

## INTRODUCTION OF RESEARCH UNIVERSITIES AND RE-POSITIONING OF ART FACULTIES IN TURKEY

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### ABSTRACT

In this paper, I aim to discuss the introduction of research universities into the Turkish university system and its relevance for fine art faculties in Turkey, the possible impacts it will have on the position of art departments in relation to the changing ideas of university. In this regard, I will discuss what happens to "academic research", how it is defined under this new scheme and where does the particular form of artistic practice stand in this context. The recent introduction of research university concept urges us to think what art has anything to do with research, and hence, what status artistic thinking holds in the newly emerging academic model. This current discussion allow us to focus on the marginal status of art education within the academia and how this exercise on thinking the position of art schools in relation to the academy can help us to reimagine both the university and artistic thinking anew.

### INTRODUCTION

With the opening of the academic year 2017 we saw the introduction of research university concept into the Turkish university system. In comparison to the long tradition of research universities across the world, the idea came as something new for the Turkish academia. Ten universities were selected as research universities after a accreditation process under the "Mission Differentiation and Specialization Project", that aims to foster the universities to be specialist in particular fields and thus to "be more visible in international arena" ("Meeting with Representatives of Research Universities at CoHE", 2017). Among the selected universities three of them hosts Fine Arts Faculties, and it brings up the question of what role art faculties could play within this new scheme, what would their position be in this setting. This paper is concerned with the new conditions the fine arts faculties find and will find themselves in, to position art schools and particular manner of thinking in and through arts.

### THE IDEA OF WORLD UNIVERSITY

A research university is defined by Turkish Council of Higher Education as "an institution that produces knowledge by cooperating with disciplines and institutions within the scope of the priority objectives and fields of Turkey, train people with doctorate degrees who are experienced in research and is ranked highly in international ranking systems"(ibid.). Thus, one of the main motivation of a research university is defined as international recognition and the urge to become a "world university". This is where I want to start with, with the idea of world university.

"In Defense of the School", Jan Masschelein and Marteen Simons (2013) discuss the mission of the school, as the realm of free thinking and making, a time dedicated to unmediated, non-instrumentalised endeavour for all kinds of human activities. In line with Pierre Bourdieu (2016), who reminds us the original meaning of "scholae" as a place for all the other forms of human activities that need uninterrupted and slow time against the speed production of industrialised knowledge (Bourdieu, 1996), the school and in particular the university is defined as a place for non-instrumentalised knowledge. Thus, when we talk about "world university", it is crucial to remember how do the knowledge, research, education engage with the world we live in.

This idea of education as an engagement with the world is stressed by education theorists Gert Biesta as well (2017). What education should provide is an encounter with the reality of the world, the world we share with others. As Biesta argues, while the times we live in is shaped by the rhetorics of shopping, the act that is focused on immediate satisfaction of our desires, until something newly desirable emerges, education is also affected by this trend. In this setting, students expect the university to give them what they want to learn, to provide the means, skills, knowledge for achieving their career goals. Nonetheless, the education should prompt us to "rearrange our desires" so that we turn towards the world and learn to be together, and not to be at the centre of our own worlds.

Thus, the main mission of education is to teach us what we do with our desires, desires shaped by our times obsessed with easily satisfiable but unsustainable urges, that create subjects who are focused on fulfilling their desires all the time, but a desire always remain to be unfulfilled.

A world university, in that sense, gives space to “transform knowledge and skills into ‘common goods’”<sup>1</sup>, as Masschelein and Simons states (2013, p. 10). What is suggested by this “common goods” is not another excuse for instrumentalisation of education as it is demanded by funding schemes or university policies seeking immediate outcomes, measurable quality. Rather, it is a call for “public use of reason”, “public gathering” in which we can find possibilities for thinking the world we live in afresh (Masschelein & Simons, 2009, p. 237), in the smallest details that goes unnoticed, that might deem unimportant, that might not produce immediate results to be measured in the yearly performance reports.

A look back at the definition of research university by CoHE shows us the risky instrumentalisation of research and of the universities, yet not limited only to our local case:

"It develops its budget as a result of its research activities and products gaining value, increases the share it gets from other research funds through productive research and tries to take part in the future of its society, which it is a part of, with the social value it creates" ("Meeting with Representatives of Research Universities at CoHE", 2017).

Here we see a dangerous deviation from the autonomous idea of university, of university as an unmediated time dedicated to thinking and making of the world. A deviation from the idea of academic research as free thinking and into becoming part of research and development scheme, that fosters edu factories working for knowledge economy. It is the human as a capital that these schemes aims at, to realise the economic motivations of free market. To link research to financial profit already situates research within the industry or the agendas of the funding bodies determined by the dominant trends, which leaves the unforeseen potential of other research fields aside. To define research in such terms is particularly grave for the kind of research and knowledge produced by so called soft-sciences, humanities and inevitably for the arts.

### **ART AND ACADEMIA: AN UNEASY RELATIONSHIP**

Art theorist and philosopher Gerald Raunig finds autonomous milieus in art academies in as much as small universities to resist this trend (2016). Raunig emphasises the possibility to stand against such an instrumentalising mentality in such institutions and to turn back to the idea of university as a realm for making and thinking of the world. An institution inquiring into the knowledge of our current reality becomes central in this regard to imagine a future world. In the utopian core of art practice as well in radical pedagogy we can find this urge for imagining "diverse visions of the future" (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1986).

What lies in the future is determined here and now. What we can envision about our future is very much defined by our present, how we engage with our position here and now. Nonetheless, as radical pedagogists Henry Giroux and Stanley Aronowitz remind us, it is the power that determines what is worth engaging with, researching, what is useful knowledge and what are the reasonable methods and means to realise this interest (1986). Here comes in the redundant, idle practice of artistic thinking. A form of thinking and inquiry that is useless if we define education and research in measurable terms. In this regard, it is crucial to discuss the connections between "art and academia", but an academia that increasingly measures its success with the collaborations of industry, with its ability to produce profitable knowledge, thus increasingly shaped by a commercially oriented, industrially defined idea of education and research.

### **DEBATE ON ARTISTIC RESEARCH**

The recent debates looking into the connection between art and academia emerges in the aftermath of Bologna accord, introducing structural changes for transferable degrees. Amidst this debates, the focus on artistic research brought heated discussions about what academic research has to do with the art practice, and accordingly the position of art schools within academia. The debates evolve around whether we can call the particular form of thinking artist produce as research, whether art produces knowledge, and if so, what kind of knowledge is at

stake, how do we define the basic tenets of academic research in relation to art practice. Triggered by the new regulations fostering transferable degrees and introduction of third cycle programmes that are defined by its research based character, the discussions focus on locating the idea of artistic research within the map of academia and to locate the form of thinking art produces in and against the main tenets of academic research paradigms.

Institutionally, these discussions on artistic research met with recognition as well as resistances by research centres and funding schemes, and changed the infrastructures defining research today. In Northern Europe and Scandinavia, the overall inclination is supportive of the emerging field of artistic research (Borgdorff, 2017). Swedish Research Council, for example, has a separate committee assessing artistic research. Similarly Austrian Science Fund established a Programme for Arts-Based Research. In Norway, artistic research is already recognised as it is evident by their Artistic Research Programme. In Denmark, there is a funding programme for artistic research under the Novo Nordisk Foundation. Thus, there is more and more acceptance of the term artistic research and new models of art PhDs that looks unfit for a conventional model of academic research.

So how does artistic research fit or doesn't fit into the world of academic research and moreover how could it fit into the entrepreneurial idea of research? Following Henk Borgdorff, we can come to a broad definition of research as "an original study, often within a single discipline, to enhance our knowledge and understanding. It begins with questions or issues that are relevant in the research context, and it employs methods that are appropriate to the research and which ensure the validity and reliability of the research findings" (2009). Regardless of disciplinary differences, this is how research is broadly defined in academic setting. Artistic research, in this sense seems to hold a marginal status with its idiosyncratic ways of reflecting on the world, building up unexpected relationships with the world and disseminating its insights that manifest unusual, unexpected aspects of the world. Nonetheless, it does not fundamentally differ from academic research, if we are to understand the academic mind in a wider perspective. String theory expert Robbert Dijkgraaf states that "scientific research is about doing unpredictable things, implying intuition and some measure of randomness" (in Borgdorff, 2009). In a similar line anthropologist Tim Ingold highlights the parallels between anthropology as one of the most "an-academic discipline" (2013, p.

2) with its practice based attitude and its highly questionable objectivity. Reflecting on the "intrinsically haphazard endeavour" of fieldwork practice common across many disciplines, Dona Davis' account also comes closer towards artistic thinking (2007, p.3). All in all, these reflections stand against the traditional claims for clear cut, objective research outcomes that seem to define and divide scientific from artistic research.

### **THE LEGACY OF TURKISH ART EDUCATION**

In Turkish context, the lines between art and science, art and academia and art and research is clearly and unproblematically demarcated to such an extent that what we define as research is oriented towards technological innovation and profit, and consequently the possibility for discussing artistic research is readily excluded. Now with the new scheme of research universities, the unsteady position of art faculties within the Turkish academia is once more confirmed. Among ten research universities accredited this year, three of them host art faculties yet there is no stated regulation on how the process will develop so far. Nonetheless, the statement of CoHE as well as the attitude of university boards manifest that the scheme does not cover art faculties, it does not consider art as a valid field of research.

It is interesting to compare the rich discussions on artistic research emerging in the aftermath of Bologna process and the silence one finds in the Turkish context. Actually, the tradition of third cycle education in art in Turkey has a long history in comparison to most of its counterparts in the world. Right after the foundation of the CoHE in 1981, third cycle programmes were introduced in art. Yet, to emphasise the difference between art and science, artistic thinking and scientific research, an idiosyncratic qualification programme was devised that was coined as "Proficiency in Arts". The term already manifest the marginal status artistic research holds within Turkish academia.

## THE TRADITION OF TURKISH ART EDUCATION AND DEBATES ON RESEARCH

At this point, one should look into the legacy of art education and where it brings us amidst the debates regarding academia and its research culture, academia as a realm for free thinking and making. Across fifty-two state and three private institutions of fine arts programmes (Gürelli, 2016), the mainstream art education model at present in Turkey largely relies on a formalism with an emphasis on inborn talent à la academic model, in which the master grants the disciple the privileged title of the artist. The overall look of art education in Turkey is a mixture of academic and modernist art education with an aspiration to catch up with the contemporary forms of artistic thinking that locates itself upon an interdisciplinary ground. On the other hand, the existing perspectives on art education relies on pedagogical models that stand in conflict with such an interdisciplinary approach with its focus on mastering technical skills and following a feudal model for education (Slager, 2015, p.18).

These models become obsolete to meet the demands of a research based art practice that urge us to think art as a critical engagement with the world (Maharaj, 2010), where "reflection and research are closely interwoven with artistic practice" (Wesseling, 2011, p.3). Conceptual artist Joseph Kosuth defines the role of art schools as one of institutionalising art. An art school that defines its educational programme as one of passing on the technical knowledge of a medium, be it painting, sculpture or let say new media confines itself to the mastery of the rules, canons, "traditions and habits of art within a social order" (1991). What he proposes instead is an education questioning what art is, its boundaries that reaches towards other fields. The post-60's art world regards art practice very distant from a discipline based art education that passes technical knowledge of a medium and that encourages rote learning of the artistic canon. Informed by the ideas of conceptual art that seeks skills fostering a critical engagement with the world and locates art practice as a cultural practice within the expanded site of art, understanding of research in and through art becomes relevant within contemporary art practice. As the field of art expands towards non-art realms other means to grasp and reflect on this expanded field redraws the boundaries of art practice rooted in social, political and historical processes that needs readdressing within art education. Thus, the world of contemporary art practice, as well as the world of academia meet in their aspiration to inquire into the world and reflect on it.

In this sense, it is crucial to position academic and artistic modalities of thinking in relation to each other in equal terms, thus, reimagining art education as well imagining academy anew. It is only then we will have a stronger position in and against the newly introduced schemes, sometimes in the name of regulations regarding research universities or introduction of research support/promotion criteria that do not recognise the specific character of our field. Thus, we need to defend a model of thinking in and through art independent of the commercial grip of the market on the one hand and on the other the "banking system" of education that determines what questions are worth asking.

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