

WHAT DO ARTISTS KNOW?

THE STONE ART THEORY INSTITUTES

Edited by James Elkins

VOL. 1

ART AND GLOBALIZATION

VOL. 2

WHAT IS AN IMAGE?

VOL. 3

WHAT DO ARTISTS KNOW?

The Stone Art Theory Institutes is a series of books on five of the principal unresolved problems in contemporary art theory. The series attempts to be as international, inclusive, and conversational as possible in order to give a comprehensive sense of the state of thinking on each issue. All together, the series involves more than three hundred scholars from more than sixty countries.

This series is dedicated to Howard and Donna Stone, longtime friends of the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

THE STONE ART THEORY INSTITUTES VOLUME 3

WHAT DO ARTISTS KNOW?

EDITED BY JAMES ELKINS

EVENT CO-ORGANIZED WITH FRANCES WHITEHEAD

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HOWARD AND DONNA STONE

long-time friends of the School of the Art Institute of Chicago

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SERIES PREFACE

In the usual course of things, art theory happens invisibly, without attracting attention. Concepts like *picture*, *visual art*, and *realism* circulate in newspapers, galleries, and museums as if they were as obvious and natural as words like *dog*, *cat*, and *goldfish*. Art theory is the air the art world breathes, and it is breathed carelessly, without thought. It is the formless stuff out of which so many justifications are conjured. Art theory also happens in universities and art schools, where it is studied and nurtured like a rare orchid. And art theory happens in innumerable academic conferences, which are sometimes studded with insights but are more often provisional and inconclusive. In those academic settings, words like *picture*, *visual art*, and *realism* are treated like impossibly complicated machines whose workings can hardly be understood. Sometimes, then, what counts as art theory is simple and normal, and other times it seems to be the most difficult subject in visual art.

A similarity links these different ways of using theory. In the art world as in academia, it often feels right just to allude to an concept like *picture*, and let its flavor seep into the surrounding conversation. That is strange because *picture* is so important to so many people, and it leads to wayward conversations. The books in this series are intended to push hard on that strangeness, by spending as much time as necessary on individual concepts and the texts that exemplify them. Some books are more or less dedicated to particular words: volume 1 focuses on *globalization*, *translation*, *governmentality*, and *hybridity*; volume 2 explores *image*, *picture*, and *icon*. Volume 3 is concerned with the idea that art is *research*, which produces *knowledge*. Volume 4 is about the *aesthetic*, the *anti-aesthetic*, and the *political*; and volume 5 concentrates on *visual studies*, *visual culture*, and *visuality*. This series is like an interminable conversation around a dictionary—or like the world's most prolix glossary of art. That isn't to say that the purposes of these conversations is to fix meanings: on the contrary, the idea is to work hard enough so that what seemed obdurate and slippery, as Wittgenstein said, begins to fracture and crack.

Each book in this series started as a week-long event, held in Chicago. No papers were given (except as evening lectures, which are not recorded in these books). For a week, five faculty and a group of twenty-five scholars met in closed seminars. In preparation for the week they had read over eight hundred pages of assigned texts. The week opened with a three hour panel discussion among the faculty, continued with four and a half days of seminars (six hours each day), and

ended with a five hour panel discussion. All thirty-five hours of it was taped and edited, and the pertinent portions are presented here.

This series is a refinement of a previous book series called *The Art Seminar*, which appeared from 2005 to 2008.¹ Like *The Art Seminar*, the *Stone Summer Theory Institutes* are an attempt to record a new kind of art theory, one that is more inclusive and less coherent than some art theory produced in North America and western Europe since the advent of poststructuralism. The guiding idea is that theorizing on visual art has become increasingly formalized and narrow, even as art practices have become wildly diverse. Both of the book series are meant to capture a reasonable cross-section of thinking on a given topic, and both include people at the far ends of the spectrum of their subjects—so far from one another that in some cases they were reluctant even to sit together in the events, or participate in the books. Some conversations are genuinely dialectic, others are abrupt encounters, and still others are unaccountable misunderstandings. All those species of communication are recorded as faithfully as possible, because they are evidence of the state of understanding of each field.²

The Introduction to each volume is meant as a straightforward and clear review of the critical situation leading up to the seminars. The *Art Seminar* books then had a set of essays to help set the stage for the transcribed discussions. There are no essays in this series, because it is not possible to usefully condense the hundreds of pages of texts that informed these discussions. (References can be found in the transcripts.) The omission of essays makes this series more “difficult” than *The Art Seminar*, but the literature of art theory has grown beyond the point where it can be helpfully anthologized. The books in this series are not introductions to the various people who participated, and they do not usually function as summaries of the subjects they treat. They are attempts to move forward given the current state of discourse in each field, and they presuppose the readings that were assigned in the seminars.

After each year’s week-long event, we selected excerpts from the thirty-five hours of tapes, and produced a rough-edited transcript. It was given to each of the participants, who were invited to edit their contributions and add references. After several rounds of editing the transcript was sent out to forty or fifty people who did not attend the event. They were asked to write assessments, which appear here in the order they were received. The assessors were asked to consider the conversation from a distance, noting its strengths and its blind spots, in any style and at any length. As the assessments came in, they were distributed to people who hadn’t yet completed theirs, so that later assessments often comment

1. The topics of the seven volumes of *The Art Seminar*: *Art History Versus Aesthetics* (2006), *Photography Theory* (2007), *Is Art History Global?* (2007), *The State of Art Criticism*, coedited with Michael Newman (2008), *Renaissance Theory*, coedited with Robert Williams (2008), *Landscape Theory*, coedited with Rachael DeLue (2008), and *Re-Enchantment*, coedited with David Morgan (2008). All are published by Routledge (Taylor and Francis), New York.

2. Different fields have different kinds of incoherence. The particular disunities of art criticism are discussed in an email exchange at the end of *The State of Art Criticism*. The incoherence of theorizing on the Renaissance is the subject of another exchange at the end of *Renaissance Theory*. My own thoughts about the very strange second volume, *Photography Theory*, are in “Is Anyone Listening?” *Photofile* 80 (Winter 2007): 80.

on earlier ones, building an intermittent conversation through the book. And finally, the books end with Afterwords, which are meant to paint a picture of the current condition of thinking on the subject, pointing out the results and noting the misunderstandings and dead ends.

The objective of all this is not to produce a new consensus, but a new level of difficulty. I say in several of the transcripts that I would be happy if the seminar conversations and assessments make it harder to write about art. For some readers, art theory may seem too abstruse and technical, but at heart it has a different problem: it is too easy. Both the intricate art theory practiced in academies, and the nearly invisible theory that suffuses galleries and art fairs, are reasonably easy to do reasonably well. And as Wittgenstein knew, the hardest problems are the ones that are right in front of us: *picture, visual art, realism*. The purpose of the books in this series is to do some damage to our sense that we understand words like those.

A SPECIAL ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This is the kind of project that is not normally possible in academic life, because it requires an unusual outlay of time and effort: a month of preparatory reading, a concerted week without the distractions of papers being read or lectures that are off-topic.

The originating events at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago are called the Stone Summer Theory Institute, after Howard and Donna Stone, whose gift made this series possible. They are dedicated collectors of postminimal art, with an eye for the most ambitious and characteristic pieces by a wide range of artists, from John McCracken to Gerhard Richter, Steve McQueen, Janine Antoni, Luc Turmans, Michael Krebber, and Marlene Dumas. What is remarkable about their support is that it is directed to *content* and not infrastructure or display. In the art world, there is no end to the patronage of display: corporate sponsors can be found for most every art project, and galleries traditionally depend on individuals and corporations for much of their programming. In that ocean of public patronage there is virtually nothing directed at the question of what art *means*. The market plummets onward, sometimes—as in the case of contemporary Chinese painting—with very little serious critical consideration or interpretation. The Stones's gift is extremely unusual. Their own collecting interests are in line with the subjects of this series: the theories addressed in these books are only important if it is granted that the history of art theory exerts a pressure on the dissipated present, just as postminimalism is crucial mainly, and possibly only, for those who experience the modernist past as a challenge and not merely an attractive backdrop.

So this series is dedicated to Howard and Donna Stone: if more patrons supported art history, theory, and criticism, the art world might well make more sense.

THE TOPICS IN THIS SERIES

Volume 1, *Art and Globalization*, is about writing in the “biennale culture” that now determines much of the art market. Literature on the worldwide dissemination of art assumes nationalism and ethnic identity, but rarely analyzes it. At the same time there is extensive theorizing about globalization in politics, postcolonial theory, sociology, and anthropology. The volume is an experiment, to see what happens when the two discourses are brought together.

Volume 2, *What is an Image?* asks how well we understand what we mean by *picture* and *image*. The art world depends on there being something special about the visual, but that something is seldom spelled out. The most interesting theorists of those fundamental words are not philosophers but art historians, and this book interrogates the major theories, including those with theological commitments, those based in phenomenology, and those concerned principally with social meanings.

Volume 3, *What do Artists Know?* is about the education of artists. The MFA degree is notoriously poorly conceptualized, and now it is giving way to the PhD in art practice. Meanwhile, conversations on freshman courses in studio art continue to be bogged down by conflicting agendas. This book is about the theories that underwrite art education at all levels, the pertinent history of art education, and the most promising current conceptualizations.

Volume 4, *Beyond the Anti-Aesthetic*, is about the fact that now, almost thirty years after Hal Foster defined the anti-aesthetic, there is still no viable alternative to the dichotomy between aesthetics and anti- or non-aesthetic art. The impasse is made more difficult by the proliferation of identity politics, and it is made less negotiable by the hegemony of anti-aesthetics in academic discourse on art. This is the first concerted, systematic effort to understand the impasse.

Volume 5, *Farewell to Visual Studies*, is a forum on the state of the once-new discipline (inaugurated in the early 1990s) that promised to be the site for the study of visuality in all fields, inside and outside of art. Despite the increasing number of departments worldwide, visual studies remains a minority interest with an increasingly predictable set of interpretive agendas and subjects. Hence our farewell.

INTRODUCTION

James Elkins

This introduction is adapted from the opening roundtable, September 21, 2009.

Welcome, everyone. This opening discussion is meant to be very informal: we're just going to talk about some of the questions we hope to raise during the week of seminars. After today's three-hour panel discussion, there will be twenty-seven hours of closed seminars, and then on Saturday the week will end with another public panel discussion. That one will be five hours long—yes, I know, five hours—but in the past it has been a great way to wrap up the week.

We have an outstanding Faculty here, and an equally amazing group of fifteen Fellows, from the U.S., Austria, the UK, Ireland, Belgium, Greece, Mexico, Hong Kong, Australia, Sweden, and Canada. Some are art historians who study the history of art instruction; some are philosophers; and others are experts in college-level art instruction, right up to the PhD. (And I wanted to record that we were going to have a Fellow from Iran, but the U.S. immigration people found out that she didn't have a large bank account, and they decided that could only mean she was intending to settle here permanently.) We have all spent the last month reading. The Faculty assigned about fifteen hundred pages of texts,¹ not including optional background reading on craft,² design,³ and art education.⁴ There were also optional texts on related subjects such as contemporary art practices outside of academies.⁵

1. These are cited throughout the text: the following footnotes are only the readings that were not cited by the participants in the Seminars.

2. Glenn Adamson, *Thinking Through Craft* (London: Berg, 2007).

3. György Kepes, *Language of Vision* (Chicago: P. Theobald, 1944); Nigel Cross, *Design: The Way of Knowing* (Basel: Birkhäuser, 2007); Alain Findeli, "Rethinking Design Education for the 21st Century: Theoretical, Methodological, and Ethical Discussion," *Design Issues* 17, no. 1 (2001): 5–17; Jorge Frascara, "Hiding Lack of Knowledge: Bad Words in Design Education," *Design Issues* 23, no. 4 (2007): 62–68; Clive Dilnot, "The State of Design History," pt. 1 and pt. 2, *Design Issues* 1, no. 1 (1984): 4–23, and 1 no. 2 (1984): 3–20; these were all suggested by Michael Golec.

4. A position paper on art education was written especially for the event: CVAE Club, Chicago, "The Condition of Art Education: Defining the Field and Its Distinct Territories," unpublished position paper, 2009, available

on request from Keith Brown or John Ploof, Art Education, School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

5. These include Jacques Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991); *The Object of Labor: Art, Cloth, and Cultural Production*, edited by Joan Livingstone and John Ploof (Chicago: SAIC; Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007); Claire Bishop, *Participation, Documents of Contemporary Art* (London: Whitechapel; Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006); Marion Milner (pseudonym Joanna Field), *On Not Being Able to Paint*, with an introduction by Anna Freud (New York: International Universities Press, 1957); the background reading included *Bild und Bildung: Ikonologische Interpretationen vormoderner Dokumente von Erziehung und Bildung*, edited by Christian Rittelmeyer and Erhard Wiersing (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1991), an anthology of texts on *Bildung*, *paideia*, and related concepts from antiquity to the seventeenth century; *Rethinking the Contemporary Art School: The Artist, the PhD, and the Academy*, edited by Brad

So we are hoping to make some headway on some of the more difficult issues about how artists are taught, and what they know. This is an enormous field—actually, no one knows how big it is. The website artschools.com lists 2,055 art schools and departments in the U.S., so there must be at least five times that number in the whole world.⁶ Another site, gradschools.com, lists 486 MFA programs in the U.S. and Canada. Every year there are too many conferences, symposia, and lectures on this subject for anyone to attend. But at the same time, some of the most fundamental issues are completely unresolved. I was amazed, really amazed, when I discovered that there is basically no definition of the MFA. It is not an exaggeration to say no one knows what an MFA is, except in the trivial sense that it involves professional-level competence in visual art and that for the moment it's still the terminal degree. No one has a good account of *how* art should be taught, *why* it should be taught, *whether* it should be taught, or even *if* it should be taught.⁷ No one knows what knowledge goes into art, or what knowledge comes out of it. And this goes doubly for the new PhD degree in studio art, which has raised some extremely difficult philosophic problems that no one, so far, has made much headway with. All this may sound improbable, but I don't mind saying it—I just feel a bit more confident saying it now that I've read the fifteen hundred pages of texts for our seminars.

The first topic, the one that I think goes before all the others, is: What is the relevant history of art education? What historical periods, what institutions, are still relevant when we are thinking about how studio art is taught today? This may seem like a simple question, but there has not been much work on the subject, and even the basic outlines of the history of studio art instruction are open for discussion. Should we think of the French academy model as one coherent development? Or should we divide it into phases? Maybe it makes sense to distinguish five phases of academic art instruction in the West: the original Italian Accademia, the French academy and the proliferation of academies throughout Europe, the final phase of academies in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as they were swamped by Modernism, and finally the straggling survivors that continue to the present. It's not that there isn't scholarship on the history of academies: it's that the scholarship is *only* historical, so it needs to be looked at again with an eye to what matters for the present.

Buckley and John Conomos (Halifax: Nova Scotia College Press, 2009) (this appeared during the Seminars); S. David Deitcher, "Teaching the Late Modern Artist: From Mnemonics to the Technology of Gestalt" (PhD diss., City University of New York, 1989); "Unsentimental Education: The Professionalization of the American Artist," in *Hand Painted Pop: American Art in Transition, 1955–1962*, edited by Russell Ferguson (Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1992); Frederick M. Logan, *Growth of Art in American Schools* (New York: Harper, 1955).

6. In 2005 the same website listed 3,623, which gives a sense of how variable the numbers are.

7. My own notion is that art cannot be taught, because teachers do not know or control the moments when essential information is imparted, and students don't know when they should listen for that information. That argument is not part of this book; see *Why Art Cannot Be Taught: A Handbook for Art Students* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001), Korean translation 학교 안의 미술 학교 밖의 미술 (Seoul: Chaek-Se-Sang, 2006), Chinese translation (Beijing: Peking University Press, forthcoming).

Once that is decided, more or less, then it becomes possible to ask a second question: What practices, ideas, skills, techniques, and exercises are still relevant? In what specific ways is the Bauhaus still with us? What is currently done with Bauhaus exercises such as Joseph Albers's color-sensitivity experiments, or the sequence from 2D to 4D, or the common first-year assignments where students gather objects of one color, or one texture, or one shape? What things have been introduced more recently—for instance, since the Second World War? And on the other hand, what remains from the Renaissance and Baroque academies? It is necessary to make a provisional inventory of these things, to compare it with what it taught today, and that's because our current way of teaching art is a mixture, a collage of all sorts of different things from different times and places, and unless we begin to understand where the parts have come from, we won't stand much of a chance of making sense of how art is taught.

We are also hoping to do some work on the very practical question of how art is currently taught around the world. That will be our third topic. It may sound unlikely, but actually very little is known about how art is taught worldwide. The major art schools in places like Los Angeles, London, New Haven, Helsinki, Maastricht, Frankfurt, Chicago, New York, and Berlin know one another, more or less, because they trade faculty and students, and because they are part of the international circuit of the art market. But there is no place to go to find out how art is taught in provincial China, India, or South America, or even how it varies from one state school to another in the U.S. The European Union has a major initiative called the Bologna Accords, which is engaged in comparing university departments and degrees across Europe. But outside Europe, there is no source, no central organization, and even within Europe there are any number of idiosyncratic institutions that fly below the Bologna radar. A few years ago I was in Bucharest, where I discovered the Academy there has a specialty in Romanian frescoes. You can go there to learn how to remove a fresco from the wall, and how to restore it, or how to paint a new one. But there are subtler differences everywhere. In Calgary, there is an emphasis on a particularly Canadian practice of painting, but also on conceptual art and postminimal sculpture. In Copenhagen, they read different art theory texts than in Stockholm . . . and so forth. Our third question is really just a forum: how can we gather information about how art is taught, so that the subject stops being such a black hole of endless anecdotal information?

The fourth subject for the week brings me to the question of the conference itself, What do artists know? I was surprised last year to discover that someone else at the School of the Art Institute had been working on that exact question. Frances Whitehead, who has co-organized this event with me, teaches in the Sculpture Department here at the School of the Art Institute, and she had been working on the question for several years. She hears the question very differently than I do. For me, it is about the ways art is taught all around the world, the histories of art instruction, and how to make sense of art instruction. In other

words, the question is about what artists are taught, how they are taught, and why they are taught the things we teach them. For Frances, the question is about artists in the world, not necessarily in art schools at all. She wants to know, What do artists know that other people don't? What kind of knowledge is particular to artists? How is it related to knowledge that other people have? And how do artists use their knowledge?

In the middle of the week, after we have discussed the history of art instruction and what elements of that history might be pertinent for the present, we will turn to Frances's question about artistic knowledge. We'll be considering texts by people who claim that artists have a special kind of knowledge called *tacit knowledge*, and arguments that artists' knowledge has changed radically from what it had been in the past. It's a wide-open field. In preparation for this event, I posted a couple of threads on Facebook, asking what artistic knowledge is. As you can imagine, the answers go across the whole spectrum from serious to completely goofy. Here are a couple, just to show the range:

One person said artistic knowledge is "skills" and "techniques." I think we'd all agree, but we'd also hope it is much more than that.

Another said it is "intuition": but what is that? And why don't people who aren't artists have intuition? Someone thought that artists work from a "different (more sensitized) position," and others said it's "personalized intelligence" or the capacity to work "at a heightened level": but aren't there callous artists? Impersonal artists? Stupid artists?

Another said it's "genius"—but in the art world, we're allergic to that idea.

Another person said what makes an artist is a "certain spiritual element": I won't go near that one.

A couple of people, more active in the art world, proposed that artistic knowledge is a matter of an "abstract, diffused, and communal practice" or that artists' knowledge doesn't matter because "perceived social value" is what counts.

And then there were the cynics (I imagine they all have MFAs). One said that artists know nothing, and that's why they make art. Another said that there is no difference between artists and others because we all work for the same "entertainment industry." And my favorite cynic wrote that artists only think they have knowledge, but really they just use their brains "in a strange way."

So it went on Facebook. Here we're intending to have a slightly more serious discussion, first about tacit knowledge and other new models, and then also about the philosophic tradition of claims about the knowledge that is contained in art. We have an expert on that subject, Roy Sorensen: he's not an art world person; he's an analytic philosopher, and he's here to make sure our claims about knowledge in general make sense. He is going to present the arguments that have been made on behalf of what's called *aesthetic cognitivism*: the claim that artworks can give us new knowledge, and that the knowledge they contain is integral to their value as artworks. It is a very difficult position to argue. What exactly do you *learn*, for example, from the Sistine Ceiling? (Other than

Christian doctrine, which Michelangelo would assume you already knew.) What *knowledge* do you get from a Mondrian painting? The art world can be very loose and inexact in its claims, and we are hoping Roy will make sure we make some kind of sense. In the Seminars, we will divide the question, What do artists know? into two parts: Roy Sorensen's philosophic introduction, which will be our fourth topic, and Frances Whitehead's investigation into tacit knowledge, which will be our fifth topic.

Our remaining four topics are about individual degrees—the first year, the BA or BFA (outside the U.S., it's usually the BA), the MFA or MA (again, outside the U.S. it's usually the MA), several exotic degrees such as the MLitt and DLitt, and the very contentious PhD (which also exists as a DFA). What matters about these degrees is how people understand them. What should you expect, as a student, from a BFA? Why consider a PhD?

It's the same here as it is with the first couple of topics to do with the history of art instruction. There is no lack of conferences where the different degrees are discussed, but they almost always get bogged down in personal, anecdotal, local information. People speak about their own programs, and what they have put in place. On the other hand, there is an administrative literature on the different degrees, and there are professional associations that monitor and accredit the degrees, so we will be considering their literature as well as the local and anecdotal texts. Our aim is to ask how the different degrees are conceptualized. What are the best available models for what happens in the first year? What are the best accounts of what the BFA should be? What are the most convincing theories about what the MFA does? And what are the most interesting ways to think about the studio art PhD? All those are our sixth, seventh, eighth, and ninth topics: the first-year program, the BFA, the MFA, and the PhD.

Perhaps it's hopeless to try to make headway on such an enormous subject. Stephan Schmidt-Wulffen, one of our Faculty, said he “desperately hopes” the week doesn't “end in despair.” Let's see how it goes.

THE SEMINARS



THE PARTICIPANTS:

The 2009 Stone Summer Theory Institute had five Faculty, fifteen Fellows, and two graduate students from the School of the Art Institute. They are shown on the panorama on the following pages.

THE FACULTY:

Frances Whitehead (School of the Art Institute of Chicago), James Elkins (School of the Art Institute of Chicago), Sir Christopher Frayling (Royal College of Art, London), Stephan Schmidt-Wulffen (Akademie der bildenden Künste, Vienna), Roy Sorensen (Washington University, St. Louis).

THE FELLOWS:

Hilde Van Gelder (Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, Belgium), Ciarán Benson (University College Dublin, Ireland), Frank Vigneron (Chinese University of Hong Kong), Barbara Jaffee (Northern Illinois University), Doug Harvey (artist, curator, and critic for *LA Weekly*), Miguel González Virgen (Centro de Estudios de Diseño de Monterrey, Mexico), Daniel Palmer (Monash University, Australia), Marta Edling (Uppsala University, Sweden), William Marotti (UCLA), Jonathan Dronsfield (University of Reading, UK), Christopher Csikszentmihályi (MIT), Areti Adamopoulou (University of Ioannina, Greece), Ann Sobiech Munson (Iowa State University), P. Elaine Sharpe (York University, Canada), Saul Ostrow (Cleveland Institute of Art).



THE SCHOOL OF THE ART
INSTITUTE GRADUATE CLASS:
Rebecca Gordon, Andrew
Blackley.

AUDITORS:
Elena Ubada Fernandez, Keith
Brown, Mark Cameron Boyd,
Fernando Uhia, Lisa Wainwright.

The panorama is courtesy of
P. Elaine Sharpe, who took
photographs on three different
days.

The following conversations were recorded during the week of September 21–26, 2009,
at the School of the Art Institute, Chicago.

1. HISTORIES OF STUDIO ART TEACHING

The idea in this first Seminar was to gather the principal accounts of the history of studio art instruction, in order to begin to understand the current state of art education. Readings in advance of the Seminar included histories by Nikolaus Pevsner, Carl Goldstein, and Stuart MacDonald. (They are cited in Section 3 of the Seminars.) Our conversation began with a text by Thierry de Duve, proposing that art education has three phases: first came academies, then the Bauhaus, and then the current condition.¹ These are shown in the table below, with some comments interpolated.

The nineteenth-century academy	Talent Talent is unequally distributed, not universal	Skill Skill is technique and <i>métier</i> , along with “canons of beauty”	Imitation Depends on ideas no longer accessible, such as the place of nature
The Bauhaus	Creativity The universalism and “generosity of the ideology of creativity” discourage talk of content	Medium Teaching by medium produces mistrust of skill, because mastery prevents questioning the medium	Invention Paying attention to the unexpectedness of student work is an “unsuitable” way of recording progress
The current condition	Attitude A “critical attitude” entails real political work, but it devolves into pose	Practice Artists fought against medium but did not revive <i>métier</i> , resulting in practice	Deconstruction The “symptom” of teachers who critiqued invention but did not know imitation

STEPHAN SCHMIDT-WULFFEN: Thierry de Duve sees three periods of artistic education. First came the academies, then the Bauhaus, and then something disastrous happened. Today, he says, we are left with nothing. I call the third period, the one that describes the current moment, the “pop culture paradigm.” This schema is apparently a very general one, and the categories are intermingled in reality, but it seems interesting to follow his argumentation, because we can learn from it.

According to Thierry, the Bauhaus concentrated on *creativity*. It is a democratic principle, in comparison to the academy’s insistence on skill. Instead of

In these seminars, the notes have been added by the speakers, except in the italicized introduction to each seminar, where the notes are the editor’s, or where otherwise indicated.

1. Thierry de Duve, “When Form Has Become Attitude—and Beyond,” in *The Artist and the Academy: Issues in Fine Art Education and*

the Wider Cultural Context, edited by Nicholas de Ville and Stephen Foster (Southampton: John Hansard Gallery, University of Southampton, 1994), 23–40; Thierry de Duve, *Faire école (ou la refaire?)*, new edition, revised and augmented (Geneva: Mamco, 2008); the Seminar read chapter 3, “Hypothèse d’école,” 103–46.

referring to a *métier*, which you had to learn and practice, the Bauhaus stressed the *medium*, which was not simply to be practiced, but had to be questioned and analyzed. Students were invited to experiment: you used the brush, for example, but you tried to use it as if it were a pencil. The Bauhaus also emphasized *invention* instead of *imitation*.

JAMES ELKINS: I thought it might be useful for the book we're producing if we talked about the utility of Thierry's schema, because it is the clearest and most forceful schema for the history of Western studio art instruction. Which parts seem most convincing, or most useful? And how might we want to talk about the schema's deficiencies?

STEPHAN SCHMIDT-WULFFEN: What is interesting for us is what the third "pop culture period" signifies. The *creativity* of the Bauhaus era is replaced now by *attitude*. And Thierry leaves it open if this is simply a polemic label—a pose—or if we can use it as a real concept like Pierre Bourdieu's *habitus*, which I would prefer. The dilemma of artistic practice and so-called theory might be resolved through *habitus*. *Attitude* is also critical—

JAMES ELKINS: Not always, because Thierry also says it degenerates into "mere attitude"—

STEPHAN SCHMIDT-WULFFEN:—that's the connotation of "pose." Thierry says that after about 1970, cultural and social theory entered the art school. After *métier* and *medium*, you therefore have *practice*. Today we are not painting: instead we have a pictorial practice. That indicates that it's accepted that techniques have a strong conventional background. As a painter, you don't genuinely reinvent the *métier* or *medium*, but rather you enter a conventional apparatus when you practice.

Along with this idea of *practice* comes the idea of *dematerialization*. So we're not talking any longer about materials or objects, but forms of practice and how to change them.

And last—and I don't know whether this is a very interesting distinction—after *imitation* and *invention*, we have *deconstruction*. Now, that is a little too close to French philosophy for me, but it is interesting that de Duve says deconstruction dissolves traditional oppositions such as *presence* and *absence* or *original* and *secondary*. So today we can expect an implosion of critical terms that had structured the identity of an artist.

Along with this schema, I think we need to consider other sources. First is Foucault's account of the ambivalent structure of power, according to which the intellectual is no longer a *universal* intellectual, but a *specific* intellectual, meaning that he or she interferes in specific social situations and tries to alter them.² In the same way we should rethink the role of the artist not as a universal artist, but as a specific artist.

2. "Les intellectuels et le pouvoir": Entretien de Michel Foucault avec Gilles Deleuze, 4 mars 1972," in *Gilles Deleuze* (Aix-en-Provence: L'Arc, 1972), 3–10.

I also want to add that creation is *articulated* through repetition. We keep language alive by repeating it: we keep art alive not by inventing new artworks, but because we repeat things in a particular way. Invention is no longer the first and most important task of an artist: instead it is the *deviation* from repetition that matters.³ That is what made appropriation such an important practice in the 1980s. Irit Rogoff's idea of *potentialities* is a good example of how contradiction can be made productive.

JAMES ELKINS: One of the things that concerns me about Thierry's schema is that the first two periods he proposes are fitted out with three concepts each, which are all found in the historical record. But the third category, the postwar art school (what you call the "pop culture paradigm"), is a different *kind* of category, conceptually, because it is polemic. He admits this, and says that his analysis of the third period might have historical deficiencies, or may be waiting for a more positive account.

Another issue is that two of the three concepts in the postwar art school period are nothing but "magic words," as he says. But *deconstruction* functions differently because he explains it in two different ways: it is a "symptom" of exhaustion, a "magic word"; but at the same time, it actually *explains* what happened after the Bauhaus. I am thinking of his paragraph on Derrida, in which "deconstruction" has some force as an explanation of historical change.

So we might want to decide what elements of his schema have historical purchase, which are useful for current discussion, and which are more like placeholders, ways of initiating debate in the absence of positive concepts.

STEPHAN SCHMIDT-WULFFEN: On the other hand, if you look for schemata of our current experience elsewhere, you find very little.

JAMES ELKINS: Exactly. That is why it is so important.

STEPHAN SCHMIDT-WULFFEN: There are entire books comparing the first and second periods. I have found nearly nothing describing the contemporary situation. On the other hand, he does use "deconstruction" in a double sense. We could use that.

JONATHAN DRONSFIELD: But I don't recognize de Duve's "deconstruction," which he characterizes negatively, as suspicion and negation, making it sound closer to skepticism than to deconstruction, which is productive in a way that he seems not to recognize. So I'm not sure it carries the explanatory force you seem to think, Jim. To deconstruct here would be to question the disciplinary distinctions of the art school, its dogmatisms and historical necessities, its political agendas, and so on—and I would say that to that extent deconstruction has

3. See Jacques Derrida, "Signature événement contexte," in *Marges de la philosophie* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1972); and Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: The Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York: Routledge, 1993), especially the introduction.

not had the influence Thierry attributes to it. But its positivity is visible, his experiences of it in the classroom notwithstanding, and despite most attempts at deconstruction, or so-called deconstruction, being politically motivated, or politics in another name, for instance in how it questions the theory/practice distinction, putting it to work.

But what is interesting about what he says about deconstruction is the distinction he makes between its influence in the classroom and its influence in art practice, where in the latter he admits that it can make for good work. Is that what you mean by deconstruction in a “double sense,” Stephan?

STEPHAN SCHMIDT-WULFFEN: Thierry uses “deconstruction” polemically in the sense of a popular but superficial intellectual habit. But I think you are right, Jonathan: Deconstruction is also an antimetaphysical method which contributed to a pragmatic turn in artistic practice and elsewhere. The idea that the philosophic subject is not *a priori* given but is to be understood as something resulting out of practice is of crucial impact for the development of the arts since the seventies. Instead of “invention” and “the new” as the major aims of artistic production, we now have the construction of identity, of publics, of time and space. The geometry of existing social facts became much more important than inventing new facts. And criticality became so crucial because deviation from these geometries in process was established as a new criterion of artistic production. But then Thierry’s use of *attitude* still sounds very empty.

JAMES ELKINS: To me, his use of *attitude* is the most wholly polemic. You wouldn’t want to start a serious discussion of contemporary art using the word “attitude,” in its polemic guide at least. His third term, *practice*, is only partly polemic. It has historical purchase, but the word also does a lot of work in contemporary art discourse, and it is often helpful to be reminded that it can tend to function as nothing more than a “magic word.”

SAUL OSTROW: There is also *attitude* as *orientation to*, rather than as personal attitude.

JAMES ELKINS: But then what distinguishes our current use of *attitude* from its predecessors, which were also “orientations to”?

SAUL OSTROW: Because this notion of attitude takes precedence: it’s not that it hadn’t been there, but now it rises to the top. Previously, the attitude of the artist towards his practice was a minor consideration, but now, according to de Duve—

JAMES ELKINS: Is that a real conceptual analysis? Wouldn’t you also have to say creativity was also an attitude?

SAUL OSTROW: I would take this critique to—

BARBARA JAFFEE: Isn’t it that attitude is cultivated? Talent is innate, and we all have creativity, but attitude is cultivated—

SAUL OSTROW: I would take this, and what has always interested me in de Duve is that he stays very much with the dominant models. He doesn't go to things like the Russian Constructivist model, which would come very close to what he calls the contemporary model. Russian Constructivism involved the site of production, the social, the notion of artistic practice, the Constructivist notion of attitude, and the question of the place of skill. Moholy comes out of the Constructivist tradition, and adopts the Bauhaus when he leaves.

JAMES ELKINS: So if Thierry were here, and we were working on his schema with him, would that be an addition to his schema of three moments in studio art instruction? Or would Constructivism substitute for the third, most recent period?

SAUL OSTROW: It would be a fourth moment, one that would affect his third period.

CHRISTOPHER FRAYLING: I think *attitude* can be an analytic category, actually. I know this is not necessarily how he meant it, but the work on socializing someone into her self-image as an artist could be an instance of attitude: the art school as a sort of entrée into a world, a launching, an orientation towards the art world. If you treat it as a sociological category, *attitude* could be interesting.

JAMES ELKINS: That would be a way of transforming Thierry's text from polemic into history.

CHRISTOPHER FRAYLING: It makes it workable.

MARTA EDLING: Yes, I agree. The third period is constructed, in accord with the polemical agenda, to show the emptiness of it. That is more explicit in *Faire école*, because there it is quite obvious that his notion of the artist and of artistic training is summarized by his first two periods. And that has been lost. So the description of the third period is negatively colored to demonstrate emptiness.

But, as Christopher suggests, a close reading of the text reveals a sense of *attitude* as something very much like what Howard Singerman describes as the contemporary artists' self-reflexivity. A self-conscious art is always aware of itself and the possibility of a critical meta-perspective, and contains a critique of each stance it takes. Which means that there always is an awareness of the presence of the artistic field and the development of the individual's position in it. There is, as Singerman notes when he cites Bourdieu, "no room for naivety" in staking out a future within the artistic field for the young artist. No young artist can do without *attitude* today.⁴

JAMES ELKINS: That is true—it's a useful reading—but *attitude* is also retroactively or recursively polemic, because the Bauhaus is described as the loss of the first period of academic instruction, in which Thierry has no active interest.

WILLIAM MAROTTI: That is almost like a reversal of the usual account of the rise of modern subjectivity. In de Duve's three-stage account, there is a declension, but not

4. Howard Singerman, *Art Subjects: Making Artists in the American University* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 212.

a progress: you go from a high point, to a democratization, to a zero. *Attitude* is described as a zero degree, a neutral point, a tautology: it is the inverse of creativity. It is a nothing.

SAUL OSTROW: It is an argument about what you lose when you lose Modernist negativity, when you lose the nihilism of Modernism. You end up with this, and Thierry cannot see it as a positive development.

WILLIAM MAROTTI: He does it with a sleight of hand. He talks about students “tapping pop culture.” What the hell is that? Do you tap it like a spigot? There is no input into the process? It’s a zero? Really?

CHRISTOPHER FRAYLING: He is lamenting the loss of hierarchies.

WILLIAM MAROTTI: Right, the inception of creativity was the beginning of the end.

MARTA EDLING: Yes, and he laments also the loss of the actual *work* of art. The manual production of a thing called art. But whether we like it or not, the disappearance of *métier* and *medium* is a result of constantly negotiating the concept of the work of art as an object, since the 1960s at least. And, as the use of the word *practice* indicates, there is, since that time, a need for a concept that can describe what an artist does, without it becoming a fixed thing. We need *practice* to describe artistic work as processes, as ideas, as concepts.

HILDE VAN GELDER: Bill, do you see de Duve as a nostalgic connoisseur? I am not sure he would readily agree with that.

SAUL OSTROW: No, but that *is* the implicit driving force. The impetus is against hierarchies, but when you achieve a nonhierarchical state, you’re in trouble.

WILLIAM MAROTTI: I think de Duve has to own up to the implications of his account.

JAMES ELKINS: This kind of conversation is very helpful for the book, but it would be even more so if we continue to look for alternate schemata, because as you said, Stephan, there is nothing else out there. I wonder also about *habitus*, and what work it could do for us.

STEPHAN SCHMIDT-WULFFEN: What happened in the third paradigm was, I think, a redefinition of the relation between practice and theory. And I think “deconstruction” was one of the reasons for this rearrangement. Althusser wrote about a “theoretical practice,” indicating that ideological work is *praxis* and not just theory. When Bourdieu talks of *habitus* he clearly wants to describe practice as something inherently “theoretical” and vice versa. It is very easy to read the work of, say, Baldessari or Richter as a “theory” about authorship. But in fact the repositioning of the author was not done through reflection, but in action. This seems to me a crucial point when we want to understand artistic knowledge: it is deeply pragmatic in the sense that any propositional content is inscribed—or should we say embodied—in the artist’s practical decisions. This is why I like

Jean Christoph Ammann's formula that artists don't *have* theory: they *are* theory. I think that Bourdieu's *habitus* is a good tool to develop this understanding. And by the way: his scientific practice, when he used interviews or photography, is very close to artistic forms of knowledge production.

DANIEL PALMER: Well, Thierry's schema was presented first in 1993, when the original critical attitude had recently sunken into "a pose, a contrivance," and political critique had sunk into political correctness. Remember, that was the crisis moment of critical postmodernism, with the Whitney Biennial of 1993. Saul's point is that we have to move beyond it, and think where we are now.

MARTA EDLING: So can we then really consider this as a workable historic account? De Duve is free to look at history any way he chooses, but we need not to agree with him, since his schema is clearly biased by a negative evaluation of the contemporary. My objection is that as historiography, his account won't do. First there was the academy, then it died; then we have the Bauhaus, and then it died: that sort of historiography is *useless* for today. There have been renegotiations, redefinitions of the old inheritance: that is clear in the Bologna process.

CHRISTOPHER FRAYLING: By the way, I am cynical about the Bauhaus and its manifestos. They would have been brilliant at Bologna! All the books about the Bauhaus, and exhibitions, stress the beautifully designed manifestos and curricula. Right from the beginning, in 1919, they were an integral part of the school's public relations—essential for its survival. But all the interviews with the students that I've read or heard stress the atmosphere of experimentation, adventure, and even chaos. Anni Albers once told me that day-to-day life had very little in common with the published manifestos.

JAMES ELKINS: If Thierry were here, he might say: Sure, fine, some of these criticisms are true enough, and yes, we have to pay attention to history: but how would *you* revise the bottom line of my chart? What concepts would you put in there?

MIGUEL GONZÁLEZ VIRGEN: In *Pictorial Nominalism*, de Duve analyzes Duchamp's appearance, and how Duchamp realized that with the coming of industrialization there was no hope for *métier* or even for medium, so that the artist was only there to nominate what art is.⁵ When Thierry talks about *attitude*, he has Duchamp's perspective in mind: the pose according to which the artist tells us what art is. The three new characteristics, of the most recent period, are post-Duchamp.

WILLIAM MAROTTI: I think that's what he means when he says it is "tautological." He gives it the crudest possible meaning, which is that it's all self-nomination and therefore a process of doing nothing other than pointing. It's a very reductive notion of what is going on in art after Duchamp.

5. Thierry de Duve, *Pictorial Nominalism: On Marcel Duchamp's Passage from Painting to the Readymade*, translated by Dana Polan with the author (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005).

P. ELAINE SHARPE: The problem I have with de Duve's writing is that there is no definitive analysis of creativity. It comes back, for me, to the problem of intention as opposed to attitude. I don't think that an artist is as wild a beast as that. There is definitely intention, and de Duve doesn't address it. There's a hierarchical expectation that stupidity is a bad thing. Avital Ronell writes about this.⁶ I would like to hope that an artist can retain a sort of cognitive stutter, and have a suspicion that the education of an artist to such an extent would remove the possibility for this intentional stupidity.

MARTA EDLING: Jim, I think we have to write a more complex account of art education, because there are influences that have not yet been described. Several generations of Nordic artists, for example, went to Paris, and many studied at free art schools in Paris, before and after the turn of the twentieth century. Matisse's atelier was one of them. This also put pressure on the old traditional schooling of the Academies: some of those who returned to Stockholm even started a free art school, and in the late 1930s their efforts resulted in a reform of the Royal Academy in Stockholm.⁷ Some of the questions that Walter Grasskamp talks about in his article, like for instance the question of the need (or lack of it) for time-limited professorships, or the question of the contact between the school and the contemporary artistic scene, were already discussed and solved in Stockholm in the reform of 1938. This reform turned the academy into what I would call a very radical institution, which stressed the freedom of education: the position that you cannot teach art and that every student has to develop in his or her own direction.⁸

CHRISTOPHER FRAYLING: This is interesting; it would make a good corrective to our schemata. Is it written up somewhere?

MARTA EDLING: Yes.⁹ It is important to note that the artistic development in Germany in the early twentieth century was met with suspicion in Sweden. Many artists and critics preferred French to German art because they considered it so brutal and primitive.¹⁰

6. Avital Ronell, *Stupidity* (Champaign-Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003).

7. In the reform of the School of the Royal Academy in Stockholm in 1938, the regulations were updated in accordance with modernistic ideals. Stressed were the need for professors to be in tune with contemporary art, time-limited positions, an age limit when recruiting professors (no one should be older than fifty-six by the time of appointment), the free choice of the student to follow the professor of her inclination, and so forth. See my *Fri Konst? Bildkonstnärlig utbildning vid Konsthögskolan Valand, Konstfackskolan, och Kungliga Konsthögskolan, 1965–1995* (Stockholm: Makadam, 2010).

8. Walter Grasskamp, "Wozu Kunstakademien," in *Akademie der bildenden Künste München* (Munich: Akademie der bildenden Künste, 1999), 16–27.

9. The history of Swedish fine art education during the twentieth century is the subject of a research project that I, together with my colleague Maria Görts, am currently finishing. Currently available texts that comment upon this development are the article by Maria Görts, "När modernisten blev professor," in *Etyder: Tillägnade Eva Sundler Malmnäs*, edited by Thomas Hall and Margaretha Rossholm Lagerlöf, Eidos 12 (Stockholm: Konstvetenskapliga institutionen, Stockholms universitet, 2004), and my *Fri Konst?*

10. The reception of German modernism in Sweden, and the conflict of what were considered German and French artistic ideals, are dealt with in Andrea Kollnitz's dissertation in art history, *Om tysk och österrikisk modernism i svensk konstkritik 1908–1934*, Eidos 21 (Stockholm: Drauförslag, 2008).

[*Laughter*]

JAMES ELKINS: That would give us three moments of Modernism instead of Thierry's one: the Bauhaus, Constructivism, and (let's call it) Matisse's studio. Ideally, we would develop these so we have a sense of what concepts to associate with each.

CHRISTOPHER FRAYLING: In the talk I gave in Brighton, I was trying for an alternative scheme of the *normative*, *critical*, and *expressive*, which is a different level of concept altogether.¹¹ I think it has a bit of mileage in it, certainly in relation to the British experience. *Normative* would have to do with all these grammars. The Victorians were obsessed, for all sorts of reasons, with "grammars of ornament," "lexicons of design," "principles of design," and the language of evangelism applied to art education. Students were there to be converted, to buy into these grammars and principles. Design was a kind of science, as was taste. I've called this "the normative tradition."

Critical, in that you see the role of the institution as *against* the norm or the society; and *expressive*, to do with individuation, intention, finding one's own voice, and so forth. It's broader than Thierry de Duve's schema, but it isn't nearly so cynical.

STEPHAN SCHMIDT-WULFFEN: Of course the third period in Thierry's schema is mixed and polemical, but it provides a clear way of asking questions: Where do you find your understanding, as an artist? Is it the academic tradition? The Bauhaus tradition? Or another one? In the academy in Vienna, we have students who find allegiance to each of these.

JAMES ELKINS: Yes, I agree. I find that in the School of the Art Institute about 10 percent of our students are academic in Thierry's sense (and those are often students who have graduated from conservative "art high schools" in Japan and Korea), 50 percent late Romantic, 30 percent Modernist, and maybe 10 percent postmodern. There are ways to take those surveys, and find the covert conservatism that is sometimes papered over by what Thierry calls "deconstruction."¹²

STEPHAN SCHMIDT-WULFFEN: I wonder if we can come up with some more criteria. You mentioned terms like *creativity*, *intention*, *freedom*, and *expression*. For me one of the aspects of the third, the contemporary paradigm, is the fact that these terms don't fit any longer. How can you talk about being creative after Duchamp, Warhol, and Koons? How can you talk about *expression* after the critique of abstract expressionism? What is artistic freedom if we understand that the artist, like gender, is a social construction? I think we have to be prepared to reinvent the discourse which we use to describe art.

11. Frayling, "The New Bauhaus," paper given at the conference Art and Design Education for the Twenty-First Century, Brighton University, February 6–7, 2009.

12. For example, the imaginary maps of art history described in my *Stories of Art* (New York:

Routledge, 2002), which bring out affinities. It is also possible to survey students on concepts such as subjectivity, naturalism, skill, or expressiveness, without saying which periods those concepts belong to.

And I want to come back to the idea of a local practice. To me one of the major changes between our first and second paradigm, on the one hand, and the third, on the other, is the complete loss of metaphysics, which in turn created a bigger awareness of the here and now. This is what Foucault's idea of a "local" practice means: a critique of the very conditions of what you yourself do, without any appeal to transcendence. Apparently this motivates not only disciplines like cultural studies but also the intense exchange between cultural studies and the arts.

Thierry's schema is interesting: but are there more criteria?

SAUL OSTROW: He doesn't address the foundational, structural elements of his models. The academy was about studying the past, and the Bauhaus was about the future.

CHRISTOPHER FRAYLING: I do think Thierry is onto something with the concept of *attitude*. Something happened in the 1990s: theory ceased to be critical: it had to do with launching people into the world. There was almost something of a revolution in the Royal College in the 1990s: painting students were desperate for business studies—

MARTA EDLING: What do you mean, "business studies"?

CHRISTOPHER FRAYLING: They wanted information about how to start their careers, how to get galleries, how to persuade Saatchi to come to their exhibition. I wouldn't have dared suggest that kind of business studies should be in a painting course: it was a matter of students wanting to be huge successes as painters. I think Thierry is onto something with *attitude*. He is interested in something that is not curricular; it's not even institutional. It's the kind of transaction that happens because of what people are thinking about. He is aiming at something more informal. It's in the ether—

FRANCES WHITEHEAD: It's in the drinking water—

CHRISTOPHER FRAYLING: Yes. You can't measure it, so people think like that. And the result is a blunting of political activism. My students' politics was: I want a spectacular exhibition at the Saatchi Gallery. We could ask what kinds of concepts would operate now.

DANIEL PALMER: But Christopher, we should be wary of universalizing this condition. For instance, the impact of postcolonial theory was quite profound in Australian art education in the 1990s in the wake of local historical developments, while our art market in Australia has always been too small to generate the kind of market attitude often ascribed to contemporary art students.

P. ELAINE SHARPE: And we have to take into consideration the political works about various isms that are often at the core of Canadian artist-run culture, or any artist-run culture, which are entrenched in a liberal arts education. There is always a new generation that is more than willing to take up the flags laid aside by their

predecessors—approaching old issues with new questions, wanting very little to do with so-called markets that are not about ideas and idealism.

JAMES ELKINS: This might be a good place to leave this conversation: we have several alternate historical schemata—although I agree with Stephan that more needs to be done. Thierry's model is an excellent one, but it needs adjustment and augmentation. Most of his concepts in the third period are double: students would agree to part of *practice*, but not another part. What matters is what we can add—what new schemata we would put in its place—not what we can critique.

The strange thing is that in the ocean of literature on art instruction there have been so very few attempts to do the foundational work Thierry tried to do.

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2. WHAT PARTS OF THOSE HISTORIES ARE PERTINENT?

*Once we have a working idea about how to think about the history of how art has been taught, the next question is what individual ideas, exercises, and teaching methods from that history are still present in art instruction. From the Bauhaus, for example, we have the sequence from 2D to 4D, which is still common in art schools, even though it comes from Kandinsky's book *Point and Line to Plane*, published in 1924. It could be argued the Bauhaus also gave us sensitivity exercises, texture exercises, and many other staples of introductory studio instruction. It is more difficult to say what we have inherited from post-World War II art schools, although that inheritance would include the idea that art should act in society, that identity and its construction are fundamental in art, and that art schools work to educate citizens as well as produce artists. Those influences are hard to discuss because we are still living and acting under their influence. It is also difficult to say what we inherit from Renaissance and Baroque academies, although in that case the problem arises because they are so far removed from us that it can seem as if we inherit nothing.*

*The idea of the following conversation was to gather those influences, and consider which ones might be appropriate or even essential, and which could be removed from the curriculum. In the excerpts presented here, the participants discuss three holdovers from the past: *disegno* and drawing (an inheritance from the Baroque academies), the master model of one-on-one studio instruction (an inheritance from Romanticism), and the persistence of realism in painting (mainly a holdover from late nineteenth-century academies).*

STEPHAN SCHMIDT-WULFFEN: I think we should develop the discussion of drawing, especially in relation to *disegno*. *Disegno* in the Neoplatonic tradition, which formed the philosophical basis of the old classicist academy, was not only an artistic practice; it was also the expression of an idea of the artist corresponding to a universal principle hidden in things. This is how Vasari spoke about *disegno* when he claimed that to draw means to articulate a judgment in the way nature formulates the idea in things. And Zuccaro made things even clearer when he differentiated *disegno interno* from *disegno esterno*.¹ Today we are stuck with an understanding of *disegno esterno*. I think we have to remember that the tradition of the old academy, up to the early twentieth century, combined the pragmatic process of drawing with the simultaneous shaping of an inner image, the idea. Apart from the fact that we have lost transcendence, the double articulation

1. For an introduction to *disegno* in a Neoplatonic tradition, see Götz Pochat, *Geschichte der Ästhetik und Kunsttheorie* (Cologne: DuMont, 1986), 276–79 and 302–5. See also

Erwin Panofsky, *Idea: A Concept in Art Theory*, translated by Joseph J. S. Peake (New York: Harper and Row, 1968).

between the external line and the internal image remains, I think, one of the most significant characteristics of artistic practice. The central problem of the *episteme* (ἐπιστήμη) of artistic practice is: how can we actually talk about this type of productivity, if we must agree that talking itself is a way of drawing?

JAMES ELKINS: I think the very broad, abstract sense of *disegno* is debatable—an emphasis on it is partly the product of mid-twentieth-century art history—but I think it's possible to develop parallel ideas in curricular terms. There is a conflict between *Drawing* with an uppercase “D,” which would be drawing underwritten by theological convictions, and our current *drawing* with a lowercase “d,” without the foundations of Renaissance and Baroque academies.² I think the current lack of resolution about the place of drawing in art schools—where it hovers between a requirement and an option, or between an exemplary medium and a medium among others—is due to the fact that we have not resolved how we conceptualize drawing. Stephan, I agree that *Drawing* is gone in a literal sense, but it remains as a ghost. We all feel, faintly, that drawing has that other function.

CHRISTOPHER FRAYLING: What is the thought on this around the table? Do most people feel that drawing is still central?

JONATHAN DRONSFIELD: At my institution there are no drawing classes. Many students applying for a place bring with them a portfolio heavy with drawing. But it's not drawing in Klee's sense, as in the first words of his *Pedagogical Sketchbook*: “An active line on a walk, moving freely, without goal.”³ It's more like tracing. At interview stage we stress that there is no drawing at Reading; that is a way of gauging their seriousness about entering a more experimental academy, and we follow it up with a question about what they would do were they given studio space, time, and facilities to experiment—which need not preclude drawing, of course.

CHRISTOPHER FRAYLING: We brought it back through student pressure. In the 1960s, they said they didn't want drawing anymore, but now we have it back.

ANN SOBIECH MUNSON: A beginning drawing studio occupies one-third of our required common first-year curriculum. The course teaches drawing from observation, drawing perspectives, and drawing imagined forms, primarily in graphite and charcoal.

ARETI ADAMOPOULOU: It is an entry requirement for all art schools in Greece. Candidates attend courses in private schools well in advance. Usually this preparation takes two years or more. I believe that's why first-year students come with academic values set in their minds. Within art schools, drawing also retains a strong place as part of sculpture and printmaking studio courses. However, there is no

2. Drawing lowercase “d” would include ordinary uses of the concept of *disegno* in Renaissance and Baroque pedagogy. The philosophic reading of *disegno*, part of uppercase “Drawing,” is in part a twentieth-century emphasis. See, for example, Karen Barzman,

The Florentine Academy and the Early Modern State (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 145–48.

3. Paul Klee, *Pedagogical Sketchbook* (London: Faber and Faber, 1968), 16.

rule about which way or to what extent each professor will use drawing in his or her courses. And just a short note here: drawing (as *σκιαγραφία*, *skiagraphia*) is described in ancient Greek mythology as a woman's invention! And another point: the word for drawing and painting in Greek before the fifth century BCE was *γραφίς* (*graphis*), which relates to writing.⁴

MIGUEL GONZÁLEZ VIRGEN: In Mexico an artist's recognition as a *full-fledged artist*, by both the art market and popular culture, is greatly sustained in his or her capacity to draw, even when that artist is conceptual or postconceptual. Education, still based largely on the academic tradition, puts enormous value in the kind of drawing ability that Stefan Schmidt-Wulffen describes as the identity of idea and pencil mark; consequently, it is a rite of passage for almost all artists to attend a drawing workshop with a master for one or two years.

HILDE VAN GELDER: Sint-Lucas Visual Arts in Ghent has recently founded a Drawing Research Group, which is organizing an international symposium called *The Drawing Incident* at this very moment.⁵ It wishes to reflect on the current importance of drawing as a direct means to materialize an artistic vision. The members of this group conceive of drawing as a medium that allows for visual understanding of its own generative process. They see drawing as a relatively transparent way to construct an image, as a drawing is composed by a chain of signs, one mark after the other. They also trust that the medium's openness allows space for the unexpected and that what cannot be controlled, and believe that these are artistic qualities often appreciated in contemporary art.

SAUL OSTROW: Christopher, we retain drawing, but we have changed its orientation from a matter of hand-eye coordination to being a discipline involving perception and systems of perspective. It has become process-oriented rather than procedural.

ROY SORENSEN: Theories of expertise are all skeptical about talent. Some of them just say, "no talent." Others say you don't need to go into the question of talent. They want to regard it as a myth. But here, this would be a matter of debunking the debunkers. In the literature I know, for example, it is said that Mozart's early work is certainly very good, but maybe nothing more than that. In the literature, expertise doesn't show until the person has put in ten thousand hours. In art, there are also skeptics about this, for example in the case of Marla Olmstead⁶—

P. ELAINE SHARPE: The child prodigy whose father puts up the canvases for her and then coaches her to fill in the—

ROY ROSENSEN: Yes. That would be the application of this kind of program of skepticism. In your case, you have the debunking of debunking.

4. See the discussion of *graphein* in Elkins, *The Domain of Images* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999).

5. This was held September 21–25, 2009: <http://www.kunst.sintlucas.wenk.be>.

6. See the amazingly commercialized website <http://www.marlaolmstead.com> (accessed September 28, 2009). [—J.E.]

JAMES ELKINS: The debunking is never complete because it is haunted by the inarticulate sense that drawing is something more. So drawing is at once a heritage and not a heritage of Renaissance and Baroque academies. This is a curricular issue for us, but it is a live critical issue for projects like the Drawing Center, which revisit drawing from many angles, sometimes including ontological claims like Alain Badiou's.⁷ Why would they do that if it weren't that they are ever so slightly haunted?

DANIEL PALMER: At my institution, Monash University, drawing is the only element of the core curriculum aside from theory. I think it's also interesting to consider the issue of God's hand in drawing in relation to drawing with *light*; that is, in relation to newer technological media such as photography, which Talbot of course dubbed "photogenic drawing." As to what elements of an undergraduate art education ought to be common or essential, I think of Moholy-Nagy's famous dictum that "the illiterate of the future will be ignorant of the use of camera and pen alike."

REBECCA GORDON: Students don't arrive in art school with their ideas wholly unformed; many of them come through high school-level art education that privileges drawing as the basis of artistic practice. So the students already think of drawing as foundational.

ANN SOBIECH MUNSON: But at our institution we have lots of students who can't draw; we tell them we can teach them. Lots of our students—remember, we are a big state school—do not have art programs in their secondary educational experience.

P. ELAINE SHARPE: York University, where I work, does have drawing as an elective for visual arts students, but it is not in any way a formulaic or how-to curriculum; it is about expression.

CHRISTOPHER FRAYLING: One of the differences between the academy and the modern version of drawing is that academies love prerequisites. Building on prior skill levels is a basic move of academic systems. The Modernists said, Let's scrap all that and start again, and they constantly badmouth the previous level of education. That is one of the basic differences between the academic and the modern.

JAMES ELKINS: Let's consider some other elements from the history of art instruction that may bear on the present. One I think is especially interesting is the notion of the one-on-one instruction, the *master model*, which I see as one of the principal surviving elements of the MFA.

STEPHAN SCHMIDT-WULFFEN: Is this true? Or shouldn't we at least resist the dominance of the master model? I am interested in new definitions of how we can organize artistic training. I think that none of the existing historical models will really help in developing new curricula. The principal point is that we have to get used to the fact that artists do things other than produce artworks. I see more and

7. See, for example, <http://www.lacan.com/frameXXIV5.htm> (accessed September 28, 2009).

more artists changing profession, and we need to get used to the idea that artistic practice may have left the art world. The production of artworks, which still is the model to define our courses and which shapes our museums, has been overcome, and we therefore have to come up with completely different questions.

JONATHAN DRONSFIELD: Stephan, what do you mean by “overcome”? You surely cannot mean that the art object is no longer privileged, or that production is no longer a dominant value. Still, today, every art student must produce a work for exhibition in a final degree show. Were a student to present a discursive essay or a piece of creative writing for that show, I would hazard that he or she would be failed. And collaborative work is still very little encouraged or produced for examination.

STEPHAN SCHMIDT-WULFFEN: To my understanding the *master* is connected to *genius*, to *inspiration* and *invention*. It’s a nineteenth-century discourse! The singularity of the invention of the genius demands the example of the master, which by the way represents an anti-intellectual way of nonverbal learning. This discourse contradicts every experience of contemporary production, where we have a completely diverse idea of the individual and her creativity. We have, I think, to reorganize major terms of our art discourse and the way we talk about art instruction. I don’t think we should begin by talking about the master model. We have been fighting that particular idea in Germany for almost two hundred years.

I would be more interested in going deeper into the institutional structures that are in place today.

ROY SORENSEN: I am surprised about the resistance to the master model. There is a literature on master-student interactions. What happens when you abandon that? A music student, for example, will work to automate some behavior, tweak it to get rid of kinks, and so on.

CHRISTOPHER FRAYLING: One of the problems there is that the music analogy doesn’t work well for visual art. For dance, you need a sort of deep learning with a huge emphasis on craft technique, and it has to begin from about six years old. After that, it’s too late. It’s the same with music performance. Music and dance academies don’t have the same kind of crisis you have described, Stephan, because you have to be good at your instrument to be able to do anything with it.

After the 1960s, all of that was gone in visual art. It leads to a problem: where does expertise come from? In music and dance, they still know.

JAMES ELKINS: I think our divergence of opinions here, about the master model in the MFA, has to do with different models of the master. One model, which is Roy’s, has to do with slow, incremental learning. Christopher’s models, dance and music performance, are similar: they have to do with hierarchical learning over a long period. What I was alluding to was the Romantic notion that learning is best done from a single master, because what is being learned is individuality

itself. Only the experience of a unique person can give you an idea of what voice, originality, and self-expression are. That is why the Romantic academies did away with group learning in ateliers. And what Stephan is objecting to, I think, is the persistence of that model in current curricular hopes.

One model is the *master as instructor*: the other is the *master as model*.

JONATHAN DRONSFIELD: But the Romantics, or at least the early German ones, set themselves against the master model, for instance in avowing plagiarism and anonymity and the destruction of great works, which they saw as obstacles to creativity, etc.

STEPHAN SCHMIDT-WULFFEN: Students of Whistler's objected that he didn't explain, and they just learned from his example. Embodied knowledge, so to say. When Vienna had master classes in the nineteenth century, the school couldn't afford to pay for private studios of the professors. The instructors were indirectly paid by the state to keep their master classes going: they used master students to help with their commissions—so again, you had the master's work as an example. But today there are no commissions, and a master in a class is doing just what we are doing: talk. But often they will be less prepared. It's a black hole. The one-to-one teaching situation is burdened with silence: people are not allowed to talk about it. Artists will never talk about their experiences in one-to-one teaching. It is one of the high secrets. Imagine: thousands of art students around the world are trained in this way, and we haven't the slightest idea what is going on in their studios.

FRANCES WHITEHEAD: I think there's a lot of talk about what happens between students and faculty—anyone else think so?

CHRISTOPHER FRAYLING: I agree. There is a lot of talking, even if it might ride around the issues you're raising.

STEPHAN SCHMIDT-WULFFEN: Sure, there is a lot of talking. But is there a lot of talking about the *methods* of face-to-face training?

JONATHAN DRONSFIELD: Yes, if the students, as they do in our case, have personal tutors to whom they can turn to talk about or be asked about what goes on in the studio, someone who is monitoring their progress across the board, someone who reads the reports of the studio tutor.

MARTA EDLING: As James said, in studio practice we are dealing with a heavy inheritance from Romanticism. And I think Stephan's got a point here. By which method do you actually teach or promote the individuality by the student? I think that face-to-face training (in its ideal state) perceived as method is a kind of identification process, a mirroring of the student in the professor. The professor is a model not by his art (or her art, but the model is in practice patriarchal) but a model as a mature colleague who has developed an individual, and original,

stance. The Romantic origin of this idea is telling if we consider it. Kant, in his *Critique of Judgment*, said that there can be no real teaching of genius; instead the young artist discovers his own talent when confronted with the older artist's genius. Genius stimulates and awakens genius.⁸ This charismatic relationship *is* the method. But this also why it sometimes does not work very well, and to my experience women students often lose a lot of energy in this "black hole" that Stephan talks about.⁹

JAMES ELKINS: And yet the master model persists. It is one of the principal default models for what the MFA is supposed to do . . . but let's postpone that discussion until later in the week, when we explore the MFA.

Any thoughts on other elements of the history of art education that are still around?

Here's an obvious example to close: the persistence of the Baroque and nineteenth-century academic practices of realism. Right here in Chicago, we have quite an array of art schools that few people from our institution ever visit: the American Academy of Art, right down the street, the School of Representational Art, and the Chicago Academy for the Arts.¹⁰ Elsewhere there is Richard Lack's Atelier Lack in Michigan, and any number of similar academies: Lyme Academy College of Fine Arts in Connecticut, the Academy of Realist Art in Toronto, Mims Studios in North Carolina, the Studio Incamminati in Philadelphia, the Grand Central Academy of Art and the Harlem Studio of Art in New York, the Studio Escalier in France, and the Gage Academy in Seattle—among many others. Larger schools, like the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts or the Royal Hibernian Academy in Dublin, are more mixed, with academic and some modern and contemporary modes practiced together.

In a subtler way, many smaller state schools in the U.S. have art departments that are slightly but perceptibly conservative. I spend a fair amount of time traveling to those institutions—I think I've seen a fair portion of all the state schools in the U.S. with art departments. It isn't quantifiable, but it's observable: the smaller the college, the more distant from a major city, the more conservative the art department may be. Sometimes the practices are only a couple of minutes behind the standard set in the major cities; other times the entire feeling of the place might belong more to the 1970s, or even the 1950s, with audible echoes of nineteenth-century skills. I wish I could write about this, but it's what Christopher calls something in the ether: it's often too subtle to pin down. (And I don't mean to be derogatory. Some magnificent realist teachers flourish in smaller contexts, like Chawky Frenn at George Mason University.)

The academy lives on in all those ways.

8. Kant, *Kritik der Urtheilskraft* (Berlin, 1790), §§ 47 and 49.

9. For a further discussion of the patriarchal structure of this relationship, see Griselda Pollock, "Art, Art School, Culture: Individualism After the Death of the Artist," *Block* 11 (Winter 1985–86): 8–18; and Gertrud Sandqvist, a professor at the Malmo Art Academy, commenting

on the traditional academic professor school, at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k3ehi6zD2QY> (accessed February 28, 2010).

10. <http://www.aaart.edu>, <http://www.representational-art.com>, and <http://www.chicagoacademyforthearts.org/>, respectively (accessed October 4, 2009).

P. ELAINE SHARPE: I believe there is a place for these independent academies in today's destabilized university economy: we will see more and more *atelier* types of learning environments outside of the university precisely because the voice of the master has gone missing.

ARETI ADAMOPOULOU: In today's art polyphony, I think all types of former education are accepted and present in various degrees. Each of these types had specific ideologies to support it and could therefore have a quite clear picture of its aims. Since contemporary education does not have just one ideal towards which to turn, and because we prepare students equally for tradition and revolution, one possible answer could be an array of idiosyncratic solutions.

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3. THE POSSIBILITY OF A BOOK ON STUDIO ART INSTRUCTION WORLDWIDE

*The only part of the world where art instruction has been compared across several countries is the EU, thanks to the Bologna part of the world where art instruction has been compared across several countries is the EU, thanks to the Bologna part of the world where art instruction has been compared across several countries is the EU, thanks to the Bologna*¹ We spent some time talking about the EU, but our conversations about the world outside Europe were hampered by lack of information. Our readings included curricula from art schools, departments, and academies in Greece, Sweden, Mexico, Switzerland, France, Austria, Hong Kong, Canada, and Belgium—but it became clear that something much more ambitious would be required before it would be possible to have a useful discussion about how art is taught worldwide. Ideally, there would have been a chapter in this book on art instruction around the world: but the information just isn't there.

Several times during the week, the conversation turned to a very practical question: would it be possible to put together a reference book on studio art instruction in different countries? This section opens with an introduction to the subject, taped during the week. What follows are suggestions by the Faculty, Fellows, and students, made after the event was over.

CHRISTOPHER FRAYLING: The key thing in looking at art education outside the EU is to hear difference. The Bologna documents have a language that is quite uniform, and indeed they break up art education into familiar categories such as studio practice, theory, possible social engagement, and technology. I'd never thought about this before we did our homework for this week, but the historians of art education all universalize their experience. I hadn't realized how Stuart Macdonald, the text I recommended, was really writing about Britain even though he claimed he was writing about world art education.² In the same way, the Bauhaus, this rather small art school that only ran for thirteen years, is taken as a universal model, across the globe, as a way of teaching. I hadn't realized before

1. *Higher Education in Europe 2009: Developments in the Bologna Process*, available at http://ec.europa.eu/education/higher-education/doc/eurydice09_en.pdf (accessed October 3, 2009); Inter|artes [sic] Thematic Network Handbook, *Tapping into the Potential of Higher Arts Education in Europe*, available at <http://www.elia-artschools.org/Documents/tapping-into-the-potential-of-higher-arts-education-in-europe>, (accessed October 3, 2009); Ute Meta Bauer, "Education, Information, Entertainment: Current Approaches on Higher Artistic Education," in *Education, Information, Entertainment:*

Current Approaches on Higher Artistic Education (Vienna: Edition Selene, 2001), 32–40; Irit Rogoff, "Schools of Thought," *Frieze* 101 (September 2006): 146–47; Clifford Adelman, "The Bologna Process for U.S. Eyes: Re-learning Higher Education in the Age of Convergence," Lumina Foundation for Education to the Global Performance Initiative of the Institute for Higher Education Policy, April 2009.

2. Stuart Macdonald, *The History and Philosophy of Art Education* (New York: American Elsevier, 1970).

I reread it that Goldstein's book is a covert polemic in support of the academy approach, so that anything that deviates, such as Albers, is cast into the outer darkness.³ And Howard Singerman is universalizing the American MFA as if it has relevance to absolutely everybody.⁴

JAMES ELKINS: And Nikolaus Pevsner's book, even though it is quite scrupulous, privileges western Europe and developments before Modernism.⁵

CHRISTOPHER FRAYLING: So how many of our assumptions are Western ones, projected onto everyone? Do we project certain Western assumptions onto everyone? In Victorian times, it was all very straightforward where Britain was concerned. South Kensington sent out the curriculum to every art school in the empire. There were twenty-two stages to it, with textbooks, and teachers were sent out to implement the program—you could set your watch by what they were doing on any given day. It was exported via Princess Louise to Ontario, and to Massachusetts by Walter Smith. Then there's the colonial issue. A book came a while ago about art education in North Africa, in relation to French art education in the nineteenth century.⁶ Basically, art schools in North Africa which were part of the French colonial regime imported a lot of their assumptions, habits, and theories from the heartland in Paris. Even their social assumptions, at times.

JAMES ELKINS: One of the issues for contemporary art instruction is what to do with the enormous number of schools that teach local craft skills.

CHRISTOPHER FRAYLING: Just one anecdote along those lines: last year I took part in a seminar in Delhi, and another at the Nehru Centre in London, on finding a contemporary idiom. So you have all these wonderful, virtuoso craft skills, which are all bent on doing designs for tourists, and the feeling is: if only they could find some contemporary idiom for those skills, then they might start really cooking from the standpoint of contemporary design.

JAMES ELKINS: It is nearly impossible to study how studio art is taught around the world, because there is a lack of international organizations, except in the EU. It is even hard to compare programs within the United States—and without comparative information, there is no way to make headway in discussing the current state of art instruction.

So here's an idea. Several years ago, in Beijing, there was a proposal to host an international conference of art school deans, rectors, presidents, and other administrators. The idea was to assemble a book that could be a reference for students looking for different places to study. That idea is on hold, but people

3. Carl Goldstein, *Teaching Art: Academies and Schools from Vasari to Albers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

4. Howard Singerman, *Art Subjects: Making Artists in the American University* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), discussed in Section 8 of the Seminars.

5. Nikolaus Pevsner, "The Revival of Industrial Art, and the Artist's Education To-Day,"

chap. 6 of *Academies of Art, Past and Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1940), 243–95.

6. Hamid Irbouh, *Art in the Service of Colonialism: French Art Education in Morocco, 1912–1956* (London: I. B. Taurus, 2005).

in several countries, including Denmark and Colombia, know about the plans, and they could easily be put in motion. I thought this might be a good place to mull over what could be in such a book. I'll just make a few comments to get us started.

First, we'd want to ask whether such a book should have quantitative measures in it. Stephan has prepared some very interesting statistics for this event, comparing, for example, the time spent in studios, or the time spent learning theory, in several EU art academies. Would we want such a book to have that kind of information?

Second, how would we want to handle the problem of using Western terms such as *art*, *fine art*, and *design*, when those words have such different valence in different parts of the world?

Third, how could we get institutions to send us candid and interesting assessments of their strengths, given that most institutions would want to be known as cosmopolitan and postnational? I can imagine that the academy in Bucharest would be glad to be better known as a center of fresco restoration, but I can't quite imagine Yale saying they are strong on figural photography.

Fourth, could we compile syllabi or reading lists? It seems to me it would be tremendously helpful to know exactly what books are being read in theory classes in different countries. I was fascinated to discover, a couple of years ago, that there is very little French theory being read in visual studies classes in Copenhagen: they are more oriented to English and German. But how could that work in practice?

Fifth, how could we get information about how connected different institutions are? I thought we might ask, for example, how many art galleries are within a day's travel from the art school.

I thought we might use this book as a sounding board. If something concrete, like a conference and a book, isn't produced, then at least we'll be raising the question.

MARTA EDLING: I don't object to the idea, but the problem is, as I see it, that there is a fundamental difference between what is written in documents, or said in official statements, and what is actually done in educational practice. Official statements either have no contact with reality, or they are too general to be of practical use. In my experience, Swedish art colleges often take pride in being flexible. Their reading lists are never the same from year to year; there is a circulation of guest professors and the workshops; and projects or seminars closely follow the changing front line in art. The point seems to be maintaining a close contact with the artistic field. So there is a difference between formal criteria, objectives and statements, and reality.

No documents describing the formal criteria for admission to the school ever say that you won't get in if you paint *too* well, or if you are too old or experienced. Nowhere is it made clear for applying students that in reality you have to

spend at least a year or two in preparatory art schools to be able to do the *right kind* of work. How do you communicate this to students? It's a real challenge!

JAMES ELKINS: Very true. I know MFA programs that prefer students who don't paint too well. It's a common enough reaction to the decades—well, the centuries—of academic skills. But it is absolutely undocumented and undefended.

HILDE VAN GELDER: That might be a feasible enterprise on a technical level, but the question remains what it would mean, in practical terms, to potential students all over the world. There is no longer a single, unified art practice, so this book would perhaps have to be compiled with rather wild subsections, such as (1) where should you go if you want to become an artist as part of the entertainment industry, (2) where will you be trained in order to become a really subversive artist, and (3) where will you find out about the latest fashion, the "academicized" artist?

BARBARA JAFFEE: I guess it depends on whether you're talking about compiling data and creating an archive or database, or you're talking about creating a work of comparative analysis. The former seems like an imperative, while the achievement of the latter, though fascinating to contemplate, seems like something of a hopeless idea, at least for the time being. (Whose ideological categories would provide the organizing principles? Whose analysis of meanings and effects would count? Whose interests would be served?) Of course, once the present is history, it's fair game—and then wouldn't it be nice to have all that data?

DANIEL PALMER: I'd like to see such a book, not least because I'd really like to see the possibility of more student exchanges, which at the moment are hampered in part by the lack of such information. It seems to me that the more mobile we can make our students, the more different experiences and contexts are likely to be understood and built on.

MIGUEL GONZÁLEZ VIRGEN: It would be great to see what schools in other countries are reading for art theory. But how could we make sure that those reading lists are up to date, that they correspond to what is actually being read? Could an Internet database make more sense than a book, in the case of syllabus listings? As for the listing of all art schools in the world, which I feel is a great idea, perhaps it would make sense not to simply ask the different institutions to describe their programs, but rather to ask art historians or art critics in the different countries to do a kind of curating exercise, by describing the characteristics, features, and strengths of their countries' institutions. It would be great simply to gather such a global team of experts describing their own countries' educational systems for the arts.

JAMES ELKINS: Yes, I agree that such a book should make minimal use of any official literature, because that literature will always claim the institution is contemporary

and international—and therefore, in theory, just like every other institution. A selection of voices from outside the institutions might be best.

ARETI ADAMOPOULOU: Jim, the way you describe it, students would look in such a book for potential quick career opportunities. Would we want to promote such an idea? I don't quite see how one can compare different systems, operating in different contexts, with different histories and notions of tradition, apart from a purely quantitative, bureaucratic point of view. What might appear as details or idiosyncrasies or local peculiarities in the worldwide, Western model of art education are what make the actual difference.

Maybe we shouldn't be looking for large-scale differences, as Christopher has put it, but for more subtle, locally determined shifts of the canon. Connecting to Frances's work, maybe *Sustainability* could be the word for such a book: we would research locality (local histories and social contexts), look for renewable forces for the needs of art students and practicing artists, and review local art economies, examining the cultural frames in which they all operate.

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4. ARTISTIC KNOWLEDGE, PART 1

*We had two discussions directly on the subject of artistic knowledge. The first was a seminar led by Roy Sorensen, which is excerpted here. Sorensen reviewed philosophic arguments about knowledge in general, outside the art world. He is not an expert on art, but an analytic philosopher, known for books such as *Blindspots* (1988), *Thought Experiments* (1992), *Pseudo-Problems* (1993), *Vagueness and Contradiction* (2001), and *A Brief History of the Paradox* (2003). The idea was to approach the problem of artistic knowledge by looking first at what has been argued by aestheticians and other philosophers, and then turning to specifically artistic usages and problems.*

Sorensen's presentation focused on aesthetic cognitivism, the claim that art can give us substantial knowledge, and that this capacity partly determines its value as art. In other words, the knowledge we get from artworks is not just a matter of their narratives, symbols, or social contexts, but something in the art itself. Art can provide knowledge in uninteresting ways—by showing us the Franco-Prussian war, by recording the fashions of fifteenth-century Florence—but if it provides knowledge in a more interesting way, that knowledge has to somehow be intrinsic to the artwork itself.

In these excerpts Sorensen discusses four topics: the kinds of artistic knowledge, whether or not images can argue (whether they are propositional), whether this entire analytic philosophy approach doesn't play false with art by insisting on propositional knowledge (that part involved a brief discussion of Gödel), and whether skepticism about knowledge doesn't enjoin the conclusion that there is knowledge that can be derived from art.

In preparation for the seminar, the group read several texts assigned by Sorensen.¹

ROY SORESENSEN: So aesthetic cognitivism addresses one kind of knowledge. You might say that artists have another kind of knowledge, perhaps *tacit knowledge*, which Frances will be addressing.

JAMES ELKINS: I was interested in the list that is mentioned in Berys Gaut's essay, which divides knowledge—that is, knowledge in general, outside of the question of art—into several kinds. I thought that was a productive way to prepare to ask,

1. In addition to those cited below, the texts included Patricia Greenfield, "Technology and Informal Education: What Is Taught, What Is Learned," *Science*, January 2, 2009, 69–71; Ulric Neisser, "Rising Scores on Intelligence Tests," *American Scientist*, <http://www.americanscientist.org/issues/page2/rising-scores-on-intelligence>

-tests (accessed October 3, 2009); and K. Anders Ericsson, "Attaining Excellence Through Deliberate Practice: Insights from the Study of Expert Performance," in *The Pursuit of Excellence Through Education*, edited by Michel Ferrari (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2002), 21–55.

What do artists know?—by asking first, What is knowledge? Gaut's list of kinds of knowledge includes *propositional knowledge*, *practical knowledge*, something called "the appreciation of significance," and *phenomenal knowledge*.² All Gaut says is that the ones beside propositional knowledge "resist adequate statement in propositional form." But I wonder about that list, and about Gaut's careless, informal manner when it comes to the list. Is meant to be taken as a complete list? Is it a list of equivalent items?

ROY SORENSEN: Well, there's practical knowledge: I can ride a bicycle, but I cannot express exactly how I do so.

P. ELAINE SHARPE: Yes, but this is still in a tangible realm of experience: you know two things, that you are on a bicycle, and that your body is doing the work.

JAMES ELKINS: Last week I was in the Florida Everglades, on a fan boat. So I have a vivid phenomenal knowledge that I didn't possess before. Is it importantly different, from an epistemological point of view, from the knowledge we both have—if it is indeed comparable knowledge—about how to ride a bicycle?

SAUL OSTROW: We're close to what Wittgenstein meant by the distinction between what can be said and what can be shown.

ROY SORENSEN: Right: in the *Tractatus*, he says whatever can be said can be said clearly.

SAUL OSTROW: But in the book on color, he has several pages trying to determine what transparency is.

ROY SORENSEN: Yes, the transparent white stuff out of Goethe. (That's Goethe's question: why can there be transparent red and blue, but not white?)

SAUL OSTROW: So those are special-status propositions, because they are very puzzling. And in this case, that's what we might be considering as special categories of knowledge.

ROY SORENSEN: Take images in particular. They are pictorial sorts of things, so they can't really have truth values. You can't have an argument that is composed of pictures. You can have labels, but then it's the labels that are doing the work. For something to be an argument, it has to have truth values, and there has to be a difference between arguing validly and invalidly. Images aren't the appropriate sort of thing: they're just the wrong medium in which you can have knowledge.

CIARÁN BENSON: Does an image have to be pictorial?

ROY SORENSEN: Well, Ned Block, for example, has a book on the imagery debate.³ He says that you can say images can be used to make judgments, if you say they

2. Berys Gaut, "Art and Knowledge," in *The Oxford Handbook of Aesthetics*, edited by Jerrold Levinson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 437–49, especially 439.

3. *Imagery*, edited by Ned Joel Block (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1981).

are covertly discursive, covertly sentence-like. You're saying, Things are like this picture.

A picture of a box can be used to make a variety of claims: this is how to box, this is how not to box, this is an actor playing a boxer, etc. It only says something after we associate a sentence with it. The picture is then a useful supplement to the sentence; but without a sentence there is no judgment at all. The sentence need not be explicit or in English. Jerry Fodor says the sentence is in "the language of thought"—Mentalese.

CIARÁN BENSON: But neuroscientists like Antonio Damasio use the concept of an image in relation to feeling.⁴ Let's imagine an object presents itself to my consciousness. In looking at it, I transform my sense of myself, and I *feel* something. Images emerge in my consciousness. But they are neither pictorial nor discursive. That illustrates the use of the word "image" in a particular frame of understanding, but in this case it is not pictorial.

ROY SORENSEN: Here's an illustration of that problem. In *Art and Illusion*, E. H. Gombrich has a section in which he is talking about a picture that George Inness was commissioned to paint.⁵ The people who commissioned the image wanted an extra railroad line in the painting, one that didn't exist. Inness was conscience-stricken. Out of family pressure, he painted the extra line, but he felt guilty. Gombrich asks, Did he lie with that picture? And he answers, No: the person who lied is the one who had to present Inness's picture. You cannot lie with a picture. Lying requires an assertion, and that is impossible in a picture.

JAMES ELKINS: There are two issues here, both pertinent but different. One is: When do we want to say that images are not pictorial (and therefore possibly propositional)? And the other is: Can pictorial images be propositional? Last year, at this same table, we debated both these issues at length.⁶ We also discussed whether or not images can negate *other images*: that is a further issue, once you've agreed that images cannot lie, or otherwise contain propositional content.

In relation to the question about nonpictorial images, mental images, and so forth, I would just say that for purposes of linking this discussion to art-world concerns, the principal instance is the one in which images are indeed very pictorial, no matter what medium or ontological status they have. It matters that images are taken to be nonpropositional.

ROY SORENSEN: And negation is just a simple logical proposition. You could also ask: can images conjoin? Can you do other kinds of logical operations with them? Can "The cat is on the mat" be conjoined with "The dog is on the porch" to yield the

4. Antonio R. Damasio, *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1995); and see the review by Daniel Dennett in the *Times Literary Supplement*, August 25, 1995, 3–4. [—J.E.]

5. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation*, fifth edition (London: Phaidon, 1977), 58.

6. *What Is an Image?*, coedited with Maja Naef, vol. 2 of *The Stone Theory Seminars* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2012).

more complex judgment “The cat is on the mat and the dog is on the porch”? When you present two snapshots of your fan boat trip, do they form a conjunction like the sentences?

JAMES ELKINS: In our discussions last year in the What Is an Image? seminars, people were unwilling to say that an image can negate another.

ROY SORENSEN: And if you can’t get negation off the ground, then you’ve got lots of problems.

STEPHAN SCHMIDT-WULFFEN: You are treating the world as if it were composed entirely of deducible or provable propositions. But we know this is not true. Many sentences are deducible, not provable. And then we have Kurt Gödel, who proved there are many sentences that are neither deducible nor provable, and one of the big problems of the analytical scheme you are proposing is that thanks to Gödel, we know Rudolf Carnap’s project failed. You can no longer treat the world as a complete calculus, or as a set of complete calculi.

ROY SORENSEN: Everybody accepts the Gödel result. It is beyond philosophy, as if it’s “just math.” It tells you what the conditions are under which a statement might be true. Some statements are unknowable, but necessary truths. Gödel’s theorems are all necessary truths, but they are unprovable with respect to the system you’re talking about. They may be provable in another system, but not in that system. Every system that is strong enough to express an arithmetic is going to have an indefinite number of these Gödel results.

The thought was that you could reduce mathematics to logic. That would be good, because logic is very clear, but mathematics is some Platonic invention [*gestures at the ceiling*]. How do you understand these objects, these twos and threes, if you don’t reduce them to propositions? The Gödel results ruined that. That was a hit. But it wasn’t catastrophic through the programs. It simply ended the deviation into metaphysical worlds. Through the work of Saul Kripke and others, it has been heavily systematized.

This doesn’t yet get into the epistemology problem, because it means we’re sort of setting up a lot of ignorance: we’re saying there are many counterfactual truths that are completely inaccessible to us. We have just revealed a huge field of ignorance.

So, to continue: there’s also the issue of skepticism. You think you’re listening to me now, but actually you’re just a brain in a vat. The skeptic isn’t trying to persuade you you’re a brain in a vat, but just that you can’t disconfirm that you’re a brain in a vat. You do not know you have legs, etc. That is a standard and powerful kind of skeptical exercise. What’s interesting here is that the skeptic supposes his counterfactuals make sense. There are other possible worlds, completely compatible with the one you believe, and you are asked to say they make sense.

So I do think that there are kinds of knowledge that can come from art, and that you can learn from art. There might for example be *knowledge of significance*, of the meaningfulness of things. John Stuart Mill, for example, had a burned-out feeling after his repressive upbringing, and came back into a feeling of life by reading poetry.

JAMES ELKINS: Is there a way of thinking about the list of kinds of knowledge, either the one you're building, or the one in Gaut's text? Is there a meta-theory accounting for such lists, so that we could begin by thinking of the full range of kinds of knowledge?

ROY SORENSEN: No, no one has claimed to construct such a list.

CIARÁN BENSON: You could add physical knowledge: I know where my arm is without looking, provided my proprioceptive system is functioning adequately. This may connect with Frances's idea of tacit knowledge. Where would you put that in your scheme, given that it's a preoccupation of many artists?

ROY SORENSEN: I don't know. I was just trying to come up with examples.

So to continue the list: aesthetic cognitivists have also claimed that artworks provide *modal knowledge*, which is knowledge that something is possible or necessary; *knowledge of actuality*, and *practical knowledge*. Moral knowledge has also been claimed, for example the knowledge we gain from novels.

JAMES ELKINS: Is it a deep problem, or a superficial problem, that we're not worried about whether these forms of knowledge comprise a list? In my count we have: modal knowledge, propositional knowledge, practical knowledge, kinesthetic or proprioceptive knowledge, phenomenal knowledge, knowledge of the significance of something, moral knowledge, concept learning, knowledge of artwork—a real miscellany, and as you say only some pertain to artworks.

ROY SORENSEN: People don't worry about it.

JAMES ELKINS: To worry about it, you'd have to start from the first (propositional or logical knowledge). You couldn't begin from a phenomenological position, and worry about the others. So I am worried that you're not worried.

ROY SORENSEN: I don't know why you'd worry, aside from the interest in achieving a full taxonomy. But suppose you wanted to find out that some kinds of knowledge are not possible. To prove that negative proposition, you would be interested in getting a full list.

JAMES ELKINS: But from the perspective of some of these, you'd be concerned about overlaps and repetitions, but not from other perspectives.

ROY SORENSEN: It's a sloppy list, because I was just trying to show how it can be claimed that we know things from art.

SAUL OSTROW: Each element in the list is categorical, not definitive. That is, the list together does not constitute a definition of knowledge. So they don't necessarily have to be reconcilable; they can be in conflict. Moral knowledge can be in conflict with experiential knowledge.

ROY SORENSEN: It is generally hard for the cognitivists to say there is that kind of variety of knowledges. The reason is that you want to be able to have arguments: you have some moral knowledge, some practical knowledge, and to reach some conclusions—

SAUL OSTROW: From the perspective of the artist, the negotiation is very important.

ROY SORENSEN: Okay, this part is true: you can concede that some things are not cknowable. I may have to be ignorant of some things to know others. But different kinds of knowledge that conflict in an incommensurate way would be worrisome. The idea for epistemologists is to pool kinds of knowledge that can be known.

One last item on the list: there are also claims that artwork enables *concept learning*. Against that, Jerry Fodor has an argument that you cannot learn concepts, from art or from anything else. ("Concepts" understood as elements that go into propositions.) Suppose I try to define a new concept. I need to have something that means the same thing but is learnable. We're born, according to Fodor, with an innate stock of concepts.⁷ And people say, Even the concept of a spark plug? And he says, Yes, even the concept of a spark plug. It's a great argument. He just keeps driving along until he runs off the cliff.

And here's the objection to aesthetic cognitivism I find most interesting. People argue that to get knowledge from art, you have to switch out of the aesthetic stance. This is how T. J. Diffey puts it: "An aesthetic response to art involves the suspension of reference by taking the work to be holding up states of affairs for inspection, scrutiny, or, to use the traditional term, contemplation. So, to learn from a work of art, that is, to move from what is shown in the world of the work to an assertion of what obtains in the world, requires a refusal of the aesthetic stance."⁸

The point is that there's a legitimate other stance in relation to art, and that shows that you're not attending to the object as art.

CIARÁN BENSON: Maybe what you're left with is not the knowledge of what the object said. Instead what happens in the experience of art supplies you with memories, which are yours, as well as information, which is its. There is a type of knowledge.

7. Jerry A. Fodor, *Concepts: Where Cognitive Science Went Wrong* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

8. T. J. Diffey, "What Can We Learn from Art?," in *Art and its Messages: Meaning, Morality, and Society*, edited by Stephen Davies (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), 30.

ROY SORENSSEN: There is a kind of knowledge, even within the aestheticist stance.

CIARÁN BENSON: This would involve a distinction between information processing, which we've mainly been talking about, and meaning making. The dominant model in cognitive psychology is also information processing, as against meaning making, which is a social knowledge.

SAUL OSTROW: Maybe we should add social knowledge to our list—

JAMES ELKINS: Well, it seems clear to me that understanding the knowledge that comes from art will involve a conversation on the limits of knowledge as that word is construed in analytic philosophy, Kantian aesthetics, cognitive psychology, and other fields, all without exclusive reference to art. All morning Roy has been asking us to attend to what can be argued, but we have been swerving toward boundary cases. There's a tidal pull, in art discourse, away from kinds of knowledge that can be argued propositionally, and toward things that cannot be logically clarified, but that can somehow still be called *knowledge*. I think we've been swept along by the strength of that tide, away from Roy's territory and back toward the swampier regions we prefer.

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5. ARTISTIC KNOWLEDGE, PART 2

That same afternoon, Frances Whitehead led a seminar on artistic knowledge. Her interest as a practitioner is in tacit knowledge: the question of what knowledge artists in particular can bring to the table. She has been involved in a series of linked civic initiatives, including the Embedded Artist Project with the City of Chicago Innovation Program¹ and the Great Lakes Basin Phenologic Garden Project, a climate change / culture change initiative for the Chicago Park District.

Her introductory PowerPoint lecture included proposals in answer to the question, What do artists know? “Beyond a wide range of material practices, histories and techniques, concepts and theoretical frameworks,” she wrote, “artists are trained to use a unique set of skills, processes, and methodologies”:

- *Artists know how to synthesize diverse facts, goals, and references—making connections and speaking many languages. Artists are very lateral in their research and operations and have great intellectual and operational agility.*
- *Artists know the production of new knowledge, as evidenced by the one-hundred-plus-year history of innovation and originality as a top criterion.*
- *Artists use creative, in-process problem solving and ongoing processes—not all up-front creativity-responsivity.*
- *Artists compose and perform, initiate and carry through, design and execute. This creates a relatively tight feedback loop in their process, compared to some other disciplines.*
- *Artists use a proactive not reactive practice—artists are trained to initiate, redirect the brief, and consider their intentionality. This intentionality is highly regarded, as are the internal logics of the work.*
- *Artists develop an acute cognizance of individual responsibility for the meanings, ramifications, and consequences of their work. The downside of this is that artists are not always team oriented or willing to compromise due to the high premium placed on individual responsibility and sole authorship.*
- *Artists have a deep understanding of the language of cultural values and how they are embodied and represented. They know revaluation, recoding, and recontextualization.*
- *Artists know how to participate and maneuver in noncompensation (social) economies, idea economies, and other intangible values (capitals).*
- *Artists have great proficiency in evaluation and analysis along multicriteria, qualitative lines—in qualitative assessment. Many are skilled in pattern and system recognition, especially with asymmetrical data.*

1. <http://www.embeddedartistproject.com>
(accessed October 2, 2009).

- *Artists are skilled at making explicit the implicit, making visible the invisible.*
- *Artists do not think outside the box: there is no box.*

Frances also argued that for artists seeking to address global issues and looking for agency that leverages their knowledge, Thierry de Duve's rubric could be extended to Metis–Praxis–Re-direction.² In preparation for Frances's seminar the Fellows and Faculty read a range of texts on and around tacit knowledge.³ The transcript here begins with excerpts from Frances's introduction and includes material on the philosophic approaches to knowledge; key concepts such as strategy, metaphor, and the artist; and a longer conversation about the relation between the practice Frances describes and art.

FRANCES WHITEHEAD: I'm going to be talking today about *tacit knowledge*. We could call it a process, or a method—this gets into semantics—but if we can't ever get to the question of what good this knowledge is, how we can use it, how we learn it, how we can teach other people about it, then I'm not sure we're addressing what is going on in the world. So I am going to map out for you today something that arrived, uninvited, in my practice. I stumbled upon it. It may be useful to you, or it may not. I make no claims about universality, no claims that this is a full list of anything. I make no claims that I can speak to all of art, or all of knowledge. I can only give you a report of what has happened in the last ten years around these issues, and what has arrived at my doorstep, and what I have tried to do with it. Rather than seeking to understand this question in the abstract, the question of artistic knowledge has arrived through the lens of sustainability as

2. See Section 1 of the Seminars.

3. In addition to the sources listed below, the readings included "Back to the Future," chap. 7 of Michael Grenfell and Cheryl Hardy, *Art Rules: Pierre Bourdieu and the Visual Arts* (Oxford: Berg, 2007), 173–94, an overview and update of Bourdieu's theories of how art operates in society, including key terms such as "field" and "habitus"; Tom Holert, "Art in the Knowledge-Based Polis," on the E-Flux website, <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/view/40> (accessed August 10, 2009), an overview and critique of the commodification of knowledge and the rhetoric around innovation and knowledge production; Daniel Aronson, "Overview of Systems Thinking," available from thinking.net, http://www.thinking.net/Systems_Thinking/OverviewSTarticle.pdf, a very brief introduction to the concept of "systems thinking"; Tony Fry, "Redirective Practice: An Elaboration," on the Design Philosophy website, <http://www.desphilosophy.com> (accessed August 14, 2009), a call for an examination and redirection of habitus of the practice for all disciplines; Hugo Letiche and Matt Statler, "Evoking Metis: Questioning the Logics of Change, Responsiveness,

Meaning, and Action in Organizations," *Culture and Organization* 11, no. 1 (2005): 1–16; Bertil Rolf, "Two Theories of Tacit and Implicit Knowledge," posted on the website of the Special Interest Group on "Philosophy and Informatics," part of the German Informatics Society (Gesellschaft für Informatik GI), <http://www.nt.fh-koeln.de/philosophyandinformatics> (accessed October 1, 2009); and Gavan J. McDonnell, "Disciplines as Cultures: Towards Reflection and Understanding," in *Transdisciplinarity: Recreating Integrated Knowledge*, edited by Margaret Somerville and David J. Rapport (Oxford: EOLSS, 2000).

For a taste of discourse around disciplinarity and transdisciplinarity, see Brad Haseman, "A Manifesto for Performative Research," in "Practice-Led Research," special issue of *Media International Australia Incorporating Culture and Policy*, no. 118 (2006): 98–106.

Carl Frappaolo, "Implicit Knowledge," *Knowledge Management Research and Practice* 6 (2008): 23–25; A. C. Spender, review of Philippe Baumard, *Tacit Knowledge in Organizations*, *Academy of Management Review* 25, no. 2 (2000): 443–46.

I have sought to understand the cultural dimension of this issue and how the knowledge of artists might contribute to this effort. Like many contemporary artists, I seek agency.

I arrived at the question of the tacit knowledge of artists by asking, what is the role of culture and the artist is the discourse of sustainability? What is my expertise? What can I bring to the collective table? Through this lens, one can begin to sketch out the disciplinary knowledge of artists, their field and *habitus*, and also how that knowledge relates to other ideas emerging in the so-called *knowledge economy*. This we can also tie to new forms of artistic practice, which can be modeled.

I like to try on different words at different times, to see how far that gets me. When speaking of tacit knowledge, then, are we talking strictly about non-verbal knowledge? Is this the same as implicit knowledge? Is that embodied, somatic, kinesthetic, spatial, knowledge?—or is it really just a matter of good old-fashioned procedural knowledge? We are not the only people asking these questions; many other sectors are trying to understand and map out their field of operations and how they can understand and capture their knowledge. This has given rise in the business community to a field called *knowledge management*. I'm looking around to see what other people are talking about with regard to knowledge.⁴

In terms of philosophy, there's the usual breakdown into *episteme* (ἐπιστήμη), pure knowledge (that is, abstract or theoretical knowledge); *techne* (τέχνη), craft or know-how (procedural knowledge); and *praxis* (πράξις), knowledge in action (practical knowledge).

ARETI ADAMOPOULOU: Since these are Greek terms, let me add a bit of linguistics: *episteme* (in modern Greek, the word for science) comes from ἐπιστάμαι, which means to know or to understand very well; *techne* (which now means art) from τίκτω, meaning to give birth or to bring to life; and *praxis* (which today means action) from πράσσω, which originally meant to go through, to cross and, later, to act. Note also that *techne* was used in antiquity also to denote slyness, deceit!

FRANCES WHITEHEAD: I would think of these as the know what, know how, and know that. But as we began to look at the philosophic background, it became clear we should also ask: what about know why, know when or where, and know who—that is, knowledge related to the intangible social network?

ARETI ADAMOPOULOU: It may help that the current term for *know that* is *gnōsi* (γνώση), for *know how* is *technognosia* (τεχνογνωσία).

4. The Seminar also read, in this connection, Chris Rust, "Design Enquiry: 'Tacit Knowledge and Invention in Science,'" *Design Issues* 20, no. 4 (2004): 76–85; Sara Delamont and Paul Atkinson, "Doctoring Uncertainty: Mastering Craft Knowledge," *Social Studies of Science* 31, no. 1 (2001): 87–107. See also Joyce S. R. Yee,

"Capturing Tacit Knowledge: Documenting and Understanding Recent Methodological Innovation Used in Design Doctorates in Order to Inform Postgraduate Training Provision," paper delivered at EKSIG 2009: Experiential Knowledge, Method and Methodology, June 19, 2009. [Last entry added by J.E.]

FRANCES WHITEHEAD: So, moving along through the cognitive and philosophic, when you begin talking about tacit knowledge, everyone mentions Michael Polanyi.⁵ I have to tell you, it was not of any use to me whatsoever. I found it logocentric, binary, hierarchical. It seemed like warmed-over midcentury thought to me, more about cognition and learning than knowledge. He is giving the subject electroshocks and then talking about knowledge! And spatially, it's just too simplistic. In his model, knowledge moves as a link back and forth between the proximal and the distal, shuttling back and forth as if it were in Flatland. All this transpires in the soup of what he calls "indwelling." He does later talk about emergence, but for me, the complex adaptive systems model is a much closer fit to what I see transpiring in the world. The models he proposes for what happens in the brain are just not as complex as what many of us talk about in the studio, in the art context, in terms of how things are functioning.

I would recommend Gregory Bateson's analysis of "deutero learning," "learning one" and "learning two."⁶ He talks about teaching dolphins: one is taught to do a trick, and gets a reward; but then he teaches one that it will only get a reward when it does a *new* trick. Eventually the dolphin learns the abstract rule of *newness*. (This of course is completely tacit, because they're not talking to the dolphins.) I think it is worthwhile to think about newness, as it is discredited in the discourse of the avant-garde, but also as it persists as an inherent value in what we're doing.

I also want to introduce some linguistic terms related to art practice. This started as a lark with some graduate students, but it turns out the subject is studied in linguistics. The suffix in words like "artist," "designer," and "engineer"—the agential suffix, *-ist*, *-er*, and *-eer*—is related to the degree of application of instrumentation. It is also related to the original language we borrowed these words from, and how they came into English. For example, "art" as a noun ends in *-ist*, not only because it's a noun, but also because the relationship between the profession, the artist, and the thing, art, is of an ideological character. It turns out that *-ists* are the most ideological. The person is deeply attached to the subject, for example in "scientist" and "artist." The agential suffix *-er* is more applied. In the word "designer," for example, the *designer* is applying the *design*. It is less ideological and more applied. The agential suffix *-eer* is the most applied, and even instrumental, as in "pamphleteer," "racketeer." So even in the language itself, we position ourselves disciplinarily and dispositionally in relation to the topics at hand. If we switch these suffixes around, it's possible to see the plate tectonics at work. The other day our dean introduced me as a "designist." If that is true, then I believe in design; I have attached myself to it—as in the words "communist," "fascist," "fashionista."

5. Michael Polanyi, "Tacit Knowing," chap. 1 of *The Tacit Dimension* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 3–25.

6. Max Visser, "Gregory Bateson on Deutero-Learning and Double Bind: A Brief Conceptual History," *Journal of the History of Behavioral Sciences* 39, no. 3 (2003): 269–78.

CHRIS CSIKSZENTMIHÁLYI: You have used the word “strategy” to describe what you’re interested in, and yesterday Stephan Schmidt-Wulffen also used it, in association with the Greek word *metis* (μητις). I’ve spent enough time with Greek scholars to know you can’t black-box a Greek word and use it out of context, as we often do—but my reading of *metis* is that it’s a tactical intelligence, a spirited, quick intelligence that certainly can be used to effect a larger strategy, but often isn’t. That doesn’t make it less important, though my sense is that many disciplines favor strategy. I completely agree that a lot of art intelligence and creativity, especially in music and in jazz, has to do with strategy, but what differentiates jazz or other improvisatory forms is that quick, tactical intelligence. In a way it is a subaltern intelligence, the intelligence one must develop when one doesn’t have the power or means to strategize—artists often don’t have the resources or ability to strategize.

FRANCES WHITEHEAD: I am interested in utilizing *metis* in the world—

CHRIS CSIKSZENTMIHÁLYI: But will you be able to do the strategic work you have outlined, with your training in artistic tactics?

FRANCES WHITEHEAD: I think it’s interesting that we’re considering the viability of this approach for the next couple of decades. The only way I knew how to talk about this was the way it arrived, what it delivered to me in terms of potentials at this time.

ANN SOBIECH MUNSON: Frances, maybe *metis* and *praxis* should be interchanged in your proposed scheme. *Praxis* suggests a strategic change, but *metis* relates to tactics, following de Duve’s trajectory skill-medium-practice.

Also, the etymology of *practice* in the *Oxford English Dictionary* has to do with cunning, scheming, and trickery—very *metis*-like. Thus *metis* highlights this particular aspect of practice.

P. ELAINE SHARPE: I am more inclined to use the term *methexis*, or *meta exis*, which Jean-Luc Nancy spoke about in a seminar at the European Graduate School, and which he defined as a kind of autonomous participation in creation—the example he gave was that of the photographer being the *methexis* of the camera. This goes back to Roy’s discussion of the phantom limb this morning, which I do believe exists as a valid circuitry in the sphere of art-making, and which also speaks to the notion of the synapses being tricked.

CIARÁN BENSON: I am an outsider in this, so I am also struggling with the language. There’s a word you didn’t use, and that is “metaphor.” You mentioned turning one thing into another, and moving laterally, and you used the word “strategy” or *metis*: but you never used the word “metaphor.” This question of metaphoric meaning is quite well studied. My own students, for example, tend not to think metaphorically, whereas art students or poetry students often use metaphorical language.

FRANCES WHITEHEAD: I'd just remind you that the document I've just presented was written for a project I am doing with the Innovation Program of the City of Chicago, and they don't speak about metaphor. They talk about "analogous thinking" and "synetic thinking" (note, not "synthetic"), but not metaphor. So this was crafted for them.

BARBARA JAFFEE: I am interested in the replacement of ethics with art. There is an either/or choice of ethics or the social. But if you burrow deep into studio practice, if you don't go out into the world, are you not ethical? At what point is it possible for art to replace ethics?

FRANCES WHITEHEAD: Well, you know, here at the School of the Art Institute I run a project called Knowledge Lab (KLab). One of the rubrics that we've ended up talking about is new knowledge, and that raises the question of what isn't new knowledge. We call that other thing known knowledge. A lot of what we are all doing as artists is keeping knowledge alive by reperforming it, re-exemplifying it in ways that create works that the current culture can understand. But there are also things at the edge of the known that are pushing change. As an artist, my disposition is to be at the edge, messing around in the region of change. Many other artists are at the other end of things, and that's very important. We need not to forget the known knowledge, by reperforming it, re-presenting it. For example, regarding Jonathan's question, if I "make art" alongside my transdisciplinary practice, I am making a series of watercolors of extinct plants where I can enjoy the personal artistic pleasure of speaking a "known" visual language, and also do the strategic work of rendering approachable a political subject.

BARBARA JAFFEE: But that time in your studio, when you're just sitting there: no one gives you a charge or a brief, and you have to come up with one: that has to be sustained within a future curriculum, if it is going to continue to happen.

FRANCES WHITEHEAD: Don't we all agree with that? That the time spent in a studio is productive because it is where artists learn proactivity?

P. ELAINE SHARPE: Absolutely. Time spent in contemplation of an idea and bringing that idea into form.

CHRISTOPHER FRAYLING: Freud called that "unconscious cerebration."

CHRIS CSIKSZENTMIHÁLYI: There's a researcher named Rich Gold, recently passed away, who was at Xerox Palo Alto Research Center, a big lab that invented laser printers, Ethernet, even the windowing software that Apple and later Microsoft ripped off.⁷ At PARC they had designers, engineers, and scientists working there. Gold thought they should also have artists, because the designers had no one to talk to, and because Xerox Park needed people of all sorts to work together. He found out that the designers and artists really hate each other—

7. Craig Harris, *Art and Innovation: The Xerox PARC Artist-in-Residence Program* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999).

FRANCES WHITEHEAD: Because they are too close together—

CHRIS CSIKSZENTMIHÁLYI: Well, no, it turned out the artists and scientists got along—

FRANCES WHITEHEAD: It becomes about difference.

CHRIS CSIKSZENTMIHÁLYI:—the artists and scientists got along, and the designers got along with engineers, and Gold speculated that it was because designers and engineers are really okay with the idea of clients. Artists and scientists are supposed to be revealing truths, right? But engineers and designers have clients, and that's okay, you can tell them to change something and it doesn't impinge on their sense of integrity.

SAUL OSTROW: One of the issues here is what model of the artist is being put forth. Art history privileges one model, and ignores others. There is the entire history of art and technology in the twentieth century, which do not appear in the historical record.

ARETI ADAMOPOULOU: How about other activities of the “great masters”? A number of Renaissance artists, such as Andrea Mantegna, Sandro Botticelli, and Piero di Cosimo, made ephemeral works for their patrons. Painting and sculpture are still the major subjects in art-historical research and writing. And this is what an art student, having attended a survey course, ends up with.

CHRISTOPHER FRAYLING: This pedagogic point goes back to Herbert Read. He didn't use the same language at all, but he said there are certain things that doing art, in an educational context, brings out much better than any other activity. He called that teaching *through art*—

JAMES ELKINS: Sorry, let me just put in there that we'll be talking about Read and teaching *through art* at the end of the week.⁸

CHRISTOPHER FRAYLING: Yes; just to say that Read listed the things that can be learnt through art: setting your own problems, your own agendas, and so forth. Frances, I think what you've done is update that, so it makes sense in a business context. And you're absolutely right: whatever you end up doing, it turns out to be a certain way of thinking. I think that's really important for the agenda of this week. We have been signally bad at articulating what art does well, even though we are good at saying that art does something well.

REBECCA GORDON: Teaching through art doesn't negate the possibility that art itself can give knowledge. It's not an either/or thing. The result of art-making can be both the artwork itself and the development of the skills or knowledge of the artist, which could potentially be applied to many non-art activities.

CHRISTOPHER FRAYLING: There's no need to be defensive: it's no threat to autonomy if we teach *through art*.

8. See Section 9 of the Seminars.

CHRIS CSIKSZENTMIHÁLYI: I remember when I came to the School of the Art Institute as a student, I had come out of the corporate world—I had been working at a design consulting firm called Doblin Group, which was founded by Jay Doblin, a student of Moholy-Nagy at the Chicago Institute of Design, and who took it over on Moholy-Nagy's death. I learned a huge amount about the field of consulting, especially after we had been partly acquired by some rogue McKinsey Consultants. Frances, you have occupied the role of consultant in some projects you have done outside the School. McKinsey—this massive, powerful consultancy—has documents describing strategies and techniques that show how to analyze any situation or problem in an *entirely structured* way: it is almost the diametric opposite of the process that you are describing, Frances. You are making an argument for an approach that many people would say would be impossible to put on just one page.⁹

FRANCES WHITEHEAD: And it has to be one page or many officials won't read it!

JONATHAN DRONSFIELD: Frances, may I ask about these watercolors of extinct plants? Are you still doing them?

FRANCES WHITEHEAD: What is the real question there?

JONATHAN DRONSFIELD: I didn't mention the watercolors, you did.

FRANCES WHITEHEAD: Well, it's important to understand the purposeful manipulation of what genres mean and what they can deliver. I consider watercolor the most palatable, even effete, of all media. It is the consummate "known knowledge" and thus affords different opportunity and little risk.

STEPHAN SCHMIDT-WULFFEN: I think there is a point there. When we discussed interventionist art, one negative argument was that the artists weren't on location long enough. The commitment only lasts a couple of weeks.

FRANCES WHITEHEAD: That is a huge point, huge.

STEPHAN SCHMIDT-WULFFEN: If you were to be hired as a consultant say to the City of Chicago for the rest of your life, you would definitely have a problem as an artist. In order that your contribution to the city politics is to be understood as an artwork, it has to have a limited duration. Otherwise it will be just that: a job for the City of Chicago. The traditional framing that made autonomous art autonomous—frames, plinths, white walls—seems to be given by the determined time span in interventionist art. And this causes also a problem for this type of social engaged art, because it is never exclusively devoted to its focus group and its problems; it always has an eye on its resonance in the art field. For a practice such as yours, there is always the same question: How long will it be art?

JONATHAN DRONSFIELD: Yes, that is where I was going with my question.

9. Frances had disseminated a page of talking points that included the kinds of knowledge listed at the beginning of this section. [—J.E.]

HILDE VAN GELDER: I have a serious problem with this institutional underpinning of what can be defined as art and what cannot. Stephan, today we should leave behind the idea that we need a consecrating instance like a museum, a gallery, or an influential critic, in order to decide what art is or can be. Art can be operative on all levels of society—even, now, in academia. For centuries, artists have been working directly for important historical patrons (think of the Medici). Frances's practice reconnects with this age-long tradition of commissioned artistic production and thus radically reinvents this very old model for issues of the future. Given her teaching job and her official patrons, she can make her work independently from the commercial and institutional gallery circuit, which can be an advantage as far as the autonomy of her thinking and subsequent artistic output is concerned. There is artistic quality to gain from this approach, all the more so since her methods are so transdisciplinary.

STEPHAN SCHMIDT-WULFFEN: If you don't switch, if you stay, then you turn into a designer or a social worker—which is okay! After two hundred years of autonomous art, perhaps it's time for that role to disappear.

WILLIAM MAROTTI: But Stephan, I'm not sure that that needs to be an either-or proposition—that to act in the world, an artist needs to “get a job” or forgo art. Perhaps you're being a bit hyperbolic here. But put another way, it seems like we've split the question of artists' knowledge into a question of applied skills in other domains, and an indefinitely deferred issue of knowing through and in art itself—something that Adorno thought was very much caught up with art being both autonomous and social.¹⁰

STEPHAN SCHMIDT-WULFFEN: Since we were confronted with the bottle rags and urinals as artworks, we had to take care about the frame which helped to direct the interpretation. And a social action is very similar to an appropriated everyday object. If there is no frame to the urinal, you run into the danger that someone will just use it. But I think Hilde is right: the bourgeois epoch of art produced a very specific framing, quite different at least from the framing of altarpieces in Gothic churches. It might be that we are witnessing the definition of a new function and social role of art in a postbourgeois society.

ARETI ADAMOPOULOU: Maybe art historians or philosophers are more attached to categories and taxonomies than artists are. What if we see what Frances proposes as a return to former types of artistic creation or action? Or perhaps she can still do her watercolors and research as often as she likes, and when she becomes the leader of a decision-making committee she will have realized something similar to what Plato proposed in *Politeia* [*Republic*] about the philosophers as governors in his ideal state.

10. Theodor Adorno, Gretel Adorno, and Rolf Tiedemann, *Aesthetic Theory*, *Theory and History of Literature* 88 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 348.

JONATHAN DRONSFIELD: Stephan, I'm interested in the complementary case, the political artist who one day is no longer political, but continues as an artist. For instance, Jean-Luc Godard. In the late 1960s he was making very political films, Maoist films. The politics of those films meant that it was constitutive of Godard's practice that the films work to change the world. One day he woke up and he was no longer a Maoist, but he went on to make films that can be seen as a continuation of previous concerns essential to his practice. So what happened there? What sustained that practice from the time he was a political filmmaker through to the point where politics didn't matter, or at least were not essential? As an artist, he no longer avows a politics, but he is also not asked to justify his earlier practice from the 1960s, which involved calling for certain films not to be made, stopping people from going to theaters to see work that wasn't political. Frances, what is it that sustains your practice *as an artist*?

FRANCES WHITEHEAD: Before I answer, it needs to be said that the concept of *sustainability* threatens the discourse of art as some people know it, and so they use the word as a way of talking about sustaining art. I see that all the time, so I thought I'd just point it out.

In terms of your question, I agree that this would be an issue if the only thing I were doing was sustaining the role of the artist. But that is not all I am doing. The actual projects, which I haven't talked about, are what matter.

JONATHAN DRONSFIELD: Yes, because you have a desired political outcome, and not because it is art. A lot of what you do is in the name of having a desired political outcome, and this becomes important in the academy in terms of how you teach artists.

FRANCES WHITEHEAD: Well, I'm conscious that I'm modeling the role of the artist, but it's not the only thing I'm doing. I am joining a team of people who are also modeling, modeling the city of the future.

JONATHAN DRONSFIELD: If you see your practice as being on the side of life, so that you're not worried about whether your practice is or is not art, and you're teaching students along these lines, *you* will be sustained through the shift from the values of art to the ones you have been exploring by your practice, and presumably through any shift back to art away from social engagement. But by what are you sustained?

CHRIS CSIKSZENTMIHÁLYI: By your *metis*, or your strategy.

JAMES ELKINS: Or, I would say: by formulations like the ones about tacit knowledge that you have set out.

JONATHAN DRONSFIELD: No, on the contrary, it's precisely the falling away of these, their disappearance or negation, that you will need to be sustained through were you to turn away from politics, away from social engagement, back to something

more properly called art. I would say that an artist is sustained through such fundamental changes by something about his or her practice as an *artist*, the practice of being an artist. But how do you teach that? *Can* one teach it? How to grasp one's talent, or make of chance a necessity, or let the intensities emerge, that sort of thing. Can what will sustain a practice through the negation of politics in it be taught? Isn't part of what students need to learn how to live the life of an artist as an overcoming of politics, which need not mean that they would be taught not to be political?

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6. THE FIRST-YEAR PROGRAM

From here to the end of the Seminars, the subject was individual degree programs: the first year, the BFA, the MFA, and finally the PhD. In each case the purpose was to understand the ideal form of the program or course. What does an MFA offer, in theory, that a BFA doesn't? What are the best ways of thinking about the PhD? What are the optimal arrangements of elements in the first year?

In these conversations, we tended to go back and forth between official administrative documents, practical considerations, and ordinary, day-to-day understandings of the different degrees. There are administrative and professional guidelines (which are often dry and abstract, but also politically important); practical problems to do with required courses, funding, and faculty (what instructors and students talk about all the time); and the day-to-day notion of the degree (what students hope to get out of the program, and what instructors tell their parents). In the case of the BFA, the day-to-day notion is that the BFA is an opportunity to experiment before you settle down to find your own practice. It seems those three ways of talking are inseparable, and each is part of what the programs are.

The subject of this first conversation is the here is the first year of college-level art education, also called the core or the foundation year.

JAMES ELKINS: An initial problem here is that the first-year program is often considered to be relatively unimportant. There is a lot of talk about it, but that talk usually happens in lunchtime sessions at conferences (those sessions no one attends), and the conversation is often really just anecdotal: "This is what we do at our institution," and so forth. There's also a common idea that the first year isn't important in the bigger scheme of things. In my field, art history, people don't talk much about the first-year survey of world art, because they think it doesn't have repercussions on professional life or on graduate-level study. I don't agree at all with that assessment: I think the structures and ideas of the first year are fundamentally important for art history, and the same is true of studio art.¹

Let me propose a couple of things about our conversation, and then I'll introduce some themes we might explore.

I would like to distinguish between *first-order* and *second-order* argument. The first order would be the work of assembling a list of elements of first-year instruction. (It is entirely typical that even something that rudimentary hasn't yet been done.) Second-order argument would be about the relation between

1. The case is made in *Stories of Art* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

those elements. Is life drawing compatible, philosophically or historically, with Bauhaus exercises in color perception?—and so forth.

The first-order task can be simplified, I think, by avoiding the categories that are usually used to divide the first year. Ann Sobiech Munson's institution in Iowa, for example, divides the first year into these subject areas: Critical Thinking, Visual Organization, Visual Translation (collage, mapping, model making), Media, Research, Ethics, Communication, Collaboration, Critical Evaluation, and Professional Awareness. The problem I see there is that several of those are *compound categories*, amalgams of potentially incommensurate elements. I think it is prudent to begin with the simplest possible categories.

Let's divide our discussion, then, into four large areas, which I think can reasonably be thought of as the fundamental constituents of the first year. They are the art history survey; the teaching of basic things like form, color, and space; the teaching of theory; and time students spend in the studio. I'll introduce each one briefly, to get us started.

1. *The art history survey.* This isn't always included in conversations on the first year, because it is often handled by the Art History Department, but ideally it should be fully integrated. There is a large literature on the ways the world art survey is taught, but virtually nothing on how it could be best altered to fit the needs of studio art instruction. The obstacle might be endemic to art history itself, because it would involve questions like: What judgments should govern the choice of artists, artworks, and ideas? Should art students learn different artists, artworks, and ideas than other students in the university? My proposal, just to open the conversation, is that art history is congenitally unable to address such questions because it is an historical discipline, not a critical one. Such questions need to be pursued *outside* the discipline, in fora like this.

2. *Basic things like seeing, visibility, color, space, and time.* There is no name for these things—and that itself is symptomatic of our reticence to talk about them. I'd like to call them *rudiments*: that was the name they had in the Renaissance, and it wasn't pejorative. It is possible to list some of them: from the Baroque academies, we have the central place accorded to life drawing and to drawing in general; from Romanticism, we have the idea of art's contingency, the importance of subjective expression, and the independence of art from the state. From the Bauhaus, we have all sorts of rudiments, including exercises in texture, motion, color, space, and line, and also the ubiquitous sequence from 2D to 4D. From the 1960s and 1970s, we have the preeminence of politics over aesthetics, the interest in identity, and the idea that art should act in society, the avoidance of essentialized media, and the fascinating problem of deskilling. Here's what I wonder about all that: why is it we don't feel comfortable assembling a list of such rudiments? Even if we restrict the listing to Bauhaus exercises, we probably wouldn't want to come up with a reasonably complete listing of things students should know. But if this were a more conservative art school, or one in another country (I won't specify that!), such a conversation would be easy and necessary. I wonder what causes our aversion.

3. *Theory*. Here we could discuss two separable issues: first, the question of liberal arts, and then the question of art theory. In North American art schools, liberal arts requirements are stand-ins for the range of classes that students would get in universities. The question is whether or not art students should get this truncated version of a liberal arts education, or whether they should be given a customized education. The second topic, art theory, is also difficult to discuss, for the same reason that people don't want to discuss rudiments—no one feels entirely comfortable saying which theorists are really indispensable for students.

4. *Studio time*. This is the fourth component of first-year instruction, but I won't add anything here, so we can get on with our conversation.

ANN SOBIECH MUNSON: There *are* groups devoted to the study of foundation year in art and design education. Foundations in Art: Theory and Education (FATE) has a website and a biennial national conference.² The National Conference on the Beginning Design Student (NCDBS) has been holding annual conferences for twenty-six years now, and recently launched an archive at Louisiana State University.³ Both groups debate how and what to teach in foundation years, though of course there's no one single list or program upon which everyone agrees.

BARBARA JAFFEE: One of the readings we were given was the 1910 circular for the School of the Art Institute.⁴ It is a very Taylorist, assembly-line model. They describe the first year as a common basis for what happens later.

JAMES ELKINS: And despite all the changes since then, I think you can argue the remnants of that idea are still around—so we need to come to terms with what we think are essential subjects.

ANN SOBIECH MUNSON: A few years ago Randall Lavender published an article in the *Journal of Aesthetic Education* that asks just this question: what are aesthetic fundamentals, where did they go, and what is their value for contemporary foundation instruction?⁵ He focuses on *aesthetic* fundamentals, though he argues that formal ideas have a place in the foundation.

WILLIAM MAROTTI: The issue of the art history survey—whether it's that art historians would have problems with a class that has utility, or whether it's the introductory survey so it gets the short shrift you could expect from departments that concentrate on higher-level work—is marginalized. But the stakes are significant, especially if you want to have an education that leads to a self-reflexive artist.

If the survey is to provide more than an ability to recognize styles or artists on sight, as if in a police lineup, I think it should engage more deeply with the way such works represented specific forms of engagement with their context and

2. <http://wwwFOUNDATIONS-art.org> (accessed October 27, 2009).

3. <http://www.beginningdesign.org> (accessed October 27, 2009).

4. Art Institute of Chicago, *School of Drawing, Painting, Sculpture, Normal Instruction [teacher instruction, and] Designing, Circular of*

Instruction for 1910–1911, pamphlet available from the Ryerson and Burnham Libraries, Art Institute of Chicago.

5. Randall Lavender, "The Subordination of Aesthetic Fundamentals in College Art Instruction," *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 37, no. 3 (2003): 41–57.

art worlds. Conveying a sense of why such works mattered to artists at the time they were made might make them more relatable to the sorts of choices students face in a different context.

JAMES ELKINS: Yes, there's literature on that, but it is also a question of how existing scholarship is taught. It might be useful here to introduce an idea of John Dewey's, from the essay "Child and the Curriculum." He imagines the issue as a law case, as if it were *Child v. Curriculum*. If the curriculum is some imagined body of art historians, the child is an imagined art student with fifty-two nose rings and an encyclopedic knowledge of art made in the last two seconds—all those clichés. As a thought experiment, *Child v. Curriculum* suggests that the problem of what to teach in the undergraduate curriculum is more a sociological question.

BARBARA JAFFEE: Part of the problem is that when art history was introduced in American art schools it was as general education, not as a scholarly discipline. This is the institution where Helen Gardner taught, and where the first edition of her survey text, *Art Through the Ages*, was published in 1926. Back then it was possible to imagine that a bit of art history would make up for what was lost with increased specialization. I don't really see the value today of the kind of superficial discussion that the survey offers. I teach the survey, but I never took a survey. It simply wasn't part of my training as a scholar. There's so much more and interesting things to teach.

STEPHAN SCHMIDT-WULFFEN: Our art historians simply refuse to teach the survey. They say in art-historical terms, the enterprise is nonsense. The outcome is nothing; you can't describe any artwork in a professional way. We have an ongoing discussion of what is needed in the first year, because art students have a very multivalent and practical interest. We decided we should cover major issues in the first year, which would contribute to the ways they organize their practice.

We are working on a sequence of lectures on three issues. First is the understanding of space in Modernist painting and sculpture. How did space change after minimalism? And then a second part is devoted to a contemporary concept of time. Here we try to react against a concept of time as something naturally given and establish an understanding of the different ways history is constructed. Also by looking to other, non-European traditions which read time in a different way. And then a third part is on identity. Artworks are selected in reference to these three part of the lecture series.

JAMES ELKINS: Those are common strategies, and elements of art history can be embedded in them. But here's the tricky thing: the decision about what elements to include in such a pedagogic plan is not a disciplinary decision. The discipline contributes the decision *not* to present space, time, identity, and other themes in a disciplinary fashion. The arrangement you describe re-presents the art history survey (the first of the four topics I proposed) *as*, or *in*, the "rudiments" (the second of the four topics).

SAUL OSTROW: The arrangement Stephan describes serves the same function as the art history survey, because it constructs a continuum. It presents a history in which the theme exists—

JAMES ELKINS: No, I don't agree.

SAUL OSTROW: The minute you use historical examples, you are presenting a continuum.

JAMES ELKINS: But in what discipline?

SAUL OSTROW: That of the artist. It is an ongoing practice, always changing, and different practices arise in that continuum—

JAMES ELKINS: But Saul, if you say that, you short-circuit the discussion. The issue here is what happens to material from one discipline when it is reformulated in another context.

SAUL OSTROW: But the approaches to art history have to be seen in the context of the reasons art history is included. And the reason art history is included is because it provides a context that circumscribes the practice of the artist.

MARTA EDLING: That is only after the 1960s. In the reform of the Royal College of Art in Stockholm that is precisely what happened. Before the 1960s, art history was taught *as history*. After, they put a here-and-now perspective on history. A kind of presentism was established; if they gave lectures on surrealism, it was not because it was interesting as a historic phenomenon, it was because they saw surrealism practiced in the contemporary scene.

SAUL OSTROW: But it was a tradition you could become part of.

MARTA EDLING: No, no, no. That was the whole point of the reform.

JAMES ELKINS: Saul, in your way of thinking of this, how is it possible to ever present something that is not a continuum?

SAUL OSTROW: This goes back to the question of what model of the artist is constructed.

JONATHAN DRONSFIELD: I agree, Jim, that it's necessary to come to a decision about art history. That decision will be circumscribed by the institutional structure in which the question is raised. I imagine this question is different for me, because I work in a university that has a department of art history. The fine art department will present the relevance of art history very differently. Even if art histories are presented as nonlinear, competing, or fragmented, they are still presented by the discipline of art history as historical. I imagine that it would be good for an art student in a university to have a degree of flexibility. Students could be offered the chance, for example, to take a course in art history. Once you've got the history of art presented by art historians, then an art department can present it again differently for artists, and perhaps not as history at all. But here, in an art school, without a broad academic support structure, you have to come to

this decision differently, but in either case, for me the answer is not to teach art historically at all. Rather than compensate for the absence or the lack, perhaps it would be better to internalize it, to grasp it as a chance.

P. ELAINE SHARPE: I wonder what effect it would have to have an artist teaching the survey.

JONATHAN DRONSFIELD: It happens a lot—but let them teach it nonhistoriographically, let them not historicize art but teach it as sets of forces, or as maps, or as so many ways of questioning.

P. ELAINE SHARPE: Yes, I know, but the artist teaching art history is not a member in good standing of the art history department—we do not meet the institutionalized criteria.

JAMES ELKINS: From my point of view, I'd say that having an artist teaching doesn't usually change anything. The enterprise of art history structures the concepts, methods, analyses, and descriptions, and parts of it are dragged along even when it appears that the artist who is teaching has made entirely idiosyncratic excerpts from the discipline.

JONATHAN DRONSFIELD: Yes, and parts of philosophy are “dragged along” too, in the form of presuppositions. I don't see why the history of art should be any more important here, any more relevant or useful to the student artist, than the philosophy of art, or the history of philosophy, for that matter. Why history of art rather than philosophy of art? Is it that the art academy believes it is creating the history of art rather than the philosophy of art? When teaching students about what art has been made in the past, why call it history of art at all, why not simply art?

SAUL OSTROW: We don't make it clear that art history is not something of immediate *use* to artists. They think it has immediate utility to the making of their art.

ARETI ADAMOPOULOU: Students think that art history's selection is a natural selection. They don't understand that someone actually *made* that selection.

SAUL OSTROW: Right. They don't see the selection of processes, and they don't see that art history is interpretive in a certain manner.

P. ELAINE SHARPE: But they *do* see the existence of a canon.

JONATHAN DRONSFIELD: Bearing in mind that the question is if and how we are to teach art history to art students, artists see theory, they see philosophy, no less than they see history. Moreover, they see stuff about history and philosophy that historians and philosophers don't see, something outside not just the disciplines of history and philosophy, which claim to be teaching history and philosophy as such, but something about history and philosophy as such. They see history outside of the ways art history is taught in surveys.

P. ELAINE SHARPE: I think they do. I can only address this teaching art history as an artist to a student body comprised of anything other than art history majors because I am tacitly forbidden to cross the academic threshold. In my teaching, it is usually couched in an expression of medium, social response, a certain history of the time or moment. Turner, for example, is not about dates and order of production, but is related to the sublime, to landscape, to the Industrial Revolution and the smog it produced. The artists I know who teach art history don't teach it as chronological history.

ROY SORENSSEN: There are studies that show that chronological order is the best for retaining in memory. So if you just want people to retain some of this material, why fight it?

JAMES ELKINS: There are many reasons. Basically because the chronology isn't just chronology. It brings with it the history and politics of the discipline.

DANIEL PALMER: I am interested in the possibility of teaching nonchronologically. What are the possibilities?

JAMES ELKINS: There is a literature on this, but basically the universities that have experimented with altering or abandoning chronology have found their experiments fail. They confuse students, the material can't be retained.⁶

JONATHAN DRONSFIELD: Jim, I think you would then be teaching not art history (the first of Jim's topics), but theory (the third topic).

JAMES ELKINS: I'd like to distinguish two themes here, which I think may be confusing the discussion. One is about how art students receive the discipline of art history, and the other is about how to reformulate the discipline. Under the second heading, we have talked about avoiding the chronological exposition, about what happens when artists teach, and about finding new contexts in which to insert art-historical material. I doubt that art history is effectively rethought in any of those strategies. You can still impart the politics, the history, and the ideology of art history without chronology; and if you're an artist, your source for the recontextualized excerpts of art history that you present in studio settings is still the discipline of art history.

The challenge, as I see it, is to figure out what and how to teach to art students—not how to cleanse studio instruction of disciplinary art history, which I don't think is usually possible.

CIARÁN BENSON: Our questions have to do with intercepting in the lives of eighteen- or nineteen-year-olds. I wonder what students should be expected to learn from the survey so that they might change, because all learning is a form of change. And I wonder in what ways ought they be told they need to change.

6. See the discussions in a special issue of the *Art Journal* (1995), including "Parallel Art History / Studio Program," 54–57.

When I was in Australia, I was struck by the excision of history from the curriculum. The historical consciousness of an eighteen-year-old could be profoundly different from that of an A-level student in the UK. One might then need to change more dramatically than the other. I would think of learning as change.

DANIEL PALMER: Precisely. I have had to introduce first-year students in Australia to the First and Second World Wars! I'm not kidding. For me history is essential not least because I think of the activity of teaching, in part, as a way of enabling students to position themselves as historical subjects, with agency; for me pedagogy is political insofar as it involves radical self-reflexivity that must include historical consciousness and an awareness of the limits of dominant accounts, art historical or otherwise.

CHRIS CSIKSZENTMIHÁLYI: If you take the model of artist as cultural producer that Stephan and others have put forward, then art history becomes more a matter of teaching cultural history—

JAMES ELKINS: And then it becomes a question of cultural studies, history, political history—

CHRIS CSIKSZENTMIHÁLYI: Yes, it seems much larger than visual history.

HILDE VAN GELDER: In a country like Belgium, where there is a strong tradition of art history and art-making, students can expect that in the first year someone will tell them how to come to terms with the tradition, and with the art that they have seen all around them, in museums and churches, when they were teenagers. It's the first thing they want to know: how can we use this? And for that reason, we hold on to our surveys in first year. This is questionable, for it has its consequences and impact on the students' minds and choices. For example, the late 1990s and early twenty-first century has seen quite a boom of students in Flanders who turned to figurative painting in oil on a canvas, partly due to the fact that surveys introduced Luc Tuymans to them as a new "Flemish master" in the line of the Flemish Primitives.

ARETI ADAMOPOULOU: For Greece also the issue of tradition is strong. Apart from the survey course of ancient, medieval, and western European art, in Ioannina we offer a national art survey course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It is not just respect for tradition that keeps surveys alive and well. In peripheral art scenes new and contemporary artists operate within a limited local market. And art history needs to narrate at least the genealogy of these artists and their market, to create artists as subjects in the local frame.

JAMES ELKINS: Let's move on to the second topic, the "rudiments" of studio art education. The place of the art history survey in studio art instruction is an endless subject, I think, because art history cannot solve it or even really pose it. It has to be rethought as we've been doing it, from *outside* the discipline.

STEPHAN SCHMIDT-WULFFEN: Art historians, or philosophers, always tend to represent their discipline. So they have trouble working in the studio and making art history productive. Instead they try to confront the students with this different field and its different methods. So in Vienna we accept art history as a discipline in the seminar, but we also force the art historians to question their practice in the context of the studio.

JAMES ELKINS: For me, there's a question about whether art historians can be pushed to such questions, and still be identifiable *as* art historians—

STEPHAN SCHMIDT-WULFFEN: Actually it has become a very productive discussion inasmuch as the art historians try to understand their own field as a practice—

JAMES ELKINS: Well, in a sense . . . but let's move on to the second topic, rudiments. Here I'd like to begin with the second-order argument, about the incompatibilities of the rudiments, instead of beginning with the first-order argument, which would be about listing what the rudiments are. Maybe we'll have a brave Assessor in the book who will give us a list of the rudiments every first-year student should have: color theory, composition, lectures on space, time, and form, texture, movement, identity theory . . . the whole disheveled lot. But I'd like to begin with the second-order problem, because I have detected a tremendous resistance among educators to talking directly about the rudiments, to list them, to commit to a list.

To take just one example: there's the book by Albers, *The Interaction of Color*, and color sensitivity exercises. They're very common, all around the world, whether or not Albers is on the curriculum. The objective there would be to get the student to increase her sensitivity to chroma, hue, simultaneous contrast, and so forth. The underlying justification has to be that better, more interesting art is somehow made by people who have spent time making themselves more visually aware. I think of this as a second-order problem because I find it is very difficult to have conversations about what other rudiments, what other exercises, might go along with color sensitivity as indispensable elements in every young artist's education. There is no discourse that includes color sensitivity as an element among others, underwritten by an account that is more than an unjustifiable list. Since poststructuralism, people don't want to address that question directly: we want to try to rearrange the list, keep it open-ended, recontextualize it, rediscover it in new forms. Stephan, when you mentioned the lecture series on space and time with non-Western components, it reminded me of some other initiatives. I've tried one myself, a lecture series that includes a text called "A Multicultural Look at Space and Form."⁷ The question I ask myself about that project is, have I just postponed a direct consideration of the elements I have reassembled in that lecture? Or is it a sufficiently radical reworking, one that could be a new starting place for first-year instruction?

7. This is available as a pdf at <http://saic.academia.edu/documents/0008/7359/the-visual-space.pdf> (accessed October 3, 2009).

STEPHAN SCHMIDT-WULFFEN: Our course was linked to a specific understanding of modernity. And the introductory course is a Modernist invention and a formalist invention also. You are forced here only look at the morphological and syntactical elements of art. If you're in a school where everything is post-Greenbergian and antiformalist, why should you have an introductory course in which you're trained to look at autonomous forms? To the contrary, you should make your students aware of the ideological impact of such an introduction. I can't think of anything in the academic curriculum that is so intimately linked to an historical moment as the introductory course.

JAMES ELKINS: Very true. But I still wonder: can students be taught that formalism comes from an historical moment, while also learning formalism? And a deeper question: what has happened to the formalism once it's been historicized? It's still there, but in a shape that is hard to define. It's something students know, something they can use, something they can't believe in, something their own education has taught them is at once necessary and dispensable.

STEPHAN SCHMIDT-WULFFEN: What has changed is the way we relate form to content. In formalism form was identical with art's legitimate content. And form was organized as structuralism organizes language. As far as I remember Moholy, one of the inventors of the introductory course was indeed connected to the Russian linguists. Beginning in the sixties we returned to reality. Content is not necessarily first, but at least content and form are constituted in the same artistic move. When you talk of form today, Jim, beauty comes to my mind, for instance the way Dave Hickey started a discussion on formalist issues in the early nineties.⁸ He does not talk about autonomous aspects of form that constitute the quality of an artwork, but about formal beauty as a political tool to create consensus. This seems to me indicative that the old discourse of formalism is really gone.

SAUL OSTROW: Part of what we look at while teaching rudimentary concepts, which include color, drawing, and materials, is ideation and concept construction. So they know more than how to see differences in color—so they can see how those differences raise questions about their own perception. Or so they know that drawing is not a means of transcribing the world, but a system of coding. We teach multiple systems of perspective, to show that it's possible to think of representation from different angles.

JAMES ELKINS: So here's my second-order question for that. Is the reconceptualization powerful enough to completely dissolve the rudiments of color, drawing, and materials—or is there a question being deferred there, about *how many* such rudiments there need to be? Why choose color, drawing, and materials?

SAUL OSTROW: We choose drawing because of its role in ideation—

JAMES ELKINS: Sorry, how would you talk about the complete list of such thing?

8. Dave Hickey, *The Invisible Dragon* (Los Angeles: Art Issues Press, 1993).

SAUL OSTROW: The list was constructed in terms of the question: what are the basic elements necessary for someone taking a photograph, making a video, doing a performance?

CHRIS CSIKSZENTMIHÁLYI: At the MIT Media Lab I am currently teaching a class on modes—or what the political scientist Charles Tilly calls “repertoires”—of social change.⁹ What I’m finding is that students are attracted to my classes primarily because they are idealizing themselves as artists who are trying to move society in directions in which they want it to move. There is nothing in those “rudiments” of color, drawing, or materials that approaches that, so I have had to cobble together from other disciplines. Of course, there is plenty in art history that is about social transformation—thinking of the Russian Constructivists, of the art that came out of May 1968, etc. But none of the techniques used by those artists was ever *taught* as rudiment or technique. So I remember from my art history classes here at the School of the Art Institute learning about people like Alfred Jarry who did that kind of work, carrying guns with them into bars. Those are the artists I remember from my classes!

SAUL OSTROW: You’d better remember them!

CHRIS CSIKSZENTMIHÁLYI: But these stories were offered as colorful stories, idiosyncrasies like the ones in Christopher’s biopics. Those personal actions were critical parts of their work, but there was no way that the art historians could abstract those more social parts of their lives, the parts in which they were agents of social change, as methods.

JAMES ELKINS: For me, that points to a curriculum that has no need of the rudiments we have been enumerating: but it also points to a curriculum that needs a new sense of rudiments, ones that I think we might be just as loath to enumerate.

CHRIS CSIKSZENTMIHÁLYI: Yes, I think we would be loath to do it. But in the meantime we accept some of the older rudiments because they are like a doddering old grandfather . . . not too relevant, but you kind of feel like you owe them something.

JAMES ELKINS: I can think of several different kinds of self-awareness, which might be deployed differently. First, students could be made aware of the history of art instruction—what comes from the Bauhaus, what comes from the nineteenth-century academy, and so forth. Second, they could be made aware of the instructors’ choices of theory, although I imagine that might be especially difficult if the instructors haven’t *chosen* theories but been educated into them.

P. ELAINE SHARPE: Hold on, I need to think about what you just said. I’m sure, no, actually I’m convinced it happens, but it is kind of a remarkable thing to consider, especially beyond an undergrad level of education. I guess it comes back the choice of where one will study . . .

9. Charles Tilly, *Social Movements, 1768–2004* (Boulder: Paradigm, 2004).

JAMES ELKINS: Third, students could be taught about the arguments about art instruction—whether art can be taught, why artists need to be taught, and so forth. Fourth: they could be taught about their own institution, its politics, and its purpose. (I imagine that could create some serious conflicts of interest, not to mention lawsuits.) And fifth: they could be advised on careers and careerism, as they often are, so they could instrumentalize their education more effectively.

Perhaps each of those raises different questions about the efficacy or utility of self-reflexivity.

Here is an example of the limits of self-reflexivity. I imagine that in all our institutions, the first year includes some units on space. Space has become a universal explanatory concept for art, even though it can be demonstrated that wasn't always the case. The word "space" doesn't occur in any architectural treatise before the eighteenth century, for example. And yet now, we're *inside* the concept: we can't see how to conceptualize art without it, and we can't even see the need to consider our position as a problem. On the other hand, if I were to bring up Albers's color sensitivity exercises, then we'd all agree: they are very much of their time and place, and we might well omit them. So there are two rudiments, space and color, which have very different relationships to self-reflexivity. One is such a large issue that self-reflexivity barely scratches it. The other seems so fragile that a moment's reflection can destroy it.

SAUL OSTROW: Rudiments can be reconceived as skill sets. And there are technical and conceptual skill sets—

BARBARA JAFFEE: Color has meant different things in different cultures. The Albers course presumes a certain kind of product—it's quite instrumental. I know no one who was better at the Albers course than my father, who was to a degree colorblind! But, as a commercial lithographer, he needed—and had—a very sophisticated understanding of the color separation process. So if you need all those colors in your work, great, but there are many other ways of thinking about color.

ROY SORENSSEN: The discoverer of colorblindness, incidentally, was himself colorblind!

SAUL OSTROW: The color course we're proposing in Cleveland is called "Color, Projected and Applied." It deals with color as light, pigment, and material.

JAMES ELKINS: I like the word "rudiments" because it helps us stay focused on the difficult part of the problem. Classical lost-wax bronze casting is a skill, but it is not a rudiment. What would we think of as necessary for all students? (What color exercises? What color conceptualizations? And is color even a rudiment?)

P. ELAINE SHARPE: It certainly is in photography, which brings with it the color temperature of light itself, metamerism, and the choice of whether to use color at all.

ANN SOBIECH MUNSON: We recently brought design principles back to our design studio. This is an example of what Jim refers to—educating students into something

but, by situating it in its specific historical context, allowing the possibility that it is provisional. But we use the terms because we need a common vocabulary. I wonder if this is a way to think about rudiments: as a common language, a provisional starting point. Of course, this raises the question of how one becomes conversant in a discipline that is constantly shifting.

STEPHAN SCHMIDT-WULFFEN: We have a very problematic group of entering students in Austria. They come from a particular kind of grammar school that focuses on artistic education. For the last three years of their school, their main topic is art; they do a specific examination for it.¹⁰ My teachers tell me that those students who are technically perfect cause a problem, because they have to be deskilled in the first year.

How do you handle this kind of question in a conversation on rudiments?

JAMES ELKINS: This is also true of Korean and Japanese art high schools, which prepare students for the “art universities” using nineteenth-century academic training. Those students often need to be deskilled.¹¹

ROY SORENSEN: This problem is common to all kinds of training. It is called *negative transfer*. I am a tennis player, and I started playing squash. But tennis strokes are not squash strokes, and it was hard to break me of those habits.

STEPHAN SCHMIDT-WULFFEN: But I am not talking about two different fields.

JAMES ELKINS: In part, however, deskilling is part of the traditional content of the first year program, because it was one of the Bauhaus’s goals: the achievement of a tabula rasa, the reeducation of the muscles, and so forth.

ROY SORENSEN: In tennis and in swimming, all spontaneous strokes are wrong.

JAMES ELKINS: That’s a curious example, because of course spontaneity is one of the key critical terms of Modernism: it is exactly what was taught—or maybe I should say it was the negative capability that remained after the students were deskilled.

STEPHAN SCHMIDT-WULFFEN: So how do you deskill someone who is schooled in the Bauhaus tradition?

JAMES ELKINS: That’s an interesting question. I bet Thierry de Duve would say that post-war academies deskill by misreading and ignoring previous educational régimes.

WILLIAM MAROTTI: That’s an example of why this repurposing of “deskilling” is inherently conservative. Listen to it long enough and you’d think the students have their hands broken and their brains washed by maniacal academicians.

JAMES ELKINS: Nice image. Let’s go on to the third of the topics here, theory. In independent art academies and schools, which offer a BA or BFA, “liberal arts” is an

10. See <http://www.hbla-kunst.eduhi.at>, <http://www.herbststrasse.at>, <http://www.graphische.at> (accessed March 1, 2010).

11. See for example, in Japan, the Shonan School of Art, <http://www.artshonan.jp>; the Saibi

Saitama Preparatory School of Art, <http://www.saibi-art.ac.jp>; the Shinbi School of Art, <http://www.art-shinbi.com>; and the Tachikawa Bijyutsu Gakuin, <http://www.tachibi.com> (all accessed October 4, 2009).

expression for whatever lectures or courses substitute for the “full” liberal arts education that students would get in a university. The other subject here is art theory. Here, as I said at the beginning, there is also a problem because it sounds a little brash to list the theory art students should know. In one text, Victor Burgin lists history, sociology, semiotics, and psychoanalysis. Here at the School of the Art Institute, I teach a required freshman class in visual studies. That forced my hand, and I had to choose, so I teach texts by Barthes, Foucault, Benjamin, Marx, Lacan, Buck-Morss, Mitchell, Rogoff, and Bal.

CHRIS CSIKSZENTMIHÁLYI: One of the things that strikes me about that list: for instance, Foucault serves to introduce questions of power and visibility, which works with the visual canon, but he also works for artists who are post-Duchamp, and thinking more about actions and identities—and who are writing to culture rather than canvas. In regard to the Frankfurt School, if you teach Benjamin and others, you can get production and history of visibility, but also other forms of culture. I bet if you go through and look at the texts that are seen as most useful in art schools, they would have that dual function; always a visual side, but not only.

MIGUEL GONZÁLEZ VIRGEN: Is it time to pass by the homogeneous list of theory that is taught in art schools? It's true that in Mexico there is already an accepted canon of theorists: Heidegger, Derrida. . . .

JAMES ELKINS: There is also a second-order problem here. The first-order argument concerns what theories should be taught. The second-order argument is about whether they are taught in compatible ways: should art students learn Lacan the same way as students in universities? Or is the art-world discourse sufficiently different so that concepts like *unconscious*, *screen*, *anamorphosis*, and others require different expositions?

ANDREW BLACKLEY: I think it would be important here to address situation of the teaching of these writers and theorists as if they were tailored to the arts specifically. Of course, we students in the art school will take what we find applicable and work from it, but teaching tailored theory to artists can nullify a lot consequence the texts were intended to carry in other fields. Of the theorists we've just mentioned, most are in fact *social* theorists. I'm afraid that this is a misuse of the texts, and then, speaking much more widely, it's a disservice to the education of the artist because it ignores the social implications of being an artist.

JONATHAN DRONSFIELD: Jim, I think you can't address that without grasping the problem of naïveté. My classes are open to students from philosophy, history, and other disciplines; and within art, at least a third are joint honors students—they are doing other subjects beside art. That condition makes me ponder whether I should be speaking differently to art students than to other students. In my view, you ought not to be speaking differently to artists than to students in other disciplines.

JAMES ELKINS: Why?

JONATHAN DRONSFIELD: Because it's not decided what their discipline is yet, if we're talking about first-year students.

JAMES ELKINS: So, to play devil's advocate: why couldn't you equally well teach them their Lacan as it appears in *Screen* or *Artforum*, as opposed to as it appears in the *Seminars*?

JONATHAN DRONSFIELD: I agree, if you are going to give them Lacan. *If* you're going to give them Lacan.

JAMES ELKINS: For me, this is an enormous submerged subject. The art world has developed to the point where entire histories of reception have developed, with their own literatures. Art world Foucault doesn't have much resemblance to university Foucault. Art world Foucault is surveillance, the panopticon, some ideas about sexuality, some ideas about institutions. It isn't epistemology, it isn't historiography or history. No one, I think, has written about this, but it could produce entirely new curricula.

CHRIS CSIKSZENTMIHÁLYI: Jonathan, the logical extension of your argument is that art historians should teach art history to art students no differently than they teach it to art history students.

JONATHAN DRONSFIELD: That's right. But I don't think that we should be teaching art history as a requirement to art students!

SAUL OSTROW: In Cleveland, my students have decided they're going to be artists; they know they are not going to the university, so they won't have the smorgasbord of ideas the university affords. Several of us are proposing that the first year should have *only* concepts, occasionally with names attached to them. We've been thinking of the textbook called *Critical Terms for Art History*, because it gives overviews of concepts like *representation*.¹² It would be introduced through the studio classes, not apart from them.

JAMES ELKINS: But that's an art history textbook—critical terms *for* art historians!¹³

SAUL OSTROW: Yes. And then in the second year, we watch to see how those ideas are put to work, how they operate in the studio.

FRANK VIGNERON: Saul, are you keeping track of the concepts as the students progress?

SAUL OSTROW: Yes. It's an incremental and progressive curriculum.

FRANK VIGNERON: What kinds of assessment methods are you using? Are the students writing about their experiences?

SAUL OSTROW: Yes; they write about how the concepts enter into their work.

12. *Critical Terms for Art History*, edited by Robert S. Nelson and Richard Shiff, second edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

13. See the critique of the book's Western, art-historical perspective by Shigemi Inaga in *Is Art History Global?*, vol. 3 of *The Art Seminar* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

JAMES ELKINS: Here is another example of how art students should, and often already do, get a different kind of theory than university students. In my experience, the art students who are enthusiastic about Arthur Danto like him because they have misread him to be saying that art history is over, art is a playground, I don't have to do my homework anymore. That's the reception, and if you wanted to teach the reception of Danto in recent art, that's the effect you would want to explore. It wouldn't have to do with his work in philosophy, in aesthetics.

Or to take a more complicated example: what exactly is the interest in Rancière, right now, in the art world? How much does it have to do with the debates he engages in? Or Alain Badiou? What is the relation between his interest in ontology and the reception he has gotten in the art world?

WILLIAM MAROTTI: I use Rancière a lot, but for me he is a theorist of temporality and change. His theory is almost untimely, in that it is against trends in spatialization and territorialization.¹⁴ There may be an interesting echo there, in regard to our discussions on the use of the concept of space. As long as art appropriation of theorists isn't just out and out misreading, it can make for some interesting avenues for conversations beyond the art world.

STEPHAN SCHMIDT-WULFFEN: I think Rancière is also very important because he can be used against a certain superficial kind of political activism in the arts. He shows you can work in a formal way, and your seemingly formalist intervention in society remains political. But Jim, I think you are much too defensive when you describe the role of theory for visual art practice. Apart from the fact that some art students might misuse it as an alibi, we witness, I think, a mutual approach by art and the humanities. Take the example of Derrida: he is a philosopher who demonstrates that the very basis of philosophy is the process of writing itself. So working with the material of language determines, to a large degree, what people once called "the truth." The production of knowledge through the impact of a material is contingent in a way we only know from the arts. You might ask: why is contemporary theory so important in art practice? I would turn this around and ask: why is the contemporary art university so important in the development of theory in the humanities? We have to take up the urgent demand from the humanities—the interest on the part of people in history, in art history, in sociology, in philosophy, in other fields—the urgent interest in the art university and art practice. I have never seen this before, and I have been in the business twenty-five years. There is a deep philosophical problem in the humanities, which can reposition the art university. And I hope that we can understand the art academy, the art university, as the main agent for producing content by working on form.

14. See Kristin Ross, "Historicizing Untimeliness," in *Jacques Rancière: History, Politics, Aesthetics*, edited by Gabriel Rockhill and Philip Watts (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 15–29.

JAMES ELKINS: Stephan, I hope that is true. I hear that position articulated mainly by people in the art world, not in the humanities.

There is also a serious question, I think, about how many people in the humanities, in universities, take Derrida's arguments about writing seriously. I think of Hélène Cixous, and before Derrida, Barthes. Almost no one in academia pushes writing itself, the form and voice of the writing, in the ways they do. So I would hope that the people in the university who are interested in art schools would find places to work in new ways—

STEPHAN SCHMIDT-WULFFEN: Derrida is just an example. Think about the new courses like "Visual Anthropology" or "Visual Sociology." This indicates that a new episteme is on its way which is much closer to artistic practice than science was ever before—

JAMES ELKINS: But I can't resist making a skeptical observation. There still remains the question of who you choose to present as indispensable exemplars. Will it be Derrida, or Cixous? Or both? Or neither? The question of the list is still there.

JONATHAN DRONSFIELD: The sorts of theorists we're talking about now—Derrida, Rancière, Deleuze—made their names in philosophy, but rather than philosophize *about* art, all of them philosophize *along with* art contemporaneous with their practice (sorry, Thierry) as philosophers. And perhaps this helps account for why the work of these philosophers holds such appeal for art students, and indeed why they see it as *material* for art practice. If you're talking about contemporary art practice since the 1960s, you have also to think about how artists use theory, how they internalize theory and philosophy as a means of wresting the authority for saying and writing what art is away from philosophers, how they see philosophy and theory not simply as a frame or support for their practice but as the very material out of which to make work, and as well how theory has emerged out of art practice.

ANDREW BLACKLEY: Theory in the studio can be dangerous. Theory is quite real and needs to be engaged with; these are real categories. Even if they were not real in their inception, they produced new positions; or, alternately, through the teaching the positions and descriptions have been *made real*. They have been made necessary. So certainly, because the teaching of theory is necessary, we have to remember that within an art school or art department the writing of theory often uses artworks as illustrations. The danger is, then, that artists and art students use their artwork to illustrate theory: they don't necessarily engage theory or produce new theory.

JONATHAN DRONSFIELD: Yes, there is always the specter of illustration, and we must watch out for it; but equally it goes the other way, no less dangerous, where artists use theory to illustrate their practice and indeed legitimate it. Also, there is the good danger that theory poses, in the form of questioning easy assumptions

and certain presuppositions regarding practice and the purity of practice and the ease with which the practice/theory distinction is made.

MARTA EDLING: There are two different traditions here. Jonathan, when you talk about curriculum and theory, you're talking about a university, and that is one thing. But when it comes to the studio, that is a different tradition. The studio, as a practice, is opposed to that. I just want to remind us that some of these problems we are encountering come from the fact that we are mixing two traditions. Theory is important in the studio, but you cannot have a *curriculum* there, because what is done there is for art.

JAMES ELKINS: Thanks, Marta, for reminding us of that. And it's a good segue and a good place to stop: we are out of time, and we haven't yet opened the fourth of the topics to do with the first-year program, which is the studio. What you've said is a nice reminder of how incommensurate the parts of the first year really are.

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7. THE BFA DEGREE

*The conversation here continued the discussion of the first year into a general discussion of the three-year BA or the four-year BFA. (The former is common in Europe; the latter in North America.)¹ For this seminar the group read parts of *Why Art Cannot Be Taught*² and other texts.³*

JAMES ELKINS: Perhaps we can begin where we left off. Is the problem of the place of art history in studio instruction solved by providing electives later in the BA or BFA?

SAUL OSTROW: We actually do the history backwards where I teach in Cleveland. History classes are electives in the BFA.

MARTA EDLING: In Swedish institutions, the students have an entire smorgasbord of choices. But the whole ideological knot is that the students choose.

WILLIAM MAROTTI: I think about this question from the point of view of the argument in *Why Art Cannot Be Taught*.⁴ The claim there is that if you change the way that art is taught, you change the concept of art. There is a relationship between what is taught in art schools and what art is. That's another level of self-reflexivity to think about, beyond the individual level.

JAMES ELKINS: When the curricular issues get this complex, there's a pressing question of how to fix them. There is one answer that seems to be in play at all levels of art instruction: you could increase the self-reflexivity of the students, make them aware of the teaching they're receiving. This comes up in discussions of first-year programs: for example, you could raise some of the issues about the survey and how it is taught in different places. But a higher level of art instruction, self-reflexivity becomes the principal, foundational strategy of instruction. We will return to it when we talk about the MFA and PhD: actually I think the principal pedagogic goal of the PhD *has to be* that an increase in self-awareness, reflexivity, can make the practice more interesting.

At the level of the BFA, it is a practical problem: how do you give a student self-reflexivity about a subject while they are only just learning the subject? How

1. In Australia the standard degree is three years plus an additional year, Honours, reserved for the top 25 percent or so of students, who complete an original research project and submit a small thesis. [—D.P.]

2. James Elkins, "Histories," "Conversations," and "Theories," chaps. 1–3 of *Why Art Cannot Be Taught: A Handbook for Art Students* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001).

3. In addition to those cited below, Raphael Rubinstein, "Art Schools: A Group Crit," with contributions by Howard Singerman, Leslie King-Hammond, Larry Rinder, Laurie Fendrich, Bruce Ferguson, Suzanne Anker, Thomas Lawson, Saul Ostrow, Dave Hickey, Archie Rand, Judith Kirchner, Jim Elkins, and Robert Storr, *Art in America* (May 2007): 99–113.

4. Elkins, *Why Art Cannot Be Taught*.

do you tell them art history is a history of nationalist narratives, when they're only just memorizing the dates and names that were generated by those nationalist narratives?

At a deeper level, the idea of increasing self-reflexivity begs the question of whether self-reflexivity *solves* the issues we've been discussing, or just makes them more complicated, more intellectually engaging. For example, imagine you have an art history lecturer talking about Hans Holbein, and then in comes another art historian talking about how patriotic German art history produced narratives about Holbein in the early twentieth century that propelled him to a place in the canon.⁵ Has that unseated Holbein? What exactly has it done?

And, as a final question: what *other* strategies are there for mending these curricular problems, other than increasing the students' reflexivity?

STEPHAN SCHMIDT-WULFFEN: Is there really an alternative to the Holbein evaluated through historical development? And if you bind the artistic phenomenon to the social and historical context, don't you necessarily produce reflexivity? In our school, art is always debated in relation to globalized market, politics, exploitation. Most of academies I know market themselves by saying: we teach critical capacity.

HILDE VAN GELDER: May I ask which languages you assign at the Vienna Academy?

STEPHAN SCHMIDT-WULFFEN: Mostly German, but most of the teachers had teaching experience abroad and can also teach in English. Certainly, language is still a problem . . .

HILDE VAN GELDER: In the past, French was the language that was most important in the art world. So now do you teach English?

STEPHAN SCHMIDT-WULFFEN: The situation in Austria is different from the one in the U.S., and possibly the UK. When students come to us, they already have six or seven years of school training in English.

JONATHAN DRONSFIELD: It would be hard to find an art student anywhere in the world whose second language isn't English. It's an interesting question, one which has been hardly written about, the fact that teaching happens more and more in a second language rather than a mother tongue.

HILDE VAN GELDER: Is that true generally? I find that a very Eurocentric presupposition, even for the European context.

JAMES ELKINS: Well, I don't want to stray too far from the question of how curricular problems can be addressed, and the role of self-reflexivity. But I would add that in the U.S., language courses in art schools exist as part of the general hope that students can have a university-style liberal arts education.

5. The example is from Oskar Bächtmann, *Einführung in die kunstgeschichtliche Hermeneutik: Die Auslegung von Bildern (Die Kunstwissenschaft)*, third edition (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1988).

WILLIAM MAROTTI: Jim, speaking about the argument in *Why Art Cannot Be Taught*, do you think that art is in itself self-reflexive? So that having a self-reflexive education prepares students for the field? Or is your interest in self-reflexivity an attempt to change the art world, or improve it?

JAMES ELKINS: Speaking for myself: I'm doubtful about the entire project of increasing students' historiographic awareness and self-awareness as a strategy for meliorating the mixed curriculum they inherit from the first-year program. An ideal, full awareness of the politics and history of art history, the institutional history of their own academy, the history of the education of their theory instructors, and so forth, will make things more complicated and therefore more interesting: but it isn't a *fix*: it doesn't have a clearly nameable effect on the clash of rudiments and other things that are cobbled together into current art instruction.

And it also seems clear to me that a fair number of art practices depend on more or less insufficient levels of self-reflexivity.

JONATHAN DRONSFIELD: What do you mean by self-reflexivity?

REBECCA GORDON: The ability to theorize yourself, your practice.

SAUL OSTROW: Or, as in cybernetics, a feedback loop?

JONATHAN DRONSFIELD: There are philosophers who continuously ask themselves: what does it mean to write philosophy rather than literature? Or, what is philosophy? The sorts of theorists we have been talking about, such as Derrida and Deleuze, continuously reflect on their practice in terms of what it is not. Is that the kind of self-reflexivity you're talking about? Are you saying philosophers who don't do that are not self-reflexive? Or do you mean self-reflexive in Danto's sense, if there is such a thing, that abstraction, or the nonrepresentational turn, is the internalization of the question, What is art?, and that this is how theory emerges from practice? Or do you want to say to the student, make him or her self-aware, that all art is the staging of the question about what art is, just as the philosopher might say that you cannot do philosophy without asking what philosophy is?

SAUL OSTROW: Is this self-reflexivity on the part of the individual, or the subject?

JAMES ELKINS: I am an opportunist about this, because it depends on the subject. For example, if you want to tell a BFA student that there debates about whether art can be taught, you produce a certain kind of self-awareness. If you tell a BFA student that her institution was founded as a conservative academy in the nineteenth century, or that her art history professor was educated by French-schooled iconographers, you produce other kinds of self-awareness—

SAUL OSTROW: I deal with these things as system networks. If you're going to be self-reflexive about pedagogy, it has impact on other things. I would argue the reason my faculty see art as a self-reflexive subject is that we view it as an emerging subject. It is literally still in the process of constructing an identity for itself.

JAMES ELKINS: Sure, but then you have artists whose work doesn't depend on the articulation or awareness of that. Identity is often built outside of awareness.

ROY SORESENSEN: There is literature, for example, on golfers—
[*Laughter*]

JAMES ELKINS: That is another really bizarre metaphor!

ROY SORESENSEN: As they improve, one way to mess them up is to improve their self-awareness. You have to concentrate on the small bits you need to change. You need to mostly *not* think about things.

WILLIAM MAROTTI: Self-reflexivity doesn't not mean you hold a mirror in front of yourself at all times—

ARETI ADAMOPOULOU: The first year is a very idiosyncratic year, and I don't think it's the time to teach self-reflexivity. I think it was Anders Ericsson who noticed that every expert came into their field in a very playful way,⁶ and I believe that's the way visual artists should be introduced in their field. First-year students don't know who they are, or what they are becoming, or what they want.

JAMES ELKINS: And as the years go on, toward the MFA, do you think self-reflexivity is a better strategy?

ARETI ADAMOPOULOU: Students need both art history and art theory. However, to really absorb and reflect on complex issues one needs time, life experiences, interaction with real circumstances, social education. We can sow the seeds of self-reflexivity during the first year and keep watering them to see flowers during the MFA. I understand education as a process, and as such it requires time to develop and grow. Self-reflexivity is certainly an answer to today's fragmented reality, but it is a quality that requires maturity and from this point of view I can understand the existence of further education for artists.

JONATHAN DRONSFIELD: Areti, what you just said about play is interesting. How would you do that?

ARETI ADAMOPOULOU: It's the *way* you treat students. It doesn't really matter what subjects you teach, but how you present the subjects. For example, I see my survey courses as studio courses, as a process lasting one semester, during which I have to make students realize the type of choices that construct art historical narratives. I present different and sometimes opposing theories about the same issue; I urge them to participate actively in my lectures and play with various narratives, to think about the "what if" possibilities. A student remembers what strikes him or her as different, so I present variety and freedom of thought. That

6. K. Anders Ericsson, "Attaining Excellence Through Deliberate Practice: Insights from The Study of Expert Performance," in *The Pursuit of Excellence Through Education*, edited by Michel Ferrari (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2002), 21–55.

cultivates self-reflexivity, even if the student may not experience it as such when it happens.

BARBARA JAFFEE: Self-reflexivity gives students a sense that there's a larger conversation going on that they can be part of. That can be very playful.

DANIEL PALMER: Jim, I don't understand your nervousness about self-reflexivity, which I also recall from your texts on the studio PhD. It may be true that not all artists need or benefit from self-reflexivity, but what is the alternative? In any case, in my experience not everyone is susceptible to it. I don't think art students are damaged by the process, and indeed old-school "mute" artists seem to survive no matter how much pressure is put on them to articulate their work in critical terms.

JAMES ELKINS: That's true. But some art students do pursue practices that are made difficult in an atmosphere of critical reflection.

We can revisit this topic when we talk about the PhD, because it seems to me that one of the root justifications of the PhD *has to be* that some art practices can be made more interesting by increasing self-reflexivity. At the BFA level, I still wonder if there is a strategy other than increasing self-reflexivity which could address the curricular mixtures that plague current art instruction.

I want to add one thing before we stop. When we discuss the MFA, we'll be looking at official definitions and guidelines. Those also exist for the BFA. NASAD, the National Association of Schools of Art and Design, has guidelines for individual fields within the BFA, including ceramics, digital media, drawing, fashion design, film/video, and almost twenty others. The guidelines are used in their accreditation procedures. Here, for example, are some of the things that students in BFA painting programs need to be able to do:

- Gain functional competence with principles of visual organization, including the ability to work with visual elements in two and three dimensions; color theory and its applications; and drawing.
- Present work that demonstrates perceptual acuity, conceptual understanding, and technical facility at a professional entry level in their chosen field(s).
- Become familiar with the historical achievements, current major issues, processes, and directions of their field(s).⁷

We can explore this problem of definitions and guidelines when we get to the MFA tomorrow. Here I just want to note how little of the substantial historical and conceptual problems are included in this document. And how oblivious this document is to the vexed status of the rudiments.

7. aqresources.arts-accredit.org/site/docs/AQ-AD/BFA-Painting.pdf (accessed October 5, 2009).

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8. THE MFA DEGREE

*This seminar was partly devoted to a close reading of several texts, which should be read before this chapter is read: the current guidelines for the MFA, published by the College Art Association;¹ and the chapter “Toward a Theory of the MFA” in Howard Singerman’s book *Art Subjects*.² In addition we read several dozen other texts.³ A further text on the MFA, by Katalin Herzog, arrived after the event was over.⁴*

JAMES ELKINS: It really matters that the MFA has no definition. Even if we only want to say the MFA is a professional degree—so that it doesn’t need a definition other than one to do with professionalization—still, the PhD is conceptually dependent on the MFA, so it will not be possible to build a coherent PhD program without a sense of what the MFA is. To me, it’s just an outrageous fact that the MFA has effectively no definition.

I would like to approach the MFA from three directions: as a development of the first-year program and the BFA, as an administrative or institutional entity (as it is currently defined), and as something that can be positively defined (as we might want to reconceive it).

1. *The MFA as a development of the first-year program and the BFA.* Earlier this week, we talked about how the historical sources of current BFA programs are mutually incommensurate, including elements from the Baroque academies (life drawing, the emphasis on drawing), from Romantic academies (the emphasis on subjectivity and inspiration), from the Bauhaus and other Modernist academies

1. This is available on the College Art Association website, <http://www.collegeart.org/guidelines/mfa.html>, with a footnote on the PhD (accessed October 3, 2009). That text is compared in the seminar with “Standards for the MFA Degree (Visual Arts),” College Art Association pamphlet, 1977: this rare document, reprinted from the *CAA Newsletter*, is the first official definition of the MFA. (Thanks to Holly Dankert, Flaxman Library, SAIC.)

2. Howard Singerman, “Toward a Theory of the MFA,” chap. 7 of *Art Subjects: Making Artists in the American University* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 187–213 and notes.

3. See the sources cited below, and also Harold Rosenberg, “Educating Artists,” in *New Ideas in Art Education*, edited by Gregory Battcock (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1973), 91–102; originally published in the *New Yorker*, May 17, 1969. See also Clémentine Deliss, “Is it Possible to Map?,” Jan Verwoert, “Posing Singularity,” and Simon Sheikh, “Room for

Thought,” in “A Certain MA-ness,” special issue of *MaHKUzine*, no. 5 (Summer 2008): 14–22, 23–27, and 28–32, respectively; College Art Association of America, *MFA Programs in the Visual Arts: A Directory*, published by the Association beginning in 1976 (the MFA was enabled by the GI Bill, but it was not defined until 1977); Karin Stempel, “Zum Stand der Dinge,” in *Reality Check: Who Is Afraid of Master of Arts?*, edited by Annette Hollywood and Barbara Wille (Berlin: Internationale Gesellschaft für bildenden Künste, 2006), 23–32; Stephan Schmidt-Wulffen, “Lernen für die Kunst von Heute: Meisterpläne und Realitäten in Wien,” in Hollywood and Wille, *Reality Check*, 85–93; and Louis Menand, “Show and Tell: Should Creative Writing Be Taught?,” *New Yorker*, June 8, 2009.

4. Katalin Herzog, *Show Me The Moves: Opstellen voor de MFA Schilderkunst van het Frank Mohr Instituut, Academie Minerva* (Groningen: Frank Mohr Instituut, 2005); Herzog is a retired lecturer in modern art at the State University of Groningen, the Netherlands.

(the *tabula rasa*, visual sensitivity training, the 2D-to-4D sequence), and from postwar art schools (the idea that art should act in society, the emphasis on politics and practice over aesthetics, deskilling). Other elements of the first-year program are seldom directly discussed. (They are proscribed.) They include the rudiments (color, space, form, composition, motion) and the theories (the essential writers, concepts, and methodologies). The theories and rudiments are not enumerated or debated because they are considered parts of older pedagogies, reflecting older purposes and ideals, and because they are considered as “solved” because they are folded into apparently new conceptual schemata. Together the incompatible elements and those that are not directly debated produce an extremely difficult situation, and that is enough to account for the fact that the first year and the BFA are always works in progress.

The BFA inherits and expands these incompatible and proscribed elements. Their relationships are obscured in two ways: by dispersing them among increasingly specialized optional courses, where disciplinarity is increasingly clear, and by dispersing them among mixed and experimental courses, where the problems of incommensurability are increasingly difficult to see.

In practice, the BA or BFA makes a virtue of this conceptual unclarity. In day-to-day studio practice, the BFA runs by versions of the general claim that it is the time for experimentation. But I think the sense of experimentation and openness of the BFA is partly supported by the unarticulated, unresolved incompatibilities among its elements. Its virtues are partly really an effect of its unarticulated problems.

So as a development of the BA or BFA, the MA or MFA proposes itself as the place where this incommensurability and irresolution shift or even resolve. In practice, the MFA is often projected for students as the place where the unclarity of the undergraduate years bears fruit: the student artist finds a voice, and orients herself to her practice and to the world. But of course this vernacular usage is treacherously close to the old artist-genius model, inherited from Romanticism.

JONATHAN DRONSFIELD: Well, we could also say that the MFA is the moment at which the student can work without tutelage, can separate himself from the master.

JAMES ELKINS: Next there's point 2, *The MFA as an administrative or institutional entity*. Here what matters is how the MFA is defined in official documents. Here I think it's productive to do a little close readings of the North American documents that define the MFA.

There is relatively little literature on the MFA in general, even aside from definitions. Of the fifteen hundred pages we all had to read for the Seminar, maybe a hundred are on the MFA. It's amazing to me that the central document defining the MFA is a one-page text by the College Art Association, which is available on its website. That one-page text descends from an original written in 1977—a document so rare that our reference librarian could only find one copy, in a library in Australia! It turns out that the 1977 version and the 2009 version

are very similar, and I thought it would be salutary to do a little close comparative reading of the second paragraph in both documents, which is *only* paragraph that really matters for the substance of the MFA.

The second paragraph in the original 1977 document reads:

First, and foremost, the profession demands from the recipient of the MFA a certifiable level of technical proficiency and the ability to make art. Having earned the degree does not, however, guarantee an ability to teach this proficiency to others. If work toward the MFA has concentrated in a particular medium, there should be complete professional mastery of that medium. The generalist, whose preparation has been broader and less specialized, must still meet the critical demands of the profession by demonstrating convincingly his/her expertise and knowledge in a number of areas. The need for a thorough training of the mind, the eye, and the hand is self-evident.⁵

The current 2009 version of that paragraph begins by substituting “professional competency” for “technical proficiency”:

The MFA degree demands the highest level of professional competency in the visual arts and contemporary practices.

(I wonder when “proficiency” became “competence,” and when “competence” became “competency” or even “competencies.”) The new document continues by expanding the original in the direction of conceptualization:

To earn an MFA, a practicing artist must exhibit the highest level of accomplishment through the generation of a body of work. The work needs to demonstrate the ability to conceptualize and communicate effectively by employing visual language to interpret ideas. In addition, the MFA recipient must give evidence of applying critical skills that pertain to meaning and content, ultimately encouraging a comprehensive examination and critique of the function and role of art from a variety of views and contexts.⁶

A couple of things about this. Ideas are now expressed through art: the purpose of “visual language” is to “interpret ideas.” The “critical skills” of the final sentence are all verbal, discursive. Skill and craft are sequestered in the paragraph that follows, which enjoins “the skillful execution of tools, materials, and craft.” Things have become much more inclined to discourse, criticism, and theory.

5. College Art Association pamphlet, 1977, reprinted from the *CAA Newsletter*. (Thanks to Holly Dankert, Flaxman Library, SAIC.) I have omitted one sentence at the end of the paragraph.

6. From the College Art Association website, <http://www.collegeart.org/guidelines/mfa.html> (accessed October 3, 2009).

MARTA EDLING: From a European point of view this is a very ideological statement. The document implies that it's unhealthy to stay in the studio, and there are other metaphors that imply that it is healthy to get out of the studio: that ensures a "sturdy" and "sound" curriculum. What does that imply about being *unhealthy*? What kind of artist are you? What about Modernist artists in Paris, leading bohemian lives, staying up all night, drinking, and speaking incomprehensibly? This document says the artist is "informed." We also have another document, from 1987, which has a lot to say about the function of this "informed" artist in society.⁷ Is there a difference here between a belief in the American artist as someone who can truly contribute to society, and a European avant-garde artist that only does art-for-art's sake?

STEPHAN SCHMIDT-WULFFEN: This is a bureaucratic document. I think we should not make it a piece of philosophy or aesthetics. It's bureaucratic because it is intended to define an outcome. Compared to the Romantic tradition, this is already an achievement. The Frankfurt Städelschule wouldn't agree: they would say that whoever you are as an artist, that's what you are.⁸ There is no norm.

JAMES ELKINS: True, it's not a philosophic document: but how much sense can it make, in the end, when it defines outcomes without considering content?

STEPHAN SCHMIDT-WULFFEN: I don't know how they developed the American standards. In Europe they worked for years to create a consensus amongst artists, teachers and so on about a minimum standard of professional behavior. But one of the deficiencies in the U.S. document is that *if* you were to try to define the MFA, you should define it together with the BFA or BA. This is what is being attempted in the Bologna Accords, especially in the tuning document.⁹ This CAA document gives the impression that everything is invented, that it is just jargon. But you need terms, so that things can be compared. In the tuning document there are elements in the BA definition that anticipate criteria for the MA and the PhD. *If* you are a bureaucrat, then you need to do things in an ordered manner.

SAUL OSTROW: This CAA document is a validating document for the place of the MFA in universities; part of its function is to claim the degree is a terminal degree in art.

WILLIAM MAROTTI: Both documents, the one from 1977 and the one from 2009, use the word "professional." But the first one says the MFA is "unlike" other MAs, in that the MFA is about becoming professional: a strange thing to say in such a document. The second one is about equivalency. It's as if it says, This is an MA like others, and it is exchangeable in the same ways. The new document defers

7. Richard Cowan, "MFA Symposium: Report and Recommendations," internal publication, Alliance of Independent Colleges of Art, 1987.

8. See *Kunst Lehren = Teaching Art*, edited by Heiki Belzer and Daniel Birnbaum (Cologne: Walther König, 2007).

9. Paradox, the Fine Art European Forum, *Tuning Fine Art Education*, Inter|artes thematic network, 2009, at http://www.elia-artschools.org/artesnet/_downloads/Tuning_Fine_Art.pdf.

its mission of saying what you might get out of the degree by saying, You get out of it much the same thing that you'd get out of other MAs.

HILDE VAN GELDER: I agree with Stephan that the MA or MFA has to be seen partly in its role of preparing for the PhD.

JONATHAN DRONSFIELD: I disagree with Stephan: you said it's only a bureaucratic document. I think there are certain philosophic claims here, and certain philosophic presuppositions. Bureaucratic documents tend to cover themselves, and I don't know that this one is concerned about that. One of the differences between the two versions is the section headed "Requirements in Art History, Art Criticism, and Other Cognate Areas." The 2009 document retains the same heading, but the first sentence changes. The earlier document says, "Much of a practicing artist's knowledge of his or her cultural heritage is gained through studying art history." In the new version, it says, "A practicing artist's knowledge of culture is gained through critical studies and art history." There is no qualifier. In the earlier document that knowledge is gained through studying art history, but in the second document it's through studying art history "and critical studies." For me, that's the significant difference between the documents. The term "theory" also appears in the new document, and together with critical studies and art history accounts for *all* of an artist's cultural knowledge.

JAMES ELKINS: And notice what "art history" is in the two documents. That first sentence in the new document has the expression "critical studies." The next sentence adds "advanced courses in . . . visual culture," and the paragraph after that adds "non-Western and Western cultures." That sounds to me like visual studies and postcolonial theory as much as art history or theory.

The earlier document pictures art history as connoisseurship. There's a sentence that reads, "seminars are not favored except in areas of connoisseurship (where art students would have much to contribute)," the implication being that an art history seminar is a seminar on connoisseurship!

MARTA EDLING: The document also speaks of art criticism as a part of art history. You might possibly also find a trace of theory there, because in 1977 criticism was considered the theoretical part of art history.

MIGUEL GONZÁLEZ VIRGEN: To me, it's interesting the new version mentions "non-Western" art history and people of color: it's almost as if the degree were a social remedy, to fix an imbalance. It also seems like students in the MFA will get a remedial course in art history, as if they didn't have any before, or because they need to get it right.

JAMES ELKINS: One other thing about the new document, which will tie it to our discussions of the PhD. I don't know if anyone noticed this, but the document has one footnote. (And footnotes are unusual in Web documents!) The footnote says that the CAA Professional Practices Committee (PPC), "after discussing [the PhD]

throughout 2008,” concluded, “At this time, few institutions in the United States offer a PhD degree in studio art, and it does not appear to be a trend that will continue or grow, or that the PhD will replace the MFA. To develop a standard for a degree that has not been adequately vetted or assessed, and is considered atypical for the studio-arts profession, is premature and may lead to confusion, rather than offer guidance, to CAA members, their institutions, and other professional arts organizations.”¹⁰

I did a little bit of calling around, but I haven’t yet discovered who was on that committee, or whether they really discussed it all year long.

HILDE VAN GELDER: Is the College Art Association a conservative institution? Putting that disclaimer in a footnote? It would be possible to psychoanalyze that!

BARBARA JAFFEE: It’s just like it was in the 1960s: if you read that document on the creative artist, you find three viewpoints, none of which is very critical of the PhD; and then the document concludes, “The three statements aroused much interest, and led to lively discussion from the floor.”¹¹ I wonder what that “lively discussion” was, since the very next statement is their resolution adopting the MFA as the appropriate terminal degree!

MARTA EDLING: Before we leave the subject of the MFA, I want to ask a question. Barbara, you sent us along some documents on the MFA from the 1960s; they put a strong emphasis on teaching. In the later documents, that demand is adjusted. They say that it’s not necessary that graduates can teach, provided the MFA is a professional degree.

BARBARA JAFFEE: Yes, that’s true. In fact, the 1960 resolution was quite dismissive of the very concept that any academic degree, PhD or MFA, can confer competence in the creative arts. It asserts explicitly that experience and success outside academia are better measures and that these can and should be accepted in lieu of a formal degree.

CHRIS CSIKSZENTMIHÁLYI: Joan Jonas explains that the problem was caused by the number of artists in the 1960s who decided to go to universities; they created a larger group of artists, a sort of academic artist Ponzi scheme on the verge of collapse.

DANIEL PALMER: I’m curious whether individual art schools read this document, and incorporate it into their documents—because I’m not aware of any such documents in Australia.

JAMES ELKINS: I’m not aware of anyone taking such documents on board. But at the PhD level, you do find snippets of definitions taken as working documents.

10. <http://www.collegeart.org/guidelines/mfa.html> (accessed October 5, 2009).

11. Allan Weller, Manuel Barkan, F. Louis Hoover, and Kenneth E. Hudson, “The Ph.D. for the Creative Artist,” *College Art Journal* 19, no. 4 (1960): 343–52.

I saw one at the Visual Research Centre in Dundee last year—one paragraph, which serves as the talisman for the program.

HILDE VAN GELDER: For the Flemish Community of Belgium, the criteria for the MA are clearly defined in a protocol.¹²

MARTA EDLING: In Sweden it is the Higher Education Ordinance that regulates general conditions for the MA.¹³ There are two kinds, a one-year *magister-examen* and a two-year *master-examen*. Both are translated “master of art.” To my knowledge, the one-year magister will have no real practical use in fine arts education; the two-year master is the one preferred by all art colleges.¹⁴

ARETI ADAMOPOULOU: In Greece we don’t offer studio-based PhDs. There are three postgraduate programs that have been operating since 2004. One fundamental law shapes all postgraduate education in the country, and it states that “a postgraduate program of studies aims at advancing knowledge and at the development of research and leads to a doctorate.”¹⁵ The Athens School of Fine Arts declares that “the Postgraduate Program of Fine Arts aims at organizing the educational conditions for the creation of an advanced think tank of artistic thought. The PPFA is a dialogue community which will inspire and facilitate artistic process for the development and deepening of the work of new artists, as well as for the cultivation of self-awareness in order to gain their autonomy.”¹⁶ That is my translation, but I’m afraid it doesn’t make more sense in Greek. There is no other statement in Greece on the subject, so I guess we have tacit knowledge of what an MFA is or should be.

JONATHAN DRONSFIELD: Stephan, is there an analogous document in the Bologna Accords which permits comparison of MFA degrees?

12. This protocol can be downloaded at <http://www.vlhora.be/vlhora/kz/vis-accr/nw-visitatieprotocol.htm> (accessed November 9, 2009). The general requirements for the master’s degree are specified on pp. 27–28 of the protocol.

13. Higher Education Ordinance (SFS 1993:100), <http://www.regeringen.se/content/1/c6/02/15/41/92fc8fff.pdf> (accessed November 9, 2009).

14. For the two-year master the ordinance includes the following objectives:

“*Knowledge and understanding:* For a degree of Master of Arts (Two Years) students must demonstrate knowledge and understanding in their main field of study, including both broad knowledge in the field and substantially deeper knowledge of parts of the field, together with deeper insight into current research and development work; and demonstrate familiarity with methods and processes for dealing with complex phenomena, issues and situations in the field.

“*Skills and abilities:* For a degree of Master of Arts (Two Years) students must demonstrate an ability to independently and creatively

formulate new questions and contribute to the development of knowledge; solve more advanced problems; develop new and personal means of expression; and reflect critically on their own and other people’s artistic approaches, within their main field of study; demonstrate an ability to create and realise their own artistic ideas, giving them well-developed personal expression; to independently identify, formulate and solve artistic and design problems; and to plan and, using appropriate methods, perform advanced artistic tasks within specified time limits; demonstrate an ability to clearly present and discuss their activities and artistic issues in dialogue with different groups, orally, in writing or in some other way, in both national and international contexts; and demonstrate the skills and knowledge required to work independently in professional life.” [There is more in the document, do to with judgment and approach.—J.E.]

15. The Greek legal reference for this is N. 2083/1992, 11 [Law 2083/1992, article 11], ΦΕΚ 159Α/21-9-1992.

16. <http://www.met.asfa.gr/library/skopos.html> (accessed October 14, 2009).

STEPHAN SCHMIDT-WULFFEN: It's difficult to identify any correspondences. The MFA does not exist in Europe. There is only the MA. As far as the emphasis put on the studio program, these two might be comparable. But then we consider the European master's as something that could lead to a PhD. When you think of the MFA as something equal to a PhD, you might compare the American MFA with the European PhD-in-Practice. But in terms of the Bologna Accords the PhD should last four years, and therefore the MFA would be too short. So actually there is no way to fit the MFA into the existing European structure. No wonder: only now are the Americans starting to consider the Bologna process, which is meant to establish a ratio between all the programs in the countries participating.¹⁷ If you came from Florence and went to Paris, teachers would know exactly what you learnt in Italy, and they could put you in the equivalent class in France. Until now this didn't work. For one thing, it is very difficult for all the different disciplines of the university to define common standards. For another, it proves to be extremely difficult for the arts. They formed groups of specialists from all European countries defining learning outcomes for bachelor, master, PhD: a long and complicated process of mutual negotiations. The universities are meant to use these criteria when they develop curricula. The aim is apparently a structured system between the value of BA, MA, and PhD which should be valued not only for one country, but for all the countries in Europe. In future, we will have agencies that approve these programs. They will refer back to the documents that are being produced now, and each institution will have to prove that its program conforms to these documents.

MARTA EDLING: That is why the Bologna process stresses learning outcomes: the idea is that this is what permits students' knowledge to be compared. All the tuning documents are framed in terms of learning outcomes. No one says that you have to construct your modules or your curricula in a certain way, as long as you can guarantee that the outcome of your program is compatible with others. Some ELIA tuning documents are very telling, I think.¹⁸

STEPHAN SCHMIDT-WULFFEN: But Marta, that is part of the problem, because every school has defined learning outcomes by itself. There was something in the air about what the BFA was, but each institution set its own outcomes.

MARTA EDLING: Yes, I agree in the sense that it is one thing what is written in the steering documents, and quite another thing what is actually done in educational practice.

JAMES ELKINS: I just have to say the tuning process, and the stress on outcomes, sounds more than just strange. It sounds hopeless, or rather possible but irrelevant to what matters. It could only work at such a high level of generality that the content named by that generality would entirely escape. A student could be asked

17. See, e.g., Clifford Adelman, "The Bologna Process for U.S. Eyes: Re-learning Higher Education in the Age of Convergence," Institute for Higher Education Policy, April 2009.

18. See <http://paradoxfineart.net/paradox/wp-content/uploads/2010/10/Paradox-Fine-Art-European-Forum.doc>, which gives a good idea of this kind of thinking. (Accessed November 9, 2009.)

to be familiar with their medium, as the 1977 document puts it, but what in the world could that mean? And how would it be possible to be honest, to say, for example, that a student be “appropriately deskilled in academic drawing,” or “understand *hybridity* as it is understood in art schools, but not as in Homi Bhabha”?¹⁹ I can’t even begin to connect with the idea of comparable learning outcomes or transferable curricula.

STEPHAN SCHMIDT-WULFFEN: But Jim, we all have an intuitive understanding of quality standards in the arts. In any jury I learn that the critics and artists are very fast in finding the 10 percent or 15 percent whose work is worth discussing. Sometimes I have the feeling that being resistant to generalization is just an ideological reaction based on the Modernist schema of the singularity of the artist and her work. When I think of the movements like pop art or Appropriation, I understand that in the arts we have a common language, that there is a social definition of art production. If this is so, we should be able to find out these socially defined standards and overcome our ideological reflexes.

On the other hand, I am also scared by a European or even worldwide master plan defining what artistic production is like. And then I am actually quite happy that the criteria are quite loose and open.

P. ELAINE SHARPE: I have a problem with the language of the CAA documents: it is *extremely* vague. Students “might have,” “should have” . . .

CHRIS CSIKSZENTMIHÁLYI: The College Art Association is not an accrediting organization, right? So what are the accrediting organizations, and what are their documents?

JAMES ELKINS: In North America, it’s NASAD, the National Association of Schools of Art and Design, and its associated organization, AICAD, the Association of Independent Colleges of Art and Design. AICAD has a Web page that asks, “What is an MFA?” Its answer derives from the CAA. It reads, in part, “The same aspects that distinguish a BFA from a BA, distinguish an MFA from an MA.” (In light of what we’ve been saying about how no one knows what a BFA is, that sentence is completely ludicrous.) And the next sentence appeals to professionalization: “The MFA,” they write, “is a concentrated ‘professional’ degree for students seeking advanced education prior to becoming practicing artists or designers.” (I love the word “professional” in quotation marks.²⁰)

NASAD has a somewhat longer document. The relevant portion says that to graduate with an MFA, students have to

- Demonstrate professional competence in one or more aspects of the creation and presentation of works of art and design, dance, or theatre.

19. The different meanings of *hybridity* are discussed in *Art and Globalization*, coedited with Zhivka Valiavicharska and Alice Kim, The Stone Theory Seminars 1 (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2011).

20. <http://www.aicad.org/whatsmfa.htm> (accessed October 5, 2009).

- Produce creative and academic work that shows the ability to integrate knowledge and skills in their field and other areas of inquiry and research.
- Complete graduate-level studies associated with their discipline in areas such as history, critical analysis, aesthetics, methodologies, and related humanities, sciences, and social sciences.²¹

There are also individual documents for competence in specific media, like the one I quoted for painting at the BFA level.

JONATHAN DRONSFIELD: When it says “education *prior* to becoming practicing artists,” doesn’t it imply or assume, or maybe even mandate, that you cannot be an artist and study at the same time? In that respect it would be ideological. It’s precisely this assumption that is challenged by the concept of research in art, and by the PhD in art. Also, the last part is ambiguous; what does “associated” mean when it says that the student must “complete studies associated with discipline”? Who’s to say what is associated? What is the discipline outside these “associations”? Are these associations known in advance, or discovered in the study? (I notice that history is first on the list . . .)

JAMES ELKINS: Let’s turn to the last topic, the MFA as something that is waiting to be defined:

3. *Positive criteria for the redefinition of the MFA.* This is something we can work on, something we can help articulate. I want to begin with a selective close reading of a chapter from Howard Singerman’s book *Art Subjects*, a book that shocked some art historians (but no studio people I know of) when it appeared, because it is framed as a meditation on the fact that even though the author has an MFA, he can’t do casting or classical investment: he is unskilled, or deskilled, and that is what the MFA has become. It is worthwhile spending some time on a chapter in this book called “Toward a Theory of the MFA,” because actually it is one of the very few texts that purports to be a definition of the MFA.

I’ll single out three concepts from the chapter: *discipline*, *self-reflexivity*, and *deskilling*. (And speaking of self-reflexivity: I have invited Howard to respond to the book—along with Thierry de Duve and some others we’ve mentioned—so you can imagine him as an invisible auditor. Howard is listening.)

Discipline is one of the key concepts of the chapter, in my reading. He starts talking about it around page 199. There are maybe four moments in these pages where he makes claims about what *discipline* might be in the MFA, and then towards the end of the chapter, he says *why* he is interested in the concept. The first passage is a quotation from Edward Levine, to the effect that “it is through the development of theoretical issues that a medium becomes a discipline.”²² Here discipline is posed against medium, as a more elaborated concept. The second

21. <http://aqresources.arts-accredit.org> (accessed October 5, 2009).

22. Singerman, “Toward a Theory of the MFA,” 199.

passage concerning discipline quotes Thierry de Duve: “art, as Thierry de Duve has remarked, names the discipline that takes place where painting and sculpture were, on the site of, and in lieu of, their craft.”²³ This excerpt takes Thierry’s ideas that we discussed earlier.²⁴ Discipline in this sense is counterpoised against medium, but in a more historically specific sense. A third passage quotes Roger Geiger, in a book called *To Advance Knowledge*. Geiger defines a discipline “quite simply” (that’s Howard Singerman’s remark) as “community based on inquiry and centered on competent investigators.”²⁵ It’s a completely different idea of what a discipline could be. And the fourth passage, which follows immediately, is a collage of quotations from Foucault, on disciplinarity. Discipline here entails “an examination of the procedures that select, organize, and distribute the production of discourse.” Disciplines “limit and bind” discourse. (There’s a lot to the sequence of brief quotations Howard uses: I’m telegraphing it here.)

After these four passages, Howard gives the reasons why the concept of discipline is so important. The first is very explicit: “I want to use the concept of the discipline,” he writes, “as it constrains and structures discourse, to keep from having to judge whether art is a profession.” The other reason is at the end of the chapter, where he says, “I do not intend to join my voice to those who would blame the university for the fall of art . . . indeed, the work that compels me is the work made, like its artists, in and out of the discipline of art in the university.”²⁶ So his motivation stems from his investment in the university, and the art it produces.

The other two concepts I want to bring out, self-reflexivity and deskilling, both appear on the same page at the end of the chapter: “I have written of the artist in the university as particularly aware of his or her place in the narrative of recent art, and have argued that awareness itself [is] a specifically professional knowledge.”²⁷

Self-reflexivity *is* artistic knowledge in that formulation. The rest of the paragraph is about skill: “Crafting a history of the discipline, or mapping its contemporary shape, and producing work in relation to it, are skills—skills we admire in the university humanities. And these are the skills that have increasingly come to replace the workshop crafts and academy techniques of the objects the university teaches as art history. I remarked in the introduction on the failure of my program to teach me my *métier*, or to make it central to my formation. . . . In contemporary art and art schools, the frame and the field of work have become precisely the *métier*, the craft skills with which work is made, as well as the site where it is produced.”²⁸

23. Singerman, “Toward a Theory of the MFA,” 200, para. 2.

24. See Section 1 of the Seminars.

25. Singerman, “Toward a Theory of the MFA,” 201, quoting Roger L. Geiger, *To Advance Knowledge: The Growth of American Research Universities, 1900–1940* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

26. Singerman, “Toward a Theory of the MFA,” 211.

27. Singerman, “Toward a Theory of the MFA,” 201 and 212 respectively.

28. Singerman, “Toward a Theory of the MFA,” 212.

So: elements of a definition of the MFA, which turn, in this reading, on particular senses of discipline, self-reflexivity, and skill. I wonder if this isn't stretching the concept of "skill" in a way that almost detaches it from previous usages? Is it a persuasive answer to the issue of deskilling, or is it an answer to another kind of question, one that comes through the value placed in the university and in disciplines?

JONATHAN DRONSFIELD: When Singerman quotes Levine in saying that "it is through the development of theoretical issues that a medium becomes a discipline," doesn't he do so to reinforce the hierarchization of theory over practice? Levine speaks of a theory affording a metacritical viewpoint.²⁹ Yes, this viewpoint will extend the medium beyond itself into a discipline; but he doesn't seem to allow for the possibility that practice can attain the same viewpoint, therefore that only theory can fully circumscribe the limits of a discipline.

WILLIAM MAROTTI: The last sentence you read returns the frame of work to the question of skill itself. In many ways, it's a better reading of the term "skill" from Braverman than the one that appears earlier, in Singerman's citation of Ian Burn on "deskilling."³⁰ I think Burn's is really a misreading: in Braverman, deskilling is about knowledge, not skill or techniques per se. It's the difference between an artisan who knows how to assemble the complex joinery of a chair versus the knowledge, in an industrial setting, of each individual worker who knows only one part of the assembly of the chair. In this deskilling, knowledge is taken out of the person and put into the process, and under the control of management. Deskilling is about losing the knowledge that put you in control of the labor process. It's the knowledge that orients and integrates an array of technical skills into a skillful production, the knowledge of the whole, rather than of specific tasks. So at the end of the chapter, Singerman is really coming back around to a more faithful application of the central point of Braverman's book.

MARTA EDLING: But "skill" in Singerman's text is about knowing about sculpture, what sculptures do. He recognizes that there are also skills within the university, which are admired. He has an idea of replacement: that we now use the skills of the humanities.

The problem I have with Singerman's book is that he doesn't discuss the fact that deskilling happened even at schools that were not part of the university. This happened in Europe. So what he identifies as a skill associated with the humanities is not necessarily a skill that was defined in universities. My research shows that art schools in Europe in the 1960s were well aware that the traditional studio practices had to be reformed, and many also held the view that theory was something that needed to be introduced and that had nothing to do with

29. Edward Levine, "Vision and Its Medium," *Art Journal* 42, no. 1 (1982): 49. Quoted in Singerman, *Art Subjects*, 199.

30. Harry Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the*

Twentieth Century (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1974). Singerman introduces Braverman, and Ian Burn's appropriation of Braverman, at 206–8.

the universities. In Sweden there was a reform at the Royal College of Art in the 1960s that showed a clear decrease in the study of the model, a new interest in theory, and experimentation in new materials and techniques (like film or plastic) that were all in tune with the kind of changes that Singerman describes.³¹

JAMES ELKINS: If Howard would grant you that point, it would still leave the question of what he admires in the university humanities—the thing he ends up calling “skill.”

MARTA EDLING: He admires a conceptual turn within art itself. It is something that happened in art, but I don’t disagree that this turn seems to have been further nurtured in art education within the university system.³²

SAUL OSTROW: Howard would argue that the university turned around and enforced and promoted one tendency before others in the arts. That is his complaint. It’s not that we introduced another set of competences, but—from his perspective—that we did that at the expense of another set of competences.

MARTA EDLING: But it also happened outside universities, that’s the whole point!

SAUL OSTROW: His claim would be that it was a tendency in art, and that the university recognized that tendency, and privileged it.

MARTA EDLING: But as an historian, I have to say that research shows that it also happened in Europe without universities.

SAUL OSTROW: That’s a determinist view.

JAMES ELKINS: The wider issue here is whether or not we can find useful, positive terms in Howard’s account, things we could use to build a description of the MFA. That’s why I was asking whether he stretches the word “skill” beyond what might make it useful in studio discussions of skill in the older senses. When he writes that “crafting a history of the discipline, or mapping its contemporary shape . . . are skills,” he is close to institutional critique, a field that doesn’t use the word “skill.”

STEPHAN SCHMIDT-WULFFEN: What is not so apparent in Singerman’s text is the contradiction between discipline and individual creativity. Especially if you follow the path opened by Foucault, you will find out that discipline results in a kind of body politics, where the subject is a result of the disciplinary structure. If we can say anything about the traditional image of the artist, it is not “community based.” (I like this formulation of Geiger.) Again I am faced here with the real difference between the older systems and the contemporary one: a completely

31. Marta Edling “It Smells of Wildeness [*sic*], Trouble, a Good Fight: On Experimental Art and Artistic Education in the 1960s,” in *Det Åskådliga och det bottenlösa: Tankar om konst och humaniora tillägnade Margaretha Rossholm Lagerlöf* (Stockholm: Stockholms universitet, Konstvetenskapliga institutionen, 2010).

32. An interesting text that sketches a development similar to Singerman’s in the UK, but

that also acknowledges it as a combination of a striving within art itself and academic pressure, is Fiona Candlin’s article “A Dual Inheritance: The Politics of Educational Reform and PhDs in Art and Design,” in *Research in Art and Design Education: Issues and Exemplars* (Chicago: Intellect, 2008), 99–108.

different way of constructing artistic identity. And also, skill hints at a conventional basis of artistic production. Self-reflexivity then has to create the awareness of these conventional structures which now should form the starting point of any artistic creativity. What is under discussion, it seems to me, is this conventional basis: Should art students accumulate knowledge? Or is it personal and spontaneous? Should modules built up on each other? Or should entrance for students be open at any stage of the program?

CHRISTOPHER FRAYLING: Part of the MFA, in some countries, is the relationship of the individual with the assessor. But there are also course elements which have a social function, and are attempts to distill what's in the ether for the benefit of everyone. In that sense the MFA is also an attempt to generalize what is going on outside the individual; pivotal for the MFA program is the balance between that attempt and the dialogue with the individual student's voice.

JAMES ELKINS: Here's what they call in physics a "toy model," a simplified version that is easier to think about. We could define the MFA as the place where you experiment with the idea of voice, subjectivity, and individuality, and see if it works for you. If the institution swamps that idea, then you go on to the PhD.

BARBARA JAFFEE: What is interesting about this statement of Singerman's is the expectation that each of us makes our own history. What is the role of the university in helping us to craft individual histories of our discipline? Who performs that role?

DANIEL PALMER: Supervisors—

BARBARA JAFFEE: Why is it the job of the university to assist in the process of creating personal mythologies? As an art historian, I don't think that what I offer students is just raw material endlessly available for appropriation . . . Wikipedia does that!

DANIEL PALMER: Supervisors perform that function. Later in the text, he talks about de Duve and Bourdieu and how the university is engaged in the construction of the identity of the artist through their relationship to their discipline. But techniques of self-creation can be more or less directed to the inner or social world, and presumably hinge on the supervisor's particular understanding of the discipline. In my university, one of the architects of our master's and PhD programs, Robert Nelson, speaks about art in terms of being true to "consciousness," which to me seems exceedingly Romantic.³³ I'd personally like to see more collaboration than soul searching.

MIGUEL GONZÁLEZ VIRGEN: It is clear to me that this sense of "skill," as described by Singerman towards the end of his essay, has to do with the cultural frame and

33. Nelson, *The Jealousy of Ideas: Research Methods in the Creative Arts* (Fitzroy: Ellikon Press, 2009). Also available as a free e-book at [http://www.writing-pad.ac.uk/photos/21_Resources/o8_The Jealousy of Ideas/o4_jealousy1.pdf](http://www.writing-pad.ac.uk/photos/21_Resources/o8_The%20Jealousy%20of%20Ideas/o4_jealousy1.pdf) (accessed October 27, 2009).

the formation of subjectivity, rather than craft or *métier*. There is no talk here of the production of knowledge *beyond* the professional field of art itself, and Singerman also seems to omit the idea of the artist as a person who has a type of knowledge that she projects, in a positivist manner, onto the world. Rather, we have a professional with the *skill* to manipulate culture in order to assert his or her own subjectivity, or, as Singerman quotes Bourdieu, “the artist ‘working on himself as an artist.’”³⁴

Thus, while art has been integrated into the university as discipline involving research, this research does not follow the paradigms of traditional academics; rather, it seems to be research into an individual’s subjective affirmation. Thus my sense is that while Singerman accepts the integration of art as a university discipline, he is aware that it does not produce the same kind of knowledge.

JONATHAN DRONSFIELD: But isn’t the kind of knowledge he is talking about, what he characterizes as professional self-awareness, isn’t it again historical knowledge? Doesn’t he say that it’s about being aware of one’s “place in the narrative of art”?

MARTA EDLING: Singerman says that “on campus, studio art cannot be a calling or vocation. To be included among the disciplines, art can no longer bear . . . as craft or technique.” And he goes on to say art can no longer be “purely inspirational, or simply expressive . . . studio art must constitute itself within the university. There must be an object of knowledge, a field carved out or claimed in relation to other fields.”³⁵ And this field of art, he argues, along with de Duve, is empty, it is a “discursive practice,” And he admits his story could be read as “a narrative of decline.”³⁶ But that is an opinion: it needs to be debated.

HILDE VAN GELDER: I think it is also a matter of fact. Jim, you express this kind of fear in the introduction to *Artists with PhDs*, where you say art may become even more alienated from skill and technique. But the Belgian experience clearly counters that fear. We have people who have advanced in skill and technique, and have rediscovered techniques for contemporary art.³⁷ This is something we need to take into account at the MFA level as well: Singerman’s argument might not be entirely true.

JAMES ELKINS: It could be that in the end this entire text is not appropriate to help formulate a new sense of the MFA, because Singerman is thinking about art as fully integrated in the university, as a “discipline,” utilizing a new sense of “skill.”

WILLIAM MAROTTI: I think we have to come back to the question of skill. He says that manual skills “of the guild or apprenticeship” cannot be fully implemented.³⁸ This is why the Braverman term is such a problem here. Its misappropriation in “deskilling” as a reference to specific technical art “skills” takes it in a direction

34. Singerman, “Toward a Theory of the MFA,” 212.

35. Singerman, “Toward a Theory of the MFA,” 198.

36. Singerman, “Toward a Theory of the MFA,” 198, 200, 201 and 211.

37. See, for relevant examples from Leuven, <http://associatie.kuleuven.be/fak/nl/node/290>, <http://associatie.kuleuven.be/fak/nl/node/317>, and <http://associatie.kuleuven.be/fak/nl/node/289>.

38. Singerman, “Toward a Theory of the MFA,” 198.

that's really opposite to Braverman's meaning. It works fine for thinking about a member of a guild, whose skills are then lost when production is divided up into parts, leading to a loss of the knowledge of the entire thing being constructed. But in the case of art, you can easily imagine a situation in which the minute, precise training in a skill could also in fact be a form of deskilling. You are left with a tremendous ability to do just one thing, but you have lost the ability to see where art is going.

JAMES ELKINS: That is so subversive. It's great.

WILLIAM MAROTTI: You can imagine someone who is tremendously well-trained in some particular material, but her work is met with a deafening silence.

JAMES ELKINS: There are many examples. Thames and Hudson have just continued their relentless slide into popular subjects with a book called *Exactitude*, on hyper-skilled painters who have almost no position in the art world.³⁹

CHRIS CSIKSZENTMIHÁLYI: These days Cellini would be one of a dozen craftspeople slaving away in Jeff Koons's studio.

REBECCA GORDON: I have lost sight of what we're talking about in terms of craft, because if you go to an MFA exhibition, you'll see that we have many skills—we can make all sorts of intricately crafted things, although the skills we possess might not be of the traditional art school set. We may not all know how to carve marble or cast plaster, but we know how to weave structures out of cardboard, or make stuffed animals, or organize happenings, or build websites, or edit video. All the anxiety about deskilling seems misplaced to me.

JAMES ELKINS: Saul, you know Howard better than I do. Did he ever go back and learn classical investment sculpting?

SAUL OSTROW: Not that I know of. There are foundries for that!

P. ELAINE SHARPE: I agree with Rebecca. I have seen exhibitions that show deskilling: they often have something else about them that's magnificent. What concerns me is that we can't rely on the notion of skill, or that the artist who produced this magnificence possesses or ever possessed it. My concern is that skills aren't built in such a way that they are sustainable for the artist: they are often a one-off thing, and that they may never again be able to produce in a way that they themselves want.

JAMES ELKINS: Tom Friedman's skills, for example—

P. ELAINE SHARPE: Ah, but he has an MFA and has shown at Gagosian!

DANIEL PALMER: I think Singerman is mainly concerned with the dehistoricization of skills, the loss of particular historical practices. From memory he refers to the

39. *Exactitude: Hyperrealist Art Today*, edited by John Russell Taylor and Maggie Bol-laert (London: Thames and Hudson, 2009).

Australian Conceptual artist Ian Burn, who borrowed the term “deskilling” from sociology in 1981 to describe the fate of the initially critical gesture. Burn was concerned to point out that skills are not merely manual dexterity, but forms of knowledge whose loss can be disabling.

SAUL OSTROW: Howard bemoans the notion that one upon a time, you asked an artist what he or she was, and you got the answer, I’m a painter, or I’m a printmaker. Now you get the flat answer, I’m an artist. For him, what is lost in that disciplinary answer is the ability to solve problems within painting, sculpture, and so forth. That’s the implicit argument in his book.

MARTA EDLING: If I were a German rector, I’d say that now we’re talking as if art has skills. Art doesn’t have any skills: artists have skills. So you cannot teach art skills. It is out of the question. This is exactly why the German rectors objected to the Bologna process: “In künstlerischen denken . . . geht es um das Unvergleichbare.”⁴⁰ Art hasn’t got anything to do with skills in the sense that you are talking about it: that is why there are no curricula in Frankfurt.⁴¹

JAMES ELKINS: I think we have three responses to deskilling. First, Howard’s response: skill is now a matter of institutional awareness and the ability to operate in the university and the art world. In his account, a deskilled artist would be one who is unaware of disciplines and her place within them—a stereotypical flower painter. Second, the standard defense of deskilling: that skills are all historically bound, so that deskilling is an illusion. Our own skills are simply escaping our classification, as Rebecca or Elaine are saying. Third, Bill’s very subversive idea that a very high level of specialized skill is itself deskilling.

We’ve been implying that these issues are of pressing interest, but is the controversy itself a kind of definition of what happens in the MFA? And if that is not the case, then what work has our conversation done toward reconceptualizing the MFA?

HILDE VAN GELDER: I don’t want to sound conservative, but skills definitely need to be taught in the MFA. And that is even true of crafts, and traditional techniques.

P. ELAINE SHARPE: I believe as with any research, skill of any nature should be apparent in an incoming MFA student, that they should come prepared to explore and consolidate what they already know.

JONATHAN DRONSFIELD: Imagine you’ve come from a BFA with an emphasis on discipline-specific, traditional work. You might then find that restrictive. In your MA or MFA, you may want to get all that out of the way. So the element of deskilling must be as central as skilling.

HILDE VAN GELDER: You can sensitize people to that while at the same time stimulating them to continue their personal engagement with and investment in the already

40. Stempel, “Zum Stand der Dinge.”

41. Belzer and Birnbaum, *Kunst Lehren = Teaching Art*.

known skills, perhaps even encouraging them to acquire additional, complementary skills.

JAMES ELKINS: Okay, so the MFA might be a place where deskilling is actually *taught*. Jonathan, in practical terms, how would you do that?

JONATHAN DRONSFIELD: It could at least be introduced as a theoretical question. You've got to build in that element of reflection. On a practical level, that's more difficult.

MIGUEL GONZÁLEZ VIRGEN: If we follow Singerman's argument, we would practice deskilling (skill as craft) by carrying out art projects that research the historical positioning of crafts or *métiers*—reinterpreting the past “as an artist,” as de Duve says—or projects that emphasize artwork that takes subjectivity itself as its medium.

CHRIS CSIKSZENTMIHÁLYI: You do it by showing an admiration for skills, but not determining which skills students need to learn. Students then seek out skills relevant to their work.

JAMES ELKINS: The MFA as a place for passive deskilling!

STEPHAN SCHMIDT-WULFFEN: We treat all the skills we've been mentioning the same way. We talk about painting, sculpture, photography, and so forth. Perhaps we need to be more precise about different kinds of skill: communication, negotiation, writing, and critical capacity. If we don't make this distinction, the visual arts disappear!

JONATHAN DRONSFIELD: Stephan, would it worry you if an MFA student changed from painting, for example, to writing?

STEPHAN SCHMIDT-WULFFEN: A couple of days ago, talking about Frances's work, we had a heated discussion on this topic.⁴² If we are liberal in such cases, we open the visual arts to the point where visual arts might disappear. We would be training social workers, curators, teachers. In our architectural department, we do this: we say we're not only training people to make buildings, but we acknowledge that architects are also people who argue with theorists, who educate the public. But we need to be aware of the consequences of focusing on certain skills.

JAMES ELKINS: We have focused on skill and deskilling. I wonder if anyone else has other ideas about how the MFA might be reconceptualized. Even “deskilling” is an unusual “positive” term. I wonder about dedisciplinization.

CHRIS CSIKSZENTMIHÁLYI: Or deschooling.

JONATHAN DRONSFIELD: Or deconstructing, where you might be encouraged to walk the line between discipline and nondiscipline, in order not to have to worry about whether they were in it or out of it.

42. See Section 5 of the Seminars.

JAMES ELKINS: It's been an interesting conversation: the conflict between the Romantic master model and its current alternates is undecided, I think, for two reasons: first, we have no clear decision about what parts of the master model should be retained; and second, we have no consensus about what positive precepts could model the current MFA. The only thing we're sure of is that no one knows what the MFA is!

P S U P
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