C. Galloway: submission re RHSA Change Management Proposal

Submission - RSHA Change Management Proposal:

It is very difficult to write a submission in response to a change management proposal when the proposal is in opposition to outcomes suggested by the Working Party reports on the restructure completed in Dec 2012-Jan 2013, has been argued against by the SCI, and is opposed by myself and my colleagues in Art History. As such, my submission returns at first to the fundamental premise of separating Art History and Curatorial Studies staff from its current academic cohort.

The restructuring process, from the initial tabling of the proposal through to the supposed consultation, has been a process without merit and reflects poorly on its instigator, who appears disinterested in accuracy or meaningful discussion. It is clear that there is intent on achieving an outcome, the motivation for which the proposer has been spectacularly unable to communicate.

I am cognisant of the submissions presented by my colleagues Professor Sasha Grishin and Dr Andrew Montana. We are all agreed in our fervent opposition of relocating the discipline of Art History and its companion program of Curatorial Studies to the School of Art. Any suggestions to the contrary would be completely inaccurate and a fabrication. Throughout the entire process there has been no interest shown by proposer in discussing the disciplinary rationale that drives our rejection of the proposal. The report of the relevant Working Party, finalised in January 2013, notes there was no common ground to be had between the two entities of the School of Art (SOA) and Art History. This has been ignored in all subsequent documentation and meetings. Should the proposal be implemented, Art History staff members are the only constituents in the SCI who would be required to accept a major disruption to their current work practices. Such a lack of interest in our concerns can only be interpreted as a disregard for our professional knowledge and experience, and the integrity of our discipline.

Concerns of Art History staff have been manipulated and minimised to suggest our main interest is in maintaining visibility if transferred to the SOA. While that is an issue, it is by far an inconsequential one when considering our core objection which relates to our disciplinary framework. Art History is a Humanities enterprise, and we are intellectually aligned with our fellow Humanities disciplines – at ANU this includes English, Classics, History (Western/Asian), Philosophy, Languages, among others. Our engagement with our colleagues within the School of Cultural Inquiry (SCI) is very positive, and intellectually complementary. We share similar methodological approaches to our teaching and research, evidenced clearly through our graduate cohorts who share the requisite PhD coursework. Our undergraduate students are almost exclusively Bachelor of Arts students, who are also studying within the current SCI, and undertaking study in languages, sociology, history, law and the like.

My own research and specialist area of Asian Art History is firmly based within the Humanities – with close connections to Anthropology and Archaeology, and Asian Studies. I am also the lecturer responsible for the core Curatorial Studies subjects. My years of experience working within a major cultural institution gives me accurate first-hand knowledge of the academic expertise required to be successful in curatorial practice – success is founded on a broad and deep knowledge and grasp of core Humanities disciplines.

Regarding the ‘Proposal and Rationale for an Enlarged School of Art’ - I am disturbed to read that the Proposal specifically states there will be a single program of Art History and Theory. This immediately has implications for the delivery of the current courses. ‘Coordinating of staff
appointments’ assumes Art History and Art Theory are interchangeable. This is incorrect. In 2011 Elisabeth Findlay and I met with Anne Brennan and Gordon Bull to review our programs and look for synergies. The result was an acknowledgement of our disciplinary strengths and differences, and it was resolved by both groups it was only appropriate to cross-list a small number of courses. The idea of ‘common core teaching’ for First Year has been investigated by Art History staff and rejected. From my perspective this position remains unchanged. The statement that no ARC applications have been submitted by Art History staff because of teaching commitments is imaginative and has no basis in reality. To state that a group of 9 staff will lead to ANU occupying a ‘leading global position in art history and theory’ is also ‘creative’. The only way staff can be relieved of their teaching load is through major program change, and there has been absolutely no discussion on the implications program change would have on the current Art History discipline, or students. However, if the objective is to completely change Art History as the discipline is currently taught at ANU, then the objective will be achieved.

ANU continually states that its primary goals are to deliver teaching and undertake research at the highest standards. If the ANU is serious about this, then Art History must remain intellectually aligned with the broader Humanities subjects as taught at ANU. Our PhD cohort has made this very clear. Placing us, the Art Historians, within another academic frame will inhibit our abilities to interact with our Humanities colleagues, and maintain our personal disciplinary interests. We will also be separated from our Film Studies colleagues, which has happened without any consultation. I wonder if anyone was aware that Film Studies and Art History were part of the same grouping in SCI.

I have little professional issue with the proposed amalgamation of the SCI and SLS but if it proceeds it MUST be done in its entirety. Indeed, I see significant potential for example in working with our European Languages colleagues to create engaging and innovative programs relating to culture and history for our students. Art History students and staff will continue to benefit from being situated in an environment that facilitates active and creative interactions across a range of interrelated disciplines, and fosters research endeavours. Art History staff will continue our very amiable ongoing relationships with our SOA colleagues, acknowledging the significant differences that exist in our approaches to learning and teaching that befits the distinct disciplinary activities.

In summary: separating Art History from its disciplinary home in the Humanities will inevitably result in fundamental change to the academic endeavours of Art History staff and subsequently be to the detriment of our currently very successful programs in Art History and Curatorial Studies.

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