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Response: Pedagogy Round Table

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Some pedagogical values are perhaps timeless—for example, helping students to improve their writing. Jules Prown also mentions generous mentoring, alluding to the "signals of encouragement" he received from professors with whom he studied in graduate school. There were moments in my training in which this kind of approval was critical to my decision to stick with art history, and I always look out for times and places to encourage my students. Prown's idea that student needs should come first is notable, as well. It reminds me of a remark I once encountered by religious historian Jonathan Z. Smith. Smith provocatively commented that syllabus writing is the most important writing academics do. In graduate school at Harvard, I arranged a directed study with Gwendolyn Shaw in which I devised a syllabus for a seminar in early African American art (from the beginning of the Portuguese slave trade in 1502 to 1861). It was one of the most useful projects I undertook during my graduate coursework and has evolved into a class I now offer. Ever since, I have expended a lot of time and thought in the construction of syllabi (too much according to some colleagues); I see this as a form of putting students first.

Prown's reflections remind me that much has changed in the field during the past half century. Whereas his reminiscences are filled with allusions to men, his mentors and colleagues, throughout he mentions few women by name and only in passing—besides his wife Shirley, just Louisa Dresser, Barbara Novak, and Wanda Corn. Of course Prown contributed to the diversification of the field by training many women. My graduate adviser, Jennifer Roberts, was one such student.[1] Even before working with Roberts, though, my main advisers were all women. As an undergraduate at the University of Chicago, I worked with Martha Ward and Rachael DeLue; DeLue was a visiting scholar during my senior year (2000–2001). Nowadays women are publishing much of the very best work. It seems this will only be more the case as time goes on. I have far more young women than men in my courses, and almost all of my graduate students and teaching assistants have been women.

In the American art history of today, diversification of the artists and subjects one teaches is an imperative. The figures populating Prown's reflections are not just men; they are, more specifically, white men. And the artists who were Prown's scholarly focus are Anglo-American white men.[2] To be sure, though, Prown's advisees have generated scholarship on a much wider range of subjects. And while his own material culture studies did not really bring a greater diversity of creators into the fold in terms of gender and race, the engagement of those methods by his students and his students' students certainly has.

I think of art history as a creative practice and am preoccupied with instigating my students' creative and historical imaginations. To help them develop their imaginative

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capacities, I have begun to move away from using the single object five-page formal analysis assignment that is a fixture of introductory art history courses. The assignment seems tired, and Martin Berger (a former Prown student) has compellingly argued that close looking is a more problematic tool than art historians suspect.[3] I give students an open-ended creative writing exercise instead, developed in conversation with me, and with no prescription to focus on a single object. This assignment, due early in the term, is designed to help students think more expansively about their research papers.

Inspired by some of Roberts' thoughts about the creative uses of contemporary art in American art pedagogy, and furthered through my own teaching of contemporary art, I talk about historically-oriented contemporary art in order to enhance my teaching of earlier American art. I have found this to be particularly helpful when I teach colonial and early national art, which are often in need of dusting off. Contemporary art can be used for comparative purposes or in place of reading, when a contemporary artist's project is, in a sense, the most substantial work of art history available on a given topic. (Roberts has suggested, for instance, Elaine Reichek's (b. 1943) contemporary sampler embroideries, which deal with the historical meanings of the craft in relation to the history of art and culture.) Attention to contemporary material can also help to better determine which historical topics are most relevant to today's students.

Having worked at schools as different as the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and Northwestern University, it is clear to me that there is no teaching as such; pedagogy is always inflected by one's students and the institution at which one teaches. SAIC students tend to be more present-minded, and I find I play historian in a less presentist way here. I insist on the closeness of the past—it is only receding from us if we think about history as a straight line. I try to persuade students that our experience of time is more complex and anachronic than that; the past is at hand, if they want it.

I tend to agree that focusing on less (e.g. one work or document) for more time, cultivating care and patience through protracted study, is something art history continues to offer today's students. Distractedness is a cultural epidemic. Other times, though, I have resisted this "less is more" approach, experimenting instead with a view articulated by contemporary Swiss artist Thomas Hirschhorn (b. 1957) that "more is more," bombarding students with reading, slides, videos, ideas, information, and associations, and taking them on whirlwind visits to see artworks in museums or the city. Breadth and intensity of exposure are as important as the nurturing of patience. This more is more strategy is not meant to pander to young people with short attention spans and hungry for action, but is a deliberate deployment of surplus energy, of pedagogical passion intended to arouse students emotionally and intellectually. Note that both less is more and more is more are excessive approaches.[4]

The Digital Revolution may foment distraction, but it has enhanced teaching opportunities, too. I like online discussion platforms and often use them in my courses. Such platforms enable instructors to hold students accountable for completing readings on time and to get a head start on discussion before in-class discussion (usually enriching the total discussion had). The Digital Revolution has also made my students more curious about history. One upper-level course I teach, and which has proven useful at SAIC, is called "Telegraph to Television: American Art and New Media." Most of the students in the class work with newer new media in their studio practices, and

they are excited to learn more about historical interrelations of analog technologies and art making.

Although university teaching remains a primary vehicle for spreading knowledge and appreciation of American art, there are many others. For example, I serve as a study leader twice a year on trips organized by the not-for-profit travel branch of the Smithsonian, Smithsonian Journeys. The travelers are typically retired, lifelong learners, and eager to know more about American art. This past semester I also started teaching in the Prison and Neighborhood Arts Project (PNAP), a program that offers art, humanities, and social science courses to inmates at Stateville Correctional Center, a maximum security men's prison outside Chicago.[5] The course I taught, The Artistic Imagination, addressed theories and practices of the imagination from antiquity to the present, including selected topics in American art. Needless to say, art history education has an existential urgency in the prison environment that it does not have at a university. This class led me to develop new exercises in the practice of imagination that I hope to use, in revised form, in other courses.

Teaching in prison has been, among other things, an effort to bring art history to people who have little experience of it. As when I started studying art history, nearly twenty years ago, I still worry about the discipline's relationship to social privilege. (Like for Prown, art was not part of my upbringing.) I thought of this regularly, when, during my first year of teaching, as a postdoctoral fellow at Northwestern, I was driving from my small and rather shoddy apartment in the Rogers Park neighborhood of north Chicago through streets of Evanston mansions, to work in a department known for a commitment to the social history of art. I wondered what my teaching was doing. Was I providing students with critical analytical skills, or contributing to existing systemic problems?

At pessimistic moments, I fear the bonds tying art history to privilege cannot be broken. Art history is part of a liberal arts education, itself a form of privilege masquerading as an instrument of freedom. It may seem an innocent diversion for those who have the money, luck, or leisure to indulge in it, but it is also a tool of class stratification. Carol Duncan's polemic, "Teaching the Rich," is in many ways as relevant in 2016 as when she first published it in 1973. She writes that higher education, including art history, is "resistant to democratization"—that "no amount of art education" will change things "so long as other aspects of existence remain untouched."[6] At other times, I am optimistic that education in art history can help my students to make the challenges and lessons of art a more integral part of their lives. At their best, imaginative art and art history rehearse, even enact, new worlds and better social realities.

NOTES

[1] Jennifer Roberts did comment, though, on gender bias in Prown's teaching and scholarship in a talk she gave at the College Art Association meeting in 2010.

[2] In American art history, the 'Anglo-American' framework has long served as a placeholder for a more thoroughgoing engagement with American multiculturalism and interculturalism.

[3] See Martin A. Berger, "The Problem with Close Looking," in John Davis, Jennifer A. Greenhill, and Jason D. LaFountain, eds., *A Companion to American Art* (Chichester, West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2015), 113–27.

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[4] For thoughts on the continuing relevance of single-object-based immersion and deceleration as pedagogical strategies, see Jennifer L. Roberts, "The Power of Patience," *Harvard Magazine* 116, no. 2 (November/December 2013): 40–43. Roberts explicitly calls this strategy "excessive," 40. Thomas Hirschhorn perspicaciously engages global capitalism, mass consumption, commodity spectacle, and intellectual fandom. Critiquing the modernist dictum of Mies van der Rohe, "less is more," he argues "less is always less" and "more is always more." He asserts, "Energy yes, quality no." See Hal Foster, "Towards a Grammar of Emergency," *New Left Review* 68 (March/April 2011): 114.

[5] For historical background on PNAP and related programs, see Erica R. Meiners and Sarah Ross, "'And What Happens to You Concerns Us Here': Imaginings for a (New) Prison Arts Movement," in Rebecca Zorach, ed., *Art Against the Law* (Chicago: School of the Art Institute of Chicago; distributed by the University of Chicago Press, 2014), 17–30. The PNAP website can be found at: http://p-nap.org/what.html.

[6] Carol Duncan, "Teaching the Rich," in Gregory Battcock, ed., *New Ideas in Art Education: A Critical Anthology* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1973), 130, and 138–39. I thank Alan Wallach for introducing me to this essay.

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