

Review of the  
Cltd 5<sup>th</sup> International Conference  
Challenging the Curriculum: Exploring the Disciplinary  
Boundaries in Art, Design and Media  
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Novotel Tiergarten, Berlin  
By  
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In a recent article on what she calls the problem of 'accountability' in higher education – a neologism that amusingly reflects Jacques Derrida's (1998) critique of the so-called 'iterability' of all of our different systems of meaning and communication, i.e. that is their essentially derivative, repeatable, and thus non-determinable or 'accountable' nature – Peggy Kamuf (2007) performs an amusing deconstructive critique of the economic rationalist logic of those forms of analysis, assessment, and evaluation that have had such an enormous impact on higher education in recent years and the discourses of 'critical theory' in particular. By staging a mock exam in which a hypothetical student is asked to assess the value of a 'Programme in Critical Thinking' according to the logic of these models of analysis, Kamuf shows how the supposedly less pragmatically workplace-orientated curriculum of this programme has actually enabled the student to develop exactly that sort of individual, creative, and entrepreneurial ability to think for themselves and solve problems that is so sought after within the contemporary marketplace: indeed, much more so than those more instrumentally driven or technical disciplines that are presumed to impart this kind

of knowledge. When asked how they see the value of their education in relation to the demands of such modes of assessment and analysis, the student responds:

First, I note the assumption that, according to this statement, my university education ought to have been a preparation for the global, competitive workforce. This is not said in so many words, but that would be precisely what signals it as an unexamined assumption. I do not share this assumption and my university experience has, I believe, been the richer for it; moreover I believe this despite the fact that, in another sense, I am now far poorer because my parents refused to continue subsidizing my studies ever since I changed my major to the Programme in Critical Thinking. No doubt like the author of these assertions, they were willing to invest in my university degree only so long as I promised an appreciable return of marketable skills. Nevertheless, I believe that my program of study, and this will be my second point, has definitely enhanced my 'capability and capacity to think and develop and continue to learn', aims that, I agree, should motivate university teaching, learning, and research (2007, p 262.)

The recognition of the value of this type of 'critical thinking' to the creative arts in general, and art and design education in particular, was very much in evidence at this year's CLTAD conference in Berlin. Whether it was a matter of how we can

best develop, harness, or assess this type of creative, problem solving, innovative, and entrepreneurial thinking that is supposed to be endemic to creative practice – a question that has only increased in significance since Daniel Pink's (2004, pp 21-22) much celebrated proclamation a number of years ago in the Harvard Business Review that, due to the "innovative" nature of creative practice the MFA should be considered the new MBA – was indeed almost all pervasive, at least in the sessions that we managed to attend.

In Philip Barnard's keynote, 'Augmenting Creativity: bridging between choreography and cognitive science as a case study', we heard how many investigative techniques within contemporary neuroscience could be usefully adapted to both analyse and describe, and ultimately augment, many of those conventionally 'tacit' mechanisms and processes through which dancers understand, and improvise upon, instructions in a choreographic context.

Similarly in Zoe Lloyd's paper, 'Let students think about their cognition in design – a constructivist approach', we heard how those 'meta-cognitive' discourses through which we describe how we learn in such contexts need to be better understood, articulated, and defined – perhaps from a 'constructivist' point of view – if we are to truly recognize and legitimize their transformative potential. In

Julia Lockheart's interesting paper, 'How can we use writing as a tool for collaboration across disciplines at PhD level?', we heard how various strategies of 'co-writing' adapted from a general 'metadesign' research context could be used to facilitate the emergence of such creative, synergetic, and non-

disciplinary specific forms of knowledge and writing. Similarly in Joyce Yee's paper, 'Enabling a Community of Practice: Fostering social learning between Designers and Design Managers at Postgraduate Level', we heard how important a truly multidisciplinary and integrated 'Community of Practitioners' is to the emergence of such creative, entrepreneurial, and 'critical' thinking. Exactly how this 'knowledge' that exists 'tacitly' within a Community of Practitioners or a society is best analysed, defined, and 'accounted' for (as Peggy Kamuf suggested) – a question that has been explicitly taken up by Ikujiro Nonaka (2000) and contested by many of his Polanyian influenced detractors (Hildreth & Kimble, 2002) – was also interestingly taken up by Peter Martin in his paper, 'Investigating the Criteria and Strategic-basis for Integrating Sociology and Design Teaching and Learning in Post-Secondary Design Education'.

All in all this was a fascinating conference that bode well for the 'accountability' of critical thought in creative practice, and its ability to defy the overly simplistic and anachronistic modes of 'accountability' that still plague us in higher education.

## **References**

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