

Rethinking the Contemporary Art School

| The Artist,
the PhD, and
the Academy

Edited by Brad Buckley
and John Conomos



The Press of the Nova Scotia
College of Art and Design



The Press of the Nova Scotia College
of Art and Design
5163 Duke Street
Halifax Nova Scotia Canada B3J 3J6

The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design gratefully acknowledges the law firm McInnes Cooper for providing a sustaining operations grant for 2008-2011.

MCINNES
COOPER
LAWYERS | AVOCATS

© 2009 Brad Buckley, John Conomos, The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, and the authors.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, without the prior permission in writing of The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, or as expressly permitted by law, or under terms agreed with the appropriate reprographic rights organizations. Enquires concerning reproduction outside the scope of the above should be sent to The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design at the address above.

The authors and publisher are grateful to all those individuals and organizations who have granted permission to reproduce images. Every effort has been made to obtain permission to use copyrighted material in this volume; the publisher apologizes for any errors or omissions and would welcome these being brought to their attention.

Editorial Director: Susan McEachern
Manager: Christopher McFarlane
Copy Editor: Ulrike Walker
Graphic Design: Arthur Carter, AustenHouse
Front cover photo: Chris Reardon
Inside cover photo: Cathy Busby
Printed and bound in Canada

Available through D.A.P./Distributed Art Publishers
155 Sixth Avenue, 2nd Floor, New York, NY 10013
Tel (212) 627-1999 Fax (212) 627-9484

Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication

Rethinking the contemporary art school : the artist, the PhD, and the academy / edited by Brad Buckley and John Conomos.

Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 978-0-919616-49-3

1. Art—Study and teaching (Higher). 2. Art schools. 3. Educational innovations. I. Buckley, Brad, 1952- II. Conomos, John III. Title: Artist, the PhD, and the academy.

N345.R48 2009

700.71'1

C2009-90247

Contents

		Acknowledgments viii
Foreword		Susan McEachern 1
Introduction		Brad Buckley and John Conomos 2
Chapter One		Su Baker Art School 2.0: Art Schools in the Information Age or Reciprocal Relations and the Art of the Possible 27
Chapter Two		Bruce Barber The Question (of Failure) in Art Research 45
Chapter Three		Mikkel Bogh Borderlands: The Art School Between the Academy and Higher Education 64
Chapter Four		Brad Buckley What is with the Ceiling! The Artist, Higher Degrees, and Research in the University Art School 76
Chapter Five		Brad Buckley and John Conomos The Australian Research Council Funding Model Condemns Art Schools to a Bleak Future 87
Chapter Six		Juli Carson and Bruce Yonemoto Curriculum and Practice in the Age of Post-Studio Art Production 90
Chapter Seven		Edward Colless Unnameable 101
Chapter Eight		John Conomos Art, the Moving Image, and the Academy 106
Chapter Nine		Jay Coogan Evolutionary Forces: Advancing Art and Design Education 121

Chapter Ten		Luc Courchesne Art, Design, and Beyond 136
Chapter Eleven		Sara Diamond Moving Out of Bounds: Expanding the Field of Art Education 145
Chapter Twelve		Lauren Ewing Remixing the Hive 159
Chapter Thirteen		Gary Pearson The Outskirts of Town: A Peripheral Centre for Art, Agency, and Academia 164
Chapter Fourteen		Bill Seaman Combinatoric Micro-Strategies for Emergent Transdisciplinary Education 182
Chapter Fifteen		Jeremy Welsh Transitions, Dialogues, Interruptions, Pregnant Pauses, and Leaps into The Void: Recent Experiences in Norwegian Higher Art Education 206
		Notes on Contributors 215
		Notes on Cover Artwork 218
		Index 221

Juli Carson and | **Curriculum and**
Bruce Yonemoto | **Practice in the**
Age of Post-Studio
Art Production

| **Part One: On dialectics and reversals**

[There is a debate that] has not advanced beyond the monotonous reiteration of arguments for and against: on the one hand, the correct political line is demanded of the poet; on the other, it is justifiable to expect his work to have quality. Such a formulation between the two factors, political and quality, has not been perceived. Of course, the connection can be asserted dogmatically. You can declare: a work that shows the correct political tendency need show no other quality. You can also declare: a work that exhibits the correct tendency must of necessity have every other quality.

Walter Benjamin, "Author as Producer."¹

In his 1934 address to the Institute for the Study of Fascism in Paris, Walter Benjamin argued across a polemic then debated by the Left. Simply stated: Must artists be politically committed? Or can they be left to experiment with their own formal devices? Is this even an accurate polemic? Benjamin concluded that neither position was true alone. He thus gave us the famous axiom, which became central to a branch of critical contemporary art practice: *the tendency of a literary work can only be politically correct if it is also literarily correct*. Which is to say, *the politically correct tendency includes a literary tendency*.² Since the political cannot be disentangled from the aesthetic because it is *through* aesthetics that the political presents itself, for an artist to be politically committed s/he has to maintain a high level of aesthetic competency. In Benjamin's time, the Left's debate was a question of political commitment versus cultural literacy. Today it has been reinvented as cultural theory versus aesthetic disciplinarity. And in some cases, as the debate progresses, the term "interdisciplinarity" has been collapsed with "cultural theory," so that an even more specific question of interdisciplinarity versus disciplinarity has emerged. As in Benjamin's times, this is a false polemic.

Deep skepticism of High Modernist disciplinarity—what New Yorkers called "reductivism"—defined the 1980s "post-studio" school of art. Even so, the pioneers of this international school—Daniel Buren, Michael Asher, Hans Haacke,

Marcel Broodthaers, Adrian Piper, Yvonne Rainer, Mary Kelly, and Dan Graham, to name a few—provided models for practice that were equally robust on two fronts: they knew the history of modernist aesthetics and combined this with broader cultural theories that defined post-structuralist discourse. Since then, for those of us who have inherited the post-studio legacy, the (art) baby has increasingly been thrown out with the bathwater. The result is the ironic proliferation of “interdisciplinarity” without any disciplines. In many of today’s contemporary art schools the cultural memory of twentieth-century modernism—its concerns and formal languages—have thus been tossed into the dustbin of history through the overdetermination of Conceptualism’s critique of High Modernism. As a means of pedagogical intervention, we are interested in a model of Conceptualism—in film and in art—that is at once informed by the legacy of modernist production *and* mindful of modernism’s blind spots. Moreover, it is to cultural critique that this aesthetic knowledge must be directed.

The problem with *over* determining the cultural side of the aforementioned axis—resulting in identity politics, cultural theory’s privileged genre—is that it tends to privilege an artist’s collusion with what Althusser called an ideological identification with a mass cultural image that “interpellates” (or hails) him or her into its service. This places the artist in the position of a consumer rather than a producer of mass culture, the latter usurping the place of art history as *the* source of a work’s form/content. In her essay “Welcome to the Cultural Revolution,” Rosalind Krauss similarly noted:

This is the shift that Cultural Studies has operated away from an earlier, and what is now seen as outmoded, focus on the “production” of texts or works of art (as the goal of an equally outmoded literary or art-historical analysis), in favor of a new concentration on “reception,” or in the mass-cultural context addressed by Cultural Studies, that form of reception which is more properly called “consumption.”³

In the context of cultural critique, this state of affairs is problematic because when debates over a work’s aesthetic production are completely cut out, one ends up going the cultural studies route alone. And *that* route always begins with the idea—usually the consumption of a cultural event—that passes straight through production, delivering a regurgitated subject for mass consumption once again. In its most dubious form, this was the problem with Nicholas Bourriaud’s culture-based model of relational aesthetics. Practitioners of this model include Rirkrit Tiravanija, who organizes a dinner in a collector’s home and leaves him all the ingredients to make a Thai soup. Or Philippe Parreno, who invites people to engage their favorite hobbies on May Day, on a factory assembly line. Or Vanessa Beecroft, who “dresses some twenty women in the same way, complete with a red wig, and the visitor merely gets a glimpse of them through the doorway.” Or Christine Hill, who “works as a check-out assistant in a supermarket” and “organizes a weekly gym workshop in a gallery.”⁴ The list goes on. But what unites these works is the presence of a given service that the

artist has displaced into a new situation, one that is then given to the “viewer” to be reconsumed.

Another problem with the cultural theory (relational aesthetics) model is that it enacts a simple dialectical reversal of Kantian modernist studio practice, one that was founded on the notion of artistic “genius.” Dialectical reversals, as a reversal of terms, have long been the most flat-footed mode of critique because the move does not challenge the meaning of conventional terms within a given system. Rather, the move reorganizes and reweights such terms, allowing the ideological associations attending them to continue. For instance, in the case of Kantian aesthetics: “*Genius* is the talent (natural endowment) which gives the rule to art. Since talent, as an innate productive faculty of the artist, belongs itself to nature, we may put it this way: *Genius* is the innate mental aptitude nature gives the rule to art” [emphasis added].⁵ And since aesthetic genius was innate, it could only be honed—not taught—within the artist’s studio. Such was Clement Greenberg’s vision of High Modernist painting against which the Conceptualists, who innovated the “post-studio” school, rallied. However, the Conceptualists did not give up on production; from their vantage point, the “studio” was only a metaphor for Greenberg’s Kantian interiority model for art production. And since it wasn’t a literal space, it wasn’t readily dispensed with. Rather it was reinvented along with the very notion of modernist aesthetics at the limits of object production. Relational aesthetics, however, dispenses entirely with studio production reversing and re-weighting the terms “studio” versus “exhibition.” Again, in this model we march straight past production towards consumption.

There has to be a better way to sift through these modernist strategies towards a model of *critical aesthetics*. And there is. This is what we are building in the Studio Art Program at UCI.

| Part Two: Modernist legacies and critical aesthetics

Historicism contents itself with establishing a causal connection between various moments in history. But no fact that is a cause is for that very reason historical. It became historical posthumously, as it were, through events that may be separated from it by thousands of years. A historian who takes this as his point of departure stops telling the sequence of events like the beads of a rosary. Instead, he grasps the constellation which his own era has formed with a definite earlier one. Walter Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History”⁶

In non-canonical accounts of twentieth-century art and theory, the very practice of modernism is so heterogeneous as to throw contemporary labels like “postmodernism” into question. Just which modernism is postmodernism “post” to? In a North American context, from which we write, the closest syn-

| Notes on Contributors

Su Baker is associate professor and head of the School of Art, Victorian College of the Arts, the University of Melbourne. She is a graduate of Sydney College of the Arts, the University of Sydney, and Curtin University of Technology. Baker has exhibited over the last twenty years in museums and survey shows at numerous venues, including the Artists' Museum, Poland, and the Art Gallery of New South Wales. Baker is represented by John Buckley Gallery in Melbourne and Gallery Dusseldorf in Perth.

Bruce Barber is a professor at NSCAD University and directs the MFA program there. His artwork, exhibited internationally since 1971, is documented in *Reading Rooms* (1992). He is the editor of *Essays on Performance and Cultural Politicization* and *Conceptual Art: The NSCAD Connection*. Barber co-edited *Voices of Fire: Art Rage, Power, and the State* and is editor of *Condé and Beveridge: Class Works* (2008). He is also the author of *Performance [Performance] and Performers: Essays and Conversations* (2008), edited by Marc Léger.

Mikkel Bogh is professor and rector of the Schools of Visual Arts at the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts. Between 1995 and 2000, he was associated with the Department of Literature and the Department of Arts and Cultural Studies at Copenhagen University. In 2000 he became a lecturer in modern culture at the University and later became head of the Department of Arts and Cultural Studies. He is an art historian and critic, publishing widely on art education and on Western art and culture from the seventeenth century to the present. His most recent publication is *Per Bak Jensen: The Unseen Image* (2006).

Brad Buckley is associate professor and director of the Sydney College of the Arts Graduate School at the University of Sydney. He was educated at St Martin's School of Art, London, and the Rhode Island School of Design. He is co-editor, with John Conomos, of *Republics of Ideas* (2001) and has also developed and chaired with Conomos a number of conference sessions for the College Art Association, including *America: the Divine Empire* (Atlanta 2005) and *The Contemporary Collaborator in an Interdisciplinary World* (Dallas 2008). Buckley's work has been shown internationally for over two decades.

Juli Carson is an associate professor in the Studio Art Department at the University of California, Irvine, where she teaches critical and curatorial practice in contemporary art and directs the University Art Gallery. She is also editor of *Exile of the Imaginary: Politics, Aesthetics, Love* (2008). Her forthcoming book, *The Conceptual Unconscious*, will be published by Les Figues Press.

Edward Colless is head of Critical and Theoretical Studies at the Victorian College of the Arts, the University of Melbourne. He has taught art history, film studies, and performance in a variety of tertiary institutions. Colless's critical writing has been widely published in journals, catalogues, and books, within Australia and internationally. He is the author of *The Error of My Ways* (1995) and has also worked as an architectural assistant, graphic artist, curator, theatre director, and filmmaker.

John Conomos is an artist, critic, and writer who lectures at the University of Sydney. His videotapes and installations have been extensively shown throughout Australia and overseas, most recently at the Tate Modern, London. He is a prolific contributor to art, film, and media journals, conferences and symposia. In 1998 his videotape *Autumn Song* won an award of merit at Berlin's Transmediala Videofest Festival, and in 2000 he was awarded a Fellowship in New Media by the Australian Council for the Arts. With Brad Buckley he co-edited *Republic of Ideas* (2001), and his most recent publication is *Mutant Media* (2007).

Jay Coogan is a professor and president of Minneapolis College of Art and Design. He is the former provost of Rhode Island School of Design, where he worked for over twenty-five years in numerous capacities. He holds a BA from Brown University and an MFA from Hunter College. His work has been shown in numerous national and international galleries and museums. Coogan is represented in a number of corporate and private collections. He has created public commissions for Boston and Cambridge, Massachusetts; Providence, Rhode Island; and Green Bay, Wisconsin.

Luc Courchesne is professor and director of the School of Industrial Design at the Université de Montréal and is a board member of the Society for Arts and Technology (SAT). He is a graduate of NSCAD University and the Center for Advanced Visual Studies at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Courchesne is widely recognized as an important contributor to the development of new media practices through his numerous interactive installations, which have been shown internationally.

Sara Diamond is professor and president of the Ontario College of Art & Design (OCAD). She holds degrees from Canada and the United Kingdom in social history, communications, and new media theory and practice. Prior to her presidency at OCAD, Diamond was the director of research for the Banff Centre. She created the Banff New Media Institute (BNMI) in 1995 and led it until coming to Toronto in 2005. Diamond created and was Editor-in-Chief of *Horizon⁰: Digital Art + Culture in Canada*, an online showcase for new media art and design, in collaboration with Heritage Canada. She is a visualization software researcher and developer. Her artistic practice has included the development of the Code-Zebra software and performance environments.

Lauren Ewing is a professor and former director of the graduate program at Mason Gross School of the Arts, Rutgers University. She is a sculptor and installation artist whose work addresses the vast construct of material culture in relation to desire and memory. She has had exhibitions at the Kunstverein in Ludwigsburg, the Biennale of Sydney, and the New Museum in New York. Her works are in numerous collections, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Museum of Modern Art, the Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego, the Chase Manhattan Bank, and many private collections.

Gary Pearson is an associate professor in the Department of Creative Studies at UBC Okanagan in Canada. He is also a curator and art writer, with reviews published in *Canadian Art*, *Border Crossings*, and *Sculpture* magazine, among other publications. He was the recipient of the Vancouver Institute of Visual Arts VIVA award in 1991. His exhibition history includes solo and group exhibitions in Canada, the US, Australia, and Europe. His most recent curatorial project was *Point of Origin*, shown at Artspace in Sydney during 2008.

Bill Seaman is a professor in the Art, Art History, and Visual Studies Department at Duke University. He received a PhD in 1999 from the Centre for Advanced Inquiry in Interactive Arts, University of Wales. He holds a Master of Science in Visual Studies (1985) from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. His work explores an expanded media-oriented poetics through various technological means. Seaman's works have been in many international shows, and he has been commissioned on a number of occasions. He is collaborating on installations with Daniel Howe and is collaborating with the scientist Otto Rössler on a forthcoming book, *Neosentience: The Benevolence Engine*.

Jeremy Welsh is professor of fine art at the Bergen National Academy of the Arts and has been MA course leader since 2004. He was previously professor of intermedia at Trondheim Academy of Art (1990–2001). He studied fine art at Nottingham Trent Polytechnic and at Goldsmiths College, London. During the 1980s he worked with London Video Arts, an artist media centre, and then co-founded The Film and Video Umbrella, a production agency for artists' film and video. Welsh has exhibited and published internationally since the early eighties.

Bruce Yonemoto is professor and chair of the Studio Art Department at the University of California, Irvine, where he teaches experimental film and video production and theory. Yonemoto's work has been featured at the Intercommunication Center (ICC) in Tokyo, the Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA) in Philadelphia, the Pompidou Center in Paris, the Generali Foundation in Vienna, and the Getty Research Center in Los Angeles. He was most recently featured at the 2008 Gwangju Biennial, Korea. He is represented by the Alexander Gray Gallery in New York and the Tomio Koyama Gallery in Tokyo.