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As a response to the ELIA conference in Gothenburg, and the questions it raised, this article can never be anything other than subjective. The inevitability of conferences is that we make our individual journeys through the 4 or 5 days; bumping into old friends, making new ones and never quite escaping from a sense that the *really important* conversations might be happening elsewhere.

But there is an irresistible challenge in being invited to take a critical, and more distanced, overview: particularly one that invites feedback on future directions for Higher Arts Education Institutions and ELIA. Like everyone, I have views - and there is nothing more enticing, or daunting, than being given the time and space to voice them.

I know that I will speak from a very specific (and no doubt very UK) perspective. Despite currently finding myself, for a part of my each week, Director of an MA at Goldsmiths College in London<sup>1</sup> my personal engagement with Higher Arts Institutions has been intermittent and sporadic. As the product of a post-war initiative to get first generation young people from working families into universities (what we might now call "widening participation"), Higher Arts Education was never an option. Theatre School was something best left to nice middle class girls who wouldn't need a job once they had graduated.

Instead I studied English (Language and Literature): and then, one actor husband, two children and several years of teaching later, completed post-graduate theatre training. Setting out to work as a writer and director in theatre in the '80s, I soon came up against the harsh realities of UK arts funding. It was clear that if I wanted to run my own theatre in education company I would have to familiarise myself with whatever current government initiative was going. In those days (under a Tory Government!) the Enterprise Allowance Scheme - set up to get people off the unemployment register - became a gift for young theatre makers, musicians, visual artists. Not only did we get unemployment benefit but we were able to earn £50 a week on top: we were being paid to make art.

Since then, creating work in the UK, across Europe and beyond, I've discovered my capacity for "ducking and diving"<sup>2</sup> has been as valuable as any artistic inspiration. Over the past 25 years, I have written funding applications for projects I've called Art and Social Change, Art and Engagement, Art and Access, Art and Participation. I've spoken at conferences about the contribution of the arts to the Creative Industries, the Creative Economies and/or Cross-Sectoral Partnerships. I have delivered papers on Drama for Empowerment, Theatre for Citizenship, Arts for Intercultural Dialogue and have run workshops with Drama Teachers in Ramallah, Health Service Managers in Bradford and theatre makers in Belgrade that involved the same activities but a different narrative.

I haven't done this out of any sense of cynicism. I have just learned not to care what government or funding bodies want to call what I do as long as they provide me with the possibility of *doing* it. What I do care passionately about is the contribution that the arts can and do make to the quality of people's lives. And everyone's right to engage with/participate in arts and cultural activities whether they are in a school, a prison, a hospital, a community centre or a refugee camp in Lebanon. This makes me an equally passionate advocate for students being given the opportunity to make work that is socially, politically, purposefully engaged and for them being introduced to the exciting range of places they could find themselves working in, once they have left the conservatoire/arts school.

When ELIA and other arts and cultural networks used to ask me to speak about this in terms of employment and mobility it was often felt to be a UK issue. Most artists trained at conservatoires or art schools in the rest of Northern, Central and Eastern Europe expected to have a job for life in an orchestra, opera house, dance or a theatre company; or for the state to buy those creative pieces that no-one else wanted. But that is no longer the reality. State funding for the arts is retreating right across Europe and artists and designers now need to find their work in all sorts of different settings.

So how do we best confront this changing reality? Like Peter Sellars I have been studying what took place in the US in the 1930s. In particular, at how, faced with the Wall Street Crash, and anxious to move the American people quickly out of the poverty and suffering it had brought about, Roosevelt conceived of the New Deal. Not only for the economy but also in terms of artistic enterprise. His conviction that "*happiness*" was not to be found "*in the mere*

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<sup>1</sup> MA in Cross-Sectoral and Community Arts

<sup>2</sup> entrepreneurial?

*possession of money*" led him to work with artists to think how *engaging* people with arts and cultural activity might create a sense of shared identity and mutual values.

As a result of this thinking 7% of the total WPA (public job creation scheme) budget was directed towards new arts programmes: tasked with *"promoting American art and culture and giving more Americans access to an abundant life"* the arts underwent a period of incredible vitality and creative renewal.

WPA arts projects pioneered the concept of integration and equal opportunities. Younger artists such as Rothko, de Kooning and Pollock were given public commissions while actors and directors such as Arthur Miller and Orson Wells learnt their craft as part of the Federal Theatre Project. The Writers Project offered emerging black writers such as Zora Neale Hurston and Richard Wright the opportunity to develop alongside national figures such as John Steinbeck and Saul Bellow, orchestras began to perform and commission works by black composers and, for the first time in history, the stories of slaves were written up and collected. A notable 40% of the artists funded by the programme were women.

Of course like all government-led schemes, the New Deal was far from perfect. The Arts Projects were soon dismissed by the right wing for being "state art". But what it did do, was bring about a "cultural revolution" that brought the arts into the centre of ordinary people's lives, for a brief but significant moment.

I have a sense that this current "credit crunch", "market crash", "recessionary period" could present a similar tipping point, should we want to take up the challenge. But it is much less likely to happen at a government level. I am in agreement with Sellars that the art schools could play an important role in forming the vanguard: charging themselves and their students with the role of "imagining a world they would like to live in, creating that world - and living in it." It is a huge task and one that requires a different level of engagement: for many art schools this would take a radical re-thinking of priorities and values.

The metaphor of a stuffed polar bear, as the signifier for this 10th ELIA Conference, was offered as "a timely reminder of the more fragile aspects of our world" and of "our responsibilities and need to orient ourselves and our actions toward the future." But viewed from the world outside it might just as easily be taken as a symbol for the taxidermic specimens some of our art schools have become. As a Finnish sculptor, one of my MA students, recently commented "artists across Europe are being forced to confront 21st century realities whilst the art schools continue to offer a 1970's training".

So how do we respond to the seismic economic, social shifts that are affecting our society? To what extent do we feel it is part of our remit, "to reflect and comment on the broader issues of our time, such as climate change, social integration, intolerance, migration and terrorism"?<sup>3</sup>

John Donne might argue that no art school, like no man, "is an island"<sup>4</sup>. The global shifts affecting our world are increasingly difficult to ignore. They demand that we create new partnerships and alliances and ELIA is in a unique position to facilitate and champion such meetings of minds. But in order to do so it will need to think carefully about whom it brings to the table and how it invites them to take part in the conversation. In a Europe of growing diversity and shifting demographics it will need to champion change: to throw down the gauntlet not only to the arts schools themselves but also to our potential partners in the worlds of science, politics or social enterprise.

Not that I am suggesting that such a dialogue is not happening or that it was not a powerful thread running through the conference. Unable, through logistical constraints, to take part in symposia such as *Arts as Dialogue*, or *Talking Loud and saying Something*<sup>1</sup> was excited by the issues they touched on. I relish the battle to prevent Higher Arts Education becoming a mere "toothless hostage" to either "creative economics" or "academic conformism". And look forward to learning how schools are taking a lead on celebrating diversity and "difference" without eliminating the "creative tension, conflict and movement" central to artistic creation.

It was encouraging to hear about MA courses that are already turning out artists whose work is more cross-disciplinary, responsible and outward-facing. But Calvin Taylor's emphasis on the fundamental inter-dependence of Creative Practice and Critical Analysis, Contextual Studies and Professional Formation raised an important issue<sup>5</sup>. While it is not difficult to see how our Higher Arts Education Institutions are engaging with the first two it is much less

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<sup>3</sup> "Who is Responsible" symposium

<sup>4</sup> John Donne (1572 –1631)

<sup>5</sup> "What Impact" symposium

clear what most are doing to develop the latter. In particular how are they enabling students to gain the skills of the cultural worker, acting as "broker, interlocuter, facilitator, or animateur" for the society around them?

At past ELIA conferences it has often been suggested that these "non art-form" skills are best acquired on return to higher education: after students have been out in the world, making whatever living they can, plying their trade in whatever circumstances they have found possible. This symposium showed there is a growing sense of urgency around this question and delegates were almost unanimous in wanting to introduce such skills as part of students' initial training.

In the plenary presentation I spoke about three moments I would take away with me. Having had more time to think about these choices I want to return to them. For me they encapsulate the current considerations for ELIA and Higher Arts Education.

The *first* was watching a young girl climb, with no safety net, to the top of a rope fixed to the ceiling of a concert hall: not only a compelling metaphor for the world into which we are sending our young artists but also prompting questions about their education.

What kind of training do we want to offer our students that will help them survive as artists? How can we create the kinds of safe spaces that invite them to experiment, take risks and explore possibilities whilst also offering them skills that will enable them to go out into the world and earn a living? A world where even the safety nets previous generations might have counted on are now non-existent? In doing so how far prepared are we to rid ourselves of timeworn concepts of success and failure and think more widely about what being an artist might mean in the 21st century? And to consider what implications that might have for our curricula, our classroom practice and our students' learning?

The *second* happened when I walked into what I feared might be a rather dry research seminar, to be greeted by a musical performance of exquisite beauty - a piece of medieval plainchant.

It made me wonder how, in a world focused on innovation, new media and virtual realities, we can ensure our students have access to the widest possible range of artistic experience? How can we take what is of significance from the past and make it resonate in the present? Not in any sense of bowing to current fashion or compromising artistic and cultural legacy but in creating meaning within a 21st century context. How do we enable our students to contextualise their own work within that wider political, social or cultural perspective? To value, as with the plainchant, what riches it might continue to offer an audience today, in this case when there are so few opportunities to delight in stillness, simplicity and solitude?

The *third* was hearing something that I felt I should have known already: that all Ancient Greek plays, except one, had, as their title, the name of a woman, an outsider or a slave. Yet all of these groups were denied citizenship and a voice at the table.

It reminded me why I find it so important that we ensure the invitation from Higher Arts Education is an inclusive one. Paying lip service to legislative targets on diversity, disability, gender, ethnicity or class is one thing; a real commitment to equal opportunities (at Institutional, Staff and Student levels) is something different. Glass ceilings of all kinds need to be shattered. New pathways to learning need to be created; more inclusive pedagogies developed. The life skills and experience of those who have been unable to follow traditional routes to higher education need to be recognised and validated. The quality of our inter-cultural dialogue needs to be enriched by trans-national programmes, increased mobility and student and staff exchange.

I think we should re-think the role of the full-time academic. That we should insist on all arts teachers be working practitioners; spending part of each term making their own work and/or earning an independent living. I know this is probably not a workable reality. But even if we are forced to work in institutions we should continue the fight against institutionalisation.

And if ELIA wants to lead us through this exciting period of change?

I think it might make an important start by taking a look at the structure of its conferences. We mainly attend conferences for one, or all, of three reasons: to hear something inspirational, to make a contribution to the debate and to meet people. The ELIA Biennale satisfies two of these wonderfully. Where I think it might make an important

difference is in giving more of its members a voice. I have recently become a convert to Open Space Technology<sup>6</sup>. As a model of self-organisation it enables groups to address complex issues by establishing their own agenda and taking joint responsibility for the outcomes: lending itself brilliantly to our world of arts, creativity and learning.

Ghandi advised us "to become the change we wish to see". In setting up its conferences as a paradigm for the more open, diverse and inclusive debate that it wishes to take place in Higher Arts Education ELIA could provide us with an important and influential model of access and participation.

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<sup>6</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Open\\_Space\\_Technology](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Open_Space_Technology)