The dance goes on forever? Art schools, class and UK higher education

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Abstract

For most of the 20th century, the UK 'art school' was widely seen as an accessible alternative to University. In *Art into Pop* (1987), Simon Frith and Howard Horne revealed how this state-funded art and design training, linked to manufacturing industries and backed by relatively low or informal entry requirements, offered the prospect of social and economic uplift for hitherto marginalised working-class youth. More recently, however, while enrolments have expanded, art schools have become absorbed into conventional universities and the class profile, at least at the more prestigious colleges, has changed significantly. Simultaneously, art schools, together with other forms of higher education (HE) have been yoked to a broader public policy agenda of the 'creative economy' - one that often marginalises working-class people. This paper takes the changing nature of the art school as its starting point for discussion of class, higher education and the creative economy workforce.

Keywords
Art school, class, mobility, creative economy, higher education

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Introduction

In the UK 'art school' refers generally to further and higher education undertaken in the fine or visual arts, design or affiliated subjects. Most of this now takes place within universities and a small number of independent art colleges, but for most of the 20th century many smaller UK towns and cities had their own independent art school, predominantly serving local working- and lower-middle class populations. As only a few universities offered fine art degrees and tended to recruit their students from more privileged social groups, the art school came widely to be known as an accessible alternative to university, offering the 'masses' the viable prospect of practically-oriented craft and aesthetic education (Field, 1977, Frayling, 1987, Le Grice, 2011, Strand, 1987). While independent art schools flourished until the start of the 1970s, the last four decades have seen a significant number close down, or else become absorbed into the wider higher education system.

Should we be concerned at the decline or disappearance of the local art school? At first glance, there doesn't seem to be much call for unease – since the idea of going to art school persists, but in a different form. In fact the last two decades have seen an enormous expansion in higher education, a widening of participation and a rapid proliferation of university courses in fine and applied arts and design – all of which appear to have broadened the social base and enhanced and diversified the skills, talents and ambitions of art students. There are now more graduates with 'creative arts and design' degrees than ever before (Universities UK, 2013). The fact that many local or independent art schools have disappeared is a surely a minor collateral cost, one easily offset against the benefits of a more integrated, formalised – and still widely dispersed – system of art education. The expansion of university-based higher education has arguably been to the benefit of art schools, given that many precarious institutions appear to have had their lives extended by becoming absorbed into singular or federal partnerships within the university system.

Further, given that the official statistics tell us that more people than ever before are employed in the creative industries (DCMS, 2014) – many presumably applying the skills acquired through arts-based diplomas and degrees - there seems even less cause for concern as creative education and the creative economy appear to co-exist in a prosperous and happy alignment. While there is perpetual undertow of debate regarding the extent to which higher education is ever able to 'meet the needs of employers', it is not uncommon for business

interests and politicians to talk up the value of the creative industries and the systems of academic and vocational education that are imagined to serve them. The prevailing common sense is that both the creative industries and universities of Britain are 'amongst the best in the world' (Cameron, 2010).

Thus, in the teleology of the creative economy – and in the idea of Britain as a 'creative nation' – the role played by art schools and art education has been quite distinct. The success of the creative industries is believed to owe much to the ways in which its art school system has provided training for, and routes into, music, publishing, television and film, art, fashion and design. It's also been widely assumed that the systematised provision of arts education and training has allowed a more socially-diverse population to obtain a career in creative industries, as well as effecting absolute increases in the total numbers employed.

The aim of this paper is to challenge some of these assumptions. Firstly by noting some of the costs and contradictions of the shift away from more informal and less instrumental arts school training to a more systematic provision. Secondly by exposing some of the fallacious assumptions that have hitherto driven such an expansion, namely the promise and guarantee of social mobility - and good jobs - for ordinary people who enter arts education and go on to work in the cultural or creative industries. This article is offered as commentary in respect of the themes of this special issue, but also in complement to a set of rapidly expanding inquiries into the neo-liberalisation of higher education (e.g. see Collini, 2012) and cultural or creative industries education in particular (Banks and Hesmondhalgh, 2009; Ashton and Noonan, 2013; Oakley, 2013b)

The origins of the art school

The art school in Britain originated in the 19th century, mainly as a response to emergent industrialisation and the need for more skilled craft, creative and artisanal workers. Many art schools grew out of existing organisations such as Mechanics Institutes (established in the 1820s) as off-shoots of an established system of technical and industry education. It is important to note that most local schools of art and design were originally state-funded, not necessarily because of an enlightened cultural policy, but through an effort to help improve the competitiveness of indigenous trades. For example, design education was first funded by Parliament in 1837, with the aim of improving the skills and knowledge of the UK's

manufacturing industry, seen to be losing out to 'better designed' European exports after the passing of free trade agreements (Bird, 2000; Strand, 1987). Parliament agreed a grant of £10,000 to fund a Government School of Design in London (now the Royal College of Art), with a proposed network of regional schools set up in the UK's major manufacturing centres thereafter (Frayling, 1987). Subsequently, the Board of Trade, and other forms of government-backing, aided by admixtures of philanthropy, commercial investment and local public fund-raising, helped many institutions develop and flourish.

Yet, in offering a technical training in craft-trades of printing, textiles, ceramics, and other forms of design and industrial manufacture, the local art school not only provided skills but the basic foundations of an aesthetic education. Indeed, since their inception, art schools have always walked an uneven path between utility and ornament; between the purely pragmatic necessities of serving industry and the desire of teachers and students to move beyond such 'narrow' instrumental concerns. To give a random, but somewhat typical example, the foundation of the Macclesfield School of Art and Science in 1877 was marked by much civic fanfare emphasising the harmony that might ensue as the two cultures met in service of the local silk industry. The *Macclesfield Courier and Herald* reported the town's Mayor, Alderman Birchenough, as enthusiastically welcoming an institution that held the high aim 'to cultivate a taste for the beautiful and at the same time to raise the staple manufacture of the town', the reporter going on to praise the new college for its focus on affairs 'thoroughly practical in nature' while aiming to nobly instil in its populations 'sweetness and light' and a 'love of the beautiful' (Macclesfield Courier and Herald, 1877). Yet this happy union was being questioned only four years later by Walter Scott, the Master of the School who opined that in Macclesfield ''Technics' and Art...should be clearly separated' – imbued, as they were, with fundamentally different purposes and ambitions (Longden, 1980:174).

Here exemplified is two centuries of argument both about the purpose of the art school and by extension, the purpose of art and design itself. A tension and oscillation between art and industry, free production and 'useful' design has been a constant of art schools since their earliest inception (Oakley *et al*, 2008; Strand, 1987; Williamson, 2013). Like many of the British universities established in the nineteenth century, local employers and civic administrations were often heavily involved in the founding of art and design colleges, and the idea of further and higher education 'meeting the needs of industry' is by no means an

invention of neoliberal capitalism. Indeed, what would now be called 'cultivating human capital' or 'investing in the knowledge economy' has long been a baseline activity for those local art colleges keen to support 'staple manufacture' and so appear civically useful, rather than merely decorative.

Yet the separation of artist from artisan has long been institutionalised in arts education. The painter William Dyce, in an 1837 letter to the Academy for the Encouragement of Arts and Manufactures in Edinburgh, reported on the differences he observed between European arts schools and those in the UK, noting that: 'the foreign school[s] of design deal with artists or designers as if they were to become workmen, and with workmen as if they intended to be artists' (quoted in Frayling, 1987: 18) - understood by Dyce as an affront to the essence of each. The British approach, in part under Dyce's guidance, was to try and avoid this apparent problem by fiercely distinguishing between 'fine arts' and 'commercial art', the former being the refuge of the Romantic artist and critic, the latter being the home of both the craft worker and industrialised processes. Thus, despite some occasional ambitions to meld the two cultures (such as in the Arts and Crafts movement) an assumed division between 'technics' and art has long persisted in the UK. As the art school evolved over the course of the 20th century, the tension between art and industry, or between creative freedoms and commercial necessities, appeared to become somewhat more, rather than less, pronounced. Yet, as we'll see, at the same time the relationship transformed, or took on new appearances, in the light of wider social, governmental and technological changes.

The art school dance

The mid-20th century expansion of art schools was underpinned by some wider transformations in the UK education system. The 1944 Education Act had led to the national introduction of free secondary education for all, compulsory to the age of 15 (later 16), which was crucial in opening up new opportunities for arts (and other forms of) education. This was followed (in the wake of the Robbins Report of 1963) by investment in a whole range of existing and new universities, and subsequently in polytechnics (tertiary and vocationally-oriented higher education providers) as well as local colleges of further and higher education – including many specialists in arts, media and design. This resulted in many thousands of working and lower-middle class people, who had previously been denied opportunities for any significant arts and cultural education, suddenly coming of age, not only as more

educated and culturally omnivorous than their forebears, but hungry for new experiences in the expanding world of UK higher education. Buoyed by free tuition, living on maintenance grants administered by Local Education Authorities, and empowered by creative freedoms integral to the pursuit of an art qualification, young people could find new worlds open to them, new ways of seeing and being in institutions that were geared to encouraging them to find their creative vocation.

By the early 1960s, most art schools were independent entities offering a mixed array of post-secondary further education, short courses and more substantial qualifications, including degree-equivalent diplomas (see below). Art schools were therefore regarded as not only vital to local trades and emergent economies of art and design but institutions that increasingly 'played a major role in making higher education available to young men and women who would not have considered university but could get a grant to study art' (Le Grice, 2011, no pagination). How students applied themselves to that study, or what they did after it, was regarded as no more or less significant as opening up the possibility for mass participation and engagement with aesthetic education (Strand, 1987).

While it is difficult to specify *precisely* what the demographic profile was in each of the emerging art schools, as little data on socio-economic background was collected at the time, (Archer *et al*, 2005), the absolute and relative rise in working class (and other minority) participation in FE and HE, especially from the mid-1960s is widely acknowledged, and such groups were recognised as significant elements of the art school population (Blackburn and Jarman, 1993; Strand, 1987). Following the introduction of the so-called 'binary system' of post-school education in the mid-1960s, the majority of the huge growth in HE participation was concentrated in the polytechnics, arts schools and technical colleges that made up one side of the 'divide' (Universities being the others). As well as the academically less-qualified, these institutions were particularly welcoming towards adult returners-to-education and part-time students, both of which featured a higher than average proportion of working class students (Ross, 2005).

Thus by 1987 Simon Frith and Howard Horne's book *Art into Pop* was able to celebrate the unruly vitality of the post-war British art school and its central importance in providing Britain with social democratic opportunity and an array of new artistic talent. At this point, despite some difficulties caused by the Thatcher government's swingeing cuts in the higher

education budget, and the creeping expansion of a managerialist tendency, Frith and Horne still felt confident in affirming the ongoing significance of art school as 'a place where young people, whether students there or not, can hang out and learn [or] fantasize what it means to be an artist, a bohemian, a star' (1987:21). This freedom to imagine and inhabit new social worlds was, they suggested, at the very essence of the 'art school dance' a dance, they maintained, 'that goes on forever' (1987:22).

As *Art into Pop* noted, because art schools were 'not infiltrated by the public schools or infested with parental income' (1987:28), they offered opportunities for enhancing the intellectual development and social mobility of a particular fraction of a hitherto marginal class. Art schools provided a particular context for people who had few qualifications or class credentials, and little cultural capital, but whose social 'awkwardness' – as Frith and Horne described - seemed to have some sort of creative potential (1987:80). Art school was where erstwhile 'council estate yobs and truants' (*ibid*) such as Keith Richards could find an outlet for their latent talents, and where a 'bright, disruptive, lower class grammar school boy with no O-levels' like John Lennon could find a temporary location that was 'better than working' (*ibid*). More recently John Beck and Matthew Cornford have described art schools of the period as refuges for working-class 'malingerers, lateral thinkers and [the] institutionally maladjusted' (2012: 63) – and in fully approving terms. Even the Ministry of Education, in overseeing the expansion in art schools in the 1960s, had recognised that art schools offered congenial sanctuaries for those students 'temperamentally allergic to conventional education' (quoted in Strand, 1987: 10). Art schools therefore welcomed the 'talented but academically unqualified' (Frith and Horne, 1987:28), who were encouraged to be self-expressive, and 'find their way', but also embody the virtues of the idea of art as a *practice* – as an open-ended, indeterminate and materially-specific process of inquiry. In doing so they ideally learnt to not only respect and subvert the ethical standards of art and art education – but to become an artistic *person:*

> 'Art schools place constant emphasis on experimental practice, but also preserve art's traditions, teach the established art techniques against which students are expected to rebel. Art school students have usually accepted the challenge, showing a healthy disdain for the demands of the past – except that is for the romantic demand that being an artist means living as an artist' (Frith and Horne, 1987:35).

What was being offered was a more fully-developed aesthetic education and self-identity, increasingly divested of the kinds of instrument and pure necessity that characterised earlier periods of art school training - one that both shaped and was shaped by the accelerated pace of wider social change. The working class artist rode the wave of the post-war welfare settlement, as well as an emergent cultural sensibility that encouraged a radical break with tradition. To be an artist was to escape – and to become someone else.

The grounds of this social revolution were of course closely imbricated with a set of wider economic transformations. The so-called 'golden age of capitalism' (Marglin and Schor, 1992) marked by strong growth and relative prosperity in the West helped furnish and fund the kinds of education and employment opportunities now being opened up to hitherto marginal social groups. The accelerated expansion of a consumer capitalist society, where people's desires for new symbolic goods and experiences were being stimulated and increased, partly to fill expansions in spending power and leisure time, was hugely significant in allowing art schools to further flourish. New subcultures and consumer fractions were emerging that further encouraged aesthetic innovations across the whole range of popular culture. Technological innovations such as cheaper, more portable communications and media, material innovations in art-making, reproduction, and new printing technologies, and new distribution systems were all vital to the art school moment. Thus the general shift from societies based on heavy industry, to service-industry and tertiary sector production, with a strong focus on symbolic and cultural production, further invigorated the perception of art, design and affiliated sectors as sources of economic opportunity. No doubt the art school student was a significant beneficiary of these macro-transformations (see Savage, 1991; Strand, 1987).

Arguably, however, the first significant impact of the post-war art school was *social*. The art school provided an opportunity for a working-class population to not only obtain an advanced qualification but expose themselves to new social and cultural worlds. The social type of the 'art school student' began to feature more prominently in the landscapes and imaginaries of post-war Britain. Like their less outré contemporaries 'the scholarship boys' (and girls), art students were symbolic of a more motile class structure - but where they 'belonged' was not yet certain. These new bohemians were in flight from proletarian tradition yet also contemptuous of middle class mores and 'straight' society; rebelling against the hand of a certain fate, yet dismissive of an easy escape into the bourgeoisie. By the mid-1960s, the art

school had become much more than just a site for the (re)production of 'staple manufacture' or of an established and conservative Romanticism, since it flourished also as a context for an emergent counter-cultural sensibility and fresh experiments in class (and especially 'youth') sociality. Crucially, in the context of the art-commerce dialectic, this was a period where a sense of the radical potential of Art in art education regained the upper hand (Williamson, 2013).

Yet what is also interesting is how a working-class presence was enabled not only by social democratic desires to confer a universal education, or a more liberal and 'permissive' social moment, but from some quite conventional state impulses to both standardise and regulate. In 1959 the Ministry of Education commissioned a review of art school education, proposing to replace the standard four-year National Diploma in Design (largely focussed on traditional vocational skills) with a new three-year qualification designed to be both more industry-friendly, while also academically rigorous. Chaired by Sir William Coldstream, Slade Professor of Painting, the subsequent 'First Coldstream' Report of 1960 recommended the introduction of compulsory theoretical elements into art school programmes, within a new Diploma of Art and Design (Dip.AD.). Under this scheme colleges were free to devise their own courses and timetables, and administer their own examinations, but were subject to external review and scrutiny and required to obtain accreditation to teach and administer the qualification. A requirement of accreditation was to be able introduce some significant art history into the curriculum, and to conceive of art training as a conjunction of vocational skill and 'theory' – more in line with a 'liberal arts' degree training (Beck and Cornford, 2012). As Beth Williamson notes, 'the twin objectives of raising standards and liberalizing the institutions were, in themselves, a remarkable combination' (2013: 362) having the effect of introducing more practical *and* academic rigour, while also giving licence for colleges to programme their own 'complementary' theoretical studies.

These complementary studies became laboratories for all manner of highly experimental and often radical and maverick teachings [1] that no doubt played a significant part in energising the curricular and extra-curricular activities of art students of the 1960s and beyond (Bracewell, 2007; Savage, 1991; Strand, 1987; Williamson, 2013). It is not straightforwardly the case therefore that art schools in their pomp were 'freer', more unfettered and unregulated, since the great efflorescence of the post-war art school is actually accelerated by Coldstream's mandated interventions. If, from today's vantage point, 1960s art schools are

somehow regarded as more ‘radical’ or ‘anarchistic’, it ought to be understood that this was is some significant part state-enabled, if not quite state-authorized.

The accident of economy

As Frith and Horne suggest, if the first achievement of art school was to mobilise working-class bohemia, and ignite some social or aesthetic ‘uplift’, a secondary effect was to foster the cultural *economy*, by training populations that would enter the newly emerging and rapidly expanding arts and cultural industries. This is where utility, or some version of it, comes back into the frame.

As its title suggests, *Art into Pop* places particular emphasis on how art schools helped generate an economy of British popular *music* – and in fact locates art schools at the epicentre of those aesthetic innovations that would help produce the British beat boom, progressive and glam rock, punk, post-punk and New Romanticism. Frith and Horne revealed how most of the more significant or influential British pop and rock musicians of the period had been through, or were allied to, local art schools. They also approvingly cited Dave Laing’s *One Chord Wonders* (1985) which suggested ‘nearly a third of punk rock musicians had been students of some kind and most of these had in fact studied art’ (Frith and Horne:127). The role of art school in providing the (unplanned) context for the production of what is now thought of as an inordinately rich and productive twenty years of British pop music industry seems evident, and led Frith and Horne to conclude optimistically that the art school might continue to provide the context for fertile pursuit of musical innovation, in its contingent and varied intuitional settings.

Frith and Horne’s crucial claim is that while art school rarely explicitly ‘trained’ these musicians (and their supporting professionals) in the practices in which they later excelled, what it *did* provide was an opportunity to experiment in one’s chosen discipline, and much beyond, without the pressure to pursue any particular career pathway. So while students were educated in some particular artistic or craft skills, they were not bound by them, nor discouraged from taking opportunities that might contingently arise from their contextual undertaking, as Beck and Cornford here describe:

> ‘For many working-class students, art school became not just a skills provider but a portal through which the most advanced cultural debates and practices of the time could be encountered. It is this collision of tradecraft and high art experienced by an unprecedented socially diverse student body that produces the moment of the British art school as an engine of unforeseen cultural outcomes’ (Beck and Cornford, 2012:61)

These ‘unforeseen outcomes’ weren’t confined to the music industry. As Frith and Horne argued, and writers such as Jon Savage (1991) and Michael Bracewell (2007) have since explored, from the 1960s onwards, innovations in ‘pop-art’, pop music, avant-garde and counter-cultural politics, commercial practices of design, publishing, retailing, and all the creative affordances of an expanded media culture, most productively came together in the art school context, so providing blueprints for what have since become known as the ‘creative industries’. Here, Janey Ironside, the first Professor of Fashion at the Royal College of Art, describes the consequences for fashion design of a more widespread working–class entry into the arts academy:

> ‘..one of the best results of the social revolution in Britain since the Second World War has been the release of many young designers [2] to the world. By a system of local and government grants, young people are enabled to go to art schools and colleges and have the freedom to experiment. Before the war most of the people who are now well known designers would probably have been maids in other people’s house, miners, or working in shops...’ (Ironside date unknown, cited in Bracewell, 2007:52)

This analysis is commensurate with a general perspective that suggests, in Britain at least, the mid-to-late century growth of the arts, media and cultural industries, and the range of jobs in them, could quite justifiably have been said to have had a positive effect on *absolute* social mobility (Goldthorpe and Jackson, 2007) [3]. This might reasonably be regarded as a genuine moment of social democratic progress, where working-class people enter worlds of society and work hitherto denied to them – and partly through their own efforts help create new kinds of ‘creative’ industry, unanticipated and unplanned. Long before the idea was taken up as a public policy nostrum, localised creative economies and innovative cultural production were taking place in a way that was more inclusive than later iterations would be able to reproduce.

Thus the traditional tension between art and commerce, free aesthetics and purposeful industry, takes on a particularly productive cast from the 1960s. Open and diverse institutions, producing both radical and innovative art and design, *and* serving a plurality of commercial tastes and markets appeared to be in the ascendancy – offering gains all round. But note that the art school was regarded by Frith and Horne less a conveyor belt or production line for fully-formed creative industry 'talent', and more as an indeterminate context for the cultivation of a *type* – the creative or artistic personality - whose 'career path,' was regarded as an extrinsic and external matter. As Beck and Cornford (2012:60) aver, the art school was less a sausage factory and more a 'condition of possibility' whose principal benefits were more 'environmental and affective' than instrumentally educative. This sense of openness and indeterminacy might be contrasted with what was soon to come.

Saving the last dance? The art school today

While Frith and Horne were optimistic that the art school dance would last, they were sanguine enough to sound a warning:

> 'The problem now is that the material conditions of art education are becoming increasingly less conducive to three years of experimentation and discovery (...) the free creative personality is becoming a less and less viable option' (p 39)

The sense of a world about to change looms in the background of *Art into Pop*, though the resilience of the art school is assumed to be sufficient to withstand the chill winds of any anticipated financial and managerial reform. However, change was already significantly advanced, since many art schools had been absorbed into the polytechnics, and, from the mid-1970s, more traditional universities had begun to offer students the option of fine art and design degrees [4]. Art education became much further removed from the kinds of idiosyncratic (albeit state-accredited) provision that had marked the earlier era of the Dip.Ad. This occurred partly in response to wider demands to draw greater value for money from higher education, and conjoin it more squarely to national economic priority as the 'golden age' began to draw to a close (Strand, 1987). It is notable however, that throughout the 1990s with further consolidation of the shift towards neo-liberal national governments (firstly Conservative, then New Labour) there is both a rationalisation of costs and institutional

structures in HE, *and* an expansion of arts higher education, both in terms of enrolled student numbers and the range of arts and design qualifications being offered.

Under New Labour an overall investment in higher education was matched by a new stringency in internal and external accounting and management, and ensuring that higher education was incentivized to more closely align its ambitions to government economic policy. At this time, local art schools continued to disappear or be absorbed into universities or other institutional partnerships, rendering them (arguably) more durable and effective, under tightened financial and managerial regimes. Such innovations ran in parallel with the rise of the creative industries as a recognisable industrial 'sector' and object of government, and under New Labour especially, universities were encouraged to lay clearer developmental pathways between higher education and creative industry. Thus the traditional utilitarian links between art school and the worlds of work were reasserted, but in a newly intensified and specific form. The following sections consider the impact of some of these measures on art schools and arts education.

Gaining Entry

The global expansion of higher education is well documented and the UK has seen a growth in undergraduates wanting to study subjects related to the arts and cultural industries, with a 30% growth in 'creative arts and design,' between 2003/4 and 2011/12 (Universities UK, 2013). The general expansion in the number of university places, heavy promotion of the necessity and virtue of having university qualifications, and the lack of viable employment alternatives at post-secondary school level drove many UK students onto arts (and other) degree programmes. Thus, in terms of absolute numbers enrolled, the art school (or rather, the university arts department) is more inclusive than ever before, though one thing we should note is the clustering of students from higher-class social groups within elite universities and arts colleges, the majority of which remain relatively closed to working-class entrants (Comunian et al 2010, Oakley, 2013b).

Change is afoot, however. From the point of view of current and future students, the effective privatization of higher education has been brought home most fiercely via the introduction of high tuition fees, currently around £9,000 a year in most English universities. Such fees mean that a student that began a degree in 2012 will be expected to graduate with debts of

over £50,000 (Johnston, 2013), approximately twice the current national average wage and more than most of those who work in the arts will ever earn. And indeed applications for arts and design degrees showed their first decline for some time with a drop of 15% in 2012 (Creative & Cultural Skills, 2014). The rhetoric of the scheme and particularly the fact that students pay no fees 'up front,' but rather take out a loan which is repaid only once post-graduate income crosses a certain threshold, seems to suggest that working class students are not unduly disadvantaged in such a system. In fact there have been some falls in applications to higher education among working class boys, while other 'non standard' groups that made up a vital part of this art school population, such as mature students, have seen a 14% drop in applications (Independent Commission on Fees, 2013). However, as Johnston (2013) has demonstrated, even if fees did not disadvantage poor students, they do disadvantage poor graduates. The longer taken to pay off the debt (and they are only written off after 30 years), the higher the overall costs.

Rising costs also mean that living away from home as an undergraduate is considerably less common in than it was, and is less likely to be the case for working class than for middle class students (Holdsworth & Patiniotis, 2005; HEFCE 2009). Such changes to student funding and the introduction of fees have helped produce a more calculating relationship between students, higher education and the labour market, one in which assumptions about the student experience, common even twenty years ago, no longer apply (Ramsey & White, 2014). The ecology of old, whereby working class students could attend for free (and without incurring financial penalty through dropping-out), any number of locally or regionally located arts schools or arts-teaching universities, as a means of improving career opportunities - or resolutely avoiding them – is no longer available. The costs of this – in terms of inequality, potentially frustrated social mobility and stymied innovation and creativity – are difficult to calculate, though perhaps already qualitatively appreciable (Barnett, 2011; Hayton et al, 2014; Tickle, 2013).

Training contra practice

The notion that universities should now simply 'train' arts workers – rather than, say, provide some fertile, independent context for learning or for the cultivation of an artistic sensibility or practice – has become more pronounced. These changes have had profound consequences for arts curriculum content and delivery, as well as shaping the practices and ambitions of

students themselves. The kind of informal, situated and practice-focussed arts education outlined in *Art into Pop* has been superseded by requirements for higher education institutions to demonstrate appropriately standardised and regulated programmes that point to specific learning and employment outcomes.

In curricular terms, while negotiating the tensions between art and commerce remains an essential feature of art school, a more pronounced focus on external outcomes, and the wider skills and employability agenda, has arguably driven the emphasis much more towards the commercial than the artistic. A decade ago, Jon Thompson railed against the accelerated imposition of an 'accountancy function' (2005:218) into higher education, which he regarded as an affront to the foundational purpose of the arts, and argued instead for the retention of a strong sense of art education as unfixed practice:

> 'In fine art, learning occurs very largely through personally directed conceptual and material experimentation. The teaching 'input' can only ever be highly speculative, its relevance and effectiveness is uncertain. The learning 'outcome' is correspondingly unpredictable, and since it depends on developmental factors outside the teaching situation, it is often indeterminately delayed' (2005:216)

This is not romanticism or a prescription for anarchy, but a claim about the objective qualities of a practice (MacIntyre, 1981): an activity that contains certain intrinsic values and goods that might well be inimical to standard forms of accounting or a wholly external measure. And while art schools generally *do* retain some sense of this practice, it is certainly clear that recent developments have challenged the kinds of ideal Thompson envisaged, as well as routine procedures more characteristic of a previous art school era.

Under the present austerity, and after the end of public funding for baseline teaching, the challenges faced by art schools are formidable (Sutton, 2014). Many institutions have been forced to close down unprofitable or loss-making degree courses, reduce what are often costly studio and technical workshop facilities and disinvest from foundation and undergraduate provision, focussing instead on more lucrative postgraduate courses that command premium fees; a picture recently confirmed by the trade journal *Art Monthly:*

> '..art education is now run as a business in a competitive environment in which universities are pitted against each other. More concerning, however, is the fact that individual courses have now been plunged even further into an internal market where they compete for resources within their host universities; courses that do not show a competitive return on investment relative to other programmes are now at risk. Fine art courses, with their expensive studio/workshop requirements, lack of industry sponsorship and limited opportunities to develop patents or intellectual property, look particularly precarious' (Barratt, 2013, no pagination)

As late as 2000 or so, the idea of art schools as incubators of the creative industries was still regarded as secondary to their core teaching purpose - or at least a priority only equivalent to that of nurturing a culture of aesthetic critique, arts participation and social democratic opportunity. Yet as the curriculum has become more managed, so its connections with the world beyond have become more instrumental. Such an approach neglects many of the traditional, informal links between art school and the cultural sector, that sustained a relatively porous and indeterminate relationship between higher education and the wider world, replacing them instead with a more formal 'knowledge transfer' model. This includes activities such as offering consultancy and commercial research, funding of start-up and spin-out companies (certainly at the technology end of the 'creative and media' disciplines), sale of intellectual property, and the growth of student placements, internships and other forms of what once was called 'work experience,' but increasingly is just unpaid work (Allen, et al, 2012; Ashton, 2013; Noonan, forthcoming). This is not to say that valuable and worthwhile collaborations between arts colleges and industry do not exist – far from it – but to suggest that the kinds of multiple, indeterminate and open-ended engagements that characterised an earlier period (and as Frith and Horne showed, proved so productive) appear under threat from a more instrumental imperative that often fails to deliver what it promises.

Getting into work

The number of people (of all social classes) with arts qualifications has dramatically increased alongside an apparently unprecedented growth in creative economy occupations and jobs (DCMS, 2014; Oakley et al, 2008; NESTA 2013). This implies an innate inclusivity and an educative and economic success. Yet the opportunities for working-class people to enter and progress in creative industry job market are less clear-cut than forty or fifty years

ago – mainly because of the colonisation of *all* kinds of (now highly prestigious) creative industry jobs by middle-class workers and the cementing of particular structures of opportunity and inequality that serve to exclude working-class participants.

That the arts and cultural industries workplace is strongly stratified by class (not to mention by ethnicity, gender, age and disability) is not in doubt (e.g. see Banks et al, 2013; Eikhof and Warhurst, 2013). Nor is the argument that such a pattern is generally getting worse rather than better (Oakley, 2013a; Randle *et al*, forthcoming). Contrary to popular rhetoric, recent research by Roberta Comunian et al (2010) suggests that arts graduates often struggle to find jobs in the creative industries - in their estimate only around half of all 'bohemian' graduates (as they term them) find jobs in creative industries or other creative occupations, shortly after graduation. The majority of jobs (and the best jobs) in the creative sector tend also to be taken by graduates from elite (known as 'Russell Group') universities, regardless of whether they have an arts-based degree or not. Their implication is that the route to success lies in holding a degree (in any discipline) from an elite university, and they emphasise 'the fact that bohemian graduates are more likely to study in 'new' university or colleges and less likely to come from Russell group universities might harm their career prospects (at least initially)' (2010, p. 400). There is no evidence that these prospects improve in the longer term. In short, for ordinary people, going to art school is no guarantee of even *entering* the creative industries, let alone obtaining a good job or salary.

This further suggests that while the traditional art school may have once helped elevate working-class people into emergent arts careers yet to be fully colonised by middle-class labour (especially the pop culture industries), this absolute mobility wasn't – and has never really been - matched by a relative mobility; an elevation of working class people up the ladder at the *expense* of middle-class others. Research has shown consistently that the best guarantee of success in the creative industries is not to be possessed of a personal artistic 'talent', that one has been able to develop at art school, and then express naturally under the meritocratic affordances of the free market, but to draw benefit from the intergenerational transmission of advantage – to have wealthy parents, attended a 'good' school and been to a 'decent' university (Allen, et al, 2013; Creative and Cultural Skills, 2014; Sayer, 2009; Sutton Trust, 2006). In industries well-known for their informal and individualised recruitment processes, to have the right 'face', 'image' and social background is to be regarded as being the right 'type'.

There are other ways in which the middle classes are now hoarding creative job opportunities. For example, the use of unpaid intern labour has become a standard practice in the cultural and creative industries. Yet internship availability tends to be restricted to those social groups who are already socially 'networked' (e.g. the children of established professionals and managers) or who can afford the luxury of working for free – usually those backed by independent or parental income. Thus, opportunities in the more prestige creative industries (especially journalism, television and film, fine art) are narrowly dispersed amongst the offspring of the already well-off. The opportunities for working class or otherwise disadvantaged groups to obtain these vital footholds in their chosen industry are thereby diminished – further narrowing the social basis of the sector (Malik and Syal, 2011; Perlin, 2011).

Finally, the opportunities for work are regionally variable, and financially dependent. The cost of higher education, increased indebtedness, unpaid or low paid work in the cultural industries and the concentration of creative employment within London and the South East of England, the most expensive part of the UK for housing, all combine to make class exclusion an increasing feature of arts and cultural industry work, even as the sectors themselves *expand* in terms of education provision and total employment.

Indeed, in a bizarre twist, the privately-educated and most socially-privileged are increasingly seen as vital sources of future artistry; here the most prestigious public (i.e. fee-paying) school of all – Eton - is re-imagined as a hotbed of creative industry talent:

> 'From Wellington to Gladstone, and Macmillan to Cameron, Eton College has long been a seedbed for British politics and for the diplomatic service. More recently a smattering of television personalities, conductors and Olympic sportsmen have also been able to look back at schooldays spent on the celebrated playing fields. Now though, that famously establishment school near Windsor is increasingly being hailed as a first-rate launch pad for a theatrical career Leading Old Etonian actors such as Tom Hiddleston, Harry Lloyd, Eddie Redmayne, Henry Faber and Harry Hadden-Paton are suddenly at the top of the list for casting directors on the most prestigious film and television projects' (Thorpe, 2012, no pagination)

What does this tell us about meritocracy – and the popular myth that in the creative industries 'anyone can make it'? And what future role does it ascribe for art schools, and the working class talent that once populated them?

Conclusions

The success of art schools of the mid-to-late 20th century lay in their abilities to attract and retain a social class hitherto excluded from higher education, to provide them with conditions congenial to the development of a practice, and a set of principles and ideals transferable into the cultivation of an artistic (or otherwise creative or critical) identity and persona. Their secondary success in helping to seed the extraordinary efflorescence of what came to be termed the UK 'creative industries' suggests that not only were they relatively successful as experiments in open and democratic education, but provided an unanticipated 'use' as economic 'incubators' – all of which took place prior to the neo-liberalisation and privatisation of higher education and its re-purposing to 'meet the needs of industry'.

As McRobbie and Forkert (2013) suggest, a worthwhile priority now would be 'to safeguard good practice in these historic institutions without romanticising them [5]' and to re-visit what made them so successful thereby 'defending their existence but dissecting what it is that has that made them important to national cultural life and beyond' (2013:3) . But the current policy approach to higher education, and to particular questions of access, equality and representation, betrays how far we have come from the cultural and social milieu of Frith and Horne's art school. For example, one recent intervention (Creative and Cultural Skills, 2014), addresses clearly what it sees as three related issues: rising youth unemployment, declines in social mobility and low pay or unpaid work in the cultural industries. Its solution to such problems is one favoured by the current UK Coalition Government, a major expansion of apprenticeships offering below-minimum wage work (subsidised for employers) combined with training, which provides a non –graduate route into working in the cultural sectors. Commenting on the need for apprenticeships, the Creative and Cultural Skills agency says,

"While a straightforward business case is difficult to establish, particularly in a sector as adverse to long term planning as the creative industries, it is apparent that a mix of factors can and is persuasive to encourage employers to take on young people. The mix of altruism with regards to youth unemployment, the need to increase workforce diversity in order to

drive innovation, the new skills and abilities young people possess in relation to the current workforce and the ability for employers to build a pipeline of talent should all be seen as key (2014:25).

Leaving aside the bizarre suggestion that taking on subsided workers requires 'altruism,' the deep instrumentalism of such an approach leaves very little room for arguments about the wider benefits of arts education and practice. The solution to the difficulties of paying for higher education for working class children is to give them work-place training, leaving higher education for those who can afford it. It's hard to imagine a clearer statement of the abandonment both of the benefits of education as a good in itself, and the role of higher education in particular as an engine of expanded possibilities, both educational and social.

Notes

1. As Beth Williamson (2013) and Michael Bracewell (2007) have outlined, these included theoretical, art-history teaching influenced by (amongst many others) Dadaism, abstract expressionism, pop-art, Bauhaus, psychoanalysis, revolutionary Marxism, cybernetics, radical ecology and so on.
2. For example Ossie Clark, Vivienne Westwood, Zandra Rhodes, Antony Price, Terence Conran.
3. Absolute mobility captures movement in the aggregate size of different classes, and the proportions of populations allocated to them – thus in the mid-20th Century the shrinkage of the traditional working class and the expansion of a new middle class gave rise to increases in absolute mobility as large numbers of people migrated from the former to the latter. In contrast, relative mobility measures the likelihood of any one individual moving *between* classes, when the absolute size of classes is held constant.
4. The BA Hons eventually replaced the Dip.Ad. in 1974, and higher art education became fully absorbed into the mainstream of university qualifications (see Strand, 1987).
5. Certainly art schools contained their fair share of inequalities, injustices and substandard practices; and it's also worth noting that the main beneficiaries of the art school era where white men, rather than women or ethnic minorities. We have

insufficient room here to do justice to this more complex and variegated history – though of course recognise the importance of addressing it.

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