other words, catering is a matter of continual calculation. A services company that doesn't calculate is doomed to fail. After all, if it doesn't deliver enough or not in time, the client will be dissatisfied. If it delivers too much, it is stuck with a surplus, which over time may lead to the company's demise. All in all, catering comes down to the *art of delivering on time and on demand*.

So, isn't education today also regarded as one big catering business? Academies and universities are after all expected to deliver knowledge that is made-to-measure and meets the demands of its clients or potential students. Even the contents of a discipline, however classic, nowadays have a limited shelf life, subjected as they are to quickly changing demands in the labour market. The transfer of knowledge and the learning process are literally custom-made to fit modules and competencies, which in turn are neatly divided into precisely calculated hours of contact. The students/consumers can then file a complaint when either the promised quality or quantity is not delivered at all or not in time. They are also subjected to consumer and satisfaction questionnaires in all sorts of interim educational assessments or audits. Education has indeed become a form of catering, and just like in catering, the client is well aware in advance of what to expect, which is never the sublime cuisine of a top-notch restaurant, but a well-calculated mediocrity. To the catering regime, after all, quality first and foremost means not delivering outside the norm. That is one guarantee the client at least has.

## Neoliberalism or the Fundamentalism of Measurability

The bold thesis that this introduction proposes is that the catering regime is in fact the carrying out of a political ideology, i.e. that of neoliberalism. The catering regime is the actual everyday implementation of a political agenda. It is a form of ‘governmentalism’, to quote Foucault once again. It is a silent but active policy that both covers up explicitly articulated politics and implements them in everyday real life. The catering regime’s starting point is a no-nonsense policy or a managerial realism that presumes to deal with reality because reality, supposedly, is objective because it is measurable. In doing so, this regime transforms a political ideology into a crypto-ideology, one that presents itself as the only possible option with any sense of reality. In other words, through the catering regime the neoliberal principles and creeds take on a ‘natural’, or at least ‘normal’, character: one that is supposedly intrinsic to human behaviour.

In previous publications by the Arts in Society research group, we have commented regularly on neoliberalism. All the issues that we have discussed so far in this series, ranging from globalisation, interculturality, and post-Fordism to community art, have links with this political agenda. In these publications, we have sufficiently explained how neoliberalism took shape during the 1970s and that it had everything to do with the privatization of hitherto collectively and/or state-managed resources. Neoliberalization also implies the dismantlement of the welfare state. In those earlier books, however, we did not really discuss the distinction between liberalism and neoliberalism. Yet the difference between these historically distinctive agendas is essential in understanding the notion of the catering regime proposed here. Whereas neoliberalism, just like its historic predecessor, firmly believes in the wholesome working of free competition and free markets, and while both proclaim that the state should take a step back and not interfere too much with the markets, neoliberalism has a fundamentally different approach to its guiding principle. This basic principle, as we all know, is simply called ‘freedom’. Historically, liberalism does not only have individual freedom as a political and social goal, but also holds an optimistic view of mankind in which the world will be a better place if individuals are given full freedom. Freedom is not just the goal of liberalism, it is also the condition on which a better society can build and develop itself. Or, to put it differently: liberalism believes that freely acting individuals will lead to the best results for society. Therefore, the mar-

ket must be allowed to function as freely as possible, which, if taken to its extreme, means a laissez-faire capitalism. Also, one should take the risk of giving individuals as much freedom as possible in order to realize progress in prosperity. This belief in the beneficial outcome of freely acting subjects means that liberalism gladly accommodates both adventurous entrepreneurs and the most idiosyncratic artists. Both, after all, are second to none at proclaiming the idea of individual freedom and autonomous creativity.

Neoliberalism, however, maintains a less optimistic view of mankind. Maybe it has learned a few lessons from some of the historical excesses that have resulted from blind faith in human freedom. In any case, neoliberalism is very suspicious when it comes to the free space that individuals should have. Do they make good and proper use of it? Because of this mistrust, the political agenda starts to efficiently direct or contain this proclaimed freedom. It develops all sorts of tools to make freedom measurable, controllable and manageable, and to keep it that way. And this is where the infamous catering regime comes in again, as it gives the customers the impression that they can choose anything they like, made to their own measure, while in fact it delivers mass-produced, standardized products. Which brings us back to education, which gives students/consumers the impression that they can choose and study highly individual programmes but in fact treats them to mass-produced competencies in increasingly comparable — within Europe — modules. Competency-driven education reduces the relationship between student and teacher or instructor to trading off practicably measurable skills. That which cannot be measured, or at least not within a foreseeable time span, will be more difficult to legitimize or honour. In other words, neoliberalism is a fundamentalism in that it proclaims the value of the number to be the foundation of our society. Numbers become the *only* foundation of living together, which makes neoliberalism essentially indistinguishable from other regimes that acknowledge only *one* foundation (be it a holy book, or the image of a God) and regard all other regimes as inferior, or worse.

Just like all fundamentalism, neoliberalism too is fuelled by fear. It is the fear of its own drive and utopian ideal: freedom. Neoliberalism is incapable of looking its own ideals in the eye. In fact, it creates a continuously expanding bureaucracy that serves to mask the fear of freedom, of one’s own population, of one’s own society and eventually the fear of oneself, of mankind. Bureaucracy is the expression of fundamentalism’s fear of mankind’s potential. And

because neoliberalism hides its profound distrust of man's virtuousness behind a discourse of usefulness and service, it is a deeply cynical ideology. In that sense, neoliberalism is an ideology that brings an echo of old-fashioned communism to mind. *Les extrêmes se touchent*. The extremes meet.

Just as neoliberalism doesn't fully trust the free individual, it is also wary of the potential free space between pupil and teacher in the classroom. By using miles of red tape and numerous assessments, the catering regime tries to keep the space between teacher and pupil as orderly and manageable as possible. In doing so, however, neoliberalism goes right in against the historical and etymological meaning of the word 'school'. In their contribution to this publication, Simmons and Masschelein point out that the original Greek word *scholè* means 'free time', being the time when people don't have to act economically or politically. Within the domain of the school, neither accumulation and profit-seeking nor power games take centre stage, but only the subject matter, for which the tutor tries to create *interest*. Therefore, what is most important in this ancient *scholè* is not the student, but the actual knowledge and skills. Good teachers of dance, music, theatre, or visual art are not primarily interested in the students, and most of all not in themselves, but speak only from their one true love for dance, music, theatre, or visual art. Students will only interest them when they in turn are interested in the subject matter. It is precisely this selfless love of a subject that the teacher is trying to evoke, putting the most immeasurable subjectivity into his efforts. The teacher shouts, is sometimes angry, laughs, and is enthusiastic. Sometimes he whispers, sometimes he loudly recites. He may be motionless for minutes at a time or suddenly start gesturing wildly. He may react very sympathetically to an unexpected idea or gesture from a student at one time and be unreasonably critical at another. Those who talk on a subject with heartfelt involvement need few pedagogic rules to evoke interest or to transfer knowledge and skills. It is precisely this subjectivity that is 'hated by capitalism', as Richard Sennett states rather emphatically in this book. Capitalism doesn't know how to deal with the immeasurability of the educational process. The catering regime, though, tries to deal with it anyway via all sorts of evaluation tools and stacks of forms that in fact miss the point entirely, as good teachers well know. Such measures actually distract from the subject matter and often dampen enthusiasm, thereby diminishing the likelihood of interest.

## Bologna

In many essays in this book, an accusing finger is pointed at the Bologna Agreement. This is hardly surprising, as almost all the authors have worked or are still working in education in Europe. The European treaty signed by the ministers of education of all the European member states in 1999 can indeed be regarded as the official starting shot of the neoliberalization of education and therefore of the implementation of the catering regime. Certainly this is the first time that it was done on a large, international scale. Through the implementation of the well-known BAMA system (Bachelor and Master), Bologna aims at uniformity and comparability of educational institutes. In a ruthless struggle of survival to obtain students, these institutes are increasingly forced to take on a corporate identity.

Gielen, like many of the other authors in this book, places the blame on this agreement. According to him, it frustrates the integration and interaction of theory and practice that are essential to the development of an artistic praxis.

Sociologist Rudi Laermans, who teaches at a Belgian university as well as at a dance academy, does some comparative research on these institutes. The first falls under Bologna, the latter has, for now, managed to stay out of this framework. Laermans concludes that a certain way of teaching theory — beautifully coined by him as 'nimble thinking' — has become impossible at the university, as nowadays one is supposed to deliver formatted packages of knowledge.

Philosopher Dieter Lesage, however, points to a possibly positive side of the Bologna Agreement: it opens up the possibility of research in higher education. If art education can translate this into its own terms and use its own parameters, there is even some intellectual and artistic profit to be gained compared to traditional, nationally organized art education, Lesage believes. To artists or future artists, research time may come to mean *free time*, time to experiment to their hearts' desire. Indeed, Bologna doesn't have to spell only sorrow and misery, as much still depends on how national governments interpret and implement the agreement. In the Netherlands this is done quite differently from how it is done in neighbouring Belgium (Flanders), which also marks the difference within this publication between Gielen and Lesage.

Authors Tessa Overbeek, Daniel Muzyczuk and Marco Scotini, however, just like Laermans, Lesage and Gielen, agree that the Bologna Agreement declares the domain of the school to be a marketplace, regardless of whether we find ourselves in Swedish, Italian,

Polish, Dutch, or Belgian classrooms. Also, based on well-informed sources, we strongly suspect that in countries outside Europe, mechanisms such as international standardization, educational marketing, increase in scale, and centralization also hold sway. It is not only within the European educational domain that the catering regime rules, or rather, controls.

### The Age of Entertainment

Art increasingly has to deal with neoliberalization in other areas besides education. Once students have left the classrooms, they enter a (professional) world where creativity and the market mix quite easily nowadays. Booming creative industries are eager to make use of the creative and artistic skills taught at art schools. The marriage between globalization and neoliberalization doesn't generate cultural homogeneity exclusively in the artistic domain. It also does so on a large scale in entertainment, which, by the way, *de facto* implies homogenization. Entertainment standardizes artistic and cultural expression into client-friendly formats. In this it is basically different from art, which time and again generates its own idiosyncratic formats. Putting it simply, entertainment is 'pre-packaged art', or made-to-measure artistry. This is not to say that there is no entertainment that has quality, only that this quality is measured in a completely different way. The quality of art is measured by the degree of transgression or 'dismeasure' it achieves. Over time, this dismeasure may become generally accepted and be repeated by others, made into a refrain. At that point, the dismeasure becomes measure, and soon becomes measurable entertainment. In other words, the distinction between art and entertainment makes clear that even great artists who keep repeating themselves, staying within their own measure, are in fact only entertaining their surroundings. Then again, entertainment that transgresses its own limits may come to be recognized as art.

We will not discuss the difference between art and entertainment in any more detail here, but within the context of this publication we will regard entertainment as made-to-measure art. After all, doesn't it also mean that, under the catering regime, made-to-measure art education results above all in teaching made-to-measure art, therefore entertainment? In his essay, Dieter Lesage states that within the entertainment regime, art research in education rather reduces itself to technical research. Ground-breaking research in

theory and art theory itself tends to get side-tracked. Nevertheless, art needs this type of research in order to push back its own boundaries. Or, as Rudi Laermans says, with art theorist Irit Rogoff: art education is in need of 'criticality' and of 'operating from an uncertain ground'. Criticality 'affirms the moment of not-knowing in the process of knowing'.<sup>1</sup>

'Particularly in respect to research', says Laermans, art schools 'must defend the at once illuminating and deconstructive moment of not-knowing as the proverbial truth of every quest for knowledge. This paradox forms the heart of both "doing theory" and genuine artistic research.' But isn't this also at the heart of art education as such? Various notions put forward by the authors in this publication, such as 'nimble thinking' (Laermans), 'escaping forward' (Muzyczuk) 'unpredictability' (Hertmans), 'indecency' (De Bruyne), 'thinking together' (Kreuger), 'dismeasure' (Gielen), 'dis-discovery' and 'quality madness' (Overbeek), certainly refer to that which is unknown: the uncertain leap one takes when one wants to create art. Unlike catering, neoliberalism, and entertainment, good art education values uncertainty more than certainty.

### Teaching Art in Three Parts

*Teaching Art in the Neoliberal Realm* is a collection of essays and one interview, divided up into three parts. The first, 'Neoliberalism and the Loss of School', offers a critical analysis of the effects of neoliberalism on art education. The contributions here show what education is in the process of losing under this political hegemony. Gielen, for instance, points to the loss of balance within a biotope that is needed to maintain a healthy artistic praxis. Richard Sennett next exposes, in an interview, the loss of craftsmanship as well as communality. De Bruyne offers an analysis of the master-mate relationship in theatre education. This relationship is not understood by the new administrators and this puts pressure on theatre education as well. Simons and Masschelein, finally, state that the original notion of the *scholè* itself is in danger of being lost.

The second part, 'Dealing with the Past, Opportunities of the Present', illustrates that we shouldn't romanticize the history of the art academy. Bert Taken and Jeroen Boomgaard, for instance, point out how the Romantic image of artists with their sublime art

<sup>1</sup> Irit Rogoff, 'Looking Away: Participations in Visual Culture', in *After Criticism: New Responses to Art and Performance*, ed. Gavin Butt (Malden: Blackwell, 2005), 119.

has entered art education via Kant and Fichte. And although this is a completely obsolete image in the current globalized media landscape, it keeps cropping up in a nostalgic longing for a new elite and the training of artists in isolation. However, art education cannot isolate itself from the world, like the classical academies did. Daniel Muzyczuk illustrates how in Poland there is a gap between the old, traditional art academies plodding on in splendid isolation from the actual professional art world and neoliberal circles proposing a radically different educational programme. The gap there couldn't be wider, but isn't it one we recognize as opening up in so many other European countries as well? Still, Muzyczuk sees in this dilemma also an opportunity 'to escape forward'. Rounding off this second part, Dieter Lesage argues that 'Bologna' isn't all bad news. He regards the implementation of research in art education, as mentioned earlier, as an opportunity 'to go back to the academy'.

Finally, the third part, 'Teaching Art and the Essence of the Quest', focuses on effective escape routes. Stefan Hertmans thinks that art education should take matters more in its own hands by articulating open learning goals itself. Rudi Laermans and Anders Kreuger, both in their own way, point to the necessity of different ways of thinking within art education. If art education is to preserve its own identity and that of art, then it will have to maintain or fight for some measure of autonomy in this. Whereas Laermans takes the practice of theoretical thinking as a starting point, Kreuger, Marco Scotini and Tessa Overbeek base themselves on artistic practices to formulate proposals for education. Kreuger relies on the practice of curating in doing so, while Scotini mainly takes forms of activist theatre to learn about an 'antagonistic pedagogical discourse'. Overbeek, finally, starts from within the circus, taking the principle of 'quality madness' from the Swedish Cirkus Cirkör as a prelude in pointing out the duality of the creative and pedagogical process. The teaching of art loses its essence if it is not a quest.

The alternatives presented show, and not just in this last part, that all of the authors speak from experience in education, thereby implicitly underwriting the idea of pragmatic philosophy à la Senneft. If nothing else, this has saved *Teaching Art in the Neoliberal Realm* from being a sour rant or limiting itself to purely theoretical musings. Although none of the authors shun theory, their contributions first and foremost testify to the 'voice of experience', which also shows their commitment to art education. In *Teaching Art...* nobody simply resigns themselves to the catering cynicism. Idealism is still

alive. Or rather, realism is. A realistic analysis of the present situation shows that the neoliberalist educational model cannot fulfil its promises of flexible services to the market and of the efficient building of competencies. It simply doesn't understand the dynamics that are the basis of art and art education well enough. As a result, it creates a permanent state of crisis within art education, a crisis that neoliberalism can hardly manage, not even by cracking the severely disciplining whip of permanent organizational upheaval. This book claims to offer the elements for a more realistic analysis of reality in order to create a type of education that does justice to the tradition and potential of art, art teachers, future artists and the function of art education in the global community. In that regard, this publication is only part of a movement in art schools that is daily combating the dominating ideology in rehearsal rooms and studios, in a light-hearted, but intense and committed way. The undercurrent is already there. Disobedience is possible, desirable, and pleasant — and it is a very effective pedagogical tool.