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Knowing Knowledge

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“Knowing : Knowledge” Paper Visual art Journal : Dublin II edition

The position of the Art Academy in relation to third level education seems to be on the agenda in a number of ways at the moment. Recently at IMMA there was a panel discussion on the topic of “Art Academy+Knowing” in the context of the I Know You exhibition which is taking place there at the moment, but also within the wider sector there seems to be a sequence of alliances between the traditional Art College and third level education. The movement towards more integration of the stand alone Art Colleges and third level education is high on the agenda of the Higher Education Authority, where recent interest in the creative arts provision for education in the Dublin region has led to the publication of a specific report. However, there is nonetheless an inherent tension between the provision of arts education and the third level sector. Whilst the push towards integration in itself is nothing new, the relationship between the types of knowledge being pursued is becoming more and more prevalent. The ‘knowing’ in the title of the panel discussion at IMMA needs to be attended to more directly which I would like to explore here a little further. The relationship between knowledge which is tacit, tactile specific to practice has been in discourse relate to the Arts College for quite some time now, however, if the Art College wishes to extend the debate with third level education there is a pressing need to advance this debate. Perhaps situating the debate during a major exhibition and providing a platform with the Irish, subtext, National Museum of Modern Art was not going to allow this necessary attention needed for the debate to take place.

The ‘Knowing’ prompted in the title allows an exploration of something which is linguistically ‘inconsistent’, the grammatical form of the gerund in English allows this to come to the fore, where the ‘ing’ form acts as placeholder between the verbal and the nominal, to know and knowledge. The verb points towards the activity itself, the process in play, the nominal form ‘knowledge’ points towards the stability, posits the object of knowing as something stable of fixed. In one way this is the crux of the matter, moving from knowing to knowledge. The gerund which is neither verbal nor nominal and is always also temporary where the process is finalised by the thing itself, the process overcome by the product. The knowing which is inconsistent, contingent, unfinished, in the middle of the process acts as a reminder for where the construction of knowledge is held within the Art School. The dichotomy, always present in the curriculum, and often way too oversimplified between the ‘doing’ and ‘thinking’, where somehow the thinking can be divorced from or even opposed to the ‘doing’. As if thinking itself were not a form of praxis and the doing not a form of reflection. The opposition held with ‘knowledge’ often presented through a contradiction with ‘positive sciences’ does not take into account that there are other forms of ‘knowledge’ which are not from the positive science and not from the praxis of art making but are in other forms such as the metaphysical in philosophy. The whole movement of anti-positivist philosophies dating back to Husserl and his early phenomenological methods are too easily brushed aside in a debate which places the knowing of the practitioner in opposition to the knowledge of the positive sciences.

The construction of knowing and knowledge, the knowing of knowledge, which is our bread and butter in Third level Education has itself been ‘contingent’ and inconsistent. The process of the standardisation of third level education across the wider European community is to be welcomed, even though, one could argue that the constraints

imposed by the movement towards a more modularised system based on a learning outcomes approach is highly problematic. It has led to the development on the one hand to a more fragmented learning experience but on the other has led to the development of more transparent and equitable modes of accountability within third level education. However, the aligning of Art and Design education with this process has been more difficult than for other disciplines, the nature of the 'knowing' is placed in transparent mechanisms of assessment and learning outcomes as the rest of the disciplines. The undisciplined nature of the 'inconsistent' knowing promoted by the Art College is confronted by the constraints imposed by national and international frameworks qualifications where the 'knowing' has to be verbalised, assessment and account for. It is this challenge to Art and Design Education which has yet to be fully apprehended and realised with the Irish context. There is not to say the the bologna process is something to be embraced uncritically but to note that if the alliances between Art College and third level univerisities is to function correctly there is a need to recognise the constraints. The research and postgraduate culture present within the third level sector is a priority which is driving the agenda internally, where the relationship between research and the curriculum, research and the so-called knowledge economy is to the foremost in the discourses of university presidents and government. The accountability for the provision of third level education is framed within discourse in relation the economic benefit of third level education to the growth of the economy in recessionary times rather than discourses about the general good of society. The applied research agenda is taking precedence over the more fundamental research. The need to more and more third level graduates with posgraduate qualifications more be of question elsewhere, in France for example, the number of postgraduate courses in the area of art and design education has increased dramatically in Ireland over the last 10 years.