

# Art history in the art school: the critical historians of Camberwell

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## Introduction

The impetus for this paper came early on in Tate's four year research project 'Art School Educated: Institutional Change and Curriculum Development in UK Art Schools 1960-2010.' The teaching of art history in the art school quickly emerged as a subject of key significance not only for the project and the development of art education, but also for the development of art history as a discipline. Michael Podro (1931-2008) was well known for his contribution to art history and how it has developed over the last 50 years. That Podro formally established the Art History Department at Camberwell School of Arts and Crafts (known as Camberwell College of Arts since 1989 and now part of the University of the Arts, London) in the early 1960s, close on the heels of William Coldstream's (1908-1987) sweeping reforms, recommends him as a figure worthy of further study within the context of art education. This paper, therefore, seeks to make some contribution to an understanding of how Podro's intellectual commitments informed his approach to art education at Camberwell and, at the same time, how his exposure to artists during this formative period inflected his art theory.

## The DipAD and art historical instruction

In the late 1950s the inadequacies of British art education were widely recognised.<sup>1</sup> As artist and educator Robert Medley recalled:

The examinations for the National Diplomas in Design (NDD) for Sculpture and Painting had long been regarded with something approaching contempt. They made the status of the award equivocal at best, and the whole business had become scandalous, for the best students (i.e., the most original and gifted artists) were habitually failed if their work did not match the preconceptions of the examiners ... The papers in Art History were perfunctory ... By 1959 protests had become so vocal that something had to be done. Sir William Coldstream was asked to write a report and made recommendations for the reform of art schools.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For a concise and critically adroit account of changes in art education around this time see Lisa Tickner, 'Back Story: NDD to DipAD' in *Hornsey 1968. The Art School Revolution*, London: Frances Lincoln Limited, 2008, 13-19.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Medley, *Drawn from the Life: A Memoir*, London: Faber and Faber, 1983, 221. Medley moved to Camberwell School of Arts and Crafts in 1958

In 1959 then the Ministry of Education appointed the National Advisory Council on Art Education (NACAE)—known as the Coldstream Council after its chair, Sir William Coldstream—which devised the new Diploma in Art and Design. The Council first reported in 1960, then again in 1962 and 1964.<sup>3</sup> While its proposals offered improved status for art schools, it also called for inspection and validation of courses by a central controlling body. The Summerson Council, chaired by Sir John Summerson and set up to implement the Coldstream recommendations, sent its team around the country to validate the bulk of art and design courses at degree-equivalent level in the UK. Most inspections took place between February 1962 and March 1963. Of the 87 colleges (and 201 courses) that applied for recognition, 29 colleges (and 61 courses) were finally approved.<sup>4</sup>

Following the Coldstream Report the National Diploma in Design (NDD) was gradually replaced by the Diploma in Art and Design (DipAD).<sup>5</sup> As part of Summerson's team, Medley's account indicates the importance placed upon the teaching of art history in the art school at this time:

Coldstream cut through the complications of a piecemeal system at a stroke by proposing the abolition of the old examination and its replacement by a system which at once gave the individual art schools more autonomy and responsibility - they would devise their own course and administer their own examinations, properly monitored by external assessors - and which raised the fine arts to the status of any other university degree. Students would also be required to study the history of art, and undertake liberal studies, which were intended to extend their general education to a level proper to the academic status of a degree. The latter was a development with which I had great personal sympathy; as an examiner I came to value a school by the success with which it integrated History of Art and Liberal Studies into its total approach.<sup>6</sup>

The twin objectives of raising standards and liberalizing the institutions were, in themselves, a remarkable combination.<sup>7</sup> Following student unrest in 1968,

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<sup>3</sup> Ministry of Education, *First Report of the National Advisory Council on Art Education*, London: HMSO, 1960; Ministry of Education, *Vocational Courses in Colleges and Schools of Art, Second Report of the National Advisory Council on Art Education*, London: HMSO, 1962; Department of Education and Science *Post-Diploma Studies in Art and Design Third Report of the National Advisory Council on Art Education*, London: HMSO, 1964. For a discussion of the Coldstream and Summerson Councils and where they figure in developments in art education more broadly see Jon Thompson, 'Art Education: from Coldstream to QAA' in *Critical Quarterly*, Vol. 47, Nos. 1-2, 215-25. See also Bruce Laughton, 'The Coldstream Reports' in *William Coldstream*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004, 242-50.

<sup>4</sup> Tickner, Hornsey 1968, 19. Here Tickner refers to Appendix B of Stuart MacDonald, *A History and Philosophy of Art Education*, London: Faber and Faber, 385-87. See also Stuart MacDonald, *A Century of Art and Design Education: From Arts and Crafts to Conceptual Art*, Cambridge: The Lutterworth Press, 2005, 207-10.

<sup>5</sup> The NDD was phased out gradually. The first DipAD was awarded in 1963 and the last NDD in 1967. See Tickner, *Hornsey 1968*, 106.

<sup>6</sup> Medley, *Drawn from the Life*, 1983, 221.

<sup>7</sup> Thanks to Nigel Llewellyn for this observation on an early draft of this paper.

particularly at Hornsey College of Art, the Coldstream and Summerson Councils joined forces, under the chairmanship of Coldstream, to review tertiary level art education and reported jointly in 1970.<sup>8</sup> The Coldstream Council was clear that DipAD students should spend 15 percent of their time studying art history and complementary studies and that these studies should account for 20 percent of the final assessment. The idea was, partly, to make the course more academic than the old NDD and to give it the status of a degree-equivalent level qualification.

Coldstream, an artist and teacher himself, had trained at the Slade in the 1920s and as an artist was part of the important Euston Road School in the following decade. In 1940 he enlisted in the Royal Artillery and three years later was commissioned as an official war artist in North Africa. In 1945 he produced his last painting as a war artist and was appointed as a visiting teacher at Camberwell School of Arts and Crafts in south London. By 1948 he had risen from visiting teacher to Head of Painting and was also a trustee of the National Gallery. The following year, in 1949, he was appointed Slade Professor of Fine Art at University College London (UCL). Soon after, in 1953, he became a member of the Arts Council of Great Britain and chaired its Art Panel. With such a career behind him, then, it is perhaps unsurprising that in 1958 he was invited to chair the new National Advisory Council on Art Education, a group that would become known by his name.<sup>9</sup> At Coldstream's memorial in 1987 David Sylvester recalled:

At the time I became aware of William Coldstream's work and history, which was during the war, I was struck by the fact that people acquainted with him tended to refer to him, not as William Coldstream or Bill Coldstream, but as Captain Coldstream, a name, by the way, which made him sound rather like a character out of a play by Sheridan. From the time he took over the Slade people insisted on calling him Professor Coldstream, which made him sound like someone out of a play by Shaw. In view of the way he spent a great deal of his time from then on, he could very aptly have been called Chairman Coldstream; that would have made him sound like someone responsible for a cultural revolution - which, of course, he was.<sup>10</sup>

In more recent reflections artist and teacher Jon Thompson points out that:

As a libertarian socialist with a pronounced anarchistic streak, he [Coldstream] was profoundly sceptical of professional educators of all types and shades of opinion and he was especially sceptical of what he referred to as the 'art education lobby'. He wanted professional artists and designers to

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<sup>8</sup> *Joint Report of the NACAE and the NCDAD: The Structure of Art and Design Education in the Further Education Sector*, London: HMSO, 1970. For a detailed account of student unrest at Hornsey see Tickner, Hornsey 1968. For a contemporary account by staff and students see *Students and Staff of Hornsey College of Art, The Hornsey Affair*, Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1969.

<sup>9</sup> The dates given for Coldstream's career trajectory are cited from the helpful chronology supplied in Colin St. John Wilson, *The Artist at Work: On the Working Methods of William Coldstream and Michael Andrews*, London: Lund Humphries Publishers, 1999, 76.

<sup>10</sup> David Sylvester in William Coldstream Memorial Meeting, 24th April 1987, London: University College London, 1987, 24.

decide on the future shape of British art and design education rather than the professional educators, and chose membership of his committee with this objective in mind.<sup>11</sup>

The visionary aspect of Coldstream's scheme, as Thompson saw it, was:

to empower a small number of independent specialist schools, by providing a reasonably stable institutional framework but without a general curriculum. Beyond a general rubric to teach some art history and provide some intellectual enrichment of their programme, to be determined by the schools themselves, under the heading 'complimentary [sic] studies' what these art schools did was to be filled in by them. The bulk of the courses would comprise studio-based practice, the pattern to be determined by the teachers on the ground. Working conditions for the student would as far as possible imitate those of artists and designers working in the world outside.<sup>12</sup>

Perhaps it was Coldstream's 'anarchistic streak', as Thompson calls it, which caused him to recommend such sweeping changes in art education. Yet, as Paul Wood has noted, '[d]espite the influence of the Bauhaus and other modernist ideas within the DipAD, a deeply traditional sense of fine art as the receptacle of civilizing values continued to have the upper hand.'<sup>13</sup> Considerable conflict arose because of the academic requirements that had been marked out for this new qualification. There were two main concerns here: firstly, the O-level entry requirement and secondly, the proportion of time (15 percent) to be devoted to Art History and Complementary Studies. This second component would be taught and examined alongside students' practice-based work.<sup>14</sup> The formal requirement for the teaching of Art History in art schools at this point affected art schools everywhere, none more so than Camberwell School of Arts and Crafts. Whilst Coldstream required that art history form 15 percent of the DipAD course, he did not lay down exactly what art-historical syllabus should be studied. The content of courses was left for individual schools to decide and opened up opportunities for creative, forward-thinking art historians in the art school.

### **Michael Podro at Camberwell**

In the wake of Coldstream's report, Leonard Daniels, then Principal at Camberwell, began to think about how to structure a new Art History Department there. Art history was already being taught at Camberwell by John Nash and others such as Bernard and Harold Cohen, but now a more structured approach was called for and Michael Podro was recruited to undertake that task. This was how the Art History Department at Camberwell came to be formally established by Podro, an art

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<sup>11</sup> Thompson, 'Art Education: from Coldstream to QAA', 219.

<sup>12</sup> Thompson, 'Art Education: from Coldstream to QAA', 219-20.

<sup>13</sup> Paul Wood, 'Between God and the Saucepan: Some Aspects of Art Education in England from the Mid-Nineteenth Century until Today' in Chris Stephens (ed.), *The History of British Art 1870-Now*, London: Tate Publishing, 179-80.

<sup>14</sup> Wood, 'Between God and the Saucepan', 179-80.

historian who was to become an important figure for the development of the discipline of art history itself. He joined as a Senior Lecturer in 1961 and became Head of Department in 1964, staying for a further three years before departing in 1967. Podro was only 30 years old when he took up the post, but over the course of his career he would become a leading art theorist, critic and philosopher. In his obituary for Podro, Charles Saumarez-Smith pointed out that he developed a 'highly independent position as a teacher and person of influence in the field of aesthetics .... [H]e helped generations of students and fellow art historians to think widely and deeply about the subject of art, provoking them with frequently opaque, but often quixotically inspirational ideas about the practice of art.'<sup>15</sup>

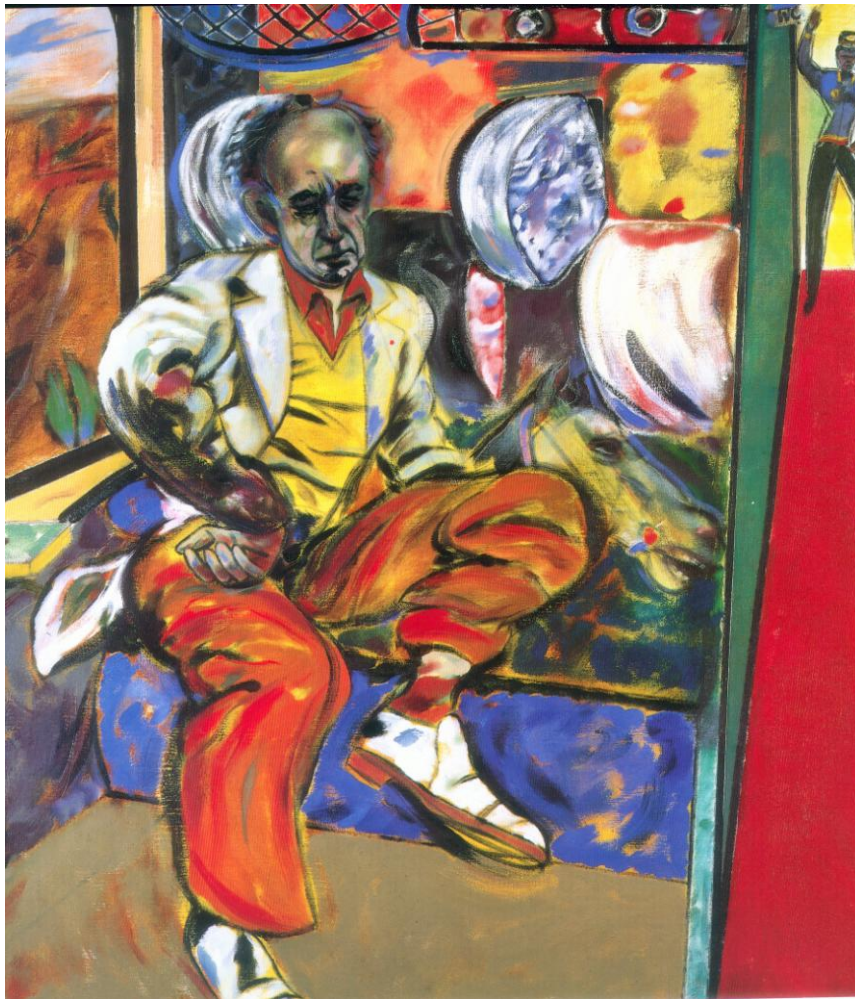


Figure 1 R. B. Kitaj, *The Jewish Rider*, 1985. [A portrait of Michael Podro]  
© The Estate of R.B. Kitaj, courtesy Marlborough Gallery, New York

For a deeper understanding of what Podro achieved at Camberwell, it is necessary to consider his own thinking on art and touch upon his three main publications: *The Manifold in Perception: Theories of Art from Kant to Hildebrand* (1972),

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<sup>15</sup> Charles Saumarez Smith, 'Obituary for Michael Podro' in *The Independent*, Tuesday 1st April 2008, accessed at <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/obituaries/professor-michael-podro-803139.html> on 13th October 2010.

*The Critical Historians of Art* (1982) and *Depiction* (1998).<sup>16</sup> In broad terms, *The Manifold in Perception* presents a series of arguments about art that Podro entwined with a history of theoretical approaches central to both nineteenth- and twentieth-century art writing. It turned on an understanding of how the arts function within the mental life of the artists and the viewer, something this paper will return to. Ten years later *The Critical Historians of Art* gave an account of those nineteenth-century German writers who had made a significant contribution to the development of the discipline of art history. The concerns of Gottfried Semper, Alois Riegel, Heinrich Wölfflin and Erwin Panofsky all figured in Podro's account, and were linked in his thinking to the basic philosophic problems of art and aesthetics formulated by Immanuel Kant, Friedrich Schiller and G.W.F. Hegel. In *Depiction* Podro held that the viewer's experience of art is inflected. What he meant by this is that elements of the design or composition in a work of art are somehow absorbed by the depicted scene itself so that the experience of it is altered. This was not something entirely new in his thinking, for analogous ideas appear in his much earlier discussion of Herbart's ideas on the interplay of medium and subject.<sup>17</sup> The continuing importance of these ideas for the development of contemporary aesthetics is evidenced by more recent publications such as Catherine Abell and Katerina Bantinaki's *Philosophical Perspectives on Depiction* (2010).<sup>18</sup> As Dominic Lopes explains in his essay: 'Features of the design may inflect illustrative content, so that the scene is experienced as having properties it could only be seen to have in pictures.'<sup>19</sup>

The question that must be posed is whether Podro's ideas in all three of his main publications have some bearing on an understanding of British art education and the way that art history was taught in art schools in the 1960s, particularly at Camberwell. His project was one that lasted a lifetime and elements of his early ideas would reappear in new ways in his mature writing. However, this paper will primarily be concerned with the themes of Podro's first book *The Manifold in Perception* since its date of publication is closest to his time at Camberwell. Even though it came later, these are ideas which arose from his own artistic and philosophical background and are, arguably, informed by his own earlier training with F.R. Leavis at the University of Cambridge and Ernst Gombrich at the Warburg Institute, as well as extended discussions with Michael Baxandall.<sup>20</sup> So, it would

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<sup>16</sup> Michael Podro, *The Manifold in Perception: Theories of Art from Kant to Hildebrand*, Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1972, *The Critical Historians of Art*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1982 and *Depiction*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998.

<sup>17</sup> Podro, *The Manifold in Perception*, 87-89

<sup>18</sup> Catharine Abell and Katerina Bantinaki (eds.) *Philosophical Perspectives on Depiction*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010. See especially Robert Hopkins 'Inflected Pictorial Experience. Its treatment and Significance', 151-180 and Bence Nanay 'Inflected and Uninflected Experience of Pictures', 181-207.

<sup>19</sup> Dominic McIver Lopes, *Sight and Sensibility*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005, 123-4 cited in Bence Nany, 'Inflected and Uninflected Experience of Pictures', 181.

<sup>20</sup> Podro, *The Manifold in Perception*, viii. Podro studied English at Cambridge under F.R. Leavis. In 1956 Podro undertook his doctoral research at the Warburg Institute. His thesis (Konrad Fiedler's Theory of the Visual Arts) was co-supervised by E.H. Gombrich and Richard Wollheim. See Charles Saumarez Smith, 'Obituary for Michael Podro' in *The Independent*, Tuesday 1st April 2008. Accessed at <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/obituaries/professor-michael-podro-803139.html> on 13th October 2010 and Alex Potts, 'Obituary for Michael Podro' in *The Guardian*, 3rd April 2008. Accessed at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/culture/2008/apr/03/1> on 13th October 2010.

seem that the ideas in this book were ones that Podro thought through even before his time at Camberwell which surely lends them both weight and pertinence in the context of this discussion. Furthermore, the model he set out seems a useful one within which to think about art history in the art school.

The program that Podro established at Camberwell offered core courses, as well as specific courses for the different specialisms within the art school. Therefore sculpture students would study the history of sculpture and textiles students would study the history of textiles. Yet, from the outset what was offered was, perhaps inevitably, informed by Podro's own interests. Like other important art educators of the period, such as Tom Hudson at Leicester, Harry Thubron at Leeds and Anton Ehrenzweig at Goldsmiths, Podro's interest in art always lay with what might be called the human element.<sup>21</sup> For it was in his understanding of the viewer's personal relationship with works of art that Podro's insights lay. This is not, however, to suggest that he promoted an art history based on any emotional involvement with the work of art. Rather, he seemed to suggest a degree of emotional detachment that frees the mind up for imaginative reflection. Podro understood Kant's thinking of that freedom as something that enables 'the play of our productive imagination and it allows us intimations of a transcendent reality beyond the world of sense which (he [Kant] assumes) we hope for.'<sup>22</sup> What Podro put forward, therefore, was a model of making and viewing art that not only allowed for but arguably insisted upon the freedom to play. This notion of play related well to his later thinking on the ideas of psychoanalysts Melanie Klein, Marion Milner and D. W. Winnicott.<sup>23</sup> In that respect, it might be said to have marked an early point on a trajectory from philosophical to psychoanalytic aesthetics.

Just as Hudson and Thubron invested their studio teaching with an understanding of the artists' 'internal' experience of art making, Podro similarly turned his attention to the viewer's 'internal' experience of the artwork. The fact that students, at times, requested Podro, rather than their fine art teachers, to offer a critique of their work, perhaps underlines that understanding and the resonance of his thinking for the artist. As Charles Saumarez Smith has suggested:

one of his [Podro's] great strengths as an intellectual was that he had an unusual understanding of the practice of art, particularly drawing, an

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<sup>21</sup> For more on Ehrenzweig's work at Goldsmiths and elsewhere see Anton Ehrenzweig, *The Hidden Order of Art. A Study on the Psychology of Artistic Perception* (1967), London: Phoenix Press, 2000. See also Beth Williamson, *Anton Ehrenzweig: Between Psychoanalysis and Art Practice*, University of Essex, 2009, unpublished PhD thesis, and Beth Williamson, 'Paint and Pedagogy: Anton Ehrenzweig and the Aesthetics of Art Education', *International Journal of Art and Design Education*, 28:3, October 2009, 237-48.

<sup>22</sup> Podro, *The Manifold in Perception*, 122. For a closer look at Podro's thinking on Kant, and particularly on his exploration of the *Critique of Judgment* (1790) see Podro, *The Manifold in Perception*, 7-35. Schiller's development of Kant's ideas follows in subsequent chapters. See Podro, *The Manifold in Perception*, 36-60. See also 89-91 where the notion of detachment is reasserted in Podro's discussion of Herbart's ideas.

<sup>23</sup> For his mature thinking on psychoanalytic aesthetics see Michael Podro, 'On imaginary presence' in Lesley Caldwell (ed.), *Art, Creativity, Living*, London: Karnac Books, 63-73 and 'Destructiveness and Play: Klein, Winnicott, Milner' in Lesley Caldwell (ed.), *Winnicott and the Psychoanalytic Tradition: Interpretation and Other Psychoanalytic Issues*, London: Karnac, 2007, 24-32.

affinity for artists as individuals with their own quirks of psychological motivation, and a genuine and deep engagement with the physical experience of the works of art, continuing to believe in the relevance of practical criticism in front of the works themselves.<sup>24</sup>

In that sense his approach to teaching art history to art students was surely a sympathetic one which was, nonetheless, underpinned by a rigorous philosophical approach.<sup>25</sup>

It is that approach that he developed more fully in the model he worked through in *The Manifold in Perception*. Here Podro marked out three sorts of demarcation, or distinctions, used by writers on art. As he explained in his introduction, '[w]riters on art have aimed to draw distinction between the interest of objects as they confront us in ordinary experience and as they appear depicted within works of art.'<sup>26</sup> So, his book identified three kinds of criterion that he explained through close study of the ideas of a small group of German thinkers and the way they write about art. The first criterion he offered his reader was what he called 'objects of attention.' Typically, Podro's focus here was less on the art object itself and more on the kind of attention it demanded from us. Theoretical writings using these sorts of principles, he suggested, 'are those which hold that the artist reveals some aspect of the subject-matter which escapes us in ordinary experience. ... Put generally, this kind of criterion for distinguishing the interest of works of art from the interest of the objects represented in them always involves an appeal to an object or aspect of an object which the work of art reveals.'<sup>27</sup> This sort of approach to art can immediately be recognized as a significant departure from the more traditional art historical approaches that had until then been the norm. Podro and those with whom he worked were not simply concerned with the object of art as understood in terms of provenance or iconography, for instance. Rather, his interest lay in how and why art is made, the same sort of questions that preoccupy artists. The second criterion that Podro marked out in this book concerned the perceptual procedures of the viewer relating to a painting.<sup>28</sup> What concerned him here was how ambiguity and analogy are perceived in art. He suggested that the viewer looks at a painting, makes a comparison between two things (the work of art and what it represents, or two similar paintings, or two elements within the same painting) and that this comparison is usually based on form or structure.<sup>29</sup> The viewer does this to

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<sup>24</sup> Saumarez Smith, 'Obituary for Michael Podro', 1st April 2008

<sup>25</sup> Uncatalogued audio interview. Conal Shields interviewed by this author for Tate's 'Art School Educated' research project. At the end of the project in 2013 these audio recordings with their content summaries, as well as any related documentation will be deposited with Tate Library and Archive Collections held at the Hyman Kreitman Reading Rooms, Tate Britain and in accordance with participants Contributor Release Form. Conal Shields was interviewed over one session in September 2010. The recording consists of two tracks [Track 01 and Track 02] totalling approximately three hours.

<sup>26</sup> Podro, *The Manifold in Perception*, 1.

<sup>27</sup> Podro, *The Manifold in Perception*, 1-2.

<sup>28</sup> Here Podro is also interested in the perceptual procedures of the reader of, say, a poem, but I have omitted that from this discussion for the sake of simplicity.

<sup>29</sup> See especially his analysis of Herbart's thinking on analogy and ambiguity in his *Allgemeine praktische Philosophie* (1808). Podro, *The Manifold in Perception*, 74-76. As he says on the first page of this excerpt: 'we could say that an aesthetic relation between two discrete features always involves seeing each of

explain or clarify what is being perceived. In this way, any ambiguity between the artwork and what it represents, for instance, is resolved through a process of analogy.<sup>30</sup> Once again, Podro's interest here centred on the viewer's experience of art, putting forward a process of 'mental analogizing' to better explain how art is understood and its place in human lives.<sup>31</sup> He went on to identify a third way by which thinkers on art 'have characterized the distinguishing interest that things take on when included within works of art is by reference to states of mind, feelings or attitudes....'<sup>32</sup> The most important aspect of this for Podro was their interest in 'inward states' or attitudes. For, it is 'through our mental absorption with a work of art, [that] we achieve an emotional equilibrium, a purging or poise or inward harmony, which we do not normally possess.'<sup>33</sup>

Podro suggested that these three criteria exist side by side in the work of Kant, Schiller, Herbart, Hildebrand, Schopenhauer and Fiedler. However, it is not the job of this paper to analyze his reading of those thinkers to any extent. Rather, it will think further about what sort of art history he and his colleagues taught at Camberwell, how they taught it, and why. The question is how these things might relate to his ideas about attention, perception and attitudes as initially expressed in *The Manifold in Perception* (1972) and further developed in *The Critical Historians of Art* (1982). Podro's concern with the importance of art history for working artists is present in these texts. This is what provides a link to art education and the sorts of concerns that someone such as Podro might have brought to bear when devising classes for a new department of Art History at Camberwell in 1961. In the midst of his teaching, then, Podro developed an art historical approach concerned with the experience of art, with how, in the presence of works of art, artists and viewers alike could touch upon inner words and meet with experiences hitherto unknown. At the same time, however, he also tackled more formalist issues. In his article 'Formal Elements and Theories of Modern Art' in 1965, his question was essentially about how the artist might master the unknown. In this essay he used the example of Kandinsky's *Point and Line to Plane* (1926) to develop his argument, but the specifics here are perhaps less important than Podro's broader pronouncements:<sup>34</sup>

Clearly we can learn to draw the figure, or do exercises in harmony and counterpoint, which would enable us to understand better certain paintings or pieces of music, or produce painting or music of roughly the kind we should be helped to understand. But in these cases it is presupposed that we are discovering and mastering factors in already existing kinds of system or art. But what about the mastery of components which are to be constituents

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the two features in reciprocally inhibiting and fusing ways, and vice versa, that each case of seeing something in reciprocally inhibiting and fusing ways involves making an analogy between the two terms.'

<sup>30</sup> My understanding of analogy here is partly and everyday one taken from Judy Pearsall (ed.), *The New Oxford Dictionary of English*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001, 58. It comes, much more, from the Kantian ideas explored by Podro in his chapter on Kant. Podro, *The Manifold in Perception*, 7-35

<sup>31</sup> Podro, *The Manifold in Perception*, 2-4.

<sup>32</sup> Podro, *The Manifold in Perception*, 5.

<sup>33</sup> Podro, *The Manifold in Perception*, 5.

<sup>34</sup> In his footnotes Podro lists Wassily Kandinsky, *Punkt und Linie zu Fläche*, Vol. IX of Bauhaus Bücher, Munich, 1926 and notes that his own references are to the fifth edition (Bern, 1964).

of an art of which we do not already have models? ... Mastery of new elements, of elements of a new or relatively new art, is the mastery of that art.<sup>35</sup>

Podro's thinking here touched upon an important question for artists and one which, in fundamental terms, marks out how work in arts and humanities and work in the scientific field differs. In science, a hypothesis is set up and the scientist sets out to prove that hypothesis: through experimentation, he or she works towards a predetermined result. The artist or writer, however, works blindly, not knowing where particular explorations might lead, creating new knowledge and understanding without aiming at any particular result. This is particularly so for the artist making new work and Podro understood this. Therefore, he objected to certain approaches to art education which, in his view, seemed to act against this fundamental requirement for 'not knowing'.<sup>36</sup> In his reply to Podro, Richard Wollheim suggested that:

[Podro] is against a certain style of art and a certain form of art-education, both of which have acquired classical status in the mid-1960's. The art-education is that which goes on under the name of Basic Design, and the art is the heterogeneous body of painting and sculpture, executed in many different countries by artists of widely varying ages, which bears most heavily upon it the influence of Bauhaus teaching, particularly as this has filtered through the work of Josef Albers. More accurately, Podro is not against any particular kind of art of any particular kind of art-education, but only against a specific theory or dogma upon which both are usually based: however, the inaccuracy is not so important in that it is dubious whether either would survive in its actual form, let alone retain its validity, if the theory which is invoked in support of it were subverted. The theory is that which asserts the existence of simple or basic constituents of pictorial design.<sup>37</sup>

So, while elsewhere in his response, Wollheim took issue with Podro's reading of Kandinsky, he seemed to agree on the need to avoid dogmatic approaches to art education. In the wake of the first Coldstream Report, then, Podro's particular interests seemed to have led him to develop new and original approaches in both writing and teaching. These two distinct but closely related things – teaching and writing – were associated in his work through a discursive permeability.<sup>38</sup> The

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<sup>35</sup> Michael Podro, 'Formal Elements and Theories of Modern Art' in *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 1966, 6 (4), 335-6.

<sup>36</sup> I take this notion of 'not knowing' from artist and teacher Rebecca Fortnum. Fortnum curated the symposium 'On Not Knowing: How Artists Think' at Kettles Yard, Cambridge, 29th June 2009. A transcript of Fortnum's introduction along with some of the day's papers can be found at <http://www.kettlesyard.co.uk/exhibitions/symposium.html> accessed on 13th October 2010.

<sup>37</sup> Richard Wollheim, 'Form, Elements and Modernity' in *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 1966, 6 (4), 339.

<sup>38</sup> I borrow this notion of discursive permeability from artist Naomi Salaman who deploys it to explain the relationship between her written and visual work. Naomi Salaman, *Looking back at the life room; Revisiting Pevsner's 'Academies of Art Past and Present', to reconsider the illustrations and construct photographs representing the curriculum*, Goldsmiths College London, 2008, unpublished PhD thesis. For

legacy of his approach at Camberwell might be traced in the work of some of those who taught there subsequently. Alex Potts, T.J. Clark, and Mary Kelly, all important figures for the development of the discipline of art history, all taught at Camberwell and the contribution of important figures such as these demands closer study.

### **Potts and Clark: The new critical historians**

Following Podro's departure in 1967, and an interim period in which John Nash was Acting Head of Department, Conal Shields took on the role of Head of Department and in 1970 employed the young art historian T.J. Clark as a Senior Lecturer. Clark had completed his undergraduate studies at the University of Cambridge in 1964. He had embarked on his doctoral research at the Courtauld Institute of Art, University of London, completing those doctoral studies in 1973. He lectured in the Department of Art History and Theory at the University of Essex from 1967-1969 then at Camberwell College of Arts from 1970 until 1974. Clark's contributions to the discipline of art history then and now need no elaboration here.

Alex Potts began his academic career with studies in mathematics and chemistry. It was whilst undertaking research in theoretical chemistry at the University of Oxford in the 1970s that his interest in art history developed.<sup>39</sup> In Oxford he had the opportunity to attend lectures by Francis Haskell, Edgar Wind and Nikolaus Pevsner, all of which seemed to fuel that interest in art. Subsequently Potts registered as a full-time research student with E.H. Gombrich at the Warburg Institute, University of London. In 1978 he completed that doctoral research with a thesis entitled *Winckelmann's Interpretation of the History of Ancient Art in its Eighteenth Century Context*.<sup>40</sup> From 1971 until 1973 he undertook part-time teaching duties in the Department of Fine Art at Portsmouth Polytechnic which had come into being following the amalgamation of Portsmouth College of Technology and Portsmouth College of Art and Design in the wake of the government White Paper 'A Plan for Polytechnics and Other Colleges' (1966) - this recommended the re-designation of the most effective colleges as regional polytechnics to form a national network for technical education. As a direct result of this policy many small colleges, including colleges of art and design, were subsumed by these new, larger polytechnics.

<sup>41</sup> Institutional and administrative changes aside, Potts' recollections of that period

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digital copies of abstract, introduction, first chapter and five chapter maps see  
<http://eprints.gold.ac.uk/2299/>

<sup>39</sup> Chronology and career trajectory taken from Alex Potts C.V. accessed at <http://tinyurl.com/3796tef> on 4th December 2010.

<sup>40</sup> Potts' ideas were further developed over the years and took their place in his important book *Flesh and the Ideal: Winckelmann and the Origins of Art History*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1994. I would want to add that, in very broad terms, the sorts of tensions that Potts explores in Winckelmann's work resonate, in a broad sense, with the tensions in the relationship between art history and art practice in the art school.

<sup>41</sup> Department of Education and Science, 'A Plan for Polytechnics and Other Colleges', London: HMSO, 1966. For a detailed exegesis of the development of the polytechnic system in England and Wales see Eric Robbins, *The New Polytechnics: The People's Universities*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd, 1968. The Parliamentary Statement by the Secretary of State for Education and Science, Rt Hon Anthony Crosland, MP, 5 April 1967, is reproduced in Appendix A of Robbins' book. Crosland's statement proposed thirty polytechnics in total; seventeen of those listed subsumed previously autonomous art schools. Robbins, *The New Polytechnics*, 242-245.

paint a picture of a very vibrant and exciting scene where teachers regularly explored new approaches. There was a 'great freedom for art historians' and teaching took a wide variety of forms, from the staging of a Maoist opera to classes in Russian socialist realism.<sup>42</sup> It might also be said that Potts' early background in other disciplines (maths and chemistry in his case) and his interest in Wind, well-known for his interdisciplinary approaches to art history, meant he may have been particularly suited to the sort of open and creative approach required to successfully teach art history in the art school, especially at Camberwell.

### The Art Historian and the Artist

At Camberwell artists were not necessarily confined to studio teaching and in 1976, almost a decade after Podro's departure, Mary Kelly began teaching art history there.<sup>43</sup> A discussion of Kelly's teaching is invoked here as something of an aside to the main thrust of this paper's arguments. However, it perhaps acts to represent something of Podro's legacy at Camberwell with the openness to ideas and approaches that was still present within the Department of Art History there.

Kelly's work and ideas around a feminist art and art history should be considered not only as an aspect of art historical training at Camberwell in the 1970s and 1980s, but also as part of a larger feminist discourse already shaped, and being reshaped, by influential publications such as Linda Nochlin's 'Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?' (1971), Laura Mulvey's well known essay 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' which appeared in the British film theory journal *Screen* in 1975 and Griselda Pollock and Rozsika Parker's *Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology* (1981).<sup>44</sup> At the same time, a network of talks and lectures took place across London, offering ideas and teaching to a much wider student body than could be made available at any single institution.<sup>45</sup> Kelly maintained that, 'there is no such thing as feminist art, only an art informed by different feminisms. If the

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<sup>42</sup> Uncatalogued audio interview. Alex Potts interviewed by this author for Tate's 'Art School Educated' research project. At the end of the project in 2013 these audio recordings with their content summaries, as well as any related documentation will be deposited with Tate Library and Archive Collections held at the Hyman Kreitman Reading Rooms, Tate Britain and in accordance with participants Contributor Release Form. Alex Potts was interviewed over one session in July 2010. The recording consists of one track [Track 01] totaling approximately one hour.

<sup>43</sup> Camberwell College of Arts: Course Prospectus for 1976-77.

<sup>44</sup> Linda Nochlin, 'Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?' *ARTnews*, January 1971, 22-39 and 67-71. Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', *Screen*, 16:3, 1975, 6-18. Griselda Pollock and Rozsika Parker, *Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981

<sup>45</sup> Artist Naomi Salaman recalls her own London art education and writes about drawings she made to explore the interaction between teacher and student: 'In between the two opposing drawings was a hand made book containing my memories of seminars, talks and tutorials that had made an indelible impression on me, and a series of images of how I saw the interaction between teacher and pupil. These interactions had been with notable feminist theorists and artists; Mary Kelly, Griselda Pollock and Marie Yates, from whom I had learnt an enormous amount as a student. The work attempted to gain access to the space of that interaction of teaching and being taught; or public speaking and individual reception; and of the transmission of ideas from one generation to another'. See Salaman, *Looking back at the life room*, 6. Later Salaman notes that 'Mary Kelly and Victor Burgin ... were teaching in London when I was a student and I was able to attend their lectures and seminars.' Salaman, *Looking back at the life room*, 18 (n. 29).

work subscribes to a particular ideology uncritically, then it risks reinventing a social totality that once more does not allow the others to emerge from their bracketed identities as the new subjects of history.<sup>46</sup> This resonates in part with Podro's thinking in terms of his insistence on a uniquely individual engagement with a work of art. Through their art historical teaching, and addressing Camberwell's students as 'the new subjects of history', Podro and Kelly individually, and in very different ways, opened up new possibilities for art history in the art school. Making art history relevant to students in their contemporary situation was not to say that all artists of all ages faced precisely the same difficulties and experiences. Rather, it was to show how relevance persisted despite the inevitable differences. For, as Michael Newman has suggested:

We have to take account of the fact that art history as a discipline arose in relation to a crisis of transmission. This is well attested by Aby Warburg – the Warburg Institute was supposed to be the place where transmission (specifically of the classical tradition in the Renaissance) would be studied but also performed. This was necessitated by a crisis in transmission that Walter Benjamin attributed to a crisis of experience in modernity. Art history cannot be understood simply as a means of transmission, since it is precisely a symptom of its failure. Therefore art history no less blocks transmission than assures it, usually both at the same time. This paradox would be particularly acute when it comes to the transmission of the 'avant-garde' which surely is the art of the break, of the interruption of tradition. How do you transmit the interruption of tradition without reducing it to continuity?<sup>47</sup>

Following Newman's arguments, it is not surprising that work such as Podro's took on the importance that it did. Somehow it operated in a space between interruption and continuity, demonstrating the continued relevance of art's histories whilst, at the same time, recognising the interruptions or ruptures - Coldstream's sweeping changes to art education and the DipAD, for instance – and addressing those changes and differences intelligently and sensitively.

It was feminism's new urgencies that interrupted tradition for Kelly. Her theory-informed practice was difficult, drawing as it did on psychoanalysis and particularly the writing of Jacques Lacan. She is perhaps best known for her work *Post-Partum Document* (1973-79) which coincided with the period in which she was teaching at Camberwell. In this work, Kelly explored her own experience of motherhood and her relationship with her infant son over the course of six years through a combination of texts, images and found objects. She explained that:

In the *Post-Partum Document*, I am trying to show the reciprocity of the process of socialization in the first few years of life. It is not only the infant whose future personality is formed at this crucial moment, but also the

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<sup>46</sup> Mary Kelly, '(P)age 49: on the subject of history' in Katy Deepwell (ed.), *New Feminist Art Criticism: Critical Strategies*, Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1995, 148. Original italicization.

<sup>47</sup> Michael Newman, 'Assessment' in James Elkins (ed.), *Art History Versus Aesthetics*, London and New York: Routledge, 2006, 210

mother whose “feminine psychology” is sealed by the sexual division of labor [sic] in childcare.<sup>48</sup>

The collection of soiled nappies, feeding charts, infant clothing, handwritten notes and photographs, came together to constitute a work that was pivotal for both conceptual art practice and for twentieth-century feminism.<sup>49</sup>

Perhaps in an attempt to justify the perceived difficulties of feminist work of this period, cultural historian Janet Wolff has explained that while ‘there are certainly dangers inherent in the academicisation of feminism, to the extent that this becomes a self-sufficient and self-serving practice, there is also a crucial need for intellectual work, in the academy and outside, which is grounded in practice and the object.’<sup>50</sup> Kelly’s teaching of art history, part of her ‘intellectual work’ in other words, was certainly grounded in practice and the object, to borrow Wolff’s terms. Her integration of practice and history of art, alongside art theory, perhaps represents something of Podro’s legacy at Camberwell. The ethos of the Art History Department he established there was such that artists and teachers like Kelly were welcomed and encouraged to take their teaching forward in new and innovative ways.

During his time at Camberwell Podro became friendly with painters such as Frank Auerbach (b. 1931) and Ron Kitaj (1932 - 2007). And as Charles Saumarez Smith wrote in Podro’s obituary:

one of his great strengths as an intellectual was that he had an unusual understanding of the practice of art, particularly drawing, an affinity for artists as individuals with their own quirks of psychological motivation, and a genuine and deep engagement with the physical experience of works of art, continuing to believe in the relevance of practical criticism in front of the works themselves.<sup>51</sup>

Kitaj’s *The Jewish Rider* (1984-85) (fig.1) is a testament to that affinity and perhaps acts to evidence Podro’s lifelong friendship with Kitaj who, like Auerbach, first met him during his time at Camberwell.<sup>52</sup> When, late in his life, Podro was made an Honorary Doctor of the University of the Arts, he reportedly used the occasion to deliver an unexpected diatribe against what he regarded as the bureaucratisation of traditional London art schools.<sup>53</sup> In his acceptance speech he recalled the distinctive

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<sup>48</sup> Mary Kelly, *Post-Partum Document*, Kegan Paul International, 1983, 1. See also Margaret Iversen, Douglas Crimp and Homi K. Bhabha, *Mary Kelly*, London: Phaidon, 1997.

<sup>49</sup> This is a core argument for Iversen, Crimp and Bhabha, *Mary Kelly*, 1997.

<sup>50</sup> Janet Wolff, ‘The artists, the critic and the academic: feminism’s problematic relationship with “Theory”’ in Katy Deepwell (ed.), *New Feminist Art Criticism*, 14-19. Here Wolff draws on Barbara Ehrenreich, ‘The professional-managerial class revisited’ in Bruce Robbins (ed.), *Intellectuals: Aesthetics, Politics, Academics*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990, 173-85

<sup>51</sup> Charles Saumarez Smith, ‘Obituary for Michael Podro’, 1st April 2008

<sup>52</sup> For an interesting analysis of *The Jewish Traveller* see Janet Wolff, ‘The impolite boarder: ‘Diasporist’ art and its critical response’ in *The Aesthetics of Uncertainty*, New York: Columbia University, 2008, 77-98. Wolff’s essay first appeared in James Aulich and John Lynch (eds.) *Critical Kitaj: Essays on the work of R.B. Kitaj*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000, 29-43

<sup>53</sup> Saumarez Smith, ‘Obituary for Michael Podro’, 1st April 2008

character of Camberwell, but not through any nostalgic reminiscence. Rather, his purpose, as he stated it then, was:

to insist on how specific and distinctive the culture of an art school is. Students need a sense of a past, of live issues openly debated and face to face experience of the visiting artists and designers to get a sense of what is possible. No legislation from above, certainly no standardization can achieve this. (~~Twenty years ago sacking part time teachers on the one hand and building up a large administration on the other was insane. Absorbing art schools into plytechnics [sic] likewise.~~) Artschools may succeed or fail now in one department, now in another, but they do so because of individuals and the chemistry between them; the sheer untidiness of it all may make our Whitehall rulers uncomfortable, but it is a necessary part of generating invention, rather than producing mediocrity. You don't need system change when things are amiss, you need fine tuning.<sup>54</sup>

This sort of attack makes sense when we remember that his approach at Camberwell and elsewhere was, above all, a creative one where intellectual freedom was welcomed and encouraged. Podro loved to argue and his passion for debate and discussion precipitated a vibrant and exciting environment for teaching and learning. Above all, Podro and those who taught art history with him, and subsequently, did so in a manner that demonstrated their investment not only in the object of art itself, but also in the process and experience of making art.

### **The demise of art history**

The art history courses offered at Camberwell altered over the years but always offered a solid grounding in art history and theory. Much later, in 1975, it was suggested that the aim of the Department was 'to help students form a workable idea of their situation, developing critical acumen vis-à-vis the present by way of historical sensibility.'<sup>55</sup> These sentiments fit precisely with Podro's. Faced with student resistance to compulsory art history in art schools, Podro believed that the way forward was to show students the relevance of art history to their own contemporary situation. This is where his ideas on attention, perception and attitudes, later worked out in *The Manifold in Perception*, came most forcefully into play. What he tried to do, then, was to show students how artists of the past faced the same sorts of difficulties in working as they did in their own practice. Because works of art were used in this way, rather than in any more traditional sense, students had the opportunity not only to empathise with artists of the past, but to recognise their enduring relevance and to learn from them.

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<sup>54</sup> Michael Podro, unpublished transcript of acceptance speech for his appointment as Honorary Doctor of the University of the Arts, London, n.d. The papers of Michael Podro, uncatalogued archive, courtesy of Charlotte Podro.

<sup>55</sup> Camberwell College of Arts: Course Prospectus for 1975-76, 49. Reproduced courtesy of Camberwell College of Arts Library, University of the Arts London.

In closing this short survey of Podro's early contribution to the teaching of art history in the art school, it is worth reflecting, in broad terms, on what has happened since at Camberwell and elsewhere. As Jon Thompson has remarked:

art history teaching has almost ceased to exist, replaced by a new orthodoxy, often referred to as art theory teaching – an agenda that mostly comprises sociological and psychoanalytic topics drawn from the extended field of cultural studies, with the result that generations of fine art students know hardly anything about the history of their chosen form of practice, even those fairly recent histories that have helped to shape their own work.<sup>56</sup>

The Art History Department at Camberwell was closed in 2000 and art historical education was formally replaced in the timetable by courses in Personal and Professional Development (PPD). In the 2004-5 prospectus, PPD was offered as,

[a]n innovative and lively aspect of our undergraduate degree courses, preparing students from all Majors for the realities and practicalities of life after college. Designed to help you develop a professional approach to your work and time as a student, so you can pursue your individual ambitions and maximise opportunities in employment, self-employment or postgraduate education.<sup>57</sup>

Delivered through a weekly programme of projects and workshops, PPD focuses on the development of skills in areas such as information technology, research, teamwork, client liaison, self-promotion and setting up freelance practice. The implications of this shift must surely form part of a larger study of art education at Camberwell and elsewhere.

As formal art historical training in the art school fades from view, how might an increased emphasis on the professionalisation of the art student, for instance, be evidenced in the resulting work? How might that shift in itself be seen to align with others, such as the gentrification of the artist and spaces of art making and display? It has to be asked whether a lack of art historical training, perhaps, means that art making is cut free from its moorings and, if that is the case, what relevance can be found in such a free-floating practice? As James Elkins remarks in the opening to his book *Why Art Cannot be Taught* (2001), '[o]ne danger of not knowing the history of art instruction ... is that what happens in art classes begins to appear as timeless and natural. History allows us to begin to see the kinds of choices we have made and the particular biases and possibilities of our kinds of instruction.'<sup>58</sup> Since Elkins writes here about the teaching of fine art rather than art history in the art school one needs to ask whether his sentiments retain relevance here. I think so. For, if, as Elkins suggests, an ahistorical approach to teaching art practice is limiting for both teacher and student, then the only way to address that limitation is to reintroduce focused

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<sup>56</sup> Jon Thompson, 'Art Education: from Coldstream to QAA', 222

<sup>57</sup> Camberwell College of Arts: Course Prospectus for 2004-5. Reproduced courtesy of Camberwell College of Arts Library, University of the Arts London.

<sup>58</sup> James Elkins, *Why Art Cannot be Taught: A Handbook for Art Students*, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2001, 1.

art historical teaching that will enable the art student to locate their own practice within a wider frame and thereby open up the possibilities for its development. This is not about making sense of a practice or achieving a greater degree of clarity of understanding. As Elkins points out:

In most subjects clarity and sense are ultimate goals, and it is not sensible to criticize them. To “get clear” or “achieve clarity” about a troublesome issue is to understand it thoroughly, to grasp it, to know it perfectly. The principles of physics are best when they are clear.... But is the same true of art classes?<sup>59</sup>

In Elkins' view the same is not true of art classes: 'It does not make sense to try to understand how art is taught.'<sup>60</sup> Yet, to continue without any direction whatsoever is unhelpful and surely puts teacher and student at severe risk of failing completely. Elkins tells the story of explorers in a gargantuan cave, so large its size was almost beyond human understanding. Tiny lights on their helmets were able to help guide them to a certain extent: 'Pictures taken on later surveying expeditions show the spelunkers' lights like little fireflies against a measureless darkness.'<sup>61</sup> Ken Neil, Head of Historical and Critical Studies (HACS) at Glasgow School of Art, has suggested that HACS might now act as guiding lights in the otherwise 'measureless darkness' of art school education.<sup>62</sup> This kind of approach offers the art student possibilities without any recourse to didacticism. This might well be viewed as a twenty-first century development of Podro's approach at Camberwell when art history opened up possibilities, guided students' studio work, and acted, quite simply, as a flexible framework within which to take studio work forward. Arguably, this may return us to Podro's academic beginnings as an English undergraduate at Cambridge under F.R. Leavis (1895 - 1978). In his book *Education and the University* (1943) Leavis proposed a model for a school of English, not an art school. Yet, there are hints here of what Podro would bring to his art history teaching twenty years later. Here Leavis set out what he called a humane education, suggesting that:

We should make our dispositions with an eye to producing neither the scholar nor the academic 'star' (the 'high-flyer') – the mind that shines at academic tests and examination gymnastic; but a mind equipped to carry on for itself; trained to work in the conditions in which it will have to work if it is to carry on at all; having sufficient knowledge, experience, self reliance and staying-power for undertaking, and persisting in, sustained inquiries.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Elkins, *Why Art Cannot be Taught*, 190

<sup>60</sup> Elkins, *Why Art Cannot be Taught*, 190

<sup>61</sup> Elkins, *Why Art Cannot be Taught*, 190

<sup>62</sup> Ken Neil, 'Authority and Pragmatism in the 21st C Art School', paper given as part of the conference 'Constructing the Discipline: Art History in the UK' organized by Professor Richard Woodfield and held at the University of Glasgow and Glasgow School of Art, 25th - 27th November 2010.

<sup>63</sup> F.R. Leavis, *Education and the University* [1943], London: Chatto & Windus, 1948, 59-60

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Podro's approach at Camberwell was, surely, to equip the young artist in much the same way as Leavis suggests here, with a mind equipped to carry on for itself. He nurtured a sense of curiosity and encouraged inquiring minds and Podro's students were shown how to look backwards in order to move forwards in their own practice. In this way, their art historical knowledge did not act as any kind of level or standard to be attained or measured against. Rather, it acted as an enabler to allow new approaches to be ventured and new sorts of work to be made.

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