

Art School Today: Who cares? (Wolverhampton, 25–29 Jun 18)

Wolverhampton School of Art, Jun 25–29, 2018

Deadline: May 31, 2018

Christian Mieves

Art School Today: Who Cares? Developing a Culture of Care within a Disembodied Institution

Fine Art programmes have been increasingly embedded into large HE providers and forced to operate on restricted, generic, fragmented teaching models shaped by managerialism. As result, a division of services prevent students and staff from developing a meaningful relationship to the course and subject. Responding to an intensified economic crisis and academic demands around success, 'clamorous individualism' seems to eclipse any consideration for community, the other or one's own well-being. Indeed, the 'academic turn' in art education since the 1980s (Elkins, 2018, X) correlates with a putative lack and inability to think and talk together: 'Splitting up of institutions, courses into modules, showing a lack of communication, link, institutional structures that do not allow any identification, nor do they have often a direct personal line for communication for reasons of efficiency' (Isaacs, 1999).

This 'high performance culture' within the current educational system effaces any sense of care or 'indebtedness' to the other, yet this seems essential within art education. As curator Jan Verwoert argues: 'To practice a politics of dedication and recognise an indebtedness to the other as the condition of your own ability to perform means to acknowledge the importance of care' (2007, 99).

Students may learn 'to care' for the other through material practice or engagement with a wider community. This notion of encounter and accommodation of the other is evident in Thomas Hirschhorn's description of his relationship to material: '[...] to place it above everything else, to work with it in awareness, and it means to be insistent with it. I love the material because I decided in favour of it – therefore I do not want to replace it' (Thomas Hirschhorn 'Doing art politically: What does this mean?' (2008)). However, it has become increasingly difficult to engage students in a community of practice that does not simply reflect their own social networks or familiar approaches to practice as financial restraints result in more localized student cohorts and limited opportunities to experience material working.

While overt individualistic approaches seem imposed by the modern neo-liberal, career driven agenda, forms of collectivist notions (such as Black Mountain College) seem equally unsuitable. Finding ourselves in a 'post-collectivist and post-individualist' situation, the challenge is, as Eagleton has argued, 'to imagine new forms of belonging, which in our kind of world are bound to be multiple rather than monolithic (Eagleton 2003, 21). The close relationship between belonging,

being and becoming, as a pedagogical concern, shows the need to identify with (and to care for) a place in order for it to become a meaningful learning environment (Peer and Fleers 2013). Moreover, 'belonging' refers essentially to different beings, and implicitly to the prospect of a 'togetherness' or identity according to which different beings are located.

Based on this notion of 'togetherness' we wish to ask what role does care and community still have in a modern art school within a large HEI.

Possible topics:

- The value or translation of 'care' in practice
- the role of the artist's studio in particular the importance of 'care' from a multidisciplinary perspective (including, but not limited to artistic practitioners, art theorists, curators, cultural geographers).
- Care and community as a subversive idea within higher education
- Creating the conditions for (art) communities to flourish
- Can you teach someone to care?
- When do you stop caring? Is it ok to care?
- to what extent the teaching of skills (and care) through 'dirty' Fine Art practice (painting, sculpture, printmaking) ironically becomes a subversive activity for staff and students in today's art schools.

Please submit abstracts of up to 250 words for either a presentation or a proposal for practice-based work to: Christian.Mieves@wlv.ac.uk

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Successful contributors will be informed by 5 June 2018.

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For further information please see the project website:
<http://fineartwolverhampton.co.uk/dirtypractice/>

Reference:

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