

NAFAE Proposal

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Approaching Alternative Organisation

Abstract

This paper draws on a wider body of research, which is directed towards gaining a more nuanced understanding of arts institutions with a view to re-conceptualising their organisational structures. In this paper the social theories of communities of practice are used to explore and conceptualise the complexity of the interaction between Higher Education institutions and self-organised artist-run institutions. Communities of practice can be summarised as groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly (Wenger, E. 1998). This learning that takes place is not necessarily intentional and this is significant as it recognises how activities that may normally be considered co-curricular can construct the curriculum in H.E. arts institutions. This paper analyses how communities of practice can form across institutions, in particular between H.E. arts institutions and self-organised artists-run initiatives. It considers methods of organising holistic and integrated learning, an approach that is legible and negotiated within artistic communities, particularly with self-organised artists-run institutions. It argues that through these trans-institutional communities of practice we are approaching alternative organisation and generating new forms of engagement and institutional structuring.

This research is in part prompted by the broader reflexive inquiry into alternative models of arts institutions that has reemerged in the past ten years. This has ranged from analyses of *Institutions by Artists* (Khonsary, J. 2012) to the emergence of 'open art schools' such as Open School East, London. These analyses have sought to challenge institutional orthodoxies and to expand the tightly governed curricula of regulated pedagogies. Significantly these developments have also highlighted the need to reassess the systems of value within H.E. arts institutions and to examine their role in the democratisation of power within their organisational structures and activities. This paper demonstrates how communities of practice can provide the model for negotiating this organisational turn that sees a shift from hierarchical to self-organised models of organisation.

This paper goes on to challenge H.E. institutions' emphasis on valuing personal ontologies and the assumption of learning as internalization. Specifically it articulates the ways we can advance institutional transformation so that collective ontologies are prioritised and that the boundaries of disciplines and the hierarchies of the tutor/student relationship are relinquished through

communities of practice. This recognizes a relational view of the student/tutor and learning that is both experiential and situated. The aim is to blur the separation between art practice and art pedagogy and to demonstrate how communities of practice offers a useful perspective about learning as a process of social participation.

References

Khonsary, J. & Podesva K.L. (eds) (2012) *Institutions by Artists: Volume One*. Canada: Phillip Folio Series C

Wenger, E. (1998) Communities of Practice: Learning as a Social System. In: *The Systems Thinker*. Vol. 9, No. 5, June