

ART ACADEMY AND THE CREATIVE COMMUNITY IN A GLOBALISED PLACE

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Joseph Kosuth (1993: 253) claims that tertiary art school is involved in constructing reality through the way art is taught, 'and in this sense an art school is a political institution as much as a cultural one.' This paper traces the conditions of art and the academy in relation to membership in community and what this might mean in terms of the political conditions of globalisation. By working through a genealogy of the relationship of art school and community, it works towards an understanding of art as a cultural enrichment proposition and the academy as an innovative site for the strengthening and sustainability of cultural and political knowledge. This discussion proposes that for the art academy to survive with potency it is imperative that art educators turn their attention to political constructions of the academy and community within the globalised knowledge economy.

ESTABLISHING THE GROUND

The artist-writer Joseph Kosuth (1993: 253) positions the art academy as a significant political institution through claiming that tertiary art school is involved in constructing reality through the way art is taught, 'and in this sense an art school is a political institution as much as a cultural one (insofar as one can separate them to begin with).' This discussion proposes that art school both constructs and responds to 'reality' in interrelated spheres that are inherently cultural, economic and political. It is a place where the investigation of ideas about the social, cultural and political are not only possible but may be explored with vigour. In tracking a genealogy of the globalised academy of the 21st century the discussion unearths a number of internal consistencies in the

way the art academy may be characterised while it seeks a political trajectory for our present and future times.

Contemporary attitudes and practices invite contestation of 'institutionally controlling and politically disempowering stance(s)' (Hollingsworth, 1997: 485) that are invested in the ways inherited knowledge is packaged and delivered. My research shows that while the institutions construct systems, barriers and borders that ring fence inherited knowledge, art is a site of knowledge through which contestation is possible.

Kosuth (1993: 253) points out that in tertiary art schools 'the presumptions and prescriptions that are taught there are a *de facto* description of what art is', reminding us that 'when you describe art, you are also describing how meaning is produced and subjectivity is formed'. This seems to be a crucial statement in context of the globalised world of which we are now a part – although that is not to say that globalisation was a condition of concern to Kosuth. However it might be said that globalisation is a crisis of meaning, a space of knowledge in which 'meaning' *per se* is seen to be fluid not fixed, and through which knowledge is highlighted as a contestable zone – albeit a marketable one.

The interest of this discussion is to consider relationships of art school and community by focusing on ways of thinking through art, the idea of creative city or region, and the globalised knowledge economy, to unearth the implications of such terms and put them to the test.

The discussion proposes that art school operates as a knowledge generating site with a role and responsibility to the community of which it is a part. As such it contributes to, shapes and reflects the cultural and historical values of a given community. It is apparent that the political agenda in Australia and New Zealand, following that of the UK, is moving towards an increased identification of this relationship and that the commercialisation or economisation of knowledge is now under the political spotlight.

The art academy specialises in research and knowledge generation via the materialisation of creative ideas through technical and creative innovation; and in this sense may be akin to the work of a scientist or designer whose processual research seeks invention and innovation, notwithstanding differences in application. The art academy is essentially a community zone where cultural concerns may be interrogated and where lineages of thought and practice are recognised and celebrated with a flow of ideas to and from the community members. There lies a capacity for generative processes of cultural knowledge and the recognition of exchange between the academy and community. It could be said that a political system that does not value the significance of its cultural knowledge through art, design and other forms of creative arts is an impoverished state. Embedded in this statement is the valuing of indigenous knowledge as well as the differences cultural values inherent in diverse multiculturalism. In the meeting of differences there are endless intersections of determinate and indeterminate moments, which calls for an ethics of practice opening of and to the 'other'. This is a particular ethics of practice that works with the politics of difference to enable the constitution of an ethics of difference.

INDETERMINACY AS A CONDITION OF PRACTICE

The art school can provide the conditions of practice whereby such an ethics can be possible. This is no more so than in the globalised world where meaning is situated in performative relations of information circulation and transmission networks. Art engages these moments of arrival and departure of knowledge as a process of revealing or opening to the *conditions* of truth rather than assuming epistemological absolutes of truth (Heidegger). Engaging ethically with indeterminacy and difference might then be possible as a condition of practice.

Through an altered enlarged photograph, 80" x 100.5", Kosuth speaks in and of indeterminacy when he posits (in idiosyncratic text), 'xxxxxWhat seems to be constructed here (when you can see the surface) makes an order from the parts not yet read and the locations not yet seen' (see *Cathexis 9*, 1981, Joseph Kosuth, Lia Rumma Collection, Naples, in Kosuth 1993: fig. 30). Art speaks of the indeterminacy of knowledge and if, as Kosuth suggests (1993: cover): 'art begins where mere physicality ends', then the questions of knowledge and the subject-of-knowledge become paramount in 'the linguistic nature of art propositions' and the way art may be approached in the art academy within a global knowledge economy. The iterative processes of meaning-making in art have the capacity to keep indeterminate relations of the possible at play – even as the institutional demands of input-output accountability would close down such processes by making other demands upon them.

What must we promulgate in the art academy and in art as a site of knowledge? What sorts of practices? Jean-François Lyotard uses the term paralogy in *The Postmodern Condition* (1984), a term explored in an article (Grierson, 1999) on the art academy and praxis. Through paralogy (*para*: beside, beyond; amiss, irregular) truth claims about art and knowledge are constructed and put to the test as art is displayed, interpreted, and made into meaning via the economic factors of production and exchange.

Lyotard (1984: 61) defines paralogy as 'a move (the importance of which is often not recognized until later) played in the pragmatics of knowledge', which Fredric Jameson (1984: xix) describes as 'a search, not for consensus, but very precisely for "instabilities," a practice of *paralogism*, in which the point is not to reach agreement but to undermine from within the very framework in which the previous "normal science" had been conducted'. Jameson acknowledges (xix) the site of 'struggle, conflict, the agonic' in 'the rhetoric in which all this is conveyed'. In the postmodern condition of knowledge and arguably in terms of contemporary globalisation, 'the agonic' would be a more relevant approach to the process of struggle and conflictual iterations marked by more productivity than the 'antagonistic' struggle and conflict that has come to mark the relations between Middle East and West in the political conditions of 21st century globalisation.

PRAXIS

To make sense of the world via an agonistic spirit as a practical and philosophically informed process, the notion of praxis is integral to contemporary pedagogy in the art academy. The

contemporary art school works across the grain of praxis as it engages with the very notion of praxis.

Greek: doing, acting, action, practice: (a) the practice or exercise of a technical subject or art, as distinct from the theory of it (b) habitual action, accepted practice, custom. 1581 Sidney. *Apol. Poetrie (Arb.)* 39 "For as Aristotle sayth, it is not *Gnosis*, but *Praxis* must be the fruit" (OED 1989: 291).

By bringing the 'how', 'what', 'where' and 'why' questions together through reverberating relations of practice and theory, the conditions of the academy can engage a form of praxis that opens the politics of knowledge to question and interrogation as a pedagogical way of thinking through the Aristotelean praxis and its separation from gnosis. This takes the Greek definition of praxis to a new opening.

While depending upon technical practice, contemporary approaches within the art academy challenge the notion of art as merely 'the practice of a technical subject'. While engaging with its own historical conditions, the art academy interrogates 'habitual action, accepted practice' as it seeks a reinvention of the known to provide space, as Kosuth (1993: 254) puts it:

[for] a questioning process as to art's nature. [Such inquiry] constitutes an institutional critique because the art student then sees his or her activity as being less one of learning a craft or trade (how) but rather as one which is fundamentally philosophical (why).

The 'why' question, it might be argued, is thus quite fundamental to the sorts of practices that artists engage, the sorts of research they undertake. Theirs is not only a highly specialized and technical arena, not only an acutely and often deeply insightful practice, but also a highly intelligent working through praxis, to question the questions as a 'way of thinking' (Heidegger), to thereby communicate knowledge in and of the world. Their work may be engaged as individual practice but their ethos is one of community in that for their ideas to have influence or impact depends increasingly upon the interpretation of viewers and dissemination by the group, and on collaborative relations of community – i.e., gallery, exhibition, public or virtual spaces and environments – with each of these sites creating particular characteristics of community praxis whereby an ethics of community practice might be realised.

THE ACADEMY: A GENEALOGY

The principle that the academy has social, ideological, practical and economic relationships to community is not new although when one undertakes a genealogy of the academy it soon becomes apparent that different formations and privileges of power play across this landscape at different times and places. If we seek a critical history of the present as a way of understanding our present times better, then an archaeology of the academy needs to take place. Such an archaeology of Western knowledge in and of art and design reveals the way power plays in the micro-politics of practice (see Foucault) in the disciplinary bases of our core subjects. Tracing the term 'Fine Arts' as an example of a set of practices and community conditions founded in the Western academy informs a critical understanding of the art academy today. There can be no

doubt that 'Fine Arts' signifies historically an intellectual pursuit, and that there have been divisions in art schools during the latter 20th century between fine arts and design, with each discourse coming from particular historical lineages. Even today this historical rub can be identified through deeply-held attitudes and practices. Tracing a genealogy in context of the specific communities served by the academy it soon becomes apparent how this difference has played itself out through academic and community practices.

By about 1500 the fine arts of painting, sculpture, and architecture are accepted as principally intellectual pursuits, thus taking their place among the liberal arts to be accepted by members of humanist society. This, argues Anthony Blunt, is the moment which marks their legitimated differentiation from manual crafts and the point of entry of the idea of 'Fine Arts' (Blunt, 1982: 52-55). Thus the term 'Fine Arts' entered Western discourse and settled into the academies of learning as *Arti di disegno* by the mid-16th century. The idea of a 'work of art' comes into being at about this time, justified by its beauty and that it is a luxury product as distinct from an object of practical utility.

Academies were established in the Renaissance as teaching institutions for artists, quite distinct from Craft Guilds for artisans, deriving their name from Plato's philosophical Academy. Stangos (1991: 8-9) references 'humanist gatherings [which] quickly attracted the official patronage' such as the *Accademia Platonica* founded by Cosimo I of Florence (c. 1542) and Vasari's *Accademia di Disegno* (1562), which sought to establish and enhance the status of artists in terms of humanist liberal scholarship. Stangos shows how mimesis and classical values were lauded and reproduced through academic training such as Carracci's *Bologna Academy* (1585), where canons of classicism were revived, and direct rendering of nature (following a period of Mannerist stylisation) was re-authenticated. Teaching academies emphasised formal properties of painting and drawing as fundamental skills through which the more intellectual ideas implicit in a work of art might be achieved.

The point to be made from this outline is that the practices that are identified are totally in keeping with the ethos and intellectual values of the communities within which those academies function in their present and past conditions.

It is to be noted that the significant rise in the number of academies in later centuries in Western Europe is consistent with the Enlightenment drive for knowledge as a civilising force. In 18th century Britain the art academy was situated in a privileged site where the King gave patronage, protection and support, consistent with his belief that the arts were a national concern, a sentiment which was announced by Joshua Reynolds to his fellow-members at the opening meeting (Reynolds, cited in Hutchison 1968: 21):

Gentlemen, An Academy, in which the Polite Arts may be regularly cultivated, is at last opened among us by Royal Munificence. This must appear an event in the highest degree interesting, not only to the Artists, but to the whole nation.

If we look at the documents of mid-18th century, the art image or object became the central point of reference, the bearer of fine principles; whereas today it is the process itself that draws attention to the creative potential and practice. Then the object was a focus for aesthetic judgement and taste; today it becomes a marketable commodity taking its place with other commodities in the commercialised sector, albeit the cultural sector of market exchange and value. Throughout modernity secular humanism drove the cultural and economic sectors in the service of scientific and capital expansion while the art academy took its place amongst institutions of learning as part of the value system of social betterment and homage to history. Progress and freedom became the dominant ideological framework, which fuelled modernity's project. So it was that the authorisation of Western emancipatory procedures, enacted through the political endeavours of colonisation, came to be considered an enlightened response to the West's project of expansion. As such it was deemed to be in the best interests of a universal thrust towards progressive humanity.

By 1870 about a hundred academies were flourishing in Europe, which suggests a 'growing awareness of reintegrating the arts and society' (Stangos, 1991: 8-9). Grand narratives of the Enlightenment were thus articulated through teleological design, projected through territorial expansion, and reproduced ideologically across place and time. From learned societies and academies of Britain and Europe, imprints of scientific knowledge and cultural refinement were pressed into Antipodean soils of 18th and 19th centuries. There they could plant the tenets of good taste and connoisseurship, through institutional practices of white-settler society, through which imported values could flourish.

THE ACADEMY TODAY: GLOBALISED FRAMEWORKS

Art academies were thus securely positioned in Western knowledge industries of previous centuries with their regimes of political and social practice. In this basic premise the Western art academy has changed little. The academy continues to reflect values and mores of a given community in time and place. Today the emphasis, through art as a site of knowledge, is on investigation and innovation rather than masterful mimetic replication of the status quo. The principle that social, economic and cultural values are made apparent in the way art is approached and valued remains quite consistent while epistemological values change with specific place and time.

Rather than 'legitimizing the status quo of existing forms and norms' (Kosuth, 1993: 254), the academy today interrogates as it engages with cultural frameworks and conditions. The new challenge today in a globalised knowledge climate, where the economy is the grand driver of political action, may be to maintain a robust interrogation, exploration, and invigoration while at the same time to invigorate and strengthen relations between art and community. We might well ask whether philosophical questions of 'why' can withstand the pressures of a globalised world with its excessively reductive and economically based accountabilities and performative measures that now dominate institutional governance. Is art and the art academy's pedagogical process political or apolitical? Kosuth takes us beyond the question of 'whether the *content* of an artwork is politicised or not' to consider the more important question of 'artworks that do not leave

intact their conception of what art is, and by extension, what an art school should be'. Art questioning its own authority, says Kosuth, is 'a much more political act than the *symbolic* "acting-out" of the use of political content within an artwork which, as art, does not question its own institutional presumptions' (254).

The questioning of institutional presumptions and assumptions becomes vitally important if the academy is to clarify its place and purpose in the new political formations of the knowledge economy. In a discussion on excellence in the global university we might turn to Bill Readings for clarification of the nature of the global institution and review the ground of institutional practices within the Western university and its lineage (see discussion in Grierson, 2004, 2005). Readings claims that any reflection upon academic study must include consideration of the institutions within which such study is undertaken (1997: 21). Thus it is relevant to look at the structures and values of the university or institution within which an art school or academy is situated if the role and responsibility of the art school is to be understood in its community setting; and if the community is to be understood in relation to its academy. What kinds of knowledge are transferred through these relations?

In globalised modes of information transfer and knowledge dissemination, the old understandings of knowledge are displaced. As Lyotard predicted in *The Postmodern Condition* (1984), 'the status of knowledge is altered as societies enter what is known as the postindustrial age and cultures enter what is known as the postmodern age' (1984: 3). This basic premise is discussed in Grierson and Mansfield (2003: 30):

Lyotard's prophetic text shows the 'old ways' of knowledge as an end in itself have been replaced by new modes of knowledge as the principle force of production and that 'knowledge in the form of an informational commodity indispensable to productive power is already, and will continue to be, a major — perhaps *the* major — stake in the worldwide competition for power' (Lyotard, 1984: 5). We may thus trace the way knowledge is now attached politically to the accumulation of value in national and global exchange, and then ask what this might mean for our present time.

In seeking an understanding of our present time questions of accumulation of value and exchange are crucial if we are to understand art as a cultural value or knowledge proposition in a globalised setting. Realigning the priorities of educator as knower and bearer of knowledge, Kosuth reminds us that 'the teacher of art, as a teacher and an artist, can do no more than participate with the students in asking the *questions*. This, rather than attempting to provide the *answers* as art schools traditionally do, realigns the priorities from the beginning' (Kosuth, 1993: 255). Beyond the dogma, space may be claimed for art and the academy as site of the *possible*, maintaining the *political* through which 'thought does not function as an answer but as a *question*' (Readings, 1996: 160).

COMMUNITY AS A CONTESTABLE CATEGORY

Joseph Kosuth, speaking from an artist's viewpoint, shows that 'the discourse, when it is the choosing of how art is to be made, takes a certain form, prioritizes certain meanings' (Kosuth, 1993: 253). Questions of meaning and legitimation inaugurate a new focus in the education of artist, designer, writer, art teacher, museum curator, researcher and other cultural protagonists in the academy. This new focus, it is suggested, works for the capability to assert impact in the community through responding to local concerns in a globalised world. When 'community' takes center stage politically it is time for the academy to pose more questions.

One of the greatest challenges is to identify what is meant by 'community' in the new political frameworks of commercialisation of art, research and knowledge practices. The notion of community is an inherently contestable category (see Peters and Marshall (1996). Peters and Marshall investigate thoroughly this site of contestability in *Individualism and Community* (1996). They show that community may be considered as a social ideal in post-war liberal democracies, yet the meaning changes and is dependent on 'the theoretical framework or "paradigm" within which it is embedded' (1996: 19). Peters and Marshall examine the notion of community in major paradigms of social policy arguing the case against what they call 'the impoverished notion of community embraced by market liberals — one which is both narrowly construed and falsely presented in universalistic terms'. Their research 'problematizes the neoliberal move to community as a broad-based response to the crisis of the Welfare State', with a concern that 'neoliberal policy discourse will construct "communities" and people as "community subjects" in an impoverished sense — community as merely an aggregate of autonomous individuals acting out of enlightened self-interest — for political reasons concerning the self-limiting state' (1996: 19).

Peters and Marshall (1996: 191) define the notion of community as an 'ideological metaphor'. This being so then art and the art academy as communities of practice may be considered in a similar way. Art practices through which the Western academy found its purchase were identified through connoisseurship with good taste being determined by standards and values from the British Royal Academy whose rules, understood by the majority of art aficionados, would be respected and followed by artists and patrons alike. Peters and Marshall (1996: 120-123) speak of rule-following and induction into shared practices as underlying the notion of community. Through artistic practice and patronage, cultural knowledge and its legitimation grew and flourished in academies and colonial art societies which may be identified as communities of interests, homogenised through ideological concerns, but no doubt with sub-groups, evaluative contexts, agreements and disagreements in judgement (120-123).

Trace by way of example the colonial Art Society as the community academy of the 19th century in Britain, Australia and New Zealand. Certainly there was an understood social decorum to be followed by members. The rules were there to be respected, social evaluations were conducted via the community of interests, with aspersions cast upon those who went against such rules or practices. 'Although the dominant aims of the art societies encompassed activities mutually beneficial to their members, the usual justification for their existence enlisted the vague idea that

their place in the community was essentially one of educating the public', explains Brown (1972: 9). Consensual agreements were thus constituted within the community of practices in the interests of cultural maintenance. If Peters and Marshall's (1996: 120-123) explanation of 'a Wittgensteinian-inspired theory of evaluation' is applied, it could be said that 'the components' of the community practices were 'logically connected and mutually interdependent because of their conceptual dependence upon the concept of a rule'.

CREATIVE CITIES: CREATIVE REGIONS

Today what are the rules for the notion of community and how is 'the community' politically positioned? It is clear that in market terms, which translate to political terms, 'community' is a prime site for the aggregation of economic policy statements and political attention. There is increasingly an expectation that the relationship of art academy and community depends upon the application of art to the economic needs and sustainability factors of a region or city. Take the notion of art and the 'creative city' for example. With the global invention of 'creative industries' as a new focus for economic growth the situating of art academy in the urban community takes on new political meaning. Likewise the creative arts are repositioned in regions. Populist commentator Richard Florida (2005) has proposed a sociological argument to validate this notion by folding the creative city and creative class into measurable categories.

While there may be much to contest in the Florida case, he has succeeded in opening questions of creativity to a general audience for some sort of further reflection. Having said this, the emphasis in Florida's thesis is on the liberal notions of growth in the creative economy, promoting therefore the conditions of creativity as essential and key economic assets of our time. Within such a procedure the liberal humanist assumptions of creativity and progress are reinvented and re-embedded into the transformative nexus of progress and place. Thus, aligned with the coupling of creativity and industry, the broader principles of creativity reflect the dominant assumptions of Western knowledge as a metanarrative of progress. Art is thus inevitably folded back into these assumptions as a reductive determinism starts to appear.

However if the institutional rationalisations within which we now operate put the heat on the art academy and threaten to restrict and straightjacket its operations, then the Florida case can be a useful one to put. There is evidence aplenty of the way art as a form of cultural production promotes economic growth as it enlightens. The 'creative city' argument can be easily and persuasively exercised. One only need look at the evidence of the Dutch Masters Exhibition at the National Gallery of Victoria (2005), which attracted more than 20,000 visitors in its first fortnight and 1800 visitors a day continuing (Plant, *Herald Sun*, 2005: 77). The report demonstrates the potency of cultural events by giving the figure of catalogue sales at 2,400 in the first two weeks as well as constant sales of memorabilia such as Delftware necessitating the reordering of stocks. Added to the impressive record of attendances and sales there is the attraction of visitor numbers to the city along with their increased commercial and social contributions to city life; and the impulse of job creation that outflows from these injections of cultural vitality.

Florida speaks of the enhancement of three Ts: Technology, Talent, Tolerance, as he proposes that creative cities and regions are places that attract more people and therefore enhance lifestyles and job creation, all of which has the positive effect of economic positioning of place. In a Harvard Business Review article, Florida places Melbourne in 4th or 5th rank of world creativity with 49.5% workforce of the central city in creative occupations (Victoria Government website, 1 December 2004). Another example of increasing capacity for economic growth in Melbourne is the film industry. Take this recent report in a local newspaper: '*Docklands Horror*', which reads, 'A BIG-budget horror series based on a Stephen King bestseller will be shot in Victoria.' It goes on to outline that this eight-part series, *Nightmares and Dreamscapes: The Stories of Stephen King*, is the latest of a string of big budget films shot in Melbourne, which include *Ghost Rider* and *Charlotte's Web*, and the third horror or thriller series shot by US production company Coote/Hayes. All of this is interesting no matter what one's taste in movies might be; but perhaps the most interesting factor for the argument of creative cities, as Premier Steve Bracks points out, is that more than \$20 million will be spent in Victoria with the generation of approximately 150 jobs for local cultural workers – crew, technical staff, actors (*Herald Sun*, Thursday July 28, 2005: 3).

These arguments bring powerful messages for the building of creative economies and communities and the role of the art academy within this process. And the examples go on – to community arts' projects and facilities, the heritage industry in all its manifestation of conservation, protection and visitor numbers, to entertainment, fashion, exhibition and community spaces, arts journals and critique, new media, music and performances, magazines, lifestyle and popular publishing, not to mention web games and creative IT innovations *et al*. Increasingly creative and commerce workers come together in the interests of creative work and knowledge generation if not to focus on local global concerns of sustainability, diversity and other political agendas.

CONCLUSION

The art academy has a crucial role to play as a site of knowledge-generation through which such issues are mobilised and disseminated. Arguably the activation of this role serves to identify an internal logic in the impetus of the art academy and its work. There can be no doubt that when the economic heat increases, the coalition of interests strengthens and art as a site of knowledge carves its political space in the broader global political landscape.

The global world iterates an increasingly complex, image-saturated place of visual writing, reading, invention and translation, scanned by aggregated readers in undetermined spaces. Like language, art's coded signs and utterances invent and reinvent meaning through multiple contextual readings. Assumptions of art's comfortable attachment to fixed or dominating referents foments in a world of local and particular differences; and it is there that the concept of creative communities may flourish. The responsibility of art educators must be to educate for a writing and reading of this world, which goes beyond the aesthetic to the political.

As Joseph Kosuth concludes (1993: 255):

When our view of art is limited, so is our view of society. If questions aren't asked in art schools, away from the conservative heat of the art market, where then? If the political responsibility of a cultural reflexivity (*why*) is not taught along with a knowledge of the history of *how* artists have made meaning, then we are doomed to be oppressed by our traditions rather than informed by them.

This discussion has undertaken a genealogy of the Western art academy and its progressive engagements with knowledge in a globalised economic order. It traces the conditions of art and the academy in relation to membership in community, while also paying attention to the problematisation of community as a category with assumed meaning.

Finally it proposes that for art and the art academy to survive with potency in the tertiary system of this present market-driven, input-output, internationalised, visually-saturated, globalised knowledge economy, it is imperative that art educators demystify, declare and deconstruct ideological constructions in discourses of 'the social', 'the community' and 'knowledge' as much as in art. Then, raising the questions how and why, the academy will foster its own reinvention as it reconstructs the potency of its place in the community of a globalised world.

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