

Is there still room for emancipatory adult learning and education?

What can we learn from art practices?

Danny Wildemeersch

A Theoretical Reflection on Art and Critical Citizenship

- An arts experiment in a community centre
- What is the relevance for disenfranchised people?
- Is the experiment emancipatory?
- Does it contribute to critical citizenship?
- Looking for answers
 - In arts: the work of Francis Alÿs
 - In philosophy: Jacques Rancière
 - In pedagogy: a cautious critical pedagogy

De RuimteVaart (Leren Ondernemen) A Community Centre in Leuven

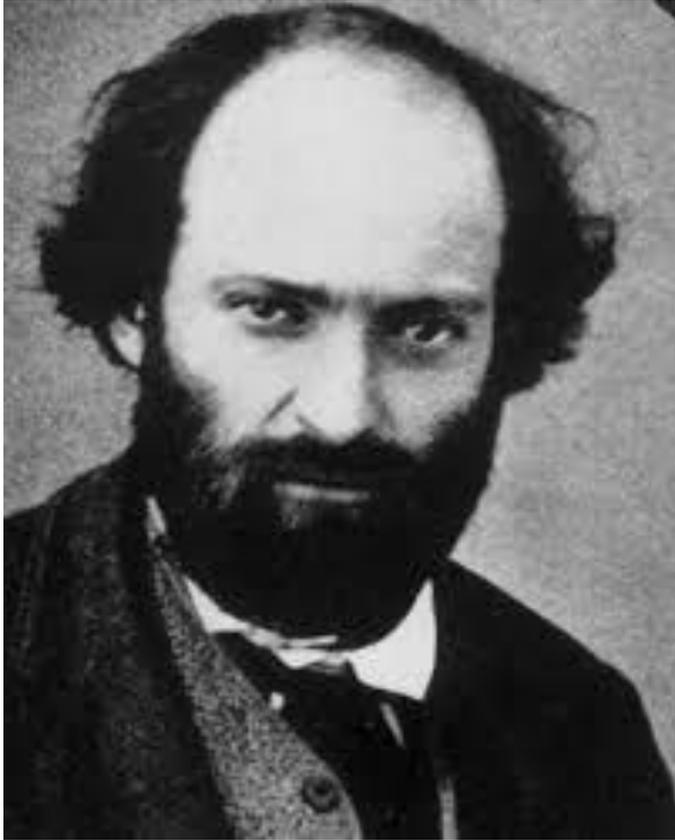


Introducing art practices



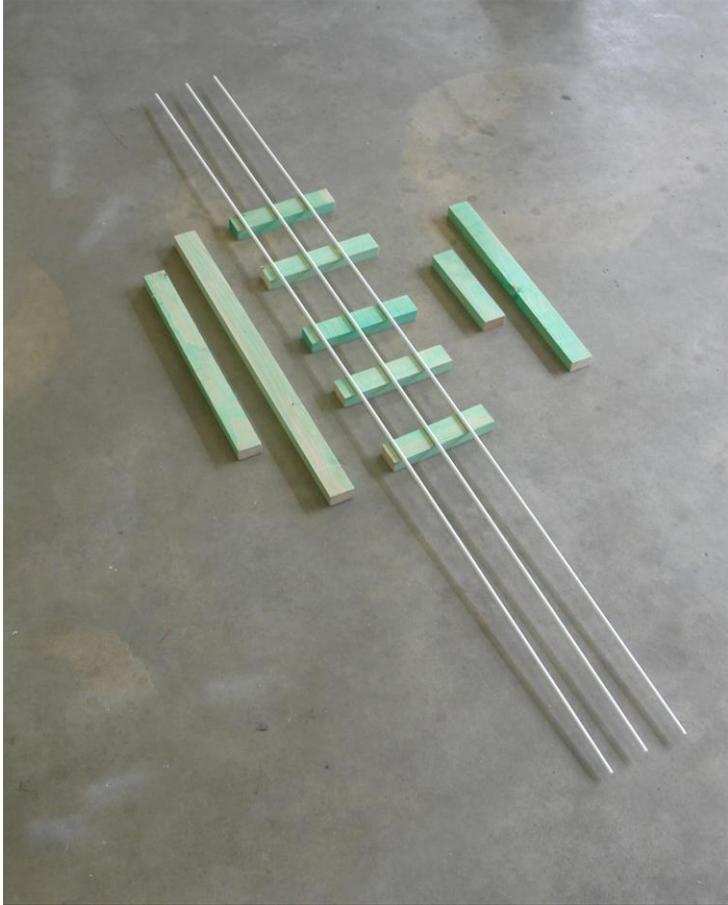


Paul Klee - Take a line for a walk



The emancipation of the line
from its predetermined codes

‘Mobility is the condition of change. The primordial movement, an agent, is a point that sets itself in motion (genesis of form). A line comes into being. The principle and active line develops freely. It goes out for a walk, so to speak, aimlessly for the sake of the walk’ (Paul Klee)





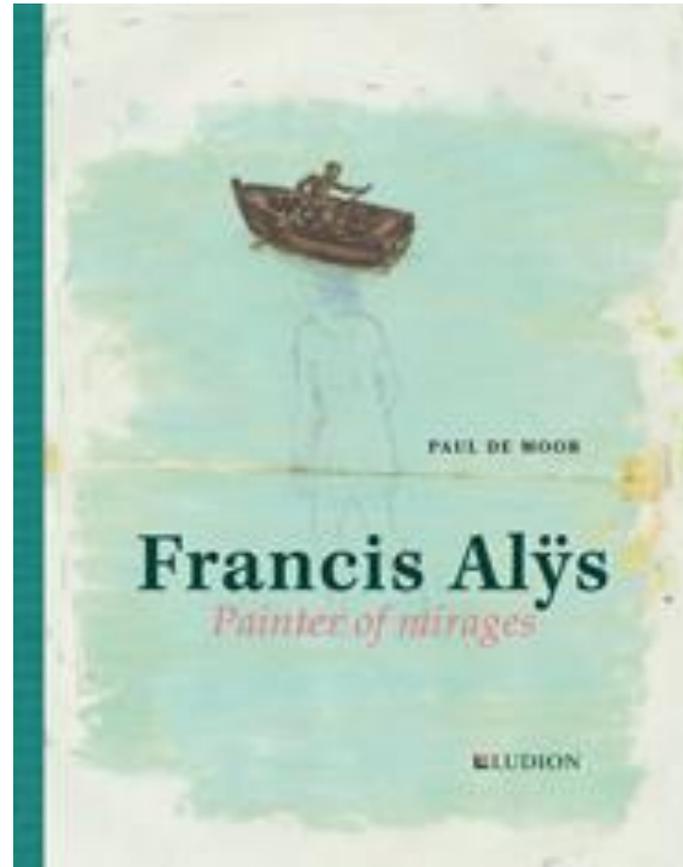
Discussing the relevance

I would agree that potentially, a process of experimentation that puts what is into question, is a useful way of bringing to consciousness the whole issue of safety, security, certainty and risk. So many creative artistic moments and public art interventions that I have seen or been part of lack this dimension – and the experience goes nowhere.

Astrid von Kotze

Francis Alÿs – an Artist of Lines and Borders

Sometimes doing something poetic can become political and sometimes doing something political can become poetic.



When Faith Moves Mountains



Five hundred volunteers with shovels gathered at a huge sand dune on the outskirts of Lima, Peru, and over the course of a day moved it by several inches. The political context was inescapable: “This was during the last months of the Fujimori dictatorship. Lima was in turmoil with clashes on the streets, obvious social tension and an emerging movement of resistance. This was a desperate situation calling for an epic response.

The Green Line in Jerusalem



Through the gratuity or the absurdity of the poetic act, art provokes a moment of suspension of meaning, a brief sensation of senselessness that reveals the absurdity of the situation and through this act of transgression, makes you step back or step out and revise your prior assumptions about this reality. (Francis Alÿs)

Connecting Key-West to Havana

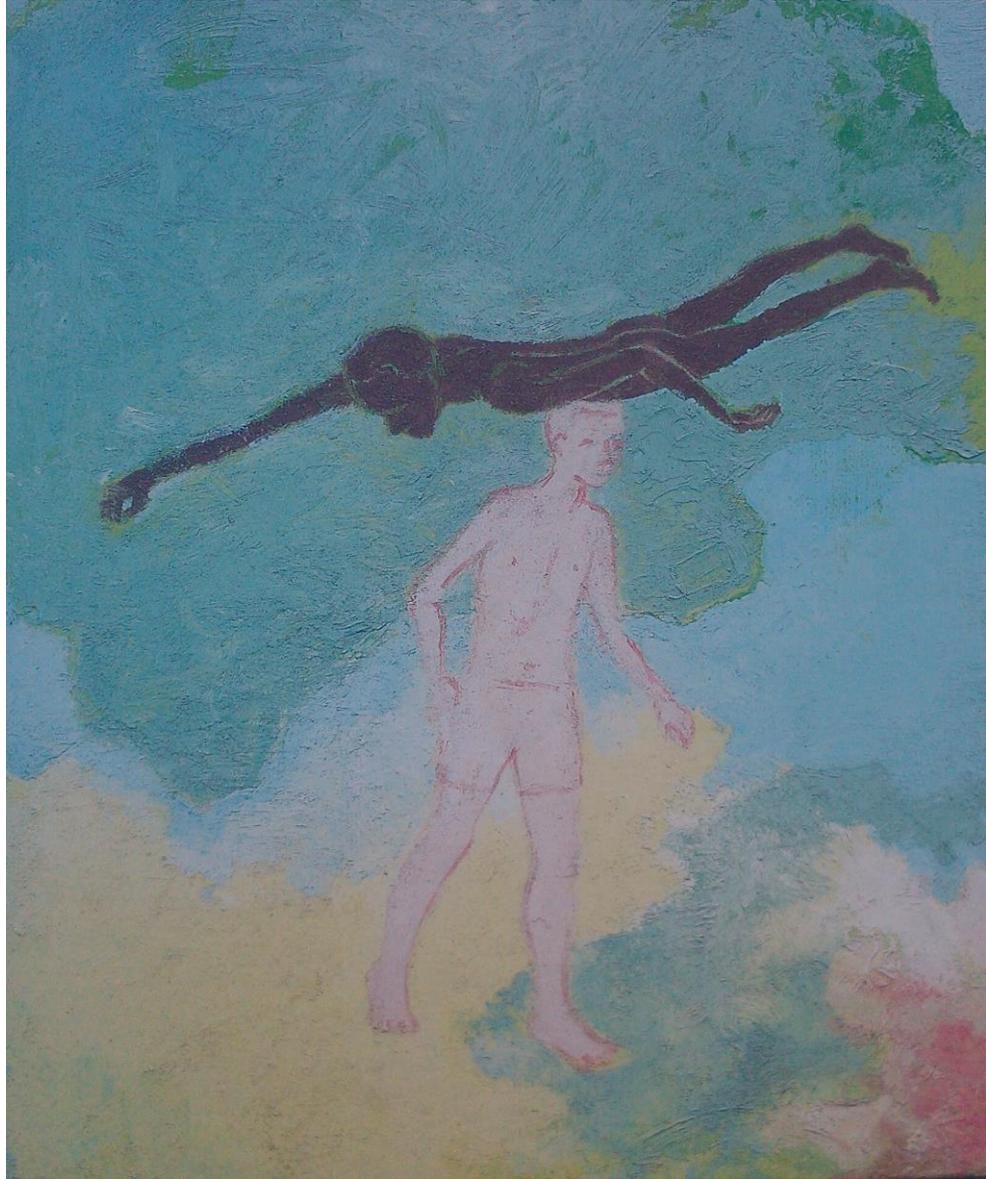


The idea was not to make a real connection (which would anyhow have been impossible), but to create an 'illusion of a bridge' as a sign of the political impasse in the relationship between the two states and the consequences for the (im)mobility of the inhabitants on both sides.

Don't Cross the Bridge Before You Get to the River



On 12 August 2008, a line of kids each carrying a boat made out of a shoe leaves Europe in the direction of Morocco, while a second line of kids with shoe-boats leaves Africa in the direction of Spain. The two lines will meet on the horizon.



Crossing the Strait of Gibraltar

But even supposing I could get enough cargo boats to close the Strait and connect the two continents, wouldn't that turn the whole project into an engineering enterprise or a military operation (..)? The difference between a military operation and an artistic gesture lies precisely in the missing fragment of the bridge: the gap that has to be filled by our imagination. That's what triggers the poetry and makes the artistic operation happen, that's what opens a moment of suspension'.

Peter Schjeldahl (in the New Yorker)

Recalling Jean Cocteau's formula of knowing 'how far to go too far', Alÿs goes just far enough to suggest offending without giving offense



Jean-Paul Sartre, when confronted with Picasso's Guernica

‘Such forms of ‘opaque aestheticisms lack a direct connection between the form and the content of the artwork and, hence, they are not really capable of affecting the hearts and minds of the audiences’.

Tony Fisher

The Pedagogical Look

It posits that what the viewer sees is a set of signs formed according to an artist's intention. By recognizing these signs, the spectator is supposedly induced into a specific reading of the world around us, leading ultimately to the spectator's intervening into the situation staged by the author.

Jacques Rancière

There's no straight path from the viewing of a spectacle to an understanding of the state of the world, and none from intellectual awareness to political action

Jacques Rancière, *Dissensus*

Jacques Ranciere
Distribution of the Sensible

“Critical art is an art that aims to produce a new perception of the world, and therefore to create a commitment to its transformation.” Jacques Ranciere



Dissensus

A rupture in the relationship between sense and sense, between what is seen and what is thought and between what is thought and what is felt. What comes to pass is a rupture in the specific configuration that allows us to stay in our assigned places in a given state of things. These sort of ruptures can happen anywhere and at any time, but they can never be calculated.

The poetic labour of translation



In this concrete situation of insecurity, this schoolmaster ‘does not teach his pupils *his* knowledge, but orders them to venture into the forest of things and signs to say what they have seen and what they think of what they have seen, to verify it and have it verified’. (Rancière, 2009b)

Sharon Todd – Spaces of Transformation

We create spaces of transformation only from our commitment to what is going on here and now, with our students, with their lives and with themselves. My point here is that it is not by refining our abstract political goals that we will create more justice in the world – multicultural or otherwise – but by encountering actual persons who compel each one of us to learn to shudder - and to learn to live with that existential shuddering responsively. In short, it is about ethically taking into account the real and not imagined others for whom justice ultimately matters.

Tara Fenwick - A shift to the immediate

- Have a closer look at how pedagogy in practice works rather than projecting hopes into the future.
- ‘I suggest we might shift our attention: from recovering and projecting a pre-given world to enacting the immediate. Ultimately what matters is how we reach out to participate in this moment with people, ideas and situations in front of our noses’

Jan Masschelein – Educating the Gaze

- Critical pedagogy is a practice that educates the gaze
- It is about freeing our gaze, rather than freeing the gaze of the other
- A practice that invites one to go outside in the world, to expose oneself, i.e. to put oneself in an uncomfortable, weak position, and offers the means and support to do so.

A Cautious Critical Pedagogy

- The practice experimented in the community centre is not in the first place about making people critical about their life conditions
- Practices of a 'master explicator' are inappropriate in these circumstances
- It is about opening unexpected spaces conversation and action that invite people to move beyond their self-evident lifeworld
- The practice shows that unexpected artistic products emerge
- The outcome of such practices cannot be predicted, they can only be verified in practice

Thank you for your attention

Further reading

- Tur Porres, G., Wildemeersch, D. & Simons, M. (2020), Revisiting Rancière's Concept of Emancipation in Vocational Education and Training Practices. *Sisyphus*, October.
- Tur Porres, G., Wildemeersch, D., Simons, M. (2014). Reflections on the Emancipatory Potential of Vocational Education and Training Practices. Freire and Rancière in Dialogue. *Studies in Continuing Education*, 36(2), 275-289.
- Wildemeersch, D. & von Kotze, A. (2014). Multiple Interruptions. Creative Encounters in Public Art and Public Pedagogy: A North-South Dialogue. *Studies in Art Education*, 55(4), 313-327.
- Wildemeersch, D. (2019). What can we learn from art practices? Exploring new perspectives on critical engagement with plurality and difference in community art education. *International Journal for Art and Design Education*, 38(1), 168-181, DOI: 10.1111/Jade12168.