

What's shit got to do with it?
Notes on pedagogy, art and feminism
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First some precepts:

1. Pedagogy is overrated: the best teachers rarely conform to someone's idea of what good teaching is, good teachers break some rules, but not all rules. Good teachers know the difference.

2. Having said that, teaching is an erogenous zone. It is not the same as sexuality but it *is* stimulating. Mary Kelly talks about her students with a kind of love that is like a mother's. This is part of it too.

3. I think of my own prehistory from 1977-79 at Alex Mackie, now CoFA: Alan Walpole Virginia Coventry co-teaching notational drawing: why is being queer good for art history? And why would a photographer and an art historian make good co-teachers of a proto-conceptual drawing class? Alan and Virginia were the first teachers in my art education who spoke to my work on its own terms: my work was deeply unfashionable: it was anecdotal, pictorial, drawn on torn pieces of brown paper, it was pictures of crappy old well used kitchens and bathrooms. That notational drawing class was my first art-school encounter with respect. This I put on the side of feminist practices.

4. Always be diligent. Use a dictionary. When I was at Sydney Teachers' College in 1980 I was in a class of about 85% women. One of my teachers, I've forgotten his name, used a word I had never heard before. I think he was relying on that fact, he had a look about him that suggested he knew that we didn't know anything much and he wielded his knowledge as a weapon against us. In front of the entire class he used the word I later found in the dictionary to describe himself: He said, 'I'm a misogynist and I'm proud of it'. His was not a practice on the side of feminism but learning from my enemy was.

5. Let's look at: Method and content, aka form and function

The collective, the think tank, the lab, the seminar, rules of critique: these are ways of privileging the many over The One. Those tall Towers and Big Voices. This I put on the side of feminist pedagogy.

5a. The Mary Kelly method of studio critique, learned when I was her student at the Whitney Independent Study Program in 1990-91: the

viewer's response is privileged over artistic intention, the group's responses are collectively the basis of the artist's insight. The artist listens, the viewers speak, one following the other. The teacher facilitates. Thought is privileged. Quiet voices are encouraged.

5b. The Michael Asher method, learned when I was Visiting Faculty at CalArts from 1995 to 1998: Long silences are tolerated. Thought is privileged. Quietude too. No one is in a hurry, everyone takes their time, the process is privileged over the product. And if one must wait for the process, wait one does. Sometimes it would seem as if Michael were dozing, which he may or may not have been. His power was like a mother cat's, all her babies in a crit classon Fridays from 1pm until no one has anymore to say, which often meant leaving campus after midnight. This disperses the articulate, the blustering, the first insight; it diffuses group think -- there's time for it to undo -- and adds in the domesticating features of meals and tiredness, comings and goings, and snoring dogs. I will appropriate Michael Asher's lateral, dispersed, squashy method for the side of feminism.

5c. Building a culture in the classroom, a sense that ideas are collectively brewing, that the class is a unit, less us and them and more we. I make it my business to know everyone's name after the first class. I address each student directly. I actively make comparisons between and draw parallels with their projects. I expect a lot of them and if they don't want to work hard in my class they have the opportunity to withdraw. I set clear boundaries. In my view, the teacher's task is to tie knots, make connections, pull sympathies together. The teacher's task is also to unravel threads and separate and wind ideas around a spindle. For me these are feminist concerns.

These methods are themselves the privilege of private institutions like CalArts where student-teacher ratios are low, where a seminar is open to grads and undergrads at the discretion of the instructor and where the school is located on its own as a private enclave some 30 miles north of the city of Los Angeles.

So in this sense my feminist pedagogy is a luxury, in a culture where outcomes are otherwise quantified and business, efficiency and moneymaking, even fame and celebrity, are valued far more than slow thoughtful processes that don't always lead anywhere. Visual art education knows the same crises of support as the scientific community: where error is unaffordable, where companies, like galleries, fund the research -- where products are the product, so to speak.

How can the methods of Mary Kelly and Michael Asher and indeed some of my own methods be applied more broadly? How can we change what is valuable? These are feminist concerns.

6. I think of El Sistema, a system developed in Venezuela and brought to Los Angeles where I live by Gustavo Dudamel, who is the musical director of the LA Phil, to teach classical music performance to hundreds and hundreds of under served children in LA. The method is one of spreading out like branches in a tree, one teaching two, then two teaching more; and then bringing young performers into the rarified world of professional classical music by adding in choral works or the symphony of a thousand, or workshops and awards for young composers. I think of this as a feminist concern.

And now to consider content:

Teaching art from a feminist pov means not exactly or not only teaching the marked term.

If the marked term is the feminine, how to make a consideration of the unmarked term, that does not simply reduce to teaching the masculine, collapsing into business as usual.

How can we qualify the unmarked term? How do we mark it?

I have been very privileged in my life as an itinerant academic to always teach courses of my own design. I have taken a perverse pleasure in teaching the quirky and contradictory. One year when I was teaching at UCLA, I was amused to discover that just as I was using my Advanced Drawing class to teach a proto-conceptualism (harking back in many ways to that Notational Drawing class with Virginia Coventry and Alan Walpole), there was John Baldessari, conceptual artist, teaching drawing in his class and Jim Welling, the photographer, teaching painting.

If CalArts was known to be a school that didn't teach drawing, I would teach a class called Water and Power in which we drew *en plein air* and we visited all the water management facilities in the region we could get to. The sites included the old San Franciscito dam disaster from the 1920s, a beautiful shiny-like-a-fire-station hydro plant from the 1930s, a sewerage treatment plant or two. We even met at 5am one Saturday to drive to Hoover Dam in Nevada. And once there we did landscape drawing. And driving is great for talking, very therapeutic along the way, and everyone

had a job to do in order to get us there and back in one piece. These were all integral parts of the learning process and feminist in sensibility.

CalArtians are often a little wacky themselves and not always known for their literacy. I taught courses like Feminism, Humanism and the Post-Human. I ran it as a seminar and we read feminist philosophy and women from the Enlightenment and we tried to imagine something like a subject in our post-human times.

CalArtians are famous for having very little art history so I taught classes like: *The Prostitute's Ear*, a course that sliced through 19th and 20th century art history and philosophy to talk about the representation of women in the public sphere and their not very clandestine coding as sex-workers. This allowed me to talk about art in Paris in 1865, about Victorine Meurent, about Impressionism of all things.

My favorite course at CalArts was another sneaky art history class that explored the abject residues of 20th century culture. The class was called *Waterclosets: Bathrooms, Modernity and the Return of the Repressed* and it extended Klaus Theweleit's work about woman and floods to the iconography of twentieth century art history and popular culture. After showing movie clips year after year, VHS recordings rewound, DVDs opened to the chapter, additional scenes suggested by the students themselves, I made what started out as a pedagogical tool for teaching *Waterclosets*. This tool was a montage collated the way they put together life-time achievement awards at the Oscars but structured to be anything but. It was called *Toilet Training* and I intercut bathroom scenes from postwar movies, from *The Third Man* to Hitchcock to de Palma to Tarantino, to show a persistent intertextual juxtaposition of 'woman' with drains, plumbing, sewers. Though it began life as an educational shorthand for the classes I taught, it was also screened in art contexts and functioned as a critical reflection of the learning we all take on when we stand in the position of the male subject and abject our bodies and our mothers. My students usually did artworks in response to the material as final projects:

My students' projects were amazing: there was the series of photographs of every defecation for a week; there was the hairs all over walls of the gallery; of the reenactment of ritualistic discarding of the ashes of a family member down the toilet in the women's loo; of performances held in the main men's toilets. One day my class and I were all in the men's toilet critiquing one such presentation and in walked Steven Lavine, the President of CalArts. He wasn't mad or shocked or disconcerted, it was

what he expected of his CalArts. He smiled something noncommittal and that was that. For me these are feminist moments in which we lateralized everything: the sanctuary of the men's bathroom, the President of CalArts, the verticality of the body.

I don't teach right now but I run into former students and former teachers of mine, all the time, and we are happy to see each other. In short, there's a lot of shit in this feminist practice of mine but I like to think there's also a lot of love.