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**"Doing" art history in the secondary school years:  
in search of authenticity**

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*In this paper, I argue that art historical experiences are neither intrinsically elite nor exclusive in character. The purpose of the case is to interrogate the long-standing dilemmas of authentic practice of art historical concepts and performances in educational settings. The author proposes an inclusive and practical approach to teaching and learning about art history in the school years.*

*The approach deploys categories derived from the artworld to the generation of authentic and engaging art historical experiences. This strategy provides a framework that is appropriate to the range of interests and needs of secondary students. The author's case is illustrated with reference to a selection of contemporary art historical exemplars. The anticipated pedagogical outcome of art historical learning is the inculcation of the student as a culturally shrewd, active lifelong audience for art.*

Art is a long established and popular subject in the high school curriculum and is commonly regarded as a subject fostering creativity, self-expression and encouraging divergent responses to aesthetic and artistic concepts. Yet, there is a conundrum within this conventional stereotype. On the one hand, creative self-expression is valorized and the gifted and talented are routinely identified through evidence of artistic precociousness. However, the school subject art is not constructed solely in terms of studio practice and creative product. A significant component at all levels requires teachers and students to deal with art historical material. Art historical study or as students often say "doing" art history – as in "do we HAVE to do art history today?" is seen by educational bureaucrats as the academic, scholarly side of the subject. It may be conventionally academic but this does not make teachers and students love art history, nor do they find it easy to reconcile the two components of the subject in terms of authentic teaching and learning experiences.

All generally educated adults tacitly participate in the artworld. This is increasingly true in communities, which must negotiate an often coercive and always saturated visual environment. This paper interrogates conventional assumptions about applications of art history in art education to innovate an artworld/lifeworld representation within the school years. The outlined strategy is authentic in terms of disciplinary models, inclusive of the learning interests of the student, and communicative in its outcomes. To satisfy the comprehensive nature of education the notion of human interest will be applied to establish

relevant lifeworld uses for art historical learning to generally educated members of the community. Artworld theory will be employed to establish art historical practice that withstands the reefs of elitism and shoals of specialization by favoring the initiation of increasingly autonomous learners into practices of art historical interpretation, interrogation and revision. An initiation into art historical practices equips individuals for recurrent percipient engagements with art.

James Curtis (2001) in a recent paper observes, "*today's college students have had more experience of the visual arts, at least in their vernacular forms, than any generation in history.*" Curtis goes on to assert that "*the ever-increasing availability of visual images has outstripped – perhaps even stunted – our students' ability to discuss them* (2001, 31)."

In art, it is paradoxical that studio practice sustains both acknowledgements of elites in the form of the gifted and talented student, while being characterized as egalitarian and inclusive through the potential for creative self-expression that is accessible to all students. Further complicating the conundrum is the parallel perception that art history is a domain fit only for the academically competent. At a colloquial level, the school subject is a kind of Janus facing in mutually opposed directions. Both teacher and student are frequently uncertain about art history. This uncertainty ranges across many different anxieties. Including, the traditional survey emphasis on chronology as opposed to contemporary thematic and case-by-case accounts and the relevance of the study of high or fine art to the general range of adolescent students. Then there are doubts about the appropriateness of particular examples as adequate representations of syllabus content and curriculum requirements. Finally, there is a teacher driven imperative to cover stipulated content contrasted with the time necessary for students to understand and become competent at "doing" art historical things. Teachers often feel that they do not know what to do with the enactive responsibilities for the students' learning. At worst, this results in the teacher endlessly grinding out material for the students to absorb and rearrange according to teacher-initiated problems, questions and, of course, tests. The teaching profession is an ageing one, with an average of 48 years of age. For many mid career teachers there is the aporia of having acquired their undergraduate art historical knowledge following very conventional and traditional models such as Kenneth Clark's *Civilisation* (1970) or Helen Gardner's *Art Through the Ages* (1926, 1948, 1987) whilst being required to teach in very differently structured paradigm. The tension that this disjunction can precipitate is palpable.

A large part of teacher uncertainty lies in the heavy reliance on examination performance as the outcome for art historical knowing. In NSW and other states, studio products are selectively displayed in exhibits such as ArtExpress or TopCATS. Art historical accomplishments in contrast, remain anonymous and subject to the proscriptions of tests. The test, or in this case HSC written paper for Visual Arts, becomes a de facto syllabus in the minds of many who see themselves at the coal face. The authority of the test is further reified for teacher, student, parent and the general public sphere by the application of marks and contribution to University Admission Indices.

Teachers are not passive in this cycle. The market, perceiving a niche opportunity has encouraged, even solicited teachers to author textbooks that are school audience specific. This phenomenon, which I shall call the "cottage text industry", does indeed address a genuinely felt need. The cottage art history text is defined by its exhibition of all or some of the following characteristics. It is written by a classroom teacher or collaborative team of teachers; produced to a price, usually between AU\$29.95 - \$39.95; is generally a paperback format using the best and most flexible devices of contemporary publishing technology. These include colour coded zones, frames, and sidebars within the page to present both a major narrative and didactic material within the one textual space. The texts represent a reliable comfort zone, with the security blanket of "looking like me." The text may contain

exercises for students, pitched at syllabus components and use the conventional vocabulary of the syllabus. The most important quality of the cottage text, however, lies not in the written material but rather in the repertoire of plates or images that punctuate the dialogue. All cottage texts are inexorably grounded in the arena of secondary sources. They have no pretension to primary research and frequently do not acknowledge the ideas of those who have made the germinal explanations of otherwise opaque images, objects eras and styles. If we were to borrow the notion put forward by Michael Apple (1986) that all actions generated by teachers are political and intended to enable teacher autonomy – even the decision not to act, then the proliferation of the school oriented art history publication becomes most interesting.

When anecdotally inquiring about the selection and use of such resources teachers will respond citing the virtues of the price range that allow the purchase of class sets. Another basis for purchase is the sense of a portable and consistent reference point which can be shared by those new to the school or the subject and those who are more experienced and in need of a starting place for revision. A personal knowledge of the author, even collegiality in the spirit of the writer is one of us and understands what it is like. However, by far the most oft and passionately cited reason goes to the use and quality of images throughout the text. These images are typically all in full colour, are of a size equal to a postcard and most importantly emphasize contemporary and current examples. Recent scrutiny of one of the texts designed to complement the new Art/Design curriculum in Singapore suggests that this is more than a local phenomenon.

The claim I make is that teachers for all manner of reasons make strategic decisions about art historical learning in the school years. Further these decisions are not comparable to the strategies initiating practical know how in the studio oriented domain of art making. Art making maintains the authenticity of the subject or at least some aspects of that field. Art history does not. The strategies brought to bear on the problematic of doing art history at school are akin to an English teacher electing to teach literature using only the *Monarch Notes Guide* published about Jane Austin's *Pride and Prejudice* rather than guiding the student through an encounter with *Pride and Prejudice* itself. Moving content to more popular and mass media culture does not resolve the dilemma as cottage texts also deal with popular and visual cultural content.

In order to make the move from "doing" the more traditional paradigm of art history, I have undertaken an analysis of historical and contemporary practices of a representative range of art historians and critics. This analysis has revealed a diversity of methods and narrative styles but one constant emerges across the gamut of idiosyncratic preoccupations. The authentic nub of the historian's work lies in the prosecutorial and revisionist nature of the hermeneutic act. Revisions arise obviously from the disclosures arising out of new, better or more complete evidence. They are also necessitated by what David Carrier (1991) has described as the "when" of art. The needs of the present audience, the position of the present investigator lead to the formulation of new interpretations which necessarily take into account the conclusions of prior inquirers before moving on. Contemporary protagonists have increasingly commenced their scrutiny from the perspective of the "other" and thus prosecuted older accounts in terms of bias, blindness and interpretive centricities.

These vigorous debates and vexatious disagreements are not so much symptoms of crisis or limitation as they are conditions of the interpretive and communicative nature of developing narratives. Arthur Danto (1964) speaks of the notion of an artworld, which he ascribed as an atmosphere of art history and theory that makes the artistic interpretation of objects and images possible. For Danto such interpretations are not the exclusive preserve of the expert and the specialist but are part of the transactions enacted by all and any that would reflect upon artistic and aesthetic material. The art historian and critic Michael

Baxandall (1985) characterizes the act of historical interpretation as an organic and messy search for the best fit regarding the actor's sense of interpretive "aboutness." Thus, an explanation is the beholder/historian thinking and generating statements about the effect, cause about the cause and about the comparison of works of art. The exhaustive categories that a historian must traverse in order to come to these conclusions have been defined by many including Danto (1964) and Carrier (1991). They are: the artwork, artist, audience and the world. A historian traverse these points over and again in the process of what Carrier (1987) dubs artwriting – the manufacture of the artifacts of narrative and explanation. These artifacts are themselves speculative and provisional rehearsing tropes and declaiming in rhetorical terms as much about the writer and their time as is revealed about the dry and distant events of that foreign country which is the past.

Two interesting contemporary art historical practitioners who have made use of Poststructural perspectives in their explanatory artifacts are Michael Ann Holly and Keith Moxey. Holly (1996) speaks of the Lacanian lens occluded by stains and mordantly observes that the stains are all that historians can access in the interest of explaining and interpreting events. Moxey notes that art history writing thrives on ambivalence (2001).

What is it about art historical practice today that is so singular and interesting? There are several qualities in particular which stand out. First, there is the emphasis on case-by-case explanations unable to be generalized into exhaustive theories of everything. Second, is a heightened awareness of the textual nature of the interpretive enterprise. This can be "text" in the linguistic sense of Saussure, or the semiotic analysis of Barthes, or the need to acknowledge the layers of textual traces that aggregate to the meanings and interpretations of objects, each of which must be taken into account and all of which, in the Foucauldian sense, might obscure even erase the object. Finally, there is a tradition of dispute, prosecution, and argument amongst historians. In recent years this has often been defined as a disciplinary crisis – I think not, it is intrinsic to the hermeneutic enterprise and part of the traditions of other branches of the humanities. The discipline of art history however, has until recently not had a strong tradition of reflection on theoretical underpinnings – such innovations emerged from the inroads made by art theory a hybrid discourse plundering strategically from linguistics, psychology, cultural and gender studies, and philosophy.

This excursion into recent art historical practice has been undertaken because it is a road less traveled by art educationists and substantially unexplored by classroom teachers. Traditionally, the art education community looks for answers to questions of relevance and authenticity within the borders of their own domain. The transaction between educational theory and teaching practice seem relatively straightforward in the domain of artmaking or studio pursuits. Yet when transacting art history or art criticism the barriers are high and deep. I have deliberately sought to go beyond the traditional borders of art education by looking for authenticity of practice and outcomes, not solely in the domain of art history and theory but also within the socially critical territory of Jürgen Habermas's writing.

The application of art historical practice to generate authentic teaching and learning encounters satisfies the need for quality learning. Equity is grounded in knowledge and human interests where the inculcation of the student into art history and theory is construed as a legitimate and fitting outcome of educational experience. The autonomy of art and the intrinsic value of art history are respected by looking to the structure and particularity of art historical knowing rather than pursuing the pedagogical tactic of shackling the value of art history to notions of visual culture, visual literacy or other instrumental interpretations. By providing students with systematic concepts and practical strategies for active participation the individual knower is capable of moving in an informed, even shrewd way from passive to active artworld player beyond the school years.

I am firmly committed to the view that inculcation of these prospective values is at the core of the art educational process, enacted when initiating students into experiences in the visual arts. The conventional focus in the process of artistic initiation is on those making activities arising from the practical domain of the studio. Yet, post-school, the overwhelming numbers of individuals who embrace the arts do so not through studio practice but through engagement with activities that are nominally theoretically grounded. Such engagement may include reading the arts pages in newspapers, visiting museums and gallery displays, making an aesthetically informed decision regarding a purchase of home wares, clothing or design, including a cultural experience in a holiday destination, or watching an arts program on television.

The concern of this paper is with art history — an orphan child of the art educational domain. Art history in the United States has had an uneven and checkered existence as confirmed by Kern (1987) in his discussion of art history as a domain within antecedent DBAE models. The situation in the NSW educational systems is similar. Historical study of artworks has been part of the public education curriculum in NSW since 1911. The 1960s initiated a period of comprehensive curriculum reform in Australian schools that resulted in changes in the way the subject was taught and examined. These changes enhanced the standing of art but brought no comparable advances in art historical content. Part of the disjunction springs from the already signaled common assumption that while the making of art is for everyone, art history is best regarded as the pursuit of an elite, academically able few. Yet the study of history throughout the curriculum, together with an introduction to the literature and art of the past, are for many a fundamental part of a general education agenda. Therefore, I propose, an alternative interpretation, which favors the initiation of the student into the milieu of generally educated adults who are capable of accessing the arts in personally relevant ways to enhance and inform life decisions. The challenge becomes how best to initiate the emergent adult into this domain.

A number of academics have articulated the cause of the generally educated adult knower. John Dewey (1916, 1934, 1938) and Harry S. Broudy (1972, 1988) are but two notable advocates. In respect of the art-historical domain I have been drawn to the virtues of what Arthur Danto (1964) has termed the "artworld." While the concept of an artworld is not without problems, it has some virtues, particularly in educational contexts. A particularly appealing aspect is Danto's notion of the interpretive force of artworks. He defines this quality as the "IS" of artistic identification. This concept requires the artist and audience to see the artwork "as evocative of something else." Interpretations accumulate around the work with each prior reading enriching and extending its meaning and significance. Thus, for example an Anselm Kiefer painting is an evocation of German philosophy and history rendered poignantly in the present and drawing the audience to introspection about the Western tradition. The artworld as configured by Danto constitutes a complete and exhaustive conceptual framework for accessing objects and images interpretively. Danto conceives of the roles and relationships of the artist, and audience, the nature of the artwork and the influence of the world.

Art educators frequently advocate the benefits of the arts for all students not just for the gifted. This advocacy requires a model for curriculum that acknowledges that the majority will go on in their lives without further active engagement in studio-oriented pursuits. The pursuit of equity requires curriculum to address the stereotype of art history as an experience designed for an elite of gifted and talented individuals. The inculcation of a general capability and informed attitude toward both the art of one's own era and the art of the past in one's own and other cultures is a significant educational objective. The arts are important to the development of a rich personal lifeworld; they also contribute, together with other experiences, to an individual's ability to articulate the significance of personal lifeworld values to others.

Art history is all too often taught without acknowledgement of the art historian's practice: facts are learned and examined but the artifactuality of the art historian's body of work is unacknowledged. Educationally, texts are quarried for learnable facts or filtered through school cottage textbooks that synopsise arguments in a descriptive and uninterrogated manner. The reader of an historical work is an audience. The reader is responsive to the art historian's historical artifact, which acts as an interpretation and assessment of artistic actions. For these experiences to form an integral and active part of the art educational activities of the school years is to develop recurrent percipient engagements with the content and concerns of the artworld. The engagements constitute a network funding the growth of prospective values. Initiating an increasingly astute perception of, imaginative response to and sympathetic understanding of art fosters prospective values or sense of art history within the domain of art. These three qualities are reflected in the three kinds of knowledge posited by Habermas. In the model at hand, set out in Figure 1, they are represented as learning outcomes.

Habermas has advanced a theory of knowledge couched in terms of a tripartite analysis of human interests. The knowledge kinds are technical, practical, and critical. Thus, it is arguable that understanding of conventions and traditions is a prerequisite to the initiation of informed and meaningful revision. The application of a theory of knowledge constituted as human-interest addresses the need for equity in terms of its capacity to develop communicative and interpretive skills. One of the important qualities of the artworld model is its authentic representation of the practices and processes of the visual arts as a domain of the humanities and of art history as it nests within that domain. The representation of this model is coherent with normal or agreed art practices as seen in Figure 1. The expansive nature of the artworld is represented in Figure 1 by the intersection of column 3 and row 3. This engagement allows an informed knower to analyse new or opposing theories and add them to the artworld construct and to account for innovations or revisions by agents of the discipline. New kinds of artworks can be understood using the category of the artwork together with the characteristics of technical kinds of knowledge. The reciprocal roles of artists and audiences can be grasped both conceptually (knowing that) and as performances (knowing how). The latter is an important distinction from other models where art history is learned as an accumulation of facts that are the subject of term papers or examination questions. In contrast, students do not learn how to paint by accumulating and regurgitating facts about painting techniques, rather these techniques are identified in the artifacts of artistic action and learned performatively through the student's own efforts. Student and artist become conceptually united through a shared experience of dealing with artistic problems. The student resolution may lack the sophisticated facility of the professional but it is nonetheless identifiably an artwork.

In this paper, the significance of an artworld approach to art history in the school years is argued as providing a synthetic mechanism enabling teachers to break out of traditional or conventional educational appropriations of art history. Art history is neither quarantined as a domain or discipline, nor reduced to a means/end educational transaction. Further, artworld knowledge facilitates non-linear teaching/learning strategies as represented by the categorical sets defined in the matrix representation of the model. The learned concepts, performances and values can be authentic and rigorous, capable of generalization into the associative and interpretive repertoire of lifeworld contexts in the interests of contributing to the individual's conception of art education's promotion of an enhanced quality of life.

	ARTWORK Technical Knowledge	ARTIST-AUDIENCE Practical Knowledge	ARTWORLD Critical Knowledge
ARTWORK Technical Knowledge	1.1 An artwork is an irreducible, factual, innovatory object. Artworks are made & explained historically as physical objects displaying technical control over objectified processes.	2.1 Artistic identification constitutes & unites artworks while differentiating them from real things. Artists-audiences historically interpret artworks & generate theories warranting theoretical/empirical conjectures & refutations.	3.1 Artworld theories reveal new features of accepted artworks sustaining different explanatory accounts. Artworld theories of artworks are technical concepts grasped descriptively to mediate conjectures & refutations.
ARTIST-AUDIENCE Practical Knowledge	1.2 Artists constitute & audiences recognize artworks by identifying their physical properties as meanings. Historically artistic identification interprets & explains perceptions of cultural meanings.	2. Artworks are new forms made by artists.  Audiences identify & apprehend artworks historically. Artists-audiences inter-subjectively negotiate exchanges between worlds of the artwork interpretively understood as meanings.	3.2 Artists make artistic decisions using an artworld atmosphere of theories & history. Audiences use theories to understand images as art. Theoretical artworld knowledge is mediated by experience & tradition.
ARTWORLD Critical Knowledge	1.3 Theories take artworks to the artworld discerning them from real things. Art historical explanations integrate art theories & the artworld recognized in balanced explanations of artworks.	2.3 The artworld shapes innovation. Artists-audiences learn more of the artworld to enrich experience of it. Artworld knowledge generates unity & reason in interpreted cultural explanations.	3.3 Art historical explanation requires an artworld understanding of artistic theories & knowledge of art history. Autonomous artworld understanding self-reflectively pursues an independent interest in further knowledge.

Figure 1. A model for art history within art education

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