

Ways of Knowing within Bauhaus, Black Mountain College and the 'Free International University' (FIU)

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Garden of Plato

Since 2008 I have been working as an art historian and lecturer at AKI ArtEZ University of the Arts, formerly the Akademie voor Kunst en Industrie (AKI) in Enschede, a small-scale, idiosyncratic academy, founded on Bauhaus pedagogy, where the emphasis was and is on experimental, cross-border and innovative higher art education (Hardy 1981). This is the basis and starting point of my PhD research.

What made the AKI so outstanding in the in 1960s? *"For example, from the mid-sixties at the AKI in Enschede, in the lee of the periphery, ample space was given to experiments in art education (...) Shielded from the angry outside world – the idea of the 'Plato's garden' cherished by director Joop Hardy – students were given complete freedom to develop themselves (...) The AKI became a sanctuary for research and experimentation."* (Beenker, 2002, p.193)

The AKI is part of a long-standing tradition of experimental art academies and institutes, like Bauhaus, Black Mountain College, and the Free International University, which have permanently changed higher art education in the 20th century. Yet I notice that my students in 2022 have little historical awareness of the history of the art institute at which they study, or the pioneers of higher art education.

Unsuccessful or successful pioneers?

Starting a first literature review on higher art education, it is immediately noticeable that three groundbreaking examples regularly appear in literature: Walter Gropius' Bauhaus, Black Mountain College of John Andrew Rice, Josef Albers and later Charles Olson and the Free International University (FIU) of Joseph Beuys (Van den Eijnde 2015; Lerm-Hayes 2019; Taken 2019; Thorne 2017; Madoff 2009) while more recent educational innovations in higher education receive much less attention. Why is the Bauhaus model still being used in 2022? Why does Black Mountain College still appeal to the imagination? Why is Beuys' FIU still relevant?

What is special about the methodology of these three radical educational innovators? Why were these experiments so meaningful on a pedagogical level? A striking similarity is their

short lifespan. Possibly this is the fate that befalls a pioneer (Lerm-Hayes 2019; Taken 2019; Thorne 2017; Madoff 2009).

Why have they become so iconic, and could they fully focus on the pedagogical experiment, because they have never been (fully) institutionalized, partly due to their short existence?

What can current art education learn from the experiments of the past?

Undisclosed archives

The three academies who are central to my research, explored new ways of knowledge while ‘learning by doing’, through radical pedagogy and experimentation (Taken 2019; Lerm-Hayes 2019). In this historical research I investigate the narratives that have formed about and around these institutes, through historical sources and archives.

What stories do the archives, the legacies of former teachers and students of Bauhaus, Black Mountain College and the Free International University tell in 2022? What aspects in these stories have been underexposed? How can this be explained? Through close reading of personal archives, artefacts, interviews, photographs, and film material, I try to gain new insights into radical experiments in higher art education. For this research I use a narrative approach and within that the genre theory of Hayden White (Metahistory 1973). I’m very interested in the stories and perspectives that have not yet been told - through selective (oral) historiography and archiving.

Archival research is therefore very important in this historical research – it’s the core of it – the archives of Bauhaus, Black Mountain College and the FIU, the official archives, but especially the individual not yet disclosed archives of lecturers and students.

The subjective nature of these archives will be taken into account (and critically questioned) as part of my research as I am well aware of how important provenance, selection and framing are within history and archival science (Jeurgens 2019).

The archive itself is also a text, never objective, and part of a metanarrative (Hayden White). Noteworthy in this context is Derrida’s book ‘Archive Fever’, originally delivered as a lecture in 1994 in Somerset House, London, in which he deconstructs the notion of archiving. (Derrida 1996).

Which narratives have so far mainly been emphasized and handed down about my three research objects? Is it mainly the success stories about the protagonists? Are there any blind spots in that? Do they change the importance of these three iconic examples for today's art education? What do those letters, photos, art objects, lecture notes of for example Joseph Beuys, Josef and Anni Albers tell us anno 2022?

Louwrien Weijers and Bud Oostrom

To do proper research I have decided to conduct three case studies (Bauhaus, Black Mountain College and the FIU) one after the other. For pragmatic reasons, that are always part of historical research (like a unique opportunity of short term availability) I started my research at the FIU, using the unique archive of the former assistant of Joseph Beuys, Louwrien Weijers. I've met Louwrien in January 2021 and visited her in her studio in Friesland. I was allowed to take an archive (consisting of letters, articles, film, and photo material), she had obtained from Bud Oostrom. I contacted him for more background information. I visited Bud in March 2021 and interviewed him about the content and value of this archive and his relation to Joseph Beuys. Oostrom worked together with Beuys, to set up this Dutch department of the FIU.

In the upcoming period I will arrange, study the content, and contextualize the documents, preparing an article about the FIU in the Netherlands. This archive seems to contain documentation in the form of correspondence, letters, film, and photographic material about the Dutch department of the Free International University, the academy that Beuys set up after his dismissal from the Düsseldorf Art Academy, together with a few others. Beuys tried to provide this initiative with a suitable location and building, in which he did not succeed, but he did manage to deploy a huge European network, which resulted in various branches of the FIU in Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands and Belgium, among others (Lerm Hayes; 2019).

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Bio

Joanne Dijkman MA studied art history with a specialization in modern and contemporary art at Utrecht University and completed the Bachelor of Visual Art and Design in Education at the HKU University of the Arts Utrecht. Since 2008 she lectures art theory and art history at AKI ArtEZ University of the Arts. She is connected to the professorship AeCT led by professor Jeroen Lutters, as PhD candidate. She is conducting this research at the University of Amsterdam under the supervision of historian and cultural philosopher Prof. Dr. René Boomkens, promotor and co-promotor historian dr. Jeroen Lutters (AeCT, ArtEZ University of the Arts), at the research school ASCA (Amsterdam School of Cultural Analysis).