Welcome to the 8th ELIA Academy

CSM and the Teaching and Learning Exchange at the University of the Arts London are delighted to welcome the ELIA Academy.

The conference offers a platform for new ideas and innovative practices for educating the next generation of artists and creators.

As one would expect from an academy of creative professionals, the conference itself is a format for many artistic interventions and provocations, allowing for active learning, serendipity, debate and exchange. Students have been involved in various ways with installations and projects that have been going on throughout the days and we hope you have had a chance to get stuck in yourselves whether adding to the growing sculpture, taking a silent walk or becoming part of a slime mould experiment!

The conference theme focuses on the concept of elasticity. As the world continues to change, creative responses become central to adaptability and sustainability; but more than that, it is expected that in your teaching, research and practice this needs to be turned into action, as well as the ability to anticipate this in your student’s development and learning. Elasticity could be regarded as a core momentum for teaching and learning in the arts and this is why it has been chosen as centre stage for the conference.

To examine aspects of elasticity, the themes of curiosity, hybridity, research and social change run throughout the event. What ideas do these themes conjure?

**Curiosity**
- playfulness, exploration,
- dynamic learning, new meanings

**Hybridity**
- intersections, collaborations, interdisciplinary approaches, innovative connections

**Research**
- critical analysis, developments in new methodologies,
- practice-based research, student research and career tracks

**Social change**
- alternative models, creative opportunities, engaging communities
The ever-successful ELIA Academy officially opens its doors for an eighth year of interdisciplinary discussion and the exchange of expertise and ideas. To kick-start the proceedings, artist and professor Heather Barnett was invited to provide the keynote presentation on Wednesday 5th July, bringing to the roughly 120-sized audience stories of her experience researching the behaviour of ‘slime mold’, a single-celled organism that fuses itself with its own kind to create ‘super-cells’. Her observations on how these clusters exhibited tendencies to actively seek out food sources, and learn to avoid repellents, she believes offer considerable food for thought for ELIA attendees on how communication, social interaction and group dynamics can impact the learning experience. If a literally brainless single-celled entity like slime mold can ‘learn’ its likes and dislikes, and retain information about its environment (as well as the possibilities maximising the efficiency of its pursuits), then surely human beings are more than capable of accomplishing astonishing things simply through being more open to different connective paths, signals from different viewpoints, and a reliance on the osmosis of thinking within group environments. To illustrate her subject matter, and to get everyone thinking about how ‘elastic’ their thinking is, Professor Barnett organised a physical re-enactment of slime mold’s behaviour using the entirety of her audience, with some volunteering as ‘attractors’ and ‘repellents’ whilst the rest were instructed to maintain constant physical contact with each other and forego vocal communication, as well as limit their vision to the floor. Passers-by in Centre Saint-Martins must have had quite the sight at a hundred people pouring out into the main concourse, silently shuffling around with heads bowed whilst several lone movers hissed at various parts of the group to prompt a retreat. A suitably sociological context for the issue at hand, compelling participants to let go of their usual social inhibitions and behaviour, and be more elastic in their thinking and feelings, for the sake of a whole larger than themselves individually. Barnett’s contribution to ELIA certainly won’t be forgotten.

**Wednesday Keynote**

Are you smarter than slime mold?
Professor Heather Barnett delivers the keynote at ELIA’s 8th Annual Academy, and gets everyone up on their feet!

“There is no top down control, only local communications”.

“Learning is at its core a series of biological and phenomenological interactions”

Heather Barnett is an artist, researcher and educator working with natural phenomena, complex systems and biological design.
Participatory Sculpture

Provoking engagement
As arts educators, we are constantly encouraging students to explore and take risks, but we must also remember that when presented with the opportunity to explore materially, we should brave enough to investigate ourselves.

— Jon Martin, UAL
Fred Deakin & Charlotte Webb discussed how digital learning practices can help prepare students for the creative industries. They began the day with a keynote of their respective projects: Modual and Futures Studio. Both projects help develop, support and propel students into thinking about social and technological futures, digital practices and the collaborative nature of the creative industries.

Discussed were the key shifts changing our social, political and environmental landscape and how designers and artists are well positioned to help and move with these changes. By recognising that students feel like they lack agency to change the course of things, Modual and Futures Studio assist them with the skills, confidence and know-how to feel like they can influence change.

In the next two decades, 15 million UK jobs will be lost to automation – and because creativity is hard to automate, artists are not only well equipped to manage new jobs, they are also well placed to help those whose jobs will be lost to automation. The question was posed: what should a year zero arts education look like?

Fred highlighted that as the last generation of educators who will remember analogue, we have a responsibility to remember the best of the old. There is a distinction between teaching digital and teaching digitally and that in a post-digital world, projects cannot be delivered in mono skilled way - distinctions which both Futures Studio and Modual are addressing through workshops that on the one hand resist the solutionism of design, and on the other hand instigate a desire to create change through artistic practice. Charlotte Webb declared that by allowing students ways to reclaim futures, we can promote desirable ones and prevent undesirable ones through creative practice.
Discovering the post-digital art school: education for possible futures

@otheragent
@freddeakin

“It is easier to imagine the end of the world than to imagine the end of capitalism”
—Charlotte Webb
Rebecca Thomas of UEA ran a session presenting the ways she has worked with colleagues to introduce ways of thinking about curiosity. She presented a range of activities she uses to get people thinking about curiosity and this proved fruitful given the wide range of participants and languages involved. Interestingly, while we all talk about curiosity in the creative curriculum and more widely in teaching and learning in general, there is not a lot of directly applicable pedagogical research. Rebecca outlined some useful ways of thinking about curiosity linking whether looking a cultural studies approaches (where curiosity has been discouraged as well as where it has been fruitful) to Brookfields’ lenses. Indeed one activity included making drawings using magnifying glasses, representing different lenses such as that of a student, a researcher a colleague. She also examined the art of noticing – clearly linked to curiosity – with an interesting activity examining the work of Hesse-Honegger.

One thing she particularly noted was the way while we might look at ways to help our students be curious, as teachers we may not always be as curious as we would like to be ourselves – her first activity was to consider various questions which including thinking about how our colleagues would view our own curiosity. It is important to keep finding time to be curious ourselves – to keep motivated, be energetic in our own exploration. She has used co-creation projects with staff as well as with students to open up explorations. Particularly important is to change the quality of questions so for instance, instead of asking ‘what job do you want to do?’ ask ‘which piece of your work has inspired you most?’
As part of this stream Kate Hewson and Marina Kelly of University of Wisconsin-Madison presented an opening session they have developed as part of the new ‘Integrated Arts’ curriculum at the University which emphasis transdisciplinary and experiential courses. They have developed a variety of activities which are designed to enable students to come together think about ways to work together as a group setting the ground work for the term.

They workshopped aspects of their session, starting by provoking an interesting discussion about the sorts of rules of engagement that groups feel they can agree to and usefully illustrated how to make this an involving and open process. For instance what role might a cell phone have in a studio? They then focused on one of the specific activities they use around gestures. Each participant develops a gesture that reflects something they feel about learning. They teach a partner the gesture, then link each others’ gesture together. Then volunteers teach their combined gesture to the rest of the group and, building that together with a number of other gestures, create a small dance that grows out of the individual expressions of what a learning experience means to them.

The evolution of the gestures themselves as someone taught them to someone else was noticeable, as was the precision with which people described them; others questioned in order to perform the gestures accurately while others wanted freedom to interpreted them differently. While this was not the main focus of the activity it was an observation about the way meaning was quickly made in relation to gestures that were only a few moments previously enacted.

The discussion that resulted from this was interesting. For some it was felt it was too much a performing challenge that not all students would feel able to participate in; for others it great for overcoming the pressure of language issues. It allowed a place for awkwardness but also, as they explained, it was challenge by choice: ‘witnessing is participating’ as well. It led to an interesting consideration of the way security can be a problem for learning, so while activities like this can create trust maybe also students need be in positions where they feel insecure, to reach transformative learning.
GLAD (The Group for Learning in Art and Design) facilitated a discussion around key questions affecting the teaching of art and design. Transitional subjects such as how best to transform school pupils into university students and whether we should be creating for a lifetime of creativity or of employment/business arose, whilst arguments of what is the distinctive thing about a practical arts education which sets it apart from other university disciplines were deliberated as well as pedagogical notions of skill disciplines.

“There must be boundaries or you can’t cross them”
— Ruben Jacobs, Utrecht University of the Arts, Netherlands

“Students seek permission to be more bold with their work”
— Lina Dzuverovic, University of Reading, UK
Trudy Cone facilitated an experiential workshop that explored how and what movement can teach you about learning. By breaking down the elements of teaching and presenting them as a development cycle through a physical set of activities, Cone explained how, by letting yourself be carried by your environment, you can find reflection after digestion and transformation.

Her methodology outlines and prescribes how each stage of movement can facilitate the next time frame and learning development to not just change but transform.

ELIA steering group member Silke Lange summarised the theme as challenging the status quo in all its forms: valuing different stories and individual voices, belonging vs isolation, co-creation, dialogue, connecting communities, participation, recognising cultural differences... and similarities.

“I just felt like I went back to an early stage being on the floor and that was fantastic for learning.”
– Rebecca Thomas, University of Hertfordshire, UK
Silent Walk

Anna Hart leads a mass silent walk across the neighbourhoods of King’s Cross

“I mean it was London, so it was the good the bad and the ugly! But what really hit me was the number of foreign voices I heard, and the consequences that Brexit will do for that.”
— Christine Pybus, Crawford College of Art & Design Cork, Ireland

“It was as disturbing, challenging and stimulating as I hoped and feared it would be. In a way for me, it was the key moment of this conference, and it didn’t disappoint. It was visceral and moving, I would highly recommend it.”
— Jon Martin, UAL

“I really appreciated that it allowed me a moment to tap into my senses - the heat, the cool, the breeze, the smells, the sounds than I would have had I been listening to someone talk.”
— Kate Hewson, University of Wisconsin, Madison, US

“No thunder, no-one lost, hot silence. TY #ELIAacademy delegates for walking with us into the everyday”
— @AIR_ing_

“It was a really good experience, especially because during the day we speak so much to other people that it was good to not speak for an hour! It was also a great chance to listen to the city to really feel the diversity around here.”
— Fahim Mohammadi, Stuttgart State Academy of Art & Design, Germany
On the rooftop of Central Saint Martin’s King’s Cross campus hosts Futuro House - a 1970’s structure that acts as both a work and performance space. In April 2017, four Graphic Communication Design students inhabited Futuro House for 4 days, 6 hours and 45mins, continuously. The Commune project was an immersive experience in creative and collective practice. Futuro House launched in 1969, also the year of ‘The Locked Room’, a famous experiment at Saint Martin’s College of Art where a group of sculpture students were locked in their studio daily for 8 hours throughout the term with restricted materials and no critical feedback from tutors. It was also the year that Apollo 11 went to the moon, a trip which took 4 days, 6 hours and 45mins. The Commune project reflected these, and invited the four students to generate ideas about the future by living differently for its period of time. The theme Commune occurred through a response to the result of the EU referendum and asked the student body to come up with a set of rules and values of how to live together.

Prior to entering the house, the students took in all they needed to survive and make work. They were unfamiliar with one another before they went in – but found that by inhabiting a physical space, their work and ideas also inhabited a metaphorical space. Many of the students felt that their experience was a positive one and reported that after their time in the Futuro House, they went more intensely into their work.

“Theirs took their work into a journey of the unknown.”
– Timothy Meara, Curriculum Coordinator Foundation

“One student went in as an illustrator, and ended up making film. She called it performance illustration” – Lucy Alexander, Curriculum Leader FAD, CSM

The Commune project at Futuro House was designed to create interventions into the core curriculum that disrupted the way students were working. By challenging student’s individualistic behaviours, the project allowed them, in a non-assessed environment, to break-free from individual identities of their own disciplines and subjects. By engaging in a space that they worked in collectively, the project gave the students an opportunity of a new way of working.
Friday

Keynote

Bart van Rosmalen, improvising cellist and director, programme innovator, advisor, trainer, professor and moderator
Polymath Bart van Rosmalen - a cellist, director, programme innovator, advisor, trainer and professor - talked about dealing with hybridity and the essence of the muse. His philosophy, that each person has many voices that can be exercised in many creative ways, was explained through his own experience when through writing his book, he found that drawing helped his process. He argued that by allowing different stories about yourself, you can stretch your own elasticity.
This zine records some of the fantastic and inspiring events of the conference. There were too many things for us to cover in a small space. The challenge is to create a document of the event while it is happening and end with a printed zine before the end of the Friday programme. We are sorry if we did not manage to cover something that you particularly enjoyed but hope that this will remind you of many of your experiences here. We have also gathered some of your thoughts and comments as the event unfolded.

This zine has been made in the spirit of DIY so it is inevitably a little rough around the edges; the design is kept simple using templates and proofing time has to be brief! We use zine-making as a form of active learning in various ways to examine how to gather and reflect upon forms of print content; students who collaborate on these projects have to make speedy decisions about text, visuals and layout. In an environment of continuous digital content creation, thinking, on the go, how to commit something to print form can be an interesting way of synthesizing learning as well as a great way to get people to participate actively in the event.