

Interview with Donald Preziosi

Philip Armstrong, Jae Emerling, and Claire Farago¹

Could you talk about your relationship to the institutional contexts in which you first studied or taught art history?

My relationships to institutional contexts, whether as a student or later as a professional scholar, critic, and theorist, at Harvard, Yale, SUNY, MIT, or later at Oxford and UCLA, was always oblique, ironic, and ambivalent. There were several sources for this, but one of the chief among them was parental cynicism regarding conventional attitudes toward what was taken as given, true, fixed, or unquestionable – a familial agnosticism, covering religious custom and social attitudes. This stemmed from one of my very earliest educational experiences: walking into what I was quickly told was the wrong room on my first day of class in grammar school. I never attended kindergarten, having taken a newly instituted citywide preschool aptitude placement test with hundreds of other New York City four-year-olds, and was put directly into the first grade. I walked into what I thought was my classroom and found a couple of dozen children reciting an incomprehensible prayer which I found funny and burst out laughing - for which I was swiftly removed and placed in the correct (and more obviously secular) room.

The sight and sound of that wrong-room experience starkly foregrounded the *artifice* of what was being said. Those other kids were obviously acting, *performing*. So my earliest memory of social conventions outside the home was linked to the fabricatedness or the ficticity of certain phenomena, in this case what was taken to be social and cultural fact. This awareness was consonant with a lively skepticism fostered by my father toward institutional verities of all kinds, but especially religion. My father's family were Freemasons – or generically deist; in other cities, environments, ethnicities, or classes they might have been Unitarians. Mother's family were rural rather than urban. In my earliest years father was a practicing artist, and throughout my childhood his work – mostly (to me boring but mysterious) charcoal sketches of classical statues all hung on two living room walls. Some of these dated from his own student days at the National Academy of Design in Manhattan, which were interrupted by the onset of the Great Depression and the death of his own father.

But in addition to those works of art, the house was full of the writings of *his* father, my grandfather, who died just before I was born, and who was a bilingual

¹ The interview was conducted by e-mail between February-July 2016, and in person with Claire Farago between June 15-20, 2016.

(and bi-national) poet and journalist. He was a journalist for a Milan newspaper and was assigned to their New York office as one of their American correspondents. Soon his poetry included work in English, the first being his impression of the opening of the New York subway system, and he and his new wife (whom he met in New York) often went back and forth to Europe. It was said that one reason for the latter was because my grandmother didn't trust American midwives and wanted her children to be born properly, that is, in Europe. My father was a twin and was named Romulus, and he was stronger character than his brother Remus. They were so named in recognition of where they were finally born (Rome); their older brother, Vercingetorix, having been born in Paris, was named after one of the native characters in Caesar's *Gallic Wars* – all in line with my grandfather's romantic/nationalist tastes in poetic subject matter.

It was much later that I was reminded of an earlier ancestor (Amadeo), who was sent from Malta as a youth to Paris to become a doctor (or lawyer?) and wound up being trained as an artist, spending the rest of his life as a practicing artist in Istanbul, where he and his family were buried, among others, in the expatriate community there. His studio was a favorite stopping-off point for foreigners (mostly British) on the Grand Tour, seeking souvenirs of exotic Istanbul, mostly watercolors of its sights and citizens. Fluent in four languages, he traveled around the Ottoman Empire recording customs and costumes of peoples in Turkey, Greece, Romania, Palestine, and Egypt, on behalf of the Sultanate, and his work is still found in Istanbul museums, collections, and exhibitions: an 'orientalist' artist who, unlike most others, settled in the city he loved, which seemed to return the sentiment (even today you can find images of his work on beer-mats in Istanbul restaurants).

So in effect my childhood experiences were framed from the start by juxtapositions of and oscillations between different (specifically visual and verbal) phenomena, a disjuncture or *partage* which came in time to be reckoned with and (seemingly) bridged through a growing interest in semiotics or semiology, which I approached as if it might provide a synaptic link between the visual and verbal. The latter was itself an outgrowth of my involvement in school (and at home, through my father) with Latin and Greek; I was fortunate (or unfortunate) to have attended a high school where both were taught. My favorite teacher, Mr. Glynn, a thin, soft-spoken polymath, taught geometry, English poetry, and Greek – a rare combination of skills in any period, but especially in North American schools.

Your MA was in linguistics and your PhD in art history, classics, and archaeology. Semiotics also played a central role in your early work. In what ways was the intersection between these disciplines formative for your understanding of art history as a discipline?

I came to Harvard from Fairfield College in Connecticut with an interest to pursue linguistic studies and classics, and with a strong background in literature. One year later, I changed my course of study because anthropology/archeology classes were

more interesting. Linguistics was at war – between old-style philologists and Chomsky-ites disdainful of any philological approach. Chomsky-ites wanted to establish a ‘cognitive linguistics’ as a science, rather than a humanistic pursuit. They were mostly engineers, trained in science. My chief advisor, a British philologist from Yorkshire, Joshua Whatmough, was famous for his work on pre-Italic dialects in Italy – an archeology of linguistics. In this divisive environment, I transferred to art history. I was more interested in visual things.

In trying to formulate a proposal for my PhD, I made a successful bid for a Harvard Traveling Fellowship to do fieldwork in the Aegean, to investigate how the complex Minoan buildings were laid out – it was not established visually that an underlying plan existed. I had to do fieldwork measuring buildings and sites to distill the orderliness of the plan. It came down to a problem in metrology. The subtext was the broader context of Mediterranean prehistory. My hypothesis was that planning methods came from Lycia, on the west coast of Turkey. Their Indo-European dialect was distantly related to Mycenaean Greek. What could not be demonstrated linguistically might be documented through material artifacts, and so the linguistic and the visual had to be homologous. The challenge was to show how they are connected on some level: the question was how?

I was inspired by the nineteenth-century work of William Flinders Petrie, a British archeologist working in Egypt, who had uncovered artifacts at a pyramid building site, al-Lahun, the site of a workman’s village. Each pyramid project used such villages, where craftsmen, attracted from all over the Mediterranean, would make pottery in the Minoan style using local Egyptian clay and resembling Minoan styles of pottery that became very famous. They held a vision of the unity of the Mediterranean – with connections all across the Mediterranean – yet no one was discussing this at the time as they were still looking for signs of Greek identity. And I realized there were networks of craftsmen who brought families with them, but we didn’t know the division of labor by gender. The evidence of wall paintings suggested that the craftsmen were both men and women. But there were distinctions in terms of living space: in Egyptian buildings, the men’s quarters were prominent and central, while the women’s quarters were distant and secluded – there were many doorways to get to them. In Crete, there seemed no such distinctions – a puzzling thing, more blurred, less hierarchical, puzzling.

My PhD consisted of a set of questions to identify where Minoan architecture came from. Prominent were nineteenth-century notions of Greek national identity. In the 1820s, the Greek national state came about with the help of Lord Byron and others, defined as distinct from the Ottoman World. The Greek ideal, classicism, was quintessentially Greek. Greek independence started in the 1820s trying to spread north to Istanbul, with the fantasy of re-establishing the Byzantine Empire at Constantinople wrested from the Ottoman Turks!

My teachers at Harvard were (primarily) George Hanfmann and David Mitten, who taught courses in Aegean art based on the existing literature on the

plan of early Aegean buildings. They said they were haphazard, and I was convinced they were not.

Could you discuss how the surface and deep structure model of Chomsky figured into your dissertation on Minoan architectural planning?

I had to justify my intuitions about Minoan architectural structure and order by analyzing the underlying design of disparate buildings. Each building is complex, custom-made, seemingly *ad hoc*. The discourse of the field was that this was a sign of an additive, unplanned, primitive approach to building. The bias was that if it is not symmetrical like a Greek temple, then it is not really ordered. The contrast was also to Egyptian buildings as the epitome of careful construction and of amazingly precise design. My task was to analyze the buildings and discover their 'deep structure' or design principles. For Chomsky, deep structure is the underlying design principles of language, which are homologous with the structure of the brain. Unlike Chomsky, I limited my analysis to problems of artifice – hence, a question of *adequation*, not an equation between the brain and material cultural production. Jakobson's model of communication took this into account in expanding Charles Sanders Peirce's tripartite model of meaning; namely, imputed similarity. For Jakobson, the missing fourth term in Peirce's model of the sign was *imputed* indexicality – *imputed contiguity*. This model avoids deterministic accounts (like Chomsky's) that draw direct relationships between mental activity and formal content. It inverts/reverses inherited art historical models and disrupts the sharp distinction between fact and fiction which is so poignantly brought out in Hayden White's famous phrase, 'the fictions of factual representation'. It draws attention to making, poesis, fabricatedness as such.

So I went to Crete to measure buildings, to find the underlying design principles. Part of this was finding the module, and the irony of it all was finding a measuring rod in Egypt in the excavation of a workman's village on a pyramid building site which employed Minoan craftsmen, who also created pottery in Egypt in a Minoan style, called Kamares ware. The further irony is that I discovered the measuring rod in the British Museum, in an exhibition of Minoan artifacts from Egypt, revealing its complex relationship to the Egyptian cubit.

At Yale (1967-73), as Director of Undergraduate Studies in the History of Art department, you organized the joint major in art history & archaeology. At MIT (1973-77), in the School of Art & Architecture, you designed and co-directed the PhD program in history, theory & criticism of art & architecture. Could you talk about these programs?

At Yale (1967-73) I developed a joint major with Prof. K. C. Chang, an archeologist of Chinese culture, who was suggested to me because of our joint visual interests. I also got to know Vincent Scully and attended his lectures, and we had a joint

interest in Minoan things. We went to Crete together to look at the major sites. He had written a book, *The Earth, the Temple, and the Gods* (1962), which had mentioned my work on relations between Minoan buildings and the landscape. Scully had just written a book on Frank Lloyd Wright – and he was convinced that Wright had been influenced by Minoan architecture. In 1970 I published a book called *Labrys* (New Haven: Charlton Press) a report on the architectural and settlement analysis carried out at Yale jointly with a group of graduate students. This was also a time when visiting European scholars and theorists such as Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, and François Lyotard were regular visiting faculty in New Haven, who also not infrequently wended their way up to SUNY Binghamton, where I later taught [1978-86]. Peter Eisenmann came to Yale from New York to lecture on Derrida and architecture. I wanted to know more about deconstruction since that was where the intellectual excitement on campus was.

I held an NEH fellowship in 1972-73, the year I also began teaching at MIT. Henry Millon brought me to MIT during the four years he was on leave to direct CASVA; I was his replacement. That was where I met Wayne Andersen, Director of the Committee on the Visual Arts, which became the consortium for a PhD in the history, theory and criticism of art and architecture (HTC). We co-designed and co-chaired the program, which still continues.

All this resonated with my Linguistics background. Hence the idea of ‘dynamic equivalence’ – they were not morphologically identical, but they were structurally equivalent. Topologically related. I wrote two books while at MIT, *Architecture, Language, and Meaning* (University of Toronto Press, 1979/80), and ‘Architecture and Cognition’, an unpublished manuscript.

When my terms of employment were over after four years, I went to Cornell’s art and architecture program and was an adjunct there for a year. I was hired in 1978 as Department Chair at SUNY Binghamton, where I organized a joint program between art history, comp lit and philosophy with the Comparative Literature Chair, Frederick Garber, and the Philosophy chair, Steven Ross. Binghamton became home to the French poststructuralist group – Derrida, Lyotard, Nancy, and Sam Weber (who was a visiting professor for one year). This intersection of academic fields was formative for my expanded understanding of art history itself as a field of inquiry. At the same time, my study of semiotics provided a possible way of linking my interests in the visual and the verbal. I became involved in the Semiotics Society of America at a time when it seemed my interests in Minoan archaeology, art, architecture might provide data for elaborating more general theories of signification. Three books were published in this period that brought these interests together: *The Semiotics of the Built Environment* (1979) *Architecture, Language, and Meaning* (1979), and *Minoan Architectural Design* (1983).

Tell us more about the role semiotics played in your work. How did you meet Roman Jakobson?

Jakobson was not a formal member of my committee, but I took courses with him and Noam Chomsky (on cognitive linguistics – connecting neuroscience and language acquisition). I also studied traditional linguistics with faculty who taught introductory grad courses in linguistic theory and method, mostly via workbooks on the analysis of dialects and shapes of grammar. I borrowed from Chomsky's *Syntactic Structures* text the notions of surface and deep structures. Again, for me, semiotics presented a way of bridging the visual and the verbal – the structure of language compared with the structure of visual meaning. Visual semiotics, however, was then largely modeled on verbal semiotics, and this was called verbocentrism at the time. My work was a critique of this model – the inspiration was Jakobson – and another important person was Ernst Gombrich, who gave a Presidential Address to the *Semiotic Society* in Bloomington, Indiana, and later the Mellon Lectures at the National Gallery in Washington DC. Gombrich said that dealing with visual art necessitated a model that did not imitate verbal art. He galvanized a lot of students to pursue semiotics of the visual on its own terms rather than simply copying verbal models. His important Mellon Lectures on meaning in the visual arts argued that we had to incorporate a semiotic sensibility of the visual.

Rosalind Kraus and Michael Fried were grad students at Harvard at the same time as you studied there. What was your relation to their work?

My attitudes toward Rosalind and her group were always complex. She and I became friends not at Harvard but at a semiotic conference in San Francisco, where we were clearly in opposition to what had been developing as an institutional orthodoxy in what was becoming the Semiotic Society of America. She and I vowed to 'make trouble' together. There was an NEH Summer Institute in 1986 for art historians interested in deconstruction and French post-structuralism, held at Hobart and William Smith College, which attracted art historians from the Northeast intent on fashioning a newer, more theoretically and critically engaged 'New(er) Criterion'. I couldn't participate because I was moving then from Binghamton to UCLA.

At Harvard, Krauss and Fried were in Art History, whereas technically I was in Classical Archeology, with an MA in Linguistics and Philology. Classical Archeology was in the Department of Classics. My PhD Committee bridged art history, classics, archeology, linguistics, and included David Mitten, who taught in the classical archeology program; George Hanfmann, in art history; and a professor of Roman history. Krauss and Fried were in a different department, but we met socially.

In those years I was also going to conferences in four different fields: semiotics, classics, linguistics, and archeology/anthropology. The art and architectural historians met together, then separated into two professional associations that met at separate times. I was also associated with MESA (Middle Eastern Studies Association) in the late 1980s.

Hal Foster was then an art critic writing for *Artforum*, Roz wrote for this and the group was centered around New York City – Columbia, NYU, Yale, Princeton. I participated in some of those conferences and workshops. I stayed away from studying artists and their work because it was associated with traditional art history. My relationship to the institutional discourse on contemporary art was more a concern with institutional critique and contemporary social and critical issues.

Isn't this precisely what the Octoberists would say their aim was?

Yes, but there was a lot of discussion about the effectiveness of their critique.

Could you talk about the development of the October group and the creation of an institutional discourse about contemporary art?

The *October* group was founded by scholars in New York City who considered themselves part of a school, the mainstream of the avant-garde of art history. Binghamton was on the geographical periphery, three hours north of the city. SUNY Buffalo was also a regional center of critical theory and comp lit. Derrida, Lyotard, Foucault and others regularly stopped off in Buffalo to give lectures, galvanize the students, and some also came to Binghamton. Yet the sense of not being at the 'center' of the discourse was simultaneously parochializing and liberating. Binghamton was just twenty-five minutes from Cornell, where there was a lot going on, as there was at Hobart & William Smith College, an hour west of Ithaca. In 1985, they staged a workshop, which attracted people from the Northeast to discuss the future of art history as a discipline. Being on the periphery gave one an edge – Binghamton had the only PhD program outside New York City in New York State. There was the sense of asking critical questions to counter the New York City brand of art history. The *October School's* conceit was to see themselves as born in opposition to the canonicity of *The Art Bulletin* or the neoconservative *New Criterion*, but often verging on a new canonicity.

At Binghamton, the art history connection to Comparative Literature was key and invigorating – students had to take courses in both disciplines. It was an attempt to coordinate these disciplines and philosophy. Fred Garber was President of the American Comparative Literature Association, so he was able to bring Derrida, Lyotard, Marjorie Perloff, Edward Said, and others a number of times.

I also co-authored and co-edited a volume on the Ottoman City while at Binghamton (*The Ottoman City & Its Parts*, with Irene Bierman and Rifa'at Ali Abou-El-Haj) that finally appeared from I. B. Tauris in 1992. There was a lot going on at Binghamton, with good colleagues, students, and visitors.

What led to your book, Rethinking Art History: Meditations on a Coy Science, which was published in 1989?

The original title was the subtitle, an echo of Nietzsche's *Gay Science*. Art History was coy about being a science - it was actually more scientific; how could there be a 'science' of art? This was the age of structuralism, and attempts to regularize the disciplinary aspect of institutions. But where was Art History in all of this? Hubert Damisch made an attempt to understand the underlying system. He characterized the foundation of the discipline as a scientific endeavor, citing nineteenth-century discussions about history and historiography (everyone was reading Wolfllin at the time), seeing art in a scientific manner. What could that mean for the present age controlled by structuralism in Europe? Was there a future for art history in these discussions and debates? Is art history more than connoisseurship? Did art history have a history? Could its evolution be studied? The same questions were asked in other fields in the 1970s on this side of the Atlantic, especially in Anthropology and Comparative Literature, where a lot of the intellectual excitement was taking place. While conventional art history departments were still concerned with style, attribution, stylistic evolution, or connoisseurship, I wondered what united these activities. If it was the 'idea' of art, what was that idea? Was there what we today call art before 1500? Was art a particular kind of thing? What could count as artistic function? These were the key questions in my seminars in the 1970s and '80s.

In *Rethinking Art History* (1989; 1991), I tried to stage my six chapters like a Star of David, which is like a Venn diagram: six overlapping chapters to show that different aspects of the discipline were not independent, but depended on each other. It was just a literary conceit to think that they didn't, an interesting rhetorical device at the time.

The choice of the book jacket cover for *Rethinking Art History* was from a Madonnari artist, which I saw in Santa Barbara with Philip Armstrong. I thought it would be interesting to use a *trompe l'oeil* image on the cover (the actual image is a similar one from Lucerne, Switzerland). Another *trompe l'oeil* appears on the cover of *The Art of Art History*, Holbein's anamorphic skull in his painting *The Ambassadors*. The whole point was to signify that art history as a discipline was providing a *trompe l'oeil* image of history. Any perspective is an artifice, a position, so the position of art historians is to give an illusion of coherence, a seeming naturalism that depends on a specific point of view. The creation of perspective gives chronology a certain teleology - it was important to discuss this in these ways.

Rethinking Art History is more connected to the world in its diversity and complexity than to the world of nation-states, tied to fixed identity. 'Mycenaeans versus Minoans' is really a projection from nineteenth-century nation-state thinking - to tie down the essence of people - as, for example, construing Celtic artifacts as 'Irish'. At the time of these studies, I was realizing that things are not so clear-cut. I recall walking through the Athenian Agora with Vincent Scully, noticing that the Ottoman-era artifacts were tossed aside in dumps because they did not fit the conception of what constituted more purely 'Hellenic' identity.

Emphasis on the discipline as a 'coy science' was already a quite singular way of framing art history's history, and certainly in 1989. What were the motivations for rethinking this critical engagement with the discipline's claims to scientificity? And what are the critical effects of this engagement when situated from a perspective (anamorphic or otherwise) that is always oblique, ironic, and ambivalent?

To keep oneself always engaged with and conscious of the artifice of any perspective. There is nothing natural about meaning – it is always a social construct, and what constitutes its apparent naturalness is subject to change. It is also important here to realize that every position has an ethical valence, ethical consequences.

This opened up a self-consciousness about the discipline that was novel. It came out of dialogic engagements with students and colleagues. To learn how to question, not an acceptance of fact, truth, or given knowledge.

One outcome of the publication of *Rethinking Art History* was a meeting with Terry Smith in Melbourne, who had given a lecture at UCLA. He was teaching in Sydney, and came to Melbourne to give a seminar and we met there. He had a connection with the Aboriginal Institute – as a visiting professor at the University of Melbourne – and he invited me to speak to his grad seminar and arranged a series of lectures in Adelaide, Brisbane, Sydney, as well as elsewhere in Victoria. At the time, Terry was a strong early advocate for Aboriginal art as Art, which provided a global perspective on the subjectivity of the artist and his/her relationship to work. I provided a different perspective on the relationship of subjects to objects; objects were assumed to have inherent meanings. This offered a different perspective on what an object was. It made the history of art in the European tradition into a highly contextualized view of creativity, fabricatedness, the relationship between individuals and matter – relational aesthetics long before Bourriaud. Different interpretations created productive dissonances, introducing questions of context, or dissonances that are similar to a *moiré* pattern. This becomes a dynamic, self-reflexive intellectual activity/practice to contemplate what, how, and when art is. In terms of my relationship with Terry Smith, we both held an oblique relationship to the discipline, the canon, the study of art history.

As another outcome, the *Art Journal* issue, 'Crisis in the Discipline', from 1982 was followed a decade later by a conference organized by Joel Snyder and Harry Harootunian at the University of Chicago, on *Questions of Evidence: Proof, Practice, and Persuasion across the Disciplines*, which was first published in the journal *Critical Inquiry* (18.2, 1992) and later published as a book. My essay, 'The Question of Art History' – which had a 'Response' by Joel Snyder, to which I contributed a 'Rejoinder' – also extended the work first undertaken in *Rethinking Art History*.

The *Rethinking* volume generated debate, including strong negative reception, for example in the *Burlington Magazine* and the *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*. In JAAC, it was because I questioned Aesthetics as a coherent field, but also because I was seen as coming from a 'Marxian' social-historical perspective that

was anathema to their paradigm. I was taking a heterodox position on 'orthodox truths' of the discipline. The UCLA Department was run by social historians – David Kunzle, Karl Werkmeister, Al Boime, Cecelia Klein – but I was bringing a semiotic perspective to that context. My job talk took an oblique perspective on the social history aspect of things to make a case that Marxist social art history could be more effective if grounded in a consciousness of the epistemological underpinnings of the discourse on art. This was in contrast to a one-to-one relationship between form and meaning, which was pervasive among Marxists at UCLA. The grad students were very interested, while some faculty like Cecelia Klein were ambivalent but wanted to broaden the Department's approach to teaching art history. At the time, Arnold Rubin 'covered' 'the Other' for the art history department – African, Aboriginal, Oceanic, etc. – in a fraught relationship with the UCLA Dance Department, with which his material overlapped. He saw himself as a link between them. The Fowler Museum was in the middle – the 'Commons' on which many issues came to be discussed and debated. In the end, at UCLA I often worked with colleagues as co-advisors, including Al Boime, Cecelia Klein, Irene Bierman, Lothar van Falkenhausen, Steve Nelson, Miwon Kwon, and Cecile Whiting.

A very exciting seminar was the 'Introduction to Theory and Methods' in 1989, in the wake of the *Rethinking Art History* book. Working with students who were really fired up with new ideas, we created a consortium of critical theory interests connected to Deconstruction, Derrida, Foucault, et. al., all of which was instrumental in getting Sam Weber hired in Comparative Literature at UCLA.

Norman Bryson: how would you frame your relationship to and estimation of his work?

Word and Image (1982) and *Vision and Painting* (1983) are his most important work. I sponsored him to speak at UCLA when I arrived in 1986, and he galvanized most gay male students – similarly to the way the Feminist caucus at CAA empowered Lesbian voices. What we call Queer Theory and/or LGBTQ was born from this. Also, his 1986 *Art Bulletin* article with Mieke Bal about semiotics, was another aspect of reading differently. My relation to him? We were parallel voices – it became an occasion for my being invited to London when Norman was being considered for the Directorship of the Warburg – he became Director of the Slade School instead, but only for two years, so he had little institutional impact. In retrospect, it seemed that Manchester and Birmingham, not London, were agents of disciplinary change in the UK in these years. Bryson's impact was limited. He did not address the discourse of the discipline as such. He was concerned more with its content; its subject matter. Yet his semiotics dealt with fundamental questions of how the discourse of art history works. He, among others, such as Clark and John Tagg, made it acceptable to talk about semiotics and visual and material culture.

How would you characterize your relation to the 'new art history' that emerged as the result of the influx of critical theory but did not seem to get at the very 'art' of 'art history'?

In the late '80s and early '90s the work of the Octoberists, of Rees and Bargello, T.J. Clark, and others promised to be more socially responsible, more attentive to history, critically engaged with received historical narratives. This meant being in the know about contemporary philosophical developments in Europe, primarily France. But in both France and England, there appeared to be the need to re-read Marx in more subtle and nuanced ways. In the US, only the group at UCLA was doing this: Werkmeister, Kunzle, Boime – social historians of art. The 'Caucuses' at the CAA of Feminists and of Marxists, allowed art historians to gravitate toward them. (One recalls that in the early 1970s, John Berger and Griselda Pollock took on the Courtauld, while at UCLA, Otto Karl Werkmeister and Albert Boime (originally at Binghamton) practiced Marxian art history as 'social art history'. Like the feminists, they established their own caucus at the CAA, an important formative movement in the field.)

As a response to this, I attempted to bring to the surface the artifice and the fiction of art historical writing. At the same time, I was attentive to the shape of the narrative, of art history as a form of knowledge production. Through close critical readings of Wölfflin, Panofsky, other foundational texts, my grad seminars led to the Oxford Reader, *The Art of Art History* (1998). The Reader is used widely in Europe, US, and elsewhere, and is now translated in Korean (2014) and Chinese (2016), A Russian edition is said to be in progress. This would be part of the conscious global history of art – where the Rest consumes what is going on in the West – but no distinction is made between Wölfflin and Preziosi, so there is again a flattening of debates, a new canonization, simplification, and commodification of the discourse into bite size pieces. At the same time, my anthology is widely read and dialogue changes both us and them. The dialogue becomes the basis for further flowering of the discipline.

*How did the idea and format for the anthology **The Art of Art History** arise?*

Oxford (OUP) approached me. An editor came to the UCLA campus to talk about a possible series of books to rival the Thames & Hudson series, something with a more critical edge. We laid out what areas to cover, and concluded that a keystone in the series was also needed as an overview of the subject. OUP initially didn't feel one was necessary. I was brought to OUP in Oxford to sell the idea and they bought it; it was to be the core introductory volume of their new series on art history in various times and places.

Organization of my text came out of my grad seminar readers – reading key texts closely to contrast with each other, to create trouble with each other. The epilogue talked about art history in general, as an art. Like so many things I've written, it

started with a catchy phrase and then let parts of the phrase react with one another. This was in contrast to the nineteenth-century idea that art history was a science. There is a scientism about that, a simulacrum of scientific method. Art history can be scientific in having coherence and method – in having a thesis that is rigorous, cogent, knowing where it is coming from and where it is going – all those things that are taken for granted in most art history texts. ‘Science’ has both positive and negative aspects, but to say art history *is* a science is scientism – art history’s method is in itself, not an example of a science. It is critical in itself. It is a form of critique, an epistemological technology and a mode of thinking.

Looking back from 2016 to the initial reception of French poststructuralist theory, in what ways has the resistance to that initial reception within the discipline become transformed – absorbed, trivialized – in an even more unsettling manner than when you were looking back at the discipline from the late 80s?

Everything became flattened out and commensurate. What used to be radically different perceptions and modes of thought became matters of personal choice – consumerism, an instrumentalization of thought leading to flattening of critical edge, thought becoming trivialized. It recalls the Ronald Reagan counter-revolution in public education, or Voter Proposition 13 in California, a conservative backlash against free education, especially the University of California system – the semi-privatization of education that is now no longer free. Reagan destroyed the University of California system and its freedom. Angela Davis was destroyed as a Marxist Feminist at UCLA, fueled by an ultra-right wing Chancellor, before winding up at Santa Cruz, which became the repository for radical thought.

The acceptance of French poststructuralist theory was channeled into various schools of acceptance. Grad seminars on theory and methodology were created everywhere. The question is, who walked the talk? The problem was that many people not trained in Comparative Literature and other fields were teaching, so theory often became an imitation of the style of Derrida and Foucault. The effects were good in changing the disciplinary discourse, but less good in becoming an end in itself. In art history departments in the US, it became routine to ask about Derrida in ads, including phrases such as ‘the applicant should be conversant with current debates’. Departments increasingly mentioned in their prospectuses that they were informed by critical theory. In the 1990s and early 2000s, critical theory became a selling point for departments, but this became increasingly limited to modernist and contemporary positions only. It was difficult to find people qualified to teach it, to track students. What happened at UCLA was that questions of theory and criticism were captured by modernists and contemporary art historians, and focused on east coast academia, which remained largely Eurocentric, although this has changed for the better over time.

At UCLA, the aim was to have students from all subfields of art history conversant with critical issues. But the Department was organized to focus on

specializations and became fragmented, de-centered; students were trained to think primarily in terms of subfields. The rationale was that otherwise students would be 'unmarketable'. This became the question of how to market specializations. The increasing commodification of the discipline was driven by the downsizing of the humanities.

What would have been the (unfulfilled) promise of exciting debates of the early 1980s on the crisis of the discipline? Addressing epistemology, the way knowledge is formatted, understood, this would have led to the destabilization and troubling of disciplinary pieties as opposed to merely enlarging the context within the same template of disciplinarity. Network theory, which came from sociology, anthropology, and cultural geography, is closer to where the excitement is today, especially in subfields outside of the Euro-American orbit. The impetus came from other fields, and less from a sustained discourse within the field of art history, which remains de-centered and fragmented. Europeanists continue to ignore the pressure from extra-European fields and don't understand what is at stake for themselves.

In recent years there has been a much more explicit focus in art historiography on the discipline's German inheritance. For example, what exactly is it about Benjamin's work and its reception that distorts our critical understanding of the discipline's history and future?

In the US, Benjamin's Jewishness seemed mostly hagiographic rather than historiographic. This compares with his earlier reception in the 1970s, with Hannah Arendt's editing of his essays published as *Illuminations*, popularized by John Berger's *Ways of Seeing*, with its emphasis on meaning as always constructed at the point of reception and the use of 'reproductive media', where meaning is always political. In turn, this was a catalyst for the critical reception of Benjamin by British Feminists such as Griselda Pollock and the American Annette Michelson, and later an important British journal in which Matthew Rampley participated, *De-, dis-. Ex-*, (see Vol. 3, 1999), a conduit for the Anglo-American discourse on Walter Benjamin. They tried to stage what was critically important about his work. Benjamin also provided a way of looking at the modern city, especial Paris, in a critical manner. The *Passagenwerk* influenced architectural historians and urban planners by focusing on the discourse of reception and how cities were used.

Could you discuss your longstanding interest in how and why the past 'haunts'. We see this as a conceptual thread between your interest in signification, museology, and art history as a 'coy', if not 'queer', historiographic practice.

The obvious connection is Freud's notion of the repressed: what is repressed in what is haunting? De Certeau's notion of historical time – including his essay 'Psychoanalysis and History' – lays this out very clearly: the past bites you back (*re-*

mord). The argument is comparable to Foucault's return of the past in displaced form.

My current book project on disremembering architecture weaves together many of these strands of interest. It builds specifically upon two publications – my 2014 *Art / Religion / Amnesia: The Enchantments of Credulity* book, and the 2016 essay in *Journal of Visual Culture* on architecture ('Poetry Makes Nothing Happen and Architecture is When Theory is the Residue of a Journey'). My recent work considers the role of the built environment as *simultaneously* an art of remembering-*and-forgetting*; ostensifying the tensions inherent in haunting.

So to conclude, could you say something about what you imagine the future of art history to be?

I've been asked this question seemingly ever since I became an art historian. There is so much implied and presupposed in such a seemingly simple query, and I've dealt with this in virtually all of my writing and teaching over the years. The artifice of art's 'history' was invented as an instrument for creating and justifying the modern nation-state in all its still-evolving aspects and manifestations, including all its 'globalizations'. As a Western epistemological technology it has always been an instrument for keeping in play a metaphysics of signification where what are distinguished as subjects and objects endlessly circle around each other on a stage like weary wrestlers: a perpetual draw, with Jacques Derrida smiling on the edge of the ring. Art history would only survive as it has always done so, as one more or less effective instrument in promoting social hegemony and manufacturing power. The real question to be answered is who and what is really being benefitted *today* by the maintenance of the fiction that art should have a 'history' - whether any of those currently on stage or projected into the future?



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