

**Removing the Cap:**  
**Institutional Affectivity and the Financialization of British Art Education**

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*A celebration of the life and work of Randy Martin*

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This paper is an attempt to think through the affective impacts of the precarity of British art departments – just one aspect of the financialization of British higher education. While the financialization of HE is an ongoing and complicated process, there are three major background conditions that contribute particularly sharply to the increased precarity across the sector: 1) the increase in tuition fees following the controversial Browne Review of 2010; 2) the Cameron coalition government's decision to remove caps in student numbers across British HE by 30,000 students in 2014-2015, and completely from the 2015-2016 academic year; and 3) uncertainty about the UK's ability to retain international students, staff and research funding – and about the UK's future more generally – caused by Brexit. These background conditions are causing instability throughout the HE sector, but they arguably produce even greater vulnerability within art departments: first, because of extra pressures on courses not deemed to lead to well-paid career options for most students; and second, because art departments, as space-intensive programs, exacerbate the politics of financialized space in the university. For instance, university management practices for pricing space and costing departments may unfairly put space-intensive programs at a disadvantage, by pricing space such that it distributes the *costs* of university management according to space use, without equally distributing the *risks* associated with running space-intensive, less profit-driven departments in a financialized HE context. Such disadvantaging through pricing space may occur in spite of the fact that less profitable, more space-intensive departments may make strong contributions to the quality of research within the university, as well as to society more generally through increasing access to high-quality art education for disadvantaged students.

How might these conditions influence what I call the institutional affectivity of art departments – in other words, the affective ecologies of art institutions, as they are impacted by increasing stress on debt- and job-burdened students; increasing precarity of academic staff, increased financial pressures on university management, and increased pressure on both students and staff due to wildly fluctuating student numbers, causing either department closures or unhealthy rates of expansion in high-recruiting departments? Further, what kinds of activist strategies might be deployed to address institutional affectivity in this financialized context? This paper suggests a need for new ways to conceptualize institutional affectivity *between* institutions – for instance, to understand how the pressures associated with under- or over-recruitment, from one university to the next, are inextricably linked within a deregulated context. Broadening the scope of entanglements, so to speak, by understanding how institutional affectivity courses through the sector between departments, might be a way to produce new forms of solidarity between departments facing increasingly inhospitable conditions in which to teach and learn.