

MAKING
ART
SCHOOLS

A READER

BY

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KING

INTRODUCTION

Some say that art can be neither taught nor learned. If this is true, then perhaps the institutions, places and communities we know as *art schools* exist to learn and teach the art of making (art) schools? What kind of histories would inform such programs, and what styles and practices serve as orientation for those eager to learn such an art?

This reader assembles histories of the development of systems and nomenclatures of art and design schools and schooling around the globe, collecting texts on the formation and transformation of educational institutions in Europe, the US, South America, and China.

The reader was assembled with the intention to support awareness of the context in which art education takes place, and which stakeholders influence the making of the artist subject and the subject of art, today.

The reader is based on research on the transmutation of pedagogical realities and utopias and their idyllization and simplification through academic and colonialistic circulation, demystifying some idealisations of the art school, be it the 18th century French Academie or 20th century Bauhaus. These critical readings of history are expanded through additions critical for an understanding of contemporary practices, which take up parasitic strategies and inhabit the cracks of academic infrastructures.

Together, this proposes a reading of the histories of schooling as a political and creative practice, a practice that wields the particular power that is calling something a school, academy or class. Here, we find the affirmation that teaching is the best way to learn, and that perhaps, by situating oneself within a political history of the art school, students and teachers, directors and evaluators, might better understand their role among the political moment and history that is going to school or making a school.

If indeed the point of going to art school might be to learn the art of coming together as a school, it is necessary to understand them as institutions that developed through waves of political transformation and irrational undercurrents. In between these two forces, we find the interstitial spaces that can be inhabited by art practices that seek for school to be a political, social and artistic experiment and experience in which we can together unlearn the unteachable. (bg)

We would like to thank Sarrita Hunn, James McAnally; Susannah Haslam, Tom Clarke (both adpe); Jamie Allen, Lucie Kolb and Jennifer Scherler for their comments and contributions.

INVENTORY

Camnitzer, Luis. 2009. "Art Education between Colonialism and Revolution." *In Art School: Propositions for the 21st Century*, edited by Steven Henry Madoff, 201–15. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

Luis Camnitzer's agenda is the ongoing fight for visibility of art production in Latin America. In this essay he points out the difficulties of the colonial structures framing all non-Western art production as well as teaching methods as declassified and folklore until today. (dk)
Chumley, Lily. 2016. "Chapter 2: Thirty Years of Reform." *In Creativity Class. Art School and Culture. Work in Postsocialist China*, 21–59. Princeton: Princeton University Press. Lily Chumley is the only dissertation I know about that deals with the implication of the colonial exportation of the European and US-American art school model to Asia and its implication by realizing a certain modernist and theory based ways of teaching on a different political and social context. (dk)

Chumley, Lily. 2016. "Chapter 2: Thirty Years of Reform." *In Creativity Class. Art School and Culture. Work in Postsocialist China*, 21–59. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

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Elkins, James. 2001. "Histories." *In Why Art Cannot Be Taught: A Handbook for Art Students*, 1st edition, 5–39. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

James Elkins manages to draw a chronological outline of the evolution of Western art and design schools from Greek and Roman models, to first European medieval universities, guild systems and the beaux arts movement. This text helps us to understand the long and traditional roots we are dealing with, when we look at the art schools of today. (dk)

Holert, Tom. 2009. "Art in the Knowledge-Based Polis." *E-Flux*, no. 3. <http://www.eflux.com/journal/03/68537/art-in-the-knowledgebased-polis/>.

Tom Holert is interested in how issues concerning current places of production of meanings of art and artistic practice relate to questions touching on the particular kind of knowledge that can be produced within the artistic field by the practitioners or actors who operate in its various places and spaces. This variety and diversity has to be taken into account to the notion of what is at stake when one speaks of knowledge in relation to art. (dk)

Lesage, Dieter. 2015. "The Black Mountain Syndrome." presented at the Black Mountain – Educational Turn and the Avant-Garde, Berlin.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=atazV-PVIXo>. Transcript.

In this lecture given at a symposium reflecting on the legacy of the Black Mountain College, Dieter Lesage introduces what he calls the Black Mountain Syndrome, a condition based on the trauma caused by the bureaucratic

processes at European academies, that leads patients to think of “Black Mountain College as the best school we have never been to.” (bg)

Colomina, Beatriz. 2019. *Beatriz Colomina: The Perversions of the Bauhaus*. HKW Berlin. <https://hkw.de/en/app/mediathek/audio/69676>. Transcript.

In a similar fashion as the Black Mountain Syndrome, the Bauhaus has been inscribed into the surface of art school histories as a story of minimalist industrial rationality. In order to contextualise the politics of the Bauhaus movement and its ongoing imprinting onto the concept of the art school, we include this text by Architectural historian Beatriz Colomina in which she “explores how the Bauhaus harbored deeply transgressive ideas and pedagogies.” (bg)

Singerman, Howard. 1999a. “Intro.” In *Art Subjects: Making Artists at the American University*, First edition, 1–10. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Howard Singer puts in historical and ideological context the rise of the Master of Fine Arts degrees in the US and at US-American universities in particular. He argues that the places where one studies art makes a difference in the forms and meanings such a study produces. He shows how universities with their language-based organisation in disciplines and, played a critical part in the production of modernism in the arts; and how this process is repeated with post-modernist structures in the third cycle programs. (dk)

Slager, Henk. 2009. “Art and Method.” In *Artists with PhDs: On the New Doctoral Degree in Studio Art*, edited by James Elkins, 49–55. Washington DC: New Academia Publishing.

In 2009 Henk Slager opens up the discussion on the current methods taught and used in artistic and practice-based PhD programs. He questions the fact that so far only the theoretical methods of measuring art history PhD theses are used in the practice-led third cycle programs. He asks for new artistic methods for non-scientific project based PhDs. (dk) Gropius, Walter. 1921. “Bauhaus Manifesto.” Published in April of 1919, a manifesto for the new Bauhaus school pencilled by Walter Gropius outlines the basic tenets of this new form of education and it’s at-the-time progressive goal of connecting architects, designers and artists to install a fresh teaching and learning community. Gropius stressed the momentum of the Bauhaus Movement by naming it Manifesto, like the Dadaists and Futurists did. (dk)

Gropius, Walter. 1921. “Bauhaus Manifesto.”

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Albers, Josef. 1934. “On Art Instruction.” *Black Mountain College Bulletin*, 35 1934.

In this short essay by Josef Albers that was part of the Bulletin series of the Black Mountain College, he underlines his traditional perspective on teaching based on the power of the docent, as the owner of knowledge, the need to position oneself in a civil society, and the use of material to meet spiritual and everyday needs. (dk)

Strycker, Jacquelyn. 2012. "The Art School as Artwork." Createquity. December 22, 2012. <http://createquity.com/2012/12/the-art-school-as-artwork/>. An annotated collection of "artist-operated schools", all founded in the early 2000s and described by the author as "exploratory educational practices" where the "the schools themselves are also the art, framed as participatory, collaborative community projects. (bg) Castelblanco, Felipe. 2017. "Para-Site School." This document by the artist Felipe Castelblanco documents the efforts of Para-Site School between 2011 and 2017. The project infiltrates existing institutional art school infrastructures in order to "embrace and serve immigrants and artists-nomads excluded by official universities in the USA and Europe." (bg)

Castelblanco, Felipe. 2017. "Para-Site School."

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The Free U Resistance Committee. 2011. "Long Live the Copenhagen Free University!" BLOG OF PUBLIC SECRETS. Accessed November 10, 2019. <https://legermj.typepad.com/blog/2011/06/long-live-the-copenhagen-free-university.html>.

If art school is a place where we learn the art of making schools, the Copenhagen Free University (CFU) can be considered the martyr of this scholastic mythology. People interested in emancipatory research and knowledge production met in a kitchen to produce communal knowledge. They institute this setting as a "free university" by titling it as such, but are subsequently shut down by the Danish state because it wants to establish a legal monopoly on institutions titled university. Because of the enlightening but overbearing discourse this produced, the CFU dissolved itself as it became an emblem and "overly fixed identifier" for this particular conversation around emancipatory education, losing its original quality as a place for "fluctuating desires". (bg)

Del Pesco, Joseph. 2009. "This Pickpocket Will Leave You (Culturally) Richer." *Museumist* (blog). September 21, 2009. <http://museumist.com/2009/09/21/this-pickpocket-will-leave-you-culturally-richer/>.

An interview with the founder of "Pickpocket Almanack" (vernacular for 'stolen calendar'), "an experimental school without walls." whose program was based on the schedule of art and culture events at venues around San Francisco, around which the faculty created its courses. It was founded by an independent curator working for SFMOMA based on his own compilation of research on "artist initiated schools". (bg via Sarrita Hunn)

Woolfe, Virginia. 1938. "Three Guineas." In *Education*, edited by Felicity Allen, 32–34. 2011. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Virigina Woolfe proposes a new form of university that is less based on prestige or endowments, but on the creative and political ideas of the students. (dk)

**E D U
C A T
I O N**

The Fleet Library at RISD

Documents of Contemporary Art

Virginia Woolf

Three Guineas//1938

[...] The part that education plays in human life is so important, and the part that it might play in answering your question ['How in your opinion are we to prevent war?'] is so considerable that to shirk any attempt to see how we can influence the young through education against war would be craven. [...]

Let us then discuss as quickly as we can the sort of education that is needed. Now since history and biography – the only evidence available to an outsider – seem to prove that the old education of the old colleges breeds neither a particular respect for liberty nor a particular hatred of war, **it is clear that you must rebuild your college differently. It is young and poor; let it therefore take advantage of those qualities and be founded on poverty and youth.** Obviously, then, it must be an experimental college; an adventurous college. **Let it be built on lines of its own.** It must be built not of carved stone and stained glass, but of some cheap, easily combustible material which does not hoard dust and perpetrate traditions. Do not have chapels. **Do not have museums and libraries with chained books and first editions under glass cases.** Let the pictures and the books be new and always changing. **Let it be decorated afresh by each generation with their own hands cheaply.** The work of the living is cheap; often they will give it for the sake of being allowed to do it. Next, what should be taught in the new college, the poor college? Not the arts of dominating other people; not the arts of ruling, of killing, of acquiring land and capital. They require too many overhead expenses; salaries and uniforms and ceremonies. The poor college must teach only the arts that can be taught cheaply and practised by poor people; such as medicine, mathematics, music, painting and literature. It should teach the arts of human intercourse; the art of understanding other people's lives and minds, and the little arts of talk, of dress, of cookery that are allied with them. **The aim of the new college, the cheap college, should be not to segregate and specialize, but to combine.** It should explore the ways in which mind and body can be made to cooperate; discover what new combinations make good wholes in human life. The teachers should be drawn from the good liver as well as from the good thinkers. There should be no difficulty in attracting them. For there would be none of the barriers of wealth and ceremony, of advertisement and competition which now make the old and rich universities such uneasy dwelling-places – cities of strife, cities where this is locked up and that is chained down; where nobody can walk freely or talk freely for fear of transgressing some chalk mark, of displeasing some dignitary. But if the college were poor it would have nothing to offer; competition would be

abolished. Life would be open and easy. **People who love learning for itself would gladly come there.** Musicians, painters, writers, would teach there, because they would learn. What could be of greater help to a writer than to discuss the art of writing with people who were thinking not of examinations or degrees or of what honour or profit they could make literature give them, but of the art itself?

And so with the other arts and artists. They would come to the poor college and practise their arts there because it would be a place where society was free; **not parcelled out into the miserable distinctions of rich and poor, of clever and stupid; but where all the different degrees and kinds of mind, body and soul merit cooperated.** Let us then found this new college; this poor college; in which learning is sought for itself; where advertisement is abolished; and there are no degrees; and lectures are not given, and sermons are not preached, and the old poisoned vanities and parades which breed competition and jealousy ...

*The letter broke off there. It was not from lack of things to say; the peroration indeed was only just beginning. It was because the face on the other side of the page – the face that a letter-writer always sees – appeared to be fixed with a certain melancholy, upon a passage in the book from which quotation has already been made. 'Head mistresses of schools therefore prefer a belettered staff, so that students of Newnham and Girton, since they could not put B.A. after their name, were at a disadvantage in obtaining appointments.' The honorary treasurer of the Rebuilding Fund had her eyes fixed on that. **'What is the use of thinking how a college can be different'**, she seemed to say, 'when it must be a place where students are taught to obtain appointments?' 'Dream your dreams', she seemed to add. [...]*

Virginia Woolf, extracts from *Three Guineas* (London: Hogarth Press, 1938); reprinted edition (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1978) 27; 39–41. © The Society of Authors.

[...] **Two models**, even though in reality they contaminate each other, **divide up the teaching of art conceptually**. **On the one hand, there is the academic model; on the other, there is the Bauhaus model**. The former believes in talent, the latter in creativity. The former classifies the arts according to techniques, what I would call the *métier*; the latter according to the medium. The former fosters imitation; the latter invention. **Both models are obsolete**. **The academic model entered a deep crisis as soon as it began to deserve the derogative label of academicism**. Its decadence was accomplished under the pressure of modern art, which is why no return to the past is thinkable lest the blackout is pronounced on all the art and all the artists of modernity. **The Bauhaus model also entered an open crisis**. That phenomenon is more recent but it isn't new, dating from the sixties, I would say. It, too, goes hand in hand with the art of its time ... [...]

Talent vs Creativity

The difference between talent and creativity is that the former is unequally distributed and the latter universally. In the passage from one word to the other, there is of course a complete reversal of ideologies, and it is not difficult to see that, historically, the progress of the ideology of creativity went hand in hand with that of the idea of democracy and of egalitarianism. [...]

Métier vs Medium

The difference between *métier* and medium is that the former has a historical existence and the latter a transhistorical existence. The Academy classified the fine arts according to the *métier* and everything the notion entails: specialized skills, artisan habits, sleights of hand, rules of composition, canons of beauty, in short, a specific tradition. Modernism classifies the arts according to the medium and everything this notion entails: particular materials, supports, tools, gestures, technical procedures and conventions of specificity. [...]

Imitation vs Invention

The difference between imitation and invention goes without saying. Whereas imitation reproduces, invention produces; whereas imitation generates sameness, invention generates otherness; whereas imitation seeks continuity, invention seeks novelty. The Academy was aware that artists worthy of the name invent. However, even though academic teaching spotted a sign of a student's

talent in his capacity to invent, it was not on his capacity to invent that it judged him, nor was it through stimulating invention that it claimed to educate him. Quite the contrary. It was through imposing on him imitation, invention's antithesis: the imitation of nature, of the Ancients, of the master. The Bauhaus model, by contrast, fosters invention, because every progress in its expression indicates a liberation of the student's creativity, an actualization of his artistic potential. [...]

Talent and Creativity vs Attitude

In the wake of the student upheaval of the late sixties no one was ready to admit the inequality of talent, out of fear of seeming irredeemably reactionary. But the May '68 slogan, 'all power to the imagination', didn't last very long, and soon creativity lost its aura, too. Philosophically speaking, the times were very suspicious of anything more or less resembling the old psychology of the faculties, and creativity, which is a neo-Romantic amalgam of the Kantian faculties of sensibility and imagination, became old hat. It had everything against itself: being universal, it could only be 'bourgeois'; being transcendental, it could only be 'metaphysical'; being natural, it could only be 'ideological'. But its greatest sin was that it could not be willed, and the most progressive art and art teaching of the seventies thought that art had to be willed, whether it aligned itself with some political programme bathed in revolutionary rhetoric, or whether it saw itself as the relentless critique of the dominant ideology. Anyway, it had become hard to suppose that creativity was the potential of mankind in general, and equally hard to hope that it could be instilled through propaganda or education (think of Joseph Beuys, in this context: he certainly represents the last great and tragic hero of the modern myth of creativity, immolating himself on the altar of both pedagogy and 'social sculpture'). Thus another concept took the place of creativity, that of 'attitude'. A concept that is a blank, actually: a sort of zero degree of psychology, a neutral point amidst ideological choices, a volition without content.

Of course, in order to be progressive – and how could art of any significance not be progressive? – attitude had to be critical. Lukács, Adorno, Althusser and others were called in to tell would-be artists that neither talent nor creativity were needed to make art but, instead, that 'critical attitude' was mandatory. And the fact that not just artists but all 'cultural workers' were thought to be in need of a critical attitude of course helped to shape a new, strongly politicized discourse about art and its relation to society, a discourse that, throughout the seventies and part of the eighties, became the dominant discourse, not in all art schools, admittedly but certainly in the most progressive, the most avant-gardistic or – why not say it? – the most fashionable ones. Even if you turn to less politicized aspects of the dominant discourse about art in those years you will see the central position of the notion of attitude confirmed. It is towards the end

of the sixties that the concept of 'aesthetic attitude' surfaced in art theory, thanks to Jerome Stolnitz in particular, but also, I should say, thanks to Duchamp's growing reputation as the first conceptual artist, a combination of influences that greatly helped in pushing aside aesthetics while retaining the notion of attitude. Finally – and this, I believe, clinches it, if only symbolically – it was in 1969 that Harald Szeemann organized the famous exhibition 'When Attitudes Become Form', at the Kunsthalle in Bern. Both the date and the title coined for this exhibition are symptomatic, for it was then and there that conceptual art was acknowledged for the first time by a major art institution (MoMA was to follow before long with the 'Information' show, in 1970), providing a new model for advanced art soon to be emulated and disseminated by most art schools.

Everybody here, I'm sure, is familiar with what happened next. Linguistics, semiotics, anthropology, psychoanalysis, Marxism, feminism, structuralism and post-structuralism, in short, 'theory' (or so-called 'French theory') entered art schools and succeeded in displacing – and sometimes replacing – studio practice while renewing the critical vocabulary and intellectual tools with which to approach the making and the appreciating of art. [...] In those days attitude still had to be critical, which basically meant: critical of the social and political status quo. But soon the very success of these art schools began attracting students who went there because of the instant rewards they were seemingly able to promise them. For these students (with or without the conscious or unconscious complicity of their teachers, I can't tell), what had started as an ideological alternative to both talent and creativity, called 'critical attitude', became just that, an attitude, a stance, a pose, a contrivance. This phenomenon, of course, widely exceeds a few art schools; it even exceeds art schools in general, for it is rampant throughout the whole academic world, especially in the humanities. It can be summarized by saying that political commitment sank into political correctness. Meanwhile, what remains of the old postulates – the academic postulate called talent and the modernist postulate called creativity – on which to ground a plausible art curriculum is the poorest, the most tautological notion of all: that of an artist's attitude.

Métier and Medium vs Practice

Dividing the arts according to the medium rather than to the métier; reading art history in terms of 'a progressive surrender to the resistance of its medium' (Clement Greenberg); fostering the purity of the medium as a value in itself, are the three strong points of formalist criticism and modernist doctrine in art. As is well known, formalism and modernism have been under heavy fire since the mid sixties, first in America, soon after in England, and then in the rest of the Western world. Just as with Harald Szeemann's show, 'When Attitudes Become Form', let

me choose a symbolic event to pinpoint this, an event all the more symbolic in that it happened in 1966 at an art school. John Latham was a part-time instructor at St Martin's, in London, when he borrowed Clement Greenberg's *Art and Culture* from the school's library and, with the complicity of Barry Flanagan, then a student at St Martin's, organized an event entitled *Still & Chew*, when a number of pages of the book were chewed by the participants and spat into a jar, then submitted to a complex chemical treatment. You know the aftermath of this performance (or was it a happening?): a year or so later, when asked to return the book to the library, John Latham returned it indeed, but in the shape of a jar containing the unspeakable, let alone unreadable, mixture. He was fired the next day.

Today, needless to say, he could do the same performance with the principal's blessing, and the librarian wouldn't even bother to reorder *Art and Culture*. Events, happenings and performances have long been absorbed into art schools, and even though most schools keep a painting studio, a sculpture studio, a printmaking studio, and so on, they have added to the list of 'mixed media' an 'interdisciplinary', or a 'free-for-all' studio – whatever the name – which definitely indicates that the teaching of art no longer rests on an aesthetic commitment to the specificity or the purity of the medium. By 1970 Clement Greenberg and Michael Fried were already the last art critics to uphold the idea that no art of significance could be done that sits in between media, and that if something is neither painting nor sculpture, then it is not art. Against them, a whole generation of conceptual artists were relying on Duchamp in order to maintain that the art was in the concept, that it was dematerialized, that it did not cling to any medium, above all not to painting. They fought against the medium but, of course, didn't rehabilitate the *métier* for all that. Just as with the word 'attitude', what was soon to replace both the *métier* and the medium was another magical word, 'practice'.

By 1975, the word 'practice' was widely in use among all the people who had been in touch with 'French theory', and since 'French theory', after all, originated in France, it is there, in the writings of the *Tel Quel* people, in particular, that it acquired a cluster of interesting meanings in the context of literature and art. One of its benefits was that it was charged with prestigious political connotations, Marxist, of course, and Althusserian. More important is that it is a general word not a specific one, or, to say this differently, that it puts the emphasis on the social, not on the technical, division of labour. Applied to painting, for example, it allowed us to conceive of painting not in terms of a specific skill (such as the Greenbergian flatness), but in terms of a specific historical institution called 'pictorial practice'. This is the way both the painters belonging to the *Support-Surface* group, and their arch-enemy, Daniel Buren, used the word in defence of painting. Other artists, who were defending interdisciplinarity against specificity, began speaking of 'artistic practice', or 'practices', depending on whether the

generic was thought of as being one or plural. But the most interesting – i.e. symptomatic – phenomenon is that the word art itself (simply, art) became taboo. It was guilty of conveying some faith in the 'essence' of art, I mean, in the existence of some transhistorical and transcultural common denominator among all artistic practices. Our epoch being radically relativistic, it wouldn't allow such unorthodox belief. The orthodoxy of the times prescribed – and still prescribes – conceiving of art as being just one 'signifying practice' (that expression was coined by Julia Kristeva) among others.

I have just said: 'prescribed – and still prescribes'. In fact, I'm not so sure. One of the things I expect from this conference [Southampton, 1993] is that it may help me understand to what extent the orthodoxy of discourse (what I nastily referred to as political correctness) fails to hide the reality of anxieties, disappointments, shattered beliefs, which, I suspect, have a hard time expressing themselves without giving the impression (as I most probably do) of wanting to go backwards and resorting to nostalgia. I hope that the discussion will bring these difficulties into the open, but meanwhile I would like to stress that what was in the seventies an avant-gardistic discourse has, by now, been largely institutionalized. I know of at least one art school where the students have the choice of enrolling either in 'Communication' or in 'Artistic Practice'. As always, the magic of changing names is a symptom: the expression 'artistic practice' has become a ritual formula, conveying the vague suspicion that has come to surround the word art, while failing to designate referents in the world (that is, actual works) of which one could be sure that the word art has ceased to apply to them significantly.

Imitation and Invention vs Deconstruction

[...] The triad of notions, 'attitude–practice–deconstruction', is not the postmodern paradigm that supposedly substituted for the modern paradigm, 'creativity–medium–invention'. It is the same one, minus faith, plus suspicion. I tend to see it as a mere after-image, as the negative symptom of a historical transition whose positivity is not clear yet. As such it is quite interesting, and it can yield strong works of art. But for the teaching of art it is sterile. Once it is possible to put it down on paper, this means that its potential for negation has already become conventional (deconstruction is today's good taste), that its anguish is no longer of the kind that nourishes true artists (it is fake, because it is reconciled with the present); and that its suspicion is, unlike Descartes' doubt, not fruitful (it is aimed at the other and not at oneself). [...]

The modern paradigm hasn't ever ceased informing art teaching surreptitiously. It is therefore to this that we need to respond, analysing, again, the traits that opposed it to the paradigm that it superseded. This is why it is not without value to ask again if we must choose between talent and creativity,

between *métier* and media, between imitation and invention, or if those oppositions themselves do not suggest their own resolution.

Talent, Creativity, Judgement

We must rehabilitate the notion of talent, and I don't think this needs to cause anyone big ideological heartbreaks, or that it necessitates institutional reforms. We should be able to rediscover, in a new way, the continuity that existed in the past from the humble artisan to the artist of genius. We should also gather the conviction that if art is not taught, judgement forms itself. What kind of judgement? Armed with the prestige of the humanities, critical awareness, suspicion and questioning nonetheless tend to finesse the kind of judgement which in art counts for more than anything else, and which is art teaching's first task to form, that is, aesthetic judgement. We never encourage students enough to make value judgements of the artworks we show them, and we never show them enough that we make such judgements ourselves. I would like to see the motto 'you will be judged on your judgement' as the ethos on which any art education is based. With this perspective, to have the *attitude of an artist*, a critical attitude, is to have, quite simply, judgement. Aesthetic judgement, what was once called taste and what today is both more and something else, gets taught. More precisely, it is formed. It is formed by being exposed to the judgements of others, it is formed as it is exercised, and it is exercised above all in relation to the art of others. As with the academic model, judgement is formed via contact with works of the past. These are no longer models to imitate through the exercise of talent, for imitation implies a stable tradition; much less are they foils against which to react to prove one's inventiveness and creativity; they remain examples to emulate. As with the Bauhaus model, judgement is formed in contact with the medium. But the medium, today, is embodied in works that are in museums, as part of our heritage. This means, very concretely, that everything is grist to the studio teacher's mill, whether the *métier* of Van Eyck or the medium of Mondrian, provided we historicize them.

Métier, Medium, Tradition

Speaking of *artistic practice* rather than *métier* or medium is to recognize the existence of art in general, for example, the art of choosing a readymade. No skill, no sleight of hand entered into Duchamp's choice of the bottle dryer, which, moreover, does not belong to any artistic medium. You can make art from anything and everything. The Bauhaus model was thus right to minimize craftsmanship and to be wary of an excess of technical skill. But if you can make art from anything and everything, you can also do so with oil painting or copper plate engraving. Why should we deprive ourselves of teaching means of

expression which take a long time to master and whose apprenticeship has everything to gain from being guided by a practitioner? I have seen too many students fall back on readymade techniques because they lacked more traditional means. [...] If there's just one word we should rehabilitate, it's tradition. To reserve it for the academy, just as dadaism is in the museum, is to condemn ourselves to the infantile and avant-gardist vision of history that regrets or denounces the 'recuperation' of avant-gardes and values rupture for its own sake. It is also to perpetuate the modernist myth of the *tabula rasa* and prevent ourselves from seeing, in retrospect, that the continuity between modern art and the past takes precedence over the discontinuities. And finally, it is to cast away pre-modern tradition into a finished past, dead, where it is available to be pillaged but can no longer be formative of judgement. [...]

The word tradition means transmission, nothing else. It does not refer to any particular style that we deem – favourably or not, it doesn't matter – 'traditional'. It refers to the fact that for a long period, and through a succession of societies whose values possibly negate each other, artists have continued to practice. 'Tradition' is a name for the continuity of artistic practices in the *longue durée*, however numerous and violent may have been the formal ruptures. To a large extent, however, these ruptures were concomitant with changes in the *mode* of transmission, changes the 'traditionalists' do not perceive as such, regularly confusing them with the decline of tradition. There was a time when art was transmitted directly from master to apprentice in the studio. There was then a time when its transmission, enjoying the aura of a new intellectual prestige, was the exclusive prerogative of the Academies. It is now transmitted by art schools that have inherited the great educational utopias of modernity, no longer know very well what to do with them, and yet transmit a tradition regardless, albeit that of anti-tradition. An art school is thus a professional school which is distinguished from other professional schools in that transmission is the first 'material' to be transmitted.

Imitation, Invention, Simulation

The academic model, which taught respect for rules, was expected to accomplish the formation of an individual who gradually acquired the autonomy by which an artist is recognized. Building on the lessons of modern art, the Bauhaus model instructed this individual, in the discovery of rules, instead. Creativity as source would encounter the medium as target and confront it. From battling with constraints, one was expected to acquire a language. When the deconstruction of language and of rules are supposed to embody the new rule and provide a new language, paralysis grips all, students and teachers alike. Aimless disorder reigns, with Alexandrianism as background. And so we have recently seen the resurgence

of the myth of personal expression, but as simulacrum. [...] Teachers settle in a relationship with each isolated student akin to that of analyst and analysand. [...] The teaching regresses beneath the Bauhaus model, even beneath the academic model. One believes in reviving the former intimate relation of master and apprentice, but it is a simulacrum. One forgets that the master transmitted a tradition while the teacher today, a false Socrates, practices maieutics without history. The cleverest students, the best perhaps, make a whole other argument, more instinctive than conscious. Since the Bauhaus model enjoins them to be creative purists and experimental innovators, they become impure appropriators and existential simulators. Here we are. It is this generation that has been landing on the art scene in the last few years.

The antidote to careers as simulators is teaching through simulation. This is anyway what we do in art schools – well, let's say it. Consider the art history course, which the Bauhaus model almost entirely eliminated and which is so needed today. Whatever we do, we never bring works into the classroom. Whatever we do, we send our students doing tourism in the past. Like any good tour operator whose brochure sells us the beaches of Bali, we can expect one thing: that upon viewing the slide show, the students will be curious enough to go and see the original. Now consider studio teaching. The degeneration of the Bauhaus model has revived a semblance of the old studio relationships: when professors of painting can no longer believe that they are teaching their classes the rudiments of a universal language, they fall back on individual demands. But they are no longer masters, they are facilitators, communicators, information providers, psychologists who must steer their patients through their desires. And their students are no longer apprentices; they are the teachers' passengers.

Tourism is the dominant model of our culture. It turns time into space and cancels the latter in the ubiquity of the image. For production in the symbolic, it substitutes consumption in the imaginary. The world is a museum where the imaginary museum has preceded us – it's banal to reiterate this, so long after Valéry, Benjamin and Malraux. What is curious is that the education system still hasn't registered it. Great consumer of audio-visual techniques, it pretends not to have anything but an instrumental relation to them, which leaves it unscathed. And it is precisely by being blinkered to the fact that cultural transmission happens in the mode of simulation – in other words, in *Flash Art* rather than at the museum – that educators, whose mission is to transmit culture, have morphed into the welcoming hosts of a great cultural Disneyland. Hello young people, let us guide you to the realm of simulation.

I'm joking? No. What I want to say is this: through simulation, we will transmit to you [the art students] everything in artistic culture that is transmissible. Simulation is a method for apprenticeship, not a goal. We will not

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BLACK MOUNTAIN COLLEGE

BULLETIN 2

CONCERNING ART INSTRUCTION



When Rembrandt was asked how one learns to paint, he is said to have answered "One must take a brush and begin." This is the answer of genius which grows without school and even in spite of schooling. At the same time we know that he had a teacher and became a teacher.

Delacroix went further when he wrote in his diary: "How happy I should have been to learn as a painter that which drives the ordinary musician to despair." He meant by this the study of harmony and especially the "pure logic" of the fugue: "which is the basis of all reason and consistency in music."

These two assertions are not contradictory. They merely emphasize different aspects of an artist's work: on the one hand the intuitive search for and discovery of form; on the other hand the knowledge and application of the fundamental laws of form. Thus all rendering of form, in fact all creative work, moves between the two polarities: intuition and intellect, or possibly between subjectivity and objectivity. Their relative importance continually varies and they always more or less overlap.

I do not wish to assert that the practice of art cannot be learned or taught. But we do know that appreciation and understanding of art can grow both through learning (the development of intuitive perception and discrimination) and through teaching (the handing on of authoritative knowledge). And just as every person is endowed with all the physiological senses — even if in varying degrees both in proportion and quality — likewise, I believe, every person has all the senses of the soul (e.g. sensitivity to tone, color, space), though undoubtedly with still greater differences in degree.

It is of course natural for this reason, that the schools should at least begin the development of all incipient faculties. But going further, art is a province in which one finds all the problems of life reflected — not only the problems of form (e.g. proportion and balance) but also spiritual problems (e.g. of philosophy, of religion, of sociology, of economy). For this reason art is an important and rich medium for general education and development.

If we must accept education as life and as preparation for life, we must relate all school work, including work in art, as closely as possible to modern problems. It is not enough to memorize historical interpretations and æsthetic views of the past or merely to encourage a purely individualistic expression. We need not be afraid of losing the connection with tradition if we make the elements of form the basis of our study. And this thorough foundation saves us from imitation and mannerisms, it develops independence, critical ability, and discipline.

From his own experiences the student should first become aware of form problems in general, and thereby become clear as to his own real inclinations and abilities. In short, our art instruction attempts first to teach the student to see in the widest sense: to open his eyes to the phenomena about him and, most important of all, to open to his own living, being, and doing. In this connection we consider class work in art studies necessary because of the common tasks and mutual criticism.

We find this way more successful than starting, without previous study of fundamentals, on studies in special fields with purely individualistic corrections, depending on the taste of the teacher. At first every student should come in contact with the fundamental problems in as many branches of art as possible, instead of beginning, for example, with life painting or animal sculpture.

Many years' experience in teaching have shown that it was often only through experimenting with the elements in various distinct branches of art that students first recognized their real abilities. As a consequence these students had to change their original plans. As an instance, a student of painting discovered his real talent was for metal working. Our first concern is not to turn out artists. We regard our elementary art work primarily as a means of general training for all students. For artistically gifted students it serves as a broad foundation for later special study.

We have three main disciplines in our art instruction: Drawing, Basic Design (Werklehre), and Color-Painting. These are supplemented by exhibitions and discussions of old and modern art, of

handicraft and industrial products, of typographic and photographic work. The exhibitions are used to point out special intentions (e.g. art related to nature or remote from nature; the so-called primitivism; monumental form, pure form; and realism or imitation), and conditions due to working material (e.g. wood form, stone form, metal form; silver form in the Baroque, and gold in the Gothic). In addition collections of materials (different woods, stones, metals, textiles, leathers, artificial materials), are shown. By excursions to handicraft and manufacturing plants we seek to develop an understanding of the treatment of material and of working in general (both as matters of technique and as social matters).

Drawing we regard as a graphic language. Just as in studying language it is most important to teach first the commonly understood usage of speech, in drawing we begin with exact observation and pure representation. We cannot communicate graphically what we do not see. That which we see incorrectly we will report incorrectly. We recognize that although our optical vision is correct, our overemphasis on the psychic vision often makes us see incorrectly. For this reason we learn to test our seeing, and systematically study foreshortening, overlapping as the main form problems of graphic articulation, and distinction between and the pronunciation of nearness and distance.

Drawing consists of a visual and of a manual act. For the visual act (comparable with thinking which precedes speaking) one must learn to see form as a three-dimensional phenomenon. For the manual act (comparable with speaking) the hand must be sensitized to the direction of the will. With this in mind we begin drawing lessons with general technical exercises: measuring, dividing, estimating; rhythms of measure and form, disposing, modifications of form. At the same time we use the motor sense as an important corrective.

It will be clear that we exclude expressive drawing as a beginning. Experience shows that in young people this encourages artistic conceit but hardly results in a solid capability which alone can give the foundation and freedom for more personal work.

For this reason our elementary drawing instruction is a handicraft

instruction, strictly objective, unadorned through style or mannerism. As soon as capability in handicraft has been fully developed, more individual work may follow. As artistic performance it will develop best afterwards and outside the school.

We repeat, our drawing is the study of objective representation.

In Basic Design (Werklehre) — design with material — we cultivate particularly feeling for material and space. It stands in contrast to a pure manual training in various handicrafts, which only applies traditionally fixed methods of work. We do not aim at “a little book-binding”, “a little carpentry”, but rather a general constructive thinking, especially a building thinking, which must be the basis of every work with any material. Basic Design is a forming out of material (e.g. paper, cardboard, metal sheets, wire), which demonstrates the possibilities and limits of materials. This method emphasizes learning, a personal experience, rather than teaching. And so it is important to make inventions and discoveries. The idea is not to copy a book or a table, but to attain a finger-tip feeling for material. Therefore we work with as few tools as possible and prefer material that has been infrequently used, such as corrugated paper, wire, wire netting. With well-known materials we seek to find untried possibilities.

Basic Design deals mainly with two subjects, with *matière* studies on the one hand and material studies on the other.

Matière studies are concerned with the appearance, the surface (epidermis) of material. Here we distinguish structure, facture, texture. We classify the appearances according to optical and tactile perception. We represent them by drawing and other means. In combination exercises we examine the relationship of different surface qualities. Just as color reacts to and influences color — in contrast or affinity — so one *matière* influences another.

Material studies are concerned with the capacity of materials. We examine firmness, looseness, elasticity; extensibility and compressibility; folding and bending — in short technical properties. These studies in connection with the mathematical inherence of form

result in construction exercises. With these we try to develop an

5

understanding and feeling for space, volume, dimension; for balance, static and dynamic; for positive and active, for negative and passive forms. We stress economy of form, that is the ratio of effort to effect.

Comparisons of various examples in architecture, sculpture, painting, help to make clear the conceptions of proportion, function, constellation, and composition as well as those of construction and combination.

In short, Basic Design is a training in adaptability in the whole field of construction and in constructive thinking in general. Although we do not actually make useful things, Basic Design is not opposed to handicraft work but is its very foundation.

Color we consider first as working material and we study its qualities and activities. Sound production comes before speech, tone before music. And so at first we study systematically the tonal possibilities of colors, their relativity, their interaction and influence on each other, cold and warmth, light intensity, color intensity, psychical and spatial effects. We practice translating color combinations into different intensities, and from colorful to colorless colors. We practice color tone scales, color mixtures and interpenetrations. We study the most important color systems, not for the sake of science or to find the harmony of colors in a mechanical way, but to learn to see and feel color; to prepare for a disciplined use of color and to prevent accident, brush, or paint-box from taking authorship.

The studies in painting, from nature or model, are in principle concerned with the relationship between color, form, space, and composition. Series painting demands serious study. Rembrandt, at the age of thirty, is said to have felt the need of twenty years of study for a certain color-space problem.

By making an extended study in the main provinces of form; namely shape, material, and color, we provide a broad foundation for the widest variety of tasks and for later specialization. No problem of form lies outside our field. Thus we do not cultivate dilet-

6

tantism — just something to do — (Beschäftigungstrieb) but develop the creative, productive possibilities (Gestaltungstrieb). Class instruction with common tasks and criticisms coming from the students and then from the teacher communicates understanding of different ways of seeing and of representing, and diminishes the tendency to overestimate one's own work.

It will be clear that this method is meant for mature students. For teaching children we should use other methods.

Life is more important than school, the student and the learning more important than the teacher and the teaching. More lasting than having heard and read is to have seen and experienced. The result of the work of a school is difficult to determine while the pupil is in school. The best proofs are the results in later life, not, for example, student exhibitions. Therefore to us the act of drawing is more important than the graphical product; a color correctly seen and understood more important than a mediocre still-life. It is better to be able really to draw a signboard than to be content with unfinished portraits.

Most of our students will not become artists. But if they know, for example, the capacities of color they are prepared not only for painting but also for the practical use of color in interiors, furniture, clothes. These examples also illustrate the need of an understanding of materials.

We are content if our studies of form achieve an understanding vision, clear conceptions, and a productive will.

JOSEF ALBERS

ART

SCHOOL

**(PROPOSITIONS FOR
THE 21ST CENTURY)**

edited and with an introduction by Steven Henry Madoff

15

IN LATIN AMERICA

Art Education Between Colonialism and Revolution

Luis Camnitzer

If the development of art making in Latin America was a product of colonialism, so was the development of the corresponding educational systems. In both areas there were flashes of resistance, but the dictum of hegemonic cultures tended to overwhelm them.

In art the problems became clear very quickly: if the art was old, autochthonous, and precolonial, it was segregated and declassified as archeology; if it was contemporary,

it was considered folklore. Initially, during Spanish and Portuguese colonization up to the early to mid-nineteenth century, depending on the area, the better craftsmen were hired by the colonizers to produce art for them. It was mostly intended for churches, a rather sordid cultural castration that today is highly admired under the positively twisted term *colonial art*. At its best, colonial art was compromised, fusing colonially imposed imagery with local imagery, such as Christian saints vested with native deities. Today this colonial situation hasn't changed much. Craftsmen in art are not generally hired anymore, and they don't work for churches but for the art market and museums. Resistance to this is mostly expressed through searches for local "identity," usually anticolonial in spirit, but the art remains largely overwhelmed by the legacy of contemporary hegemonic aesthetic colonialism. Emphasis is on content, and because of this it tends to create visual pollution with programmatic kitsch. At its worst, the more radical fight against hegemony is through either endorsing other hegemonies (as was the case with applications of Social Realism) or local conventions that confirm an idealized past and arrive dead on arrival on the canvas. At its best, the fight ignores "art" as a goal and lets itself happen as a natural wrapper for ways of thinking and acting, usually also with a political bent. **The definition of what comprises art and what does not has nevertheless remained relatively coupled to the old colonialist definition.** Accordingly, art is whatever the centers decide. During early colonialism, this meant an emphasis on skills and representation using the two main media: painting and sculpture. Later it would be the whole sequence of aesthetics guided by an imported chain of isms. And the same happens with art education.

The push for resistance in education at large in Latin America has been more effective than in art education, although in the long run it lost its compass thanks to a spread of dictatorships over the continent that became particularly acute during the 1960s. The first formidable move to have universities seriously and radically address local needs took place in Córdoba, Argentina, as early as in 1918.¹ It was a cataclysmic event for the ruling classes and is known as the University Reform of Córdoba. **It was achieved through a violent revolution led by the students. The reform, on the heels of the Russian Revolution the preceding year (and as a consequence of it), set down several crucial concepts: education was to be a civil right; the university was conceived as an autonomous state within the state, even when funded by the government; it was to be ruled by students, faculty, and alumni; and access to education was to be for all social classes and dedicated to correcting social injustices, including the elimination of social classes.**

Within less than a decade, the university reform took hold in most of Latin America, and it then took another four decades to be picked up or at least echoed, albeit briefly, by the United States and Europe. Student rebellions of the 1960s, though prompted partially by the Vietnam War, reflected in their academic demands much of what had been achieved in Latin America during the 1920s. This was particularly notable in the application of governance shared with the students; institutionalized student evaluation of faculty; and student representation on committees that traditionally had been closed to all but tenured faculty. In the U.S., this became a temporary standard in new experimental colleges, and in Europe it prompted the model of free universities. Education applied to art, however, lacked these overarching reforms or any translation as it might have fit art.

There isn't yet a comprehensive history that documents the travails of art education in Latin America. Information is limited to personal experiences and tainted by the personal ideologies and wishful thinking of whomever writes about the topic. This is clearly my case with this essay, and it's only fair that I give the appropriate warning about bias and spottiness. A good history would require not only a country-by-country analysis but also a nearly impossible agreement on what the purposes of art and education in relation to the public and the power structures are. In the Latin American situation, where art education takes place as much in artist studios and through community actions as it does in university settings, it would be enormously difficult to capture all of this, particularly in a single essay.

However, it seems fair to say that the definition of art as a group of crafts, which was imported with the colonization processes that followed the trips first undertaken by Columbus, generally stood in the way of the development of a good art education program. And when some kind of a liberating breakthrough happened, it was soon hampered by repression or the dynamics of exile. Consistent with the crafts definition, Latin American schools generally taught *how* to do things—a much less demanding process than helping people to think. *What* to do was something that was taken for granted and also something that was first defined by overt colonizing needs.

National independence in the Latin countries took place primarily during the first half of the nineteenth century. However, this was not achieved by native populations, but by what were mostly first and second generations that descended from invaders and immigrants. As a consequence, despite political independence, the cultural mores and values and dynamics of the colonial past remained. Added to this, French influence became increasingly

stronger during the nineteenth century via the Napoleonic legal code, positivism, and French masonry and art concepts. Therefore, the pedagogical leaning was toward ideas informing the Beaux-Arts tradition, dating back to the late seventeenth century in France. In this approach, with its endless practice of imitation, reality ruled—and the better you rendered reality or the masterpieces that rendered it before you, the better an artist you were considered to be. Any little contribution you made to the tradition set you apart and made you recognizable.

The first major challenge to the French academic model that affected art education came from the Bauhaus in Weimar, Germany, in the 1920s, but reached Latin America much later. In fact, the changes reached the continent's architecture schools long before they affected the art schools there. The hold that the French academy had on architecture was less potent than the one it had on art, as functionalism was economically a much more viable approach than neoclassical wedding cakes. What this meant for Latin American art was that during the first half of the twentieth century, the cultural model remained in France, and French institutions like André Lhote's very popular studio in Paris only complemented the picture.

It took the influence of the local schools of architecture that adopted the changes, and then the Americanization of the teaching systems, to finally shake up art education programs and move things along. While architect-thinkers like Walter Gropius and Le Corbusier had a direct influence on the pedagogy (and aesthetics) used in the schools of architecture, it was László Moholy-Nagy's move to Chicago in 1937 and the consequent publication of his books, as well as those of György Kepes, that mark the beginning of more direct challenges to the old model. Still, it took time for influence to become actual transformation. It wasn't until the late 1950s and the Cold War that the ideas promulgated in the American publication of Moholy-Nagy's and Kepes's books made their way into the Latin American system, when the spread of American English as a more global language and the aggressive increase in U.S. cultural sway took hold of the continent. Their influence became even more powerful from the sixties onward.

Until this point, as I've said, Paris (and, to a lesser degree, Florence) had served as the artists' finishing school for roughly a hundred years, starting in the mid-nineteenth century. Those less academically prone ended up in either the Académie Julian, the heavy setting of Lhote's studio, or under the lighter touch of Fernand Léger's atelier. On their return, many of those artists went into teaching and exerted some individual influence. However, with the

exception of the dogmatic schools inspired by Mexican muralism, starting in the mid-1920s, and the equally dogmatic school of Joaquín Torres-García in Uruguay, 1943–1962, none of these had a seriously systemic impact on pedagogy. Teaching remained conventional, and these examples tended to work by indoctrinating students in issues of style.

To achieve a profound transformation, one would have needed several changes to take place simultaneously. These were a centralized public education system, a student rebellion to implement reforms that paralleled the University Reform of 1918, a shift from craft training to problem posing and learning by need, and a decision about the issue of whether art was something teachable .

One rare coincidence of all these factors took place in Uruguay in 1959. It produced a reform that stayed alive roughly between 1959 and 1965 and then stagnated (though some believe it remains alive today). **Thanks to student pressure, the national university absorbed the art school**, which until then had been the province of the Ministry of Education. Subject to ministerial political whims and its bureaucracy, the School of Fine Arts was given the lower standing of a high school.² A student uprising against the faculty forced their collective resignation and led to the hiring of new and more contemporary personnel. **A new curriculum designed by the students was put into place and slowly refined during the next five years. The influences for this reform were varied and included the British art critic Herbert Read's writings; Maria Montessori's teaching model; Johannes Itten, who had taught at the Bauhaus in Weimar; information about the School of Design in Ulm and the School of Art in Kassel; and all of these combined with much serious anarchist thinking.** The school abolished authority, grades, and degrees, and people were allowed to graduate and exit at their own pace. There was an institutionalized refusal to formally declare when a student became an artist. A group of exploratory workshops formed the foundation period, and the technical studios became satellites to the creative studios. The foundation period started as a circulation through different techniques and then increasingly evolved into the posing of creative problems in "small-scale" and "big-scale" studios.

Overall, it was assumed that art was a natural activity that could be taken up by anybody. Not unlike what Joseph Beuys would preach in Germany, everybody was considered a potential artist who was waiting to be educated as one. The aim was not to generate competitive art makers but better and creative citizens. The project was seriously weakened by a false sense of populism that

led to emphasize the organization of craft fairs and the decoration of walls in worker quarters.

In most other countries in South America, changes were slow, gradual, and fragmentary. Progressive approaches were mostly possible by giving autonomy to artists in charge of studio courses. Good artists would emerge from these schools, but most serious aesthetic ruptures bypassed academia. One exception to the pattern may have been Lucio Fontana's "Manifiesto blanco" (White Manifesto) in 1946. Fontana, who alternated between figuration and abstraction from the 1930s on, had challenged his students at Altamira, a private art school he founded in Buenos Aires, to come up with a more radical manifesto than the "Manifiesto invencionista." This manifesto had been published that same year by the Asociación Arte Concreto-Invención, also in Buenos Aires. The students responded to the assignment, which included the proclamation, "Matter, color, and sound in motion are the phenomena whose simultaneous development makes up the new art." This led to Fontana's path-breaking ideas that he captured under the name *spatialism*, which eventually brought him to his most famous work, his slashed canvases, begun in 1958. And yet all this amounted to a rupture produced by one individual artist.

While the Altamira manifesto was in many ways esoteric, the Asociación manifesto was straightforward, proposing "an aesthetic against good taste" and asking artists "not to search, not to find, but to invent." Unknowingly, it also echoed the memorable and unheeded anticolonialist appeal—"If we don't invent, we fail"—that Simón Rodríguez (the tutor of Simón Bolívar) had published during the early 1820s. The "Manifiesto invencionista" instigated the relatively long-lasting abstraction and concretist movement in Argentina, which peaked from the mid-1940s to the mid-1950s, though its total span was closer to twenty years.³

Tomás Maldonado, a concretist painter and the writer of the *invencionist* manifesto, represented the position that the creation of art needed scientific rigor.⁴ During the early 1950s, he befriended Max Bill, who invited him to join the faculty of School of Design in Ulm in 1954. The school in Ulm, cofounded by Bill in 1953, was a postwar heir to the Bauhaus. Its primary focus was on industrial design as a broad cultural, rather than narrow sales, component.⁵ Soon after joining, Bill and Maldonado developed serious disagreements, which, according to some commentators, were about the issue of whether art could or couldn't be taught. Bill believed that it couldn't be, while Maldonado believed that indeed it was possible. Maldonado's position won, and he became the second director of the school. To add precision to the methodology used in

the school, he introduced semiotics and aesthetic analysis into the curriculum. It was a typical paradox that the person who could have changed art education in the Southern Cone left to have an impact in Germany. Typically, instead of being mourned as a loss, he was admired for succeeding somewhere else.

The point of art being teachable or not still remains one of the primary pedagogical issues everywhere. It has certainly plagued Latin American art schooling, although it has been discussed more in political than in pedagogical terms. If art is teachable, it follows that the elitist establishment power structure that rules taste and the market can be demolished. **If it isn't teachable, then the primary function of art institutions is to skim off the talented cream and make it serve a consumer society.**

Mostly, art schools today still act, implicitly or explicitly, as filters for the identification of innate talent. After sifting through the applicants and selecting their students, art schools develop and refine abilities. This is seen as a rational investment of resources, since so-called talented students will evolve on their own no matter how bad the faculty teaching them. If the selection process is applied efficiently enough, the emerging talent will be credited to the institution, enhance its fame, and bring in more students. Since famous artists will attract talented students, schools tend to hire art stars instead of spending time looking for good educators. When student A becomes successful in the market after graduation, school B takes the credit because star artist C is on staff, regardless of the quality of pedagogical interaction. Since all this adds to profit, this selection policy and attitude are particularly strong where schools are private. In Latin America, this process was delayed, given that for a long time the tradition of public education remained dominant.

Since the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, democratic governments all over the continent favored state monopolies or semimonopolies of education, which didn't necessarily preclude the existence of private (mostly parochial) universities.⁶ However, the flourishing of military dictatorships during the 1960s and '70s made public education a prime target for change and opened Latin American countries to education for profit. But profit was not the only motivation. Several interests systematically sought to undermine the system. Generally, public universities were havens for leftist ideas that were equated with a communist threat to "God, fatherland, and family." The church, the ruling armies, and the U.S., which backed the military, all perceived them correctly as their enemies, and so promoted regressive changes.

Another problem these forces faced was that most public universities in Latin America were structured after the Napoleonic university model (a

centralized university with career-oriented schools or faculties and rigid curricula that reflected the notion of a state monopoly of education and its certification) and therefore lacked compatibility with U.S. ideas about the development and use of local research. To secure U.S. financial help, public and private universities started to adopt some of the arcane constructs used by U.S. universities, such as credits and subdivision into departments (which have now been adopted by universities in France as well).

The consequences of this privatization process were socially dramatic. Private institutions paid better than public universities did and started drawing the good teachers. The imbalance in quality made private degrees much more market friendly and desirable, therefore increasing social class differences among students and graduates. While the actual pedagogy in private institutions wasn't much different from the public system, the filters for application ensured a two-tier system that was based on both affordability and motivation, and later on the quality of networking after graduation. A self-fulfilling vicious circle obscured the aberration of losing education as a natural right by its transformation into a commodity and killed, or at least diluted, the conquests of the Córdoba Reform.

During the long period when the Beaux-Arts model ruled, when the criteria used for the selection of art students were based on manual skills, the identification of students presumed talented was relatively easy. If students knew how to draw well (that is, how to copy reality), they were accepted. This process was radically refined when the Bauhaus introduced Itten's *Vorkurs*. In most Western schools, this course eventually became the guiding model for any initiatory foundations curriculum—the basic artistic training leading to the crafts of drawing, painting, sculpting, and so on. In the Bauhaus, one had to take this course in order to be allowed to continue with the rest of the studies. The most radical by-product of this was the extension of the notion of talent beyond skills in order to include the generation and use of ideas.⁷ This extended notion of talent also started permeating Latin American art schools.

Regardless of the degree of democracy in each country, the creation of art departments in private universities was not an immediate priority. Their main focus was architecture, industrial design, and advertising, all considered better potential profit makers. The Universidad de los Andes, a prestigious private university in Bogotá, Colombia, with one of the best art departments on the continent, started in the late 1970s with a studio for textiles. It took five years of politicking to have it changed into a visual arts program, and many years more to be full-fledged and able to offer a B.F.A. degree. In Venezuela,

the most extreme ideas appeared at the private Instituto de Diseño founded by the industrialist and patron of the arts Hans Neuman, together with artists Gego (Gertrud Goldschmidt) and Gerd Leufert. The institute became a creative haven in 1970 when President Rafael Caldera closed the Universidad Central for two years to stop student protests. The most original and interdisciplinary program in Chile probably is taught at the School of Architecture and Design of the Universidad Católica de Valparaíso, which in 1952 started teaching architecture as a form of poetry. The main founders, the architect Alberto Cruz and the poet Godofredo Iommi, believed that poetic thinking precedes and informs action and that the awareness of this is what generates proper spaces. But overall, a general lack of interest in institutionalized art education, often coupled with the problems caused by repression in public universities, led to a flourishing of private artist studios as the best places to study art.

The tradition of well-known artists opening little academies wasn't new, and it always suffered from the disadvantage of having the fame of the artist override the quality of the work or the ability to teach.⁸ While the artists who were products of these academies can't be dismissed in terms of quality, the loss of public and free education meant that art making itself became increasingly associated with the middle class, sometimes even with the idle middle class. David Manzur and Humberto Giangrandi countered this dynamic with their influential studios in Bogotá, Colombia, during the 1970s and '80s, and similar examples are found throughout Latin America. For instance, Nelson Ramos's studio in Montevideo helped to form one of the finest generations of artists in Uruguay, until his death in 2006. And there is Guillermo Kuitca's studio in Buenos Aires, which offers fellowships to about fifteen students who work under Kuitca's guidance (but with aesthetic independence) for a year. The spread of private studio activities has typically been supplemented with *clínicas* (clinics), where invited artists and curators are presented with the work of local artists for evaluation and suggestions. And while the term may be unfortunate, presuming that the artists who show their work can be "cured" by the guests, the clinics help to fill the gap left by the single-teacher system.

In thinking through this complex Latin American history, the approach that Cuba has taken is entirely its own. The filtering system developed there is carried to an extreme not shared in Western academia. Cuba operates on a tracking system that starts very early within the course of studies and allows students to double their curriculum. Anyone interested in studying art at an early age takes both aptitude and creativity tests that are evaluated from assignments and free work. When the students enter the ISA (the Instituto Superior

de Arte, or Higher Institute for the Arts in Havana), they're already considered professional artists. By the time they graduate, they have gone through roughly twelve years of training. Pedagogical processes are quite eclectic. From a period in the 1970s, when academicism was introduced by some Soviet artists invited to teach, the general trend went toward Western experimentation and included the same contradictions.⁹ **It's particularly noteworthy that all of the artists who graduated from the ISA during the 1980s had guaranteed employment in some activity connected with the arts.** Today the situation is somewhat different. Many of the artists who shaped Cuban art in the '80s and early '90s and taught at the ISA left Cuba, mostly in exile (Flavio Garcíandía and Consuelo Castañeda, among them).¹⁰ **Art became a competitive activity, feeding the international market and the art-tourist market.** Some of the artists who remained in Cuba and teach at the ISA today, like Lázaro Saavedra and René Francisco Rodríguez, try to hold to the high standards of the past while adapting them to current practices. Others, like Tania Bruguera, are splitting their time between Cuba and other countries. Every year Bruguera offers workshops at the ISA to which she invites prominent international artists.

Given the politicized atmosphere in which education takes place, it makes it even more difficult in Latin America than in other regions to limit an analysis of art education to the academic sphere. Much of the art made there in the twentieth century has been produced with political and social agendas for change, which makes the relation to the public as much a concern as the actual production of art objects. The works produced by Mexican muralism, particularly during the 1920s and '30s, probably have to be given as much credit in developing artistic criteria as any class in art history or in teaching students how to dip and slide paint brushes. The same can be said about Salvador Allende's mural campaigns in Chile during the early 1970s or even of Tucumán arde, the Argentine collective that in 1968 gave up traditional art making to organize an exhibition that denounced hunger and exploitation by the dictatorship in the province of Tucumán. In Colombia, artist Antonio Caro travels to small villages to organize community workshops and probably has more cultural impact than an art department. Regardless of what one may think about quality and taste produced by these activities, they may have had a greater impact as educational agents than academia has had. Meanwhile, a network of alternative residence groups is appearing throughout the continent now. El Basilisco in Buenos Aires, Incubo in Santiago de Chile, Capacete in Rio de Janeiro, and Lugar a Dudas in Cali are some of the organizations that bring together international artists and local artists for residencies and activities that promote

artistic production and the exchange of ideas. Casa Daros in Rio de Janeiro organizes semester-long workshops for beginning artists, in which international theoreticians and artists teach groups of younger artists, focusing on the public and social impact of their projects.

Regarding such fringe pedagogical activities, let me jump to the recent past, to **the Sixth Biennial of Mercosur in Brazil**, in which I was deeply involved. The biennial was first organized in 1997 as a traditional regional exhibition event. The chief curator for the sixth, in 2007, was Gabriel Perez-Barreiro, who wanted a high-quality biennial that focused on the pedagogical relation with the visiting public and the surrounding communities. I became the pedagogical curator for the project, and **rather than attach an educational program to the finished exhibition, we designed the whole event as an educational tool.** The visitor was to be drawn into the creative process of the artist, the consumer was to be equipped to become a creator, and art was to be reclaimed as a methodology to acquire and expand knowledge. We decided not to use the exhibition to flaunt the artist's intelligence but to stimulate the intelligence of the visitors. We inverted the terms by defining the biennial as a pedagogical institution that, among other things, expresses its purposes through an exhibition every two years.

We asked ourselves: What benefits, if any, does the public derive from anecdotal information about artists and their works? How can a critical distance be generated in a public that lacks experience with works of art? How can one break through the barrier erected by taste when appreciating art? How can one work simultaneously with a multiplicity of publics when the artist usually only addresses one of them? And we made several decisions:

The process of preparation of the docents who mediate between the works of art and the public was revamped, lengthened, and deepened. Rather than training the mediators to supply detailed information about works and artists, they were prepared to think with the public. It was stressed that it is preferable to share ignorance with precision than to share knowledge imprecisely.

Emphasis was placed on the importance of speculation about art over the repetition of digested historical data. The docent was to propose the work of art as a solution to a problem rather than to look at it as a hedonistic object.

All through the exhibition space there were pedagogical stations—places for the exchange of information that concerns those artists who participated in the pedagogical project and their works. The artists were asked to formulate in one or two paragraphs the research problem that the exhibited pieces were addressing. The public was encouraged to understand the problem and to leave comments useful to both the artists and the subsequent visitors. Thus, the public started to educate the public.

Along the walks through the biennial, we had spaces designed to hold discussions. The biennial was conceived like a park, with manageable walks frequently interrupted by areas for rest and conversation.

As part of the exhibition space, there was an ample educational center with classrooms, studios, an auditorium, and a library. Teachers and students were able to discuss and work there in relation to what they had just seen in the exhibition and to produce works that followed problem-oriented assignments. The results of their work were exhibited in the studios and on surrounding walls. The space dedicated to these educational activities, along with the pedagogical stations, took about one-tenth of the surface of the biennial.

A Web page with an information and exchange center operates during and in between biennials. The main topics for the exchanges are creation processes and art pedagogy. Chatrooms were organized so that in real time, the public was able to engage in discussion with both artists and curators. The biennial aims to become a clearinghouse for pedagogical ideas and curricula applied to art education.

Teams for preparation were sent to schools all over the state of Rio Grande do Sul. Day-long workshops were given to put the biennial in the context of contemporary art history and discuss methodologies and ideas present in the works expected in the biennial.

Teachers were prepared to become a nexus with the biennial, telling visitors about their schools and their fellow teachers and students about the biennial.

Five months before the opening, the schools received pedagogical exercises with problems related to the work exhibited in the biennial. The point was to stimulate creation instead of reducing information to anecdotal data. Students were able to make works that related to the ideas that informed the work rather than simply copying particular pieces. That way, they could understand the art in the exhibition far better. They were able to look at the works with a more experienced critical eye, seeing the art as an artistic colleague rather than as a passive consumer.

Symposia were organized so that the artists and art teachers involved would promote the idea that both activities, making art and teaching art, should be considered a single activity that takes place in different media. Both demand the same amount of rigor and creativity.

The biennial was highly successful. Meetings for the art teachers were organized in fifty-two cities of Rio Grande do Sul by an educational team of the biennial, with the participation of 7,350 teachers. The exhibition had over half a million visitors, 156,887 of them students. Buses were sent to pick up and return students in a radius of 100 kilometers.¹¹ Twenty-three states in Brazil asked to share the pedagogical template of the biennial, and the Ministry of Culture awarded the pedagogical project one of its 2007 *Cultura Viva* (living culture) prizes.

When discussing the education of artists, we are conditioned to envision an activity that mostly takes place in a school setting and leads to the formation of a professional, much as in other disciplines. But the experience in Latin America indicates that if we're to consider art as a cultural factor, more education is taking place in nonacademic settings than in schools, and professionalism in the sense of disciplinary proficiency is only one of the aspects. It seems to me that this realization ought to lead to a revision of what we consider important in the education of artists; what we actually consider the education of artists to be and want it to be; and what methodologies should be employed to achieve those goals once they're decided on. In the absence of any glimmer of clarity, it isn't surprising that art education is always the first victim of budget cuts. On the other hand, the artist's identity as a producer of high-priced commodities is spreading in Latin America. Gallery success—and preferably international gallery success—is a primary aim for many art students. For example, students at the art school Prilidiano Pueyrredón in Buenos Aires, a public university school, complained to me that after graduating they don't have comparable access to the market as graduates from other institutions or from private studios because their school isn't good at professional networking. These students follow the contemporary notion that a university degree is important for their credibility, and when affordable (through personal wealth or fellowships), they prefer an M.F.A. from a star international institution.

The situation of the arts in Latin America isn't particularly clear at the moment. Thanks to the U.S. distraction in Iraq, a temporary breathing space has been created for Latin America that allowed the improvement of both democracy and the economy, which could have some lasting effects. Local art markets

have been augmented by a sprouting of biennials and art fairs, all of which helped raise levels of professionalism. The interest and power of international Latin American collections (Daros, Cisneros, Tate, and The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston come instantly to mind) nourish the image and standards of Latin American artists as significant cultural producers on the world stage. And yet it's refreshing that the interest in communities as a locus and destination of the artists' creative efforts has increased as well and seems to balance the otherwise impoverishing trend against locality. Still, while alternative organizations and some private foundations recognize the latter case, there has yet to be a serious curricular response.

The political and economic outlook for the world and therefore the outlook for advanced cultural independence for Latin America are very fragile. It is a fact that institutional art education is still operating in the past and that it isn't correctly addressing a high-powered market or any true social involvement. One would hope that the democratic left, if it is allowed to settle and stabilize, will be able to develop university reform that addresses local issues on both levels so that producers of art objects and art activists can help to improve their communities and give less of a priority to the predilections of the international market. That would be a phase of new educational practice in Latin America, and it might also become a lesson worth noting throughout the world.

Creativity Class

Art School and
Culture Work in
Postsocialist
China

Lily Chumley

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2

THIRTY YEARS OF REFORM

What has happened is that aesthetic production today has become integrated into commodity production generally: the frantic economic urgency of producing fresh waves of ever more novel seeming goods . . . now assigns an increasingly essential structural function and position to aesthetic innovation and experimentation.

—FREDRIC JAMESON (1991: 4)

Over the course of the eighties and nineties, **the fields of work that produce aesthetic form** (graphic design, packaging, product design, fashion, architecture and interior design, film and television, visual art) followed a familiar trajectory: **decentralizing, privatizing, fragmenting, expanding, commodifying, marketizing, and speeding up.** As they grew they produced a gradually and then rapidly shifting array of new images and styles. These forms and their contrast with the past became emblems of the change from socialism to what came after—still officially called socialism, because state rhetoric contradictorily emphasizes both change and continuity.

The culture industries offer more than a case study in the transition to a market economy. Rather, as a fundamental mechanism of capitalism all over the world, they played an essential role in establishing the new economy in China. **Just as one of the basic tactics of Maoist socialism was the control of aesthetic form, the proliferation of images and styles was endemic to reform and opening up.** First, establishing a market economy meant making commodities, which required styling, packaging, and advertising. In that respect artists, designers, photographers, stylists, and others gradually became involved in every industry, from pharmaceuticals to household appliances.

Second, the culture industries played a central role in facilitating the new forms of subjectivity necessary for a market economy. Comrades (*tongzhi*) were converted into consumers (*xiaofeizhe*) in part through their experiences being addressed by advertisements, looking at arrays of packages on a shelf, and “self-styling” by choosing between different materials, shapes, and colors.¹

Third, and most important for this chapter, marketized culture industries offered a new way of experiencing the passage of time: through the periodicity of planned obsolescence. The temporality of the fad, the chronotope of the fashionable—utterly opposed to communism’s teleological model of history—makes aesthetics both the measure and the substance of historical change. To describe the past thirty years, Chinese movies and TV shows use montages of changing clothes, commodities, and interiors. Histories of the first thirty years of socialism do not operate this way, because the socialist state intentionally eliminated the oscillations of fashion. Instead of marking changes in clothes or furniture, histories of Maoism use political campaigns or movement (*yundong*) slogans. Style is one way to know you are in capitalism.²

This chapter does not attempt the impossible task of telling a detailed history for each of the culture industries; such histories have been written in a variety of disciplines, in both Chinese and English.³ Instead, the chapter explores the role of the art schools in *gaigekai fang* (reform and opening up) through histories told by culture workers. I begin with a brief oral history of the Central Academy of Fine Arts (CAFA), as both an exemplary case and central site of *gaigekai fang* as political, cultural, and economic change. This history shows how state institutions were transformed by and participated in reform and opening up, anchoring new aesthetic communities, new fields of production and new subjectivities. I then translate and comment on three art exhibitions from 2007 and 2008, each of which tells a story about the transition to a commodity economy, its particular subjectivities, and its ways of marking time.

Gaigekai fang is often referred to in English as “reform” (*gaige*), putting the stress on the structural adjustments that fomented change. But *kai fang* (opening up) much more accurately captures the complexity of the process. With many of the same valences of the English word “open,” it means, first, to bloom or flower; second, to lift a ban or restriction; third, to be opened to the public (as in an exhibition); fourth, to start up or turn on; fifth, to be privatized (as in a government monopoly). To say that a man is *kai fang* generally means that he is open-minded and progressive, while to say that a woman

is *kaifang* implies that she is sexually promiscuous. The first part of this chapter, the institutional history, is primarily concerned with *gaige*; the second part—the analysis of the retrospective exhibits—is primarily concerned with *kaifang*.

CAFA

The development of commodity aesthetics and the visual culture industries in postsocialist China is sometimes narrated as a kind of “rebirth” in the wake of the gradually receding state-planned economy. But *gaigekaiifang* was planned by the state: rather than submitting to a foreign-orchestrated shock doctrine, Jiang Zemin and Deng Xiaoping oversaw a market transition with socialist state-management techniques.⁴ Although many state factories closed or converted to a profit model, most state institutions did not wither or recede. Rather, these institutions shifted roles in order to facilitate economic liberalization and in so doing grew in power and influence. As Zhang Xudong argues, “the surviving Chinese state infrastructure (was) a conditioning factor in the making of a ‘socialist market economy.’”⁵ This was equally true of the educational institutions that produced the *rencai* (human capital) for the culture industries: the schools that fostered the development of many of the new professional fields and aesthetic communities that gave shape to *gaigekaiifang*.

The institution of the art school was central to the development of Chinese art and design industries, as well as to state aesthetics, not only as a reproductive apparatus and a source of stable employment, but also as an anchoring site for aesthetic communities and a place for experimentation in new styles. The Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing, the most prestigious of the eight (later nine) big art schools (*badameiyuan*), run directly by the central Ministry of Education, served as a leader in the massive projects of institutional expansion and subdivision through which Chinese art schools channeled, encouraged and controlled the growth and diversification of culture. The stories below trace this expansion and show how it resulted in two parallel and correlative inversions of status in the 1990s and 2000s. As employment in the school (and by extension in the state) lost its value relative to success in the market, the fine arts, which had formerly held a privileged position relative to industrial arts—at CAFA, in the education system, and in society more broadly—lost that status to the new fields of design. At the same time, higher education was transformed, from small, centrally located, intimate academies, built on networks of “strong ties” between

mentors and students, to large, suburban, or peripheral institutions, relatively anonymous, which foster large networks of “weak ties” oriented to market practice.⁶

In 1978 CAFA admitted its first new class of students after the traumatic upheavals of the Cultural Revolution, including occupation by Red Guards and political struggle sessions within the school.⁷ They began rebuilding and restoring its pedagogical apparatus, following the mandate of Deng Xiaoping’s Four Modernizations policy. The students who tested into college in that first cohort and in most of the later cohorts of the 1980s (born in the mid-1950s to the end of the 1960s) had mostly learned drawing first from state media such as *lianhuahua* (graphic novels) and taken their first drawing lessons at the local *wenhuabu* (cultural affairs office). Many of them were children of artists and teachers. Test registration cost five yuan (not an insignificant sum at the time),⁸ and the tests were held only once, on campus; all test drawings were reviewed by every single teacher in the department.⁹

CAFA was then located in a small building south of the National Art Museum, just east of Wangfujing (now a major shopping center), the campus it had occupied since 1950. The school was divided into small departments, including oil painting, Chinese ink painting (*guohua*), and printmaking. In the 1980s CAFA added only two departments, one in Mural Painting (to meet the demand for big art installations in public buildings) and the other Folk Art (devoted to preserving local culture). The first few cohorts (*ban*) counted fewer than a dozen students. The students were all undergraduates, but many were in their early twenties, having tested repeatedly before finally matriculating. There was one dormitory for both teachers and students, who frequently ate and drank together in their small rooms. One current CAFA professor who graduated from CAFA in 1987 remembers that “if there was a lecture, we would all walk there together. . . . We could walk to the museum, didn’t even have to take a bus; a sweater only cost five yuan . . . almost nobody worked, unless they were from very poor families, then they might paint little drawings for magazines or things like that.” For those who did side work, there was a wide market for handmade images, from advertisements to technical drawings.

People who studied at CAFA (and many other art schools) in the 1980s remember that teachers were extremely strict; they would tell students to throw bad paintings away and would not allow music in class. Similar restrictions applied to teachers: the artist Xiao Yu, who taught at the Applied Fine Arts Academy of the Industrial Arts Institute from 1990 to 1998, remembers in an interview with Ai Weiwei that when he “performed an experiment” by playing a symphony in class and asking the students about

their experiences drawing while listening to music, the director of the department wanted to kick him out and the head of the school told him he wasn't allowed to perform experiments and disrupt order (*pohuai zhixu*).¹⁰

Schools were then devoted to producing highly trained art teachers. In the mid-1980s, according to one faculty member who stayed at the school to teach, “only the worst students went to work in publishing or design. The best all went to teach art at colleges, and the very best stayed at CAFA to teach” (*liuxiao*, to stay in the school, is still a standard practice at Chinese universities and art schools). Most of the artists and designers I met who graduated before 1995 were assigned teaching jobs of some kind after graduation. As a result, until the 1990s most of the faculty members in industrial art schools (*gongyi xueyuan*) had never practiced the kind of design that they were teaching.

Over the course of the 1980s and 1990s, the gap between pedagogy in state institutions and “practice” in the market expanded. The “New Wave” art scenes that developed in the early 1980s and coalesced with the world-renowned “Stars” exhibition in 1985, included many aesthetically and politically disaffected members of the first generation of CAFA students, at that point just beginning their careers as art instructors; many of these artists were involved in the protests in 1989 and went abroad shortly after, while the underground art scenes in Beijing developed into the bohemian community living around the old Summer Palace (*Yuanmingyuan*). As film, fashion, advertising, and architecture developed in new directions—first in the special economic zones and then in other big cities—successive generations of new graduates and older faculty members decided to *xia-hai*, jump into the sea, leaving their state-assigned work units for freelancing, private firms, and entrepreneurship. They went off to “play” (*wan*) or “float” (*piao*). Often they explained this decision in terms of a sudden whim, or an irrational feeling: “When I quit my job, it was just—I was sitting in my office, and the longer I sat I got uncomfortable. I had been a teacher for eight years, even half an hour before I wasn't uncomfortable, but suddenly in the blink of an eye (*shunjian*) I was uncomfortable, and I didn't want to stay another second. . . . I went straight to the leader (*lingdao*) and told him I wouldn't be coming back the next day.”¹¹ As artists and designers who jumped into the sea told me, in this period only the *least* capable stayed behind to teach in the school or accepted their assigned jobs. The (self-appointed) best and brightest all left the institutions to work in design firms, freelance, sell paintings to galleries, or open their own businesses.

However, throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, even as the gap between institutional pedagogy and independent aesthetic communities grew, art

schools continued to play a central role in the new deinstitutionalized aesthetic communities, in part by providing new cohorts of students and young professors with the advantages of urban residence permits, but more importantly by providing central sites for network building in nascent visual culture industries, including graphic design, fashion, and architecture. Involvement in these professional and social networks, which also became new aesthetic communities, oriented to new styles, was crucial for later success in those industries. Several Chinese designers who went to school in this period remember that they learned little about their trades in their actual classes; nevertheless, their first exposure to design work was through the networks provided by the school, for example working for teachers who were doing commercial projects on the side. The former art students and teachers who left CAFA in this period all continued to circulate and work in CAFA-based aesthetic communities.

In the mid-1990s, the art schools themselves began to change, shifting in orientation and internally dividing to accommodate the new visual culture industries. According to an administrator at the Design Division at CAFA, faculty at CAFA began debating the question of adding a design department in 1993. Many faculty members initially resisted the change, arguing that design belonged in the Industrial Art Academy, but in 1996 they finally added a Department of Design and Architecture. The Industrial Art Academy merged with Tsinghua University and became the very prestigious Tsinghua Academy of Art; rather than “Industrial Art” (*gongyi*), the new academy taught “Design” (*sheji*). Following these changes, art schools and academic universities all over China opened design departments. Although these structural changes followed long internal controversies, they were and still are regarded as elements of a national effort at modernization: “Since the beginning of *gaigekaiifang*, the Central Academy of Fine Arts has energetically carried out educational reform, academic construction and reform of the educational management system, building on the basis of its original superiority and adding new disciplines that meet the nation’s modernizing development needs, vigorously launching international cooperation and foreign exchange activities, while establishing a structure of multiple disciplines advancing together.”¹²

In 1997, two new education policies radically restructured CAFA and other art schools: the drastic expansion of higher education, and the relocation of colleges from city centers to new, larger campuses outside the city, in most cases to remote “college towns” (*daxue cheng*): huge new college campuses surrounded by large walls. In 2001, CAFA left its little Wangfujing building for a massive complex in what was then the suburb Wangjing, beyond the Fourth Ring Road (by 2008, Wangjing, which is also home to nearly

all the major arts districts and studio complexes in Beijing, was considered part of Beijing proper, and the “suburbs” had moved beyond the Sixth Ring Road). In this new complex there were four major academic buildings: one for the Fine Arts Division (*Zaoxing Xueyuan*), one for administration and exhibitions, and one for the new, considerably expanded Design Division (*Sheji Xueyuan*), with offices for multimedia, architecture, and design (there is also a separate building at the back of the campus for the Art History Division). Although the traditional Fine Arts majors are still listed first in the school’s literature, and the whole complex was designed by a single architectural firm and built at the same time, the Design Division’s facilities are vastly superior. The Fine Arts buildings have bare-walled studios, cramped offices, and institutional furniture; the Design Building has high-tech facilities and interior design, appointed with black marble, smoked glass, and brushed steel.

Like most other schools, CAFA was required to finance its own state-mandated expansion, and as a result found itself in serious debt. In 1996, annual tuition went from four thousand to fifteen thousand renminbi. The 1997 policy expanding secondary education also included a mandate for schools to expand “revenue collection” and public/private collaborations. At CAFA, the most prominent example of this kind of institutional cooperation was the elaborately designed art museum on the Wangjing campus; it was partly privately funded and its very first exhibition upon opening in 2007 was a car show.

The new focus on moneymaking extended beyond the institution to include faculty and students. CAFA **teachers circulate in a particularly fashionable scene and desire a higher standard of living than teachers in some provincial schools.** Because of its real estate debt, the school has been unable to raise faculty salaries (which in 2008 started around four thousand renminbi), so teachers are always working on contracts or selling paintings, leaving less time for teaching. The same is true of students, as both teachers and students told me: “Now, all the students work, except for one or two who come from very wealthy families—but lots of the students are from poor backgrounds, they have to earn their tuition. The city kids don’t have to work so much, but they still have to earn their living money, by teaching test prep classes, or working for designers or magazines.” Even in the fine arts, the focus on selling art increased during this period: “The prices have gone up so quickly, gallery owners who used to buy a lot of my [oil] paintings can’t afford anything but the watercolors; people who used to trade in well-known artists’ work can’t afford anything but stuff from students who’ve just graduated. I’ve even heard of people buying student homework

for several thousand renminbi!” Many informants suggested that the pursuit of money is destabilizing the pedagogical function of higher education in China, distracting students and teachers, leaving classrooms empty. Undergraduates are now faced with the problem of anonymity: with so many students in each class, most teachers don’t know their students’ names until at least the third year; only a few undergraduates in every class manage to develop “thick” (*miqie*) relationships with their teachers. However, both faculty and students have much more extensive experience in private industry than they had twenty years ago and much wider networks, which are as important as ever.

During the mid-2000s, when the market in contemporary Chinese art was at its peak, many artists considered the regular salary and benefits of a teaching job unnecessary. Nevertheless, the status of a position in a major art school retained some of its allure: one female teacher went back to work at CAFA’s new Design Division in 2005, after years of “floating outside” (*piao zai waimian*) because as a woman, she felt she needed the prestige even more than the economic security, and because the “requirements weren’t too high” (meaning the workload was very light).

Teaching positions became more desirable after the art market collapse in 2008, when many formerly successful artists found themselves in serious financial difficulty. However, they also became more difficult to procure. Teaching positions at CAFA are no longer simply distributed to recent graduates. CAFA’s Design Division now requires all faculty members to have been educated overseas (one administrator told me he and his friends see CAFA as their children’s first stop before going abroad: “After CAFA, they can go to England for two years and America for two years, then come home to work”). By contrast, CAFA’s Fine Arts Division now requires faculty members to have doctorates in studio art—degrees that are available only in the PRC—in effect requiring faculty members to pass the difficult master’s and doctoral examinations in government thought, and thus counteracting the tendency to cosmopolitanism.¹³

These contrasting tendencies illustrate an ongoing tension in *gaigekai-fang* China. On the one hand, political, cultural, linguistic, and economic forces pull cultural workers inward to local Chinese networks and markets, toward state institutions and party membership. On the other hand, economic, cultural, and state forces push culture workers outward, toward transnational markets and professional networks. Over the past thirty years, many Chinese people, including visual culture workers, have experienced the push and pull of these centripetal and centrifugal forces and come to regard themselves as subjects of dialectical history, caught between the territorial

logic of state institutions (*gaige*) and the “opening up” of a “private” or “natural” and cosmopolitan social life grounded in consumer culture, media, and global markets (*kaifang*). In the remainder of this chapter I examine three commemorative art exhibits that describe this history, to show how the artists position themselves, their generations, and their practice communities in relation to *gaige* and *kaifang*. Each of these art exhibits tells a different story about reform and opening up.

ART HISTORIES

The year 2008 marked the thirtieth anniversary of Deng Xiaoping’s rise to power following Mao’s death. State media celebrated this anniversary with CCTV documentaries and biopics, video montages and propaganda billboards, as well as enormous public ventures including the Olympics and the first Chinese space walk. There were retrospective art exhibitions in every major museum and art school, for which thousands of academic artists and art students produced works on specially selected historical themes (*tikai*). The anniversary year was mediated by a constant stream of patriotic *xuanchuan* that presented all aspects of contemporary Chinese material life (food, apartment buildings, trains, cars, hair, clothes) as evidence of development.¹⁴

This stream of *xuanchuan* was all the more constant because in 2008 China was beset by an unrelenting series of national tragedies: a cataclysmic snowstorm during the Lunar New Year’s travel season that left thousands stranded for days on trains; a major train wreck in Shandong in April; an earthquake in Sichuan that killed at least seventy thousand people in May; a separatist bus bombing in Kunming in July; and a crisis over melamine-contaminated milk and infant formula that erupted after the Olympic closing ceremonies, having been suppressed by censors all summer long. The censorship itself became a scandal after the Olympics when journalists publicly reported on government efforts to prevent them from reporting the contamination.

Each of these events had the potential to threaten the Communist Party’s legitimacy or at least cast a pall over the commemoration. Indeed, the Sichuan earthquake became a turning point in the relationship between the government and the art impresario Ai Weiwei, who participated in the design of the Olympic stadium in 2006 and 2007, but by January 2008 was denouncing the Olympics as a “propaganda show.” In December 2008 Ai used his blog to publicize corruption, and set up an online memorial to the thousands of Sichuanese children killed by collapsing schools.¹⁵ The corruption scandals of 2008 gave new vigor to nascent political resistance. In

December of 2008, hundreds of Chinese dissidents signed and published a prodemocracy petition called Charter 08; among them was Liu Xiaobo, who was arrested in 2009 and awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2010.

However, these Internet-based antigovernment discourses were more widely publicized abroad than in China. Within the stream of authoritative discourse projected on the radio, on television, in newspapers, and by ordinary citizens, the tragedies of 2008 gave the anniversary a heightened emotional tenor: a thirty-year narrative of struggle, triumph, and unity was dramatically, metonymically retraced in a single year, as People's Liberation Army troops rescued those trapped on trains and stuck under buildings and government-service doctors provided free treatment to infants who had drunk the tainted milk. Many Beijing residents were enthusiastically engaged in this narrative: there were public displays of patriotic identification, from the earthquake donation drives organized by schools, neighborhood committees, and movie stars to the crowds of student volunteers who put on Olympic T-shirts to conduct crowd control and provide information services at Olympic venues and subway stations, to the senior citizens in every neighborhood of Beijing, who spent the summer wearing Public Security T-shirts (*zhianfu*) and managing security from their customary stoops and street corners (see figure 2.1).

The commemoration of *gaigekaiifang* extended far beyond the propaganda bureau. Independent cultural organizations also produced commemorations, which used material culture as history in ways very similar to the CCTV montages, and focused on the same historical themes. Here I examine the histories of *gaigekaiifang* explicit and implicit in three unofficial exhibitions: a 2008 series of memory paintings by the artist Chen Xi, displayed at the New Art gallery in Beijing; a late 2007 installation with performance at the Arario Gallery in Beijing by the artist Xiao Yu called "Material Reality Play: The World, Chilling and Warming"; and a 2008 group show called "Home-sickness: Memory and Virtual Reality" at T-Space in Beijing.

These exhibitions combined national retrospection with private introspection. For Chinese visual culture workers at the end of the long twentieth century, lived experience is national history. The generation born in the 1960s—which includes many of the artists whose work is described in this chapter, as well as the three astronauts who participated in the spacewalk mission—witnessed the establishment of the markets and institutions they now lead. There were no major design firms or contemporary art galleries in China when they went to college. Their nostalgia is informed by a reflexive recognition of the historical significance of their own memories.¹⁶ These exhibitions reflect



FIGURE 2.1 CAFA New Campus, with 2008 Sichuan Earthquake commemorative art.

the institutionalization of nostalgia, showing how such memories are articulated in relation to more official or more institutionalized genres of history.

In the tradition of Lu Xun's "Ah Q" and Zhang Yimou's *Raise the Red Lantern*—narratives in which subaltern individuals appear as allegories of the nation—life stories are always potentially inflected with national narratives. Many of the artworks described in this chapter make this inflection explicit by positing personal memories as national history. In this respect, these artists engaged in a representation of national subjectivity that has often been controversial in the Chinese art world. International collectors have preferred Chinese artists' work to be about China, and Chinese artists often resent this requirement.¹⁷ Many artists protest that they are not trying to depict China, its history or its current situation. But whether in a Chinese political context or in Western markets for Chinese art, every subject stands potentially for the nation.

Like all unofficial histories, these exhibitions could not help but be in dialogue with official history.¹⁸ As Prasenjit Duara argues, **the nation-state frames historical consciousness, and historical consciousness has been one of the most important tools of nation building in China. And yet "the state is never able to eliminate alternative constructions of the nation."**¹⁹ There

are the alternative nationalisms of separatist groups in Taiwan, Tibet, and Xinjiang, which Duara calls “self-conscious Others within the nation.” But there are also alternative versions of history in China from within the “us” of mainstream Han Chinese identification. Some of the contemporary artists I discuss in this chapter draw on traditions of irony and parody to critique official versions of history, while others uncritically echo official histories. I begin with an example of the latter: Chen Xi’s “China Memories” series. Chen Xi takes up the trope of the individual as metonym of the nation and lays out its mechanics by focusing on the television: as a piece of material culture, an instrument of memory production, and a technology of interpellation.

Chen Xi: “China Memories”

In 2008, Chen Xi (b. 1968), a professor at CAFA since 2005, presented a new series of works on history: highly realistic oil still lifes of old televisions, ranging from the late 1970s to the late 1980s, on desks or tables. On the screens of some of these televisions are officially designated important moments in history, on others pictures of young families standing in front of Tiananmen Square.²⁰ The televisions as objects and the fragments of rooms visible around them suggest a relationship between mass media and material culture: each image constructs a time-space or chronotope. Rendered in oil, the images on the screen seem as ageless, as permanent, as the television machine (*dianshiji*) itself. These images suggest the nation and its shifting self-projections, while the televisions and furniture record a growing material culture and material wealth. The television has been, since the 1980s, itself a fashionable commodity, as well as an instrument in promoting the desire for newer, prettier, and better things. By fixing the television in a freeze-frame, the paintings draw attention to the contrast between scales of time, from the events on the screen to the eras of the furniture (see figure 2.2).

In these paintings and in her artist’s statement about them, Chen Xi articulates the role of visual culture, especially television and film but also visual art, in constructing both personal memories and the nation as a public. In her artist’s statement, “Through the Door of Memory,”²¹ Chen Xi articulates retrospection through the metaphor of film:

Before I was thirty, I was completely unaware of the change that I was experiencing as this country went from suffering to reform, and soon after got on the high-speed train of change, finally arriving at this flourishing and prospering time. Now that I am forty, it’s as if I can finally see clearly how fortunate I was. In the span of history, forty



FIGURE 2.2 Artist photo. Chen Xi, “China Memories”: Spring Festival Gala series. Courtesy of the artist.

years is just the blink of an eye (*shunjian*), but it’s as if I was watching a perfect movie: with my own eyes I saw this country in the blink of an eye (*shunjian*) exploding forth with too much brilliance.

The chronotope of “in the blink of an eye” (*shunjian*), which Chen Xi repeats twice in one sentence, was frequently used to describe *gaigekaiifang* in many 2008 commemorations. The experience of *kaiifang* is described as being inherently televisual; it is “as if I was watching a perfect movie,” a complete narrative that can be appreciated only as a viewer, retrospectively. In watching this perfect movie, Chen Xi discovers the political aspect of the personal: “I always believed I was a person with no interest in government or history, until this year, when I made a new series of nostalgic and retrospective works, which surprised and even scared me a little. When I thought about the reason, I realized that some things are like genes buried deep inside the body.” Chen Xi describes herself as a spectator of her own paintings, which serve as a mirror, reflecting back the “government and history” buried in her apolitical body, in the most private memories. From this point on, her essay figures history in terms of the rhythm of mediated events that

constitute national histories in the modern era, events made public by the televisions that also bring them into private spaces all over the nation, far away from where they occurred. It traces a series of events almost identical to the historical *tikai* (topics) of the official painting exhibitions organized to commemorate thirty years of reform, to the contours and trajectories of the official historical narrative, even while positing itself as an individual memory.

Official culture plays a role in her earliest memory, as in the following story from her childhood (her mother was in a group of revolutionary opera performers): “When I was three or four years old I liked best to get grown-ups to dress me up in the red costumes of Tiemei from the revolutionary opera *The Red Lantern*, to tie on red dancing shoes, and perform in a circle of adults.” Another kind of official culture figures in her primary memory of the Cultural Revolution, of a young cousin with a strange habit: “Every day she did just one thing, she stood ramrod-straight in front of the radio, with her head down low, softly chanting. After a while we pretended she wasn’t there. . . . At night when my mother came home, the cousin would interrogate her, asking: what, are you back from your reactionary Dengist meeting again?” The cousin’s total involvement in the radio (and, by implication, the stream of political discourse) marks her as unusual and possibly dysfunctional; Chen Xi asks her mother if the cousin is crazy and is told that she is just pitiful. Soon after this the cousin leaves. From then on memory is organized according to events of news, information passed from person to person directly: grown-ups talk about the earthquake in Tianjin, and then Chairman Mao’s death in 1976 (when Chen Xi was eight years old): “We were on the street and there was a burst of panic, the grown-ups were quietly passing some news and I was scared because their faces were all stricken with pain and some of them started to cry. . . . For a while after that I didn’t dare talk or laugh on the street or play at school.” The period of mourning following Mao’s death soon lifts, however, with another, even more dramatic event, the arrival of a new communication device:

One summer, I found out that a friend’s house had a strange new thing, a thing that could play movies! My friend’s dad told me this was called a television. At the time I was completely fascinated by it. Whenever I had a chance I would go to her house, and if they hadn’t turned on the television, I would be very sad. Actually most of the time what we saw when we watched was static; when finally a person would appear, I would get terribly excited. A few years later, my house also got its first, tiny television set. After work, the neighbors who

didn't have televisions would all gather in our house, or the house of another neighbor who had one, watching and talking until very late. I knew the grown-ups were all enchanted by the television. From the time it appeared, it seemed that the world got smaller. Through a tiny little screen, people could watch all the human drama (*xinuaile*) of every corner of the earth. In those years, and even until today, so many people's spirit and visual field were locked into this tiny heart (*fangcun*). It has certainly had a profound influence on modern people, including myself. It is now coming clearly into view (*lilizaimu*).

The arrival of the television is the clearest of all the "memories" described in Chen Xi's narrative. The television appears not as a medium of political messages, but rather as a forum for voyeuristic linkage with the "human drama" beyond the nation. It is a technology of interpellation that brings neighbors physically together into the same room to watch and also converts them into members of a smaller "world," by "locking" (*suoding*) them into itself. In Chen Xi's narrative the television, which arrives at the end of the 1970s, is both the emblem and the implement of *gaigekaifang*. It transforms China by bringing new forms of subjectivity and new aesthetic experiences (or qualia):²² "Once the 1980s began, it was as if this country's people had suddenly woken up: even though the city was still just as old and shabby, the crowd of people popped out with more and more bright and shining colors (*xianliang secai*); people's expressions weren't dull anymore. A new wave (*fengchao*) had begun, and all the young people were transformed." Chen Xi posits the television as the fundamental technology of *kaifang*, producing a totalizing commensuration (joining the community of the world), an emotional engagement and release (sharing human drama, newly expressive faces), and an aesthetic transformation (new colors, new wave).

In the remainder of the essay, Chen Xi's personal memories are interspersed with televisual memories. The women's volleyball team wins the world championship and Chen Xi adopts their lead player's signature hairstyle. She goes to high school and fellow Sichuan native Deng Xiaoping stands atop Tiananmen reviewing the troops: "The grown-ups said, Old Deng went up, our days are about to get better. Life really did get better, everybody's mood was improving; at the end of the year the feeling of celebration was at its peak, and the [annual CCTV] Spring Festival Extravaganza was the main dish for New Year's Eve dinner. I remember the last years of the eighties and the first years of the nineties were the golden age of the CCTV spectacular, all the biggest stars of the time wanted to appear on that stage" (see figure 2.2). Despite having been at CAFA in 1989, during the student

protests and the crackdown that followed, that is all she has to say about the end of the 1980s. Her own critic, Wang Jing, describes Chen Xi's time at CAFA as the period "when Cui Jian's rock'n'roll poured from the roof of CAFA, when intense longing and the image of freedom permeated the air . . . political and social transformation made social values uncertain." But Chen Xi passes over the turmoil of the late eighties in silence, focusing instead on the rise of the CCTV spectacular as a consummate performance of national unity: "All the stars of the time wanted to be on that stage."

Chen Xi then relates how she graduated from CAFA in the early 1990s, got married, and "became an artist" (*cheng yishujia*) in Beijing. When friends began leaving for Shenzhen to *chuangye* ("pioneer," meaning start a career or a business), she and her husband followed them to "go play" (spending the year 1994–95 there in Shenzhen). Informal or independent work can be called "play" in contrast to working for a state-assigned work unit, which is never referred to as such. Chen Xi emphasizes the phantasmagoric effect of new capitalism: "I painted a year's worth of paintings there, because that place gave me a really special feeling: there were building sites everywhere, everyone was going in for big construction (*daxingtumu*), the women dressed in gorgeous clothes (*chuande huazhizhaozhan*);²³ at night the streets were extremely lively, full of stalls and stands, there was a restless spirit in the air, everyone was looking to wash out his first bucket of gold." Rapid construction, fashionable women, lively nightlife, restless spirit, money: these are the emblems of Shenzhen's protocapitalism, which by the late 1990s had begun to spread out from the "special economic zone" (just as classic socialist propaganda had asserted that capitalism would) and gradually transformed all of mainland China.

Chen Xi's description of the late 1990s is less synesthetic: "Everybody started to get rich." The stock market starts up and her mother (the former revolutionary opera performer) starts playing her luck. Soon Chen Xi is watching the evacuation of the Three Gorges area in preparation for the building of the dam: "Often, in front of the television, watching the crowds of emigrants from Three Gorges quietly and peacefully leaving their homes, my heart was full of an inexplicable feeling. That was a construction project that seemed to take forever." Chen Xi assimilates the Three Gorges Project to the "construction projects" that overtook Shenzhen in the early 1990s. There is no attribution of agency in her history of this period: everything happens as if capitalism and its "construction projects" were a natural force. Over and over Chen Xi uses metaphors of uncontrolled momentum to describe *gaigekaiifang*: a speeding train, a car going down a hill, and a wildfire spreading across a prairie.

At the start of the new century, everything began moving faster like a car speeding down a hill, and then there appeared in China's televisions a "choosing-girl-singers" program: Supergirl. This program had an astonishing influence, it roused the whole nation of young men and women and fired their dreams of stardom. I remember that night we were all gathered around the television, we all wanted Shang Wenjie to win, because she had moved us with her song. And our wishes were fulfilled (*ruyuanyichang*). . . . Soon all kinds of viewer-choice programs took over all the channels like a wildfire, the girls and boys were all on the streets fanatically debating their heroes, it seems that Chinese people had never before expressed themselves (*ziwo*) so recklessly and crazily (*siyi fakuang*).

Chen Xi describes both the Three Gorges Dam relocations *and* the Supergirl show as television events, involving herself (and, by extension, the whole Chinese nation) in a kind of emotional communion: first, the "inexplicable feeling" provoked by nameless villagers leaving their homes in an orderly fashion, performing a national sacrifice; second, the thrill of "dreams fulfilled" and the "reckless self-expression" provoked by the competition between "heroic" singers.

Chen Xi finishes her narrative as so many official histories did in that period: with the serial spectacles of the Olympics and the spacewalk. In the summer of 2008 her parents come to visit her in Beijing, partly because of the earthquake in Sichuan, but mainly to see China grandly (*honghonglieli*) host "its first Olympics." Her parents go to watch a practice performance and spend all evening in the stadium doing the wave, and take pictures standing in front of the Olympic architecture: the Bird's Nest stadium and the Water Cube swimming pool. They describe these monuments as having a lot of *qishi*, momentum (also energy or force), picking up on the metaphors of momentum used to describe *gaigekaiifang*.

Chen Xi and her parents echo the tropes of the 2008 commemorative *xuanchuan* images of these stadiums, regarding them not as temporary icons of the Olympics, but rather as permanent emblems of the apotheosis of "China's rise," of a development (*fazhan*) that culminates in 2008, without ever ending. Indeed, these buildings have joined (if not begun to replace) Tiananmen in both nationalist *xuanchuan* and the kinds of pilgrimage photographs that figure in Chen Xi's paintings and Liu Yuanwei's photobiography. Years later, the area around these two stadiums is always filled with Chinese tourists—many of them aging farmers and their migrant-laborer children—posing for photographs, with other migrant workers selling

instant-print photographs. This permanent monumentality raises the problem of life after thirty years of reform (or post-postsocialism): did the 2008 anniversary mark the end of *gaigekai-fang* as a historical period?

Chen Xi's essay addresses this question by continuing past the last staged, celebratory, national event of 2008: the spacewalk. The spacewalk would have been a proper ending for the year's dramas and for her narrative; but unfortunately it was almost immediately eclipsed (in the screen of the television) by a less manageable event:

We were again in front of the television, watching the astronauts slowly crawl out of the shuttle, waving a little Chinese flag in the middle of the cosmos. It seemed that China stood on the towering peak of the world. But then the fall came, Wall Street met misfortune, the financial crisis touched the every corner of the world and everyone felt winter's cold; but life continues. Too many things happened in 2008, happy things, terrible things, tragic things, unknown things. It was certainly hair-raising, but next year in March the forsythia (*yingchunhua*, spring-welcoming flower) will open again. All we can do is bear everything that life gives us.

When the tiny flag in the giant cosmos appears in the television, "China stands on the towering peak of the world"; but then comes the fall. Suddenly a teleological narrative of momentum and progress, of gravity and trajectory—a narrative that coincides at every moment with official narratives of history, and works continuously to ground the narrative in its own most powerful means of reproduction, the television—is replaced by a cyclical chronotope of seasonal fluctuation. The forsythia is a device that allows the periodized narrative of commemoration to give way to the ongoing flow of time (as well as the ongoing flow of television broadcasts): it is a way of referencing the future without making any predictions. At the end of this memoir, in a few short sentences, Chen Xi goes from the anticlimax of the narrative to the cyclicity of seasons to the linear chronotope of the biography, which is also the chronotope of the cohort: "Now I use paintings to preserve memories that belong to most Chinese people. When this generation gets really old, we will turn around and see our lifetime of memories, of major national events and of little personal things; having such an abundant life, shouldn't we be satisfied?" Chen Xi's televisual history of *gaigekai-fang* ends with the deictic center of the cohort born in the late 1960s. This cohort defines itself as one that experienced all of reform; as in Chen Xi's

narrative, for them 2008 marked not just a national anniversary but also a coming of age, as they transition from the work of *chuangye* and prepare to step into major leadership roles in central Chinese institutions, including CAFA. Chen Xi makes no explicit reference to these future possibilities; she refers only to the “abundant life” that her cohort will in the future have to remember.

That Chen Xi’s systematic silences and near-relentless optimism dovetailed so neatly with the sanitized versions of history presented by the central government’s propaganda apparatus is not surprising. As a professor at CAFA, she could have many reasons to find the “genes” of government and history “buried deep inside the body.”²⁴ In the spring of 2008, I watched a conservative professor at CAFA tell his graduate students, who were working on a group series of paintings for historical exhibitions, to meet “the nation’s requirements” (*guojia yaoqiu*; also *biaozhun, shuizhun*). He told them that if they could do so, they would “become artists, the nation will collect your work.” When one student (who wore a camouflage baseball cap in the pseudo-military style worn by many avant-garde artists in those years) suggested working on a piece about the burning of the Summer Palace by the eight Western powers in 1860, a common subject of nationalist histories, Professor Zhang—who always wore a black zip-up bomber suit and looked as if he’d just come from a Politburo meeting—told him “your attitude (*zhuangtai*) is very dangerous, your thought (*silu*) is dangerous”; compared him to a certain female painter who liked to read, but “read too much”; and told him to avoid “sensitive questions.” Political control filters unevenly through pedagogy, creating absurd dangers. In the next section, I examine an installation that critically examines these absurdities.

Xiao Yu, “Material Reality Play: The World, Chilling and Warming”

Xiao Yu, the artist cited in the first section of this chapter as having experimented with music in the classroom, who left his teaching position in “the blink of an eye” when he could no longer stand the institution, was not subject to such pressures, nor was he required to make art on historical *tikai*. Nevertheless in September 2007 he presented a historical installation exhibit at the Arario Gallery in Beijing. This installation comprised a series of rooms organized like a museum of Chinese national history. “Material Reality Play” traced the long twentieth century (1890–2008) from the “last emperor’s casket” to the Bird’s Nest Olympic stadium, self-consciously referring to the roles that visual culture industries, from film to advertising

to interior design to contemporary art, play in producing historical narratives. Where Chen Xi's painting series aligned with official commemorations to celebrate economic development in the era of reform and opening up, Xiao Yu's installation rejected those commemorative frames for an acerbic critique of the whole century. Xiao Yu's installation was distinctive for its clever use of text, inverting the traditional relationship between text and object. The objects in the rooms, some very simple and others gorgeous, massive installations, all served to give context to the tiny label texts (in English and Chinese) posted next to them: little phrases that kept pointing to the instability of historical discourse, and which were available for viewers in printed form on the way out.

The viewer began the installation in the lobby of the gallery, where a small television screen showed a video of a middle-aged man in contemporary clothing sitting at a white table in a white room, reading from a large document, the pages stacked on the table before him. The text was Chinese, and his speech sounded like Mandarin but made no sense; it took me a while to realize that he was reading the most famous passages of Marx's *Capital* in English, transliterated into Chinese characters. On the wall next to the television was a small slip of paper with the phrase: "There are some things you must read, you must read them aloud, and it is important to read them carefully." Thus Xiao Yu began the exhibition by alerting the viewer to the importance of recitation, rather than reference, in a political culture built partly on translated socialist texts; to the relevance of Marx's analysis of the commodity form in "market socialism"; and to the importance of reading the wall texts in the exhibit.

From this well-lit lobby the viewer passed through a narrow door covered by a black curtain into a dark room, where a cheap Qing dynasty imperial costume of the sort offered by photo-vendors at tourist sites lay in a coffin, a miniature tree growing where the head of the corpse would be. Around the room a few objects hung on the wall, marked by labels (translated here in plain text; my descriptions of the objects are in parentheses and italics).

1. The First Scene: The Emperor Committed Suicide

The strong countries' leaders together presented a stainless-steel coffin we made ourselves to bury him in.

- A. The emperor cut down the doorsills, because they got in the way.
(A traditional raised wooden doorsill, used to protect the house against ghosts and to mark wealth and rank)

- B. The telephone the emperor used to communicate with the intellectuals. (*An antique telephone*)
- C. The emperor's favorite painting. (*A cheap reproduction of a landscape painting*)

In this room Xiao Yu began with the beginning of so many official, academic, and popular histories of modern China: the decline of the Qing dynasty and the "semi-colonization" of China by the "strong countries" (the European powers, the United States, Russia, and Japan) in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Xiao Yu points to the traditional themes of most Chinese histories of this period: first, Manchu weakness (the emperor has removed the doorsills that should have kept the "ghosts," or foreigners, out of the palace); and second, Chinese complicity with colonization (the emperor's coffin was made by "us").

Xiao Yu presents this emperor as a sympathetic figure, who appreciated art, talked privately to intellectuals, and welcomed change, if only to bring on his own misfortune. This is not Puyi, the so-called "Last Emperor" famous in the West and puppet monarch of Japanese Manchuria, but rather his uncle Guangxu (r. 1874–1908), who with the intellectual Kang Youwei attempted to introduce major modernization reforms in 1898, only to be put under house arrest for ten years and finally poisoned to death by General Yuan Shikai and Empress Dowager Cixi. The little bonsai tree growing in place of the emperor's head suggested the possibility of rebirth, the continuous revival of reform movements in twentieth-century China. On the other hand, the little tree also brought to mind the big tree in Jingshan Park where the last Ming emperor hung himself in 1644, suggesting continuous cycles of dynastic collapse.

Xiao Yu's use of museum conventions such as dark rooms with spot lighting and serious wall labels suggests an aura of authenticity. But the combination of cheap reproductions, genuine antiques, and a modern coffin references both historical tourism and period TV shows. The telephone evidently came from one of the prop houses that rents old things for use in period movies. The "doorsill" looked as if it belonged to one of the brand-new traditional courtyard houses, including shiny new *menkan*, which were in 2007 and 2008 appearing all around the back alleys of the central *Xicheng* area in Beijing, replacing aging, crowded socialist-era *ping fang* (one-story brick houses).²⁵ Even as it represented a starting point in the historical narrative, this room pointed out the contemporary popularity of the imperial aesthetic.

From this dark room the viewer walked through a door onto a lighter winding path, with a bumpy foam floor resembling rocks, divided by a

series of walls of stage scrim. Passing back and forth as if from backstage to front stage, the viewer emerged into a large room, where a tree (with shackles hanging from its trunk and branches) stood by a wall of rocks. Looking back at the path from which she had come, the viewer saw a stage set depicting a sunset over a mountain road. On the wall at the side hung a few objects.

2. The Second Scene: The Hero Left

Walking on the path the hero walked, we blithely, merrily stroll along.

- A. The hero's favorite grass sleeping mat. (*A straw mat*)
- B. The grass shoes the hero used to wear. (*Straw shoes*)
- C. Fish bones left from the hero's meal. (*Fish bones glued to a plastic plate*)

Coming after the death of the emperor, the rocky road through the mountains, the tree with its shackles, and the paltry remnants of the hero's life suggested early Communist Party revolutionaries. The winding path along a bumpy road evoked their Long March through the mountains during the war with the Nationalists. At the same time, the red sunset and lone tree and the straw shoes and mat called to mind an itinerant kung fu hero of the kind frequently depicted in Hong Kong martial arts films such as *Tai-Chi Master* and *New Dragon Gate Inn*. In those films the itinerant heroes are almost always drawn directly from history, usually remnant loyalists to a defeated dynasty. This sequence managed to articulate multiple dimensions of the trope of the defeated hero wandering in the mountains.

The text positioned viewers as the followers "blithely" walking along the hero's path, calling attention to the (uncertain) temporal distance between the present and the past. Like the earlier scene of the dead emperor, this passage described not only the loss of an idealized hero but also a general contemporary sense of loss, a vague nostalgia for something unknown and possibly unreal: the early years of socialism, or perhaps the bare-bones simplicity of premodern, preindustrial life. The arrangement of the hero's possessions evoked archaeological fetishism. But the use of the stage set materials (foam and scrim) emphasized the theatricality of the exhibit, as did the fish bones, absurdly glued to a plastic plate.

At the other end of this room, far away from the straw mat, a giant wall of rusted steel stood at an angle, more than ten feet high and almost two

feet thick. In the wall were embedded gigantic bullet casings, as if caught in the moment of piercing through. On the other side of the wall, visible only when the viewer reached the far end of the room, the shells “emerging” from it blossomed into giant golden flowers.

3. The Third Scene: Each Time the Great Guns Sound, Ten Thousand Gold Ducats

Fireworks spend money, bullets earn money.²⁶

A. A coatrack made of bullets. (*A coatrack made out of large artillery shells*)

B. Fireworks waste money, bombs earn money. (*The rusted steel wall*)

C. Handmade guns. (*Model guns made of bent wire and rubber bands*)

This part of the room called to mind, first, the frequently cited contrast between Chinese and Western uses of gunpowder as fireworks and artillery, respectively. It also suggested the grand military projects and massive industrialization of the fifties and sixties, especially the Great Leap Forward, when pots, pans, and tools were collected from households to be melted down for steel to be used in military and industrial constructions (the coatrack made of bullets inverts that process). The oversized flowers bursting from the wall seemed to connote the grandeur of Maoist spectacle: the parades, the brightly colored posters, the giant paper flowers, the weapons. On the other hand, the little handmade guns, in their resemblance to children’s toys, suggested the nostalgic stories of scrappy, handmade childhood games that I have often heard from middle-aged Chinese artists and designers, stories about the ingenuity of deprivation that characterized their childhoods in a world without commodities (in contrast to their own children’s passive reliance on the market to provide objects of entertainment).

In the first three rooms of the installation, Xiao Yu managed to describe the first half of the twentieth century, by displaying the detritus of grand imperial visual culture; an archaic or revolutionary, heroic simplicity; and Maoist industrialism, a world of parades and poverty. From this point on the installation shifted in emphasis, as the viewer went through a small door into a small dark room, painted black. In the center of the room was a large sculpture made of a solid piece of red glass; it looked like a giant bowl full of liquid, with a bottle appearing to float or sink among concentric waves. It was lit in such a way that it seemed to glow.

4. The Fourth Scene: Thought Problems

Our brains aren't always producing thoughts; once thoughts are produced, they are certain to be misinterpreted.

- A. A note that may have recorded thoughts, but was put through the wash in a pants pocket. (*Scraps of paper with traces of ink, in a frame*)
- B. Under this lantern, thoughts might have been produced. (*An old glass lantern*)
- C. "Those who believe have; those who don't, lack"—Ancient bone inscription, unintelligible. (*Leg bone of a cow or horse, covered in scratches or tooth marks*)

The objects in this dark room were all concerned with uncertainty and inscrutability (see figure 2.3). The floating/sinking bottle might contain a message, but it is unreachable; the ink on the note might at one time have had meaning; the lantern might have shed light on something. Only the bone inscription suggests a more menacing cause for uncertainty. Here what looks like nothing more than a chewed-up bone is labeled as a *jiaguwen*, the ancient oracle bone inscriptions that are the earliest examples of Chinese writing. From one interpretation, the label "*xinze you, bu xinze wu*" taunts the viewer, suggesting that in order to "have" a person must learn to believe that tooth marks are an ancient, mystic script. From another angle, this bone suggests the redemptive potential of a scrap of faith in something chewed over and left behind.

The title of the scene, "Thought Problems" (*sixiang wenti*), is a phrase that has been used by the Communist Party in political criticism throughout its tenure, including during the repressions of the Cultural Revolution. The scene's place in the historical sequence of the installation, coming after the Great Leap Forward, would indeed suggest that it was about that period, from the mid-sixties to the end of the seventies. However, aside from the phrase "Thought Problems" there was nothing in the room to suggest the 1970s: no Red Guards, no green uniforms, no crowds or kneeling people, no dunce caps, no Mao buttons, no big character posters. In the field of Chinese contemporary art, where nothing has been more commonly repeated than the images of Red Guards, and in the context of contemporary Chinese historical discourse, where the Cultural Revolution is relatively open to public criticism, Xiao Yu's treatment of this topic was beyond subtle.

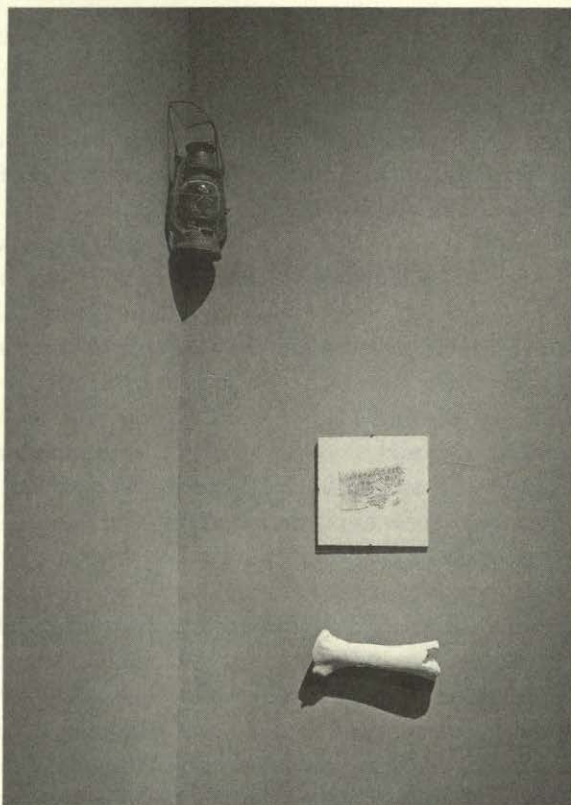


FIGURE 2.3 Artist photo. Xiao Yu, *The Fourth Scene: Thought Problems*. "Material Reality Play," 2007. Courtesy Arario Gallery Beijing.

However, this room made reference to communication in paranoid, hyper-political environments, precisely by deploying the kind of ambiguity that often characterizes such communications (such as the CAFA professor who told the student his "thought path" was dangerous). There is a sly understatement about this part of the installation that was a distinctive feature of Chinese intellectual discourse in the seventies and eighties. For instance, the subtitle suggests that "thought problems" take two forms: not thinking enough and getting misinterpreted when you do think. This part of the exhibition put the Cultural Revolution in the broader context of political repression.²⁷ The glass bottle and the scraps of paper point to the difficulty of holding on to something meaningful, without suggesting the reason for the difficulty. Only the label accompanying the chewed bone hints at the

presence of obstacles to believing the evidence of one's own eyes, or thinking for oneself.

Similarly subtle was a side room at the back, divided off by a black wall. It was also dark. In the center sat another large monument, a giant cube of polished black granite, inscribed with the subtitle of the scene in Chinese, English, French, German, Dutch, Japanese, and Korean:

5. The Fifth Scene: Dog Memorial

Loyal, grateful, fearless, fervent—we deeply cherish you, and memorialize all dogs that have died since they were domesticated by people.

- A. The bird the dog would most like to kill. (*A taxidermied eagle attached high on the wall, its beak open as if shrieking*)
- B. The dog's favorite chew toy. (*A pair of slippers*)
- C. The dog's most hated tool. (*A stick*)

This scene might be construed as a monument to the socialist ideal person: "loyal, grateful, fearless, fervent," once-ideal personal qualities that have now changed their meanings, lost their virtue. At another level it refers to China's relations to other countries, to the situation of postcolonialism and subjugation. The memorial to all dogs is inscribed in the languages of the colonial aggressors (English, French, German, Dutch, Japanese) and contemporary competitors (Korean). The eagle "the dog would most like to kill" is a reference to the United States. This room, positioned as a sidetrack to the main path of the exhibition, suggests a kind of subaltern subconscious, which like the "Thought Problems" scene overflows its temporal position in the installation.

Given their position in the sequence of the exhibit, these rooms also make veiled reference to the end of the 1980s, to things that happened in the vicinity of certain monuments, to certain uses of force and ideas left behind. Xiao Yu, who graduated from CAFA's attached high school in 1985 and from CAFA in 1989, and must have been there in Wangfujing just a few blocks northeast of Tiananmen in June when the student demonstrators (including many from CAFA) occupied the square, collapses a sequence of unmentionable history into two small rooms: "Thought Problems" and "Memorial to All Dogs."

From this room the viewer could only circle back into "Thought Problems," and from there to a small door, which led onto a brightly lit narrow white hallway lined with white painted bricks and white pebbles. In the

wall were a series of round Plexiglas windows like those on ships, lit from behind. At each window was a small label:

Intermission: History has laid many roads before us,
but we are always coming along just one

- A. Life-smarts—Don't get lost.
- B. Life-smarts—Combine work and play.
- C. Life-smarts—Caution.²⁸
- D. Life-smarts—Walk toward the future.

This path brought the viewer into a new era. Like the hard-minded, upbeat aphorisms on the labels, the white walls, bricks, pebbles, and round windows all evoked trendy, modernist interior design. These materials and colors marked this intermission as a description of the 1990s, when this kind of global modern interior design first appeared in a few urban centers, in shopping malls and nightclubs. The instruction to “combine work and play” echoes Chen Xi's reference to entrepreneurship (*chuangye*) as a form of “play.”

This passageway resembled the mountain path that led the viewer to “The Hero Left.” But where that path was built out of the materials of theater, this walkway was built of the materials of architecture: it was real, hard, and not at all fanciful or nostalgic. There was an irony in the reminders “don't get lost” and “walk toward the future”; there was only one path, a very narrow one, so despite the “many roads” history lays before us, there wasn't any choice of which way to go.²⁹

From this point on, the exhibit took on a terse humor that requires little explication. The white brick road opened onto a small, brightly lit room painted sky blue, occupied by an Astroturf stage, on which sat a model of a spaceship the height of a man, robotically opening and closing its launching gear like a pair of wings.

6. The Sixth Scene: The Plan to Get to the Moon

It was a tool for communicating with heaven anyhow, might as well use it to go to heaven.

- A. A moon-vehicle prepared long ago. (*The space rocket opening and closing its launching gear*)
- B. When Chang E went to the moon, she took these pills. Every country's astronauts should take them, they really work. (*Large*

balls of Chinese medicine in a box labeled "bull's gallstone," niuhuang shangqingwan)

- C. The animal best suited to live on the moon. (*A taxidermied rabbit with white wings attached high on the wall*)

This room made light of the astronomical goals of the Chinese government,³⁰ putting futuristic national ambitions in context of ancient Chinese mythology and childhood fantasy.³¹ In the context of the exhibition, coming after the white path with its hard-minded aphorisms, the whole stage setup suggested the feeling of explosive, unreal transformation of the late 1990s and early 2000s, as incomes, prices, and apartment buildings all shot upward and the Communist Party developed ambitious plans for domestic infrastructure and global military power. The brightly lit stage with its AstroTurf and the winged rabbit gave tribute to the phantasmagoria of economic growth and political power at the height of *gaigekai fang*.

The final room in Xiao Yu's exhibit contained three scenes depicting the present-just-then-coming-into-being through very recognizable governmental and nongovernmental spectacles, and in particular the Bird's Nest (*niaochao*) Olympic Stadium designed by Ai Weiwei and the architectural firm Herzog and de Meuron.

7. The Seventh Scene: Futuristic Fashion

Rich people should do rich people stuff.

- A. Grandeur and style are very important. (*A military hat in the shape of the Bird's Nest*)
 B. You can't be without beautiful women. (*A model, who puts the crown on her head*)
 C. You gotta have baubles, the bigger the better. (*A scale model of the Bird's Nest about the size of a car*)

During the exhibit opening, these scenes became set pieces for a performance: a beautiful model wearing a pant suit and very high heels put on the Bird's Nest hat which resembled both a military cap and a crown, and then stood ramrod straight, not looking at the viewers, even when they drew close to read the label (B) pinned to her breast. The next sequence extended this satire of pecuniary expenditure by mocking the Chinese contemporary art world, which was at that point still breaking price records at auction (see figure 2.4).³²

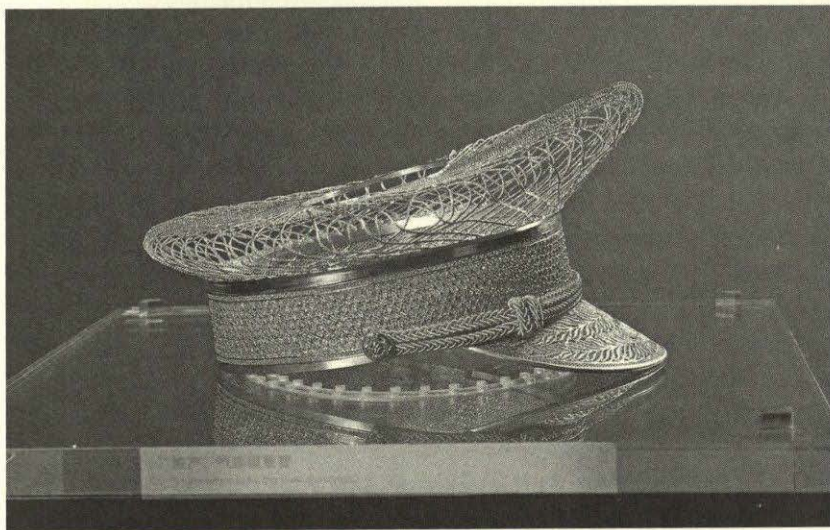


FIGURE 2.4 Artist photo. Xiao Yu, *The Seventh Scene: Futuristic Fashion*. “Material Reality Play,” 2007. Courtesy Arario Gallery Beijing.

8. The Eighth Scene: Big Business

If you’re gonna do business do it big; first sell the few big things nearest to us.

- A. Sell the moon. (*A map of the moon, printed on canvas*)
- B. Sell Mars. (*A map of Mars, printed on canvas*)
- C. Sell the sun. (*A map of the sun, printed on canvas*)

During the opening Xiao Yu, an auctioneer, his assistant, and a group of “collectors” held a mock auction. As each piece was “sold” the assistant cut a large section of the canvas from its frame, leaving a gaping hole. In this sequence Xiao Yu indicted the state’s reliance on real estate development, and the art world for selling things that shouldn’t or couldn’t be sold.

The final scene, at the far end of the room, consisted of a stage with a podium and microphone, from which the auction was conducted. At the back of the stage was a red curtain; bent over between the curtains was a mannequin in the distinctive Chinese long green army surplus coat worn by migrant laborers, digging in a pile of red flowers spilling out from under the curtain, as if still preparing for the event. One label was affixed to the wall next to the stage, a set of instructions for a ceremony:

9. The Ninth Scene: The Award Ceremony

- A. Athletes' procession.
- B. Only pull out the microphone when the ceremony starts.
- C. Give red flowers to the heroes.

In the fall of 2007, when the Olympic stadium was still surrounded by steel construction gates, this room elicited nothing more than familiar chuckles.

This short history of the long twentieth century in a series of bullet points demonstrates Asif Agha's insight that irony can be an effect of "metrical text structure." The installation combines nostalgia and cynicism, while focusing attention on the role of the culture industries in producing that nostalgia, by indexing the industries that manufacture memory: film, television, museums, archaeology. If Chen Xi echoed official history in narrating development as progress, and Xiao Yu repudiated it as phantasmagoric decadence, the last exhibit discussed here, a group show, took a well-trodden middle path: ambivalent nostalgia. This show addressed the rise of the design industries by lovingly memorializing the lost material culture of the socialist "past."

Fu Xiaodong: "Homesickness: Memory and Virtual Reality"

Those cruel things from the past, when we look at them today all seem sweet.

—NEON SIGN, PART OF AN INSTALLATION ARTWORK BY
ZHUANG HUI IN THE EXHIBITION "HOMESICKNESS"

In summer 2008, the gallery T-Space in the 798 arts district of Beijing presented a group show curated by Fu Xiaodong (b. 1977). The exhibit included artists from all over China, ranging in age from their twenties to their fifties. Their works were diverse in media and style, with no linear chronological or narrative arrangement. Yet the exhibit shared with Xiao Yu's "Material Reality Play" a basic interest in the nostalgias precipitated by the transformation of visual and material culture in China over the past few decades. In Fu Xiaodong's curatorial essay and in the art pieces she selected, "home" was figured not as a place left behind but rather as a time past:

With the arrival of the new century, time has turned us into exiles in multiculturalism. We seem more melancholy and lost due to “homesickness” (*xiangchou*). . . . China has been involved in the process of great transition from a productive society into a consumer one and therefore the structure of all social strata has undergone a deep-going transformation. Precisely speaking, the inner disintegration has taken place among the original (classes of) workers, peasants and intellectuals; more and more independent intellectuals have composed a new large social class. In the process of development, we are experiencing the dislocation of values and the changes of lifestyle, and face an entirely capricious personalized choice. Shall we contribute to the international collective loss of memory or directly confront Chinese reality?³³

Many of the artworks in this exhibition used everyday objects—from pieces of furniture to gas tanks to old photographs—to describe “intimate experiences” of the transformation to a consumer society and the “dislocation of values.”

Liu Zhuoquan’s *Jiuwu*, which was translated in the catalogue as “Used Goods,” could be better translated as “Old Things.” In this piece, Liu (b. 1964) hired craftsmen of the traditional glass bottle “interior painting” (*neihua*) technique to paint haunting images of old things inside of old glass bottles. The bottles, which he had found in garbage heaps, were only twenty or thirty years old, but to American eyes many of them looked as if they might have been made in the early twentieth century. They were relics of a time before plastic, when all containers were made of tin and glass. The objects inside them looked like the daily stuff of life under socialism, the simple material culture that persisted well into the eighties in most parts of China: a wooden stool, a tin cup, a pedal-powered sewing machine, a woven grocery basket, a lock that Liu described as being “from the Cultural Revolution” (see figure 2.5).³⁴

In a similar vein, the artist Qiu Xiaofei (b. 1977) presented a seemingly real (but actually fiberglass) representation of a wooden desk from the late seventies or early eighties, with an old-style clock, lamp, small white television, and photographs stuck under the glass surface. Called “7:00,” the piece used objects that were rendered historical by their recognizable *oldness* (as much or more than by their fabrication) to depict a moment in the past. In the context of the exhibition, there was a connotation of childhood memory, a suggestion that these might be things that used to be “at home.”



FIGURE 2.5 Liu Zhouquan, *Old Things*. “Homesickness: Memory and Virtual Reality.” Source: T-Space Beijing (2008: 14).

“Old Things” and “7:00” get their meaning from the implication of a historical disjuncture. These pieces present objects that index not merely a different stage in the stylistic cycles of capitalism but a time “before” such cycles. These things are not merely dated or out of style. All these objects have a poignant aura of lost permanence to them, because they were not born into a world of planned obsolescence. They were built to last, and now they have been thrown away.

However, the chronotope of the “past” associated with these objects is subject to a disjuncture that can be understood only in terms of the reorganization of class and its distinctions in postsocialist China, which Fu Xiaodong pointed to in the exhibition essay. This disjuncture is most evident in another of Qiu Xiaofei’s pieces in this exhibition. These pieces consisted of dozens of (acrylic representations of seemingly genuine) cooking gas tanks: the type used in Chinese households of lower income, not poor enough



FIGURE 2.6 Qiu Xiaofei, *Cakravarta Mountain*. “Homesickness: Memory and Virtual Reality.” Source: T-Space Beijing (2008).

to cook with coal or cornstalks, but not wealthy enough to live in Western-style apartment buildings where gas is delivered through pipes. For upper-middle-class urbane visitors to this Beijing gallery, these gas tanks could provoke “memories” of past lives, the sorts of apartments they used to live in before they had made their money, or maybe their natal homes. And yet these endlessly recycled gas tanks, which are picked up, refilled, and redelivered by truck or bicycle cart, are by no means obsolete.³⁵ For many working people and migrant laborers in China in 2008, these gas tanks were a central part of daily domestic life, not emblems of distant memories. And in the exhibition, the tanks—painted in various shades of gray, standing clumped haphazardly, a few lying on their sides—indeed looked like a crowd of ordinary people (see figure 2.6).

These few examples show how this exhibit used the temporal signposts of material culture to call up a national narrative of transformation. In his

essay accompanying the exhibit, Qiu suggested that the piece “7:00” represents a collective memory, literally the “big family’s same memory” (*dajia xiangtong de jiyi*). As seven o’clock is the hour when the news begins and people eat dinner, in front of “the same TV, the same furniture,” Qiu described this piece as “a reflection of the group controlling the individual.”³⁶ The antique television here looks very much like the televisions in Chen Xi’s paintings. But where Chen Xi described the television as a wellspring of transformational aesthetic spectacle, Qiu Xiaofei (who is almost the same age as Chen Xi) described the television in “7:00” as an instrument of social control and regulation.

On the other hand, these objects also articulate the unequal access to commodities that opened a historical gap between classes in the years after reform. The years to which viewers would date that kind of desk, that kind of clock, that kind of TV might depend on their socioeconomic position. *Gaige kaifang* led to dramatic class mobility. Many spectacularly wealthy people in their forties and fifties grew up in poverty, while many of those who grew up in families that were relatively comfortable prior to the reforms have fallen into a fixed-income subsistence, never managing to integrate themselves into the consumer economy. In this period of class “disintegration,” the “independent intellectuals” and culture workers such as artists and designers, who have not fared as well as businesspeople, frequently accuse *shangren* of what Fu Xiaodong calls “the refusal of refined culture, the negation of elegance,” trying to leverage culture as an alternative to wealth.³⁷ On the other hand, class distinction undercuts the commensurating narratives about the unity of national experience promoted by *xuanchuan*.

Several pieces in the exhibit collapsed temporal narratives and spatial constructions of the distance between poverty and wealth. Xu Shun presented a series of soft-focus, faintly colored paintings of a simple room, possibly a farmer or worker’s home, based on a photograph found on the Internet. Xu wrote that these places “are dark, shabby and far away from consumer culture’s psychological standards, also lack any kind of stylish decoration.”³⁸ As an artist, he claimed, “using cheap and ordinary materials allows me to tell stories of other places. When a momentary image becomes a painting, it becomes a point in relation to time and history.” He explicitly positioned himself as conducting history by depicting “other places,” places untouched by “stylish decoration” or “consumer culture.”

Similarly, the quote about how “cruel (*canren*) things from the past . . . now look sweet” with which this section began, an installation piece by the artist Zhuang Hui (b. 1968), was written in pink neon, in an installation replicating a dirty lean-to against a brick wall, titled “Bamboo Structure.” It is

an environment of uncertain date. What marks this building as the “past” is what Xu Shun identified in his pictures of spartan rooms as a distance from the “psychological standards of consumer culture”: a lack of style, a bare functionality. In the interview printed in the exhibit catalogue, Zhuang Hui says, “We think what happened during the Cultural Revolution was very cruel. Think about it, in a few years how will we regard what is happening today in this so-called era of reform and opening up?” The interviewer (Liu Zhuoquan, the artist who made the painted bottle series) replies, “Our behavior today is really a continuation of the Cultural Revolution.” Zhuang responds, “Exactly. Really, it’s our inheritance from thousands of years of authoritarianism in China. Common people have never had the respect they deserve. It reminds me of the time from 1979 when I entered the factory to 1996 when I left, the ‘worker’s class’ which had been the ‘master class’ suddenly became ‘the laid-off workers.’ A human being in this society is like a beast of burden.” Zhuang Hui equates workers’ decline in status after the end of the Cultural Revolution, and his own experience entering the industrial workforce in the period of this decline, with the political repressions of the Cultural Revolution: all “cruelties.”

All of the pieces discussed above—Liu Zhuoquan’s paintings of old things in bottles, Qiu Xiaofei’s fiberglass models of an old desk and a pile of gas tanks, Xu Shun’s paintings of sparse rooms, and Zhuang Hui’s installation depictions of decrepit environments—seek to build on the aura of things that lie outside the aesthetic world of Chinese contemporaneity. These artists employed an archaeology of reform to create a postsocialist pastoral, memorializing and romanticizing a lost world of workers and peasants. By moving unstyled objects into this highly stylized exhibition space—a sleek gallery with white walls, exposed pipes, and buffed concrete floors—these artists sought to recapture a kind of authenticity belonging to things whose aesthetic qualities are not reflections of their performances as commodities in markets.

The idea that such unaesthetic things belong to the past is implicit in all these works, and in the exhibition themes of “homesickness” and transformation. In the catalogue, Zhuang Hui talks about buying a digital video camera in order to “record the places where I lived during my childhood” to “preserve some memories for my late years. You know this society is changing too fast, and nothing can last very long.” He talks about watching the horizon as a child, and Liu Zhuoquan agrees that “this can only be a memory; in our present life, to see a horizon is nothing but a dream” (because of the sprawl of high-rise construction).

The aura of the undesigned became most evident by its contrast with the pieces in the exhibition that dealt with contemporary material culture. Liu

Chuang (b. 1978) presented one piece from a series called “Buying Everything on You,” displaying the entire personal effects of an ordinary woman: a ruffled summer dress, a pair of high-heeled shoes, bra and underwear, purse and wallet and all their contents, including money, identity cards, photographs, and makeup, arranged in neat rows on a flat white platform. This piece, far from attempting to give any aura to contemporary material life, made it seem pathetic, meaningless, and far too alienable. Likewise, He An’s text piece, a sentence that began “Brother do you think you can you help her . . .” spelled out in bits of discarded neon signs, played on the alienating effect of the overwhelming addressivity of consumer culture. He An (b. 1971) took fragments of the giant red, yellow, and blue neon characters that are attached to every building in the city—always calling for attention, addressing people as consumers—and stitched these fragments together into an ambiguous plea, a fragment of a communication overheard or intercepted, which seem nonetheless to directly address the viewer.

From Liu Chuang and He An’s dark cynicism to Liu Zhuoquan and Qiu Xiaofei’s postsocialist pastoral, each of these artists illustrated Fu Xiaodong’s theme of homesickness and dislocation. From relatively elite visual artists enjoying the fruits of marketization, nostalgia for a pre-reform material culture might seem disingenuous.³⁹

There was only one piece in the exhibition that pushed back against this assessment of *gaigekaifang*: a photo-biography by Liang Yuanwei, one of the younger artists in the exhibition (b. 1977) and the only woman other than the curator (also b. 1977). Liang Yuanwei presented a series of photographs of herself from early childhood to the present, a banal response to the “retrospection” projects of 2008, taking the problem of history literally in terms of biography.

Liang Yuanwei’s family album consisted of a few dozen photographs. The series traced the history of the development of photography over the course of reform. The earliest photographs were black-and-white and printed by hand, later ones in color on stiff paper with white edges; they formed a long sequence of ordinary family photographs of a sullen, plain, ordinary girl, laid out on a shelf. But at the end of a shelf sat a ThinkPad laptop, playing a seemingly endless slideshow of party pictures: Liang Yuanwei and friends, wearing stylish clothes and unusual haircuts, posing, smoking, perhaps drunk, definitely happy (see figures 2.7, 2.8).

In her interview in the catalogue, Liang described this piece as a narrative of self-realization, a story of escape from the pressures and expectations of family and fulfillment through individualization. In this piece, *gaigekai-fang* and what Fu Xiaodong called its “changes of lifestyle . . . capricious personalized choice” took on a straightforwardly positive valiance. There was



FIGURE 2.7 Liang Yuanwei, 1978–2008. “Homesickness: Memory and Virtual Reality.” Source: T-Space Beijing (2008: 87).



FIGURE 2.8 Liang Yuanwei, 1978–2008. “Homesickness: Memory and Virtual Reality.” Source: T-Space Beijing (2008: 91).

no interest in the material culture of the past, no disaffection for the materialism of the present. Liang Yuanwei here inverted the image of the dissolute party girl that, in the years running up the commemoration, had so often been used by male painters as a shorthand for the disorder of *kaifang*. The annual Art Beijing exhibition was always full of paintings of leering *meinu* ("pretty girls") with cigarettes, liquor bottles, and exposed flesh. Instead, Liang showed self-possessed women playing with their own cameras, seemingly uninterested in the male gaze. The photographic eye informing her party pictures was much more interested in clothes, hats, haircuts, and sunglasses than in bodies, cigarettes, or liquor. It was a celebration of self-styling.

Like Chen Xi's paintings and Xiao Yu's installation, Liang Yuanwei's biopic describes the role of technologies of visual representation and visual culture industries in the production of memory. Instead of memorializing material culture, Liang Yuanwei showed how the visual is implicated in commodity culture as a *medium*: a mode of enregistering style by picturing it. The slow progression of a handful of precious family photos giving way to the rapid, dramatic shifts of style of her party pictures demonstrated the relationship between the chronotope of the fashionable and technologies of visual reproduction. New photographic technology increases the pace of self-representation and demands an increasing variety of self-presentation. Much as Xiao Yu's treatment of history kept pointing to the role of the visual culture industries in producing memory, this piece pointed to the crucial role of photography in the practice of style, and thus to the fundamental reflexivity of self-styling.

CONCLUSION

Each of these retrospective exhibits used national narratives as frameworks for individual experience, and individual lives as allegories of national history. In these narratives the state appears only in its "biggest" forms: references to the "movement" (*yundong*) politics of the Cultural Revolution, to political repression ("thought problems"), and to spectacular projects such as the CCTV New Year's broadcast and the space program.

In many Chinese accounts of *gaigekaiifang*, as in many of the artworks discussed in this chapter, the proliferation of visual culture industries in the 1990s is depicted as a natural efflorescence. Chen Xi naturalized consumer capitalism and its "reckless self-expression" by likening it to physical forces and climatological phenomena: momentum, gravity, wildfire, a wave, a wind. Other, more critical artists framed *kaifang* in terms of unbound greed

and desire: as Xiao Yu says, “you gotta have baubles, the bigger the better.” But as Zhang Xudong has pointed out, the explanation of capitalism by self-interest has problems as a mode of critique: “Whereas critical humanist intellectuals view the advertising and television industry as creating a culture of consumer hedonism and materialist corruption, thus representing the evil of the market, the political dissent communities inside and outside China see a sinister maneuver by the political state to cling to power and detract challenge to its legitimacy.” By contrast, Ai Weiwei—who in 2008 began to criticize the Olympics as propaganda and was targeted by security forces for his efforts to record the names of Sichuan earthquake victims—engaged in straightforward dissent.⁴⁰ Xiao Yu’s 2007 “Material Reality Play” offered a particularly nuanced version of the “critical humanist intellectual” position. Like the authoritative discourse of momentum (wave, wind, wildfire), the critical discourse of hedonism (greed, yearning, lust) downplays the role that state institutions play in cultural industries, the manifold interconnections of state and nonstate. It also naturalizes the desiring consumer self. The next chapter, which examines the art test prep system in which the post-1980 generation of art students was formed, describes the obstacles those students face as they seek to become self-styling individuals like Liang Yuanwei, the bored child turned wild party girl.



University of Illinois Press

Urbana and Chicago

Why
ART
Cannot
Be
Taught



JAMES ELKINS

The Fleet Library at RISD

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Is there anything worth knowing about art schools in past centuries?¹ It is worth knowing that **art schools did not always exist**, and that they were entirely different from what we call art schools today. This chapter is an informal survey of the changes that have taken place in art instruction during the last thousand years. I have stressed curricula—that is, the experiences a student might have had from year to year in various academies, workshops, and art schools. It's interesting to think what a typical art student of the seventeenth or nineteenth century might have experienced. **It shows how different art and teaching once were**, and how we've invented much of what we take for granted.

The main development is from medieval workshops into Renaissance art academies, and then into modern art schools. Art departments, which are in the majority today, are less important from this point of view since they take their methods and ideas from art schools. Throughout this book, I refer to “art schools,” but what I say is generally applicable to any art department in a college or university.

Histories



ANCIENT ART SCHOOLS

Though **we know there were art schools (or workshops) in Greece and Rome, we no longer know what was taught**. By the fifth century B.C. in Greece, art had become a complicated subject, and there were technical books on painting,² sculpture,³ and music. According to Aristotle, painting was sometimes added to the traditional study of grammar, music, and gymnastics.⁴ But almost all of that is lost.

In general, the Romans seem to have demoted painting within the scheme of “higher education,” although it appears to have been something done by educated gentlemen. One text suggests a nobleman's child should be provided with several kinds of teachers, including “sculptors, painters, horse and dog masters and teachers of the hunt.”⁵ Thus the history of the devaluation of painting, which we will follow up to the Renaissance, may have begun with the late Romans, especially the Stoics.⁶

MEDIEVAL UNIVERSITIES

The idea of a “university” in our sense of the word—“faculties and colleges and courses of study, examinations and commencements and aca-

demic degrees”—did not get underway until the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.⁷ **There was much less bureaucracy in the early universities than we're used to: there were no catalogs, no student groups, and no athletics.** The curriculum was limited to the “seven liberal arts”: the *trivium*, comprised of grammar, rhetoric, and logic, and the *quadrivium*, which was arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music.⁸ There were no courses in social studies, history, or science. Mostly students learned logic and dialectic. Logic is seldom taught now, except as an unusual elective in college mathematics or philosophy departments; and dialectic, the study of rational argument, has virtually disappeared from contemporary course lists.⁹ Medieval students did not take courses in literature or poetry the way we do in high school and college. Some professors admitted—even boasted—that they had not read the books we consider to be the Greek and Roman classics.¹⁰

Before students went to a university, they attended grammar schools, something like our elementary schools, where they learned to read and write. When they arrived at the university, sometimes they were allowed to speak only Latin, a fact that panicked freshmen and prompted the sale of pamphlets describing how to get along in Latin.¹¹ As in modern universities, the master's degree took six years or so (students did not stop for the “college degree,” the B.A. or B.S.). Those who studied at medieval universities meant to become lawyers, clergymen, doctors, and officials of various sorts, and when they went on to professional study (the equivalent of our medical and law schools), they faced more of the same kind of curriculum.

A typical course used a single book in a year. In some universities, teachers drilled the students by going around the class, and the students were expected to have memorized portions of the book as well as the professor's discussions of it. It is not easy to imagine what this regimen must have been like, especially since it involved “dry” texts on logic and little original thought—which is precisely what is required in modern colleges from the very beginning.¹² Today the medieval kind of rote learning occurs in Orthodox Jewish classes on the Talmud, in Muslim schools that memorize the Koran, and to some degree in law and medical schools—but not in colleges, and certainly not in art classes.

It is interesting to speculate about the differences between such an education and our own: certainly the medieval students were better equipped to read carefully and to frame cogent arguments than we are. From the medieval point of view, being able to memorize and to think logically are prerequisites to studying any subject: a student has to learn

to argue about any number of things before going on to study any one thing. That's very different from what happens in art instruction. The closest analogy, which I will consider a little later, is the strict copying of artworks, a practice adopted during the seventeenth century, essentially during the Baroque period. But in general, modern college curricula do not require memory training, rhetorical (speaking) skills, or dialectic (logical argument), and those omissions are not made up for in graduate schools. You don't have to be a conservative defender of "cultural literacy" or a Eurocentrist to wonder just how different education could be with the kind of rhetorical and dialectical training that was the norm in parts of the classical world and during the six or so centuries following the institution of medieval universities.

Artists were not trained within the medieval university system at all.¹³

They went directly from grammar school into workshops, or from their parents' homes straight into the workshops. Students spent two or three years as apprentices, often "graduating" from one master to another, and then joined the local painter's guild and began to work for a master as a "journeyman-apprentice." That kind of work must not have been easy, since there is evidence that the young artists sometimes helped their masters in the day and spent their evenings making copies. Many of their tasks would have amounted to low-grade labor, such as grinding pigments, preparing panels, and painting in backgrounds and drapery. Eventually the journeyman-apprentice made a work of his own, in order to be accepted as a master.¹⁴

Though painting remained outside the university system, beginning in the twelfth century there were various revisions aimed at modifying or augmenting the *trivium* and *quadrivium*. Hugo of Saint-Victor proposed seven "mechanical arts" to go along with the seven liberal arts:

Woolworking

Armor

Navigation

Agriculture

Hunting

Medicine

Theater.

Strangely, he put architecture, sculpture, and painting under "Armor," making painting an unimportant subdivision of the "mechanical arts."¹⁵

It is often said that Renaissance artists rebelled against the medieval system and attempted to have their craft (which did not require a university degree) raised to the level of a profession (which would require a university degree), a status they eventually achieved by instituting art

academies. But it is also important to realize how much medieval artists missed out on by not going to universities. They were not in a position to formally learn about theology, music, law, medicine, astronomy, grammar, rhetoric, dialectic, logic, philosophy, physics, arithmetic, or geometry—in other words, they were cut off from the intellectual life of their time. Though it sounds rather pessimistic to say so, much the same is true again today, since our four-year and six-year art schools are alternates to liberal arts colleges or universities just as the Renaissance art academies were alternates to Renaissance universities. The situation is somewhat better in the case of art departments, because students in liberal arts colleges have more classes outside their art major than art students in four-year art colleges; and at any rate modern art students aren't as isolated as medieval students were. But there is a gap—and sometimes a gulf—between art students' educations and typical undergraduates' educations, and it often delimits what art is about. (Conversely, it marginalizes art that is about college-level scientific or non-art subjects.) Much can be said about this, and I will return to it in the next chapter.

RENAISSANCE ACADEMIES

The first Renaissance academies did not teach art.¹⁶ Instead they were mostly concerned with language, though there were also academies devoted to philosophy and astrology.¹⁷ A few were secret societies, and at least one met underground in catacombs.¹⁸ In general the early academies sprang up in opposition to the universities, in order to discuss excluded subjects such as the revision of grammar and spelling, or the teachings of occult philosophers.

The word "academy" comes from the district of Athens where Plato taught.¹⁹ The Renaissance academies were modeled on Plato's Academy, both because they were informal (like Plato's lectures in the park outside Athens) and because they revived Platonic philosophy.²⁰ Many academies were more like groups of friends, with the emphasis on discussion among equals rather than teaching. Giovanni Giorgio Trissino, a poet and amateur architect who tried to reform Italian spelling, had an academy,²¹ and so did King Alfonso of Naples, the philosopher Marsilio Ficino, and the aristocrat and art patron Isabella d'Este. After the Renaissance, Queen Christiana of Sweden described her academy in Rome as a place for learning to speak, write, and act in a proper and noble manner.²² Poems were read, plays were put on, music was performed, and what we now call "study groups" got together to discuss them.

THE FIRST ART ACADEMIES

Leonardo da Vinci's name is associated with an early academy, probably a group of like-minded humanists. Academies became more popular and more diverse after the High Renaissance.²³ (By 1729 there were over five hundred in Italy alone.)²⁴ After the turn of the sixteenth century, mannerist taste tended to make the academies more rigid, less "informal and loose," and the idea of the academy began to merge with that of the late medieval university. Academies specifically for art instruction began in this more serious atmosphere, which lacked a little of the enthusiasm and experimentalism of the earlier academies.²⁵ "Renaissance academies were entirely unorganized," according to Nikolaus Pevsner, but "the academies of Mannerism were provided with elaborate and mostly very schematic rules." Not only were there rules, there were odd names: the Academy of the Enlightened, of the Brave, of the Passionate, of the Desirous, of the Inflamed, the Dark, the Drowsy.²⁶

The Florentine Academy of Design (*Accademia del Disegno*) was the first public art academy.²⁷ Its original purpose was rather morbid: to produce a sepulcher for artists who might die penniless.²⁸ In 1563, three years after it was founded, Michelangelo was elected an officer (one year before he died). The setting was still informal—lectures and debates were held in a Florentine orphanage, and anatomy lessons at a local hospital (the Ospedale degli Innocenti and the Ospedale of S. Maria Nuova, respectively; they can both still be visited). The Florentine Academy was an early "urban campus," spread out among existing buildings rather than cloistered in its own campus or religious compound.

(Incidentally, the distribution of buildings in an art school or university inevitably affects the kind of instruction carried out there. I teach at an urban campus, in a half-dozen buildings scattered around the Art Institute in Chicago, and our instruction is decidedly more involved with the art market and urban issues than the art instruction at the cloistered University of Chicago—the site of the story I told in the Introduction. The University of Chicago's studio art department is on the far southwest corner of its campus, as if someone had tried to push it off into the surrounding neighborhood. Cornell University used to teach drawing in the Fine Arts Building and also in a building that was part of the agriculture quad, and the instruction in those two places was quite different. Berkeley's studio art department shares a building with anthropology—an interesting affinity for art students. Duke University's studio art department is a small house set apart from other buildings, in a field behind one of

the campuses. If you're studying in a building remote from the rest of your campus, or remote from a big city, you might consider the strengths and limitations of your location.)

The teaching in the Florentine Academy was mannerist in inclination,²⁹ meaning students looked at statues (later called simply "the antique"), studied complexities of geometry and anatomy, and learned to make intricate, "learned" compositions. This was the opposite of earlier Renaissance taste; as we know from drawings, students in the fifteenth-century workshops drew each other, and it seems there was significantly less interest in drawing from "the antique" or in bookish learning.³⁰

When they first entered the Florentine Academy, students learned mathematics, including perspective, proportion, harmony, and plane and solid Euclidean geometry. The idea was to get away from the empirical, haphazard kind of learning that artists had faced in workshops, and to substitute theories. Artists, it was thought, need a good eye and a good hand, but even before they develop those they need mental principles to guide them: so "measured judgment" and a "conceptual foundation" must come before manual dexterity.³¹ This is our first encounter with an idea that was absolutely fundamental in art academies before the twentieth century: the notion that looking and working are not enough, that art requires a balance between theory and practice.³² It is an idea worth pausing over. Often, I think, ideas in history are easy to understand—easy to write down or to explain—but difficult to "take to heart," as if they were your own. There are two aspects of this idea of theory and practice that I think are particularly alien to current ways of thinking:

1. The Renaissance educators had in mind a balance. Today we rarely conceive art as a matter of balance. Instead we look for extreme effects: the phrase "middle of the road" shows how little we care for works that try to blend properties we've seen before. Renaissance and Baroque academicians conceived art as a subject that inhabits the middle shades of gray rather than the black or white extremes. The operative word here is *decorum*, indicating a kind of art that does not stray too far from the middle for the sake of effect. It seems to me that modernism and post-modernism are so bound up with dramatic effects and innovations that the Renaissance way of thinking is nearly inaccessible. Imagine trying to make art that has no special effects and that achieves a measured calm and fluency by considering and balancing the moderate and compatible aspects of previous artworks. Harshness, stridency, excess, shock value, crudity, monotony, enigma, radical ambiguity, hermeticism, fragmentation,

Wer recht bescheyden wol werden
Der pit got trum hye auff erden



Albrecht Dürer, The Schoolmaster.
1510. Chicago, Art Institute,
Department of Prints and Draw-
ings. © 2000 The Art Institute of
Chicago.

Dürer's woodcut doesn't show art students, but the scene wouldn't be too dissimilar from the setting of art instruction of the day. Dürer wrote several books that could have been used to teach the technical side of art—one on perspective, another on figure drawing. He compared the poor German students of his

day to saplings growing up crooked. They need Italian art theory, he said, in order to grow straight. Here the instructor wields a sharp, straight pointer. Outside the wall (a very perspectival wall) are the asymmetric forms of nature, growing rulelessly, beyond the reach of systematic art instruction.

impatience: all the things we love were once excluded in the name of decorum. How could a well-balanced, moderate work of art possibly be more expressive than a weird, ambiguous, bizarre one? In today's art world, old-fashioned decorum would be essentially a waste of time.

2. Academicians balanced the real and the ideal. The two extremes that the Renaissance and Baroque academies sought to balance are alien to our thinking: they advocated that each painted or sculpted figure should display a knowledge of ideal forms, along with selected peculiarities of the live model. This concept of "ideal forms," derived from the Platonic Ideal, is not a concept that seems real today. When a contemporary artist looks at a model, she does not compare the model's body to a perfect form, seen only in her mind, and she does not contrast that imagined perfection against the imperfect, mundane form that the model actually has. In other words, we no longer conceive drawing as a mediation between the Ideal and the Real. The Platonic approach seems especially strange when we consider that the Ideal was colored with ethics and theology. The Renaissance Neoplatonists sometimes equated the Ideal with the highest ethical good, and called it "Venus," "love," or Christian love, *agape*. These ideas are easy to teach in a classroom—there are books on Neoplatonism, and translations of Renaissance Neoplatonic texts—but they are dead as ideas, because it is impossible to translate them into art practice. (It's always possible to invent classroom exercises that employ historical concepts. I can picture an assignment in which students drew Ideal and Real forms of objects and read texts on the Neoplatonic Ideal—but that would be artificial. Contemporary drawing practice no longer requires that kind of philosophy.)

After mathematics, the next subjects for the Florentine Academy students were anatomy and life drawing. Dissections were held once a year in the hospital, often in the winter so that the corpses could be kept around a little longer. Today teachers don't usually bring art students to see actual dissections (courses for that are available at some universities), and anatomy itself has become an elective. Typically, an art school has an art anatomy instructor or a doctor who teaches anatomy, though it is not always claimed that anatomy is indispensable for life drawing. Again the ideas behind the Florentine practice are unfamiliar ones. A primary goal of painting and sculpture was to express states of mind, and it was thought that artists such as Michelangelo had managed to do that by their knowledge of the hidden structure of the body. A person's nobility of the mind was thought to be mirrored and expressed by the nobility of his or her

body. Movements of the body were movements of the soul. In addition, Renaissance artists thought that the body's proportion and its "architecture" had something divine about them. The body had been made by the Divine Architect, and it repeated some of the harmonies that governed the universe. Hence proportions, articulation, and bodily movement were thought to be both expressive and divine.³³ Do we believe anything of the kind these days? I don't think so, and it seems to me that the loss of such ideas account for the marginal importance of anatomy in our art schools. For today's instructors, art anatomy is a dusty relic of old-fashioned teaching practices. Life drawing, as it is practiced today, has been emptied of much of its original meaning.

A third topic of study at the Florentine Academy was natural philosophy. The idea was that if an artist studied the body in order to express the "motions of the mind" or—to use the Renaissance phrase—"affects of the soul," then it made sense to have a theory about the soul, to explain how the soul works and what forms it can take. Until the late nineteenth century, "natural philosophy" meant physics, and the academy students learned whatever natural laws were relevant to artmaking. They studied "physiognomy," the science of facial expressions as signs of particular mental states; and they studied the "doctrine of the humors," which held that mental and physical well-being depends on a balance of four bodily "fluids." Too much blood, and a person becomes sanguine and jolly; too much "black bile," and a person becomes melancholic and depressed.³⁴ The doctrine of the humors sounds like medicine, but it was also physics since the humors were thought to be influenced by the planets. All the mistaken medicine and physiognomy was put to the purpose of understanding how the soul expresses itself in flesh. Since contemporary art instructors don't have doctrines like humoralism or physiognomy, art students are on their own if they want to communicate the idea that their model is in a certain mood. The result is that students don't often try to depict specific moods, or when they do, the moods are expressed by obvious symbolic gestures—an arm over the eyes for sleep, a hand over the eyes for grief. It no longer seems interesting to try to express specific mental states—anger, torpor, humiliation, humility—by studying the typical poses or expressions that accompany each state.³⁵

Two further topics completed the academy curriculum. One was the study of inanimate objects such as drapery.³⁶ Students were required to draw drapery twice a week, and the seriousness with which they took those classes is attested to by beautiful drapery studies done by Leonardo and others. To some people, drapery is the most typical academic

subject, since it is reminiscent of the yards of drapery in Renaissance and Baroque painting and sculpture. But it is important not to forget that drapery study came *after* the more essential classes in theory (mathematics) and in the human soul (dissection, life drawing, natural philosophy). Drapery was an “inanimate form,” quite different from the body and face. Today it is the other way around: students draw live models as if they were “inanimate forms,” and they talk about drapery, fiber arts, and fashion in terms of deeper significance.³⁷

The other advanced subject was architecture, and the reason it was placed last may have to do with a famous demand made by the Roman architect Vitruvius, who said that architects should know drawing, geometry, optics, arithmetic, history, philosophy, physics, astronomy, law, music, ballistics, pipe organs, medicine, and philology.³⁸ Buildings were thought of as analogies to the proportions of the human body, so it was reasonable that an architect should master everything a painter knew and more. In terms of education, architects were to painters as psychiatrists are to doctors: they knew the rudiments of their art, and also a number of more specialized fields, especially anatomy, geometry, and musical harmony (to help them construct harmonious proportions). From a twenty-first-century perspective it's odd to think of architecture as a required “advanced” course in an art school curriculum. Architectural theory has expanded tremendously since the Renaissance, but in this sense we think less of architecture than we once did.

THE CARRACCI'S ACADEMY

The late Renaissance painters Agostino, Ludovico, and Annibale Carracci began the best-known Renaissance art academy at the end of the sixteenth century.³⁹ They were reacting against the decades of mannerism and attempting a return to the standards of the High Renaissance. Specifically, they wanted to synthesize three High Renaissance styles: the drawing of Rome (meaning Michelangelo's and Raphael's), the color of Venice (principally Titian's), and the aristocratic style of Lombardy (meaning Correggio's). They did not admire naked realism, such as Caravaggio was then painting, and they did not want to continue the Mannerists' habit of neglecting drawing from nature. As in the Florentine Academy, they valued work that mediated the Ideal and the Real: work that was neither a fantastical invention nor a slavish imitation of natural forms.

There have been debates about the value of the Carracci's program. Art historians have come to appreciate what the Carracci did,⁴⁰ but it seems to me that Carracci-style painting is entirely off the radar screen

of contemporary painting. If it appears at all, it appears as a dead end—a long-past, wrongheaded experiment in academic thinking.⁴¹ One of the differences between art students and art history students is that the former always care about whether they like what they see, and as a result styles like the Carracci's get taught a little less in art schools than those of other periods. The time of the Carracci is one of the dead zones in art instruction, along with the line of styles and artists the Carracci admired, including Hellenistic sculpture and Raphael, and along with the Baroque art the Carracci academy inspired. This kind of prejudice, which seems so alien to art historians, needs to be carefully weighed when it comes to studio artists.

Nevertheless the Carracci did something unusual with history: they looked beyond their recent past, back to a period that had already ended, where they found models for their own work. They *used* history as a kind of buffet table, picking and choosing the best work. That quintessentially *academic* frame of mind is what makes their academy, if not their art, important for anyone interested in how art is taught. Many of the Carracci's choices echo in the later activities of European and American academies. In a short list, the Carracci's choices include the following:

- rejecting contemporary art
- looking to a certain "golden age" when art was better
- taking only certain elements from artists
- putting those elements together into a new art.

These are simple ideas, and they might seem unproblematic. But each entails a certain way of imagining the past, a way that can be called "academic," and they often occur together as symptoms of academia. I will return to them when I examine the concept of academic art in chapter 2.

BAROQUE ACADEMIES

Even in the Baroque period, there were still many "academies," "schools," "societies," and informal "studio-academies" in which instruction essentially followed the medieval guild system.⁴² Yet for the most part, the Baroque is the period in which the large, well-organized academies began.⁴³ The most important were the French Academy, founded in 1655, and the Royal Academy of Arts in London, founded in 1768,⁴⁴ and there were dozens of others throughout the eighteenth century—though America did not have an academy before the nineteenth century.⁴⁵ (The Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, in Philadelphia, was the first in

America. It opened in 1805, though it had been preceded by an art school.) In non-Western countries, art academies were still being set up early in the twentieth century. The first Chinese academy opened in Nanjing in 1906, following the Tokyo Art School by seventeen years.⁴⁶

Some of the Baroque academies had aristocratic antecedents. As early as the sixteenth century, drawing was one of the things that polite gentlemen or ladies might do in their spare time. Once painting had gained its new status as a liberal art, it became a suitable aristocratic pursuit. The odd result, however, is that in a way it was demoted again, this time into an “amateur” activity: one text lists painting along with other pastimes appropriate to a gentleman, including fencing, riding, classical learning, and coin collecting.⁴⁷ Other sources suggest that gentlemen should learn to draw in order to know about maps, or in order to acquire a good calligraphic handwriting, or to be better able to appreciate art.⁴⁸ Various sixteenth- and seventeenth-century authors also mix art and aristocratic education.⁴⁹ It is necessary to recall this aristocratic, amateur tradition when considering academies in general. Though we’ve lost most of it, some lingers. Anyone who travels to London should see the cast sculpture gallery in the Royal Academy, which still breathes the dark, serious air of the Baroque.

In many respects the Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture in Paris is exemplary. It was the largest, most influential, and best-organized of the seventeenth-century academies. From 1656 onward, classes were held in the Louvre.⁵⁰ Like most other academies, **the French Academy taught only drawing.** The purpose was again to provide theoretical instruction to go along with the practical knowledge that could be gotten in studios. Students were expected to learn painting, carving, and modeling in workshops, where they were apprenticed to masters, somewhat in the medieval fashion. As time went on, the workshops became less important, and by the later seventeenth century, the academies had broken the monopolies that the guilds once had on commissions and teaching.

The curriculum at the French Academy was divided into lower and higher classes, but it supported essentially a three-step process: first, students were allowed only to draw from other drawings; then they drew from plaster casts and antique sculptures; and finally from live models (from six to eight in the morning in the summer, according to one schedule).⁵¹ In the eighteenth century, beginning students did not even draw from *original* drawings, but from lithographs of drawings. Often enough the originals were done by teachers at the academy rather than Renaissance masters, and the “Raphael” and “Michelangelos” the students



Pierfrancesco Alberti, **Painters' Academy**. Early seventeenth century. Bartsch XVII.313.1. Photo: author.

Here is an eighteenth-century European academy where the teaching methods are systematic. In the middle ground on the left, a student draws an *écorché* leg (a plaster cast of a flayed limb, used to study muscles). In the center, a group discusses geometry, one of the rudiments of all art. They haven't progressed to perspective yet, because they're still using calipers

and drawing basic geometric shapes. In the right background, a group dissects a cadaver. (It could be fresh, or perhaps it's been preserved by being soaked in honey and spices.) The genres of painting are represented on the wall: landscape, portraiture, religious painting, in order from least to greatest. This kind of instruction must have been very reassuring: you knew where you were at every step.

copied were contemporary lithographed versions of originals. And the first-year course was even more dismal than that, since in the first stages students didn't even copy lithographs of *entire* drawings, but lithographs of drawings of parts of bodies: ears, noses, lips, eyes, feet, and so forth. The idea of disassembling the body in this way appears to have begun with Leonardo, and it was practiced at the Florentine Academy.⁵² Broadly speaking there were two kinds of body-part illustrations: proportional studies, meant to show what ideal noses looked like, and physiognomic studies, intended to teach how noses reflect a person's soul—how, for example, the nose of a virtuous man might differ from the nose of a sinner. In the Berlin Academy, these “first rudiments” included lithographs of flowers, ornaments, and “ideal foliage.”⁵³ Students worked their way from plants to small body parts, and from there to larger parts of bodies, whole figures, and then compositions of more than one figure.

The academies maintained collections of life-size plaster casts of famous sculptures and also casts of body parts. Many drawings of ideal Greek sandaled feet survive. The results of studying them can be seen in paintings such as David's *Death of Socrates* in the Metropolitan Museum, where the foot of Socrates displays the anatomy of the classical, Roman-style sculpted marble foot. Even Picasso drew from such casts, and several of his drawings survive. Students from all over Europe learned from the same array of plaster figures: the Belvedere Torso (called simply “The Torso”), the Farnese Hercules, the Spinario (a boy pulling a thorn from his foot, from a Roman bronze statue), the Apollo Sauronctonus (Apollo with a lizard), the Discobolus (discus thrower), the Apollo Belvedere, and the Laocoön. Most of these are unfamiliar today, but they were deeply ingrained in the imaginations of students who drew them and lived with them every day. (A life-size plaster cast can be an intimidating presence, well worth a visit. In America, these casts can be seen at Cornell University and at the Carnegie Museum of Art in Pittsburgh. The latter museum as well as museums in London and Paris also have full-size plaster casts of architecture.) In addition the French Academy had *écorchés*, plaster casts of flayed figures, used to study anatomy. Some of them were casts of flayed versions of famous sculptures, and others were designed by academy members and modeled on actual dissected bodies.

This silent population has almost vanished from schools.⁵⁴ A typical art school or large art department may have one or two battered *écorchés*, where once it may have had dozens. The Art Institute of Chicago threw away its collection in the 1950s, and by the early 1990s, the School of the Art Institute had only a single remaining *écorché*, a famous one designed

by an artist at the French Academy.⁵⁵ An upper floor at Harvard's Fogg Art Museum has a cast of Michelangelo's *Giorno*. Cornell University has a large collection of casts, scattered in various places: a small library room houses a copy of the Discobolus, a coffee shop has an entire pediment from Olympia, and a small art gallery has the Laocoön and the Pergamon Altar. Plaster casts of antique sculptures have only limited importance in contemporary schools, and their ghostly presence—added to the fact that no one knows their names—is strange and a little sad.

It's hard, these days, to recapture the effect that the casts (and, in some cases, the originals) had on artists' imaginations. The closest influence on the public consciousness that we have is in sculptures like Rodin's *Thinker*, because everyone knows it; anytime you draw or photograph someone in a pose remotely like that of the *Thinker*, you're reminded of it. Still, it's not a close parallel, because artists seldom use the *Thinker* in their work, and students are not required to draw it. I doubt many people are even sure of details of the pose. (Is the thumb out or in? Which knee does the elbow rest on?) By contrast the painting and sculpture of the sixteenth through nineteenth centuries would be unthinkable without references to famous Greco-Roman sculptures.

One of the principal aims of this sequence of academic instruction, and one that is virtually forgotten today, was to enable students to draw from memory. It is seldom appreciated that Michelangelo, Titian, and other Renaissance artists could invent poses and arrange entire compositions in their heads, with relatively little reliance on models. (One of the reasons we do not pay much attention to this is that it is not easy to say which figures and compositions were imagined and which real.)⁵⁶ Invention (*invenzione*) was a Renaissance goal that included this ability, and academies through the nineteenth century included classes in invention. Vasari, Leonardo, and Cellini all advocated drawing from memory,⁵⁷ and remnants of the doctrine still persist.⁵⁸ There's a simple exercise that can be done in life-drawing classes to give some feeling for what Renaissance and Baroque artists could do: draw the model, omitting one arm. Then invent a position for that arm, add it to the drawing, and re-pose the model so his or her arm corresponds with what has been drawn. That way you can compare the model to what you invented. The exercise can be made progressively harder by inventing more and more, until you're beginning by drawing *just* the arm, and inventing the whole body to go with it. Students trained in the French Academy and other Baroque academies were expected to be able to invent whole compositions of figures without models; models were used to fill in details but not to build compositions.

Though Renaissance artists including Leonardo and Squarcione had advocated the same basic three-step sequence from copying drawings to drawing casts to drawing from life, they could not have imagined the sober rigor with which it was implemented by the French Academy, or the academy's absolute exclusion of media other than drawing. French Academy students were judged for criteria that now sound alien or repellent:

1. The drawings were required to have perfect proportions. Baroque academies didn't place any value on inventive elongations or other distortions of the figure. Bodies had to be represented in the heights and breadths in which they appeared, or in slightly idealized versions of their natural proportions. These days that kind of restriction would seem absurd, and more to the point, we would probably find it very difficult. Students often say, "I'm not very good at that kind of thing," when they see an academic figure done in flawless "photographic" proportions, and people outside the art world assume that few people can make such figures. But the academies proved that everyone with a modicum of talent can make an impeccably proportioned figure, if they are trained to do so. The tens of thousands of drawings by Baroque academy students, held in museums throughout Europe and America, show that basically anyone can learn to draw a figure with reasonably correct proportions. A proportionally correct drawing is not really a matter of skill, and only marginally a question of training. Everything difficult about drawing begins after proportions are not longer an issue.

One of the keys to the academies' success in producing accurate drawings was their long life-drawing sessions. Typically, in the "atelier system," students looked at one model (or cast or drawing) for four weeks, and they made only a single drawing in that time. One of the students, designated *massier*, set the model's pose each morning, making sure it exactly matched the day before. Later, when the Romantic aesthetic began to hold sway, students found this way of working "petrified, immobile, and artificial and commonplace," if not "hopelessly dead."⁵⁹ Another convention that allowed art students to make drawings with precise proportions was the hierarchy of *kinds* of drawings, from "first thought" to thumbnail sketch to composition drawing to anatomic study to oil sketch to full-scale monochrome underpainting.⁶⁰ Students trained in the use of different levels of sketches could more easily produce impeccably proportioned studies, because they used their first drawings (which were normally done from imagination, without models) to begin thinking about proportions, and then gradually refined them by working up detailed studies from life.

2. **The students were required to observe decorum.** As in the Renaissance, decorum meant moderation in all things. Drawings could not be too large or small, and they couldn't be made too quickly or too slowly. The speed of the chalk or the *crayon* (that is, the pencil) on the paper could not be excessively rapid, nor the pressure too heavy or too light. These days teachers tend to encourage drawings and paintings done very rapidly, or with a tense hand, or very loosely and weakly. There is nothing particularly wrong with pictures that are uneven, or disunified, or otherwise quirky. The idea is to find interesting effects. In the Baroque academies, the purpose was to avoid *bizarrierie* and abnormal excesses, in order to practice the most broadly and effectively expressive style.

3. **The students were not asked to be original.** Creativity in the modern sense, in which each student is helped to make something that is his or her own, was not important in these stages of academy instruction. It was as if students in a life-drawing class were to be asked to conform to the teacher's way of drawing: there was little question of individual interpretation; the idea was to bring whatever was peculiar to the student's own manner under the control of the accepted style. Today that is exactly what teaching is *not*, or to say it the other way, virtually all our instruction goes into fostering individuality. It's hardly possible to imagine an art classroom at the beginning of the twenty-first century—at least in Europe and America—where students are encouraged *not* to try to find individual voices and styles.

Even though the Baroque academy's curriculum was more restricted than the Renaissance curricula, it did address other subjects, typically perspective, geometry, and anatomy. Periodic lectures, called *conférences* and modeled on the less widespread Italian Renaissance lectures (*discorsi*), were the most important addition to the student's education.⁶¹ Some of the lectures were published, and there were books that came out of the academy environment.⁶² (The present book is in that tradition: it is a theoretical treatise, concerned with education, that belongs to the school environment.)

In English-speaking countries, the most famous of these books of lectures is Sir Joshua Reynolds's *Discourses*. Among his first duties as president of the Royal Academy in London was to begin a series of lectures setting out, among other things, the academy's goals. The fifteen *Discourses* are still read, though their ideas are not often applied to contemporary art.⁶³ In France there were a number of such books,⁶⁴ and they

helped give that country the first independent body of art theory since the late Renaissance.⁶⁵ Today such books are mostly read by art historians. But the *idea* of having public lectures to define a curriculum is not a bad one for any art school or art department. If it is rare, that may be because it requires an administrator who is also an art theorist—but there is no reason not to have a symposium on the organization and purpose of a school or department even if the school has been around for some time. I recommend this to any school or department: it's always interesting to see what faculty produce when they're asked about the purpose of their institution, and the paper trail that results can be helpful to the next generation of teachers and administrators (as well as to historians trying to understand how art instruction has changed).

The books produced in Baroque academies seem stilted today. They sometimes had a formulaic way of discussing paintings: a book by Roland Fréart, for example, evaluates all pictures according to their invention, proportion, color, expression, and composition.⁶⁶ The categories entailed rules, *préceptes positifs*, which determined how best to treat each subject. Another author, Roger de Piles, rates painters on a scale from one to eighty on the basis of composition, expression, design, and color. Some results:

Raphael and Rubens (a tie)	65
Carracci	58
Poussin	53
Rembrandt	50
Michelangelo	37.

Today we might invert this order (and add other artists that de Piles neglected). Baroque academic theorists also rated paintings by genre. The so-called "hierarchy of the genres" determined which subjects were worthy of serious attention. One hierarchy reads, from lowest to highest:

Still life
Landscape
Animals
Portraits
Histories.⁶⁷

Practices like these are valuable to the extent that we might define ourselves in relation to them. Here again are ideas that are easy to read about but quite difficult to take seriously. Can portraits really be more



Charles-Nicolas Cochin, Drawing School, detail. 1763. From Denis Diderot et al., Encyclopédie (Paris, 1751–57), v. Dessein, pl. 1. Photo: author.

This is a detail of a plate that appeared in Denis Diderot and Jean Le Rond d'Alembert's Encyclopédie, one of the biggest publishing efforts of the eighteenth century. The plate accompanied the essay on "Drawing." The students drew from their teachers' drawings, not from nature; that was the first step in their art education. Later they would graduate to drawing plas-

ter casts like the ones on the wall. Everything in drawing, like everything in art education—and everything in the whole Encyclopédie—is rationally arranged. As in modern art schools, the academy was a substitute for a university education. Notice how young the students are.

worthy than still lifes because they are inherently more noble? In contemporary parlance, “noble” is a word that most often occurs in speeches by politicians. The view in the early twenty-first century is decidedly anti-hierarchical: “Men think they are better than grass,” as the poet W. S. Merwin says.

In the French Academy, beginning students were called *élèves*. They had a reasonably good life; they were exempted from military service and were well positioned to compete with apprentices outside the academy. There were monthly examinations, designed to weed out inferior students, but the major goal, from 1666 onward, was to win two all-important prizes: the Grand Prix (Grand Prize) and the Prix-de-Rome (Rome Prize) scholarship.⁶⁸ The Grand Prize was not easy to attain. First, students had to pass an examination by executing a satisfactory drawing in the presence of an instructor. If they passed that test they could submit a sketch, and if that sketch was accepted, they were invited to make a picture or relief from the sketch while locked in a room (to make sure they weren't cheating by copying other drawings). All the pictures that had been made that way were put in a public exhibition, and eventually a panel chose a single Grand Prize winner.

The subjects were often set beforehand, and they were usually taken from Greco-Roman mythology. Imagine an art competition today that required artists to pick from the following subjects:

Hannibal Looking Down on the Italian Plain

Albinus and the Vestal

Papirius and His Mother

Alexander and Apelles

The Death of Caesar

Achilles and Thetis

Venus Leading Helen to Paris

Hector Leaving Andromache

Ulysses and Diomedes Carrying Away the Horses of Rhesos

Achilles's Fight with the Rivers

Achilles and the Daughters of Lycomedes.⁶⁹

Part of the student's work was to research such subjects, even though Greek and Roman myths were more or less common knowledge until the mid-nineteenth century. It's ironic that one of the few modern artists who makes pictures with titles like these is Joel-Peter Witkin—his work is strongly academic in that sense, and infused with art history, even though

it would have been unthinkable to the French academicians. (It would have seemed mad.)

The Rome Prize was much more generous than today's grants and fellowships. Winners went to the French Academy in Rome for four years, and when they returned they had a choice of careers.⁷⁰ They could either set up shop in some small town or else try for the next step up in the academy. After being an *élève* and taking part in the Grand Prize competition, a student could apply to be accepted as an *agrégé*, which involved finding a sponsor and submitting another painting. *Agrégés* then had to pay a fee and complete a third work, this time specifically for the academy's permanent collection; and if it was accepted, they became *académiciens*, the highest normal position, something like our full professors.⁷¹ This three-stage system was adopted from the medieval sequence from apprentice to journeyman-apprentice to master. The correspondence with the medieval system is therefore:

MEDIEVAL GUILDS

Apprentice

Journeyman

Master

FRENCH ACADEMY

Élève

Agrégé

Académicien

The Rome Prize and the other competitions put tremendous pressure on students to produce a winning work, a "masterpiece," which would launch their careers. The closest modern analogy I know is the large music competitions such as the Tchaikovsky competition, which use a merciless weeding-out to find a single winner. That winner is then offered concert dates and an opportunity to build an international reputation. The large public competitions for buildings or monuments are not quite the same, in part because they generally attract people who are already professionals. (The same could be said for the MacArthur "genius" grants, which are often given to people who are already established.)

Another consequence of the Rome Prize system was that art students had to be single-minded: they had to think of each of their classes as preparation for a single painting. In fact, the entire curriculum of the Baroque academies was geared toward the production of a single work. Art historians who study these academies ask about what kinds of work were most likely to win the prize, and they note that the Rome Prize and similar competitions fostered uniformity and discouraged experimentation. It is also important to see it from the students' viewpoint: everything they did, from taking drawing lessons to reading the classics, would have

fed into the production of their competition piece. It was a blinkered curriculum, and it must have encouraged obsessive students. What would it be like if one of today's art schools offered a single prize so lucrative and prominent that the winner would be virtually assured of making a living? The whole school, I think, would become obsessed with the prize, and suddenly the noncompetitive atmosphere of postmodern practice would evaporate.

The early French Royal Academy perpetuated and legitimized a number of customs and ideas that are still with us. One worth reiterating is the idea that an academy exists for the sake of *theory*, rather than menial practice. The academy's exclusive attention to drawing, even at the expense of color,⁷² came from Renaissance ideas about design (*disegno*), though the Baroque academies narrowed the Renaissance meanings of *disegno* into an unyielding pedagogic demand. The idea that theory belongs in academies and "mere" technique belongs elsewhere still has influence, even though the majority of contemporary art schools and departments also tend to provide some market-oriented, technical, "industrial" and engineering instruction. (This is not to say that there was an obvious connection between the theory that the students learned and the paintings they made. Then as now, theories often had little to do with the work.)⁷³

Another seminal idea was the dissective manner of talking about pictures that got underway in the seventeenth century. Before that, for example, in the Renaissance, systematic art theory was not common, though there are examples of it. Instead people wrote appreciations mixed with snippets of biography and other anecdotes, technical information, and descriptions of what the pictures were about. It was mostly very informal. Forms and categories of art theory got underway at the end of the Renaissance, however, and flourished in the ambience of the French Academy. Today, although pictures are no longer divided into "invention, proportion, color, expression, and composition," they *are* divided. When students now complain that there is too much icy intellection at art school, too much jargon and theory-speak, they are complaining about something whose seeds were planted in the early Baroque in France and Italy. The phenomenon has always been academic.

There is no better way to appreciate the atmosphere of a Baroque academy than to put yourself through some of the exercises the students of that time had to master.⁷⁴ It is fairly easy to find at least a second-rate, anonymous academic drawing from eighteenth-century France in a local museum; and many museums allow drawings to be copied in their

departments of prints and drawings. If that is not possible where you live, then you can try drawing from reproductions of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century drawings and casts of sculptures. (That wouldn't be so different from the activity of first-year students at the academy, with their lithographed books of drawings.) Or you could draw from the plaster statues that ornament downtown buildings—Cézanne did that in the south of France. The three-part regimen of the academy (drawing from drawings, from casts, and from life) can be duplicated in three day long sessions. This may sound like an odd suggestion, but the experience is informative no matter what you end up producing. It will give you a sense of eighteenth-century artists' physical exactitude and mental constraint, and you'll remember it long after you've gone back to the freer exercises that are done in today's studio classes.⁷⁵

NINETEENTH-CENTURY ACADEMIES

Inevitably, there were revolts against this pedantic and artificial way of teaching. In general, the rebellion is associated with the Romantic movement, especially in Germany in the last decades of the eighteenth century and the first decades of the nineteenth. **One leading idea, held by the young artists who came to teach in the late 1700s, was that the subjective, individual vision of each artist is more important than any sequence of classes or standardized theory.** Routine and requirements were thought to be wrong; freedom was all-important. The artists spoke out against uniformity and in favor of the "special qualities" and "particular talents" of each student. Teaching, they thought, should be "natural," "unaffected," and "liberal." One aspect of codified Baroque instruction, the analyses of paintings according to fixed categories of color, expression, and so forth, seemed particularly offensive. Art was conceived as an "organic entity," something "living" that should not be dissected.

These sentiments led to sweeping rejections of art academies. It was said that all academies do more harm than good. Academy students were compared to maggots, feeding on a rotting cheese; academy drawing was compared to masturbation; academy rooms were compared to coroners' rooms full of corpses; the academy was imagined as a hospital for sick art.⁷⁶

There are tempting parallels between the early 1800s and the 1960s, even though the kinds of art produced in the two periods are completely different.⁷⁷ Both periods shared a surplus of idealism and a shortfall of practical curricular change. It is one thing to rebel against a bureaucracy and another actually to change a curriculum. On 11 November 1792 Jacques-Louis David voted to close down the French Academy. In 1795

it was split in two (becoming the Institut de France and the *École des Beaux-Arts*),⁷⁸ but both branches quickly reverted to very conservative positions. The new academies were, in a word, antidisestablishmentarianist.⁷⁹ Some educators in European academies tried to get rid of the first years of the Baroque curriculum, but typically the old ways of teaching remained in place, and nineteenth-century students continued to draw from drawings and casts. The Romantic emphasis on drawing from nature instead of from the antique usually meant even more life drawing, instead of trips into the countryside.⁸⁰

German Romantic artists did not rebel the way late-twentieth-century artists did, and their works look strange by our standards. Yet the Romantic rebellion has had lasting impact on contemporary art schools. Five notions are particularly important:

1. We still devalue the intensive investigation of meaning. Most of what is taught in studios is loose and informal—a whole mix of criteria and judgments without pattern or consistency. (This is the subject of chapter 4.) Contemporary instructors avoid the kind of formulaic, compartmentalized analyses that the Baroque academicians promoted. Even professional art critics, who can seem downright nasty, are tender toward artworks in that they rarely try for a “complete” analysis the way Roger de Piles did; instead they work impressionistically (another nineteenth-century term), going from one image or allusion to another. All that is a lasting heritage of the Romantic rebellion.

2. Artists should be independent of the state. Baroque academies were a little like modern businesses, since they served the aristocrats who needed artists to build and decorate their houses. After the French Revolution that source of income dried up, and in the wake of Romanticism artists tended to proclaim their independence from any class of patrons. Today there is a spectrum of opinions about the relation between artists and their society, but there is a nearly universal consensus that artists should not primarily serve the state.⁸¹ There’s a simple thought-experiment you can do to measure your distance from your society. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the great majority of academicians would have been happy and proud to be commissioned to do a portrait of their king or queen. But how many art students these days are motivated by a desire to paint the president? Artists *caricature* the president, and critique him, but I don’t know any who admire him enough to want him to commission their painting.



Rowlandson and Pugin, Drawing from Life at the Royal Academy. From The Microcosm of London (London: R. Ackermann, 1808–10), vol. 1, plate following p. iv. Photo: author.

This is an unusually well-ordered classroom. That is because it would have doubled as a lecture hall, and perhaps as an “anatomical theater”—a place where doctors wheeled in cadavers and dissected them in front of an audience. By the early nineteenth century, drawing was becoming a pastime for the leisure class as much as a profession for young men—notice how many of the students are

middle-aged. Some in the far row even have curled wigs. The sad-looking instructor stands against the back wall, presiding over the production of yet more identical-looking drawings, to be followed by yet more identical-looking sculptures like the ones on the shelves up above.

3. We retain the Romantic re-invention of the "master class." In order to foster individuality and freedom (and in part, to return to what they thought of as authentic medieval workshops), the Romantics expanded the advanced levels of instruction. Students worked under masters, who helped them to develop their "individual genius." Contemporary teachers adhere to this in that they do not try to foist a uniform standard on each student they advise. Instead they try to feel their way to an understanding of what each student is all about. Teachers acknowledge that everyone has different ideals, directions, talents, and potentials. That sense of individuality is quintessentially Romantic.

4. We still think—sometimes—that art cannot be taught. Some Romantics thought that only techniques could be taught in art school. Hermann Grimm (son of one of the brothers Grimm) held that art was "altogether unteachable." Later in the century Whistler said, "I don't teach art; with that I cannot interfere; but I teach the scientific application of paint and brushes."⁸² These ideas are extreme, but they follow directly from the less radical idea that artists are individuals: if everyone is different then there's no telling how art can be taught. The Romantics were the first to explore the idea that art cannot be taught, and some of their reasons are also my reasons in this book.

5. It is possible to study painting in art school. Because the Romantics thought individual vision was so important, nineteenth-century students could study art from beginning to end in their classrooms. They no longer had to learn painting, sculpture, and other arts outside the academy, by apprenticing themselves to independent masters. In the Royal Academy in London in the nineteenth century, some teachers specialized in painting, ornament, and even coach decoration. The huge range of techniques and media in current art schools is due to the Romantics, who took the essential first step of bringing painting into the academy.

MODERN ACADEMIES AND THE BAUHAUS

The history of modern academies begins in the middle of the nineteenth century, with the Great Exhibition of 1851 in London. Nineteenth-century exhibitions were more like national trade fairs than the world's fairs we think of today, and this one was particularly driven by manufacturing, since one of its purposes was to showcase and improve industrial and manufacturing skills. These days people like to complain about how

“cheap” manufactured goods are. At the turn of the century, people complained about the poor quality of architecture and furniture (why don’t we complain about furniture outlets anymore?), and in the mid-nineteenth century people complained about the poor quality of everything that was manufactured, as opposed to being handmade. **Each generation has thought it was the first to notice the disappearance of skilled craftsmen and the first to see that industrialization was the cause.** Perhaps to future generations the late twentieth century will seem like a utopia of skilled apprentices.

The Great Exhibition inspired a number of books on the subject of the loss of the workshop tradition. The nineteenth-century architect Gottfried Semper thought that the crafts had degenerated so far that the best decoration was to be found on the objects that needed it the least, such as weapons and musical instruments.⁸³ Museums were set up for people to study examples of good craftsmanship; the Victoria and Albert Museum in London is the most prominent instance. Educators began to think that what was needed was a single curriculum for “fine art” and “industrial art”—meaning whatever is made with the help of machines, from hammers to iron staircases. Others thought that the principles of “fine art” were of prime importance, and these precepts needed to be applied to decorative and industrial arts (hence the term “applied arts”).⁸⁴

The most influential nineteenth-century worker along these lines was William Morris. Like many others, he associated the unity of arts and crafts with the pre-industrial age, specifically with the Middle Ages. His shop, called Morris, Marshall and Faulkner, Fine Art Workmen in Painting, Carving, Furniture and the Metals, founded in 1861, made things only by hand. The phrase “Fine Art Workmen” is telling, and so is the art movement that Morris enlisted: the Pre-Raphaelites, who wanted a return to higher, and nonacademic, standards of production.⁸⁵ A number of schools followed Morris and the Arts and Crafts movement. Birmingham had a school for jewelers and silversmiths in 1881, and various schools incorporated crafts such as printing, goldsmithing, and embroidery into their curricula.⁸⁶ Part of the impetus for this was purely economic; students at the state-run academies objected to being given worthless degrees. Who needed academic painters when Courbet, Degas, Renoir, and others were challenging the status quo, and who needed a degree in painting when there was so much demand for skilled craftsmen?

If there was a downside to Morris’s ideas, it was that only the rich could afford handmade objects. Mass production and industrial techniques could not be avoided if the goal was to disseminate the arts rather than just im-

proving them for a minority of customers. The most famous solution to that problem was Walter Gropius's school, the Bauhaus, which taught a range of subjects—even if it was not entirely singleminded in its integration of “industrial” and fine arts. Students at the Bauhaus went through a three-stage curriculum, which I'll list in detail because the Bauhaus is by far the most important influence on current art instruction:⁸⁷

1. The first-year course. A six-month preparatory class was taught originally by Johannes Itten,⁸⁸ and it has been extraordinarily influential in modern art instruction. Itten divided the course into three topics:⁸⁹

(a) Two-dimensional instruction: Training the senses. The first exercises were to train the senses and the hand. (Sometimes Itten had his students get ready by doing special breathing exercises.) Students were asked to draw fine rows of parallel lines, pages of perfect free-hand circles, and spirals. Some of this still survives in postmodern curricula. I have assisted in classes taught by a student of a Bauhaus artist, in which the students drew long series of fine parallel lines across long sheets of brown butcher paper. Each line had to be a little darker than the one before, and then a little lighter, so that the paper looked like it was buckled in waves. The object was control of the hand, the arm, and the eye. I remember it as difficult, exhausting, and apparently irrelevant to any other kind of artmaking. The first portion of Itten's course also included exact drawings from models and the study of different textures and materials.

(b) Two-dimensional instruction: Training the emotions. Here students were given emotional themes (anger, sorrow, pain) or emotional subjects (a thunderstorm, a war) and told to represent them graphically. Sometimes an abstract approach was required, but more frequently the surviving drawings show a high degree of abstraction that includes realistic elements.

(c) Two-dimensional instruction: Training the mind. The intellectual side of art was promoted by exercises in the analysis of Old Master paintings, color schemata, and simple formal oppositions (light/dark, above/below, motion/rest). Live models and abstractions were both used to teach the analysis of rhythm.

These same three principles—training for the senses, the emotions, and the mind—were then applied to three-dimensional objects, including some arrangements of junk that Itten brought into the studio to test the students' capacity to render unusual textures and forms. This final por-

tion of the six-month introductory course was meant to lead into the studio work of the next stage.

2. The undergraduate curriculum. Next in the Bauhaus curriculum came a three-year program in which students specialized in an area of their choice (stone and marble, textiles, “wall-painting,” ceramics, glass, wood-working, and so forth). The entire Bauhaus was open to students so they could learn new disciplines, but they were expected to remain in one area and apprentice themselves to two masters. (That was a compromise between the master class of the German Romantics and older academic instruction, and it still survives in the contemporary system involving two or three “advisors.”) Bauhaus students were instructed in materials, geometry, construction, model-making, and some history of art.⁹⁰

3. Assistant work. At the end of the three years, students took a standard municipal trade examination and got a journeyman’s certificate. That in turn enabled them to enter the third course, which was something like being an assistant in an architectural firm or doing postdoctoral research in science. The graduates helped with Bauhaus commissions and sometimes did work in local industries.

The specific agendas and organization of the Bauhaus have been superseded, but a number of Bauhaus-inspired exercises are still common today. As often as not, they form the basis of the first-year or foundation programs in art schools and art departments. Some of the more common exercises include:

- **Textures.** Students gather different textures and try to depict them in pencil or charcoal.
- **Materials.** Students learn about different materials by making carvings, molds, and so forth. Sometimes the object is to make as many different objects as possible out of a single material.
- **Value.** Students are asked to arrange small newspaper clippings into a continuous scale from white to black or to reproduce a scene or still life in shades of gray.
- **Rhythms.** Students arrange objects into a rhythmic composition or making a complex drawing using simple forms.
- **Concrete to abstract.** Beginning with a still life or a painting, students analyze “lines of force” or “points of equilibrium” and eventually arrive at an abstraction.
- **Collections.** Students collect objects that seem to have little in common, or else similar objects (e.g., red things), and see how they are related.

- **Emotions.** Students make abstract or concrete drawings or constructions that express given emotions.
- **Color.** Students are sensitized to color relations through a wide range of experiments.

There are many more, and they can be found in Albers's and Itten's books and in books on the Bauhaus written by former students. Though the Bauhaus instructors did not originate all these exercises, they were unknown in Baroque or Romantic instruction. The list I've given is fairly typical, and versions of it are nearly universal. Yet it should provoke some questions:

1. Is there a tabula rasa? Some Bauhaus instructors used exercises like these to erase bad habits inculcated by the society and the state of the arts. Itten spoke in these terms: he wanted to return students' minds and muscles to a tabula rasa, a blank slate.⁹¹ Yet as time passes, it becomes more apparent that Bauhaus exercises weren't aimed at a timeless blank slate, but were closely related to the styles of the day. Some Bauhaus students' works look expressionist, and others show the influence of international abstraction. This is well known to historians, but it is not often noted in contemporary art instruction. When exercises like the ones I've listed are done today, teachers don't usually talk about the tabula rasa, and their goals remain similar to Itten's: to do something rudimentary, without the influence of current art styles or art history. But I think it makes sense to think of art history and the styles that inevitably creep into the exercises—after all, an exercise that looks “timeless” today (say a sheet of butcher paper, covered with straight lines) will look very much of its time to future viewers. In other words, there is no tabula rasa.

2. What is the relation between sensitivity and work? Many of the Bauhaus exercises are aimed at increasing sensitivity to colors, values, textures, and compositions. Itten's idea was to bring out the individual's capacity to respond to phenomena. Albers's book on color is a sequence of “scientific experiments” in color perception intended to provoke new ways of thinking, to shake up the students' confidence in their sensory knowledge. Yet it's an open-ended sequence because the purpose is primarily to increase sensitivity. (Albers says you probably will never get to be as good at seeing color as he is.) Albers's “experiments” are still popular because they increase the enjoyment of everyday life: if you go outside after a session with Albers's book, you will probably notice more colors, shapes, textures, and compositions than you had before. But



Woman student painting. c. 1945. Chicago, School of the Art Institute. Archives of the Art Institute of Chicago, folder 8250FFIB. Used with permission.

By the mid-twentieth century, the demanding and systematic methods of the Baroque academies had been virtually forgotten. This woman was free to paint in just about any style—she might have been thinking of Titian, Rembrandt, Toulouse-Lautrec, Matisse, Augustus John, or even Norman Rockwell. But she couldn't have gotten tips in the ways Titian or Rembrandt painted; that knowledge was lost well before the twentieth century. She might not even have been able to get instruc-

tion in proper proportions or the mixture of paint: there is no telling, these days, what a studio instructor might know. I remember a life class when I was a student: a number of other students were out sick, and the instructor decided to have some fun. He set up his own easel and tried drawing the model for an hour. At the end he had a picture that looked like scrambled eggs, and he said, "Boy, this figural stuff is harder than I thought."

the same reactions may not be helpful in the studio. Is Albers's artificially high level of color sensitivity really necessary to painting? Some kinds of art require nuance and others don't. Sensitivity can be irrelevant, and Bauhaus-style exercises can be more like meditation than like making art.

3. What is rudimentary? The exercises were concentrated in the "preparatory" course. The study of "rudiments" has a much longer history, going back before the Baroque academies. The earliest post-medieval Western art text is Alberti's *Rudiments of Painting*, written in the early fifteenth century. His "rudiments" are geometric forms and constructions.⁹² In the Baroque period the rudimentary discipline was drawing. Both Alberti's geometric exercises and the Baroque drawing books make good sense for their respective periods: the Renaissance did base much of its picturemaking on geometry, and the Baroque practice was founded on certain conventions of drawing. But it should not be accepted without question that the Bauhaus's miscellany of exercises is our "rudiments." Do we really think that materials and textures are the basis of our practice? Is postmodern art practice well served by the formal agendas of the Bauhaus?

The Bauhaus curriculum contained the seeds of the 2-D, 3-D, 4-D sequence that is common today. That sequence is open to the same objections as the study of "rudiments." Why assume that 3-D should come after 2-D? If you're a teacher, and you have some latitude in the curriculum, you might consider rearranging the 2-D, 3-D, 4-D sequence. Why not teach 4-D, then 3-D, then 2-D? (Start first-year students with time arts, work down through painting to drawing, and end up in the spring with lines and points.) Does it make sense to start art with sequences of "D's" at all? Should there be *any* "fundamentals"? After all, postmodernism prides itself on not believing in foundations, and the remnants of Bauhaus teaching look more out of place with each passing year. At the same time, I am not so sure there is any such thing as a post-Bauhaus method of elementary art instruction. The Bauhaus notion of rudiments and the 2-D, 3-D, 4-D sequence are the *only* workable alternatives to the academic model. It can seem as if contemporary art departments and art schools have done away with the Bauhaus by intermixing all sorts of new things in their first-year courses—digital video, multimedia installation, biology, ideology and politics, and even pornography—but the mixtures only obscure the ongoing belief that art *does* have rudiments, and that they have to do with seeing, making, and the tabula rasa.

4. The resistance to theory. There is an interesting parallel between the first-year course at the Bauhaus and the children's exercises advocated by Friedrich Froebel, the inventor of the kindergarten. Froebel gave children woolen balls, blocks, laths, paper, and hoops. He encouraged them to draw, to compare sizes, make patterns, investigate texture and color, weave, and model clay. The rationale was that learning takes place best in nonutilitarian interaction with materials. Like the Bauhaus instructors, Froebel held that theory—what he called “mind”—need not, or cannot, develop before activity.⁹³ These ideas have been held by a wide range of theorists, from Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi through John Dewey.⁹⁴ It is worth considering that the kindergarten and the Bauhaus first-year course share an interest in nonverbal, ahistorical learning, and that such learning may not correspond with artmaking that is done in later years. How many subjects in elementary school are prepared for by kindergarten exercises? How useful are the various remnants of Bauhaus pedagogy?

One last point about the Bauhaus. Like some instructors in the French Academy, teachers at the Bauhaus made statements and wrote pamphlets, lecture notes, and books. Several students wrote about their experiences. That, more than any single factor, accounts for the importance the Bauhaus continues to have. Students still read Albers, Klee, Mies, Itten, and Kandinsky, and that makes all the difference in our estimation of the school. Today teachers who write about successful classes they have taught publish in journals like the *Journal of Aesthetic Education* or in the various regional teachers' journals—where their articles are immediately lost. Most art schools have no formal histories and few archival documents. This is a note more for instructors than students: consider writing at length about the school where you teach, to define it and your teaching.

ART SCHOOLS BEYOND THE BAUHAUS

Art academies were very slow to catch up to contemporary styles. In the late 1930s, when Nikolaus Pevsner was writing his history of art academies, the *École des Beaux-Arts* still had three departments (painting, sculpture, and architecture), and the Royal Academy was still teaching a nineteenth-century curriculum of five classes (the antique school, school of painting, life drawing, life modeling, and architecture). Only the London Central School of Arts and Crafts, Frank Lloyd Wright's Taliesin Fellowship, and the Royal College in London—originally an industrial arts school—are mentioned by Pevsner as progressive, and mostly they

were following late nineteenth-century ideas about the unification of the arts and crafts and the return to medieval apprenticeships.⁹⁵ A utilitarian kind of art education flourished in the United States in the nineteenth century, stressing the practical value of visualization, handwriting, and accurate drawing. Though such instruction pertained mostly to elementary and high school curricula, it found its way into art schools, where it mingled with the academic strains inherited from Europe.⁹⁶ (Thomas Eakins is an example of an artist strongly influenced by such academic training.)

Art schools in the contemporary sense did not arise until after the Second World War.⁹⁷ They are marked by an absence of almost all restrictions on the kinds of courses that can be taught, and on a radical increase in students' freedom to choose courses. The educational reforms of the 1960s removed even more restrictions, sometimes including letter grades and basic or "core" course requirements. Many American art schools were reorganized in the sixties and seventies to remove from their names or course rosters such older-sounding terms as "applied art" and to substitute inclusive categories such as "communications" and "art and technology." The tendency to lump subjects continues today.⁹⁸ At the same time schools and departments tend to disavow any overarching purpose in favor of pluralism and the independence of different courses or departments. The result is a curiously free "learning environment," in which students have a large say in what they will learn and when they will learn it.

What I want to stress here is not how we are connected to the past but how strongly we are *disconnected*. For practical purposes current art instruction doesn't involve a fixed curriculum, a hierarchy of genres, a sequence of courses, a coherent body of knowledge, or a unified theory or practice. In large art schools, any two students will be likely to have very different experiences of their first-year program, which is supposed to be the common foundation for further work. They will have been in different classes and had different teachers. In art departments, students' experiences differ widely year by year. Since instructors are generally free to devise their own class plans within the general guidelines of the school or department, the same core course can be very different in different hands. (Art history surveys are restricted by the textbooks, but they vary too.) It is as if modern art schools are a different *kind* of school, as different from the French Academy as it was from medieval workshops. Contemporary art instruction does have a past. But what is done at the beginning of the twenty-first century is strongly different from what was done in the preceding centuries. Yet art instruction has invisibly reinvent-

ed itself, creating the impression that nothing has changed. It looks as if art is being taught in all sorts of ways—in any established way—but what is done in studio classrooms is often either the determined *opposite* of the customs and habits of the older academies or else the lingering, nearly inaudible echo of the Bauhaus.

And is there anything beyond the Bauhaus? I have seen bits and pieces of post-Bauhaus teaching that are free of the ideas I discussed above—the tabula rasa, the rudiments, sensitivity training, resistance to theory, the sequence from 2-D to 4-D. I've seen postmodern exercises intended to demonstrate how *little* can be understood about art: that's certainly a post-Bauhaus mentality. The Bauhaus that exists today has itself adopted a post-Bauhaus curriculum; students design “sociological experiments”—essentially public installations and performances—and take courses to build up whatever skills they may need.⁹⁹ Any first-year program that stresses ideology and politics over media and skills is certainly post-Bauhaus. But any introductory course that focuses on seeing, on visuality, on textures, colors, motions, value, weight, emotion, assembly and composition, or sensitivity, is working in the shadow of the Bauhaus. Contemporary art instruction has moved far beyond the Baroque academy model, without even noticing it. At the same time we have moved only baby steps away from the Bauhaus.

Walter Gropius, “Bauhaus Manifesto and Program” (1919)

The ultimate aim of all visual arts is the complete building! To embellish buildings was once the noblest function of the fine arts; they were the indispensable components of great architecture. Today the arts exist in isolation, from which they can be rescued only through the conscious, cooperative effort of all craftsmen. Architects, painters, and sculptors must recognize anew and learn to grasp the composite character of a building both as an entity and in its separate parts. Only then will their work be imbued with the architectonic spirit which it has lost as “salon art.”

The old schools of art were unable to produce this unity; how could they, since art cannot be taught. They must be merged once more with the workshop. The mere drawing and painting world of the pattern designer and the applied artist must become a world that builds again. When young people who take a joy in artistic creation once more begin their life's work by learning a trade, then the unproductive “artist” will no longer be condemned to deficient artistry, for their skill will now be preserved for the crafts, in which they will be able to achieve excellence.

Architects, sculptors, painters, we all must return to the crafts! For art is not a “profession.” There is no essential difference between the artist and the craftsman. The artist is an exalted craftsman. In rare moments of inspiration, transcending the consciousness of his will, the grace of heaven may cause his work to blossom into art. But proficiency in a craft is essential to every artist. Therein lies the prime source of creative imagination.

Let us then create a new guild of craftsmen without the class distinctions that raise an arrogant barrier between craftsman and artist! Together let us desire, conceive, and create the new structure of the future, which will embrace architecture and sculpture and painting in one unity and which will one day rise toward heaven from the hands of a million workers like the crystal symbol of a new faith.

Walter Gropius

Program of the Staatliche Bauhaus In Weimar

The Staatliche Bauhaus resulted from the merger of the former Grand-Ducal Saxon Academy of Art with the former Grand-Ducal Saxon School of Arts and Crafts in conjunction with a newly affiliated department of architecture

Aims of the Bauhaus

The Bauhaus strives to bring together all creative effort into one whole, to reunify all the disciplines of practical art-sculpture, painting, handicrafts, and the crafts-as inseparable components of a new architecture. The ultimate, if distant, aim of the Bauhaus is the unified work of art-the great structure-in which there is no distinction between monumental and decorative art.

The Bauhaus wants to educate architects, painters, and sculptors of all levels, according to their capabilities, to become competent craftsmen or independent creative artists and to form a working community of leading and future artist-craftsmen. These men, of kindred spirit, will know how to design buildings harmoniously in their entirety-structure, finishing, ornamentation, and furnishing.

Principles of the Bauhaus

Art rises above all methods; in itself it cannot be taught, but the crafts certainly can be. Architects, painters, and sculptors are craftsmen in the true sense of the word; hence, a thorough

training in the crafts, acquired in workshops and in experimental and practical sites, is required of all students as the indispensable basis for all artistic production. Our own workshops are to be gradually built up, and apprenticeship agreements with outside workshops will be concluded.

The school is the servant of the workshop, and will one day be absorbed in it. Therefore there will be no teachers or pupils in the Bauhaus but masters, journeymen, and apprentices.

The manner of teaching arises from the character of the workshop: Organic forms developed from manual skills.

Avoidance of all rigidity; priority of creativity; freedom of individuality, but strict study discipline.

Master and journeyman examinations, according to the Guild Statutes, held before the Council of Masters of the Bauhaus or before outside masters.

Collaboration by the students in the work of the masters. Securing of commissions, also for students.

Mutual planning of extensive, Utopian structural designs-public buildings and buildings for worship-aimed at the future. Collaboration of all masters and students-architects, painters, sculptors-on these designs with the object of gradually achieving a harmony of all the component elements and parts that make up architecture.

Constant contact with the leaders of the crafts and industries of the country. Contact with public life, with the people, through exhibitions and other activities.

New research into the nature of the exhibitions, to solve the problem of displaying visual work and sculpture within the framework of architecture.

Encouragement of friendly relations between masters and students outside of work; therefore plays, lectures, poetry, music, costume parties. Establishment of a cheerful ceremonial at these gatherings.

Range of Instruction

Instruction at the Bauhaus includes all practical and scientific areas of creative work.

A. Architecture,

B. Painting,

C. Sculpture

including all branches of the crafts.

Students are trained in a craft (1) as well as in drawing and painting (2) and science and theory (3).

1. Craft training-either in our own, gradually enlarging workshops or in outside workshops to which the student is bound by apprenticeship agreement-includes:

- a) sculptors, stonemasons, stucco workers, woodcarvers, ceramic workers, plaster casters,
- b) blacksmiths, locksmiths, founders, metal turners,
- c) cabinetmakers,
- d) painter-and-decorators, glass painters, mosaic workers, enamellers,
- e) etchers. wood engravers, lithographers, art printers, enchasers,
- f) weavers.

Craft training forms the basis of all teaching at the Bauhaus. Every student must learn a craft.

2. Training in drawing and painting includes:

- a) free-hand sketching from memory and imagination,
- b) drawing and painting of heads, live models, and animals,
- c) drawing and painting of landscapes, figures, plants, and still lifes,
- d) composition,
- e) execution of murals, panel pictures, and religious shrines,
- f) design of ornaments,
- g) lettering,
- h) construction and projection drawing,
- i) design of exteriors, gardens, and interiors,
- j) design of furniture and practical articles.

3. Training in science and theory includes:

- a) art history-not presented in the sense of a history of styles, but rather to further active understanding of historical working methods and techniques,
- b) science of materials,
- c) anatomy-from the living model,
- d) physical and chemical theory of color,
- e) rational painting methods,
- f) basic concepts of bookkeeping, contract negotiations, personnel,
- g) individual lectures on subjects of general interest in all areas of art and science.

Divisions of Instruction

The training is divided into three courses of instruction:

- I. course for apprentices,
- II. course for journeymen,
- III. course for junior masters.

The instruction of the individual is left to the discretion of each master within the framework of the general program and the work schedule, which is revised every semester. In order to give the students as versatile and comprehensive a technical and artistic training as possible, the work schedule will be so arranged that every architect, painter, and sculptor-to-be is able to participate in part of the other courses.

Admission

Any person of good repute, without regard to age or sex, whose previous education is deemed adequate by the Council of Masters, will be admitted, as far as space permits. The tuition fee is 180 marks per year (It will gradually disappear entirely with increasing earnings of the Bauhaus). A nonrecurring admission fee of 20 marks is also to be paid. Foreign students pay double fees. Address inquiries to the Secretariat of the Staatliche Bauhaus in Weimar.

April 1919.
The administration of the
Staatliche Bauhaus in Weimar:
Walter Gropius.

ART SUBJECTS

MAKING ARTISTS IN THE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY

Howard Singerman

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PRESS

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INTRODUCTION

It is a commonplace of recent criticism that even before I begin, and in ways I cannot tell, I am captured by and folded inside the object of my research. However I attempt to stand at a distance and view objectively, the blindnesses of ideology and interest, the entanglements of identification and transference, and the traps of textuality lie in wait. It is easy for me to acknowledge the impossibility of distance here. My study is on the graduate training of artists in the American university (and in the degree-granting art schools fashioned in its image), and I have been captured by and folded into that object once before—bodily, and as its object. You might read what follows as a confession of my critical involvements and complicities, or, if you are of a different school, as an inside view.

I have a B.A. degree in studio art from a small liberal arts college. Most of my undergraduate courses were in painting, supplemented by a year of printmaking and two semesters of life drawing, in a course whose title, Drawing and Composition, was left over from a slightly earlier, yet more “modern” conception. The drawing program, a familiar one, proceeded from mark-making exercises to the nude model, rendered first in gesture and blind contour drawings, and then in increasingly extended poses. In printmaking, instruction was technical and craft based: I ground stones, scraped rollers, learned the uses of gum arabic, Carborundum, asphaltum. In introductory painting too there were mechanics, though fewer: how to build a stretcher and stretch a

canvas, how to apply gesso as a ground. I was asked to make a color chart. I learned how to glaze and stain, but these techniques I picked up later from other, older students. Working as a studio assistant for my painting teacher, I used a spray gun. Painting problems were given only in the introductory class: make a painting with only three colors. The unspoken problem of the course in painting as it advanced was to make something that was convincing as a painting. Not long after Painting 1, looking like a painting became an issue of scale; I made five-by-eight-foot monochromes and, later on, shaped canvases of equal size.

In class and out we discussed art, its physiological or anthropological or psychological necessity, its political and social value. What formed the discussion and continued in it was the question of what to do, a question at once personal and what might be called professional. The question “What should I do?” was also always the question “What do artists do?”¹ As students we were troubled by the title “artist,” not simply because of our status, but also because of those attributes of “creativity and genius, eternal value and mystery” that, as reading Walter Benjamin would teach us in graduate school, “lead to a processing of data in the Fascist sense,” a mythical sense as opposed to a historical one.² We were, for at least a while, “technicians” or “cultural workers.” It was clear to us that something historical was at stake in the name we took. Long after our one visiting artist, a painter from New York, had departed, discussion continued about his insistence on identifying himself as a painter rather than an artist. The labels proposed different objects and different questions concerning what was to be done: a critical art practice after Duchamp, on the one hand, and a history of painting descended from Cézanne, on the other.³ I would learn from the shop assistant in graduate school to run a few more power tools, but this was the sum of my technical instruction in art. It took place precisely where merely manual or specialized professional instruction was not supposed to occur, in an undergraduate liberal arts college.

What manual training I had in graduate school might be imagined as an updated, and markedly abbreviated, version of the master’s workshop. Under the tutelage of the shop assistant, I learned to make maple frames and bases (for use by my department chair) and to hang dry-wall. That is, I learned to craft the edges and outsides and supports of art, or what Jacques Derrida has called, after Kant, the *parergon*, that “outside which is called to the inside of the inside in order to constitute it as an inside: . . . the limit between work and absence of work.”⁴ The

frame is a particularly critical modern lesson; its enclosure extends from the page to the professional field, from Hans Hofmann's insistence that the "four sides of the paper are the first lines of the composition"⁵ to Raymond Parker's observation that in art schools "teachers demonstrate how they participate in the art-world, or discuss how others do it. . . . [T]he art-world can be understood and taught as a subject."⁶ My passage as an apprentice from maple frames to gallery walls might be read as an emblem for what is taught, and indeed what needs to be taught, in graduate school: again in Derrida's words, "the marking out of the work in a field."⁷

What took place outside my graduate school woodshop, in the program's seminars and organized activities and in the individual cubicles where we worked at doing our own work, was the teaching that Raymond Parker described, our training as participating artists in the art world. Artists are the subject of graduate school; they are both who and what is taught. In grammar school, to continue this play of subjects and objects, teachers teach art; in my undergraduate college, artists taught art. In the graduate school, I argue throughout this book, artists teach artists. Artists are, again, both the subject of the graduate art department and its goal. The art historian Howard Risatti, who has written often on the difficulties of training contemporary artists, argued not long ago that "at the very heart of the problem of educating the artist lies the difficulty of defining what it means to be an artist today."⁸ The "problem" is not a practical one; the meaning of being an artist cannot be clarified and solved by faculty or administration, although across this book a number of professors and administrators try. Rather, the problem of definition is at the heart of the artist's education because it is the formative and defining problem of recent art. Artists are made by troubling over it, by taking it seriously.

Since the 1960s the visiting artist program—the display of the exemplary artist—has been crucial to teaching artists.⁹ I address a logic of the visiting artist in Chapter 6; here I want only to note the most obvious of that artist's functions: to embody a link between the school and a professional community of what graduate schools refer to as "national" artists. Visiting artists are chosen by students or faculty from national journals and magazines, from the pages of *Flash Art* or *Art in America*, and they speak to students, whatever they say, in the shared language of those journals and that community; their speech constructs that community. The visiting artists who spoke to me and my peers modeled for us what an artist was. Our assignment, as we watched and

listened, was not secret, or no longer seems so. In graduate seminars we researched artists in the magazines, presenting to the class our favorites or least favorites, making clear and verbal the relations and positions we needed to plot for ourselves within that field emblemized by dry-wall and maple frames. In one assignment we were asked to invent an artist of another type than we imagined ourselves to be—since we were to know ourselves as types—and then to produce an oeuvre, to make slides and do the talk, to model a speech or slouch. We learned to run our own careers as well, to produce cards and catalogues and slides, and to attend openings, which were staged like rehearsals every other week in the fall, every week in the spring.

Although I hold a Master of Fine Arts degree in sculpture, I do not have the traditional skills of the sculptor; I cannot carve or cast or weld or model in clay. I think the question that I began this book to answer is, why not? In some sense, I must admit, my inability was not my program's fault. The tools and skills of sculpture were available to me as options. If I needed them to do my work as an artist, to address the issues or make the objects I wanted to make, there were people who could teach me. But it was clear at the time that the craft practices of a particular *métier* were no longer central to my training; we learned to think, not inside a material tradition, but rather about it, along its frame. The problem of being an artist occupied the center. The question I posed to my teachers, and that they posed to me again and again, was not how to sculpt or to paint, but what to do as an artist, and as "my work." Perhaps this is where my program failed me—after all, I am not an artist; at the time, however, I imagined that its failure lay in its outmoded map of recent art and its issues, in its parochial roster of gallery exhibitions and visiting artists. I am still not sure why, but at some point not long after graduation it became very difficult to imagine myself as an artist, or to be convinced by what I made.

Although this book is predicated on my own experience, and on my own failings, it speaks now to a set of less self-absorbed questions: what constitutes training as an artist now, and what has determined its shape? What did my training mean, historically and ideologically, and what was it in? To forecast the ground where I look for answers, I sketch a narrative of education that, like my own, takes place in a college and university, stresses theorization and a verbal reenactment of the practices of art and the role of the artist, and is rewarded by a degree. Artists have not always been trained and credentialed on university campuses, or at art schools that envision themselves, not as ateliers

or academies, but as “universities for the arts” and “aesthetic think tanks.”¹⁰ The basic assumption of this project is that where and how artists are educated now—and, indeed, where art and its criticism take their places now—makes a difference. It is currently making the difference labeled postmodernism: criticism and text are important products in departments across the university. But it has also ensured that the practice of art in America is even more fully modern, that is to say, more specialized, more rationalized, and more historically conscious, endowed with an ever fuller and more critical sense of its position.

My interest in the sites and practices of art in the university is not only personal. In looking to the institutional formation of artists as a way to understand recent art, I am following Ernst Gombrich’s advice that a “study of the metaphysics of art should always be supplemented by an analysis of its practice, notably the practice of teaching.”¹¹ But what emerges throughout the book, I hope, is that teaching does not come without a metaphysics. It is not offered, nor is it heard, outside an ensemble of representations, values, and beliefs woven in and out of course assignments, studio critiques, and modeled roles; this ensemble might be called, after Gombrich, a metaphysics, but it is more precisely an ideology. The university too has its representations, its discourses of service and citizenship, of independent research and *Bildung*, and there are types and legends of the artist that it cannot easily include. The first assignment of this book is to examine how the practices of art and the identity of the artist are fashioned in the discourse of the American university, fitted to the image of the liberal arts college, the university-based professional school, and the research university in America. The artist, or artistic subjectivity, is the university’s problem and its project. From the turn of the century on, it has offered a series of new artistic subjects, written over and over in the likeness of the university professional.

The chapters that follow address not only the various images of the artist on campus but also the arguments those images advance for the place and position of art as a study in the university: its likeness to university scholarship and theoretical research. On campus, art cannot be a calling or a vocation. To be included among the disciplines, art must give up its definition as craft or technique, a fully trainable manual skill on the guild or apprenticeship model. At the same time, it cannot be purely inspirational or simply expressive: the work of genius is unteachable and self-expression is untutored. Moreover, art in the university must be different from a certain “common sense” of its problems

and procedures. Whatever has called a student to enter the department—the love of past art, an excitement about the process of creation, a desire for personal growth, the ability to draw—one of the primary lessons of the graduate program is that art can no longer be seen as a simple response to, or merely the repository of, those needs and excitements. Among the tasks of the university program in art is to separate its artists and the art world in which they will operate from “amateurs” or “Sunday painters,” as well as from a definition of the artist grounded in manual skill, tortured genius, or recreational pleasure. Moreover, art in the university must constitute itself as a department and a discipline, separate from public “lay” practices and equal to other studies on campus.

My project requires that I at least begin a history of professional training in the university, although I do not pretend to tell it fully or in strict order: there are over a hundred and eighty universities and degree-granting art schools now awarding the Master of Fine Arts in studio art. The first M.F.A.s were awarded in the mid 1920s at the Universities of Washington and Oregon; Yale and Syracuse, the nation’s oldest campus-based art schools, place their first M.F.A.s in the late 1920s.¹² But the Master of Fine Arts did not become widespread, nor did it become the terminal degree in studio art that it is now, until much later. At the beginning of the 1940s there were 60 graduate studio candidates enrolled at eleven institutions; in 1950–51 there were 320 candidates at thirty-two institutions. Many of these students worked toward advanced degrees with other names: the Master of Creative Arts, for example; or the Master of Painting; or, at Ohio State, a studio art Ph.D. Only in 1960 did the College Art Association approve the “M.F.A. rather than the Ph.D. as the terminal degree for graduate work in the studio area.”¹³ In that year 1,365 students were enrolled at seventy-two institutions. Thirty-one new M.F.A. programs opened in the 1960s, forty-four in the 1970s. In 1994–95 there were at least 7,100 students enrolled full-time for the M.F.A.; more than ten thousand degrees were awarded between 1990 and 1995.¹⁴ If these statistics suggest the unchallenged administrative success of the M.F.A., that victory has taken place in the midst of a continuing debate over the place of the artist and of graduate training in the university.

The chapters that follow examine the discourses that surrounded and shaped the history of studio training in the university that is abbreviated in these numbers. Recorded in assignments and lectures, in papers presented to College Art Association meetings, in essays in the *Col-*

lege Art Journal or *Arts in Society*, and in the mission statements of the new art departments, the debates over art and artist in the university and the calls for reappraisal and reform bear witness to a set of unresolved contradictions. These thread through the book as recurring motifs. I introduce them here with a quotation from Walter Gropius, who founded the most influential art school of the century, the Bauhaus, which—to broach one of the contradictions—although it changed the way artists were made, did not acknowledge itself as a school for artists. Making artists was a problem; indeed Gropius insisted it was impossible: art is not a “profession which can be mastered by study”; it “cannot be taught and cannot be learned,” even if the “manual dexterity” of the craftsman can and must be.¹⁵

Gropius’s insistence that art cannot be taught is repeated again and again by American educators through mid century, most often by artists teaching in increasingly well organized and articulated university art departments. By 1951 it was “widely held opinion” in the pages of the *College Art Journal* that “all one can teach are techniques, but that artistry is completely a matter of endowment and self-induced personal growth.”¹⁶ That same year, a teacher from Bard discounted the possibility of even much effective technical instruction: “All but the most elementary techniques are fundamentally not teachable.”¹⁷ So did the dean of Washington University’s degree-granting professional school: “There just isn’t enough to teach—enough that can be taught—to justify six years of an artist’s life.”¹⁸ The contradiction between the triumphal history of the M.F.A. and the doubts—or certainties—expressed by its teachers should be obvious, but the strongest and strangest effect of this argument might be its displacement of art, the first of a series of displacements at the same site. Gropius’s equation makes technique and dexterity necessary to the practice of art, perhaps, but it assumes, as well, an essential separation of art from technique: art is the name of that which escapes teaching; technique, as the name of what can be taught, is destined to become “merely” technique.

In insisting that art is not a profession, Gropius targeted both the teaching of the classical academy and the presumption that acquiring the skills of representational drawing and its accompaniments—perspective, chiaroscuro—was becoming an artist.¹⁹ He sought, like many late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century educators, to displace the figure and technique of academic drawing with the objects and rigorous skills of the craftsman. The artist isolated in his studio would be replaced by, or reborn as, a skilled craftsman; moreover, he would be liberated by a

new audience, a broad general public trained, in Gropius's words, in a "common language of visual communication . . . made valid through general education."²⁰ The express goal of most of the new art departments, and of their new methods, was the visual education of the nonartist. One of the corollaries of the equation that art cannot be taught is that everyone can be taught, if not manual techniques, then visual fundamentals. In the aftermath of the Bauhaus, in the idea of design and the visual arts—the assertion of a "language of vision," and of teaching as "training the eye to see"—the craft skills that Gropius had earlier forwarded as a cure for the academic isolation of the artist are themselves displaced, replaced by the field of vision and the rectangular canvas plotted in its image by the foundations and fundamentals of art.

Despite Gropius's protest but according to his logic, I would again claim art as a profession: the privileging of overarching principles over specific technical competencies—the grounding and guiding of art practice in visual fundamentals and the fashioning of individual works as experiments, researches, proofs—echoes the severing of articulated theory from manual labor that characterizes the process of professionalization. But if the themes I highlight in my educational story—university education, the theorization and formalization of knowledge, and the receipt of a degree—are the hallmarks of professionalization in the United States, nonetheless the label professional does not easily correspond to our image of the artist. The idea of the "artist born" runs long and deep, from Pliny's Lysippus, who had no teacher, to Dürer's Geertgen tot Sint Jans, who was "a painter in his mother's womb,"²¹ and even to Gropius's declaration that art is not a profession but, rather, the "grace of heaven."²²

The image of the artist that we have inherited from the nineteenth century—a driven, alienated, and silent individual—clashes directly with the idea of a university-trained professional artist. Indeed, that inward figure is a particular target of those who champion the artist on campus. For both critics and supporters, the university stands for the presence of language and the production of formal knowledge, and against the silence and inspiration of the born artist. I spend a good deal of time in the chapters that follow on language as it displaces both manual craft skills and traditional academic skills, the drawing of an earlier version of the professional artist. Whether the language of the university displaces technique—becomes the technique of a new art—or displaces art itself in the practice of criticism, I leave an open question.

The question posed most insistently in these pages is whether the artist is a professional and, following from it, what the struggle with that word—its acceptance or rejection—might mean for the fashioning of artists. Finally, I take the M.F.A. at its word that it is a professional degree. But even that clear answer poses other questions, raised by both recent training and recent art: What is that profession and (a corollary) where is it practiced? Is art a profession learned in the university and practiced outside it, like medicine or, closer to home, architecture? Or is it a profession in and of the university, an academic discipline, like history or mathematics or, perhaps, literary criticism? Still other questions follow from these, most obvious among them, how does that difference change what is taught and learned in school?

While the themes I have introduced with Gropius's insistence that art cannot be taught—the displacement of academic figure drawing and craft skills, the place of language and the questions of professionalization—cross the text from beginning to end in different guises, *Art Subjects* proceeds, sometimes roughly, chronologically, falling into three sections of two chapters each. The opening chapters stress the university's discourse on the problem of the artist, the language with which the products of the European academy and the avant-garde were caricatured. Chapter 1 charts the vision of a new college-educated American artist across the often conflicting demands of the undergraduate college and the high university, and it rehearses their shared disdain for the nineteenth-century European artist (or for a broadly drawn stereotype of that artist), the academy that trained him, and the studio that housed him. The university's artist, like the university-trained models he is offered, is always male; the excessive artist lampooned by educators is marked and marred by the "problem" of femininity. Chapter 2 examines that problem as it both covers for and reveals the structuring role played by women art educators and women's institutions—and by the women who, as students, continually outnumbered males in art schools and university departments—in shaping the practice of art in colleges and universities.

The middle chapters, too, turn around language, the "language of art," and the discourse that supported the Bauhaus and its foundation course. Chapter 3 addresses the difference written in the shift from the "fine arts" to the "visual arts," a change that embeds the work of art making in the eye and signals the displacement of the figure and the practices of representation. It traces that shift—and certain specific practices—from the nineteenth-century schools of design and the industrialization of artisanal training; the grids and type forms of schools of

design become the symbols of science in the Bauhaus and after. Chapter 4 links the “trained eye,” gridded by the fundamentals and grammars of art, to the “innocent eye.” The innocent eye is at once the intrinsic, necessary source of the fundamentals of vision taught as grammar, and a tabula rasa that must be trained and gridded. This chapter also begins in the nineteenth century, not with industrial education but in the kindergarten classroom, and continues through early-twentieth-century school art to general education in the postwar college.

The closing chapters once again focus on language; not a discourse on the artist, but of the artist. A central character through them is the artist who speaks as a teacher, a student, a visiting artist or lecturer. Chapter 5 argues that the rapid expansion of the New York art world’s influence after World War II was reciprocally related to the equally rapid expansion of university-based graduate art programs. It also looks closely at the teaching of the artists of the New York school, and the work of speech around the work of art, as its displacement or extension: forcing the student to find his or her place in that speech becomes the teaching of professional subjectivity. Chapter 6 returns to those debates of the 1950s and 1960s over art practice in the university that cast the tension between the artist and the university as a struggle between vision and language. That same struggle between vision and language has, of course, characterized the question of postmodernism in the visual arts, and the chapter maps the questions of the earlier debate with the answers provided by the theorization of postmodernism in the 1980s. Finally, Chapter 7 returns to the autobiography I started with, and to the question of professionalization, by asking one more time, “What does the M.F.A. certify?”

Tom Holert
**Art in the
Knowledge-
based Polis**

01/13

Lately, the concept of “knowledge production” has drawn new attention and prompted strong criticism within art discourse. One reason for the current conflictual status of this concept is the way it can be linked to the ideologies and practices of neoliberal educational policies. In an open letter entitled “To the Knowledge Producers,” a student from the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna has eloquently criticized the way education and knowledge are being “commodified, industrialized, economized and being made subject to free trade.”¹

In a similar fashion, critic Simon Sheikh has addressed the issue by stating that “the notion of knowledge production implies a certain placement of thinking, of ideas, within the present knowledge economy, i.e. the dematerialized production of current post-Fordist capitalism”; the repercussions of such a placement within art and art education can be described as an increase in “standardization,” “measurability,” and “the molding of artistic work into the formats of learning and research.”² Objections of this kind become even more pertinent when one considers the suggestive rhetoric of the major European art educational network ELIA (European League of Institutes of the Arts), which, in a strategy paper published in May 2008, linked “artistic research” to the EU policy of the generation of “‘New Knowledge’ in a Creative Europe.”³

I am particularly interested in how issues concerning the actual situations and meanings of art, artistic practice, and art production relate to questions touching on the particular kind of *knowledge* that can be produced within the artistic realm (or the artistic *field*, as Pierre Bourdieu prefers it) by the practitioners or actors who operate in its various places and spaces. The multifarious combinations of artists, teachers, students, critics, curators, editors, educators, funders, policymakers, technicians, historians, dealers, auctioneers, caterers, gallery assistants, and so on, embody specific skills and competences, highly unique ways and styles of knowing and operating in the flexibilized, networked sphere of production and consumption. This variety and diversity has to be taken into account in order for these epistemes to be *recognized* as such and to obtain at least a slim notion of what is at stake when one speaks of *knowledge* in relation to art – an idea that is, in the best of cases, more nuanced and differentiated than the usual accounts of this relation.

“Far from preventing knowledge, power produces it,” as Foucault famously wrote.⁴ Being *based on* knowledge, truth claims, and belief systems, power likewise *deploys* knowledge – it exerts power *through* knowledge, reproducing it

e-flux journal #3 — february 2009 Tom Holert
Art in the Knowledge-based Polis



Kim Howells (speaking) and Alex Roberts during a sit-in meeting. Photograph © John Rae



Buckminster Fuller speaking at Hornsey College of Art, June 29, 1968. Photograph © Steve Ehrlicher

and shaping it in accordance with its anonymous and distributed intentions. This is what articulates the conditions of its scope and depth. Foucault understood power and knowledge to be interdependent, naming this mutual inherence “power-knowledge.” Power not only supports, but also applies or exploits knowledge. There is no power relation without the constitution of a field of knowledge, and no knowledge that does not presuppose power relations. These relations therefore cannot be analyzed from the standpoint of a knowing subject. Subjects and objects of knowledge, as well as the modes of acquiring and distributing knowledges, are effects of the fundamental, deeply imbricated power/knowledge complex and its historical transformations.

1. The Hornsey Revolution

On May 28, 1968, students occupied Hornsey College of Art in the inner-suburban area of North London. The occupation originated in a dispute over control of the Student Union funds. However, “a planned programme of films and speakers expanded into a critique of all aspects of art education, the social role of art and the politics of design. It led to six weeks of intense debate, the production of more than seventy documents, a short-lived Movement for Rethinking Art and Design Education (MORADE), a three-day conference at the Roundhouse in Camden Town, an exhibition at the Institute of Contemporary Arts, prolonged confrontation with the local authority, and extensive representations to the Parliamentary Select Committee on Student Relations.”⁵

Art historian Lisa Tickner, who studied at Hornsey College of Art until 1967, has published a detailed account of these events and discussions forty years after the fact. As early as 1969, however (only a few months after the occupation of Hornsey College of Art had been brought to an end by pressure from the above-mentioned local authority in July 1968), Penguin released a book on what had already gained fame as “The Hornsey Affair,” edited by students and staff of the college. This paperback is a most interesting collection of writings and visuals produced during the weeks of occupation and sit-ins, discussions, lectures, and screenings. The book documents the traces and signs of a rare kind of enthusiasm within an art-educational environment that was not considered at the time to be the most prestigious in England. Located just below Highgate, it was described by one of the participants as being “squeezed into crumbling old schools and tottering sheds miles apart, making due with a society’s cast-offs like a colony of refugees.”⁶ One lecturer even called it “a collection of public

lavatories spread over North London.”⁷

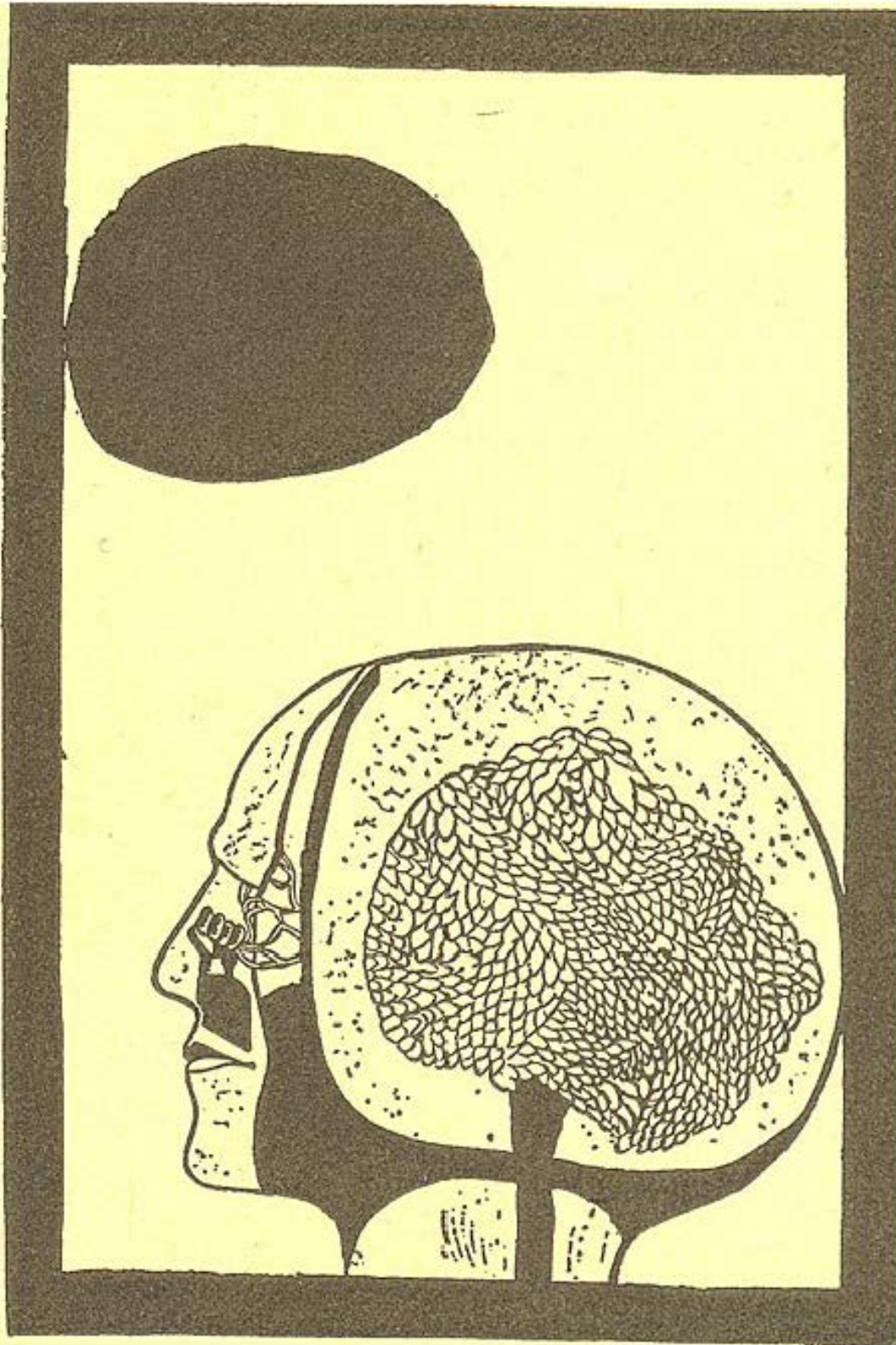
But this modernist nightmare of a school became the physical context of one of the most radical confrontations and revolutions of the existing system of art education to take place in the wake of the events of May ’68. Not only did dissenting students and staff gather to discuss new terms and models of a networked, self-empowering, and politically relevant education within the arts, the events and their media coverage also drew to Hornsey prominent members of the increasingly global alternative-utopian scene, such as Buckminster Fuller.

However, not only large-scale events were remembered. One student wrote of the smaller meetings and self-organized seminars:

It was in the small seminars of not more than twenty people that ideas could be thrashed out. Each person felt personally involved in the dialogue and felt the responsibility to respond vociferously to anything that was said. These discussions often went on to the small hours of the morning. If only such a situation were possible under ‘normal’ conditions. Never had people en masse participated so fully before. Never before had such energy been created within the college. People’s faces were alight with excitement, as they talked more than they had ever talked before. At least we had found something which was real to all of us. We were not, after all, the complacent receivers of an inadequate educational system. We were actively concerned about our education and we wanted to participate.⁸

From today’s standpoint, the discovery of talking as a medium of agency, exchange, and self-empowerment within an art school or the art world no longer seems to be a big deal, though it is still far from being conventional practice. I believe that the simple-sounding discovery of talking as a medium within the context of a larger, historical event such as the “Hornsey Affair” constitutes one of those underrated moments of knowledge production in the arts – one that I would like to shift towards the center of a manner of attention that may be (but should not necessarily be) labeled as “research.” With a twist of this otherwise over-determined term, I am seeking to tentatively address a mode of understanding and rendering the institutional, social, epistemological, and political contexts and conditions of knowledge being generated and disseminated within the arts and beyond.

The participants in the Hornsey revolution of forty years ago had very strong ideas about what it meant to be an artist or an art student,



Poster from Hornsey Occupation, 1968, artist anonymous

about what was actually at stake in being called a designer or a painter. They were convinced that knowledge and knowledge communication within art education contained enormous flaws that had to be swept away:

Only such sweeping reforms can solve the problems . . . In Hornsey language, this was described as the replacement of the old “linear” (specialized) structure by a new “network” (open, non-specialized) structure . . . It would give the kind of flexible training in generalized, basic creative design that is needed to adapt to rapidly changing circumstances – be a *real* training for work, in fact . . . the qualities needed for such a real training are no different from the ideal ones required to produce maximal individual development. In art and design, the choice between good workmen and geniuses is spurious. Any system worthy of being called “education,” any system worthy of the emerging new world, must be both at once. It must produce people whose work or ‘vocation’ is the creative, general transformation of the environment.⁹

To achieve this “worthy” system, it was considered necessary to do away with the “disastrous consequence” of the “split between practice and theory, between intellect and the non-intellectual sources of creativity.”¹⁰ Process held sway over output, and open-endedness and free organization of education permeated every aspect of the Hornsey debates.¹¹ It was also clear that one of the most important trends of the mid-1960s was the increasing interaction and interpenetration of creative disciplines. “Art and Design,” the Hornsey documents argued, “have become more unified, and moved towards the idea of total architecture of sensory experience”; England underwent “a total revolution of sensibility.”¹²

The consequences of the intersecting developments within the rebelling body of students and staff at Hornsey (and elsewhere), as well as the general changes within society and culture, had to become manifest in the very conceptual framework not only of art education, but of art discourse as such. Hence, there was a widespread recognition that in future all higher education in art and design should incorporate a permanent debate within itself. “Research,” in this sense, came to appear an indispensable element in education:

We regard it as absolutely basic that research should be an organic part of art and design education. No system devoted

to the fostering of creativity can function properly unless original work and thought are constantly going on within it, unless it remains on an opening frontier of development. As well as being on general problems of art and design (techniques, aesthetics, history, etc.) such research activity must also deal with the *educational process itself* . . . It must be the critical self-consciousness of the system, continuing permanently the work started here in the last weeks [June, July 1968]. Nothing condemns the old regime more radically than the minor, precarious part research played in it. It is intolerable that research should be seen as a luxury, or a rare privilege.¹³

Though this emphatic plea for “research” was written in a historical situation apparently much different than our own, it nonetheless helps us to apprehend our present situation. Many of the terms and categories have become increasingly prominent in the current debates on artistic research, albeit with widely differing intentions and agendas. It seems to be of the utmost importance to understand the genealogy of conflicts and commitments that have led to contemporary debates on art, knowledge, and science.

2. An Art Department as a Site of Research in a University System

Becoming institutionalized as an academic discipline at the interface of artistic and scientific practices at an increasing number of art universities throughout Europe, artistic research (sometimes synonymous with notions such as “practice-led research,” “practice-based research,” or “practice-as-research”) has various histories, some being rather short, others spanning centuries. The reasons for establishing programs and departments fostering the practice-research nexus are certainly manifold, and differ from one institutional setting to the next. When art schools are explicitly displaced into the university system to become sites of research, the demands and expectations of the scientific community and institutional sponsorship vis-à-vis the research outcomes of art schools change accordingly.

Entitled “Development and Research of the Arts,” a new program of the Austrian funding body FWF aims at generating the conceptual and material environment for interdisciplinary art-related research within, between, and beyond art universities. Thus far, however, the conceptual parameters of the FWF appear to be the subject of debate and potential revision and extension. One should be particularly careful of any hasty

05/13

e-flux journal #3 — february 2009 Tom Holert
Art in the Knowledge-based Polis



6137 McKeldin Library at the University of Maryland



Board Room at the African Leadership Academy

grafting of a conventional image of a “scientific” model or mode of research (whatever it may be) onto the institutional context of an art academy. This is not only a matter of epistemological concern, but of education policies and of political debate as well.

One only has to look at the history of the implementation of practice-led research in Art and Design in Great Britain. In 1992 the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) of the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) began to formulate criteria for so-called practice-based/practice-led research, particularly in the field of performance, design, and media. By 1996 the RAE had reached a point where it defined research as

original investigation undertaken in order to gain knowledge and understanding. It includes work of direct relevance to the needs of commerce and industry, as well as to the public and voluntary sectors; scholarship; the invention and generation of ideas, images, performances and artifacts including design, where these lead to new or substantially improved insights; and the use of existing knowledge in experimental development to produce new or substantially improved materials, devices, products and processes, including design and construction.¹⁴

The visual or fine arts of that time had yet to be included in this structure of validation, though in the following years various PhD programs in the UK and elsewhere did try to shift them to an output-oriented system of assessment close to those already established for design, media, and performance arts. “New or substantially improved insights” as well as “substantially improved materials, devices, products and processes” are the desired outcomes of research, and the Research Assessment Exercise could not be more explicit about the compulsory “direct relevance to the needs of commerce and industry.”

PARIP (Practice as Research in Performance) is a research group that supervises, assesses, and discusses the ongoing research in the new art and design environment initiated by the RAE and other organizations concerned with higher arts education in the UK. A 2002 report by Angela Piccini repeatedly focuses on the relation between research and (artistic) practice, and on the subjects and subjectivities, competencies, and knowledges produced and required by this development. After having interviewed various groups of researchers and students from the field of performance arts and studies, it became clear

that both concepts assume specific meanings and functions demanded by the configuration of their new settings. One of the groups Piccini interviewed pondered the consequences of the institutional speech act that transforms an *artistic practice* into an *artistic practice-as-research*:

Making the decision that something is practice as research imposes on the practitioner-researcher a set of protocols that fall into: 1) the point that the practitioner-researcher must necessarily have a set of separable, demonstrable, research findings that are abstractable, not simply locked into the experience of performing it; and 2) it has to be such an abstract, which is supplied with the piece of practice, which would set out the originality of the piece, set it in an appropriate context, and make it useful to the wider research community.¹⁵

It was further argued that “such protocols are not fixed,” that “they are institutionalized (therefore subject to critique and revision) and the practitioner-researcher communities must recognize that.” The report also expressed concern about “excluded practices, those that are not framed as research and are not addressing current academic trends and fashion,” and it asked, “what about practices that are dealing with cultures not represented within the academy?”¹⁶

When articulated in terms of such a regime of academic supervision, evaluation, and control (as it increasingly operates in the Euroscapes of art education), the reciprocal inflection of the terms “practice” and “research” appears rather obvious, though they are seldom explicated. The urge among institutions of art and design education to rush the process of laying down validating and legitimating criteria to purportedly render intelligible the quality of art and design’s “new knowledge” results in sometimes bizarre and ahistorical variations on the semantics of practice and research, knowledge and knowledge production.

For applications and project proposals to be steered through university research committees, they have to be upgraded and shaped in such a way that their claims to the originality of knowledge (and thus their academic legitimacy) become transparent, accountable, and justified. However, to “establish a workable consensus about the value and limits of practice as research both within and beyond the community of those directly involved” seems to be an almost irresolvable task.¹⁷ At the least, it *ought to* be a task that continues to be open-ended and

07/13

e-flux journal #3 — february 2009 Tom Holert
Art in the Knowledge-based Polis

inevitably unresolved.

The problem is, once you enter the academic power-knowledge system of accountability checks and evaluative supervision, you have either explicitly or implicitly accepted the parameters of this system. Though acceptance does not necessarily imply submission or surrender to these parameters, a fundamental acknowledgment of the ideological principles inscribed in them remains a prerequisite for any form of access, even if one copes with them, contests them, negotiates them, and revises them. Admittedly, it is somewhat contradictory to claim a critical stance with regard to the transformation of art education through an artistic research paradigm while simultaneously operating at the heart of that same system. I do not have a solution for this. Nonetheless, I venture that addressing the power relations that inform and produce the kind of institutional legitimacy/consecration sought by such research endeavors could go beyond mere lip service and be effective in changing the situation.

3. Art in the Knowledge-Based Polis

I would like to propose, with the support and drive of a group of colleagues working inside and outside the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, a research project bearing the title “Art in the Knowledge-based Polis.” The conceptual launch pad for this project is a far-reaching question about how art might be comprehended and described as a specific mode of generating and disseminating knowledge. How might it be possible to understand the very genealogy of significant changes that have taken place in the status, function, and articulation of the visual arts within contemporary globalizing societies?

With reference to the work of French sociologist Luc Boltanski, the term *polis* has been chosen deliberately to render the deep imbrications of both the material (urbanist-spatial, architectural, infrastructural, etc.) and immaterial (cognitive, psychic, social, aesthetic, cultural, legal, ethical, etc.) dimensions of urbanity.¹⁸ Moreover, the knowledge-based polis is a conflictual space of political contestation concerning the allocation, availability and exploitation of “knowledge” and “human capital.”

As a consequence, it is also a matter of investigating how the “knowledge spaces” within the visual arts and between the protagonists of the artistic field are organized and designed.¹⁹ What are the modes of exchange and encounter and what kind of communicative and thinking “styles” guide the flow of what kind of knowledge? How are artistic archives of the present and the recent past configured (technologically, cognition-wise, socially)? In

what ways has artistic production (in terms of the deployment and feeding of distributed knowledge networks in the age of “relational aesthetics”) changed, and what are the critical effects of such changes on the principle of individualized authorship?²⁰

The implications of this proposal are manifold, and they are certainly open to contestation. What, for instance, is the qualifier enabling it to neatly distinguish between artistic and non-artistic modes of knowledge production? Most likely, there isn’t one. From (neo-)avant-garde claims of bridging the gap between art and life (or those modernist claims which insist on the very maintenance of this gap) to issues of academic discipline in the age of the Bologna process and outcome-based education, it seems that the problem of the art/non-art dichotomy has been displaced. Today, this dichotomy seems largely to have devolved into a question of how to establish a discursive field capable of rendering an epistemological and ontological realm of artistic/studio practice as a scientifically valid research endeavor.

As art historian James Elkins puts it, concepts concerning the programmatic generation of “new knowledge” or “research” may indeed be “too diffuse and too distant from art practice to be much use.”²¹ Elkins may have a point here. His skepticism regarding the practice-based research paradigm in the fine arts derives from how institutions (i.e., university and funding bodies) measure research and PhD programs’ discursive value according to standards of scientific, disciplinary research. For Elkins, “words like research and knowledge should be confined to administrative documents, and kept out of serious literature.”²² In a manner most likely informed by science and technology studies and Bruno Latour, he argues instead that the focus should turn toward the “specificity of charcoal, digital video, the cluttered look of studio classrooms (so different from science labs, and yet so similar), the intricacies of Photoshop . . . the chaos of the foundry, the heat of under-ventilated computer labs.”²³ I think this point is well taken.

However useless the deployment of terms such as “research” and “knowledge” may seem, such uselessness is bound to a reading and deployment of the terms in a way that remains detached from the particular modes of discourse formation in art discourse itself. The moment one enters the archives of writing, criticism, interviews, syllabi, and other discursive articulations produced and distributed within the artistic field, the use of terms such as “research” and discussion about the politics and production of “knowledge” are revealed as fundamental to twentieth-century art – particularly since the

08/13

e-flux journal #3 — february 2009 Tom Holert
Art in the Knowledge-based Polis

inception of Conceptual Art in the late 1960s. After all, the modernists, neo- and post-avant-gardists aimed repeatedly at forms and protocols relating to academic and intellectual work – of research and publication, the iconography of the laboratory, scientific research, or think tanks.

Administrative, information, or service aesthetics, introduced at various moments of modernist and post-modernist art, emulated, mimicked, caricatured and endorsed the aesthetics and rhetoric of scientific communities. They created representations and methodologies for intellectual labor on and off-display, and founded migrating and flexible archives that aimed to transform the knowledge spaces of galleries and museums according to what were often feminist agendas.

Within the art world today, the discursive formats of the extended library-cum-seminar-cum-workshop-cum-symposium-cum-exhibition have become preeminent modes of address and forms of knowledge production. In a recent article in this journal on “the educational turn in curating,” theorist Irit Rogoff addresses the various “slippages that currently exist between notions of ‘knowledge production,’ ‘research,’ ‘education,’ ‘open-ended production,’ and ‘self-organized pedagogies,’” particularly as “each of

09/13

these approaches seem to have converged into a set of parameters for some renewed facet of production.” Rogoff continues, “Although quite different in their genesis, methodology, and protocols, it appears that some perceived proximity to ‘knowledge economies’ has rendered all of these terms part and parcel of a certain liberalizing shift within the world of contemporary art practices.” However, Rogoff is afraid that “these initiatives are in danger of being cut off from their original impetus and threaten to harden into a recognizable ‘style.’” As the art world “became the site of extensive talking,” which entailed certain new modes of gathering and increased access to knowledge, Rogoff rightly wonders whether “we put any value on what was actually being said.”²⁴

Thus, if James Elkins is questioning the possibility of shaping studio-based research and knowledge production into something that might receive “interest on the part of the wider university” and be acknowledged as a “position – and, finally, a discipline – that speaks to existing concerns,”²⁵ Rogoff seems to be far more interested in how alternative practices of communality and knowledge generation/distribution might provide an empowering capacity.



Art Classroom at The Calhoun School

4. Artistic Knowledge and Knowledge-based Economies

Since the neo-avant-gardes of the 1960s (at the latest), knowledge generation within the visual arts has expanded through the constitutive dissolution (or suspension) of its subjects and media. Meanwhile, however, its specific aesthetic dimension has continued to be marked by elusiveness and unavailability – by doing things, “of which we don’t know what they are” (Adorno).²⁶ A guiding hypothesis of the “Art in the Knowledge-based Polis” conceit is that this peculiar relationship between the availability and unavailability of artistic knowledge production assigns a central task to contemporary cultural theory, as such. This not only concerns issues of aesthetics and epistemology, but also its relation to other (allegedly non-artistic) spaces of knowledge production.

To advance this line of reasoning, the various reconfigurations of knowledge, its social function, and its distribution (reflected within late modernist and post-modernist epistemological discourse) have to be considered. From the invocation of the post-industrial information society²⁷ to the critique of modernist “metanarratives”²⁸ and the theorization of new epistemological paradigms such as reflexivity, transdisciplinarity, and heterogeneity,²⁹ the structure, status and shape of knowledge has changed significantly. Amongst other consequences, this has given rise to a number of specific innovative policies concerning knowledge (and its production) on national and transnational levels.³⁰

A point of tension that can become productive here is the traditional claim that artists almost constitutively work on the hind side of rationalist, explicated knowledge – in the realms of non-knowledge (or emergent knowledge). As a response to the prohibition and marginalization of certain other knowledges by the powers that be, the apparent incompatibility of non-knowledge with values and maxims of knowledge-based economies (efficiency, innovation, and transferability) may provide strategies for escaping such dominant regimes.

Michel Foucault’s epistemology offers a hardly noticed reasoning on artistic knowledge that appears to contradict this emphasis on non-knowledge, while simultaneously providing a methodological answer to the conundrum. In his 1969 *L’Archéologie du savoir* (*The Archaeology of Knowledge*), Foucault argues that the technical, material, formal, and conceptual decisions in painting are traversed by a “positivity of knowledge” which could be “named, uttered, and conceptualized” in a “discursive practice.”³¹ This

very “positivity of knowledge” (of the individual artwork, a specific artistic practice, or a mode of publication, communication, and display) should not be confused with a rationalist transparency of knowledge. This “discursive practice” might even refuse any such discursivity. Nonetheless, the works and practices do show a “positivity of knowledge” – the signature of a specific (and probably secret) knowledge.

At the heart of “Art in the Knowledge-based Polis” would be a recognition, description, and analysis of such “positivity” – as much as an exploration of the epistemological conditions in which such positivity appears. Just as the forms and discourses through which artists inform, equip, frame, and communicate their production have become manifold and dispersed, so has a new and continuously expanding field of research opened up as a result.

In many ways, the recent history of methodologies and modes of articulation in the visual arts is seen to be co-evolutionary with such developments as participate in the complex transition from an industrial to a postindustrial (or in terms of regulation theory: from a Fordist to a post-Fordist) regime. However, the relationship between art and society cannot be grasped in terms of a one-sided, sociological-type causality. Rather, the relationship must be seen as highly reciprocal and interdependent. Hence it is possible to claim that in those societies for which “knowledge” has been aligned with “property” and “labor” as a “steering mechanism,” the visual arts dwell in an isolated position.³² The pertinent notion of “immaterial labor” that originated in the vocabulary of *post-operaismo* (where it is supposed to embrace the entire field of “knowledge, information, communications, relations or even affects”) has become one of the most important sources of social and economic value production.³³ Hence, it is crucial for the visual arts and their various (producing, communicating, educating, etc.) actors to fit themselves into this reality, or oppose the very logic and constraints of its “cognitive capitalism.”³⁴

Amongst such approaches is an informal, ephemeral, and implicit “practical wisdom” that informs individual and collective habits, attitudes, and dialects. Moreover, the influence of feminist, queer, subaltern, or post-colonial epistemologies and “situated knowledges” is of great importance in relation to the visual arts.³⁵ Thus, for the purposes of inquiring into “Art in the Knowledge-based Polis,” the array of artistic articulations (both discursive and those deemed non-discursive) will be conceived as reaching far beyond common art/science and theory/practice dichotomies, while a careful analysis of the marks left on artistic epistemologies will be

pursued throughout.

The relocation and re-contextualization of the knowledge issue create room-for-play absent in traditional research designs. The socio-spatial dimension of knowledge production within the visual arts should constitute another essential interest. Urban spaces are understood today as infrastructures of networked, digital architectures of knowledge as much as material, built environments. The contemporary knowledge-based city is structured and managed by information technology and databases, and the new technologies of power and modes of governance they engender (from surveillance strategies to intellectual property regulations to the legal control of network access) demand an adapted set of methodologies and critical approaches. Much of the work to be done might deploy updated versions of regime analysis and Foucauldian governmentality studies (which would by no means exclude other approaches). This urban “network society” displays features of a complex “politics of knowledge” that cannot be limited to stately and corporate management of biotechnological knowledge, because it is also actively involved in sponsoring the so-called creative industries, universities, museums, etc.³⁶ By this token, it also becomes important to investigate and explore the social, political, and economic shares held by the visual arts in the knowledge-based polis.

What is needed is a multifocal, multidisciplinary perspective with a fresh look at the interactions and constitutive relations between knowledge and the visual arts. The specific, historically informed relations between artistic and scientific methodologies (their epistemologies, knowledge claims, and legitimating discourses) should play a major role. However, as deliberately distinguished from comparable research programs, research will be guided onto an expanded epistemic terrain on which “scientific” knowledge is no longer a privileged reference. Internal exchanges and communications between the social/cultural worlds of the visual arts and their transdisciplinary relationalities will be structured and shaped by those very forms of knowledge whose legitimacy and visibility are the subject of highly contested epistemological struggles.

An adequate research methodology has to be developed in order to allow the researchers positions on multiple social-material time-spaces of actual making and doing – positions that permit and actually encourage active involvement in the artistic processes in the stages of production *before* publication, exhibition, and critical reception. I would suggest

that notions of “research” motivated by a sense of political urgency and upheaval are of great importance here. As can be seen in what took place at Hornsey in 1968, positions that are criticized (and desired) as an economic and systemic privilege should be contested as well as (re)claimed. Otherwise, I am afraid that the implementation of practice-based research programs and PhDs in art universities will turn out to be just another bureaucratic maneuver to stabilize hegemonic power/knowledge constellations, disavowing the very potentialities and histories at the heart of notions of “practice” and “research.”

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This essay is a revised and abridged version of a talk given at the conference “Art/Knowledge. Between Epistemology and Production Aesthetics” at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, November 11, 2008. A Chinese translation of this text has been published in issue #4 of *Contemporary Art & Investment*..

11/13

e-flux journal #3 — february 2009 Tom Holert
Art in the Knowledge-based Polis

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12/13

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Good Afternoon. Indeed, the title of my lecture became "The Black Mountain Syndrome." For more than a decade if not already for two decades education has been the talk of the town that is called the arts world. We have been turning around the so-called educational turn in so many ways that we got dizzy and our sight got blurred and that was, to some extent exactly what we wanted. Museums became academies and vice versa. Some of us have stressed the potentiality of museums as sites of learning while others have argued for academies as sites of research and while it is still possible to reach respectively appreciate all these our endeavors as most welcome joyful luring of boundaries which were simply waiting to be deconstructed. There was also another darker side too. In fact, what happened was also that both museums and academies as publicly funded institutions were all standing in the threatening shadow of an ideological monster called neoliberalism. From the start, the introduction to the book that accompanied the 2006 academy project stated it very clearly.

"The initial impetus for the exhibitions and projects that came to form academy was a dissatisfaction with the present political situation in which both educational academies and art institutions find themselves. Driven by the neoliberal economic credo Western European governments are increasingly instrumentalizing public sector support of art rejecting its speculative potential for more secure and measurable outcomes. Changes that have been brought about in both fields are designed to account for our activities in more direct ways compressing the space for speculation and imaginative rethinking of the current system and its representation."

With a sense of premonition of upcoming existential threats museums and academies were also saying that they were doing or could do or wanted to do each other's job whereas museums were traditionally research institutions art academies began to claim research and whereas art academies have been the most traditional of learning institutions museums now consider themselves as learning institutions par excellence/ To put it in another way through their respective representatives museums and academies were, in fact, boasting about width of their respective output while at the same time rightly rejecting any measurement of it. Thus, unwillingly and/or unknowingly we were also delivering the message that just in case one of us had to be sacrificed on the altar of austerity, the other could continue to do the job. On several occasions, I was one of those representatives and therefore I absolutely plead guilty. Indeed, the title of my 2009 e-flux essay stated the Academy is back. The art world's ugly duck had become attractive again, more attractive maybe than the museums, art spaces, galleries and art fairs.

In 2010 Tirdad Zolghadr in his contribution to the volume curating and the educational turn put it very succinctly and laconically when he wrote and I quote, "For many in the art field, it is the

Academy which offers the width of adventure and for good reason. The commercial sector has proven too cunning to outsmart but also too volatile to be reliable. While the curatorial alternative clever group shows of various sizes is looking pretty tired to say the least. Hence Black Mountain College." And indeed, every now and then for the past 10 years or is it already 20 people in the arts world having taken the said educational turn would whisper the words Black Mountain mostly in a reverential tone as if it were one of only very few historical examples of an artistic Edutopia that was ever effectively realized.

In this talk, I would like to have a closer look not so much at the ever-growing Black Mountain College academic historical scholarship which is impressive to say the least but rather at a few moments where artists, curators, critics in the arts world seem to be talking about Black Mountain College and the discourse that this contemporary art store (?) produced. 10 years ago, the announcement of an exciting biennial project explicitly referred to Black Mountain College as historical precedent.

On April 26, 2005, the International Foundation Manifesta in Amsterdam had invited to a joint press conference with the Nicosia Municipality at Famagusta Gate announcing the concept of the Manifesto Biennial 6 at Nicosia, Cyprus in the following terms which I will quote extensively. So, a long quote from a press release manifesto." The complexity of Cyprus and Nicosia a culturally and politically divided site geographically isolated and located closer to The Middle East and to Europe creates a unique opportunity to revisit the original mandate of Manifesta and to rethink its form and functions in so doing activating manifestos capacity to be catalysts for energizing cultural production, institutions and discourse in the region. One historical precedent for such a catalyst is from the American continent where for a short time a small town in North Carolina a region almost completely isolated from the advanced cultural practices and discourse in the 1930s became a hub of American culture production. This amazing institution was the Black Mountain College founded in 1933. Crucial to its success was the core group of some of the most interesting artists, writers and thinkers of this period who resided, worked and taught there.

Combining communal life living with an informal class structure Black Mountain created an environment conducive to the interdisciplinary work that revolutionized the Arts and Sciences of its time in America and beyond. As their project from Manifesta 6 the curatorial team of Mai Abu ElDahab, Anton Vidokle and Florian Waldvogel intends to use the capital network and infrastructure of Manifesta along with the local resources to start an experimental art school. The school bi-communal and international in composition will be formed around the site-specific exhibition materialized through short and long term residency programs resulting in a production of a number of new works and events in Nicosia and may have gone on to become a permanent institution," end long quote. Now, it only takes a moment before one grasps the awkward character of the comparison in which Black Mountain College for the first time as far as I could see entered the scene of the curatorial discourse under scrutiny here. One could easily imagine a more diplomatic press release. So, here is an International Foundation in the global city of Amsterdam announcing that it's next bi-annual will travel to the periphery of Europe, namely Cyprus also known as the North Carolina of Europe in order to reenact Black Mountain College which was also an initiative established in a region, "almost completely isolated from the advanced culture

practices and discourse." Now this may not be exactly what is said and still, it is exactly what is said. Not only statements are made on the level of cultural connectedness of Cyprus and North Carolina for that matter that may be unfair as they resonate and willingly for sure with a kind of hillbilly stereotyping that Appalachians are well known to have suffered from. By comparing its own initiative to Black Mountain College, the International Foundation Manifesta also minimizes the infrastructural challenge that Black Mountain College was while at the same time exaggerating the scale of its own challenges whereas the Manifesta Art School would have been able to rely on existing cultural infrastructures of a capital city with 300,000 inhabitants, Black Mountain College during its first years was entirely relying on the summer camp infrastructure in the Appalachian Mountains miles away from the nearest city. Indeed, Black Mountain College lacked the more or less dense infrastructural surroundings of which art schools today like to pride themselves of and therefore had to be everything itself not only school but also home, not only workshop but also restaurant, bar and club. There is no way that Manifesta Art School in Nicosia also intended to organize everything that Black Mountain College had to organize for itself quite simply because that wouldn't have been necessary as the press release makes abundantly clear.

In their book "Notes for an Art School" published in early 2006 curators Mai Abu ElDahab, Florian Waldvogel and Anton Vidokle would elaborate on the organizational concept of the Manifesto Biennial 6 that should have taken place at Nicosia if it wouldn't have been canceled due to conflict with the local authorities which I will not discuss here as this has already been done in detail by all the people involved.

Now, in his text "School as Exhibition in a Divided City" his individual contribution to the book Anton Vidokle mentions Black Mountain College without going into any detail. Vidokle's curatorial argument for the concept of Manifesta Biennial 6 at Nicosia runs somewhat like follows. Art nowadays is expected to intervene in society. An exhibition doesn't seem to be the best way to intervene. A much better way to intervene in society is to conceive of an exhibition as a school hence the Manifesta Biennial 6 in Nicosia will be a school like Black Mountain College. However, instead of naming some of Black Mountains supposedly inspiring characteristics that could clarify the reasons for this particular historical comparison Vidokle supplements his essay with a full-length quotation of George Maciunas prospectus for New Marlboro Center for Arts from 1968-69 a center that had never been realized however the interest of Mattoon its prospectus may lie in its first sentence where Maciunas refers to Bauhaus and Black Mountain and I quote from Maciunas, "The center is being created in recognition of the great contribution made by Bauhaus and Black Mountain as a think-tank and training ground for the avant-garde."

So, here is another art school project conceived by the founder of Fluxus who also referred to Black Mountain which is referred to by Anton Vidokle co-founder of e-flux as an example for the Manifesta Art School while at that moment still unaware that Manifests Art School like Maciunas's project would not be realized either. Both in Maciunas's and Vidokles text Black Mountain seems to have acquired the status of a myth as if it were next to Bauhaus, the one and only Edutopia realized. But then again Anton Vidokle adds a second supplement to his text in which he with a little help from his friends dresses up what is called an incomplete chronology of experimental art schools mentioning only briefly Black Mountain College as one of many. The list is presented as

an ongoing research project, but it basically limits itself to the names of what seemed to be considered for reasons that remain indefinite as experimental art schools.

Now, the list is quite heterogeneous and at times surprising to say the least. It begins with the Paris École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts founded in 1671 and even mentions the Berlin Free University founded in 1945 as an experimental art school I guess. It mentions Vkhutemas founded in Moscow in 1920 by decree of Lenin's Soviet government but also the École Temporaire by Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster, Phillipa Parreno and Pierre. Huyghe, a project from 1998/1999. Among all the so-called experimental art schools a few well-established educational institutions are mentioned such as the Munich Academy for Film and Television founded in 1967, the Vienna University of Applied Arts founded in 1867 as well as Bart College. But the list mainly mentions many short-lived projects that named themselves school, the traces of which today 10 years later are often very difficult to be found.

At the very end of the list in the book published in 2006 there is a Cypriot email address most likely no longer active on which one could contact Anton if one would have had any further suggestions. And further suggestions there are although Anton certainly knows them all one of them being notably United Nations Plaza, a project which Anton Vidokle realized in a building later called The Building at Platz der Vereinten Nationen here in Berlin a project which up to a certain point attempted to realize in Berlin in 2006/2007 what Vidokle et al had wanted to realize in Nicosia. After the cancellation of the Manifesta Biennial 6 in June 2006 however, it would be both Bauhaus and Black Mountain College that would continue to figure prominently in the press releases explaining what happened and what the Biennial had wanted to achieve. In the letter from former curators of Manifesta 6 released on June 6, 2006, the curatorial trio stated, "Manifesta 6 was planned to take the form of a temporary art school. The Manifesto 6 school comprised of three departments revolving around diverse cultural issues and debates and each proposing a different structural model for art education. The proposed Manifesto 6 school is a postgraduate transdisciplinary program for approximately 90 participants from many parts of the world lasting about 12 weeks. Inspired by such historical examples as Black Mountain College and the Bauhaus the school would be a meeting ground for culture producers in the region and beyond and a platform for discussion and production."

Now, as Black Mountain College has enjoyed quite some name-dropping in the educational curatorial rhetoric over the past few years as an exemplary experimental art school whereas its supposed characteristics were most often left unmentioned it makes sense to ask the question what exactly one was referring to if referring to Black Mountain College. In curatorial discourse not explaining exactly what the name refers to but apparently knowing exactly what one wants to evoke by mentioning this name it seems that the name has been used as a short for a characteristic or a cluster of characteristics of an art school. This hypothesis led me to try to describe what Black Mountain conceptually seems to be according to those who refer to it not explaining exactly what it was. What is the imaginary concept of Black Mountain present in today's curatorial rhetoric's of the "educatoriat" as Dieter Roelstraete has called it. Indeed, the educational complex today haven't taken the educational turn seems to be a Black Mountain complex. If we define a complex as a

correlation of concepts what then are the concepts that figure prominently in the rhetoric of those curators who took the educational turn.

I believe that a curatorial rhetoric can be diagnosed as pertaining to the Black Mountain complex if it refers to the following three key concepts as crucial in its artistic endeavors interdisciplinarity, experiment and self-organization. What I find quite puzzling in said curatorial rhetoric is that in general according to the discourses that are immersed with it more or less established educational art institutions don't seem to qualify as interdisciplinary, experimental, self-organized institutions. There's no coincidence that Vidokles chronology of experimental art schools through the ages mentions only few established art schools and not necessarily those who are generally considered as very interdisciplinary and experimental. If we are to believe the educational curatorial rhetoric at hand self-organized, interdisciplinary, experimental artistic institutions of learning almost don't seem to exist. The logical aim then of the artistic endeavors of the curator turned educational becomes to found such an institution whereas with respect to other art institutions such as biennials, art fairs, etc. the educator seems content to say that what one should try to make the best of it rather than to found another biennial or another art fair. The academic institution seems by definition to be a lost institution where nothing can be done. Although established educational institutions certainly do not have the monopoly of interdisciplinarity and experiment little research needs to be done in order to discover established art institutions dedicated to interdisciplinarity and experiment. One could even claim that in a very specific sense many of them are self-organized by artists.

Indeed, let's have a look first at a concept of self-organization. The curatorial stress on the need for self-organization of experimental art schools or rather the need for art schools in order for them to be experimental, to be self-organized misses the point that many more or less established academies today are still characterized by the principle of self-organization meaning that artists are leading many academies in the same vein as many scientists are leading universities. Of course, this principle of *Selbstverwaltung* as it is called in German is under extreme pressure. The threat that managers will overtake the organization of academies and universities constitutes a real danger if it is not as in many countries already a depressing reality. Nevertheless, the principle of *Selbstverwaltung* needs to be defended wherever it still exists before we do as if it never existed at all and would be a good idea.

Although I felt very sorry for the cancellation of the Manifesta Biennial 6 and signed a petition against cancellation like many others and while it is easy to understand how terrible this was for the three colleagues, friends, comrades who had put so many efforts in its preparations one needs to say that the simple fact that the three curators were dismissed by the organization that had formally hired them shows that geologically speaking the Manifesta Art School would never have been a self-organized school whatever its curatorial rhetoric had suggested. The three curators were employees of an organization under heavy political control they weren't self-organized. If they would have been nobody would have been able to fire them or at least it wouldn't have been that easy. In this sense the Manifesta Art School would have been not only literally thousands of miles away from Black Mountain as it lacked a defining Black Mountain characteristic of self-organization. Moreover, if one really wanted to self-organize an experimental art school on

Cypress it should certainly have been possible to create an experimental art school in somebody's house there, after the example of some of the schools in one's own list. You don't need the state for self-organization do you? More often than not one gets the impression that curators who call themselves self-organized want to be able to do so and get public funding for everything they want to organize themselves.

Apparently the state should understand how important it is to fund organizations that claim that the state is perfectly useless. The paradox of the claim of self-organized artists initiatives as different from or opposed to state-subsidized institutions is that most of them through project funding rely on some form of state's intervention. Those of these initiatives which are aware of this paradox and want to prevent it become inescapably dependent on private capital either their own or that of other sponsors. As we know Black Mountain College as a thoroughly self-organized school would never have been possible without the donations of private sponsors and without the particular social networks that some of the people involved had in order to be able to acquire these private donations in the first place. Only in an indirect way Black Mountain College was dependent on public support through the grants that some students got in order to study there.

Although it is always delicate to talk about money in the arts world with so many precarious workers having too little of it while a happy few colleagues are making an obscene amount I believe one should nevertheless ask oneself the question whether today's Black Mountain frenzy of a certain curatorial discourse in these neoliberal times among many things also not only, but also signals a resignation towards capitalist luck as the only way out of the new liberally inspired suffocating state control of research output, learning outcomes in audience numbers as the counterproductive price to be paid for state funding. At least this seems a plausible reading of Anton Vidokles position when he states describing the circumstances of its 2006/2007 United Nations Plaza initiative in Berlin and I quote Vidokle. "I have found it increasingly important to find ways of doing things that do not involve complete reliance on existing institutions for audiences, funding or legitimacy. It is not at all coincidental that many of the most important art schools such as the Bauhaus and Black Mountain College were self-organized by groups of artists. Sometimes I feel that it's almost impossible to realize truly innovative ideas within a framework of already established institutions and networks."

The freedom that Black Mountain College seemed to enjoy in organizing itself was also due to the origin of most of its capital. Thus, it was possible at least it seems to set its own rules and not the rules that publicly funded educational institutions have to set up in order to be accredited and subsidized as educational institutions. Now the founding history of Bauhaus, however, is an entirely different one as Staatliches Bauhaus in Weimar founded in 1919, it was the result of a political decision to merge two former public schools, Großherzoglich-Sächsische Kunstschule Weimar and the Großherzoglich-Sächsische Kunstgewerbeschule Weimar and was funded by the Thuringian Regional Government in the beginning. Bauhaus didn't start as a privately funded institution. Quite to the contrary it represents the European model of a state subsidized school. When Vidokle names Bauhaus and Black Mountain in the same breath as two schools that were self-organized by artists he simply conflates the two opposing funding models of Education thereby suggesting that both schools were so brilliant because they were privately funded. The

question therefore is whether along with the reenactments and exhibitions of Black Mountain College throughout Europe in which Black Mountain College is celebrated we also at least implicitly celebrate the particular economic model that is one of Black Mountain College without which Black Mountain College would not have been what it became.

In a worst-case scenario all these initiatives of which it is easy to see that they were and are intentionally all about celebrating the joy of experimentation and interdisciplinarity are leading this as unintentionally to a political experiment most of these initiatives very likely would never willingly want to endorse and that is the total privatization of education in Europe. Whenever I have darker thoughts and luckily I do not only have darker thoughts but whenever I have darker thoughts, Black Mountain College the catalyst from the American continent becomes a Trojan horse imposing capitalism's laws on the organization of education in Europe. We know that in the end it didn't work for Black Mountain College so why would it work for us. What else could Vidokle mean when he says that he tries not to be dependent on existing institutions if not that he resigned to be dependent on somebody's private capital. The alternative foreign existence depending on the goodwill of benefactors would be that the state subsidizes schools as long as they experiment and thereby shows as much trust in the diverse ways schools want to organize themselves as the private benefactors of black mountain college did. Instead of museums and schools being harassed by the question whether they achieve certain numbers of students, of visitors, of publications etc. the state should be harassed by the question whether it shows enough trust where this trust could be benchmarked, as they call it, with a historical example of good practice in trust shown by the benefactors of Black Mountain College.

So, therefore we may expect the state to trust its museums, its theatres, its schools, its universities more than it does today. In doing so the actual cost of an impressive bureaucratic apparatus of control could flow into experimentation and interdisciplinary production. Let's have a very brief look now at the claims of interdisciplinarity and experiment as desired characteristics of an art school which it would only be possible to realize in a newly founded self-organized school. Now it is quite touching that it is believed that interdisciplinarity as the aim of an experimental art school still constitutes a progressive endeavor whereas every institution of higher education today claims to be interdisciplinary and research-based. It may be very tempting to think of Black Mountain and Bologna as two complete opposites however as a matter of fact it could be argued that Bologna is in favor of the three basic concepts that define the Black Mountain complex.

Therefore, the problem with Bologna is not that it opposes interdisciplinarity, experiment and self-organization because I believe it doesn't. However, what it does is that it supplements these three concepts with a fourth concept and that is quality control. In doing so it supposes that as an institution you cannot simply put that you are in favor of interdisciplinarity, experiment, and self-organization. You have to develop methods and protocols of quality control. In other words, one could be tempted to risk the exaggerated formula that Bologna equals Black Mountain plus Quality Control. The formula shows where the weakness of Bologna lies. A system of quality control as systems of quality control have become extremely formatted and procedural undertakings which are often partly or wholly outsourced to specialized agencies. They tend to kill that of which they are supposed to control the quality. It is by adding quality control to Black Mountain that Bologna

kills Black Mountain thus it kills experimentation because as a researcher you are supposed to know what your research will lead to before you even have started your research.

The reason why you should know upfront what you're going to discover is that otherwise, the system of quality control cannot control whether you reach your goals. Secondly, it kills interdisciplinarity because it is much easier to establish clear, quantifiable results within a discipline than in an interdisciplinary space and thirdly it kills self-organization because nobody wants to organize if managers and their manuals are telling us how it is that one should be self-organized. Within Bologna self-organization has become the freedom to control oneself according to measures with which one doesn't agree.

Now, the many references to Black Mountain College in the European arts worlds curatorial discourses how suggestive and stable and even imaginary they may be signal a profound discontent with the inherent tendency of the Bologna process to become a suffocating bureaucratic instrument of control that kills experiment, interdisciplinarity and self-government while at the same time giving lip services to these main three characteristics of what I have been calling the Black Mountain complex. In a sense it seems as if we, representatives of European academies are so traumatized by the bureaucratic processes in which we are drawn that we have begun to think of Black Mountain College as the best school we have never been to. As such, we seem to suffer from the Black Mountain syndrome which seems to be the core of our educational complex. The question is whether we still have the energy and the courage to turn the Bologna process in a different direction to climb another mountain hoping to find our Lake Eden. Whenever I have cheerful thoughts I believe that a new European deal on education which we could call the Black Mountain Process is possible.

Far from Being a Temple to Rationality, the Bauhaus Was a “Cauldron of Perversions”

Architectural historian Beatriz Colomina explores how the Bauhaus harbored deeply transgressive ideas and pedagogies.

by [Beatriz Colomina](https://www.metropolismag.com/author/beatriz_colomina/) (https://www.metropolismag.com/author/beatriz_colomina/)

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Disappearing Figure in a Chair by Marcel Breuer, c. 1932.

© Thomas Breuer/Courtesy Peter McMahon; Barry Bergdoll and Leah Dickerman, pp. 47, *Bauhaus 1919-1933: Workshops for Modernity*, The Museum of Modern Art, 2009

*Editor's Note: This article by Princeton University School of Architecture professor [Beatriz Colomina](https://soa.princeton.edu/content/beatriz-colomina) (<https://soa.princeton.edu/content/beatriz-colomina>) builds off research on the Bauhaus (<https://www.metropolismag.com/tag/bauhaus/>) she and her students began in Spring 2018, which included a catalog, workshop, and a performance produced for the *Floating University* (<https://www.metropolismag.com/architecture/floating-university-berlin-raumlabor/>) in Berlin that summer.*

Despite its surface rhetoric of rationality, clarity and efficiency, and smooth surfaces, the Bauhaus was never straightforward. Bauhausers were engaged with everything that escapes rationality: sexuality, violence, esoteric philosophies, occultism, disease, the psyche, pharmacology, extraterrestrial life, artificial intelligence, chance, the primitive, the fetish, the animal, plants, etc. The Bauhaus was in fact a veritable cauldron of perversions.

Modern architecture is usually understood as having a normalizing function, establishing patterns that are stable, predictable, and to some extent standardized. The idea of architecture is intimately associated with the idea of the normal—perhaps it even sees itself as the caretaker of the normal. But the normal is not normal. It is a construction. There is a hidden tradition in architecture of the transgressive, work that crosses the lines of the normal, complicating these lines, threatening the limit.

Take [Le Corbusier](https://www.metropolismag.com/tag/le-corbusier/) (https://www.metropolismag.com/tag/le-corbusier/), for example, arguably the single most influential architect of the 20th century. He was deeply into the occult, esoteric philosophies, sexual complexities, cross-dressing, scatology; he was also obsessed with the toilet, disease, nudism, body building, the animal, and the other. For less well-known figures like [Carlo Mollino](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carlo_Mollino) (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carlo_Mollino), architecture and design were [literally a product of perversion](http://www.artnet.com/artists/carlo-mollino/) (http://www.artnet.com/artists/carlo-mollino/), so much so he is not easily placed in any traditional account of Modern architecture. Historians don't know how to position him. So if you take these two extremes—Le Corbusier is a seemingly straight architect who is secretly twisted, and Mollino a seemingly twisted architect that is secretly at the center of Modern architecture—the question is whether so-called perversions are twists of architecture or its very engine.

Perversion comes from the Latin *pervertere*, “to turn away,” that is, turning away from normality. There is a relationship between the personal, often extreme, pathologies of Modern architecture and the call for a new normal.

If there is no such a thing as Modern architecture without transgression, what is remarkable about the Bauhaus, and perhaps the secret of its success, is the sheer density of transgressions of every kind. It was like a laboratory for inventing and intensifying perversions as a kind of pedagogical strategy. I am reclaiming here the terms “perversion” from its pejorative use to a positive one, in the same way that the label “queer” was reclaimed in the 1980s by gay activists. In fact, inspired by my students at Princeton, I would like to make a call for a queering not just of the Bauhaus but of architectural history, starting with the way we read Modern architecture—what we see or choose not to see.

Purging



Paul Citroen: Mazdaznan Cures, 1922.

In his preparatory course at the Bauhaus, Johannes Itten introduced a regime of purging, following the principles of [Mazdaznan religion](http://www.bauhaus-imaginista.org/articles/2210/a-mystic-milieu) (<http://www.bauhaus-imaginista.org/articles/2210/a-mystic-milieu>). The idea was to rid the body of “gross matter” through enemas; fasting for three weeks; eating a diet of garlic-based mush; and using machines for pricking the skin. As Paul Citroen, one of the students, put it: “There was, among other things, a little needle machine with which we were to puncture our skins. Then the body would be rubbed with the same sharp oil which had served as a laxative. A few days later all the pinpoints would break out in scabs and pustules—the oil had drawn the wastes and impurities of the deeper skin layers to the surface. Now we were ready to be bandaged, but we must work hard, sweat, and then, with continued fasting, the ulcerations would dry out.”

One of the intended effects of Itten’s regime was a trance-like delirium offering access to spiritual domain—reinforced by deep breathing and concentration exercises ran by Gertrud Grunow. Many of the masters, like Paul Klee and Wassily Kandinsky, were into different forms of occultism and spirituality. Esoteric logic was not esoteric within the school. It was a kind of science. There was even a genre of spirit photography: Bauhaus objects were suspended in a cloud of ghosts (see top image).

Gender Ambiguity



Portrait of Marcel Breuer as girl with a magnolia. On the occasion of Walter Gropius’s birthday, May 18, 1924. Photomontage.

Courtesy Elizabeth Otto, pp. 192, Chapter 9 of *Designing Men: New Visions of Masculinity in the Photomontages of Herbert Bayer, Marcel Breuer, and László Moholy-Nagy*, Routledge, 2013

There was continuous experimentation with the performance of gender at the Bauhaus. Gender inversion was the norm. Famously, [women performed as men](https://www.metropolismag.com/design/bauhaus-women-global-perspective/) (<https://www.metropolismag.com/design/bauhaus-women-global-perspective/>). Less famously, men cross-dressed, putting on lipstick and tights. Marcel Breuer sent a tantalizing card to Walter Gropius for his 41st birthday party including a double image of himself as a woman with the words: “My dear Walter, keep our sweet secret. Eternally and truly yours.”

Hair



"Haircuts at the Bauhaus"

Courtesy John Cooper

The Bauhaus is unthinkable without the haircuts, which were used to embrace gender ambiguity, express modernity, and convey an otherworldliness. The Bauhaus student had to look like a Bauhaus student, which meant visualizing transgression (see bottom image). One can do a catalog of all the Bauhaus haircuts and their evolution, including completely shaving your head as Itten urged his followers.

Leather



Ilse Fehling and Nicol Wassilieff, 1927.

Photograph by Umbo (Otto Umbehr). © 2019 Phyllis Umbehr/Galerie Kicken Berlin / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn / Photo: Mercedes Valdivieso, pp. 95, *La Bauhaus de festa*, Fundació la Caixa, 2005

The leather of Luftwaffe jackets used by fighter pilots and Berlin's S&M and lesbian clubs made its way into the Bauhaus as a symbol of cultural rebellion and sensuality in clothes, both male and female. Chairs bound like corsets and leather straps lying around inexplicably in photographs suggest something illicit.

Eroticism



Teachers and students at the beach in between Elbe and Mulde, first dancer: Xanti Schawinsky. 1928/1929.

Courtesy Bauhaus-Archiv Berlin

For all the official commitment to artistic experimentation on the way towards sober industrial design—there is a continuous erotic charge. The beach, for example, was never simply the beach. It was yet another space of transgression and intimacy between teachers, between teacher and student, and within genders. Naked bodies smoldering in the sun are tenderly photographed. Fourteen scantily clad men happily hold each other intimately while performing a kind of feminized cabaret, complete with delicately raised legs and a parasol.

The Affairs



Lotte Beese and Helmut Schulze at the design table at the Bauhaus, c. 1928.

Courtesy Bauhaus-Archiv Berlin

Lotte Beese, later the chief architect in charge of the massive reconstruction of bombed-out Rotterdam after the war, was the first female Bauhaus student allowed in the architecture workshop started by Hannes Meyer in 1927. Meyer had an affair with Beese while he was married with children. When he became director, Beese was asked to leave the Bauhaus because it wouldn't look good. Walter Gropius had a sexual relationship with a student who was a war widow while he was still married to Alma Mahler and with a mistress, Lily Hildebrandt.

Sweatshop



Marianne Gugg carpet weaving at Bauhaus Weimar. 1925.

Photograph by Walter Hege. © 2019 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn; Courtesy Bauhaus-Archiv Berlin

After the preliminary course, all women were sent to the weaving workshop whether they liked it or not. Since weaving made the greatest profits (<https://www.metropolis-mag.com/design/early-bauhaus-craft-history/>) for the Bauhaus, we could ask whether it was a workshop or a sweatshop. Women sustained the Bauhaus but were diminished within it. It was a transgressive school in many ways, but not in gender politics (<https://www.metropolismag.com/design/bauhausmadels-book-taschen-bauhaus-women/>). Gropius even theorized his discrimination in his inaugural lecture. The artistic impulse was that of a man who has experienced the horror of war rather than the “dearest ladies” who remained at home: “...the awakening of the whole man through trauma, lack, terror, hard life experience of love leads to authentic artistic expression. Dearest ladies, I do not underestimate the human achievement of those who remained at home during the war, but I believe that the lived experience of death to be all-powerful.”

Colomina, Beatriz. 2019. *The Perversions of the Bauhaus*. HKW Berlin.

<https://hkw.de/en/app/mediathek/audio/69676>. 00:25:30. Unauthorized Transcript.

Thank you very much for inviting me to speak here, for inviting us. Actually, this is a double lecture with Mark Wigley, and I would like to start by expanding the traditional understanding of the Bauhaus, to include the full kaleidoscope of his obsessions from the depth of the unconscious to outer space. The Bauhaus in fact was never straight forward; he was never a straight at all, as you will see, despite the surface rhetoric of rationality, clarity, efficiency, smooth surfaces, etc, Bauhauslers were engaged with everything that escape rationality, sexuality, violence, esoteric philosophies, occultism, diseases, the psychopharmacology, extraterrestrial life, artificial intelligence, chance, the primitive, the fetish, the animal, plants, etc. So in that sense, you can see that the Bauhaus was a veritable cold room of perversions

Our main point is that the Bauhaus was actually a performance, a work. It states in a variety of media to great effect and extreme performance if you want, that went viral. And it's still playing in the latest media, particularly in social media. It is not by chance that a performance stage was precisely at the heart of the Bauhaus building and at the heart of every publication, the whole thing, you could argue from the stage to the buildings, the graphics, the products, the books, the films was a form of theater or a brief remarks here today, are based actually on a collaborative research project that we conducted with our students and at Princeton University and at Columbia University. And we explored two interrelated themes. They stream even qualities, attitudes and behaviors that energize this performance; this is what I will do here. And the active and sophisticated construction and global prediction of our self, much of the Bauhaus, through our range of different media; this is what Mark will do after me

The hypothesis is, precisely that the crucial part of the shocking success of this ongoing performance was a set of experimental attitudes about sexuality, diet, breeding, animals, plants, etc. And this is the site of the Bauhaus that is normally repressed but, I think it's absolutely central to the success

In our view, the Bauhaus has a project to construct a new man actively redesigning the human, has to be understood in terms of a deeper psychosexual and psycho technological obsession that underpin every aspect of the Bauhaus. The idea of constructing a new kind of normalized superhuman, was not just to respond to the trauma of war, who saw that was always there at the Bauhaus, but was also driven by an experimentation with alternative understandings of the human body and brain

where basically we are arguing that the Bauhaus was a kind of opera in that sense, a formidable, a dramatic performance war, involving radical understandings of the human that needs to be understood before it can be overcome with another kind of counter performance

It is important to remember that Gropius imagined that the culmination of the Bauhaus has being just Seabird Mario will be architecture as a synthesis of the art, technology and experience. And architecture actually, it's almost always understood as having a normalizing a function, establishing partners that are stable, predictable and to some extent, standardized. The right angle is called the normal and is very hard to find in nature. I think I put a slide in the wrong place. Here it is, Gropius. The right angle in the sense belongs to architecture, to culture. The idea of architecture is intimately associated with the idea of the normal. Perhaps he sees itself architecture as the caretaker of the normal, but the normal of course it's not normal. It's a kind of artifact always produced, never found, it is a construction involving a certain violence

Meanwhile, there is a hidden tradition in architecture of the transgressive world that crosses the lines of the normal, complicating these lines, threatening the limit. As Michel Foucault wrote in the preface to *Transgression* of 1963, originally attributed to Georges Bataille: *"the limit and transgression depend on each other, for whatever the entity of being they possess. A limit could not exist if it were absolutely uncrossable and, reciprocally, transgression would be pointless if it merely crossed a limit composed of illusions and shadows"*

Transgressions are, then, is not a small eccentric, ostentatious chapter in architecture, but a constant presence even in the work of the most orthodox or most conservative thinkers and designers of the 20th century. Even if we ask historians of architecture, try very hard to repress these. Technical research, for example, the single most influential architects of the 20th century, he was deeply into the occult, into esoteric philosophies, sexual complexity, he was a cross dresser. He accuse dressers of the odalisque in Turkey, eschatological obsess with the toilet, with sexual complexities, here you have him as a cleaning lady, eschatological obsess with the toilet, all these drawings was the bidet that he put in the middle of the living space to his, the distress of his wife, they used to put little tea course on top of his underwear when they had visitors, very interested in, of course, nudism, bodybuilding, the animal here was his dog. And when he's dog died, he actually cover his donkey with the skin of his dog, all kinds of perversities and of course obsessed with the other, etc

And they are, of course in the history of architecture, less known figures like Carlo Molino, who worked on architecture and design for him, are literally the product of perversion. So much so, that he's not easily placed in any traditional account of modern

architecture. These are some of his work as a photographer, but also as a dress designer, etc. And all these things that you know, I mean, he was also a race car in Monaco, a crazy skier, he's here, and I don't know exactly what he's doing here, but you get the sense

So, historians actually because of these don't know how to position them. So you have two extremes then. Le Corbusier, a seemingly a straight architect who is secretly twisted, and then Molina, which is a seemingly twisted architect, but in fact is secretly at the center of modern architecture. The question then becomes whether are so called perversions are twists of modern architecture or there is very ancient

Perversion in fact, comes from the latin *pervertére*, to turn away, that is to turn away from normality. And there is a relationship with the personnel often pathologies of modern architecture and their call for a new normal. Attention between which a new concept of the human emerges but, the same perversions are not simply about the old two human pathologies of designers. It's about the construction precisely over the human by modern design. A catalog of modern architecture is actually like a catalog of perversions

Let me quickly go through the 20th century, I'll point to a few cases in which in the spirit of everything you always wanted to know about architecture, but we're afraid to ask, I would reveal to you the ways in which modern architecture is full of secrets. So, let's start with Adolf Loos, the great moralist, ornament and crime. But, when Loos arrived in Paris in 1926, he was actually on the run, accused of pederasty in Vienna, of pedophilia, where he was found with a young child and convicted. A fact that, until recently, was carefully concealed in all the scholarships on Loos, despite that is public that they sold these trials and things but, the great moralist of Ornament and Crime turns out to be a criminal himself

He succession of a teenage brides, here you have a few of them and there are many more, were to be wrapped in this furry bedroom. Let's move to Richard Neutra, I didn't knew that he was Austrian, whose theories of architecture are very influenced by theories about diet, exercise, nudism, when he gets to California, he publishing this new living, this article about the complex of nudism, diet, etc. But, he also thought that architecture could enhance the sex life of the inhabitants. He was a very influenced by a psychoanalysis, etc. Many clients of Neutra talk to him about their nervous problems, their marital problems, their fertility problems and he installed in their houses organ accumulators and perhaps you don't know what are organ accumulator is, but it was popularized as the orgasm machine in films like "*Barbarella*", or Woody Allen's "*Sleeper*"

So, not only he installed these organ machines in the houses of his clients but, he ends up arguing that the houses that he's designing himself are like organ accumulators, kind

of sex machines. Okay. Another organ machine, starting to look like it's organism but it's not, you will see.

Bernard Rudofsky, which is completely into food fetishism but here he developed a complete catalog of abnormal bodies that are large in-between normal clothing, like this tennis outfit from the 19th century. And argue that the literal torture of winding the feet of young Chinese girls was actually acted out in the streets in the west, regularly. He sorts that, the foot that compresses, that corresponds to our stylists. A shoe is the form as seen as Chinese Lilly foot. Likewise, he shows that the perverted show, it's not just the, the foot of the women, but also of the men because he saw these feet of the western men. And he says, if we keep going that way with this kind of all sports show, we will end up developing a big toe, in the middle. Rudofsky ends up designing a kind of counter fashion, this kind of sandals that are still sold, Rudofsky sandals.

Clothes that supposedly liberate the body like the sandals and yet, he clearly enjoys, as you can see in the images, the pornography of these, the form body with a particular obsession on the feet. His fetish is equally intense with the twisted foot as it was the supposedly liberated one that you see here. Okay, this is crazy because the next one is another Viennese

I didn't realize that. Kiesler, Frederick Kiesler had eating disorders. Who would have thought that architecture will have anything to do with eating disorders, but that's what actually Kiesler is telling us, that architecture is our digestive system. That the house is like a stomach full of false absorbing juices and nutrients and that the occupant becomes a kind of food in extraordinary confusion of his own body. With architecture, he projects his own eating disorders onto the house and he describes more than architecture, as an architectural on a diet. But the time of the diet is now finished and now he, we are in danger apparently or being overweight. And points to billions like the Guggenheim of my continent having a problem of overweight architecture, projecting his own eating complications. He started for most of his life into his architecture

Okay. This is American Bucky Fuller, finally! He was obsessed with the toilets, he need as the center of everyday life and the beginning of the day. He spent years designing the perfect toilet and photographs himself naked inside it for architecture and women's magazines

He detested the idea that anything coming out of the body will leave the house arguing that valuable chemicals are to be recycled from the house, not such a stupid idea after all. And of course I could go on and on with all these modern architects, but don't think for a minute that is just modern architecture, even in more contemporary times, you just have things like these bonded, in the 1970's but not to me. And not only, he wrote a series of essays on the relationship between architecture and transgression, deeply

influenced by tie, but Kiesler wrote also the erotics on economy of forbidden art, such as bondage or crime and this culmination in a series of advertisements for architecture in 1976, like the one that you have on the screen

Body building and porn, will be Rem Koolhaas who with OMA took the Mies Van der Rohe pavillion and twisted it for the Milano Triennale, in order to produce the bodybuilding house where the neoclassic sculpture in the pavillion will be replaced by the naked body of Lisa Lion, the first woman bodybuilder, champion bodybuilder in California photographed for Robert Mapplethorpe. The supposed calm in a space of music was turning into an erotic's of exercise complete with these secret pictures that I found in the archives of the Koolhaas office.

Koolhaas who wrote a script for a porn film, "*The White Slave*", before becoming an architect, turns the architecture into a movie set for an expanding eroticize body. It is not such a thing then as more than architecture without transgression, as I have tried to demonstrate here in three minutes, what is remarkable about the Bauhaus and perhaps the secret of his success is the sheer density of transgressions of every kind.

It was like a laboratory for inventing and intensifying perversions as a kind of pedagogical strategy. Perhaps we could argue that there's no education without transgression and even without perversions, but this fact is typically repressed in the name of discipline, tradition, expertise, responsibility, etc. The Bauhaus, both embrace transgression and repression. So, here is another very quick catalog of the perversions of the Bauhaus.

Painter Johannes Itten in his preparatory course of the Bauhaus introduce, as you probably know, a regime of painting following the principle of the maternal religion. The idea was to get to rid the body of the gross matter through enemas, farting for three weeks or a diet of garlic base mass, and machines actually for picking up the skin. Here you have some drawing,, who not only did these drawings, illustrate in this situation, but also write about this machine.

There was some other things, a little needle machine with which we were to puncture our skin. Then the body will be wrapped with the same sharp oil with could serve as a laxative. A few days later, all the pinpoints will break out in a scalps and postils. They oil have drawn the waste and impurities of the deeper skin layers to the surface. Now, we were ready to be bonded, but we must work hard, sweat, and then with continue farting, the alteration will dry out, but of course they didn't dry out, the stayed for weeks. And this is part of the masochism of the Bauhaus

Okay. Occultism, one of the intended effects of Itten regime was a trans, like delirium, after three weeks of farting, not upright, offering access to a spiritual domain reinforced

by debriefing and concentration, exercises from by Gertrude Grownup that, that he brought to Bauhaus to teach these classes. And that will take over sometimes the whole class. Many of the masters like Clay and Kandinsky were into different forms of occultism, more on spirituality. Esoteric logic was not esoteric within the school. It was a kind of tie, it was a general of a spirit photography, Bauhaus object like these Broyer is lads here was suspended in with disgust in the chair or post drawing here, in his spirit is Seance in 1924

Okay. Very quickly, gender ambiguity. Here you have Margarita Hyman. There was continuous experimentation with the performance of gender at the Bauhaus. Gender immersion were wrong. Famously, women perform as men and less famously, men got a dress and put lipstick on and ties on in many of these situation. Here you have one of these parties, several of these men are dressed as women who have lipstick or have the title or are cross-dressing. Perhaps the most interesting, Marcel Breuer saying a tantalizing card, Walter Gropius for his 41st birthday party, including a double image of himself, of Marcel Breuer as a woman and with the words: *"My dear Walter, keep our sweet secret eternally and truly yours, Marcel Breuer"*

Here, the Bauhaus is unthinkable without the haircuts, which were used to embrace gender ambiguity and express modernity. The Bauhaus to them have to look like Bauhaus students which meant visualize in transgression. You can do actually a catalog as one of our students, young Cooper at Princeton did of all the haircuts and the evolution of the Bauhaus, including completely shaving your head as Itten or his followers and Luther Schrader reminds us, one day Itten declared that hair was a sign of sin. He's smart, enthusiastic and his disciples shave their head completely. And that's when we went around by a mark

Okay, later the leader, of course, of the Loof warfare jacket whose wife, fighter pilots, and also the later years in bondage and S&M and lesbian clubs around here in Berlin, made its way into the Bauhaus as a symbol of cultural rebellion and sensuality. It closed both male and female here you have Margaret Marianne brand. Gropius also went around apparently in the memories of Harbor buyer with a leather jacket. The tears would bond, not only made a little, but were bound tightly like corsets and later stripes and whips appear lying around in a split cover sometimes in photo, just things unkind or illicit act

Initiation of fantasies. I was told that, says Harbor buyer that during the entrance examination, every applicant is lock up in a dark room. Thunder and light aren't let loosed upon him to get him in a state of agitation. He's been admitted, depends on how well he describes his reaction. So these all these initiations, rituals and with these, we move to physical exertion

Under the skews of gymnastic or trying to gain control of the unruly body, any opportunity to put the body in a stream, a position was taking his part in the Bauhaus was training the body for artistic work but also to cure neurosis, neurosis from the war. But that is collective neurosis. It didn't, actually interesting enough, had been a successful competitive gymnast before he came to the Bauhaus. He used to play soccer, track and field. He integrated the sport in his prep course as I mean a physical control to release the mind. After Itten left, the whole thing continue, the flood roof of the student's house in Odessa was designed for exercise and Hannes Meyer re-introduced physical education to combat what he called *"the proverbial collective neurosis of the Bauhaus"*. The result of the one sided emphases on brainwork. Even during the parties, apparently the Bauhausler had developed their signature dance moves involving exaggerated rhythmic movement. In all these six months. For all the official commitment to artistic experimentation on the way to was sober industrial design, these are continuous erotic charts in many aspects of the Bauhaus as you have seen already

So, very quickly, Beaching intimacy, the beach was never simply the beach for the Bauhaus, it was yet another space of transgression and intimacy between teachers and students and between teachers and sometimes so between genders, as you can see in some of those images. And finally, the love affairs, Latte Bausey who was the later to be the chief architect of in charge of the massive reconstruction of bomb out the Rotterdam after the war, was the first Bauhaus's student to be admitted into the architecture workshop started by Hannes Meyer in 1927. Hannes Meyer somehow convinced her that you have to associate yourself with a male architect in order to succeed. So she had an affair with him, where he was married with children. But when he became the director, Hannes Meyer basically was asked to leave the school because she wouldn't look a good choice. Not Kim who has to leave, but she has to leave to the other one looks good

Walter Gropius whereas still married to Alma Mater and with a mistress, Hille Bran had a sex relationship with a student who was a widow. Sweet shops, after the preliminary course, all women were sent to the women board so whether they like it or not, here you have what Gertrude Arm said: *"they all went to the weaving wards so whether they want it or not, yet that was simply the way out. I never wanted to weave; it was absolutely not my way aim, not at all. Not all these stress. I didn't want that, that was not my thing"*. And you can see she's not very happy! She is very good and another student in the workshop

But this is the interesting thing, since weaving made the greatest profit of all for the Bauhaus, we could ask if it was really a workshop or a sweat shop. All these women got

sustained financially. The Bauhaus, but they were these meanings between it. He was a transgressive school in many ways, but not in gender politics

Well, the Gropius even theorize this discrimination if you see now will our lecture, the artistic impulse was that of a man who has his period on the horror of war. So he writes, or he says in this lecture: *"the awakening of the whole month through trauma, lack, terror, hard life, experience of love, leads to the authentic artistic expression. Dearest ladies, I do not underestimate the human achievement of those who remain at home during the war. But I believe that the live experience of death to be all powerful"*

Of course, many students arrive at the Bauhaus directly from a military service and Gropius himself was a casualty of war. He was injured and abandoned for several days in a bomb boat and totally destroy a building. He later wrote, *"First man must being constructed"* This is what the Bauhaus attempted to do. Reconstruct, the human.

Outfit likewise, reflects this military background starting with Gropius going around in his leather jacket but also extreme poverty led to the reconstruction of military uniforms into everyday office and multiple other gender bending configurations. But the military never quite went away and even the idea of a quasi-military uniform, including a whistle, appears in the end as you can see in this quote of *"Slammer"*: *"at first people let themselves go. Boys have long hair and girls got short skirt, no colors or stockings were worn, which was shocking and extravagant"*

Then a Bauhaus government was designed; the Bauhaus whistle and the Bauhaus salute were invented. One was also called a hungry for the sake of one's ideas. So the military in the end never goes away. And this uniform is established on my final point is that it was our uniform, a uniform of transgression precisely

Thank you very much.

END OF LECTURE

Artists with PhDs

On the New Doctoral Degree
in Studio Art

Edited by James Elkins



Washington, DC

Art and Method

Henk Slager

The curricula of many institutes for art education are largely dominated by an art historical model. As a consequence, one gratuitously deploys a clear-cut duality: on the one hand, artists produce artistic work, while on the other hand, professionals (mostly art historians) supply frameworks for the interpretation of those works. Standard works such as Ernst Gombrich's *Art and Illusion* and Hans-Georg Gadamer's *Truth and Method* have provided a methodological foundation for a nearly dogmatic art historical hermeneutics.¹

Gadamer compares the encounter with visual art with intently reading a letter; both entail a certain expectation. He notes that every interpretation has a horizon: that is, it is rooted in a temporality, which also counts for human knowledge. However, in spite of such a sense of perspective, Gadamer still believes that, in encountering a work of art, it must be possible to locate a determinate meaning.

Gombrich's work demonstrates a similar inclination; he spends many words on the conventional character of representation and the important role of the spectator in arriving at the intended meaning of the image — "the eye of the beholder." At the same time, Gombrich believes that it is indeed possible for adequate art historical research to arrive at an iconographically exact (if not systematic or unambiguous) meaning of a certain image. In light of such art historical hermeneutics, the artistic image is, in fact, a repository for determinate meanings.

However, today's practice of visual art makes clear that it is time to declare monolithic thought framed in binary models of truth (the hermeneutic method) and illusion (the visual creative) as obsolete. Moreover, the practice of art shows that art and method can connect in a novel and constructive way. In such a connection, the emphasis will shift from an art practice focused on final products to a practice directed towards an experimental, laboratory-style environment, exploring novel forms of knowledge and experience. In

other words, artistic practice has become a dynamic point of departure for interdisciplinary experiments governed by a reflexive point of view. Critical reflection deals with questions such as what makes art art, what art should be, and what the context of art is. Such a conception of artistic activity challenges many present-day artists to view their artistic projects as forms of research.

Obviously, conceiving art in terms of artistic research has considerable, institutional consequences, since the focus on research requires an adequate curriculum in advanced art education. Ute Meta Bauer's publication *Education, Information, Entertainment* gave a first impetus to critical reflection on such a curriculum.² Bauer argues that the curriculum of art academies should radically break with the art historical paradigm of autonomous art in order to address current artistic developments. Furthermore, art academies and their curricula should particularly focus on the cultural preconditions of visual art, that is, on the circumstances and conditions which enable artistic activities. This means that a reflexive attention to art education should begin by researching what she calls "the political, social and media-related conditions which decisively determine the artistic concepts and practice."

In Europe, the concept of research also plays a decisive role in advanced art education in the context of the introduction of a Bachelor-Master structure; ultimately, art institutions need to start thinking in terms of PhD degrees. The three-year PhD program in Fine Art at the Utrecht Graduate School of Visual Art and Design is embedded in the structure of the MA research program.³ In the first year, the PhD student is expected to participate in two MA seminars: "Methodology" and "Transmedial Research," during which the progress of research is discussed. At the end of the first year, the PhD student must be prepared to present a concrete plan for a research trajectory. During the next two years, the student stays in close contact with his or her supervisor; to that end, students are offered poses as teaching assistants. In addition, peer review seminars are held at least six times a year. These seminars are given by experts in the field of transmedial research; PhD students are screened critically in the course of the seminars. The research seminars also engage curatorial studies, because the experimental process of transmedial research has a direct impact on the reflection of models of presentation. A final exhibition, in a professional environment, or a series of sub-exhibitions, are also part of the research trajectory. The PhD student is expected to contextualize his or her research trajectory in an essay of approximately 30,000 words that coherently reports on the project's contribution to topical methodological discussions.

We concentrate on the status and position of the artistic image in our present visual culture. How does an artistic image relate to other forms of visual production? Our position evokes critical questions about presentation and representation. Students in the Utrecht research program first learn how to methodologically reflect on their art. Next, they are trained in developing research hypotheses and models. In addition, they are asked to think about the specificity of research subjects. Questions arise such as: What are the boundaries of the artistic domain? Where could constructive cross-overs with other fields of knowledge and visual domains be envisioned? Could those connections lead to novel concepts? In short, how can a topical artistic concept be formulated and how can an adequate visual grammar or language be developed? Is a visual language differently constituted by various media perspectives or can it ultimately be considered as transmedial or intermedial? What is, for instance, the factual input of the photographic paradigm in the field of topical visual art? Is reflection from the painterly paradigm still relevant for understanding a topical artistic production? Do the visual language of cinema and the reality of the screen influence the imagination of current visual art? And last but not least, students investigate the contextualization of the artistic image in light of an exploration of the preconditions of artistic communication process as such. What is the optimal context for a specific, artistic image; what curatorial and communicative preconditions does such an image require; and under what circumstances should it ultimately be presented?

These research questions make clear that it is urgent to reflect on the specificity of artistic research, whether it is institutionalized or not; in such contexts the differences and similarities with other forms of research should also be explored. After all, artistic research seems to continuously thwart academically defined disciplines. In fact, art knows the hermeneutic questions of the humanities; art is engaged in an empirically scientific method; and art is aware of the commitment and social involvement of the social sciences. It seems, therefore, that the most intrinsic characteristic of artistic research is based on the continuous transgression of boundaries in order to generate novel, reflexive zones.

What then are the criteria determining the object of knowledge, when artistic research is conceived as an exploration of different academic or research zones? The concept of research unmistakably invokes certain expectations. After all, research implies an organized manner of approach, a systematic treatment of information, and a significant contribution to the information and knowledge economy. Furthermore, research could imply ethical responsibili-

ties such as a better understanding or improvement of the world. Does that help define a characteristic element of such research? One could say that each form of research seems to be focused on how to formulate a methodology. Research might not be inspired by a great cause or an accidental discovery (it might happen serendipitously), yet it may ultimately lead to a novel, methodologically formulated form of knowledge. The force of the method seems to determine the value of the results. Continuous control should clarify to what extent methodological conditions have been applied. Moreover, although research methods obviously differ according to their fields and subjects, they share a fundamental basic principle: methodological research is primarily directed towards formulating questions and providing answers. Thus, it seems that research as such could be described most adequately as the methodological connection of questions and answers.

Attention to the concept of research can also be observed in today's practice of visual art, outside of advanced art education. However, the mostly trans- or interdisciplinary research of visuality conducted by artists is not really characterized by an objective, empirical approach. After all art does not strive for generalization, repeatability, and quantification. Rather, art is directed towards unique, qualitative, particular, and local knowledge. In that respect, artistic activities still seem to perfectly match Baumgarten's classic definition of the aesthetic domain, where knowledge is described as a knowledge of the singular.⁴ Even though artistic knowledge understood as a *mathesis singularis* — because of its focus on the singular and the unique — cannot be comprehended in laws, it deals with a form of knowledge, says Baumgarten. Hence the emphasis on the singular and the unique in the aesthetic domain does not imply that artistic research is impossible, as for example the philosopher of science Karl Popper claimed. After all, an operational form of research seems to satisfy the most basic research criteria: it focuses on the importance of communication; it foments a critical attitude; and it leads to autonomous research.

In contrast to academic-scientific research emphasizing the generation of "expert knowledge," the domain of art seems rather to express a form of experience-based knowledge. Whereas pure scientific research often seems to be characterized by academic goal (and perhaps even on purposeful uselessness), artistic research focuses on involvement, on social and non-academic goals. That does not preclude the fact that artistic research as a form of idiosyncratic research still should be able to answer two well-defined questions. First, how can autonomous research take place in visual

art? Second, how can the chosen methodology (as compared with research projects of other artists) best be described?

The epistemological perspective of uniqueness and divergence requires a further methodological deliberation. After all, in contrast to other forms of research, the methodological trajectory of artistic research and its related production of knowledge cannot be easily defined. However, in my view, this trajectory could be designated as a *differential iconography*, because it reveals a worldview no longer conceived as a transparent unity. Fundamental aspects such as indefinability, heterogeneity, contingency, and relativity color the trajectory of artistic research. Therefore, artistic research should explicitly request tolerance, an open attitude, and the deployment of multiple models of interpretation. Only then will it be able to manifest itself as a critical reflection on the status and position of the artistic image in current visual culture. Conceiving artistic research as a differential iconography gives it the capacity to avoid anchoring the image in a one-dimensional hermeneutic.

Thus, the most important methodological paradigm of artistic research could be described as an awareness of divergence without a hierarchy of discourses, as, for example, was the case with the prevalence of hermeneutics in art history in Modernism. Awareness of divergence implies the capacity to mobilize an open attitude and an intrinsic tolerance for a multitude of interpretations that, if necessary, could be transformed into a revolt against the danger of any one-dimensional contextualization.

One might conclude that artistic researchers continuously need to deploy a meta-perspective in order to enable critical reflection on the temporary, operational parameters of their research. Such a methodology could be considered a form of two-plane analysis based on a dual research perspective, which I will call knowledge economy and ethical responsibility.

The perspective of the first plane is expressed in Jean-Francois Lyotard's postmodern maxim that, in their research of visibility, artists should pose the epistemological question of what art is. Or better put, in their transcendental research, artists should investigate whether the institutional or territorial foundations of the concept of art should be deconstructed. It is necessary to continuously question the concept of art. As Lyotard says, "a work of art is a kind of proposition presented within the context of art as a comment on art." If this perspective is implemented too radically or one-sidedly, art risks becoming the equivalent of its definition. "Art has evolved in such a way that the philosophical question of its status has almost become the very essence of art itself," Lyotard writes, "so that the philosophy of art, instead of standing outside the subject and

addressing it from an alien and extended perspective, became instead the articulation of the internal energy of the subject."⁵ Today it requires a special kind of effort to distinguish art from its own philosophy.

The perspective of the second plane is clearly underscored by Merleau-Ponty's definition of the artist as a person who has the capacity to observe what fail to notice. After all, through merely visual means, the artist succeeds in making visible what ordinary vision fails to see. Everyday categories of perception can be dislocated in a flash. The artist compels us to see the world in a different way, according to different norms and habits. Images do not replace reality, but reveal novel visibilities, and art proposes polymorphic kinds of observation. The artistic image provides an open view while liberating the spectator from a frozen perspective. As Merleau-Ponty says: "essence or existence, imaginary or real, visible or invisible, art disrupts all our categories by revealing its dream universe of sensuous essences, of striking similarities and silent meanings."⁶ From that perspective, artistic research is also connected with the search for a critical understanding of our existential conditions and the formulation of utopian proposals for improvement. Such a modernist view is inseparably linked with an emancipatory ideal: artistic research should be based on the ethical guideline of human freedom.

These planes of research correspond to the impetus of Kant's two Critiques: the Critique of Pure Reason, concerning the foundation of human knowledge; and the Critique of Practical Reason, addressing the preconditions of human morality. However, as a continuation, Kant also formulated a third critique, the Critique of Judgement, where he envisions art as an interstitial space, a zone, where both faculties of cognition, pure reason and practical reason, meet. The perspective of a third space as reflexive zone seems to be of immense interest in today's visual art, certainly after the two episodes of modernism and postmodernism, which have brought both of the two planes into play. Today, artistic research takes place in an operational and experimental way in a zone determined by a configuration of the two planes.⁷ The methodological perspective of artistic research cannot be decided a priori, as it can in one-dimensional scientific research. After all, artistic research as an operational process is "an open-ended work-in-pre-growth."⁸ Thus, in artistic practices, there is no form defined entirely beforehand. As a consequence, it is by definition impossible to research the artistic process by assuming that such a definition may already exist. In artistic research one should speak of a continuous, self-reflexive movement questioning the situation and determining the artist's

position with regard to the spaces of analysis. The result is not a fixed concept or a static point, but the indication of a zone, leaving unmarked room for the continuation of artistic experiment. As a consequence, artistic research continually produces novel connections in the form of multiplicities characterized by temporary, flexible constructions. These constructions run up against problems, but rather than creating solutions, they keep on deploying novel methodological programs while producing continuous modifications.

In sum, topical research creates methodological trajectories determining how, why and where the operational research proceeds while also engaging in critical, parallel discourses. Such a model is in continuous flux: as a work in progress it always involves articulation, segmentation and reconstruction. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari describe the zone as a unlocalizable relation of speed and slowness. One could argue that the non-localizable zone of artistic research is characterized by reflecting interactions, accelerating speed, and mutating flows of thought. Such a refuge of artistic research could be cut through by a relative stoppage of flows of thought and by points of accumulation that might introduce forms of rigidity in the variety of flows. In both processes, the two planes of analysis play a decisive role. Not surprisingly, artistic methodology as an operational, cartographic composition does not offer a closed system with a localizable structure of components. In line with Deleuze and Guattari, one could argue that the zone of artistic research "always has detachable, connectable, reversible, modifiable, and multiple entryways" and idiosyncratic lines of flight. It is for that reason that it is only possible at the end of a program of research to determine whether the trajectory of the proposed methodological process has indeed produced interesting connections, accelerations and mutations. Artistic research can never be characterized by a well-defined, rigid methodology. Rather, its form of research could be described as a methodical: it entails a strong belief in a methodologically articulable result founded by operational strategies that cannot be legitimized beforehand. Indeed, that is the essential characteristic of artistic research.

escuela = school—
para = alternative—
sitio = site—

www.parasiteschool.org

The Para-Site School infiltrates the university in a parasitical way and uses its resources, people and infrastructure to embrace & serve immigrants and artists-nomads excluded by official universities in the USA and Europe. This project explores education as artistic material and the university as a contested political arena.

Until 2014 The Para-Site School operated almost in secrecy from different universities in the USA, in order to protect the identity of the students or prevent deportation.

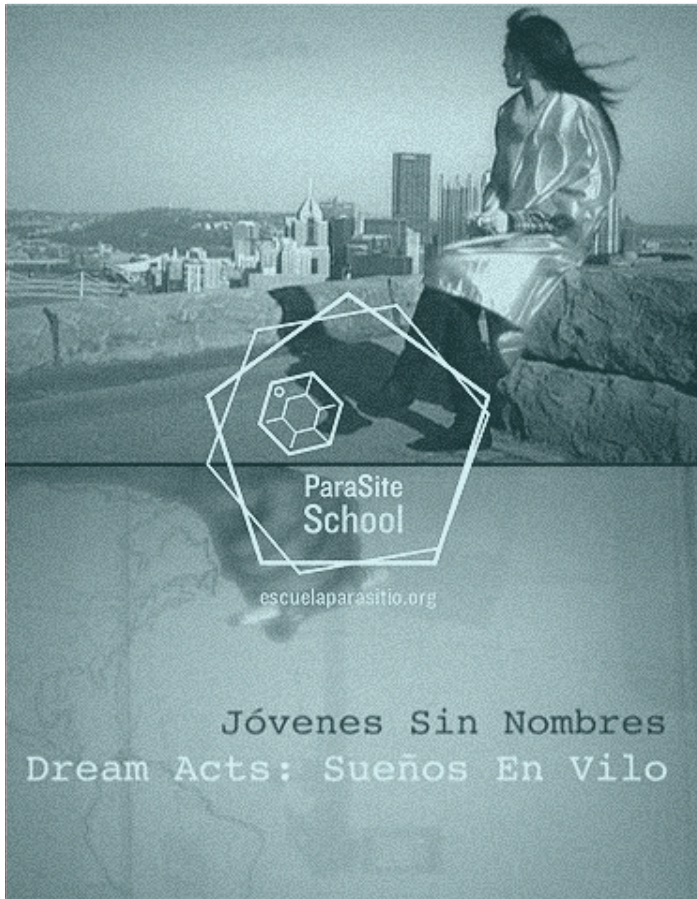


2011:

Artist Felipe Castelblanco initiated an art course (in secrecy) at Carnegie Mellon University for a group of Latino youth. Several of these students have been living in the United States for most of their lives, but still remain undocumented and therefore can't access funding -or even paperwork- to attend college.

During this course, students learned video production skills and created a participatory documentary that takes the classes and their own legal situation as the subject of the work. This participatory documentary has been shown in film festivals across the US.

During an artist residency in Cologne, Felipe Castelblanco (artist and founder of the Para-Site School) established a new film collective with a group of young Syrian refugees now living in Germany. Together they founded BORDERLESS TV, a refugee story telling and Media collective broadcasting form Cologne since May, 2016.



2012:

Nima Deghani is an artist and activist born in Iran. In 2012 he was awarded a scholarship to study at Carnegie Mellon University (U.S) but his student visa was delayed by a complicated bureaucratic process between the U.S. embassy in Dubai and the university. In the end, he wasn't able to attend school for entire first year of his scholarship. In an effort to further develop the field of distance learning, The Para-Site School used performance and data streaming to extend—virtually—Nima's presence to the U.S while still being in Tehran. This resulted in a year-long collaboration and an exhibition where Nima was able to interact and communicate directly with other students and audiences in the U.S through the body of Felipe C, who became a surrogate (or living avatar) for the artist.



2012:

'We Paint Houses' is a participatory art project that takes the form of a temporary business run by Latino artists/labourers living in the U.S. For an entire week, the group offered to paint people's houses within the city of Portland, using local media and street advertisement. However, instead of painting the walls of the houses, artist and labourers created fine art paintings — on canvas — of the façades of the buildings, while engaging customers/audiences in a situation that stimulated public debate about immigrant labour, class and misrepresentation. A temporary art studio (with easels, canvases and palettes) emerged on the streets as the group created the paintings. WPH employed undocumented Latino Labourers and provided faire wages in the form of artists' stipends, using funds from academic research grants and artistic fellowships granted by U.S. universities.



2013:

Several microcontrollers, sensors, manuals, New Media Art literature and mini computers were smuggled into Cuba from the U.S. The funds to purchase these materials were donated by the Robotics Department at Carnegie Mellon University. Private investors and government, including the U.S military, support this division of the university. The ParaSite School used these materials to teach a series of workshops on interactivity and New Media art to local artists and engineers in Havana and Camagüey. Some of these tools were the first of their kind to arrive in Cuba due to the 52 year-old embargo enforced by the U.S over the island, which among other issues also affects research, artistic and technological development.



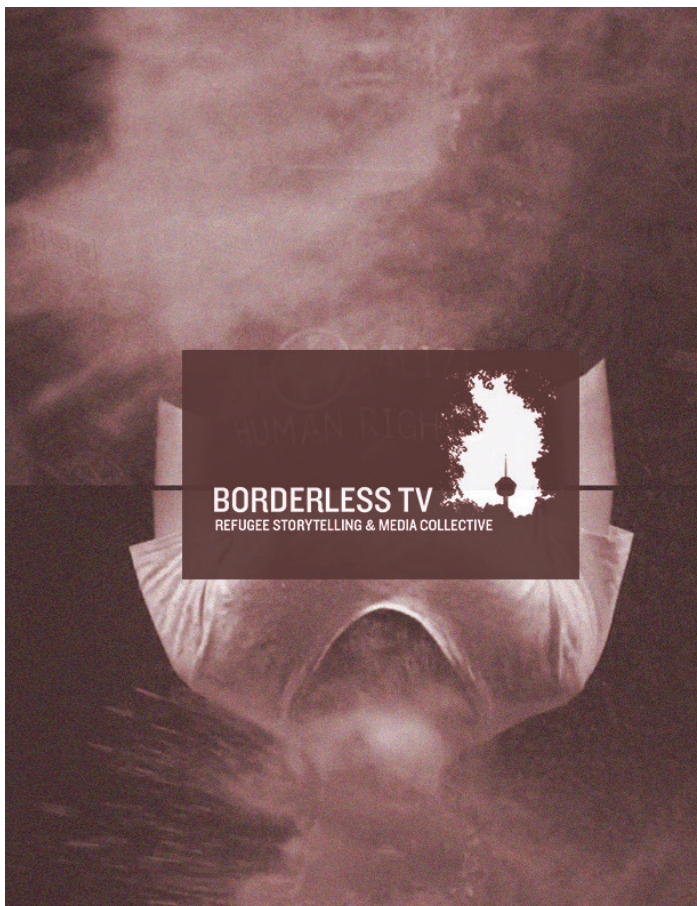
2015:

This is an attempt to demystify the isolating artist-in-residency model. To circulate a gift of time and space (as any “gifted” artist could). And bring other voices into the conversation taking place at the RA Schools. Current Starr Fellow Felipe Castelblanco invited three international artists living in London to conduct a month-long residency at the RA Schools through his ongoing project The ParaSite School. The programme became an extension of Castelblanco’s own artistic residency and fellowship at the Royal Academy. This iteration of the The ParaSite School is a direct response to the current UK government’s policies that prevent the RA Schools to enrol non-EU artists/citizens.



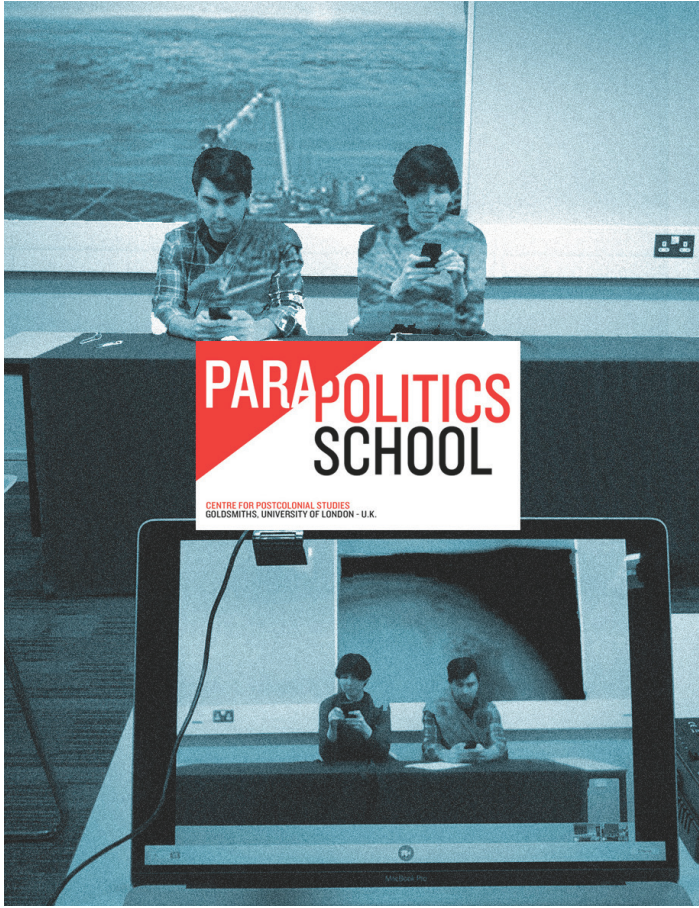
2016:

Refugees are usually in front of the camera, and rarely ever behind it. Put on the spot on TV as human-interest informants, they must speak from a certain position or remain silent and invisible. As a way to question this unbalanced relationship, The ParaSite School established a new film collective with a group of young Syrian refugees living in Germany. During this collaboration, the group developed new skills on filmmaking, created and released short documentaries and experimental videos, contributing a new perspective to the conversation about the migrant crises and its current developments. This project was supported by CAT Cologne, the City of Cologne and Akademie der Kunst der Welt.



2017 / 18:

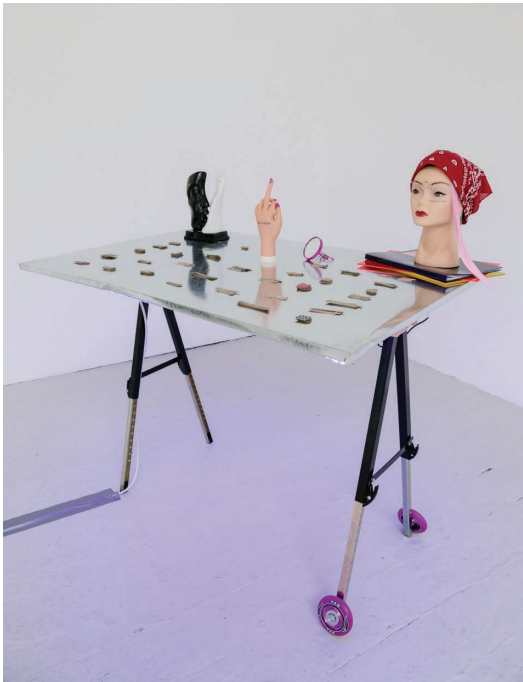
The Parasite School joined the Centre For Postcolonial Studies at Goldsmiths University. The aim of this residency is to infiltrate the university through its research environment using a new framework called "The Para-Politics School." This chapter is a direct response to a volatile political time after the 2016 'elections', which directly undermined any option for progressive, postcolonial and future-facing political attitude. We are now dedicated to turn inside-out and the political discourse. Using research as enactment we provoke speculative thinking in academic and political settings. We want to set in motion the political discourse encouraging future thinking to practice other political (or utopian) realities and think-feel beyond outdated forms of democracy.



Recent Fellows / Residents / Students:



Melanie Coles
b. in Canada, Lives in London.



Serra Tansel
b. in Turkey, Lives in London.



Shepher Manyika
b. in Malawi, Lives in London



Nima Deghani
b. in Iran, Lives in Pittsburgh - USA



Members of Borderless TV. Syrian Refugees living in
Cologene, Germany. 2016



Initiated by artist Felipe Castelblanco and Collaborators. Est. 2011



Jacquelyn Strycker

The Art School as Artwork

Filed Under: [Economy](#) Tagged With: [arts education](#), [Createquity Fellowship](#), [institutions](#), [social sculpture](#)



"The University of Trash: at the Sculpture Center
Photo by Graham Coreil-Allen

Artist-founded and administered schools have existed for over a century. In 1875, a group of artists pinned a notice to the bulletin board of the National Academy of Design inviting students and instructors to attend a meeting, effectively founding [The Art Students League](#) in New York City. In 1919, the German architect Walter Gropius started [Bauhaus](#), an institution that merged fine arts and applied arts in pursuit of the "gesamtkunstwerk" (total work of art). His [manifesto declared](#):

Let us strive for, conceive and create the new building of the future that will unite every discipline, architecture and sculpture and painting, and which will one day rise heavenwards from the million hands of craftsmen as a clear symbol of a new belief to come.

And in 1933, the scholar John A. Rice began the experimental [Black Mountain College](#) in North Carolina. It was owned and operated by its faculty, which included artists, musicians and poets such as Josef Albers, Buckminster Fuller, John Cage, Merce Cunningham and Charles Olsen. The school believed in an interdisciplinary approach to education and combined communal living and farm work with classwork.

Over the past five years or so, there's been a resurgence of artist-operated schools. However, what differentiates these new exploratory educational practices from their historical predecessors is that the schools themselves are also the art, framed as participatory, collaborative community projects. Rather than using physical materials to construct a work that may comment on a social condition, the artists use language, thought and action to construct social spaces. Their art schools destabilize one's notion of a school by placing it in a museum, a house, a park or a gallery while asking participants to work collaboratively, creating a shared sense of space. There's precedent for this: [Joseph Beuys](#) first coined the term "social sculpture" in the 1960's to describe interdisciplinary and participatory action-based work. Let's take a look at some of these art schools as artworks:



The Bruce High Quality Foundation's "Teach 4 Amerika" school bus
Photo Credit: Matt Kowal

[The Bruce High Quality Foundation University](#)

Founders: The Bruce High Quality Foundation, a mostly anonymous New York City-based arts collective. Most of the Bruces met while studying at Cooper Union.

Sample Course Offerings: “BYOU (Build Your Own University),” “Drawing Extensions,” “The Language of Love: Intro to Italian” and “XXXTreme Performance Studies”

Cost: Free

The Gist: Embracing a collaborative learning model where “students are teachers are administrators are staff,” the BHQFU claims to be “a community of scholars” and “a ‘f*** you’ to the hegemony of critical solemnity and market-mediocre despair.”

[Mildred’s Lane](#)

Founders: Artists Mark Dion and J. Morgan Puett

Sample Course Offerings: “Attention Labs with The Order of the Third Bird” and “PondHouseSpringHousePond”

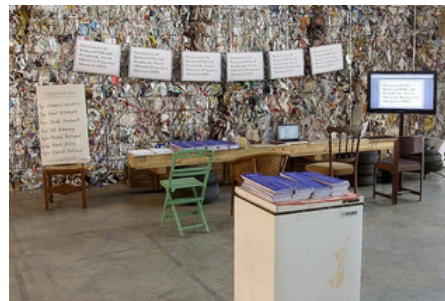
Cost: \$3000 (includes room and board)

The Gist: “Life is a studio” in this northeastern Pennsylvania communal art space where participants live and “collaboratively work with internationally renowned artists” who direct each session. An iteration of the working-living-researching-making environment is included in the [Museum of Modern Art Education Department’s MoMA Studio](#), and, through



Artists at Mildred’s Lane
Photo by Naya Peek

discussions, meals and other interactions, “invites visitors to explore inventive forms of domesticity, tactile qualities related to textiles and the natural states of food.”



Pickpocket Almanack at Artissima 17
Photo by Joseph Del Pesco

[Pickpocket Almanack](#)

Founder: Contemporary art curator Joseph del Pesco

Sample Course Offerings: “Celebrating Dilettantism,” “Revolutionary Experimental Cinema in the Bay Area” and “Do-It-Yourself, Together”

Cost: Free

The Gist: “An experimental school-without-walls,” commissioned by the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art in 2009-10, curriculum used existing lectures, screenings, workshops and other public events in the Bay Area as its starting point, and then took them “out of context” for a new “thematic frame” and “unexpected discoveries.” Discussions happened online.



Anton Vidokle's "Exhibition as School" including "Night School" archives
Photo by Knoxville Museum of Art

Night School

Founder: Artist and e-flux founder Anton Vidokle

Sample Course Offerings: seminars led by Boris Groys, Martha Rosler and Liam Gillick

Cost: Free

The Gist: Part of Vidokle's series of temporary school projects, this iteration was hosted by New Museum in 2008. The program included a lecture series open to the public as well as additional workshops and discussions for a core group of 26 accepted applicants.



Portrait Drawing Round Robin at the University of

Trash
Photo by Peter Walsh Projects

The "Skool of Refuse and Appropriation" at [The University of Trash](#)

Founders: Michael Cataldi and Nils Norman

Sample Course Offerings: "How to Stay Free," "Supersede Yourself" and "Freeing the Airwaves from Corporate Control"

Cost: Free

The Gist: free and open to the public during summer 2009, the temporary, makeshift university as exhibition hosted lectures, workshops and screenings. Resources included stages, a low power FM radio station, internet, hammocks and a grill, and participants were invited to "teach a class, hold band practice, contribute to zine library or propose any project!"

School of the Future

Founders: Artists Cassie Thorton and Chris Kennedy

Sample Course Offerings: "Mutant Student Groups Think Tank," "Compost Brigade," "Philosophy Yoga," and "Gender, Identity and Making Mustaches"

Cost: Free

The Gist: The "un-school" was first an "outdoor intergenerational free school" run by artists, activists and teachers in industrial north Brooklyn. It has since become "an archive of lessons learned and a network of radical educators who question our current forms of education."



A Trade School class in London
Photo by Canning Town Cara

Trade School

Founders: OurGoods co-founders Louise Ma, Rich Watts and Caroline Woolard

Sample Course Offerings: “Pilates in a Chair,” “Caviar: Demystified,” “Portrait Photography” and “Baudrillard Camp: Media Theory vs Literary Criticism”

Cost: Participants pay for classes by bartering goods and services

The Gist: “Trade School celebrates practical wisdom, mutual respect and the social nature of exchange” and has been endorsed by socially-engaged-art heavyweight Pablo Helguera. They recently participated in [Parsons’ *Art, Environment, Action!*](#) “creative teaching laboratory and environmental ‘artshop.’”



Mike Perry’s “Wondering Around Wandering”
Photo by Meredith Jenks, courtesy of the artist’s website

Wondering Around Wandering

Founder: Graphic designer and artist Mike Perry

Sample Course Offerings: “IMAG(in)ING the CITY,” “Never Nude!” and “Mega Zine”

Cost: Free

The Gist: Graphic Designer Mike Perry created a free three-month “exhibition and community event space” to coincide with the launch of his monograph. Perry and other designers conducted workshops, screenings, gatherings and open discussions where visitors could “explore freely and create their own unique experiences.”

*

Some of these education-as-art projects, most notably the Bruce High Quality Foundation University, have been posited or lauded as progressive and practical alternatives to the increasingly expensive Master of Fine Arts (MFA) education from accredited art colleges and universities. [The Bruces explain:](#)

Something's got to give. The \$200,000-debt-model of art education is simply untenable. Further, the education artists are getting for their money is mired in irrelevance, pushing them into critical redundancy on the one hand and professional mediocrity on the other.

Could programs such as these eventually replace our current institution-centric paradigm? I find the premise somewhat disingenuous and unrealistic. Many of the participants of the alternative art schools are either current MFA candidates, or have already received an MFA. And many of the lecturers or faculty are also faculty at universities—they've hardly rejected the academy. What's more, the rigor of the course offerings for the art-school-projects wildly fluctuates, from seminars on Marxism to analyzing the dim sum offerings in Chinatown. Although the latter is interesting and arguably, the ability to differentiate between dumplings is a far more practical skill than being able to pontificate on the finer points of Foucault, it's also not something one could receive credit for in graduate school. Finally, regardless of the intellectual and instructional level of materials, in all of these programs, there's no consequence for failing to complete the homework or not engaging in a discussion. No degree is withheld, because there are no degrees.

And of course, this is the point. These art schools offer a re-imagining of our arts educational system. Yet, so many of the artists involved in these projects have formal arts degrees and continue to have positive relationships with traditional academic institutions—as faculty, guest lecturers and even students, that it's difficult for me to trust that they genuinely believe in their institutions as replacements for the current model. Their true purpose is not as higher-ed replacement, but as an exploration of art's value in a learning environment.

In this sense, these art schools as art projects are the purest form of education— the reward for one's efforts is not a certificate, but instead, learning. In fact, that's why these new alternative art schools are most

intriguing. Unlike their historical predecessors, they aren't meant to replace the art college/university model. In part, that's why these new art schools are also artworks. They are social sculptures where pedagogy is a means to another end—participatory, socially engaged, community based art projects, education as exhibition.

Long Live the Copenhagen Free University!



The stairwell at the Copenhagen Free University, 2001-2007. Courtesy of Jakob Jakobsen.

All power to the free universities of the future

By The Free U Resistance Committee

The Copenhagen Free University was an attempt to reinvigorate the emancipatory aspect of research and learning, in the midst of an ongoing economisation of all knowledge production in society. Seeing how education and research were being subsumed into an industry structured by a corporate way of thinking, we intended to bring the idea of the university back to life. By life, we mean the messy life people live within the contradictions of capitalism. We wanted to reconnect knowledge production, learning and skill sharing to the everyday within a self-organised institutional framework of a free university. Our intention was

multi-layered and was of course partly utopian, but also practical and experimental. We turned our flat in Copenhagen into a university by the very simple act of declaring 'this is a university'. By this transformative speech act the domestic setting of our flat became a university. It didn't take any alterations to the architecture other than the small things needed in terms of having people in your home staying over, presenting thoughts, researching archival material, screening films, presenting documents and works of art. Our home became a public institution dedicated to the production process of communal knowledge and fluctuating desires.

The ethos of the CFU was critical and opinionated about the ideological nature of knowledge, which meant that we did not try to cover the institution in a cloud of dispassionate neutrality and transcendence as universities traditionally do. The Copenhagen Free University became a site of socialised and politicised research, developing knowledge and debate around certain fields of social practice. During its six years of existence, the CFU entered into five fields of research: feminist organisation, art and economy, escape subjectivity, television/media activism and art history. The projects were initiated with the experience of the normative nature of mainstream knowledge production and research, allowing us to see how certain areas of critical practice were being excluded. Since we didn't want to replicate the structure of the formal universities, the way we developed the research was based on open calls to people who found interest in our fields or interest in our perspective on knowledge production. Slowly the research projects were collectively constructed through the display of material, presentations, meetings, and spending time together. The nature of the process was sharing and mutual empowerment, not focusing on a final product or paper, but rather on the process of communisation and redistribution of facts and feelings. Parallel to the development of the CFU, we started to see self-organised universities sprouting up everywhere. Over this time, the basic question we were constantly asking ourselves was, what kind of university do we need in relation to our everyday? This question could only be answered in the concrete material conditions of our lives. The multiplicity of self-organised universities that were starting in various places, and which took all kinds of

structures and directions, reflected the diversity of these material conditions. This showed that the neoliberal university model was only one model among many models; the only one given as a model to the students of capital.

As the strategy of self-institution focused on taking power and not accepting the dualism between the mainstream and the alternative, this in itself carried some contradictions. The CFU had for us become a too fixed identifier of a certain discourse relating to emancipatory education within academia and the art scene. Thus we decided to shut down the CFU in the winter of 2007 as a way of withdrawing the CFU from the landscape. We did this with the statement 'We Have Won' and shut the door of the CFU just before the New Year. During the six years of the CFU's existence, the knowledge economy had rapidly, and aggressively, become the norm around us in Copenhagen and in northern Europe. The rise of social networking, lifestyle and intellectual property as engines of valorisation meant that the knowledge economy was expanding into the tiniest pores of our lives and social relations. The state had turned to a wholesale privatisation of former public educational institutions, converting them into mines of raw material for industry in the shape of ideas, desires and human beings. But this normalising process was somehow not powerful enough to silence all forms of critique and dissent; other measures were required.

In December 2010 we received a formal letter from the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation telling us that a new law had passed in the parliament that outlawed the existence of the Copenhagen Free University together with all other self-organised and free universities. The letter stated that they were fully aware of the fact that we do not exist any more, but just to make sure they wished to notify us that "In case the Copenhagen Free University should resume its educational activities it would be included under the prohibition in the university law §33". In 2010 the university law in Denmark was changed, and the term 'university' could only be used by institutions authorised by the state. We were told that this was to protect 'the students from being disappointed'. As we know

numerous people who are disappointed by the structural changes to the educational sector in recent years, we have decided to contest this new clampdown by opening a new free university in Copenhagen. This forms part of our insistence that the emancipatory perspective of education should still be on the map. We demand the law be scrapped or altered, allowing self-organised and free universities to be a part of a critical debate around the production of knowledge now and in the society of the future.

We call for everybody to establish their own free universities in their homes or in the workplace, in the square or in the wilderness. All power to the free universities of the future.

The Free U Resistance Committee of June 18 2011.

Practicalities in Denmark: Please send a mail to the Minister of Science, Technology and Innovation declaring your university (min@vtu.dk) and cc. to the The Danish Agency of Universities (ubst@ubst.dk)

Please circulate!



Former member of the Situationist International Peter Laugesen at the Copenhagen Free University, 2003. Courtesy of Jakob Jakobsen.

We Have Won! Speech delivered at the Creative Time Summit, October 9, 2010

Jakob Jakobsen

When talking about education and learning we have to talk about struggle. I think that it is a very important aspect of working with an emancipatory perspective in relation to education and production of knowledge. People, especially within the art scene, tend to forget that.

When we established the Copenhagen Free University in 2001 struggle was the perspective. It wasn't just another art project. We found that we were living in a situation where action was urgent. The so-called knowledge economy was becoming the norm and changing not only the established universities and other educational institutions, but it was changing society as such. It is almost ten years ago by now, but to those of you who don't know about the Copenhagen Free University the CFU was a self-organized institution situated within the framework of our apartment in Copenhagen. Before we opened the free university we had for a while been discussing the change in capitalist production that had taken place with globalization - especially the impact on our own lives in the western world.

Here knowledge and human imagination was increasingly becoming the frontier of capitalist expansion and this had turned the educational sector into a contested source of value. There was money to be earned. With globalization and the opening up of movement of goods and capital, there was also an opening up of a global market of knowledge.

We were in many ways children of the anti-globalization movement of the late 1990s, but never felt at ease with the summit-hopping of the globalized protests, although it was at that time very successful. It was our intention (and hope) to somehow connect the anti-capitalist struggle to our everyday, our material life. And sometimes the solution lies just in front of

you. When production had turned immaterial then there were not any big factories to occupy, there was no heavy machines to take over, the main machinery had on a very basic level become the production of subjectivity. So to take over production was a discursive act, a speech act. So we said: This is a university, and by that simple speech act we established the Copenhagen Free University in our messy apartment on the 4th floor in the north district of Copenhagen. And the university was reality.

When I say 'we', it was a floating group of close friends; Henriette Heise, Emma Hedditch, Howard Slater, and Anthony Davies. But it was mainly Henriette and I who was living in the Free University although we had guests in our 'residency' for months. But the founding speech act, 'let's make an university,' actually started a process, an experimental process. The institutions of society are normally presented to us as given. They are as they are. I myself was born in a hospital, a hospital that I of natural reasons didn't have any influence on. If my parents had been rich I might have been born in a nicer hospital, but anyways. From there on I went to nursery, to primary school, to secondary school, then to high school and eventually to the University of Copenhagen, from where I dropped out and got accepted to the Art Academy. All these institutions have shaped me, shaped my body and my mind. Of course I have through most of my institutional life felt alienated, that was the name of the game. But I had absolutely no illusions about changing these institutions, despite of the spectacle of students representation.

I was well aware of the fact that the state and society wanted to shape me in a certain way to become a good and productive citizen. That was at least how I experienced it during my youth in Copenhagen 20 years ago. But for us it was actually a interesting challenge to ask ourselves: What kind of institution do we want? What kind of university do we need? This was very much the experimental process that was the Copenhagen Free University. How should a university be structured if we wanted a university that was emerging from our material life? All people should ask themselves this question once in a while. One thing is sure, capital is constantly asking itself, what kind of university does it need to make even more money.

We fast got into a inquiry of how knowledge is valorized in society and what kind of knowledge is viewed as important and what kind of knowledge is viewed as less important. Foucault taught us that knowledge isn't just a tool of power, knowledge and power are two sides of the same coin. And universities are working like banks in society: They guarantee a certain system of knowledge as truthful and right. The fact that we had re-appropriated the university gave us power from the outset, perhaps not 'all power', but power. On a practical level we could use the name to get access to archives and libraries that were increasingly privatized, people used CFU as a reference in relation to autonomous research projects if they needed an institutional reference, and people actually started to call us to apply for jobs and such. All this showed the kind of power the name of the university is carrying. We were very careful not to claim to be an alternative project, we didn't want to measure our Free University in relation to the University of Copenhagen or some of the other universities in the process of selling out their autonomy. They were just alienated alternatives to us, as far as we saw it.

Since we didn't actually want to teach anyone anything, our aim was to learn as a collective process - and the main focus became research. A kind of collective socialized process, where everyone was contributing what they could in terms of time and competence. When starting a new branch of research we made open calls asking people to contribute and join the process of the project. We organized talks, film screenings, various debates in our flat and communities slowly built up in relation to the specific topics of research we were focusing on. Somehow accepting that knowledge is a social relation rather than something someone possesses, our project turned into a number of research communities that slowly was building a discourse (a sphere of knowledge) around the specific topics. I don't want to start telling about the specific projects that we engaged in but the headlines were Art and Economy, Radical history, Media Activism, Feminist Organizations, and Refugee Subjectivity. As we didn't want to instrumentalize the knowledge produced we rarely wrote papers or reports, but thought that the people involved could utilize and disperse the collective knowledge produced within their own networks as

they felt appropriate. We wanted to make the knowledge social and free.

We have lost!

When I started I said that I see all these activities as struggles and not as a playful and funny alternative art project. This is because I can't see it in any other way. Capital is constantly teaching us how to behave and how to live our lives. And if we don't fight that, the school of capital will shape our social relations and our innermost emotions. And capital is already teaching us to compete, teaching us to be possessive with our ideas and our talents, teaching us to become highly skilled only in areas where there is a market and only in areas that are useful to the unstoppable appetite of capital itself. Perhaps it is already too late and we have all become good students in capital's school of alienation.

I sometimes have my doubts. Capital is persistently teaching us in the universities, in the schools, in the everyday (capitalism has got its own pedagogy) and here it is not just a matter of being critical and making fancy art shows about alternative education, but a matter of coming to terms with the fact that we don't want to learn capitalism. That's why it is a struggle. It is a struggle between learning to be submissive to capital or learning to be free. And, I am sorry to say, this struggle has had a hard time within the art scene in recent years with big projects about self-organized education and loads of books and seminars about 'non-aligned' universities, run by academics and curators who want to join the 'educational turn' in art as it has been called. This has in my view been a depoliticizing turn, taking the struggle out of the equation and turning it into a nice and interesting theme for high-profile corporate art or educational institutions. Parallel to this 'educational turn to the right', is an unfolding 'educational turn to the streets' with students all over the world starting to protest and resist the pedagogy of capital that is destroying the autonomy of - and access to - education. With the occupations of the universities in Vienna, Berkeley and in hundreds of other places around the globe last year, the protests appear to gather even more momentum this year, most recently with massive protests

in California and across Europe. So if we are really interested in the emancipatory potential of education we have to support the students right now.

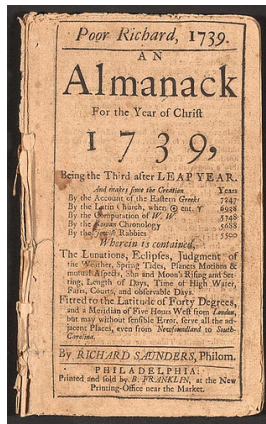
We have Won!

I forgot to tell you that we actually shut down the Copenhagen Free University in 2007 with the statement, We have Won! As a natural consequence of our attempt to take power we wanted to show that power can as easily be destroyed. So we decided to abolish the name, but we are carrying on similar research and sharing of knowledge in the dark in our community, among our friends, between ourselves.

Thank you and all power to the protesting students!



This Pickpocket Will Leave You (Culturally) Richer



About a week ago, I stumbled across an interesting program at SFMOMA that had the potential to put a whole new spin on both cultural education and museum learning. Known as [Pickpocket Almanack](#), this program is billed as “an experimental school without walls.” Curious to know more about the school and about the implications for museums, I posed some questions to Joseph Del Pesco (more info [here](#) and [here](#)) – SFMOMA independent curator and creator of Pickpocket Almanack. Here are his responses, hope you enjoy them as much as I did...

1) Why is it called Pickpocket Almanack?

The title means, roughly, “stolen calendar.” It’s because the program borrows and compiles event calendars from all the venues in the Bay Area to make a sort of meta-calendar—which is subsequently used by the faculty to create courses. The word “pickpocket” was actually suggested by artist Anne Walsh as a more provocative way of naming an experimental school. I think her suggestion was “Pickpocket Academy,” which I liked, but ultimately I decided not to use the terms University, Academy, School etc after talking with artist Brian Conley. I told him I wanted to try to break

the teacher-student hierarchy, or at least disrupt the conditioned roles inherent in formal education. He suggested one way to send this signal was to use different language. I took his advice. When I was first thinking about the word “Almanack” I was looking at Benjamin Franklin’s Poor Richard’s Almanack, which was his most populist publication. The extra “k” is in homage to him. As is some of the typography of the website, designed by the brilliant Scott Ponik.

2) Can you tell me a little bit more about Pickpocket Almanack? What was the inspiration for the program?

For the last couple of years I’ve been compiling research into artist initiated schools. This includes Amy Franceschini’s Playshop, Tsuyoshi Ozawa’s University of Sodan Art, The Center for Urban Pedagogy, Jon Rubin’s Independent School of Art, Ted Purves’ Momentary Academy, The Mountain School (not to be confused with Black Mountain College), Fritz Haeg’s Sundown Schoolhouse, and Pablo Helguera’s School of PanAmerican Unrest. All of these excellent and extremely varied approaches to education serve as markers of a changing artworld, and informed my thinking about the Pickpocket Almanack.

3) What is the most interesting event you have featured in this season of Pickpocket Almanack? What sort of events pique your interest or what criteria is used to select events for the school?

The way Pickpocket is set-up, I’ve collected a master calendar of about 100 events, including lectures, panel discussions, workshops, screening etc. I subsequently presented these to the five faculty member’s we’ve asked to organize courses. These cultural experts living in the SF Bay Area will undoubtedly each have a uniquely different selection process and criteria, and I won’t attempt to speak for them. However, I can say that the program is less about picking favorites and more about constructing an alternative narrative. Of course I expect that they’ll pick events that are worth going to, but as the selection is happening this week, I’m not yet sure how things will turn out. I’m as excited and curious as any of the hundred or so people who have already expressed interest in singing-up. Ultimately,

I think the most interesting event will be the final group meetings with the faculty at the end of each course. (Thanks go to legendary Bay Area curator and my friend Renny Pritikin for suggesting this aspect of the program).

4) Why did you choose to operate Pickpocket Almanack through a museum? Would it be successful/unsuccessful if it was not conducted through any organization?

I first started discussing the rough ideas for Pickpocket Almanack with Dominic Willsdon who was working on some plans that involved connecting various institutions in the Bay Area. It was a proposal germane to an ongoing conversation and was developed within that context. Dominic is the Curator of Education and Public Programs at SFMOMA, and he has been a huge help in pushing the program as far as it could go. I couldn't have done it without him.

5) Do you hope that people go through the program and to events alone or do you see this as a more communal learning experience?

That is one of the big questions, and we'll have no way of knowing how it's going to work for individuals until the courses start. Everyone signed-up for a particular course will be connected via email groups, but whether they'll decide to become "communal," to use your word, is still one of the great unknowns. We'll do a few things to help make this possible, to break the ice, but that's as far as we'll go. The rest will be up to them. It's also interesting to note that while the five key events that make up the course will be made public via the website (for anyone to "audit"), there will be other events and readings available only to the participants who've signed-up, sent out via email by the faculty.

6) Since this is an "experimental school," are you aiming to create a new way of learning, or are you hoping to enhance people's experience with Bay Area culture, both, or something else altogether? Essentially, what is your goal with this program?

I'll answer this in a personal way. I tend to go to events (lectures, screenings, symposia etc.) either when I already know of the artist or writer or filmmaker or at the recommendations of friends and colleagues. If no one points out a particular person or event to me, I rarely go. And while I have some affinities for certain institutions in the Bay Area, and do occasionally read the papers and websites, the rarity of recommendations means I get stuck in routines and don't typically go to things I know nothing about. I suspect this is true of most people interested in culture living in big cities. That they're willing but don't tend to go to unfamiliar events without some nod or pointer. Pickpocket is, at its most basic, a structure for guiding these decisions, through taking the advice of those respected in the field. In compiling the master calendar for this Fall, it became obvious like never before just how much I've been missing.

7) Do you see Pickpocket Almanack, or some variation of it, taking root in other museums? Or do you feel that there is something distinctly Bay Area about the program?

I do think the idea is portable, but I think it's best suited for cities that have too many interesting things happening. It's a good problem to have, and Pickpocket is just one way to address it. To develop the master calendar we've partnered with Happenstand.com, the best listing of art related events, places and people in the SF Bay Area, hands down. Websites like Happenstand are invaluable resources for tracking the pluralistic landscape of contemporary art.

Enrollment for the Fall Season of Pickpocket Almanack (October 1 – December 11) begins September 23.

Published on September 21, 2009 [1 Comment](#)

READER

Making Art Schools

EDITORS

Dorothee King & Bernhard Garnicnig

“Annotating” is a series of open access readers seeking to elaborate and explore perspectives on institutional practices. Each “Annotation” is developed by a commissioned collaborator, a select author-compiler, who’s inspired and inspiring work is to bring into momentary focus, and relation, institutional-practices from a given perspective. Recomposing the inevitable canonizing power of all institutional practice, and in particular this thing we call ‘research’, Annotations seeks to envelop the outlier and undo the archive of movements known as ‘institutional critique’, ‘new institutionalism’ and ‘instituent practice’, concentrating on what is to be done, by whom, with whom and how.

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SERIES

Other issues of this series are available at
<http://annotating.institutions.life>

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TYPEFACES USED

Rig Solid
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Each publication is the result of a workshop and discussion among the contributors, with the aim to elaborate and explore perspectives on institutional practices.

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