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Nicholas Addison and Lesley Burgess

The Friendly Interventionist: Reflections on the relationship between critical practice and artist/teachers in secondary schools

> Built into the British national curricula… are structural safeguards against 'too much creativity', too much initiative and too much critical thinking, which are typical of corporate management. First, effective creativity can be limited by devaluing and demoting the morale, self-image and social status of [art teachers] by changing them from a potentially critical, autonomous, creative, meaning-making and intellectual force… into conforming 'managers' through an intensive period of teacher training where they undergo an ideological initiation.
>
> (Dalton 2001: 132-133)

In this chapter we examine the relationship between the school subject art and design and the field of contemporary art. We do so by investigating the ways in which the dominant values of art within schooling support or contest the critical practices of many contemporary artists. The locus of our investigation is the interface between the two fields as they come together in the context of initial teacher education (ITE) a place where the disjunction between the two is rendered in sharpest relief. If a dialogue can be set up between contemporary practice and schools then critical practices do not have to be elided or denied, especially where intervention and exchange ameliorate the one way process of induction implicit in Dalton's 'ideological initiation'. Our argument is developed in response to the experiences of artist/teachers who have followed the part-time PGCE initiated at the Institute of Education, University of London (IoE) in September 2000. The emerging dynamic between artist/teachers and school culture has highlighted the differences between contemporary critical practices and the commercial culture and reproductive schooling that dominate the lives of the majority of young people (Bourdieu and Passerson 1970). We discuss the possibility of resistance to ideologies of consumption and reproduction by examining artist/teachers' evaluations of the interventionist residencies they undertake during their final school placements. These evaluations are part of an end-of-course assignment through which artist/teachers begin to articulate and embody their developing philosophy for art education. We analyse and interpret these assignments to understand the relationship between making and teaching art and the ways in which these two activities demand a different sense of self. We also make reference to statements made by artist/teachers during a focus group discussion in order to estimate the extent to which the course militates against an 'ideological initiation' that inevitably negates one persona for another.

Over recent years in ITE, student teachers' expectations about their contribution to the development of the art curriculum has not matched their subsequent experience in secondary schools. Although they enter art departments with a deep knowledge of the production of art, craft and design in contemporary society they find that they are rarely allowed to translate this knowledge into classroom practice. Such resistance to their expertise is partly the result of the retrospective and formulaic traditions of school art (Hughes 1998, Steers 2003). In addition, they are subsumed within a culture of

schooling that valorises conformity in order to provide consistency and continuity for young learners. This process is not peculiar to art and design. It has been theorised as the dominant disciplinary process of social regulation in 'so called' liberal democracies (Bourdieu and Passerson 1970; Foucault 1977; Walkerdine 1988). However, the resulting disjunction between disciplinary and pedagogic personas is perhaps more pronounced in art and design than in other school curriculum subjects. Indeed, we identify the difference between the social and political roles of artist and teacher, as they are mythologised in the literature (hooks 1994; Miliband 2003) and the media (Burchill 1997; Howells 2001) as the primary catalyst for a training regime that destroys one persona in order to replace it with another.

Atkinson (2003) observes that in initial teacher education, 'the Standards discourse constructs an ideal image of teaching which fails to embrace the idiosyncratic and fragile states of student teachers learning how to teach. When presented with the Standards inventory student teachers often pathologise themselves according to its demands' (p.197). The ideological initiation that Dalton points to is interpreted by Atkinson as a process in which the student is reconstituted as the voice of the art department, and therefore as a part of the symbolic order of the institution. This act of reconstitution, from artist to art teacher, is therefore experienced as a difficult, even traumatic process in which one identity is collapsed to make room for the other. Unfortunately, many artists find this teacher persona alien to their sense of self. What is the voice of the art department in the institution of schooling?

The values of art and design within the secondary school curriculum

Art and design has been a part of the curriculum in primary and secondary schools for over a hundred years and is thus an integral part of modernist, mass education. Despite the positive tenor of this trajectory, it could be credibly argued that mass education was first introduced for the purpose of social containment rather than personal advancement (Dewey 1916). In this model schooling is a form of social engineering through which young people are inculcated into those values considered necessary to ensure conformist social behaviour in support of the state (Bourdieu and Passerson 1970). Michel Foucault (1977) defines the school as the pre-eminent site for discipline. Through schooling the ideal subject takes the form of the 'docile body', a way of being that in the collective ensures a governable population. Obedience is achieved through a mechanistic pedagogy in which learning and assessment are based on repetition, and replication (Skinner 1953). The examination is the means for regulating this process. In many ways it is a process that mirrors the factory production-line and the etiquette of bureaucratic control, a process called 'social efficiency', but with the added weight of traditional moral authority rather than bald, national and economic necessity (Kanpol 1994: 6-8; Dalton 2001). Stephen Ball (2001) suggests that since the 1980s, far from this model being overturned, it has become more entrenched. He insists that the primary concern of the government agencies responsible for education is the 'taming of the teacher' exposing the bureaucratic apparatus by which a once respected voice in the community is now being both silenced and de-centred:

> What is being achieved is the redistribution of significant voices. As always it is not just a matter of what is said but who is entitled to speak. The teacher is increasingly the absent presence in the discourses of education policy, an object rather than a subject of discourse (p.12).

The rhetoric of art and design extols a set of values that appear antithetical to this vision of social efficiency. The mantras of the art teacher: creativity, imagination, autonomy, self-expression and so on, suggest that the art department is perceived as 'a kind of oasis', a part of the timetable where 'isolationist and territorial teachers' are free from the constraints of the tightly structured programmes imposed on other curriculum subjects (Tallack 2000). Dalton too doubts that the alliance between progressive pedagogy and psychology implicit within these mantras has brought to fruition a developmental model based on individual growth. She claims that teachers and students do not 'see the systems and structures to which they are subjected. They have become so successfully internalized and are so invisible, that teachers believe themselves to be acting spontaneously and freely choosing their own actions' (2001: 66).

Experiences of the artist/teacher PGCE

We have found that artist/teachers who join the course at the IoE are not necessarily in thrall to the progressive myth, nor are they willing to succumb to the instrumental models that are resurfacing in the name of vocational education. The following comment from a course essay indicates the difficulties artist/teachers face when navigating the gap between official imperatives and personal experience:

> I am not only [new to] this edifice of learning, but a foreigner, non-British, bilingual, dual citizen. This impurity always already at play, is not to be ignored, (an impossibility) as an educator in English, in art and design, in a nation enlightened by the philosophy of the *logos,* that has its own logic, its own legitimation, its own law… The conflict of an ideology of education and the difficulty of thinking education *today*, is my task… The task *today* is to stop looking up or down, forth or back, but looking sideways, looking around, looking *horizontally*.
>
> (Toft 2003)

The new artist/teacher PGCE is in many ways a hybrid model in which the relationship between artist and teacher is one of co-existence rather than substitution. This is not necessarily a comfortable relationship and artist/teachers often experience an oscillation between roles. Nonetheless, this to-ing and fro-ing can lead to a type of reciprocity between pedagogic and artistic practice that revisits the model of the teacher/practitioner promoted by the Gulbenkian Report and its disciples (Robinson 1982; Taylor 1986; Prentice 1995). However, rather than the artist informing the teacher, the influence of one set of practices on the other may be experienced in reverse, as one artist/teacher notes: 'I'm just so much more able to communicate my ideas, [and] organise and be an effective artist in lots of ways. It is very rarely looked at from that way round – it's usually: "how can you be a better teacher by being an artist?"… I really notice it; I feel I have much stronger skills to go forward with my practice in the future' (Focus group 2004).

By learning to become artist/teachers within the frameworks of both critical and reproductive pedagogies, the formation of the artist/teacher's identity is always multiple and dynamic rather than singular and static. This hybrid identity provides a space in which the relationship between the two roles is not one of loss or ethical gain but of potential, a space where the stereotype of unequal and antithetical partners can be questioned and tested. The artist/teacher Martina Geccelli used the metaphor of a bacterium to represent her potential role in education:

> The idea of the art bacteria came to me when I thought about what purpose art could still have. For example, it could help society to become aware of the different structures within its body. It could make people understand what is going on in a different way to the way the mass media might show it… I would like to act like a small, but effective, bacterium becoming part of an organism. My intervention doesn't need to be grand and risky. It needs to be thoughtfully inserted into a system which tends to control via chemicals rather than allowing the 'body' to be regulated by itself.
>
> (Martina Geccelli 2003)

With this metaphor, a complementary difference is posited as the basis for a healthy constitution. It is a metaphor that enables the artist/teacher to critique those parts of the curriculum that thrive on artificial supplements whilst simultaneously contributing to a partnership in which the well-being of the whole is the primary concern.

It is through a programme of judicious partnerships, of which the artist/teacher PGCE is just one, that any remaining resistance to a critical art education in secondary schooling can be gradually eroded. With this in mind, the course has been designed to draw on the strategies and tactics of a range of radical pedagogies, including critical and engaged pedagogy (Freire 1990; hooks 1994; Giroux and Shannon 1997). Why are these radical traditions still important if progressive education is nothing but a myth?

Calls for a mythic unity

Recent calls for a return to mythic and ritualistic forms of art as the mainstay of art and design education can be seen to elide the historical changes that have rendered transparent the incommensurability of some differences (Burbules 2000). For example, Cunliffe (2003) suggests that art and design education should give 'priority to connectivity (myth) over difference (parable) by drawing on meta-narratives overlooked by postmodern thought' (p 305). Such a desire for unity at all costs has its dangers. In the twentieth century the wish to hide difference within a fictive unity manifested itself in extreme forms, one only has to think of the 'meta-narratives' of Herbert Read's Jungian symbolic order (1950) or the totalitarian aestheticisation of politics from both left and right (Ades et al 1995; Taylor and van der Will 1990). What we advocate is an education in which artist/teacher, art teachers and their students become aware of the histories of art and design through a critical engagement with their mythologies. However, it is not only the mythologies of art and artists that are of concern but the mythologies of teaching and the teacher.

The values of art within critical pedagogy

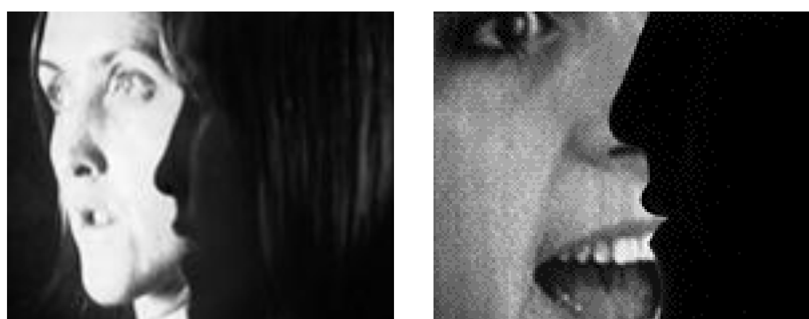
In Henry Giroux's interpretation of critical pedagogy students and teachers work together in a critical partnership (1992). Through this collaborative process they interrogate the way power is perpetuated by cultural institutions (including schools) and examine their own positions and potential agency within those same institutional structures. The result is an interventionist and oppositional pedagogy situated in dialectical relationship to conventional forms. Learning is no longer relegated to the *acquisition* of 'objective' knowledges or skills but is *productive* 'of knowledge, identities, and desires' (p.166). Giroux suggests that radical educators:

> Must make an attempt to develop a *shared language* around the issue of pedagogy and struggle, develop a *set of relevancies* that can be recognized in each other's work, and articulate a *common political project* that addresses the relationship between pedagogical work and the reconstruction of *oppositional spheres*. Second, we need to form alliances around the issue of *censorship* both in and out of the schools. The question of *representation* is central to issues of pedagogy as a form of cultural politics and cultural politics as practice *related to the struggles of everyday life*. Third we need to articulate these issues in a *public* manner, in which…we're really addressing a *variety of cultural workers* and not simply a narrowly defined audience. This points to the need to broaden the definition of culture and political struggle and in doing so *invite others to participate* in both the purpose and practice central to such tasks (p. 159)

If then, one purpose of critical pedagogy is to help students understand how they exist in the world and how they can come to inform and change that world, in what ways can the practice of art inform this process?

Friendly interventions

Aileen Glen, video artist, introduced a group of seventeen-year-old AVCE students from a specialist arts school to the work of video artists. Her intention was to highlight the difference between artists' video and commercially made television. In focusing students' attention on the role of television soaps and adverts as products designed to construct local and national identities, she encouraged them to 'become aware of the medium's false sense of intimacy' (Rush 1999: 102). The students were invited to work collaboratively in their local communities to record the habits and rhythms of their daily lives. Aileen inducted students into the editing strategies of video artists and then asked them to edit their own footage with both artists' and commercial techniques in mind. Through this activity students were able to demonstrate their understanding of how media representations construct rather than mirror popular identities, and how subtle interventions rather then grand gestures can question or indeed undermine the tropes of popular culture. For her curriculum assignment Aileen juxtaposed and overlaid images of herself with sequences taken from 'EastEnders' (**Figure 1**).



(figure 1)

She claimed that through these interventions she wished to:

> …draw attention to television as a site of instruction in how to behave, and also to question the dichotomy of viewer and subject… I attempt to bring an off-centred perspective to the emotionally charged scenes in EastEnders, creating new images that give insight into the processes involved in making the fictions

so often seen as real. I believe it is vital to actively encourage young people to question these fictions and allow space for a dialogue where conventional media practices can be questioned. The deconstruction of these practices makes possible the re-making and re-thinking of dominant narratives in a less predicatable and stereotypical way.

(Glen 2002)

An alternative strategy is to deploy a relatively new technology such as film, to parody the craft based practices of traditional fine art. For example in his video practice, Martin Toft takes on the persona of the male painter and toys with some of the sacred mantras and procedures of modernist creativity. The main targets of his humour are the existential, but ritualised practices of the Abstract Expressionists, particularly as they are theorised in relation to Hans Namuth's filmed sequences of Jackson Pollock painting in 1950. By mimicking the artist 'moving at various speeds alongside the canvas, bending and straightening, stopping and stepping back, throwing in wide arcs or repeated small stitches of paint from the can' (Clark 1999: 327) Martin parodies the idea that 'Art is the externalisation of the internal feelings and mental contents of this distinctive type of personality- the artist [and that] the primary object of art [is] the artist whose being is expressed in it' (Pollock 1996:56). With this in mind, Martin films himself in the act of carrying out modernist procedures, but in the manner of the 'idiot of the bourgeois family' (Bourdieu 1993: 165). When he takes a 'line for a walk' he abandons the graphic tools preferred by Paul Klee in favour of a roll of paper. Wandering through a rural landscape he literally takes the roll for a walk, unravelling it to form a line tracing his movements (**Figure 2**).

(Figure 2)

He marks his journey with a medium that is more usually used as the 'ground' for holding the artist's improvised, graphic gestures and, perhaps unwittingly, references a well know television advertisement in which a puppy playfully unravels a roll of toilet tissue (no doubt readily referenced by students in school). By using this everyday 'stuff' he makes fun of the transcendental tenets of modernist processes, even suggesting that the free, graphic traces left by the artist are little more than everyday, bodily traces. The result is a cleverly crafted parody that mimics both the serious art documentary and the slapstick of early, modernist comics (eg. W. C. Fields, Charlie Chaplin and Buster Keaton).

For his final school placement, Martin involved students in an exploration of the possible relationship between parody and a 'national treasure', the work of John

Constable. Constable was the son of a miller and landowner and Michael Rosenthal (1987) argues that his landscapes represent an idyllic, rural vision of England in which the working classes contentedly rehearse the agrarian myths of antiquity as exemplified in Virgil's 'Georgics' (AD197-204). As such Constable is seen to perpetuate a myth of unity favoured by the old landed classes. After introducing sixth form students to the ephemeral and temporal work of 1960s performance-related Land Art, Martin took them to one of Constable's favourite locations, the pond at Sandy Heath on the edge of Hampstead. There, he invited them to make spatial interventions into the site. One student used digital photography to document a series of interventions in which he changed the physical environment. In this way he moved beyond the traditional roles of the landscape painter as topographer or as 'Romantic' artist, one who uses the landscape as a vehicle on which to project their feelings. Instead he participated in a practice that acknowledges the artist as a bodily presence *in* the landscape and highlighted the shift in function from a site once associated with agrarian production to one of recreation and play.

If Martin chose to locate his intervention in one of the formative and canonical sites of the English School, Hermione Allsop located her intervention in the British Museum, a canonical site for the construction of national identity. Over recent years, under the banner of social inclusion, the government has identified galleries and museums as vital 'partners for the new learning society' institutions capable not only of regional regeneration but also of building and uniting communities (Anderson 1999; DCMS 2001; 2001a). Hermione is more sceptical arguing that: 'The traditional, National museum, as a space, is not just a place to view art/artefact it is a shop, a label, an identity, a package and a lifestyle; a place where myths of national identity are both culturally produced and consumed.' (2003:11). In her visual display for the end of course exhibition she presented examples of the 'official' confectionary sold as souvenirs by the British museum (representing spectacular examples of Egyptian and Roman art) and juxtaposed them with chocolate casts of fetishes and bones. In this work, she draws attention to the way artefacts are recontextualised and reconfigured through processes of display and popular modes of consumption, acknowledging that, although the processes of commercial culture are transformative, they erase difference and elide the representational value of the artefacts as objects of history.

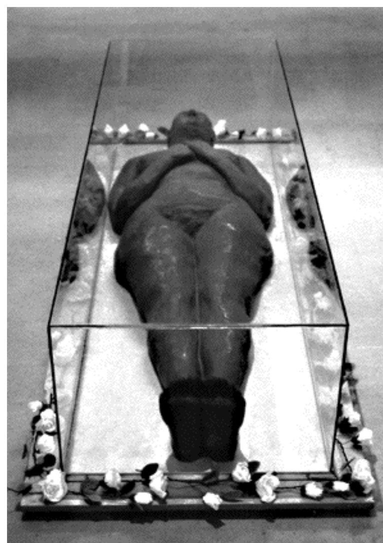


Figure 3

In her own work, ‘Chocolate Box Museum’ 2002, (figure 3) Hermione had already played with the relationship between museum and commercial display by exhibiting a figurative sculpture in such a way as to suggest either an archaeological specimen or a department store ‘confabulation’. The installation comprises a vitrine surrounded by white flowers in which a chocolate cast of a woman’s body is laid out like a mummified corpse/giant cake. Here, the female body is consumed, as it were, by a scopofilic public, a public that expects the artist to transgress social norms just as the museum transgresses the taboo in British culture against the public display of corpses. If the contemporary artist presents her/himself to be consumed as performance, the ‘charismatic’ art teacher is likewise there to perform, inviting a process of consumption that nourishes and sustains. In schools, however, the teacher’s traditional role does not invite the transgression of social norms, rather their role is to exemplify and reproduce norms through their students.

Figure 4

Artist/teacher Samantha Marsh has a personal passion for collecting everyday objects. Like Baudrillard (1968) she emphasises the passion and desire inherent in collecting but without pathologising the process. Sam maintains that ‘everyone collects something; we live in a culture so obsessed by possessions that one has to consciously decide *not* to collect’ (Marsh, 2002) Since 1992 she has collected used babies’ ‘dummies’, which she has found on the street, rescued, recorded, labelled and displayed as art (**Figure 4**). For her, these lost, discarded objects are imbued with Freudian connotations: ‘Dummies can be seen as a substitute for the mother’s breast; the collection illustrates a missing connection, a sentimental museum for the plastic relationships between mother and child. The objects exemplify loss, the emotional investment implicit in personal possessions, incomplete, misplaced, fallen from narration and never to be returned’ (ibid). Sam’s collections parody in order to challenge the more traditional approaches to classification (taxonomy) and curation employed by galleries and museums. She claims that as an artist she is aware of the role of the institution in the construction of meaning, and the ways in which juxtaposition, intertextuality and signage all influence the reading and reception of artefacts. Nevertheless, she still finds it ‘difficult to connect with artefacts displayed in galleries and museums… where the atmosphere of the institution can be unnerving and alien’. Her work is inspired by (amongst others[1]) the artist Susan Hiller who produced *After the Freud Museum* (1991-7) a series of boxed collections produced in response to Freud’s own collecting habit. Hiller claimed her collection offered symbols and references to those outsiders who do not understand the way that established collections are supposed to be objective, self-evident representations. ‘The work I find most interesting is a very sophisticated play on

[1] Christine Borland, Christian Boltanski, Michael Landy, Tomoko Takashi and Sophie Calle

accepted and recognized systems of representation, format and so on, with a desire to subvert, modify, change and, through this interplay, create a space, gap, hiatus, or absence in which something new can come into being' (Hiller 2001: 367). The collections housed in museums and galleries are significant cultural representations determined by people whose historical and social situations may be very different from those of school students today. It is one role of the art teacher to enable young people to investigate this difference. Sam argues that using young people's personal collections as a starting point to investigate meaning, value and context is more accessible than focusing exclusively on institutional collections. It is a way of 'looking sideways, looking around, looking horizontally':

> Indeed, if there is a significant justification for personal collecting it is that the collector, in establishing a different order of things, removes authority away from such institutions and identifies a different system of value and meaning. (Marsh 2002)

Sam believes that by locating the act of collecting within the domestic sphere young people can be encouraged to analyse and represent themselves as desiring subjects. This analysis can lead them to an understanding of their motivations for collecting and can, in turn, be used as a basis for investigating institutional collectors. Through this process, galleries and museums can be understood as collections brought together to tell a story, one motivated by the interests and subject positions of the collector rather than as fragments of a fixed reality (Belk 2001; Pearce 1998; Cheek and Lavers 1999). Young people's relationship to commercial culture and the mass media is not as passive as is sometimes supposed; they use the products of these industries as resources from which to make meaning (McRobbie 1999; Foster 2002). With this in mind, it is important that art teachers acknowledge young people's personal investment in these products and resist taking up either the dismissive positions of the universalists (Fuller 198; Abbs 1987; Cunliffe 2003) or the oppositional positions of historical, critical theorists (Adorno and Horkheimer 1999).

Conclusion

The artist/teacher PGCE presents a real opportunity to consider the interface between school art and contemporary practice. The way artist/teachers on the course have managed to construct a hybrid identity encapsulating multiple roles suggests that the strong ideological initiation implicit within current models for teacher training does not inevitably have to dilute the critical practices of many contemporary artists. Art teachers need to recognise that the alternatives offered by the aesthetic practices of artists, craftspeople and designers today are different to traditional school art. Of particular importance is the way in which they relate new technologies and theoretical positions to somatic and material practices that have deep historical and cultural significance. It is therefore important that traditional aesthetic practices are explored in dialogue with the digital and the virtual, a mainstay of popular, global culture. Although aesthetic practices have been valorised within modernism, the role of the artist within it has often been that of critical agent. To forget this role in the rush for normative standards, examination success and increased status is to deny the history of modernism and to fall prey to such collective amnesia is to deny what is most valuable about art in modern culture.

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