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REVIEW ESSAY

To Do or To Teach? The Dichotomous Relationship of Cultural Work and Higher Education

Devin Beauregard

University of Ottawa, Ottawa, Canada

La culture comme vocation, by Vincent Dubois. Paris: Liber/Collège de France, 2013, 199 pages, ISBN 10:2912107741, $25.58.

Cultural Work and Higher Education, by D. Ashton and C. Noonan. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, 288 pages, ISBN 97B-1-137-01393-4, $85.50.

Vincent Dubois's (2013) *La culture comme vocation* and Daniel Ashton and Caitrona Noonan's (2013) collected edition, *Cultural Work and Higher Education*, offer unique—albeit complementary—perspectives on the cultural sector and its relationship with higher education and teaching. In particular, both books draw upon the role education (and the education sector, both as educator and vocation) plays in shaping the professional trajectories of cultural workers. At times, these two sectors have worked in unison to achieve creative, academic, and economic goals; at other times, they have seemingly worked at cross-purposes, arguably setting each other up for failure in terms of establishing unrealistic expectations for graduates hoping to work in the cultural sector and defeatist conjectures for cultural workers looking at the education sector as an alternative work environment. However, to fully appreciate the context of the two books, it is perhaps best to take a step back and view the relationship between the cultural sector and higher education from an historical perspective.

There is an old saying popularized by Irish playwright George Bernard Shaw (1903) that says, "He who can, does. He who cannot, teaches." Inherent in this saying is the notion that only the individuals who possess the innate skills or abilities to perform and succeed in a set profession will do so; those who do not possess the skills to succeed—though maintain an ambition or passion for said profession or its field—will invariably become teachers of that vocation and its craft (Falcone, Ferson, and Hamed 2014, 96). While this saying may be somewhat defeatist in a day and age when the notion that one can do anything one puts own's mind to is ingrained into the collective conscience of Western society, it nevertheless holds true for most professions,

Address correspondence to Devin Beauregard, University of Ottawa, 120 University (Room 7005), Ottawa, ON K1N 6N5, Canada. E-mail: dbeau032@uottawa.ca

to some degree. Where this saying has arguably been most salient, however, is with respect to those working in the creative and cultural industries, where—short of holding the saying as a truism—even possessing the skills to "do" does not guarantee that one will not have to "teach" at some point in their career as a means of sustaining themselves. For many people working in the cultural industries, finding secondary (or tertiary) employment in other sectors is a necessary condition for supporting themselves when work in the creative sector is lean or the pay is insufficient to live on. In fact, even when work in the cultural industries is steady and consistent, many cultural workers must still hold onto their second or third jobs in order to remain economically solvent (Throsby 2007). Often, the most popular work option for cultural workers has been to teach their craft at secondary and post-secondary schools, as it provides them with the opportunity to combine their passion with a profession that ensures a reasonably stable living—not to mention a relatively flexible schedule that afford them time to continue their oeuvre (Bain 2005, 40-41). However, much like work in the cultural industries itself, work in the education sector, particularly where arts and cultural studies are concerned, can be limited—with only 3.5 percent of advertised teaching positions falling under the purview of arts education (Twombly et al. 2006, 503). Moreover, much as education as a secondary option is popular for cultural workers, it carries the stigma encapsulated in Shaw's quote—that those who teach are "enthusiastic amateurs or failed professionals" (Berger et al. in Ashton & Noonan 2013, 89).

It is perhaps in part due to the negative connotations associated with teaching that many cultural workers have sought secondary work in other fields more closely related to arts and culture. Among the most prominent of these alternatives has been the relatively novel field of cultural administration. As the lines between "various arts disciplines [blur]" and "broader, more inclusive concept[s] of culture" emerge as a result of factors largely subsumed under the concept of globalization, the classic conceptions of arts management and administration have given way to the more nuanced conception of cultural administration—a program that, at once, navigates the currents of public, not-for profit, and private sector arts management, often in the context of cultural policy (Dewey 2004, 17–20). Consequently, interest in cultural administration has swollen, to the point where it is now seen as a cultural career to aspire to. It is with this context in mind that Vincent Dubois's (2013, 15) *La culture comme vocation* explores the growth of the cultural sector (primarily focusing on the sector's growth in France) since the 1960s, with an emphasis on the more recent emergence of cultural administration as a viable and highly sought-after work option for cultural workers. With cultural administrators as his point of reference, Dubois seeks to understand why the cultural sector has grown and continues to flourish—often with more willing workers than there are positions to be filled—in spite of what can only be described as deplorable working conditions (Dubois, 26). In fact, despite the transitory nature of the sector, what little it offers in the way of job stability or financial certainty, and with working conditions that, at times, border on criminal, the cultural sector continues to be viewed as a beacon of promise and hopeful ambition for those with creative aspirations (Dubois, 9). However, while this may be the case for many professions in the cultural sector, cultural administration boasts a relatively stable job environment compared to other cultural jobs—which accounts, in part, for why it has become a particularly popular alternative in recent years (Dubois, 41–42).

Dubois (2013) posits that the growth of the cultural sector—and of cultural administration—can be largely attributed to a rising number of new job designations in the sector in recent decades, coupled with the inherent desire of cultural workers to produce and

work creatively. For many aspiring cultural workers, cultural administration offers the opportunity to do just that: work in the cultural industries and have a hand in the creative process. Moreover, cultural administration—as a vocation—is seen as a realistic and realizable objective for many cultural workers—a fact that cannot always be said of other fields in the cultural industries (Dubois, 16–17). The long-term increase in employment in the cultural sector has also had an influence on the interest the field of cultural administration has received, often overshadowing the harsh realities of working in the cultural industries (Dubois, 26). Drawing on statistical analysis of cultural jobs in France spanning from 1962 to 2008, Dubois (2013, 28) notes that the number of professionals employed in the cultural sector increased 4.2 times over that span—a number that doubles if unemployed artisans are included. This, in effect, has created the illusionary impression that the employment opportunities in the sector are both abundant and secure.

The resulting interest and entry of new blood into the cultural sector and, specifically, the field of cultural administration is a relatively novel phenomenon for the sector, one which has had a domino effect on the evolution of the field. Historically, as Dubois (2013) outlines, cultural administration has been primarily a position filled by individuals already working in the cultural sector. Employment opportunities in the sector, thus, were not so much increasing as it was the case that the workforce was shifting from one cultural field to the next. As such, positions in cultural administration were taken as secondary jobs by cultural workers, and often seen as positions requiring little education or formal training in administration (Dubois, 45). As interest in the field of cultural administration began to increase, however, so too did the competition for these positions. To distinguish themselves from their competition, many would-be cultural administrators sought post-secondary and graduate education—effectively creating a demand for cultural administration programs. The result of this has been a proliferation of educational programs specializing in cultural administration—albeit through schools that have maintained limited space in their programs (Dubois, 63). Consequently, Dubois (2013, 64) suggests that, like a self-serving mechanism, limited space in cultural administration programs has resulted in two things: (1) the programs have become more desirable as they are, by virtue of the supply and demand, more difficult to get into; (2) the field/work of cultural administration has become legitimized by both the demand for and necessity of higher education to find gainful employment in the field.

This legitimation has not gone unnoticed by individuals in other fields. In fact, Dubois (2013) notes that it is not exclusively culturally inclined individuals who have taken an interest in cultural administration; many individuals who have evolved in fields outside of the purview of the cultural sector have also sought work as cultural administrators. Dubois (2013, 49–50) broadly attributes this outside interest in public administration to the increase in the number of individuals with diplomas (and the overall increase in the time people spend in school), coupled with the search for work that would complement their education. This has been paired with a university-promoted drive towards teaching practical skills to students, which has led to a proliferation of specialized programs in business and administration (among others). This, in turn, has led to an influx of students applying to specialized programs, which has resulted in the supply of graduating students seeking employment in these fields to exceed the demand for their services (Dubois, 50–51). As such, these graduates have sought work in less conventional places, such as the cultural sector, where their specialized skills can be advantageously used. Similarly, many artistically driven individuals aspiring to work in the cultural sector have sought master's degrees in fields other than culture as a means of diversifying their abilities/skills (Dubois, 126). The result of these

cross-working phenomena has been that now, more than ever, employment in the cultural sector requires a diversity of skills and abilities that go beyond artistic or latent talents for the arts. Consequently, the field of cultural administration has evolved to necessitate the blending of two types of scholastic capital as a requisite for working in the field: (1) cultural competencies; (2) general competencies and/or competencies that come from outside of the field of culture (Dubois, 82). To this extent, cultural administration is—as its name implies—as much about culture (and the skills it entails) as it is about the broader context of administrating. It is in this respect that cultural administration offers both a legitimate career option for both cultural and/or administrative-minded individuals and a somewhat "kitsch" alternative for individuals with a broad interest in culture and creativity.

To better understand the growth of the cultural sector—and the growth and development of the field of cultural administration—Dubois (2013, 15) profiles the cultural administrator (and, more specifically, candidates studying in a master's of cultural administration with aspirations of becoming cultural administrators) from their cultural, educational, and professional backgrounds to their career trajectories, working conditions, and rationale for working in the field or sector. In particular, Dubois (2013, 65) found that individuals aspiring to work and/or study in cultural administration (i.e., candidates in the masters of cultural administration) tend to be socially privileged women, with high degrees of cultural and educational capital, many of whom have family members that already work in the cultural industries. Many of these individuals, Dubois (2013) notes, have (or had) artistic aspirations but are now seeking employment as cultural administrators as a means of remaining connected to the cultural sector—and this despite being intimately aware of the harsh working conditions of the sector. In fact, the individuals who continue to aspire to have a cultural career yet work as cultural administrators are about as numerous as those who gave up on their artistic aspirations (Dubois, 125). To this extent, cultural administration has become the "go to" alternative for workers in the cultural sector, supplanting teaching as the de facto work for "failed artists"—though instead of the clichéd failed artist, cultural administrators are seen as the entrepreneurial artists who approach administration as a means of practically managing their creative work (Dubois, 129).

Overall, Dubois provides a seasoned and succinct overview of the rise of cultural administration as not just a "secondary" career for the failed artist, but as a legitimate and highly sought-after career choice by individuals coming from sectors sometimes untraditional or disassociated with the cultural industries—though perhaps ironically, given the often harsh and unattractive working conditions of the broader, cultural sector. Where Dubois (2013) offers unique (and statistically supported) explanations for the the growth of the cultural sector and the field of cultural administration, his findings and appraisal of the education sector as cultural vocation tend to mirror those of many other studies. Namely, Dubois's (2013) findings suggest that teaching as a cultural vocation is seen as an albatross to cultural workers. There is little room for opportunities/growth in education once a creative worker has become a teacher. In effect, teaching is often looked at, vis-à-vis the broader cultural sector, as a trade-off between stability and risk, closure and openness, and repetition and creativity—the culmination of which serves to establish teaching and culture as mutually exclusive (Dubois, 120). Conversely, and perhaps more than any other culturally related field, cultural administration is viewed as being about working in the cultural field/sector than it is about the job itself (Dubois, 109-110). Simply put, cultural administration is seen as a bridge between the personal and professional life that does not compromise the artistic integrity of cultural workers in the way that teaching is often seen to do

(Dubois, 167). In this respect, Dubois's book offers a double-edged sword as far as teaching and education are concerned. On the one hand, teaching is seen as a last resort—an option that cultural workers are leery to approach due to the social stigma associated with the vocation. On the other hand, Dubois's findings suggest that the education system, more broadly, has played an ironic role in legitimizing the cultural sector—and cultural administration in particular—to the point where there is now an oversaturation of individuals aspiring to work creatively. Thus, short of vilifying the education system, there is a subtle undertone to Dubois's book that suggests that the education system has played an inherently nefarious role in cultivating the allure surrounding the cultural sector and cultural administration. By fostering the prevailing notion that a higher education will almost certainly yield the "job of your dreams," the education system has effectively set up cultural workers for disappointment—a disappointment that is, arguably, embodied in the vocation of teaching.

If the cultural sector maintains a precarious, often dichotomous vocational relationship with the education sector, the same cannot be said of their educational and social relationship. It is in the context educational and social that Ashton & Noonan's (2013) collected edition, *Cultural Work and Higher Education*, explores the evolving nature of the relationship between higher education and the cultural sector. As the cultural industries and higher education become progressively more entwined, Ashton and Noonan (and the various authors who contributed to the edition) (2013, 2) speculate on what sort of risks and rewards emerge from such a union. Similar to Dubois (2013), Ashton and Noonan (2013, 6) note that with the rise in academic programs geared towards artistic fields, graduates "faces an uncertain and challenging labour market"—one where there are clear "winners and losers." Drawing, in particular, on readings from the UK, Ashton and Noonan (2013) note that "creativity" has become a popular term in UK policy discourse, where creativity is used in the context of how it can be harnessed to produce discernable individual, social, and economic benefits. This understanding of creativity is largely informed by management literature, and posits creativity in the context of human capital (Ashton and Noonan, 7–8). Consequently, there has been a push towards "prioritizing economically valuable skills" in higher education, often at the expense of more generalized skills—which, ironically, has put the "creative diversity and [. . .] experimental cultural production" that can be (and has been) developed within the educational environment at risk (Ashton and Noonan, 8). Moreover, despite this push towards economically valuable skills, cultural sectors are finding that higher education institutions are failing to provide their graduates with the right kinds of skills to succeed in their industries (Ashton and Noonan, 10).

To address the skill deficiencies of graduates, many higher education institutions have drawn on their social ties with the cultural sector. With this sectorial connection in mind, the first few sections of Ashton and Noonan's (2013) collected edition seek to suss out this relationship and explore its broader implications in relation to public policy. Broadly, higher education institutions have, since as late as 2000, been seen as "incubators" for the cultural industries—a "by-product of their teaching" rather than the result of any policy implementation on the part of government (Oakley, in Ashton & Noonan 2013, 25). In fact, policymakers have incrementally dismantled the grant system that helps fund students' higher education—all the while, ironically, espousing the antiquated notion that the student experience of leaving home, funded by grants, to study is what helps create a milieu favorable to the cultural industries. In response to these dynamics, schools have sought to strengthen their ties and become more involved with the cultural sector in order to maintain the creative atmosphere that makes the higher education environment appealing

to cultural industries—but also to address the ongoing industrial concern that graduates are not leaving school with the skills needed to succeed in the cultural sector (Oakley in Aston and Noonan 2013, 27-28). What has emerged is a system that promotes government subsidized and/or unpaid work placements, internships, and co-ops. The rationale behind these work placements is that students will be able to acquire firsthand pedagogical and vocational skills and social/industry connections they need to succeed in the cultural field of their choice (Berger et al. in Ashton and Noonan 2013, 87). In fact, work placements have become such a crucial component to success in the cultural industries that many graduates who did not have the opportunity/experience felt disadvantaged vis-à-vis those who had had a placement (Pollard in Ashton and Noonan 2013, 47–48).

However, government cuts to student grants, coupled with the ever-rising cost of tuition, have made it increasingly difficult for students to afford to move away from home to go to school. Rather than move away and incur the extra living costs associated with doing so, many students are choosing schools closer to home and are working part-time in order to afford higher education (Oakley in Ashton and Noonan 2013, 30). As such, many students coming from lower- and working-class families are unable to participate in unpaid work placements because they simply cannot afford to and/or do not have the time outside of school and (paid) work. Consequently, higher education institutions—working with and through the creative sector—are creating a class dichotomy wherein only the students who come from well-to-do or financially solvent families can afford to take unpaid work placements and are thus able to gain the skills and connections needed to succeed (Lee in Ashton and Noonan 2013, 205-207). In this respect, Ashton and Noonan's (2013) contributors tend to agree with Dubois's (2013, 73) assessment that the majority of cultural workers tend to come from the higher tiers of the social hierarchy—and often at the expense of the lower classes.

The question of exclusion, however, extends beyond mere class considerations. Both racial and gender exclusion have also become inherently "hardwired" elements of the networks that underpin the cultural industries (Luckman in Ashton and Noonan 2013, 79; Taylor & Littleton in Ashton and Noonan 2013, 156). While cultural studies classrooms have become considerably more diverse in recent decades, multiculturalism and difference in the cultural industries have become a form of commodity used to extract "surplus value"; rather than celebrate diversity, the cultural industries transform it "into something to be feared or fetishized" (Saha in Ashton and Noonan 2013, 217). In this context, race is akin to tokenism, and commodification serves to transform the works of minority practitioners from "progressive representations of 'race'" into something that more closely resembles stereotypes (Saha, 215–216). In a similar vein, women are also underrepresented in the cultural sector—though their underrepresentation is less a question of commodity and more a question of gender inequality. Women account for more than sixty percent of the students in higher education cultural studies—and account for eighty percent of those inscribed in masters of cultural administration programs—but only account for 38–43 percent of the cultural sector's workforce (Allen in Ashton and Noonan 2013, 232; Dubois 2013, 66-67). What these statistics speak to is the notion that the cultural sector is an exclusory, (white) male-dominated sector. When women and minorities have been able to ascend to "privileged positions that have not been reserved for them" within the cultural sector, they are often met with an "abnormalizing" gaze from their male counterparts (Allen in Ashton and Noonan 2013, 242). This abnormalizing gaze, in itself, serves as a form of exclusionary tactic—one which is rooted in notions of "us" and "them."

The fact that inequalities of this nature persist in the cultural sector is ironic, given the sector's name, but perhaps not to be unexpected. Dubois's (2013, 99) research indicates that males often approach culture as one of many vocational options, whereas females will often see it as their only option—to the point where they do not consider other options. These findings, thusly, suggest that—to a certain extent, at least—men are more open or flexible when it comes to the type of work they are willing to accept in the cultural sector (or beyond), while women are set on specific vocations to the point where they will hold on to their aspirations long past their "best before" dates. Inherently, this speaks to a measure of gendered socialization—but, more broadly, it speaks to Bourdieusian concept of habitus—that is to say, a "structuring structure, which organizes practices and the perception of practices" and a "structured structure," which serves as the principle through which the "division into logical classes which organizes the perception of the social world is itself the product of internalization of the division into social classes" (Bourdieu 2010, 166). Those familiar with Dubois will note that his work often draws upon that of Pierre Bourdieu—to the point where Dubois could easily be perceived as the spiritual successor of Bourdieu in the field of cultural studies. With that said, questions of economic, social, and cultural capital figure prominently in Dubois's (2013) book, with much of the success of cultural workers being attributed to their ability to maximize their various forms of capital. Dubois (2013) points to the concept of the "artist's life" to accentuate this point: The advent of the "artist's life" in the nineteenth century was a way for the upper classes to construct a social identity devoid of the connotations associated with bourgeoisie; the modern investment in positions in the cultural sector, like cultural administration, is a way to reclaim that identity in function with modern scholastic capital and the state of the current job market (Dubois 2013, 165). This, too, is reflected in certain chapters of Ashton and Noonan's (2013) book—most notably the chapters by Oakley, Luckman, and Lee. Simply put, these inequalities—though readily observable in the context of cultural studies—are perhaps not unique to the cultural sector, per se. Rather, these are inequalities that are prevalent systemically throughout society—an internalized product of class-based society. This is not so much to excuse the inequalities found in the cultural sector, but to instead suggest that the problem goes much further than the cultural sector.

Overall, both Dubois (2013) and Ashton and Noonan (2013) manage to provide nuanced, albeit relatively complementary, accounts of work in the cultural sector—the former, by exploring the cultural sector through the vocational and educational lens of cultural administration; the latter primarily through the cultural sector's relationship with the education sector. Where both books are, perhaps, most salient to academics is with respect to their explorations of why the cultural sector continues to be a desired sector to work in, despite its questionable and often exclusionary work environments. While many factors invariably play a role in influencing an individual's choice to pursue a career in the cultural sector, the central reason invariably seems to be the oft-romanticized concept of the "artist" or the "creative." Even when one's aspirations for a specific vocation in the cultural sector fail to materialize, there is this prevailing sense of optimism that, by finding different work in the cultural sector—such as, for instance, work as a cultural administrator—one can at least maintain one's foot in the proverbial door and hold out hope of eventually segueing into the vocation of choice. But when does the dream effectively die? It is in this respect that both Dubois (2013) and Ashton and Noonan (2013) (and their contributors) arguably fail to offer a suitable answer. While both books suggest that becoming a teacher is the moment when creative aspirations are let go, this answer is somewhat clichéd, not to mention derogatory towards the profession of teaching. Although cultural administration is offered as an

alternative to teaching—one that does not invoke the connotation of failure that goes along with teaching in the cultural sector—it nevertheless carries with it an aura of inevitably becoming synonymous with teaching: that is to say, of becoming associated with failure. With that said, if there is a glimmer of hope to be found in these two books, it is that the students and graduates these researchers interviewed maintained a sense of optimism in spite of the underlying realities of working in the cultural sector. If these students are to be commended for their optimism, however, they must also be criticized for their naïveté: by accepting the realities of the cultural sector and simply hoping for the best, cultural graduates are accepting subjugation at the hands of the cultural sector and enabling it to continue with its system of inequality and, at times, exploitation.

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