

NAFAE conference proposal. The Hidden Curriculum.

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**Territories of Practice and The Fall of the Studio.**

Expanding space for risk, collaboration and agency.

The paper I presented at PARADOX '15 explored the role of assessment within the fine art curriculum. I outlined the development of a pass/fail unit at Chelsea entitled Territories of Practice. Citing previous models and approaches, the paper asked what might replace assessment as arguably the most powerful aspect of a student's learning experience if attainment of a grade is removed as an outcome of a unit of study. I asked what aspects of a fine art educational experience might be most precious, but which might have previously been described as hidden. These emphasised potential for experimentation, risk taking, participation and collaboration. The paper described how the unit attempted to highlight these aspects to ensure they are visible and forefronted within the fine art curriculum.

For the NAFAE conference I propose to develop the PARADOX paper by discussing the relationship between generating space for risk and experimentation within the curriculum to new approaches to the organisation of physical studio space. Identifying the conceptual and material context within which students work on our cross-disciplinary programme goes hand in hand with providing agency for students to decide the way space is used. My paper will again consider how *process*, both the process of making art and the educational experience, might be emphasised over *product*, which could be understood as either the finished artwork or the grade achieved.

The Fall of the Studio, Artists at Work, *'questions the many assumptions underlying popular and international discussions of the so-called post-studio era'*. (Davidts and Paice, 2009) My paper will cite arguments presented in this book, acknowledging that studio space in art schools requires a re-think. I will argue that accepted wisdom and conventions about the organisation of studios (and perpetuated by some of the recent alternative models of art education) may no longer be fit for purpose.

Increased numbers studying Fine Art at University brings about pressure on space and, in particular, pressure on providing individual studio space. I will argue that erosion of the emphasis on the individual within the physical space of the studio, far from being negative, is appropriate to the way the studio is being re-thought by contemporary artists.

At Chelsea, discussion between staff, students, alumni and studio providers has resulted in the formation of an evolving set of principles and guidelines<sup>1</sup> for the use of

studio space. These principles acknowledge that the main function of the studio is to support discourse where a strong, critical community of artists can be developed. As such our approach to the studio symbolises the philosophy of the Fine Art course - identifying and declaring the art school's function.

I will expand on some of the principles. In particular I will focus on the ambition that our approach to studio organisation provides a blueprint for how artists might operate after college. The flexible, collaborative approach to space, which privileges discourse and develops communities of artists, provides a sustainable model for graduates. At a time when individual studio space is unaffordable (in London) this is an approach that can enable continuing practice after art school. The paper will argue that this approach provides a model that can help to maintain the vitality of London at a time when high property values and escalating rents put potential for artistic and other cultural production, and its associated social benefits, in jeopardy.

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## **1 Fine Art at Chelsea – Studio Space**

### **The Principles**

1. The studio space is the most important learning environment for a Fine Art student.
2. The studio's main function is to support discourse and the exchange of ideas.
3. The studio should be a space where you can take risks with practice and experiment & a space where mistakes can be made in public.
4. Students should feel a sense of shared ownership of the studio space; when students refer to 'my studio' this should mean the whole of a space/room rather than an individual portion.
5. The studio space needs to be as flexible as possible to allow space to be maximised and to reflect the needs (often changing) of each student's practice; ambitions should not be limited by the nature of the space.
6. The studio should foster communities that might become a blueprint for setting up sustainable, affordable studio collectives after college.
7. The studio should not be a space to hoard material in individual areas for long periods of time; work should be made, photographed, discussed or assessed (by tutors or students) and then removed.
8. Furniture should be used as sparingly as possible & if everyone has their own table and chair the spaces become full. This reduces the amount of space for making work and discussing ideas.
9. The studio space should be a safe working environment.

### **Guidelines for the organisation of studios**

1. Wall space should remain as free as possible – if tables are in the middle of spaces students will work while facing each other, opening up the potential for discourse to take place. If tables are against the wall students are likely to work facing the wall, cutting off the potential for group discourse.
2. Each room should have areas that reflect the needs of students' practices, e.g. a large wall to make paintings or a desk area for laptop work.
3. Each studio should have an area designated for discussion – a table or a collection of chairs, perhaps including sofas.
4. Decisions about the best use of a studio should be based around the discussion of work and decided by the student groups.
5. Storage should be addressed collectively across the year group. The storage spaces are primarily for lockers and furniture to allow the studios to be cleared as needed.