

Acting out the Art School: Students as Social and Political agents

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Abstract

How do art schools and art students operate externally as social and political agents creating connections with civic, cultural and commercial networks? What training should we give students to help take them beyond the limitations of insular disciplines into broader, more diverse activities that help them to operate successfully as critical engineers within social and political systems? How do students and artists operate within post-studio conditions? Through a reading of the political theories put forward by Chantal Mouffe and the importance of antagonism in socially engaged art practice offered by Pablo Helguera, this paper proposes that learning can be expanded through agonistic interventions in the public realm.

Motivated by the awareness of what are often suppressed contentions within place this paper calls for students to engage in projects and actions that create a sense of unease, discomfort or frustration as well as absurdity or contradiction. It questions how students learn to navigate between antagonistic positions as well as being generators of positive meaning. Critical of many community and public art projects that art schools often endorse, the paper agrees with

Claire Bishop that much of these practices tend to be so morally and ethically wholesome that they become void of any form of critically. Drawing on examples of how artists operate within post-studio conditions the paper interrogates how the art school and student body interact and connect with social and political infrastructures.

Keywords

Political, Social, Chantal mouffe, Antagonisms, Art education.