

## **Appendix 23\_OS Liverpool, Art School Alternatives.**

Event: 'ART SCHOOL ALTERNATIVES' Symposium at  
Liverpool John Moore's University  
Title: Liverpool, Art School Alternatives, Responses  
Type: Online Editable Document  
Category: Post Event Open Discussion/ Proposition / Journal  
Date: 7 Oct 2010  
  
Contributors: \_OS

On Thursday 7th October 2010

\* \_Open School (as it was then called)  
attended the 'ART SCHOOL ALTERNATIVES'  
Symposium at Liverpool John Moore's  
University .

These are some reactions:

## 0. The Art School: adapt it, alternatives, or destruction?

### 1. Why are we satisfied with so little?

#### 1.1. or, why weren't students as angry in October as they became in November?

There were a few points at which people stated that we should be looking at the positives of the current situation, and that it is a surprise that Fine Art education exist *at all*; that we should be grateful that this is the case. Do we have any sympathy with this view? It can be accused of the general left failure over the past 30 years, that of always being reactive, and retreating almost constantly with the lack of self-confidence typical of the wounded.

[And of course assuming that all art students are left-leaning is a bit excessive: they may be radical conservatives.]

Whilst one might feel *personally/in principle* that it's good art education exists in any form, that *at the very least* it is better than nothing, this is no platform for political/social/artistic engagement/activism. Such a basis will not convince anyone of anything. **Activism needs to be founded - and this is at a very basic level! - on BELIEVING THAT WHAT IS BEING ASKED FOR IS WORTH HAVING! If we believe that art - in the widest possible sense - is an indispensable part of life/society/politics, then that's what we need to argue for!**

As someone stated in the panel discussion: "The more manure there is the faster the seed will grow", followed by "if you had a really good art school you'd have really boring artists". This perpetuates the stereotype as the 'starving artist' as a 'successful artist' and inevitably leads to an acceptance and

compliance rather than radicalism or revolution. Also: is it worth it? The defense of Capitalism is that it brings great benefits, but the corollary of this is that it also creates great destruction.

## 2. If we have a radical practise, how do we make it resistant to infection (marks, professionalization, co-options of all sorts)

Collaboration, interdisciplinary, entrepreneurship, peer-learning. These are all techniques and tactics that can be deployed by any movement: how do we create or personalise these techniques in a way that is resistant to co-option by external value-systems.

So what do we value then and how do we make it happen?

## 3. Are decisions ever made on a 'purely' economic basis?

Or/and

Economics almost always include ideological positions, so I would suggest not. How about even 'principally' economic bases?

-I feel this question needs a reference point: Are we talking about a potential student's decision to go or not to (art) school? Are we talking about the decisions of an institution within their curriculum or overall structures? Are we talking about the political justifications for the recent budget cuts? Are we talking about the decisions of makers and artists (whether students or not) about their own practice or lifestyle?

## 4. Isn't there a qualitative difference between student-led, student-organised, student-run and student-initiated?

What about being anti-student/teacher/school? Surely there is a contradiction in a 'student-led school', it is the image of the school without the function of a school: unless we are re-capturing the idea of what a school is as an organisation of peers that is self-organised, rather than an institution that contains teachers as well as students.

We should be careful to distinguish between the socially constructed meaning/use of teachers/students and any definitions we might have or might exist outside of the traditional western educational model. Teaching, learning, studying in and of themselves are interesting and useful ideas and techniques, but the hierarchical system at present is not but is it not a nature of the roles played here that means a hierarchy emerges? We should also take note of how much teachers are co-opted/disenfranchised by current

Commented [1]: On a slightly off-note, taking the manure statement very literally, I believe it contradicted what we learned in the Grow Your Own Grub course about what makes good dirt - :) GOOD. I think we need to contradict this concept that 'the best art is made by the starving artist'.

education policies - though is this sympathy with abusers warranted? Yes. In School the people who are given the role 'Teacher' are in fact an agent of the state. Teachers aren't given free reign to do as they please- students are taught that ultimately authority rests with the state, its rules, it's assessments and learning requirements. See 'education is a duty'.

### 5. Aren't schools about a transfer of knowledge?

Or is the outcome to have done something, rather than to achieve something? You can only certificate outcomes or obedience, and therefore you need an outcome-orientated (atomised) system of education. Instead we want to be process-orientated. However there are problems with the politics of processes - the processes are equally controlled by externalities and subjectivising forces.

Flinching slightly at the "transfer of knowledge" phrasing in part as now "knowledge transfer managers" are creeping into the structures to seize on outstanding research and partner findings with existing corporations or industry to be "furthered" or instrumentalised.

I agree, 'transfer of knowledge' is equally problematic, because it requires some sort of medium within which to transfer (who controls that medium?) and it implies some sort of outcome. The phrasing above is difficult, but I wish to argue for *at least* a process organised system of study, but then, who is the process designed to help?

Design as well may be a problematic term from the management arsenal. Perhaps if the goal is to empower citizens to self manage then the sinister nature of knowledge being instrumentalised can be neutralised. The main concern about instrumentalisation is the knowledge becomes hidden and secret not accessible and so the process we are looking for must enable transparency, a mode of blind wiki, where synthesis precedes analysis and in doing design and structure emerge.

I've been wondering about the very process/experience of education/learning. Can we use a strategic valorisation of the very act of learning, by burrowing into it and interrogating it? Can we achieve things by a sort of stubborn refusal to even contemplate outcomes? "Just say

no" (!) - Can we retain some sort of fidelity to the "idea of the university" ?

**Maybe we will see whether the Student Protest tactic (of shouting no**

no no) will get them anywhere.

Alternatives must actually *be of alterity*: we have to 'culturally other' be engaged in a cultural othering of ourselves, in the sense of 'culturally destroying' ourselves

Isn't learning about (unbounded) exploration?  
Shouldn't schools be about learning?

6. Is learning an 'encounter with something previously unknown' or 'becoming capable of seeing the previously unseeable.' Can education be shown, or must it be found? The way this question is framed perhaps answers the question itself. Note the difference between the question above and the following question: "Can education be taught, or must it be shown?"

7. "Being an extension of an institution is the most a (self-organised) group can hope to achieve" -  
(paraphrased from comments in the Round Table Discussion and throughout the symposium)

Within this statement is a discussion of the relationship between the 'status quo' and the 'alternative', counter/cultures ... The way the language is constructed about movements other than dominant structures which illustrate such things as 'alter' 'counter' 'anti' or 'non' in relation to the norm create a binary situation in which the existence of one is dependent on the other.

How "symbiotic" or interdependent is one to the other?

Marx and/or Maybe Lukacs would say that everything is interrelated, and symbiotic - it flows, with slightly stickier and slightly harder areas, but it is a slide rather than a break (Barthes). Of course, we have to create ideological antagonisms and extremes in order to act - the differences have to be *pointed*<sup>(out)</sup>, or they are not useful tools/abstractions for actions.

'Children of the metropolis, we offer this wager: that it's on the most profound deprivation of existence, perpetually stifled, perpetually conjured away, that the possibility of true communism resides'

The action to be taken on your antagonism is not to do the opposite to what it does. how about:

**“An insurrection within an institution is the most a (self-organised) group can hope to achieve” but after it has started...**

or, surely, once the insurrection has begun, the institution is invalid(?) Once the population refuses to recognize forms of implicit/tacit governance then the result will be violence from the institution to bring them back into line. You can disobey a court, but they will still put you in prison.

Or/and that

## **8. or/post/maybe-- How do we avoid becoming ‘elitist’ again.**

There is a major problem in that what we might perceive as ‘technical language’ is seen as ‘elitist’. Practically, if the language is not understood, then it is exclusive. If we wish to retain some terms, or engage with them, we have to find a method of inclusion :

1. could this be cyclical in nature: ie we have a monthly ‘breakdown’ and ‘break-up’. We go back to first principles with the new moon and then re-adopt and re-adapt terms. People can jump on the carousel/bigwheel when it stops/hits the ground, and rides as far around as they want and/or can before returning to the ground to begin again.
2. Group cultures will always be a problem. Non-verbal communication is always a way to break this up, but the intimacy of these forms can also be exclusionary.

## **9. This**

Or/and that

## **10. This**

Or/and that

## **11. This**

Or/and that

Review from Islington Mill Art Academy member

## Art School Alternatives

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A Corridor8 Symposium

Liverpool John Moores' University

7th October 2010

### A School Trip

Last November three members of [Islington Mill Art Academy](#), including myself, traveled Northwards to Glasgow in order to attend, and take part in a series of workshops organised by [Open School](#) (\_O.S) as part of the tenth annual *Instal* Festival. Given our status as an alternative art school organisation, and rather academically referential title, I like to consider our visit to be a kind of school trip.

*Instal* is an experimental music and sound festival, organised by *AKA*. For this tenth edition of *Instal* the aim was to present not just a festival of experimental music, but an experimental festival - challenging the conventional structure of a music festival, and exploring the dynamic between audience and performer. Improvisation and the denial of the subjectivity of the artist were central concerns. Nowhere was this explored with more dedication than within the *evacuation of the great learning* workshops, run by \_OS. which we had been invited to take part in.

A number of individuals who had been partaking in \_OS prior to *Instal* met with O1, and O2 to discuss what form these workshops would take. O1 is a philosophy faculty member at the American University of Beirut, and an proponent of *speculative realism*, Whilst O2 is a musician/sound-artist exploring the anti-capitalist and revolutionary potential of improvisation, who also performed at *Instal*. They had been looking to the improvisational work of Cornelius Cardew, particularly *The Great Learning* as performed by The Scratch Orchestra (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XNCI3u-Wan0>) and, as such, the concept of a graphic score was prevalent, along with a somewhat confrontational approach to the notion of a workshop.

Just as *Instal* as a whole was seeking to interrogate the notion of an experimental music festival, so these workshops denied many of the expectations which the term *workshop* evokes. An Intense, sometimes unpleasant, and sometimes highly enjoyable experience for the participants, *evacuation of the great learning* certainly lead us three from the I.M.A.A to question our approach to meeting, learning and making.

At \_OS HQ when I arrived the participating non-leaders were busy accumulating objects for making noise and could serve as props for the workshop. These were, however, in the end mostly ignored. Setting up the space before any participants arrived we began by arranging chairs into a large circle, the traditional method of seating a group so that theoretically everyone has equal power. However, we soon realized that in such a large group (around 50 participants were signed up to attend) the massive circular space would only intimidate some, and encourage others. With this in mind we rearranged the chairs messily; facing each other, back to back, upside down and every which way around the room. At first participants took chairs and sat amongst each other, however soon the group had organised themselves into the giant oval which we had initially rejected. Some of the participants became frustrated and demanded that 'something be done!', others were happy to quietly sit and listen, yet others still actively tried to avoid any action; certain \_OS-ers notably 'striking' when plans and alliances began to form. From the beginning of the very first workshop every single action which was taken by anyone was interrogated, questioned and denied, and the suffocating lack of action which this entailed surely contradicted many expectations of an 'improv workshop'.

On the first night *evacuation of the great learning* had failed in almost every respect, if it were to be judged as a traditional workshop; engagement had been nigh on impossible, after all what was there to engage with? Confusion and frustration reigned, and it is doubtful that anybody left feeling creatively empowered. However, in interrogating the notion of 'a workshop' and in exploring boundary-less improvisation it was judged to be a success. Those members of the \_OS

who were there, along with O1 and O2 endeavoured to play a minimal role, denying their subjectivity and status as workshop leaders and arts practitioners. Travelling to Glasgow and partaking in the workshop prompted us to reflect on our own structures and means of engagement at I.M.A.A. At the Art Academy I would generalise that we tend to favour action, over debate. Taking part in The \_OS has acted as a catalyst for us to re-address our engagement in debates and ignite more discursive meetings.

A defining factor of \_OS, though they may not intend this to be the case, is that many of the 'core members'\* are friends. Whilst at Islington Mill our relationships seem to manifest in a seemingly professional way: we work together, we have meetings, but we don't necessarily spend time together socially. This may be to do with the way in which \_OS germinated within the Glasgow Art School, and as such attracts many, though not all, attendees of similar ages and lifestyles. Whereas within the Art Academy we have often found our differing lifestyles problematic, with some members working full time, some unemployed, some living in Islington Mill and some living miles away. In fact, a suggestion which arose from our experiences in Glasgow was that we should endeavour to spend more time together socially, in order to function better as a self-supporting collective taking something from our experience of \_OS to develop our own collective means of action, education and debate.

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*\* I must apologise here to \_OS for describing them in this way. The Open School is perhaps best described as a belief, or concept which anybody can partake in at any time, however for the purposes of this article I need to refer to the 'group' so mundanely.*