

Art Education: The making of alternatives?

Sue Breakell, University of Brighton

Gavin Butt, University of Sussex

Matthew Cornford, University of Brighton

Naomi Salaman, University of Brighton

Modern forms of art education have variously created world-making environments for staff and students to envisage, conceptualise and create alternatives to dominant aesthetic, social and political forms. From the Bauhaus to Hornsey College, and Black Mountain to Dartington, art education has acted as a laboratory for social and political, as well as artistic, change. In the UK, from the countercultural 1960s to the anti-Thatcherite '80s, change has come from students being afforded time and liberty to act at a remove from capitalist imperatives of paid employment – even from the constraints of pedagogy itself – or from direct engagement with radical teaching content: experimental studio briefs, placement activities or critical theory.

But, building on the work of Left-theorist Mark Fisher, we ask: Are art schools in neoliberal times still potent sites for the incubation of alternative political possibility? Or have they become tamed by the marketised imperatives of competition and of audit culture? Have students become more conservative upon becoming consumers of their own education? Or is asking such questions only to describe the different conditions of alternative world-making in art school today?

This session addresses such questions with reference to radical histories of regional UK art education, to the urban and rural politics of independent institutions, and to inter-generational artist's workshops and the policies of school-level study.

Speakers and Abstracts

What Happens *Before* Art School: The state of the arts in compulsory state education

Sophie Frost (University of Leicester / De Montfort University)

This paper considers the vital legacy of British art schools in view of the decreasing value placed on the arts in the compulsory UK school sector, for those aged 5 to 18. Since Michael Gove's time as Secretary of State at the Department of Education (DfE) (2010–14), vast swathes of changes – including new standardised measures and shortfalls in school funding – have accelerated a shift in how the arts are valued across the entire national curriculum.

The first half of the paper takes a whirlwind tour through the more complex elements of the crisis: assessing the rise of the 'core knowledge' curriculum, changes to assessment in primary schools, the reform of GCSEs leading to the cultivation of the EBacc, the introduction of Progress 8 as well as university 'preferred' vs. 'non-preferred' subjects (all of which indicate a return to a Victorian tradition of learning, with its systematic focus on 'the three R's': wRiting, Reading and aRithmetic). The second half of the paper then considers the critical bequest of art schools in light of these factors, drawing upon key historical examples to propose that the spirit of art school must be used to promote a radical new policy for the keyholders of the DfE. This must be a policy prepared to take a leap into the unknown; one which learns from artistic practice to be open to failure; that moves beyond grade boundaries and restrictive assessments towards experimentalism and practices of learning motivated by independent discovery as much as collective curiosity.

'Not London': Art school magazines, conceptual art and the Newport Group

Louisa Lee (University of York)

The student magazines produced in British art schools in the 1970s provided an integral space for dialogue from student to student or from student to teacher, demonstrating a form of generational intersubjectivity through networks rather than hierarchical transmission of knowledge. In this paper, I argue that the content

of these magazines were not radically different from those produced in the 1960s as both were based on a commitment to dialogue. Rather, art school magazines in the 1970s enacted a discursive, or recursive relationship to these earlier magazines, which saw their sites and contexts change rather than their ideologies. This dissemination mirrored a larger relationship of 1960s to 1970s art, yet it was the site of the art school magazine where it was most evident. For this dissemination and dialogue, I argue, the site of the magazine was integral. This paper explores a group of students producing *Art-Language*-inspired publications in the early 1970s at Newport College of Art in South Wales, provisionally and retrospectively called *The Newport Group* and concludes by looking to the magazines *Ratcatcher*, *Issue* and *Ostrich*, which were produced in the mid-1970s out of Hull College of Art, Nottingham Trent and the Royal College of Art respectively. I argue that an alternative definition of the continuation and development of conceptual art practice in Britain from the 1960s through to the 1970s can be traced through the plurality of voices identified in these student publications.

Art School for Rebel Girls: Feminist pedagogies, practices and histories in Leeds

Elsbeth Mitchell (Loughborough University)

Gill Park (University of Leeds/ Newcastle University)

In this paper we explore the example of *Art School for Rebel Girls*, a project that we developed and produced for Leeds-based arts organisation Pavilion. Inspired by Pavilion's feminist beginnings as the UK's first women's photography centre, founded in 1983 by graduates from the Department of Fine Art at the University of Leeds, which taught young women in its immediate community to make photographs at a time when the means of production was otherwise unavailable to them, *Art School for Rebel Girls* draws on feminist pedagogical practices for creative workshops for 13–15 year-old girls in two inner-city Leeds schools, leading to an intensive summer school bringing the girls together with other artists and curators, forming a collective inter-generational working group. Testing out alternatives to the national curriculum and traditional art classes in school, *Art School for Rebel Girls* also engages with the historical intersection of art education, representation and feminist practices of working, learning and being together. Using the questions and problems raised by this Pavilion project in conversation with Pavilion's feminist history in Leeds, we attempt to theorise a practice of 'looking back' as a way to 'look forward' to situate this as a crucial dimension of feminist politics oriented toward transformation.

New Conditions

Matthew Noel-Tod (University of Brighton)

In October 2018, artists Matthew Noel-Tod and David Panos founded Conditions, a one-year low-cost studio programme for artists. Conditions is based in Croydon and was set up in response to the increasing cost of both studio space and higher education for artists in London. The programme has 13 artists enrolled for the first year and it has a group of Associates who provide regular input. The programme gives 24/7 access to studio space and structured critical conversations to develop each artist's work as well as encouraging collaboration and collective work on exhibitions and events. The educational framework for Conditions is informed by an awareness of the network and history of studio based, or independent, art and design study programmes worldwide and in response to the conditions of art education in UK higher education today. Examples of existing and former programmes include, Whitney Independent Study Programme, New York, Ashkal Alwan Home Workspace Program, Beirut, Werplaats Typografie, Arnhem, Lux Associate Artists Programme, London and Open School East, Margate. Conditions aims to be focused on the studio space, production and exhibition, to be critically engaged and to have the flexibility of a DIY approach. The programme seeks to avoid the inherent competitiveness of award-bearing university courses and does not require specific educational qualifications to apply, although most participants have completed some prior higher education. The project proposes sharing knowledge as a central resource and seeks to push aesthetic questions on the current notion and conditions of 'contemporary art'.

'Event as an alternative institution': Pedagogising performance at Cardiff College of Art 1968–1973
Heike Roms (University of Exeter)

In 1969, a group of young lecturers and students at Cardiff College of Art (CCA) initiated a 'study group' with the intention of making performance works together. Inspired by the occupation of Hornsey the previous year, the group approached performance as 'an alternative institution' within which students and teachers would take equal share in 'the development of a real state of learning'. The group launched the increasing pedagogisation of performance art at Cardiff, which first led to regular performance workshops for fine art students ('Action/Ideas'); then to public sharings in the form of performative 'symposia' staged at the National Museum of Wales; and finally to the establishment in 1973 of the 'Alternative Studies' department at CCA (later renamed 'Third Area' and then 'Time-based Art'), making Cardiff one of the first art schools in Britain that offered a dedicated provision for performance. In this paper I will trace the pedagogical address to performance art at Cardiff between the late 1960s to the mid-1970s. My particular interest lies in exploring what became of the promise of forging alternative learning relationships as performance became progressively incorporated into the institutional teaching structures at CCA. I will also consider the long-term legacy of this work for the college on the one hand and the UK's live art scene on the other. The paper will draw on archival records such as teaching plans, workshops notes and documentation of student work, as well as oral history interviews and workshop reconstructions I conducted.

'The very grass roots of democracy': Self-sufficiency as settler spatiality at Black Mountain College
Arabella Stanger (University of Sussex)

Between 1937 and 1941, the population of Black Mountain College came together to make its own campus: a settlement of buildings for learning and living constructed upon a waterside site named Lake Eden. Having set itself since 1933 amid the sprawling hills of western North Carolina, the College's self-identification as an incubator for alternative ways of living was located not only in its pedagogic and artistic experimentalisms but also in practices of utopian residency that forged a domestic culture of self-sufficiency. The construction of the Lake Eden site represents the apex of the Black Mountain's DIY practice, for over this period the College's construction as a physical site became its enactment as a cultural institution: a place where faculty and students would literally build a democratic life together.

In this paper, I problematise the political ideals underpinning Black Mountain's material world-making by framing the construction of the Lake Eden site as a practice of settler spatiality. I consider the actions and economies of this construction project in relation to intellectual histories of American libertarianism, which, in turn, permit a reading of Black Mountain's utopianism as one bound up with liberal fantasies of property, land, and social alterity. While the College has so often provided a historic model for pedagogic experiments orientated towards an emancipatory sociality, its self-made environment, I argue, should be thought of as one in which indigenous styles of inhabitation are both physically absented and figuratively marshalled to position the white institution inside an extra-political space of pure possibility.