

Another Day in Paradise

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I. SECURITY IF YOU DON'T LET THE KIDS FUCK IN THE CAR YOU CANNOT SING HERE

In February 2014 I took part in a Karaoke night at CalArts. I am not a regular Karaoke performer but when I sing, I sing "Another Day in Paradise", this night was no exception.

Another day, for you and me – in Paradiiise, Para- Para – Para-dice.

I studied at CalArts as part of an exchange program that the government-funded highly overrated University of the Arts in Berlin (UdK) maintains with the highly overpriced poison "ivy league art school" California Institute of the Arts in Valencia, California. The Karaoke happened at Meghan Gordon's MFA studio, then an in-situ bar named some times, situated in the village of studio cells clustered at the north-eastern tip of the campus. It was already dark, students in front of the studio were drinking, the door a crack open shone a bright green line on their faces and into the courtyard. From there the lawn slopes down to the intersection where the public transport of Awesometown¹ stops running at 9pm and without a car you're trapped at school. Around the hill a tire deflation one-way spike strip is installed so that cars can only enter campus through the front entrance where they have to pass through a security checkpoint. The chrome-badged, pepperspray art school cop has trouble waking up from his First person shooter dreams into the reality of an actual law enforcement job. I received text messages from the CalArts emergency notification system on my mobile phone several times from incidents of highly profiled suspects on campus, of virus outbreaks, and threats. On the CalArts website you can read the Daily Crime Log of campus security²: "Campus Safety staff were dispatched to a report that a subject removed from property earlier was once again back on campus. The subject was confronted by Campus Safety staff and arrested for trespassing"³, or "Campus Safety officer discovered two students in a parked car in lot # 1. The students in the car were naked and engaged in an act of lewd conduct. The students were instructed to cease/desist and relocate".⁴

The Log must be kept by the school in compliance with the Cleary Act, passed in 1990, which the school must adhere to in order to participate in federal financial aid programs. Through the contract of financial support, the government encourages the school's security department to act like law enforcement. Hence the security guard mistakes itself for law enforcement, pretends to be, emulates one - its looks, its language, its tactics, and even its dissemination of paranoia. Relax though, this is still Paradise, this is not a new development in educational disciplinary organization. In Discipline and Punishment Foucault describes

how in the 19th century, the school system and disciplinary institutions had their very own penchant for developing surveillance, "para-law enforcement," and disciplinary court systems, which were more advanced than the actual law system. Although they assumed the logic of the civil code, they created a far more rigid version of normalizing rules - perhaps out of jealousy, out of competition with the actual civil code - a version ready to compete, to rival, and excel the existing civil code.⁵

In fact, the perpetual state of emergency established by the security department at the Disney-founded school contributed heavily to the horror high school atmosphere of the CalArts experience, which I enjoyed so much. Extended youth culture dog walks in white washed vault hallways; chia seeds spill in the cafeteria while the glidecam loses focus on backflipping skateboards tattooed on a forearm in the palm tree parking lot. The Karaoke night I attended was a response to the recent redevelopment of the security force. In 2013, campus safety began shutting down social gatherings and parties. These events mostly took place on Thursday evenings after the weekly opening receptions in the school's galleries. The parties, a particularly productive social interaction organized by students, were an unsanctioned extension of the Institution's curriculum. But the school seemed concerned with noise disturbances to neighbors and working students, as well as with underaged students drinking alcohol. When the Institution decided to repeatedly shut down parties by way of campus security, it not only didn't acknowledge the pedagogical value of unmonitored social interactions in an educational environment, it also aggressively reinforced the privatised quality of this very education.

II. SNACKS ARE A DOLLAR / TECATE IS FREE

I entered the studio, the thin room was drenched in green light from a neon-sign that read "some times", the bar itself ran parallel to the right wall occupying half of the space, at it drinkers=students=singers, a cowboy, parents, Charles Gaines. Above the door the projection of YouTube Karaoke songs. A microphone was passed around. Sam Shoemaker served drinks in a denim outfit, I sat at the bar and watched Vanessa Sioufi perform "Betty Davis Eyes." Taralyn Thomas performed "Everytime" by Britney Spears.

[I guess I need you Baby!](#)

The educatory model of CalArts' art program requires a presentation of work in the form of a solo exhibition in one of seven gallery spaces for each student during their last two years at school. A raffle at the beginning of the school year assigns a student to a gallery for one week of the year. Each Thursday 7 shows open at the same time. Visitors to the galleries are predominantly other students, but a large number of non-students visit. CalArts administration does not support the students financially or organisationally with these opening receptions, still the weekly shows are a substantial opportunity for the school to present itself. Does not send out invitations, does not sponsor drinks and food, quite the opposite makes the student complete a mountain of paperwork in order to offer the guests they invited themselves a free can of Tecate. Tuition for the 2016-2017 academic year was \$45.030.

CalArts main educational focus when evaluating a student appears to be these solo exhibitions, which essentially require a student to organize their practice into a kind of a simulation of a project-based format. Parallel to this effort, the system is organised around a wallet of collectable credit points that students can gain by taking seminars, critiques, and workshops. In keeping with the good tradition of gamification, it is up to each individual player to amass enough credit-point-coins to graduate to the next level. There are

also extra curricular, student-organised components to the educational structure like the visiting artist lecture series, critique clubs, film screenings, student political organisation groups, or more casual gatherings like open drawing. None of these structures, student and administration organised offerings alike, intend to teach or situate art teaching in a socially determined or otherwise experimental educatory context.

Similar to “real world” openings, people visit the campus to see the art, but also for social reasons. They come to support their friends, enjoy free drinks and snacks on the polished floors, socialize, and eventually party. With the gradual shutdown of these student-run parties, attendance at the Thursday openings ebbed immensely. In response to supposed noise complaints from on-campus housing, students moved their small dance parties away from the institution’s public space into semi-private indoor locations. Eventually those were also terminated. Meghan Gordon responded to the situation by transforming her studio for her last three months at CalArts into a bar where students could present work, congregate, drink, and party. Her studio-bar represented a structural gesture for a space and a form of presentation that contextualized the social aspect of student organised parties as integral to the educational system.

When it was my turn to choose a song, I didn’t have to think twice – I was slowly riding down the dark slide of poverty affectedness, social exploitation kitsch, despair of class struggle: a culture shock that no light of activism could ever penetrate and no glimpse of political change could ever realize!

o-o-o-oh LOOOARD, is there nothing more anybody can do?!

I became helplessness, I became bad conscience, I became #1 chart hit in the face of poverty porn.

III. Suggesting Emulation

The first time I remember singing the song was during Rundgang 2012 at UdK Berlin. I stood in my classroom, microphone in one hand and mop in the other, behind me an amphitheater of wooden bleachers decorated with satin bows and banners. Four of my co-students in the room mopping, collecting trash under the bright fluorescent lights. During a break from cleaning up the dirt from the day’s hundreds of visitors to my classroom, I felt a sudden hunger for karaoke and scanned YouTube for my song. By the end of the song the room had filled with a large crowd of people, lights off to a glittering night-time atmosphere, with at least 8 or more songs lined up in the browser tab bar projected on a large screen. After 20 minutes of passionate singing, performing, drawing the last of the visitors in the school to our room, at the height of the excitement we stopped the karaoke, lectern back to center stage, crowd corralled to the bleachers, there and then we proceeded to host what was probably the finest art auction thriller in the history of Berlin. At the climax of which we sold an Olafur Eliasson print to the bidding team of Leon Kahane and Leon Eisermann, who worked together to outbid their rivals.

University of the Arts Berlin organizes Rundgang, a presentation of all its fine arts classes (about 20) at the end of the school year, alongside the final exhibition of the graduating Meister students in the main gallery, a concept customary throughout art schools in Germany.⁶ All classes, all students present work to the public during this long weekend of open house art school. As opposed to the CalArts structure of weekly solo exhibitions, which mimic the commercial gallery system with its openings, drinks, networking, and receptions, UdK creates a context for an educatory model that is in many ways suggestive of an art fair, including expensive trash-food stalls, brass bands, high security, long waiting lines, and an opportunity for

the Dean to host high-profile guests from the senate and the art world. Gallerists and well-to-do visitors buy work from painters, while sculptors get drunk at a huge party the night of the opening. Many classes use this opportunity to raise their class budget by hosting parties in their classrooms in order to sell booze.

For the 2012 edition of Rundgang my co-students and I developed a proposal for the lensbased class of Hito Steyerl. The Trader House Rules was a turbo-capitalist bartering game turned participatory art installation that would contextualize and emphasize the art fair character of Rundgang. Students in my class were fed up with exhibiting their work in a commercial format and were interested in developing a presentation structure that would be open to the other students at the school.⁷ For four consecutive days visitors to our classroom could trade any object with other players. Each trade made was contractually recorded and awarded with points. The traders with the highest points/most trades were placed at the top of a privilege pyramid, a specially designated section of the college-sport-bleachers, and received perks, food, massages, etc. like only a Facebook employee would. Even money. The art auction format was used to exhibit student work, as well as to generate money, which was distributed in equal percentages to the class, the artist, and the privileged few with the highest points in the game. Each day of the event consisted of approximately 6 game cycles alternating between trade mode and auction mode, but the climax of The Trader House Rules most certainly was the Friday night karaoke auction.

"The heat is on, the muscles are tight!"

An emulator is known in the context of computation as a piece of software or hardware that has the ability to simulate an operating system in order to run applications that can't run on a computer. Emulation is primarily used in gaming culture to run console games on computers, say to play a SEGA cartridge game on a computer with a UNIX operating system. An emulator pretends to be a different environment in order to make a game playable outside of its originally intended context.

I find the term emulation to be productive when describing my participatory practice. I am interested in contextualizing a structure, in this case the Rundgang, an art-school-art-fair, by running various equivalent structures on its system, in this case a bartering-competition game and an art auction. Sets of potential cartridges to be inserted into a foreign operating system can take all shapes and forms as long as they run on the defining structure of that system. For each participant the emulator proposes a different gaming experience, that relates back to the larger structure. For the sausage and pretzel visitor who came to the fairground to have fun, The Trader House Rules proposed a trading platform, that transformed their accumulated privilege points into a brand new haircut. For the student whose work was ceremoniously walked through the room by the white gloves of the auctioneer, it proposed a transformation of their contribution - a common good - into euro bills payed out to the winesopping pedicured trading elite. For the any-gallerist-what-ever who came to spot a bargain, it proposed an intermediary value system that restricted their access to student artworks .

Emulation has an alternative definition that I find interesting in relation to the educational structures i have experienced. Michael Tomassello, a developmental psychologist, related the term emulation to his work with chimpanzees who can learn from each other not only by simulating or copying behavior, but also by observing the results of each other's behavior.⁸ Through this process chimpanzees learn about the affordances of a tool used in a process or gain a broader fundamental understanding of relationships between objects in an environment without having to complete the task themselves. Emulation is thus considered a

form of observational learning, a trait of education so to speak. Both CalArts and UdK emulate systems of art distribution - commercial gallery openings and art fairs - each replicating neo-liberal narratives of art production and art distribution for the purpose of offering their students a professional context for their art practices. Through experiencing the results of each other's practices, students gain an understanding of tactics employed within these systems, which can be then be utilized affirmatively, critically, ironically, or on other planes. But they are always the point of reference in relation to which the art student simply has to produce and present work in order to receive a degree.

Which tools are not suggested through these educational structures? Art Schools are not the commercial art world. Of course they depend on economic organization, but nevertheless they are their own systems, with their own particular production economies, histories, and conditions of presentation and distribution of art works. Art Schools should take responsibility for the fact that they are artistic environments in their own regard, with the ability to critically challenge models existing outside of art school. Accordingly they should design their educatory models to be more reflective of the multiplicities of artistic environments other than the commercial art world. An Institution's decision to imitate the commercial art world must be understood to have political as well as economic incentives. As a student at these institutions I have learned more about the conditions of educational structures than I have about the conditions of art production. In fact I found them interlocked and ideologically structured in such a way that it seemed impossible to produce work without becoming aware of this correspondence.

some times derived its structure in response to an educational device present at CalArts - the post-opening reception party. A device not intended by the administration to be extra-curricular in any sense not even intended as such by the students who organised them. A familiar game cloned and running on the same system as the one it referenced: students could use the space like a gallery, mirroring any of the other galleries hosting opening receptions on Thursday nights, while contextualizing it with the cartridges for "after party", for "bar", for "lecture", for "karaoke". some times became a marker of the educational quality of this invisible device lost to security concerns.

The schools emulate the art world, the students emulate the educatory model, the security guards emulate the police, the karaoke singer emulates the pop star. I will excel him, vie with him, rival Phil Collins. As I am inserting the cartridge labeled another day in paradise I become Top 40. This stage, this microphone, these fans are not considering learning as a goal oriented endeavor.

¹ In 2010 the town of valencia used billboards with the title “Just another day in ... Awesome-town” as marketing slogan for a real estate campaign .

<http://articles.latimes.com/2010/sep/23/business/la-fi-0920-awesometown-20100920>

² <https://www.CalArts.edu/campus/safety/reports>

³ <https://www.trakal.net/pdf/DCL1-8-16.pdf>

⁴ <https://www.trakal.net/pdf/DCL3-27-16.pdf>

⁵ Foucault, Michel. (1995) *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Part 3.2 - Normalizing Judgement

⁶ Rundgang is a system that was introduced to UdK Berlin by way of a Student in the 1990s, Gunda Foerster who imported the system from the Kunstakademie in Düsseldorf, a renowned art school with a more than two hundred year old history. In Düsseldorf and most of the art schools in Germany, the teaching system was organised in Meister-classes centered around one teacher (the master), who's working methods a student studied to acquire. The classes were exclusive and studio production was intentionally hidden from the public. Once a year the classes opened their studios to other students from parallel classes in an in-house exchange of their work. By the 70s the school had gained fame through art star teachers and alumni as well as through the notorious educational environment of Joseph Beuys's class. Beuys taught at the Akademie from 1961 to 1972. In 1972 he was dismissed after he organised a protest with several students and rejected applicants. They occupied the secretaries office protesting the admission procedures. That same year Norbert Kricke, a conservative teacher at the school, became the new Direktor and the administration decided to open its yearly presentations to the public, no doubt an act of public relations and marketing. Berlin introduced the system in the 90s. At first organised by students of the Freie Klasse, a student run fine art class, that had lost its professor to job-cuts. The class went on to protest; they demanded to self-manage the supposed reabsorbed salary. Rundgang at UdK began as a student organised event with a political intention until, inspired by the immense turnout of visitors, the administration of UdK commenced to “help” the students organise the event into today's gigantic, highly advertised, all departments encompassing marketing celebration of the Institution.

⁷ the organisation team consisted primarily of Till Witter, Boaz Levin, Gian Luigi Scarpa and Kristof Trakal but the workload was shared by the entire lens-based class at the time of summer semester 2012

⁸ Tomasello, M., Davis-Dasilva, M., Camak, L. & Bard, K. A.

1987 Observational learning of tool-use by young chimpanzees.