

Arts in Re-imagining the University

Rinne, Jauhiainen and Plamper (2015) noted that university similar to church is one of the oldest institutions passing and preserving cultural heritage. In addition, universities are active societal contributors and influential communal contingences also in our contemporary society. However, recently increasing number of these traditional and historical functions of universities, such as the Kantian idea of reason or the Humboldtian idea of culture, have become transformed into the technological idea of excellence (e.g. Biesta, 2011, Davies & Hansel, 2010, Readings, 1996). Within this transformation one of the dominant discourses emphasizes, among other things, accountability, efficiency, cost-effectiveness and quality in both education and research. Universities and their programs are expected to perform effectively, that is, to produce more graduates from high-quality degree programmes with often diminishing resources (Jauhiainen et al. 2006; Ylijoki 2005; Johnson & Deem 2003; Chandler et al. 2002; Deem 2001). In addition to upskilling and increasing the competencies of their graduates, universities are increasingly part of the globalisation of education and research (Peters, 2010). In this context, the question Readings (1996) asks in his seminal work on *The University in Ruins*, is still very topical: how might we re-imagine the university after relinquishing one single unifying idea.

In this proposed paper presentation, I discuss the arts as a possible site for re-imagining the university. The paper draws from the speculative philosophy of Gilles Deleuze, or his philosophy of difference (Deleuze, 1989; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). His writings especially on the functions of the cinema serve as an impetus for exploring the role of the arts more generally in re-imagining the university. First, I will provide an overview of the changes that the university institution has faced recently in Finland. I will then discuss the Deleuzian philosophical framework for new images of thought with respect to the university. I will conclude by offering some arts-based educational examples carried out in my university in Finland. These include university-wide art-based course offerings and sharing and co-creating transdisciplinary artworks. By these examples my aim is to encourage speculative imagination for re-thinking the university.

Methodology

This proposed paper presentation is a theoretical approach into understanding the university. However, as specialist for art and creative practices in my university, I have worked closely with developing the university through diverse arts-based activities. So, the main methodological goal of this presentation is to connect these practical insights and experiences with a wider and more generalizable understanding of the role of the arts in higher education. Thus, the presentation draws from the broad methodological tradition of ethnography. Ethnography here is understood as:

a process of creating and representing knowledge (about society, culture and individuals) that is based on ethnographers' own experiences. It does not claim to produce an objective or truthful account of reality, but should aim to offer versions of ethnographers' experiences of reality that are as loyal as possible to the context, negotiations and intersubjectivities through which the knowledge was produced. (Pink 2009: 8; see also Pink 2007: 22)

The ethnographic approach in this study can be specified as at-home ethnography (Alvesson, 2009, 2003; see also Halstead et al. 2008; Löytönen, 2016, 2017; Mäkelä & Löytönen, 2017) in the sense that I describe a cultural setting to which I belong. As Alvesson (2009, p. 160) noted "at-home ethnography draws attention to one's own cultural context," but, "rather than putting oneself and one's experiences at the center," it is concerned with what goes on around oneself.

While at-home ethnography can be also conducted through a planned and systematic data collection, I am following a less structured form of at-home ethnography, one that uses an emergent-spontaneous study that begins when something interesting occurs. With such an approach, the researcher explores something familiar in a new light: "The idea is that a consistent, long-term scan of what one is experiencing produces a more extended set of incidents or an especially rich and interesting event calling for analysis" (Alvesson

2009, p. 165). As Alvesson (2009, p. 162) continues: “The trick is more a matter of accomplishing a description and insightful, theoretically relevant ideas and comments out of the material.” At-home ethnography in this paper presentation therefore constitutes theoretical developments that are well grounded in practical insights and experiences within one university. By drawing from current research literature on educational philosophy, university pedagogy, and art education, I elaborate on the role of the arts in re-thinking the university and its education and research.

Conclusions and Expected Outcomes

This paper presentation offers an elaborated understanding of the role of the arts in re-imagining the university as well as raises general questions and concerns about the uses of the arts when rethinking the aims and modes of higher education today and in the future (see eg. Barnett, 2016; Peters & Besley, 2013). Here I follow Peters (2010), who suggest that the future of the university is no longer based on the power of a single motivating philosophical idea but favours openness – and multiplicity, incompleteness and difference. Thus, rather than providing a clearly delineated set of research findings, the aim of this presentation is to open up new milieus to discuss how the arts could inform the academia.

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