Counting (Art and Discipline)

Bill Brown

One

> The work of art is an ostentatiously improbable occurrence.
>
> —Niklas Luhmann

My title, "Counting," is not meant to caption the phenomenon that sounds like this: 103,002 divided by 6 is 17,167. It is meant to caption a phenomenon that sounds more interrogative: How exactly am I supposed to count that? Are we expected to count *that* the way we count *this?* Should you really count those?

For the moment, my mise-en-scène situates a relatively well-dressed dean (the requisite tweed, but a skinny striped tie) in a relatively well-appointed office (mahogany veneer) where two large black portfolios sit on a kind of credenza. There too sits a red three-ring binder containing fifteen sheets of slides, accompanied by one CD, and a slim folder of short but spirited reviews. This is work that needs to be evaluated in some relation to—and on the same grounds as—a cluster of articles on Aristotelian ethics in the medieval world, a monograph on Italian futurism and Italian film, and a study of experimentation, scientific and literary, in the English eighteenth century. Here, in this scene, the incommensurability of the practice of what we call scholarship and the practice of what we call art becomes abruptly conspicuous and demands to be overcome. It must be overcome within the political economy of higher education, wherein, of course, answering the question of what counts and *how* it counts turns into the sound of that other counting: assigning value in contractual, numerical terms—conferring an appointment, a promotion, tenure, a housing allowance, a raise, a research and travel account, one or two semesters of leave, technological support, better space.

Crude as the scene may be, it is where, as Harry Harootunian puts it, departments and disciplines are pitted against one another in a zero-sum game, where the transgressions called theory and interdisciplinarity have come under siege, where the humanities has begun to chant its rediscovery

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of the love of literature, and where departments (say, Slavic literature or Italian studies) can disappear into other departments (say, foreign literature), all subject to the cartographic drive that is inseparable from the increasingly "managerialized and instrumentalized world of universities and colleges, progressively being emptied out of any respect for the intellectual life and its social necessity."[1] Within this scene, the arts don't appear only as a familiar problem (should I count this the way I count that?) but also, at times, as a solution, fetishized for their authenticity and purity and capacity to transcend the murkiness of the humanities in the opening decade of the twenty-first century—as though the art of fiction, say, really were an exact science, as Henry James hoped his readers would believe.

But even as the problem of the arts *within* the humanities can suddenly reappear as the (relatively cheap) solution to the problem *of* the humanities, the discrepancy between evaluative systems persists as an aggravation, compounded by the externality of art's scene of judgment—the autonomy of that scene not from society and the market but from the university. Not since Gustave Courbet, Édouard Manet, and others flipped a big bird at the Académie, and certainly not since Clement Greenberg designated academic art kitsch or John Dewey considered the unexperimental artist "a poor or good academician," has the academy (including the art academy) been the scene for adjudicating what counts as interesting art or original art or important art.[2] Which is to say: what counts as art. It is no system of education but, rather, the art system that is, in anachronistic parlance, the decider. The art system, with its various market mediations and fluctuations, its collectors and critics, its gallery proprietors and its curators, its magazines and its biennial circuit, confers status on artworks and artists.

1. Harry Harootunian, "Theory's Empire: Reflections on a Vocation for *Critical Inquiry,*" *Critical Inquiry* 30 (Winter 2004): 397. I should note, though, that "interdisciplinarity" is often the only banner that attracts attention from deans, provosts, and external funding institutions; it is hard to imagine writing a grant proposal on behalf of history as this discipline has been traditionally conceived and pursued.

2. John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (1934; Harmondsworth, 2005), p. 149; hereafter abbreviated *AE.*

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The university should feel pretty confident about the professional trajectory of a Dostoevsky scholar or a philosopher of mind or a historian of science because that trajectory depends on, and occurs within, the university system. But a decade from now, a certain video artist's art may have stopped counting at all, as art, and the university will have played no role in the conclusion. Half a decade from now, should that installation artist's work really count, as art, well, then, he or she is likely to live his or her life beyond the university. (Indeed, an artist's dependence on the university would seem to mark a devolutionary tale: the return to a kind of patronage.) This is why the dean would rather appoint an artist for a three-year term—as a lecturer or an instructor or an adjunct assistant professor, as something (someone) somewhere off the tenure track. Still, to stabilize the program and, say, to make the arts *count* (everyone knows they should count), the dean recognizes that the artist should be more ideally integrated.

Imagine the dean looking for guidance when it comes to assessing the assessments of a painter, trying to locate some stable ground of adjudication, involuntarily recalling the antinomy of taste, and knowing full well, from Michael Fried, that the stakes are high; for "unless something compels conviction as to its quality it is no more than trivially or nominally a painting."[3] Shit: not even painting. And everyone knows that if it's not painting it's . . . well . . . decoration. Yet Stephen Melville reports that the capacity for painting to assert itself as painting "depends upon an internal detachment that makes its departure from itself a dimension of its achievement," which threatens to mean that just when painting almost isn't painting it most augustly is.[4] The dean has come across Melville's essay, "Counting/as/Painting," published as the introduction to the catalogue that accompanied "As Painting," an exhibition at the Wexner Center for the Arts. "If painting finds itself most fully only where it is most deeply in question," Melville writes (the depth of the question here being posed by minimalism), "it is just here that one might expect to find whatever measuring or discovery of itself painting is yet capable of. It is this work of

3. Michael Fried, "Art and Objecthood," *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews* (Chicago, 1998), p. 169. To preserve the clarity of my caricature I'm suppressing the fact that a scholar and critic like Fried can make an artist's career and the fact that artists themselves (along with curators, collectors, and gallery proprietors) are increasingly asking academics to write about their work—to contribute to exhibition catalogues, for instance. The rise of the professional critic within the university system as tacit arbiter of what counts means that the university can be said to play a role in such counting, but that role remains minor.

4. Stephen Melville, "Counting/as/Painting," in *As Painting: Division and Displacement*, ed. Philip Armstrong, Laura Libson, and Melville (exhibition catalog, Wexner Center for the Arts, Cambridge, Mass., 12 May–12 Aug. 2001), p. 23; hereafter abbreviated "C."

measuring or discovery that determines what counts as painting" ("C," p. 3). We measure painting by measuring how it measures itself. The question of counting can begin to sound like a spiritual, not an epistemological, endeavor, riddled by the logic of faith: "painting counts as painting. It has always done so" ("C," p. 21). As Melville himself says, the strong criticism that engaged the "'breakthroughs'" of American postwar abstraction was "neither description nor interpretation but something closer to evocation" ("C," p. 4). You remember: the stuff about grace.

All this may simply testify to what Robert Post, in this issue, calls the "charismatic authority" that artists have over and against scholars.[5] But the dean's problem is, first, that he wants to house these charismatic authorities in close proximity to scholars and, second, that charisma can run out. Such authority seems singularly unstable, complicated by the perpetual *fort/da* wherein art violates the very boundaries it asserts, by the fact that some negation of the negation can always allow the passé an apparent return, by the fact that the art system—the institution named Art—aggressively stabilizes its perpetuity through all kinds of destabilizing processes. From outside the system it was argued (circa 1970) that the infinite formal possibilities newly available to artists spelled the likely end both of "authentic creation" and of aesthetic theory ("in the sense in which aesthetic theory existed from Kant to Adorno").[6] And yet, in the Luhmanian account, "the end of art, the impossibility of art, the final sellout of all possible forms assumes a form that claims to be self-description and artwork at once, and this secures the reproduction of art as a perfectly autonomous system, a system that includes its own negation."[7] Whether or not you're willing to sign off on this adeptly and aggressively rendered portrait of autonomy, it helps to debunk that too-breezy Baudrillardian account of a transaestheticized world that marks the very end of art (yet again), just as it helps to clarify the problem that the disciplined university has with, say, art's constitutive insurgency.[8]

Today's best-known philosopher of aesthetics says that "disciplinary thought says: we have our territory, our objects and the methods which

5. Robert Post, "Debating Disciplinarity," p. 761.

6. Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Michael Shaw (Minneapolis, 1984), p. 94. But see also his rejection of the renunciation of aesthetic theory, p. 105 n. 2.

7. Niklas Luhmann, *Art as a Social System*, trans. Eva M. Knodt (Stanford, Calif., 2000), pp. 296–97.

8. See Jean Baudrillard, *The Conspiracy of Art*, trans. Ames Hodges (Cambridge, Mass., 2005), p. 105. For a brief history of the end of art, from Hegel to the present, see Hal Foster, *Design and Crime and Other Diatribes* (New York, 2002), pp. 123–26.

correspond to them."[9] Art says: we experiment with new methods to produce new objects and new scenes. Disciplines constitute objects (society, culture, and so on), disciplines study objects, and disciplines explain objects. Art simply makes them: *Green Boxes*, *Floor Burgers*, *Corner Plots*. Disciplines change, of course, but not by changing the protocols by which to generate or measure knowledge-effects. Art today doesn't know what, tomorrow, its territory and methods and protocols of assessment will be. The temporality of insurgence within the art system outstrips the temporality of change within disciplines. (Within the art system, deconstruction, discourse analysis, microhistory, New Historicism—these would have passed in a flash.) Though some critics and curators project and promote "'one true art world,'" unified by a "shared vocabulary of forms, methods, and references," Larry Rinder (among others), currently the director of the Berkeley Museum and Pacific Film Archive (and previously serving as the dean of the California College of the Arts, and as the curator of contemporary art at the Whitney) urges any new generation of artists "to resist the narcotic allure of the 'one true art world,'" to imagine "not one but countless diverse and dynamic art worlds"; he encourages students "to confound expectations, make your own rules, make your own institutions."[10] It seems as though Art, in relation to the disciplines of art, should have the same character as aesthetics, as Jacques Rancière has described it: an interdisciplinary character that exposes the arbitrariness of what the disciplines regard as given.[11] How can the practice of confounding expectations and making your own institution inhabit that institution, the university, which is so already made, made on the grounds of rules and expectations? Boris Groys is willing to assert that "all good art always was and still is made against any kind of rules put forth by education."[12]

Two

I don't know where I end
And where you begin
I need your discipline

—Nine Inch Nails

9. Jacques Rancière, "Thinking between Disciplines: An Aesthetics of Knowledge," trans. Jon Roffe, *Parrhesia* 1 (2006): 11.

10. Lawrence Rinder, "One True Art World," in *For Real* (exhibition catalog, Hyde Park Art Center, Chicago, 29 Jan.–26 Mar. 2006), pp. 15, 17.

11. See Rancière, "Thinking between Disciplines," p. 8.

12. Boris Groys, *Art Power* (Cambridge, Mass., 2008), p. 7.

It is hardly surprising that art institutions themselves face a cartographic challenge: the challenge to describe and manifest the programs that will count, the institutional territories where young artists can realize their unruly ambitions. At the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, the program in designed objects is differentiated from the programs in ceramics, sculpture, and fiber and material studies. Yet the program in sculptural practices brings those programs together, along with fashion design, to produce "an area of interdisciplinary study which focuses on material practices, mediated and performative objects, spatial bodies and moving materials bridging historical and contemporary material practice with time-based, digital, installation, and public art/community-based work. . . . These relationships are motivated by a need to respond to the complex ways in which artists think and art is made today."[13] Complex indeed, if not manifesting that slippage between creativity and insanity that generally goes by the name Artaud, and certainly making the interdisciplinarity between humanistic disciplines (say, philosophy and literature or history and political science) look rather like a Sunday ad insert, meant to satisfy prepackaged desires.[14]

In Canada, where the provincial and national governments support the arts to a degree that should shame the U.S., the effort to be maximally inclusive has come to provoke a kind of administrative vertigo. If you were applying for a grant from the Canada Council for the Arts, you'd find on the website, among the first of the Frequently Asked Questions, one that draws attention to this question of discipline, to that issue of territorial counting: What art counts as what kind of practice? Where do I as an artist belong? "How can I tell the difference between a disciplinary art form (such as theatre) and an inter-arts practice (such as interdisciplinary work or a new artistic practice)?" The answer to this FAQ needs to be read in the spirit of anxiety with which an applicant no doubt encounters it:

13. School of the Art Institute of Chicago, "Sculptural Practices," www.saic.edu/degrees_resources/departments/areas_focus/#sculpt_pract

14. This disciplinary flux resembles not the humanities but the sciences, within which one is inclined to speak of fields rather than disciplines; certain fields—bacteriology, nuclear physics—all but suffer the fate of alchemy only to return again, decades later, with renewed force. To imagine the humanities confronting a new field on the order of genomics—thriving with unbridled energy since the completion of the Human Genome Project in 2003—we would have to imagine something like the discovery of another territory between Canada and the continental United States, four midsized nation-states, each with a complex cultural, literary, and aboriginal history, giving scholars years and years of objects and texts to study. That said, it's nonetheless important to register new media as a new field within a variety of disciplines: literature, history, anthropology, and so on.

> Consult the information sheet for the discipline closest to your project and compare it with the Inter-Arts Program. If your project is eligible under an existing grant program of the Canada Council, it is not eligible under the Inter-Arts Program (with the exception of performance art, which is also eligible under certain programs in the Visual Arts Section). Note that interdisciplinary work projects, by definition, integrate distinct art forms (not just juxtapose them) and transform them into a new form of disciplinary practice. . . . If you still have questions, send a one-page summary of your project (maximum of 300 words) to the Inter-Arts Coordinator well before the competition deadline.[15]

A "new form of disciplinary practice" becomes fundable as something other than a "disciplinary art form." The struggle here is to fit a language of disciplinary practice, imported from the academy, to the kind of thing that disciplines don't gauge but which must be gauged for administrative reasons. The language of practice doesn't square with the language of form.

In its ongoing effort to "better serve artists, arts audiences, the arts as a whole, and Canadian society"—or, say, its effort to respond (in Rinder's terms) to those diverse art worlds inhabited by artists who "confound expectations, make [their] own rules, [and] make [their] own institutions"—the council has recoded and cross-coded the territory between or beyond art disciplines to the point where the funding institution gives up altogether, at times, on the term *disciplinarity.* A report commissioned by the Multidisciplinary Workgroup of the Council explains the "recurring need for the Council to be even more flexible and inclusive regarding funding for interdisciplinary work (defined as work that 'integrates and transforms distinct art forms'), and multidisciplinary arts (implying 'the associative presence of more than one discipline that are combined, but not integrated')." The report itself deploys "the term 'multi-arts' in order to capture the full range of activities currently being examined, without referring to disciplinarity as a defining feature."[16]

Nonetheless, such institutional efforts to accommodate and encourage

15. Canada Council of the Arts/Conseil des Arts du Canada, "Frequently Asked Questions," www.canadacouncil.ca/help/faq/default.htm#Question1_6

16. Rachael Van Fossen, "Opening up Space: Toward an Expansive Vision for Multidisciplinary Arts in Canada," www.canadacouncil.ca/publications_e/research/art_disciplines_sect/dh128290817209386927.htm. One has to imagine such a problem being exacerbated by PhD programs in creative writing and in studio art. On the latter, see James Elkins, "Theoretical Remarks on Combined Creative and Scholarly PhD Degrees in the Visual Arts," *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 38 (Winter 2004): 22–31. See also Raphael Rubinstein et al., "Art Schools: A Group Crit," *Art in America* 92 (May 2007): 99–113.

the indiscipline of art have not evolved without a competing will to disciplinarity: the effort to vitalize, by clearly organizing, the arts curriculum. Particularly well known and well funded, Discipline-Based Art Education (DBAE), a programming plan that was formalized in the early 1980s by the Getty Center for Arts Education, has been put into practice across the U.S., in Australia, and in Asia. This effort to reconceptualize art education diminishes work in the studio to just one component of a program where students learn to understand, critique, and enjoy the arts and thus where they can thrive without much artistic talent. Adaptable to any educational level but implemented foremost in elementary and secondary education, DBAE organizes four different "parent disciplines" into one curriculum: art production, where students learn studio techniques for producing their own work; art history, where they study both the formal features of artworks and their cultural contexts; art criticism, where they "describe, interpret, evaluate, theorize and judge the properties and qualities of the visual form, for the purpose of understanding and appreciating works of art and understanding the roles of art in society"; and aesthetics, where students study the more general nature and value of art.[17]

Whether or not DBAE will come to be regarded "as one of the most important contributions to twentieth century American art education," as Peter Smith argues,[18] even critics of the program, such as Jerome Hausman, recognize the economic and evaluative pressures to which the program responded, making arts education count as education by making the outcome of its objectives countable when "terms such as 'basics,' 'accountability,' 'learning outcomes,' and 'school management' are in vogue." School districts were encouraged to establish specific goals, which the art program would achieve through a sequential curriculum and regular evaluation. "For many," Hausman understands, "the stability being sought is to be found in clearly defined 'disciplines' and specified competencies and outcomes."[19] Disciplinary clarity appears as the mode for attaining respectability, for showing how art counts.

17. "Discipline-Based Art Education," aco.artsnet.org/Portals/10/documents/Educational_Theories_2004/1-4_Discipline-Based_Art_Education.pdf. For a bibliography for 1982–1998, see Ralph A. Smith, "The DBAE Literature Project," www.arteducators.org/olc/filelib/NAEA/cpages/9002/Library/DBAEBIBL1.pdf. And see the proceedings from a 1987 conference at the Getty Center for Education in the Arts, *Discipline-Based Art Education: What Forms Will It Take?* (Santa Monica, Calif., 1988), and Stephen M. Dobbs, *The DBAE Handbook: An Overview of Discipline-Based Art Education* (Santa Monica, Calif., 1992).

18. Peter Smith, *The History of American Art Education: Learning about Art in American Schools* (Westport, Conn., 1996), p. 214.

19. Jerome J. Hausman, "Another View of Discipline-Based Art Education," *Art Education* 40 (Jan. 1987): 56.

But during the 1980s—a decade when some university disciplines seemed on the verge of implosion—objections to DBAE and to its disciplinary focus were frequent and far-ranging. As Dennis Fehr went on to report, DBAE provoked a kind of "postmodern ambivalence"; it could be characterized as elitist, given that connoisseurship has been a mode of marking distinction (in Bourdieu's sense), but also as populist, given that the program intended to democratize the access and appreciation of art, to provide cultural capital to the masses (at which point, of course, it couldn't count as capital).[20] And though the implementation of the program in Taiwan and Australia incorporated indigenous cultural materials, DBAE was charged with being necessarily conservative and Eurocentric, given that three of its disciplines (art history, art criticism, and aesthetics) are Western and therefore, the argument ran, inappropriate for investigating non-Western cultures. The Getty DBAE conference in 1987 included a keynote address from William Bennett—arguing that "'the arts are an essential element of education, *just like* reading, writing, and arithmetic,'" and that the study of great works of art teaches "the breadth and depth and complexity of human nature"—which couldn't help but make disciplined-based arts education appear as a capitulation to the neoconservative agenda.[21] As for the disciplines themselves, even as one critic argued that an arts education should also include "psychology, philosophy, history, literature, science—indeed, the full range of our human knowledge" (making art something like the master term under which all disciplines might be organized)—another critic argued that the goals of DBAE, while enabling it to resemble other fields (via standardization, quantitative assessment, and accountability), compromised any serious effort to nurture a student's imagination and personal creativity.[22] Moreover, one Australian ethnographer, studying two artists who taught within a DBAE program, discovered that despite their descriptions of what they were doing, both were breaking all the rules (which is not to say that they

20. Dennis E. Fehr, "Promise and Paradox: Art Education in the Postmodern Arena," *Studies in Art Education* 35 (Summer 1994): 214.

21. William J. Bennett, "Address to the Getty Center Conference on Art Education," in *Discipline-Based Art Education*, pp. 32, 38.

22. Hausman, "Another View of Discipline-Based Education," p. 58; quoted in Elliot W. Eisner, "Discipline-Based Art Education: Its Criticisms and Its Critics," *Art Education* 41 (Nov. 1988): 13. See David K. Holt, "Post-Modernism vs. High-Modernism: The Relationship to D.B.A.E. and Its Critics," *Art Education* 43 (Mar. 1990): 46. For Eisner's general outline of the initiative, see Eisner, *The Role of Discipline-Based Art Education in America's Schools* (Los Angeles, 1988).

weren't teaching successfully).[23] Disciplined they may be in theory; not so in practice.

Three

Among those critics who judged DBAE to be elitist, formalist, and essentialist, Vincent Lanier suggested an alternative program, grounded in an aesthetic response theory derived from Dewey's pragmatism. Arguing that the engagement with art should be understood as one among many aesthetic experiences, he promoted egalitarianism and contextualism within a curriculum requiring just a single discipline—aesthetics—designated as the study of the nature of aesthetic response: to paintings but also, say, to billboards. Student inquiry would be viewer-oriented, not object-oriented, with art history and art criticism playing subordinate, indeed peripheral roles.[24]

The importance of art within Dewey's earlier educational theory, coupled with the status and function of art in his major work on experience, made him an important resource for challenging a newly disciplined arts education program, just as it makes him a conspicuous source for considering art's place within the university, if not, alas, a font of administrative clarity for the dean. Helen Mirra's indexing project at the University of Chicago, *Instance the Determination*, makes use of two source texts, one of which, Dewey's *Experience and Nature* (1925), became part of a trilogy that includes *Art as Experience* (1934) and *Experience and Education* (1938). In *Art as Experience*, Dewey quotes from the prior book, from his chapter on "Experience, Nature, and Art," where he had arrived at the conclusion that science is a "handmaiden" in art's service. Reiterated, the point becomes more precise: "Although recognition of the fact still halts, because of traditions established before the power of art was adequately recognized, science itself is but a central art auxiliary to the generation and utilization of other arts" (*AE,* p. 26).[25] Of course it is Dewey himself (with considerable energy derived from Friedrich Schiller and Percy Bysshe Shelley) who offers the adequate recognition of art's power—a power that, I will come to argue, Mirra's installation of *les mots trouvés* means to wield.

Most simply put, this power derives from art's capacity to alter the human sensorium, as Benjamin might put it, enabling us to experience experience—experience having become for Dewey, as for Martin Buber

23. See Judith Carroll, "An Ethnographic Study of Art as a Discipline Concealed in the Beliefs and Practices of Two Artists," www.aare.edu.au/00pap/car00094.htm

24. See Vincent Lanier, "ART, a Friendly Alternative to DBAE," *Art Education* 40 (Sept. 1987): 46–52.

25. See John Dewey, *Experience and Nature* (La Salle, Ill., 1958), p. 290.

and Martin Heidegger, Theodore Adorno and Benjamin, a crucial concept with which to apprehend modernity, or, in Dewey's parlance, contemporary American society.[26] Dewey's recognition and elaboration of this capacity depends on debunking various traditions, on effacing boundaries and eradicating differences of the sort on which the disciplines depend (anthropology distinguishing itself from cultural studies, history distinguishing itself from New Historicism, art history distinguishing itself from visual studies, and so on). It depends on projecting new horizons of art, on redistributing the aesthetic among various objects and subjects, and on fathoming an eventfulness wherein subjects and objects no longer make sense as discrete entities. It is hardly surprising that, even as artists found Dewey's aesthetics an intriguing inspiration, the discipline of philosophy, disciplined by successive paradigms of analytical philosophy, found the book a "hodgepodge of conflicting methods and undisciplined speculations."[27]

But the speculations are not passively "undisciplined." They actively work to challenge discipline—*discipline* understood not as instruction but as a regime for maintaining the distinction of one sphere of knowledge. First and foremost, though, Dewey challenges the image of art's autonomy. Although "the *idea* of art as a conscious idea" is "the greatest intellectual achievement in the history of humanity," a "philosophy of the fine arts" has the responsibility of effacing the boundary lines that have produced the "fine arts" to begin with, of working against the history (effected by *l'art pour l'art*, as by museums, for instance) that has generated "the compartmental conception of fine art," and of "restor[ing] continuity between the refined and intensified forms of experience that are works of art and the everyday events, doings, and sufferings that are universally recognized to constitute experience" (*AE,* pp. 26, 6, 2). Such a philosophy can have no truck with such familiar oppositions as the art/science binary, for successful science depends on creative intelligence, and the artist thinks no less intently than the scientific inquirer. The pressure—to break down the

26. Martin Jay points to the rapport between American pragmatism and critical theory when it comes to describing the crisis of experience perpetrated by modernity. See Martin Jay, *Songs of Experience: Modern American and European Variations on a Universal Theme* (Berkeley, 2005), chaps. 4 and 7. One could argue that the famous distinction in the German tradition between *Erlebnis* and *Erfahrung* appears in *Art as Experience* as the distinction between experience and an experience, although the former distinction assumes different valences in different texts.

27. Arnold Izenberg, "Analytical Philosophy and the Study of Art" (1950), *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 46 (1987): 128. For Dewey's influence on artists, see, for instance, Maurice R. Berube, *Eminent Educators: Studies in Intellectual Influence* (Westport, Conn., 2000), chap. 3, "John Dewey and the Abstract Expressionists."

wall distinguishing art from other modes of thought—comes from both sides. On the one side, art "probably demands more intelligence" than the "so-called thinking" of "'intellectuals'" (*AE,* p. 47). On the other, "the thinker has his esthetic moment when his ideas cease to be mere ideas and become the corporate meanings of objects" (*AE,* p. 14). Difficult as it can sometimes be to keep a handle on the specificity of art in Dewey's thinking, he continues to assert it, claiming, for instance, that art transforms knowledge into "something more than knowledge because it is merged with non-intellectual elements to form an experience worthwhile as an experience" (*AE,* p. 302).

As the title of his book proclaims, it is this concept of experience that Dewey deploys to rethink aesthetics, and it is the concept with which he breaks down the distinction between art and everyday life. For there can be an aesthetics of the everyday, and art is a quality that *can* saturate experience, that in fact does characterize our experience whenever we are able to pause and differentiate *an* experience from experience *tout court*. "Experience in the degree to which it *is* experience is heightened vitality," signifying "active and alert commerce with the world," ultimately the "complete interpenetration of self and the world of objects and events" (*AE,* p. 18). A completed game, an exceptional meal, a resolved argument: each of these can attain the status of being *an* experience. In general, though, experience—the "general stream of experience"—is too "dispersed" and "miscellaneous" to grant us *an* experience: things happen, they start and cease, without genuinely beginning or concluding, and without the form, the rhythm, or the intensity of *an* experience (*AE,* pp. 37, 46). The general, mushy kind of experience is what Dewey designates as "anesthetic" (*AE,* p. 41).[28] The role of art, then, is to expose this "anesthetic" quality of life and thus to provoke new economic, social, and political conditions that would grant everyone access to aesthetic experience—that is, to art within the everyday.

Dewey's understanding of art encompasses not just El Greco and Matisse but also traditional folk art, crafts, jazz, comics, and so on. More fundamentally, though, art can't be identified in or through any object or objects at all, for the artwork isn't an object but the experience of it, the beholder's re-creation of it (see *AE,* p. 56). This amounts to a phenomenological ontology: art *is* the experience of art. And Dewey's apprehension of such an ontology concludes by undoing yet another distinction, be-

28. For a productive, intensifying complement to this notion in the work of Benjamin and Adorno, see Susan Buck-Morss, "Aesthetics and Anaesthetics: Walter Benjamin's Artwork Essay Reconsidered," *October,* no. 62 (Autumn 1992): 3–41.

tween subject and object. Whereas philosophers, not least those who work in the field of aesthetics, are "perpetually haunted by the difference between self and the world," the "uniquely distinguishing feature of esthetic experience is exactly the fact that no such distinction of self and object exists in it, since it is esthetic in the degree to which organism and environment coöperate to institute an experience in which the two are so fully integrated that each disappears" (*AE,* p. 259).[29]

Throughout *Art as Experience* Dewey runs the risk of being not simply "undisciplined" but tautological: the experience that art *is* discloses the fact that art *is* experience. And determining precisely what is and isn't art, what is and isn't experience, can prove futile; such precision would capitulate to the compartmentalized thinking that Dewey means to disrupt. He runs such risks on behalf of a far-reaching agenda. The book was originally a series of lectures, the inaugural William James lectures at Harvard in 1932. In a year of unprecedented economic confusion and social fragility, Dewey chose to speak about art, venturing fully into the field of aesthetics but not without arguing on behalf of art as an essential response to social crisis—as, indeed, a mode of apprehending crisis and the depth of its ramifications in our psychic and social lives. He imagines that some animated (or reanimated) creative intelligence could unsettle the conceptual blockage made apparent by the papers every day. Appreciating Plato's commitment to censoring poetry and music because this marks the social and political influence that the arts once had, he laments the subsequent "isolation of art," considering it a symptom of the "incoherence" of modern American civilization. And as for philosophy in the twentieth century, the "philosophy of art is sterilized unless it makes us aware of the function of art in relation to other modes of experience, and unless it indicates why this function is so inadequately realized, and unless it suggests the conditions under which the office would be successfully performed" (*AE,* p. 10).

29. My exposition of Dewey elides some obvious problems, not least whether today's art would count as art in his book. More saliently, his appreciation of the aesthetics of the everyday makes no mention of the active (engineered) aestheticization of commodities, politics, social forms, and so on, no mention of what came to be called the culture industry, and no mention of the dangers of the total artwork. Buck-Morss says of the Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk,* "The goal is manipulation of the synaesthetic system by control of environmental stimuli. It has the effect of anaestheticizing the organism, not through numbing, but through flooding the senses" (Buck-Morss, "Aesthetics and Anaesthetics," pp. 22–23). Similarly, it is difficult to know how to deploy his insights in an era when "experience" has become such a hackneyed marketing term: a massage, a meal, a trip to Disney World, a new cell phone—each appears as "an experience" just waiting for you. In Hal Foster's words, ours is an "era of blurred disciplines, of objects treated as mini-subjects, of total design" (Foster, *Design and Crime and Other Diatribes,* p. 14). This is only to say that *Art as Experience* would require some serious updating to feel like a forceful argument in the twenty-first century.

Art may not have a purpose, but it does have a function. Because art "is the most direct and complete manifestation there is of experience *as* experience," exemplifying "what experience itself is in its very movement and structure," philosophy as such must turn to art to "understand what experience is," and we must learn from art about the human "hunger" for experience and come to acknowledge that "the values that lead to the production and intelligent appreciation of art" need to be "incorporated into the system of social relationships" (*AE,* pp. 309, 293, 358).

Thus, though he recognizes that "we are repelled by any suggestion of teaching and learning in connection with art," Dewey considers art to be an "incomparable organ of instruction" (*AE,* p. 361). The problem lies not with the educative capacities of art but with our idea of education, which "proceeds by methods so literal as to exclude the imagination," never "touching the desires and emotions of men" (*AE,* p. 361). Art grants us access to "meanings that transcend indurated habit" (*AE,* p. 362). Dewey is not concerned with the teaching of art but with what art can teach, residing between disciplines or serving as a transdiscipline; the point is not that we need to know history, philosophy, and anthropology to understand aesthetic experience but that art (the experience of art, the experience that re-creates art) can teach other disciplines what experience feels like. More broadly, then, the "features that make any experience worth having as an experience are prepared by art for commensurate perception" (*AE,* p. 192). You might thus say that art has "the task of educating the sensibility of a humanity to come," as in Rancière's formulation of Schiller's project.[30] Dewey asserts that "the first stirrings of dissatisfaction and the first intimations of a better future are always found in works of art"; disciplines can provide the factual rationale for change, but "change in the climate of the imagination is the precursor of the changes that affect more than the details of life" (*AE,* p. 360).[31]

Dewey's ethical and political ambitions for art somewhat anticipate Rancière's more recent ambitions for the aesthetic. But while Dewey works to democratize the object of aesthetic experience, Rancière works to democratize the aesthetic subject, specifically dislodging the capacity for aesthetic enjoyment from any class habitus. His assault on Bourdieu's assault on Kant cuts against that "single demystification in the name of the social"

30. Rancière, *The Philosopher and His Poor,* trans. John Drury, Corinne Oster, and Andrew Parker, ed. Parker (Durham, N.C., 2003), p. 211.

31. Paul Virilio offers the horror-story version of this logic: "Inseparable from the suicidal state of representative democracies, the art of the twentieth century has never ceased dangerously anticipating—or at least saluting from afar—the abomination of the desolation of modern times" (Paul Virilio, *Art and Fear*, trans. Julie Rose [London, 2006], pp. 32–33).

that amounts to equating social identity and experiential possibility.[32] Dewey identifies a reductive fallacy in the "so-called sociological criticism" that "translate[s] the distinctively esthetic over into terms of some other kind of experience" as though the work of art "were a reëditing of values already current in other fields of experience" (*AE,* pp. 329, 331). Rancière objects to the "the rule of correspondence between social conditions and the attitudes and judgments of those who belong to it." In "Thinking between Disciplines: An Aesthetics of Knowledge," he argues on behalf of the fundamentally deregulating achievement of "aesthetic experience," which "eludes the sensible distribution of roles and competences which structures the hierarchical order." Within the disciplinary distribution of the thinkable, "knowledge cannot be aesthetic, but must rather be the contrary of the aesthetic."[33] If it is difficult for the dean to evaluate art in some proximity to the disciplines, this is not least because disciplines have worked so hard to keep the aesthetic at bay.

Four

> I know that one of the most profoundly exciting moments of my life was when at about sixteen I suddenly concluded that I would not make all knowledge my province.
>
> —Gertrude Stein

As a topic, "The Disciplines and the Arts" might provide the opportunity to address the seven liberal arts in relation to the modern disciplines. The requisite attention to late antiquity would focus on prior taxonomies of education—say, Plato's, in which the proper course of study moves the individual from sensuous to intellectual perception, from aesthesis to reflection to dialectic and insight, from the coarse life of the senses to the refined life of the mind. Of course it might be argued that such a trajectory continues to exert considerable force on university education, but the life of the senses, as embodied in a host of art practices, has staged repeated acts of revenge.

The site specificity of *Instance the Determination* should raise a question about the history of the arts at the University of Chicago, the life of the senses as these irrupt in "the life of the mind." Perhaps the best-known irruption took place when Gertrude Stein arrived on the Chicago campus in November 1934, part of her celebrity tour after the success of *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, which included stops at several universities

32. Rancière, *The Philosopher and His Poor,* p. 214.
33. Rancière, "Thinking between Disciplines," pp. 7, 4, 6.

and colleges. With Alice Toklas and Carl Van Vechten, who accompanied them on the plane from New York, Stein attended the Chicago opening of her opera, *Four Saints in Three Acts*, delivered lectures to clubs, and became a topic for the society pages. ("Whom to invite to dine with Miss Stein, where to find guests speaking the same language, should puzzle any hostess.")[34] Though her visit at the university had been arranged by Thornton Wilder, she was officially invited by the famous young president of the university, Robert Hutchins. She gave a lecture, "Poetry and Grammar," in which she spoke plainly about her love of grammar—"I really do not know anything that has ever been more exciting than diagramming sentences"—but also spoke more enigmatically: "As I say commas are servile and they have no life of their own, and their use is not a use, it is a way of replacing one's own interest and I do decidedly like to like my own interest my own interest in what I am doing."[35] At the dinner held in her honor, Hutchins himself was late because, with the philosopher Mortimer Adler, he had been teaching the celebrated "great books" seminar until 9:30 p.m. As Adler reports in his autobiography, when the two of them arrived for after-dinner coffee and cognac, Stein accosted the president:

> "Where have you been, Hutchins, and what have you been doing?" . . .
> "Miss Stein, Mr. Adler and I have been teaching the great books." . . .
> "Don't call me Miss Stein; . . . call me Gertrude Stein. What are the great books?"

So began an extended altercation. Gertrude Stein objected to the fact that they weren't teaching the books in their original languages. Adler explained that they were interested in the great ideas found in the books, which "transcend the particular language in which they are first expressed." Gertrude Stein disagreed; they continued to fight until she began to tap him on the head, declaring that she would argue no further: "'I can see that you are the kind of young man who is accustomed to winning arguments.'" At that point, the butler announced that the police had arrived, to which Stein responded, "'Have them wait.'" Wilder explained to Adler that Stein wanted to tour Chicago at night in a squad car and that two captains were waiting downstairs for her. Adler concludes his account of

34. Cousin Eve, "Society Busy with Lectures and Luncheons," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 4 Nov. 1934, p. E2. On the opening, see India Moffett, "Audience Eyes a Simple Gown at Stein Opera," *Chicago Tribune,* 8 Nov. 1934, p. 19. On her lecture to the Arts Club, see Fanny Butcher, "English Letters to Flower Next in U.S.: Gertrude Stein," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 26 Nov. 1934, p. 4.

35. Gertrude Stein, "Poetry and Grammar," *Lectures in America* (London, 1988), pp. 210, 221–22.

the event by writing: "the way I felt about her at that moment, I wished they had done it earlier and taken her for a ride Chicago-style."[36]

But, before she had left, Hutchins told Stein that if she thought she could do better, she was welcome to teach the next class, which she did (on the *Odyssey*), the students talking more freely and enthusiastically than they ever had. In *her* account, from *Everybody's Autobiography*, she explained her success by saying, "you see why they talk to me is that I am like them I do not know the answer, you say you do not know but you do know if you did not know the answer you could not spend your life in teaching but I I really do not know, I really do not, I do not even know whether there is a question let alone having an answer for a question. To me when a thing is really interesting it is when there is no question and no answer." She went on: "I know, naturally you are teachers and teaching is your occupation and naturally what you call ideas are easy to teach." She objected, moreover, to the fact that their ideas addressed society, the state, and government, "the least interesting thing in human life," whereas the "real ideas are not the relation of human beings as groups but a human being to himself inside him."[37] You could say that, instead of teaching the students ideas, Stein made manifest the experience of doubting. Or better—given that disciplines are designed to perpetuate and domesticate doubt as healthy skepticism—you might say that Stein meant to question the distribution of interrogative authority, the question of who gets to say there is a question, of how you know there is a question, of what a question sounds like.

It is easy to laugh at Hutchins and Adler under such attack, easy to forget that they themselves (Adler was appointed in the law school because the philosophy department at Chicago would not have him), pursuing their *summa dilectica,* were conducting an experiment, against which Gertrude Stein could be described as insisting on a kind of discipline, resisting the idea that great books should be read for the great ideas in them and thus that language amounts to a transparency through which one can discern the idea, unobscured by the medium. Still, her trip was sufficiently successful that Wilder invited her to return on her voyage back from the West Coast. In March 1935, then, she gave a series of four lectures (subsequently published that year, by the University of Chicago Press, as *Narration: Four Lectures by Gertrude Stein*, with an introduction by Wilder) and she con-

36. Mortimer J. Adler, *Philosopher at Large: An Intellectual Autobiography* (New York, 1977), pp. 139–40.

37. Stein, *Everybody's Autobiography* (New York, 1937), pp. 213, 206. Adler's account of the class is very different: "We tried to persuade her to ask the students questions, but most of the time she harangued them with extempore remarks about epic poetry which she thought up on the spot, but which none of us, including Gertrude, could understand, then or in the years to come" (Adler, *Philosopher at Large*, p. 140).

ducted ten seminars and held office hours, in Cobb 203, from two to four in the afternoon on Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday. The lectures were well publicized in the campus paper, the *Daily Maroon*, as was her participation in other campus events—her moderation of a student debate, for instance.[38] "All they are taught is debate," she said to one *Tribune* reporter. "They have never learned to think."[39]

That year, having seen *Four Saints in Three Acts* on the New York stage, William Carlos Williams declared that were he made a professor "in one of our better universities" he could advance "our culture ahead at least twenty years" by "expounding" the work of Stein. The "interior revolution" that implied a "tremendous cultural revolution" lay in the "disinfecting effect" of Stein's prose, "its releasing force" that dislodged words from the "grammar which stultifies, the prose or poetical rhythms which bind us to our pet indolences," promising nothing less than the medium for "a regeneration of the process of clean thinking."[40] When Stein first arrived in Chicago the previous fall, one malcontent writing to the *Tribune* complained of such admirers that "they are trying to kid themselves into thinking they are superintelligent and can make sense out of the mess. No intelligent person is fooled by either Stein or her admirers."[41]

Five

> Generalities, glittering, 139
>
> —Helen Mirra

How can you count Helen Mirra's *Instance the Determination* (a different scene of revenge with a very different tone) as a contribution to the discussion of the disciplines and the place of the arts among them? This wordwork appears in various buildings on the University of Chicago campus, in various spots (on the wall of a stairwell, on the wall of a foyer for a cluster of faculty offices), at various lengths, and with varying degrees of clarity or obscurity, however consistently without discursive context: "Evidence, relunctantly extorted; of how intimation of the objectivity of ideas haunts the mind in spite of the theory to the contrary." To provide some

38. See, for instance, the article that explains that "the first of a series of small conference sections will also begin today for a discussion of specific problems in the field of narrative. Thornton Wilder will interview students seeking admission to these groups" ("Gertrude Stein Opens Series of Lectures Today," *Daily Maroon*, 1 Mar. 1935, p. 1). See also "Stein Gives Second Lecture of Series on Narrative Today," *Daily Maroon,* 6 Mar. 1935, p. 1.

39. "Miss Stein Lets in Some Fresh Air," *Chicago Daily Tribune,* 12 Mar. 1935, p. 12.

40. William Carlos Williams, "A 1 Pound Stein" (1934), *Selected Essays* (New York, 1969), pp. 162–64.

41. L.P., "Not an Admirer of G. Stein," *Chicago Daily Tribune,* 3 Nov. 1934, p. 14.

FIGURE 1.

FIGURE 2.

historical context, let me turn to her second solo exhibition at the Donald Young Gallery in Chicago, where she presented *Laws of Clash, 247*, the title derived from the alternative index she generated for a book by William James (figs. 1–2). The entries were typed on brown, hand-painted 16mm cotton bands, stretched to create a single horizontal line around the gallery. The bands thus evoked both strips of film and typewriter ribbon, the time-art of moving pictures and the time-task of typing. The work altered anyone's spatial and temporal relation to indexes, denying the verticality that offers readers a panoramic view, retarding the sort of seek and find mission we all pursue in the back of scholarly books, yet rendering every entry, in its way, a find, a word or phrase that could fascinate, released from its attachment to one or another great idea, proudly achieving a new function by referencing not so much the author's text as the indexer's will or, say, redistributing the locus of authority among author, writer, and world. The serene perversity of the project lay in its exposure of the inconsistency of indexes, one book to another, the arbitrariness of indexing despite the impression of order and precision that indexing as such conveys. The delight of the project lay in the promise of precise alternatives—deeply per-

sonal indexes for our own textual worlds.[42] And at a moment when philosophy and art have come to use each other as material (often theatrically) the project literalizes the dynamic as a citational practice that redeploys philosophy with intimacy and restraint.

Laws of Clash, 247 helps to dramatize the contrasting site specificity of Mirra's subsequent indexing project, which might be said to deny, physically, the distinction with which I began, the distinction between the university system and the art system, by practicing art along the stone belly of the institution—not in some satellite space and not within a discrete framed space that brackets off the exhibitory context. Thus, pristine as the words and numbers are, they appear as acts of transgression, a defacement, a kind of graffiti—a "crime of writing," as Susan Stewart would say, that threatens to invite or incite further inscription. Aren't we all—students, professors, postdocs—wordsmiths of a sort who might be longing, however secretly, to claim the walls as though we were claiming the streets? Is this a pedagogical project teaching us not just to inhabit but also to inscribe the built space we occupy?

As Stewart explains, the urban graffito interrupts "the boundaries of public and private space" with "the ethic of presence, signature, and individuality," the goal of which is to serve "purely as the concrete evidence of an individual existence and the reclamation of the environment through the label of the personal."[43] Should you be in a less-disciplined mood, you might say instead that the crime of writing amounts to an "effort to get inside people's heads and vandalize their eyeballs":

> Every car tagged with his own neon zoom, with highlights and overlapping letters and 3-D effect, the whole wildstyle thing of making your name and street number a kind of alphabet city where the colors lock and bleed and the letters connect and it's all live jive, it jumps and shouts—even the drips are intentional, painted supersharp to express how the letters sweat, how they live and breathe and eat and sleep, they dance and play the sax.[44]

42. In contrast, the Borgesian index would presumably include every word and topic in the book; thus, after the requisite cross-indexing, it would dwarf the original text.

43. Susan Stewart, *Crimes of Writing: Problems in the Containment of Representation* (New York, 1991), pp. 217, 208, 212. Stewart goes on to describe the efforts to discipline graffiti artists sent to art school or to "check the writer's ego and prepare him or her for the long hierarchical process of becoming an artist through institutions" (p. 222). "This 'encouragement' of the writer's creativity is in effect a matter of disciplinary punishment, a punishment that takes as its thematic a generalized representation and simultaneous suppression of the signature that had been at the center of the graffiti artist's work" (p. 220).

44. Don DeLillo, *Underworld* (New York, 1998), pp. 435, 433.

In sharp contrast, the unsigned writing on the walls of the university (the effacement of self, an ethic of absence and of reproductive originality) combines the impersonality of typeface with no more than the idiosyncrasy of an indexing ambition. That ambition, however playful at times, manifests itself with the kind of austere authority of a monument's inscription. It is an effort to get inside people's heads and vandalize the scholarly brain.

What differentiates Mirra's writing on the walls, quite precisely, from the work of artists in the typographic tradition of Lawrence Weiner (say "KUNST IST LESBAR / BOOKS DO FURNISH A ROOM") is the sense of incompletion, the suspicion that there must be more, and more. Kay Rosen's brightly colored word work (painted on gallery or museum walls, on placards, on billboards) generally depends on a kind of semantic disruption or discovery, on oscillations between sight, sound, and sense that are at once catalyzed and completed within the frame: *YELL OW*; *ABCDEHG**HI***; *OH**NO**AH*. Mirra's painted wall text evokes a meditation that seems as though it must go on:

> Human nature
> broken, 8
> varying, imperfect, incalculable, 52

Just as *Instance the Determination* seems dislodged from the grammar and rhythm in which it is habitually found—"in for *instance the determination* of "—so each entry seems suspended, hardly in its proper place and in the midst of some uncompleted time.

If you have ever consulted *The Indexer*, published by the Society of Indexers twice a year, you know that the index entry, simply and classically understood, has a tripartite structure: it includes a *heading*, an *optional modifier*, and a *locator*. Mirra's indexing project, dislocated from any art gallery and pursued in stairwells and halls, suddenly draws attention to the locator, to the dynamics of location and dislocation, to the freedom of the word no longer bound within books and shelved. And Mirra would seem to have transposed the book index into a fantasmatic building directory. In Stuart Hall, as you're ascending the staircase from the first floor, you read: "Ulterior functions, treated as original properties, 26" (fig. 3). Could it be that somewhere inside the building, somewhat as though you were on the inside of a book, you could find a room number 26, where you'd find the office of or perhaps the Department of Ulterior Functions, wherein, presumably, these would be treated as original properties? Some kind of Danielewskivian journey? Don't such entries, moreover, prod us to index university buildings and their contents with a higher degree of specificity, where departments and disciplines (within the "manage-

FIGURE 3.

rialized and instrumentalized world of universities") no longer count? It is as though the point of housing art within the university is not to add another discipline (to history, chemistry, linguistics, sociology) but to have art intrude among them, the artist's experiments, as Dewey had hoped, "open[ing] new fields of experience and disclos[ing] new aspects and qualities in familiar scenes" (*AE,* p. 150). What counts are thoughts, newly disclosed: "Deficiency of Being," "Analytic Dismemberment." Not, say, "Philosophy, Stuart, 202." What counts is "The will, understood as a psychological phenomenon with a force-like character which is evident in our acting or trying to act and is necessary for these types of events, 226." If Mirra means to help us overcome our anaesthetizing habits, to rethink our "Purposes, diverse and unavowed, 32"; to "Change, 46, 47–49" our "Experience, ordinary, 6, 38, 57, 61, 209," then she would seem to be showing us how, in some literal space between the disciplines (one floor and another, one room and another), there lies an aesthetics of thinking.